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Disney's Media Parks:

The Convergence of Theme Parks, Film, Television, and Game Space

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Film and Television

by

Heather Lea Birdsall

2022

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Disney's Media Parks:

The Convergence of Theme Parks, Film, Television, and Game Space

by

Heather Lea Birdsall

Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Chon A. Noriega, Chair

This dissertation traces the relationships between screen media, including film, television, and digital games, and the modern American theme park. Taking the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim as a prototypical case study, I explore the flexible boundaries between physical parks and virtual media on different scales of immersion (attraction/ride, land, and park) and across different media (film, television, and video games). Beginning with Disneyland's early history and continuing through today, an ever-growing interpenetration of screen media and physical park space has challenged older concepts about screen media and theme parks as discrete types of experiences. I call the emerging new configuration of these two elements a "media park." This dissertation considers media parks as a distinct media form characterized by permeable screen space and spectator experiences that are distinctly corporeal, sensory, and integrated into the

narrative, and explores how media parks are reconfiguring our subjective and embodied relationships to screen media.

My goal is to define the media park with respect to its unique relationship to and roots in screen media. I develop a typology of how we can read Disney's parks relative to the broader field of Disney's transmedia production. This dissertation considers both how screen media has been adapted to park spaces, by looking at media-based attractions and park lands, as well as the reciprocal movement, as these physical spaces have been translated back onto movie, television, and computer screens. This dissertation adapts traditional media studies analysis to three-dimensional built environments, while it also foregrounds interdisciplinary approaches to spatial, experiential, industrial, and narrative analyses of media parks. Toward this end, I draw upon political, social, economic, and industrial histories of Disneyland, cultural histories of entertainment in public space, and both spatial theory and media phenomenology. Finally, in-depth observational fieldwork offers a sustained mapping of the narrative and sensory experiences generated by these convergent media forms.

The dissertation of Heather Lea Birdsall is approved.

John T. Caldwell

Denise R. Mann

Eric R. Avila

Chon A. Noriega, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

For my family. I love you more than the sun and the moon and the stars and the sky.

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## Vita

### EDUCATION

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- M.A. History of Art and Archaeology, 2011**  
Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York, NY
- B.A. Fine Arts, 2006**  
New York University, New York, NY  
Minor: Studio Art  
*magna cum laude*

### AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

---

- 2020-2021 UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship
- 2020 UCLA Plitt Southern Theater Employees Trust Fellowship
- 2019 UCLA Plitt Southern Theater Employees Trust Fellowship
- 2018 UCLA Kemp R. Niver Scholarship in Film History at UCLA
- 2017 UCLA Hugh Downs Graduate Research Fellowship
- 2016 UCLA Plitt Southern Theater Employees Trust Fellowship
- 2015 UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship with Professor Chon Noriega
- 2015 UCLA Plitt Southern Theater Employees Trust Fellowship
- 2014 UCLA Otis Ferguson Memorial Award in Critical Writing
- 2010 NYU Shelby White and Leon Levy Travel Grant

### TEACHING FELLOWSHIPS

---

- 2019-2020 UCLA Collegium of University Teaching Fellowship

### PUBLICATIONS

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#### Book Chapters

- 2019 “The Happiest Plays on Earth: Theme Park Franchising in Disneyland Video Games.” In *The Franchise Era: Managing Media in the Digital Economy*, edited by James Fleury, Bryan Hikari Hartzheim, and Stephen Mamber, 77-104. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

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- 2021 “‘Live Your *Star Wars* Story’: Geographical Storytelling, Immersion, and Interactivity in *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge*,” (virtual presentation) Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Virtual conference, March 17-21.
- 2019 “Looking into the Eyes of Mara: Kinetic Narratives in Disneyland’s Indiana Jones Adventure.” (oral presentation) Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Seattle, WA, USA, March 13-17.
- 2017 “You’ve Just Crossed Over Into...the Abyss: *Mise en abyme* as a Spatial Narrative Strategy in *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*.” (oral presentation) Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Chicago, IL, USA, March 22-26.
- 2016 “Of Backlots and Genres: Disneyland's Industrial and Conceptual Origins in Film and Television.” (oral presentation) Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Atlanta, GA, March 30-April 3.
- 2015 “Context as Content: Captain EO, Intertextuality, and the Immersive Theme Park Experience.” (oral presentation) Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Montreal, Canada, March 25-29.

## Introduction

[Walt Disney knew] the limits of motion pictures and he knew that something was missing in communicating with images alone. As you sit in a darkened place, and you look out of a kind of window which the screen provides, you have a kind of vicarious experience there. It's not the same as if you actually walked down the street yourself. I think that's really why Walt wanted to simply step from motion pictures into *another kind of reality*.

—John Hench, Imagineer<sup>1</sup>

Since Disneyland opened on July 17, 1955, in Anaheim, California, it has often been considered the prototypical “theme park,” a new kind of public entertainment typically seen as emerging from the older traditions of amusement parks, world’s fairs, and pleasure gardens. Margaret J. King defines the theme park as a “social artwork designed as a four dimensional symbolic landscape, evoking impressions of places and times, real and imaginary.”<sup>2</sup> She further describes the theme park as a “total-sensory-engaging environmental art form built to express a coherent but multi-layered message” that is comprised of “symbolic landscapes of cultural narratives.”<sup>3</sup> While such definitions appropriately describe Disneyland as a complex space shaped by numerous cultural concepts, messages, symbols, and ideologies, they increasingly do not account for both the vital role of media in the park’s inception and media’s growing prominence as a defining factor of the “theme park” experience today. As Disneyland and parks like it are becoming ever-more-mediated places that explicitly evoke not simply “themed” environments but specific narrative film, television, and game worlds, I argue that it is essential

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<sup>1</sup> John Hench, *Designing Disney: Imagineering and the Art of the Show* (New York: Disney Editions, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Margaret J. King, “Theme Park,” in *The Guide to United States Popular Culture*, eds. Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2000), 387-389.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret J. King, “The Theme Park: Aspects of Experience in a Four-Dimensional Landscape,” *Material Culture* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 3.

to reevaluate theme parks and their histories from a media studies perspective. In this dissertation, I consider the intersection of media—specifically film, television, and video games—and parks like Disneyland, and argue for the need to understand them not strictly as “theme parks,” but as “media parks.” I propose this term, which borrows from the phrase “media theme park” used by media sociologist Nick Couldry in his 2003 book *Media Rituals*, to signal the historical shift of parks like Disneyland away from broader themed environments and toward spaces that are increasingly reliant on specific media narratives and geographies to provide the structures for visitor experiences.<sup>4</sup> In using “media parks,” my goal is to reframe our understanding of “theme park” spaces that have often been considered a peripheral site of media display and consumption. Far from being peripheral, however, media parks have been and are increasingly significant sites of cinematic and televisual presence, narrative spatial exchange, and media history.

This dissertation thus traces the relationships between film, television, and video games and the modern American theme park. Taking the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California, including both the Disneyland and Disney California Adventure parks, as a paradigmatic case study, I explore the permeable boundaries between physical park space and virtual media space on different scales of immersion (attraction/ride, land, and park) and across different media (film, television, and video games). I look both to park spaces that derive from screen media as well as

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<sup>4</sup> Couldry mentions the phrase “media theme park” somewhat in passing and does not develop the term further. Since my historical analysis traces the media influences of the “theme park” back to its very inception, and because the parks have only become more defined by media narratives in recent decades, I suggest abandoning the word “theme” as a misnomer. The term “media park” is predicated on the exploration of a particularly understudied aspect of the intersection between park and film, television, and video games: the interrelationship between their physical and virtual spaces and the resulting experiences that this interrelationship creates for the park visitor. This dynamic is present in the apparent spatial contradiction between the physical and the virtual in the phrase “media park.” Furthermore, this attention to the spatial relationship between media and park suggests an experiential distinction between the experiences of film and television and of physical park space that is at the heart of this project. See Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 80.

at spaces that have been adapted onto the screen. Park spaces have an increasingly significant role in our modern cultural landscape yet remain understudied as media texts. Considering these texts as a distinct media form—characterized in particular by permeable screen space and the resultant spectator experiences that are distinctly corporeal, sensory, and integrated into the narrative—this dissertation seeks to define their unique relationship to screen media.

Synthesizing scholarship on park history, media studies, and phenomenology, this dissertation thus foregrounds an interdisciplinary spatial, experiential, and narrative analysis of media parks. It intersects with and complements discussions of the political, social, economic, and industrial histories of Disneyland, the broader cultural frameworks of entertainment in public space, and theoretical frameworks of spatial theory and media phenomenology.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, this project invites a reconsideration of our understanding of theme parks, whose increasingly media-defined spaces are reconfiguring our subjective and embodied relationship to the screen.

To do this, this project adapts traditional cinematic and televisual textual analysis to three-dimensional built environments. In combining visual, narrative, spatial, and phenomenological analyses of film and television texts and built spaces (rides, lands, and parks), it confronts what it means to be a media text, asserting that park spaces have textual integrity

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<sup>5</sup> While my immediate focus in this dissertation is to engage with experiential intersection of screen media and theme parks, it is important to note that theme parks have also been the subject of postmodern critiques from theorists like Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson. Moreover, scholars of postmodern geography like Edward Soja and economic geography like Allen Scott and Michael Storper have considered how Disneyland, Orange County, and/or Southern California operate as cultural, social, and economic spaces. These are productive areas for further exploration into how the park as a media space relates to larger spatial contexts and conceptions. See, for example, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Edward Soja, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2014); Allen Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, The Industry* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

equal to films and television shows and merit similar academic consideration. My close textual analysis distinguishes this research from most existing scholarly work on Disneyland, little of which has addressed the formal and experiential connections between moving image media and theme parks. While several cinema and media studies scholars have taken important steps toward considering theme park space as media space, this dissertation offers a sustained analysis of the narrative and sensory experiences generated by this transmedia exchange. Our cultural landscape is increasingly impacted by new forms that challenge traditional understandings of screen media as well as emerging technologies that break down the boundaries and interfaces between the physical and the virtual, the analog and the digital. The study of media parks as both an early site of such exchange and a booming contemporary industry thus has significant implications not just for media historiography, but also for how we navigate, are affected by, and impact an increasingly mediated world.

The variety of case studies here illuminate how films have been translated into park space throughout Disneyland's history, first as individual attractions like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride and Indiana Jones Adventure and then as "lands" like Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge. Through these texts, I explore the role of the embodied visitor/viewer through different modes of narrative construction, varying subjective experiences, and multiple levels of immersion and interactivity. I then reverse this movement, analyzing how ride- and land-based films like *Tomorrowland* (2015) and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise (2003- ) and park-based video games like *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* (2011) further illuminate the liminal spaces between virtual and physical media. Throughout the dissertation, I trace the larger historical trajectory of these developments in park space toward an increasing focus on immersive interactivity and narrative participation that, I argue, contributes to an expanded understanding of changing media culture,

as emerging technologies continue to rework and even dissolve the distinctions between our virtual and physical worlds. The experiences that are created by these in-between spaces of media/park help to better illuminate our complex and ever-evolving relationships with both screen and space. By presenting a systematic analysis of media park forms, structures, techniques, and experiences, this dissertation provides historical and theoretical frameworks for understanding the changing spatial and narrative relationships between media and park and how we fit into their stories.

### **Of Backlots and Genres: Disneyland's Industrial and Conceptual Origins in Film and Television**

Cultural historian and theme park expert Margaret King noted in 1981 that, “some of the best observations ever made about [theme] parks have been tossed off in passing...as casual asides in the course of pursuing weightier matters.”<sup>6</sup> Disneyland, often cited as the “original” theme park, has naturally had almost countless books and articles, both popular and scholarly, written about it. In keeping with King’s remark, I have found that Disneyland’s cinematic and televisual origins have often been the subject of strikingly poignant but largely undeveloped or overlooked observations, particularly in early press coverage. Thomas Pryor of the *New York Times* predicted in 1954 that Disneyland “will resemble a giant motion-picture set.”<sup>7</sup> I agree that Disneyland at its inception did—and today still does—resemble a motion picture set more than it did a traditional amusement park or any of its other oft-cited precursors, such as world’s fairs.

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret King, “The New American Muse: Notes on the Amusement/Theme Park,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 15, No. 1 (Summer 1981): 58.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas M. Pryor, “Land of Fantasia is Rising on Coast,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1954, ProQuest.

However, a crucial part of Disneyland’s heritage—its extensive roots in cinema—often remains a side reference or passing observation. Scholarly literature at times picks up on this important connection, but save for a handful of articles that deal obliquely with the subject, not enough has been done to paint a comprehensive picture of the early relationships between film, television, and theme parks. Using Disneyland as a case study and taking it as the first and most significant example of a theme park, I build on these observations in order to reclaim cinematic and televisual influences as crucial components of theme park creation and thus to reframe how we understand this modern media phenomenon in terms of our contemporary mediascape. Given the contemporary Disney park landscape, which is increasingly dominated by filmic narratives and characters, it is critical to understand that these cinematic and televisual roots are complex and run deep.

The product of a film studio and a television deal, and designed by filmmakers, early Disneyland was fundamentally shaped by its industrial milieu. Disneyland was more a product of Hollywood backlots and sets than of, as is often claimed, amusement parks or world’s fairs. Yet it also has conceptual roots in film and television via the film genres and cinematic experiences that influenced Disneyland’s design, geography, and mythmaking. J.P. Telotte claimed in 2011 that “the theme park, as originally conceived and effectively invented by Walt Disney, had no essential connection with the movies.”<sup>8</sup> I assert, rather, that the theme park, as manifested at Disneyland, has been, at its core, based both industrially and conceptually on the movies since its very conception.

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<sup>8</sup> J.P. Telotte, “Theme Parks and Films—Play and Players.” In *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 171.



It is this Hollywood origin that we continue to see as an ever more prominent part of the parks today. What appears to be a recent trend toward large-scale manifestations of cinematic properties across all Disney parks—from Cars Land (2012) and Pandora – The World of *Avatar* (2017) to Toy Story Land (2018), Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge (2019), and Avengers Campus (2021)—is not new at all. By tracing the early influences of Hollywood on Disneyland, I argue that we can trace the lineage of the “media park” phenomenon discussed in this dissertation to the very birth of the modern theme park.

### ***Industrial Influences: Disneyland as a Backlot***

Just as there are a wide variety of books, articles, and studies that have been written on Disneyland, so are there a wide variety of influences to which Walt’s inspiration for the first theme park have been attributed. Common among them are world’s fairs, which Walt and his designers were reportedly known to visit, and his hometown of Marceline, Missouri, often cited as the inspiration for Disneyland and Main Street, U.S.A. in particular. Perhaps most frequently, scholars and others often consider Disneyland as the direct descendant of amusement parks of the early- to mid-twentieth century. Less common, however, is scholarly work that examines the fundamental connections between Disneyland and Hollywood, by which I mean the U.S. film and television industry, despite the substantial evidence to support Hollywood, and not just amusement parks, world’s fairs, or childhood memories, as the primary source for Disneyland and subsequent theme parks. When Hollywood’s influence is mentioned, its significance is often merely gestured toward or casually assumed, rather than explored and explained. Not only was Disneyland the product of a deal between a television network and a film studio, as is well documented, but the methods and manifestations of Hollywood filmmaking and televisual production pervaded everything from its earliest conceptions to its final reality and continuing

legacy. Foremost among these elements of filmmaking was the influence of the Hollywood backlot, which, I argue, was far more influential on Disneyland's conception and formal construction than has been previously acknowledged.

It is important to acknowledge that Disneyland's industrial connections to Hollywood have not been entirely understudied. Excellent work has been done, in fact, from the perspective of understanding the park as the product of a financial arrangement between the ABC broadcasting network and the Walt Disney Company by scholars like Christopher Anderson and William Boddy. As Anderson discusses in his book *Hollywood TV*, ABC signed a deal with Disney in 1954, whereby the network promised \$2 million for a fifty-two-week series with a seven-year option for renewal. More importantly for the park, ABC agreed to purchase a 35 percent share in Disneyland for \$500,000, helping Walt Disney to get the funds he needed to finance his vision.<sup>9</sup>

The *Disneyland* series, produced by Walt Disney Productions under the *Disneyland* title from 1954 to 1958, took up the anthology format, which allowed Disney to use the program to synergistically promote several different aspects of the burgeoning Disney empire.<sup>10</sup> As J.P. Telotte observes, *Disneyland* was something of a mash-up that combined older pre-existing content, including the studio's back catalog of short cartoons, promotional segments used to publicize new studio releases, and sections or even entire episodes devoted to showcasing the new theme park, all tied together with Walt as the host and personal guide through the world of

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Anderson, "Disneyland," in *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 141.

<sup>10</sup> The series was renamed and reconceived throughout the next half-century, most notably for the development and depiction of the park as *Walt Disney Presents* (1958-1961) and *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* (1961-1969). See J.P. Telotte's *Disney TV* for a concise but cogent analysis of the series.

Disney.<sup>11</sup> The use of the television series as a vehicle for promoting a variety of existing Disney content and properties was such a central focus with *Disneyland* that the “only completely new programming” in its first season was the three-part Davy Crockett serial and Walt Disney’s hosted lead-ins.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars like Anderson and Telotte explore the implications of this foundational connection to Hollywood through their in-depth analysis of the synergies between Disneyland and ABC’s *Disneyland* television series.<sup>13</sup> They analyze the industrial, artistic, and cultural effects of the new synergy created by uniting film, television, and theme park. Anderson points to the unification of the theme park and the TV series under a single name as a “commercial decision” that was emblematic of Disney’s desire to “create an all-encompassing consumer environment that he described as ‘total merchandising.’”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Telotte identifies the integration of show and park as the “drive for synergy or integration.”<sup>15</sup> As Boddy argues in *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*, Disney launched the *Disneyland* television series during a time of great turmoil in the television industry, when film studios and broadcast networks were jockeying for control over television programming. *Disneyland*, as a deal with ABC, served as a means for Disney to both attempt to maintain control over television programming and profitability while also promoting its studio productions as well as its new theme park. The Disneyland park, as a physical space, acted as an arena where the company

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<sup>11</sup> J.P. Telotte, *Disney TV* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 64-79.

<sup>12</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland;” Telotte, *Disney TV*.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland,” 134.

<sup>15</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 64.

could maintain exclusive control over its own IP. This suggests, in other words, that Disney used the ABC television deal to branch off from an industry where it was difficult to maintain control (television) to one where the company could execute monopolistic control over its own product and profit.<sup>16</sup>

Anderson, Boddy, and Telotte make significant arguments about the industrial motivations for the park/media relationship. My dissertation contributes to such work by providing close analyses of the texts (including park rides and lands) themselves. My work thus puts the experiences of these media spaces in dialogue with their larger industrial and historical contexts, drawing inspiration from John Thornton Caldwell's synthesis of industrial, historical, and formal/aesthetic analysis in *Televisuality*.<sup>17</sup> While the industrial influence of the television industry on Disneyland has been well documented, other Hollywood influences, such as the formal and architectural modes of the movie studio and backlot, have perhaps not been given the attention they deserve.

Disneyland's roots in Hollywood, particularly Disney's film production, can be traced to the park's pre-history. As Disney biographer Neal Gabler notes, "almost from the moment Disney first imagined it, he had thought of Disneyland in cinematic terms—a 'cute movie set is what it really is,' Walt told his staff."<sup>18</sup> In the decades leading up to its opening in 1955, the nascent ideas that would become Disneyland went through several incarnations, but all of them were connected in one way or another, with varying degrees of intensity, to filmmaking and to

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<sup>16</sup> William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 132-149. Special thanks to John Caldwell for suggesting this argument.

<sup>17</sup> John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), x.

<sup>18</sup> Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 533.

Hollywood. The result did, and still does, more closely resemble “a cute movie set” than anything else.

One of the earliest of Walt’s ideas was for a park that was sometimes referred to as “Mickey Mouse Village.”<sup>19</sup> As Michael J. Barrier notes, as early as the late 1930s, Disney began throwing around ideas for a space that would be built either on or adjacent to the Walt Disney Productions studio lot in Burbank.<sup>20</sup> Other major Hollywood film studios, including Universal Studios, had offered guided tours of their backlots and sets, but Disney, whose animation lot had not yet turned to life-action films, had nothing to show people who wanted to see behind the scenes.<sup>21</sup> Disney animator Ward Kimball recalled that Walt had remarked:

You know, it’s a shame people come to Hollywood and find there’s nothing to see. They expect to see glamour and movie stars, and they go away disappointed. Even the people who come to this studio. What can they see? A bunch of guys bending over drawings. Wouldn’t it be nice if people could come to Hollywood and *see* something?<sup>22</sup>

After that, according to Kimball, “Walt began talking about building an amusement park on an eleven-acre triangle the studio owned across the street on Riverside Drive.”<sup>23</sup> This park was to serve both the public and the studio itself. Studio staffers recall Walt talking about a “magical little park” on an eight-acre piece of land across the street from the studio. Visitors to Hollywood

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<sup>19</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 489.

<sup>20</sup> Michael J. Barrier, *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 212.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Neuman, “Disneyland’s Main Street, U.S.A., and Its Sources in Hollywood, U.S.A.,” in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 43.

<sup>22</sup> Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: An American Original* (Glendale: Disney Editions, 1994), 218.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 218.

could enjoy the park in conjunction with studio tours, and Disney employees could spend time with their families there.<sup>24</sup>

Among the variety of books and articles written about Disney and Disneyland there are some varying accounts and dates, particularly as regards Disneyland's pre-history, but the connections between the ideas that would become the park and Hollywood are well-documented by several sources through Disney biographies. According to biographer Neal Gabler:

Wilfred Jackson said that Walt had first broached the idea for an amusement park during the *Snow White* premiere, where Walt had a dwarfs' cottage erected outside the theater as a display. As they walked past it, Walt told Jackson that he wanted to build a park scaled to children's size. Ben Sharpsteen said he first heard about a park in 1940 when he accompanied Walt to New York for a demonstration of Fantasound and Walt discussed his plans for setting up displays on a strip of land across the street from the studio between Riverside Drive and the Los Angeles River—'just something to show people who wanted to visit the Disney Studio,'—Walt said. Dick Irvine, an art director at the studio, remembered Walt coming into the office during the war and describing a public tour of the studio that Irvine felt later expanded into the amusement park. And John Hench, an animator and layout man, recalled Walt in the 1940s pacing out the parking lot and imagining the boundaries for an amusement park there.<sup>25</sup>

Although the times and dates differ—from the late 1930s with Ward Kimball and Wilfred Jackson to the 1940s with Ben Sharpsteen, Dick Irvine, and John Hench—what remains consistent is the fact that in all these cases, the idea for Disneyland seemed to spring directly from the movie studio. These early kernels of what would become the theme park may differ in nature, from the more fanciful recreation of film sets scaled down for kids to actual behind-the-scenes studio tours, but what seems most significant is that they all originate concretely with the studio itself, not simply with some abstract memory of amusement parks or world's fairs.

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<sup>24</sup> "Walt Disney Archives Presents Disneyland the Exhibit," D23 Expo 2015, The Walt Disney Company, Anaheim, California: Anaheim Convention Center, August 14-16, 2015. Wall text.

<sup>25</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 484.

Karal Ann Marling has argued that Disney's 1941 film *The Reluctant Dragon* served as a place for him to work out his ideas and anxieties about the animation process and the desire for a physical studio tour. In her reading of the film, she demonstrates how *The Reluctant Dragon* reveals Disney's budding theme park idea, stemming from his discontent with the movie business and desire to make three-dimensional the two-dimensional world of his animations.<sup>26</sup>

According to Marling:

Children from every corner of the country wrote to Walt now, wanting to come to Hollywood and see the place where Mickey Mouse lived. Public demand had forced some of the other studios to sell paper-bag lunches and maps of their backlots, for fans bent on a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the movie business. The segment of *The Reluctant Dragon* in which Alan Ladd pretends to make an animated film was Walt's answer to the studio tour. Tourists would be bored stiff by the painstaking technicalities of animation, he thought. There really wasn't much to see.<sup>27</sup>

Her analysis of this 1941 film fits chronologically with the anecdotal memories of Disney's friends and animators, many of whom point to the late 1930s and early 1940s as the time when Disney's desire for a new, more three-dimensional project were gestating. Moreover, her argument reinforces the idea that not only was Disneyland a product of a filmmaker and a film studio, but it was also the product of a fundamental discontent that Disney had with the filmmaking process *as such*. It seems that whatever these early projects were, they all grew out of Disney's filmmaking and storytelling process, and the desire to expand access to it.

At some point, Walt's "Mickey Mouse Park" gave way to a project that eventually became known as Disneylandia, a touring exhibit of miniature scenes, some taken directly from his films.<sup>28</sup> A series of small, animated models, Disneylandia is also significant as an early

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<sup>26</sup> Karal Ann Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, edited by Karal Ann Marling (New York: Flammarion, 1997), 31-33.

<sup>27</sup> Marling, "Imagineering," 39.

<sup>28</sup> "Walt Disney Archives Presents Disneyland the Exhibit."

precursor to his later development of Audio-Animatronics as an extension of his animated films. Walt Disney had long been a collector of mechanical toys, and these toys may have “suggested to him the possibility of finding a three-dimensional equivalent for the art of screen animation.”<sup>29</sup> As Margaret J. King and J. G. O’Boyle argue, Disney, “as a communicator constantly pushing the frontiers of animation and film, saw the possibilities in creating a new type of three-dimensional movie for a new kind of ‘audience’—one that moves around, interacts, and reads its own personal plots and subplots into the script.”<sup>30</sup> The Disneylandia project could be understood as an outgrowth of this same impulse.

Frequently acknowledged to be Walt’s personal favorite of his films, Disney’s 1941 film *So Dear to My Heart* and its bucolic milieu became central to this early Disneylandia concept. While Disneylandia’s miniatures were not all strictly film-inspired—there was a barbershop among the early models—Walt’s personal investment in the scene of Granny’s Cabin, recreated in miniature from the film, is a testament to the presence of cinema even here. Granny’s Cabin was the first of the miniatures created before the Disneylandia project was abandoned. Walt himself created the model and brought Beulah Bondi, the actress who had played Granny in the film, to record a narration for the scene.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, however, it became apparent to Walt and his designers that the scenes were too small to engage a crowd and might prove too boring to hold their attention.

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<sup>29</sup> Christopher Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 400.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret J. King and J. G. O’Boyle, “The Theme Park: The Art of Time and Space,” in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Marling, “Imagineering,” 47-48.



At this point, according to Disney's mechanical engineer Roger Broggie, "the whole job was stopped and they said, 'We're going to do this thing for real!'"<sup>32</sup> However, the scene of the cabin was apparently so significant to Walt's early ideas for the park, and the film so connected to the gestation of his idea, that even after the Disneylandia idea was abandoned for the actual park, Granny's Cabin still made an appearance as a full-size building on some of the early plans for the park.<sup>33</sup> While that building was never realized at Disneyland, another remnant of *So Dear to My Heart* did, in the form of Frontierland Station (now New Orleans Square Station), which was modeled on the small train depot from the film. According to the Walt Disney Archives, "by 1951, [Walt] combined the Disneylandia idea with a 'kiddie park,' planned for the now 16-acre lot in Burbank."<sup>34</sup> No matter how the plans morphed and changed, the influence of Hollywood remained a constant presence.

Despite the Disneylandia project's markedly different relationship to cinema, initial plans for Disneyland always seemed to revert to the backlot. Early discussions of Disneyland, both on Walt's part and in the media, frequently mention not only that the park would be *like* a backlot, but often that it would function itself *as* a backlot for actual film and television production. Preliminary Disneyland plans included "a residential street, with a white clapboard Harper Goff church, to be used as the backlot for making television shows."<sup>35</sup> Walt himself said that the park was designed to be the site of a "complete television center" that could broadcast programs

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<sup>32</sup> Marling, "Imagineering," 52.

<sup>33</sup> Marling, "Imagineering," 47.

<sup>34</sup> "Walt Disney Archives Presents Disneyland the Exhibit."

<sup>35</sup> Marling, "Imagineering," 63.

throughout the country.<sup>36</sup> According to Neal Gabler, Walt’s brother and business partner Roy Disney, charged with the financial and practical side of things, was only won over by the plans to have the park function as a studio: “Roy said he wasn’t initially enthusiastic either, though he grudgingly justified the project on the grounds that the park could be used as a broadcast studio for television.”<sup>37</sup> As Robert Neuman notes, a 1953 prospectus for the park shown by Roy to television executives in 1953 included explicit plans for not one but three park-based facilities for television production: “the Opera House on Town Square for the *Disneyland* TV series; Treasure Island in Frontierland for the *Mickey Mouse Club* show; and Tomorrowland home of the futuristic *World of Tomorrow Television Show*.”<sup>38</sup>

The public at the time would have understood the park as, in part, a production facility as well, even though the finished park would not contain any of these explicit production spaces. Even as late as 1954, Thomas Pryor of The New York Times reported that, as the subtitle of his article reads, Disneyland “Will Serve Two Purposes.” He wrote that, “the Disneyland amusement park is an ambitious project, which would serve two purposes—as a film production center and as a tourist attraction for which admission would be charged. The fairyland, which would be patterned after Disney ‘villages’ seen in pictures and peopled with his famous gallery of characters, would be spread over more than 100 acres, including parking space.”<sup>39</sup> The next month, he reported that the park, “will serve also as the production center for the television

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<sup>36</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 234.

<sup>37</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 488.

<sup>38</sup> Neuman, “Disneyland’s Main Street,” 43.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas M. Pryor, “Disney to Enter TV Field in Fall,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 1954, ProQuest.

shows.”<sup>40</sup> While the plans for Disneyland as a production facility never reached fruition, even without the presence of a television studio, as Marling argues, “Main Street still amounts to an elaborate setting for an unscripted drama enacted by the pedestrian and his fellow guests. It is a movie that runs inside the consciousness of the actors.”<sup>41</sup>

It seems, however, that Disneyland was also a movie that ran inside the consciousness of its creators. The park’s connection with Hollywood is reinforced by the fact that the people who designed and built the park were actual filmmakers. Not only was Disneyland the product of a filmmaker’s mind, but it was also brought to life by filmmakers and the techniques of their trade.

According to the Walt Disney Archives:

To design the park [Walt] ‘cast’ the people he knew best: animators, artists, sculptors, engineers, story-tellers, and special effects artists like John Hench, Marc Davis, Ken Anderson, Claude Coats, Herb Ryman, Sam McKim, Fred Joerger, Marvin Davis, Blaine Gibson, Bill Martin, and Harper Goff. Others came from the world of Hollywood art direction and design.<sup>42</sup>

To design and build his park, Walt created WED Enterprises in 1952, which he staffed primarily by bringing people over from the studio.<sup>43</sup> Bill Cottrell, WED’s first employee, was working simultaneously on both television projects and the park.<sup>44</sup> Layout artist Ken Anderson, who had been charged with creating background for Walt’s miniatures in the earlier Disneylandia, was also brought over from the studio.<sup>45</sup> Rather than hire amusement park experts, as might be

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas M. Pryor, “Hollywood Double Entente,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 1954, ProQuest.

<sup>41</sup> Marling, “Imagineering,” 89.

<sup>42</sup> “Walt Disney Archives Presents Disneyland the Exhibit.”

<sup>43</sup> WED stands for Disney’s full name, Walter Elias Disney, and the company would later be renamed Walt Disney Imagineering and its employees referred to as Imagineers.

<sup>44</sup> Cottrell quoted in Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 494.

<sup>45</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 481.

expected if Disney were trying to create just another amusement park “themed” to his films, Disney relied almost exclusively on filmmaking talent to construct his park.

It is not surprising that these filmmakers conceived of the park and its attractions as they did their films. Nothing like Disneyland or what came to be understood as “theme parks” had yet existed, so they drew from what they knew to plan the park. According to Christopher Finch, “a number of the rides for both parks were designed by Marc Davis, formerly one of the Studio’s top animators. He begins each of them as if he were planning a cartoon.”<sup>46</sup> Bob Thomas also notes that Disney artists Richard Irvine, Marvin Davis, and Harper Goff, got their ideas for Disneyland’s attractions from the studio’s feature cartoons: “They drew storyboards for the rides, and Walt contributed his storytelling talent. He described the entire Snow White ride as if it were a movie cartoon, visualizing all the park’s attractions for the designers just as he had brought cartoons to life for his animators.”<sup>47</sup> As Finch observes, what distinguished Disneyland from other amusement parks, “is the fact that it is designed like a movie lot. The skills that go into building film sets are the same skills that went into Main Street and Frontierland.” Finch goes on to note that, “the difference is that a set may consist of façades that open onto nothing, whereas Disneyland’s streets are punctuated by doors that give access to rides, entertainments, stores, and restaurants.”<sup>48</sup>

Disneyland was not only conceived of like a film and designed by filmmakers, many of its attractions, including those based on the studio’s films, were constructed at the studio itself. The Mark Twain riverboat was a prime example: even though it was a functioning boat, and

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<sup>46</sup> Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 399.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 243.

<sup>48</sup> Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 393.

while the hull was constructed at a shipyard, “nearly everything else was built by the various departments at the Disney studio.”<sup>49</sup> The earliest attractions, many of them “dark rides” based on the Disney animated films, were also largely designed and assembled in Burbank. The animators developed the stunts and the visual effects of the Snow White, Peter Pan, and Mr. Toad rides, and “mock-ups were laid out in a tin-roof shed so the planners could visualize space relationships. Other dark rides of amusement parks had steel wheels on the cars, but Walt considered them too noisy. ‘We’re trying to tell a story in those rides; we need quiet cars.’”<sup>50</sup> While the format of the dark ride derives from the amusement park tradition, the essence of the ride—the need to tell a story based on a film—was fundamentally different, and thus required the talents of filmmakers rather than traditional amusement park engineers. Even in the traditional dark ride form, the impulse appeared to be to bring everything back to the film studio and to work toward those cinematic standards, rather than adapt to preexisting forms.

The fact that Disneyland was the product of a film studio, and Disney’s desire to use filmmakers and filmmaking techniques to construct his park, became somewhat problematic for the project. While Disney’s team was comprised of skilled animators and live-action filmmakers, they were not entirely knowledgeable about the real-life requirements of a serious architectural undertaking. According to Neal Gabler, Dr. Charles Straub, president of the Santa Anita Turf Club and an acquaintance of Walt’s, “convinced him that he didn’t need a big architectural firm, that the park was essentially a matter of entertainment rather than design, and that building the park, in the words of one art director, was ‘very much like doing a set for a motion picture.’”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 267.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 265.

<sup>51</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 494.

But because Walt and his designers conceived of Disneyland in cinematic terms, as an entertainment product rather than an architectural one, they were occasionally struck by problems that arose from thinking of the park more like a backlot than an amusement park. Disney biographer Michael Barrier notes that, “as a longtime filmmaker, Walt had imagined that Disneyland would be built more like a motion-picture set, on a temporary basis.”<sup>52</sup> The result was that, “sometimes the engineers told him that effects he could easily accomplish in motion pictures were impractical in an amusement park.”<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, such practical, industrial conditions of Disneyland’s creation—as the product of filmmakers and a film studio—informed the experiential nature of Disneyland as a place that both grew out of—and functions like—the movies.

### ***Conceptual Influences: Experiencing the Movies***

Beyond its construction, the conceptualization of Disneyland as a media space is reflected in the language Disney and his associates used to conceive of and describe Disneyland. This language belies the park’s deep-rooted connection with the movies. Modern park-goers are likely familiar with Disneyland jargon, such as the practice of referring to workers as “cast members” and customers as “guests.” The non-public part of the park is referred to as “backstage.” However, more than a clever modern public relations tactic, this language is evidence of the ways in which the park was conceived, which suggests how it is intended to be experienced by the consumer. Indeed, language both reflects and shapes how something is understood, and as early as the park’s first days, Disneyland was being described as a cinematic experience: “[W]e don’t hire for jobs here,” the [Disney University] training program’s head,

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<sup>52</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 251.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 263.

Van Arsdale France, told a reporter, in keeping with the theme that this was not a park but a set, ‘so much as we cast for parts, especially the onstage roles—ticket takers, ride operators, tour guides.’”<sup>54</sup> Even in building the Jungle Cruise, “...landscape designer Bill Evans began to speak of ‘casting’ vegetation for appropriate sections of Disneyland, so that the smallest detail of plant life would support the overall theme.”<sup>55</sup> Though these details may seem incidental, they speak to the park’s fundamental conceptual frameworks.

It seems that Walt himself thought of and often referred to the park cinematically. In one oft-cited anecdote, one time Walt took a ride on the Jungle Cruise, it ran several minutes short of its target run-time. He is reported to have told Adventureland manager Dick Nunis: “If the trip is seven minutes and you cut out three minutes, it’s like going to a movie and having some important reels left out.”<sup>56</sup> Transitions between lands or buildings were described as “cross dissolves,” spaces in attractions were “scenes,” and main attractions were “key frames” in the film that was the park. As Neal Gabler notes, “‘Imagineers’...had not only been inspired by movies in thinking of rides; Walt had coached them to think of the rides as movie experiences.”<sup>57</sup>

Thinking of the rides and the park in this way distinguished Disneyland from early amusement parks. Walt was conscious of the distinction: “‘In the first place,’ Walt said, ‘this is not an amusement park.’”<sup>58</sup> Disneyland is often called the first “theme park” and indeed, it became the template for subsequent theme parks, created both by Disney and by competing

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<sup>54</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 528.

<sup>55</sup> Marling, “Imagineering,” 107.

<sup>56</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 536.

<sup>57</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 534.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 268.

companies and studios. Yet, today, the terms “theme park” and “amusement park” are frequently blurred together in everyday parlance, despite the fundamental differences between the two forms. As scholars like Margaret King and J. G. O’Boyle have noted before, theme parks are distinct from amusement parks at their very core. Much of this essential difference derives from what they identify as the central impulse of the amusement park—the physical sensations created by the rides themselves—and that of the theme park, which “is an environmental art form, one that owes far more to film than physics.”<sup>59</sup> King and O’Boyle describe theme parks as “the multi-dimensional descendant of the book, film, and epic rather than the spawn of the roller coaster and Tilt-A-Whirl,” noting that while rides are present as a fraction of the time spent at a theme park, the experience of a theme is not limited to or dependent on them.<sup>60</sup> As they pointedly argue, “a theme park without rides is still a theme park; an amusement park without rides is a parking lot with popcorn.”<sup>61</sup> Walt Disney’s nascent creation was more than just a different kind of amusement park, it was a new kind of hybrid media form, and the language he used to describe it suggests he thought of it as such.

Disneyland is also something more than either the films and television series from which it drew or the physical spaces that were created within the berm. The experience of the park is something that combined both media and space together into a new kind of experience, an idea that is illustrated by the *Disneyland* television show. More than simply a synergistic financial move, the connection between Disneyland and *Disneyland* exemplifies a more fundamental conceptual and experiential link between the park and the studio. Essentially, the series and park

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<sup>59</sup> King and O’Boyle, “The Theme Park,” 6.

<sup>60</sup> King and O’Boyle, “The Theme Park,” 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> King and O’Boyle, “The Theme Park,” 7.



were considered, and framed, as one in the same thing—as Disney biographer Bob Thomas noted, “Walt argued that entertainment was the same in any medium.”<sup>62</sup> This began with the first episode of the series, where, as Michael Barrier, points out, “the real business...was to cement the identification between the show and the park to come.”<sup>63</sup> And, as J.P. Telotte argues, “The first step in developing Disneyland—and its subsequent offspring—involved creating a kind of entertainment hybrid, an amalgam of the amusement park and movie experience.”<sup>64</sup> In Disneyland, Walt Disney combined embodied aspects of the amusement park form with the narrative immersion of the movies to create a new kind of media experience.

As discussed above, while *Disneyland* quite literally brought Disneyland into existence through the solid financial backing of ABC, Christopher Anderson noted that, “television’s figurative representation of Disneyland actually called the amusement park into existence.”<sup>65</sup> Even before the park was finished, the program was used to raise consciousness about this new phenomenon and, as Jennifer Gillan has astutely demonstrated, to show viewers how to *think* about Disneyland.<sup>66</sup> The television series virtually brought the park into the home, through the television set. However, it simultaneously brought the viewers *to* Disneyland, as in *Disneyland’s* first episode, “The Disneyland Story,” where maps and aerial footage are used to virtually transport home viewers to the still-unfinished park. In a meeting with ABC executives, Walt said, “Disneyland actually is the format of the Disneyland show...it becomes a real place

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 242.

<sup>63</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 247-248.

<sup>64</sup> Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 119.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland,” 134-135.

<sup>66</sup> Jennifer Gillan, *Television Brandcasting: The Return of the Content-Promotion Hybrid* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), Chapter 4.

springing out of what we present on the TV screen. The public is going to see it on TV and actually feel they are a part of it.”<sup>67</sup> Following these maps and aerial shots, the television camera pans through a “quarter-inch-to-the-foot scale model of Disneyland” to guide audiences through the (simulated) park. As Telotte notes: “the most curious element of ‘The Disneyland Story’ episode is precisely this insistence on blurring boundaries” between television and park.<sup>68</sup> This is accomplished, in part, by using the televisual medium to combine the simultaneous movement inward, from the park into the home, and outward, from the home into the park. The conceit of flying the viewer into the park space was later brought to life in a 1958 episode, “An Adventure in the Magic Kingdom,” where Walt quite literally asks Tinker Bell to fly visitors down the freeway and into the park for a visit.<sup>69</sup>

More than simply presenting the parks to viewers, in blurring these spatial boundaries *Disneyland* also functioned as a means by which Disney could compel viewers to *become* visitors. Through the television series, the park was made into a narrative setting that would be activated when viewers actually travel to the park to take their parts in the “inhabitable text” of the park. According to Anderson:

A trip to Disneyland—using the conceptual map provided by the program—offered the family viewer a chance to perform in the Disneyland narrative, to provide unity and closure through personal experience, to witness the ‘aura’ to which television’s reproductive apparatus could only allude.<sup>70</sup>

In his famous essay on the “aura,” “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin argued that, “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in

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<sup>67</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 510.

<sup>68</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 76.

<sup>69</sup> Gillan, *Television Broadcasting*, 215.

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland,” 152-153.

one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>71</sup> The lack of this aura in the televisual representation of the physical park, combined with the creation of a narrative to be inhabited by the viewer, created a compelling impetus for viewers to become visitors. The connection with the *Disneyland* television series promised an experience for the viewer that would be delivered to the park-goer. As Douglas Brode observed about the Davy Crockett serial:

That TV-created dream, Disney assured his audience, could soon be incarnated in reality: just such a keelboat awaited holiday season customers on the park’s ‘Rivers of America.’ Some day, every viewer decided, I’ve got to go there and, like the hero of this show, step on board; live out an adventure I know I’ll love because I’ve already seen it on TV.<sup>72</sup>

Through the combination of park and television, Disney created what Walt called “a new concept in entertainment.”<sup>73</sup>

Central to this new concept in entertainment was the ability to experience movies and television shows in built space. As Katherine Howe asserts, “The park represented the first intersection point between Hollywood studio production, television, and architectural space; Frontierland as a physical attraction corresponded with the televised adventure of Davy Crockett at the Alamo, or ‘The Saga of Andy Burnett,’ a serial about a pioneer traveling from Pittsburgh to the Rockies.”<sup>74</sup> In individual attractions, visitors could fly over London like Peter Pan or escape the clutches of an evil witch like Snow White. While the park only opened with a handful

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<sup>71</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 220.

<sup>72</sup> Douglas Brode, “Of Theme Parks and Television: Walt Disney, Rod Serling, and the Politics of Nostalgia,” in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 186.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 245.

<sup>74</sup> Katherine Howe, “Vacation in Historyland,” in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 197.

of rides that spoke explicitly to existing Disney properties, even parts of the park not overtly tied to specific film or television narratives, like Main Street, were nevertheless constructed and experienced cinematically. Moreover, unrealized plans for the park meant to go even further into the three-dimensional recreation of screen geography. As Marling points out: “[Storybook Land was] his template for what the whole of Fantasyland should have looked like had the money not run out. The little houses—Toad Hall, the cottages of the Three Little Pigs, Peter Pan’s London, the castle of Cinderella’s prince—were fiberglass stand-ins, models for full-scale buildings to be erected later.”<sup>75</sup>

This “new entertainment” of experiencing the movies in three-dimensions was not lost on early journalists, who communicated this aspect of the park even before it opened. Louis Berg of the *Los Angeles Times* described the future experience in 1954: “You’ll be offered a soft drink and find yourself reduced in size, in a room with giant furnishings. Or a sip from another bottle will make you a giant moving in a miniature world. In brief, you can live through the adventures of Alice in Wonderland, or take an aerial flight on Dumbo, the air-borne elephant.”<sup>76</sup> And, as Gabler observed, “most [visitors] seemed to realize that Disneyland was an extension of Walt’s animations, that it was the fantastic and imaginary now made corporeal, or as *McCall’s* put it, ‘Walt Disney’s cartoon world materializes bigger than life and twice as real.’”<sup>77</sup>

Individually, the attractions themselves were to be experienced cinematically. From the beginning, the focus of the attractions was on a story presented in a controlled and cinematic way. As Barrier recounts:

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<sup>75</sup> Marling, “Imagineering,” 127.

<sup>76</sup> Louis Berg, “Walt Disney’s New Ten Million Dollar Toy...” *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1954. ProQuest.

<sup>77</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 533.

[Harrison ‘Buzz’] Price’s first meeting with Disney took place on June 3, 1953. Writing about that meeting, Price said that what Disney described to him, ‘sounded strange, unlike anything you would expect in an amusement park...Walt’s major investment would be committed to creating a storytelling environment. Rides would be subordinate to story and setting. Most shocking, there were no thrill rides, no roller coaster, no super fast fear of falling rides anywhere.’<sup>78</sup>

As Christopher Finch argues, “the movie influence is most obvious within the context of individual attractions.” Attraction vehicles are “used exactly like a movie camera. The rider is traveling through a programmed show which unfolds in time. The choice of where to look is not his to make—it has already been made by the designer, who determines what will be seen, just as a director determines what the movie patron will see.”<sup>79</sup> Moreover, as Erika Doss observes, the riders were often put in the place of the protagonist, as “the rides in Fantasyland were designed to allow children to ‘step into’ and become a part of their favorite animated films. Central figures in several rides were downplayed to allow their riders to ‘become’ Snow White or Peter Pan.”<sup>80</sup> This, however, did not always work. Ken Anderson, the art director of the original *Snow White* film in 1937, selected the scenes that would be brought to life in three dimensions in the Snow White and Her Adventures attraction.<sup>81</sup> This ride was designed to fully immerse the visitor by placing them at the center of the story. According to Anderson, riders were supposed to understand that they were Snow White, but “nobody got it. Nobody actually figured that they were Snow White. They just wondered where the hell Snow White was.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 239-240.

<sup>79</sup> Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 414-415.

<sup>80</sup> Erika Doss, “Making Imagination Safe in the 1950s: Disneyland’s Fantasy Art and Architecture,” in *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, edited by Karal Ann Marling (York: Flammarion, 1997), 180-181.

<sup>81</sup> Marling, “Imagineering,” 74.

<sup>82</sup> Barrier, “The Animated Man,” 258.

This identification of the cinematic modes employed in these rides underscores a difference between the theatrical and the cinematic. Although many of the techniques used in the creation of Disneyland and its attractions are taken, through cinema, from the stage, the essential perspective of the parks and the rides is a cinematic one. Yi-Fu Tuan describes the distinction:

Note that a difference already exists between watching a movie screen and watching a theater's stage. The movie makes the viewer feel like a participant: the camera's eye is the moviegoer's eye, and as the camera shows a car's hood pointing and moving down a road, I in the dark cinema feel as though I am behind the wheel myself, steering the car down the road. Nothing like this order of participation can occur when I watch a performance on a theater's confined stage. It is this movie-house experience that Disney wishes to carry over into the ride, greatly enhanced by the jerky, thrusting motions of a car or boat that is attached to the conveyor belt.<sup>83</sup>

The fact that the visitor may not explicitly realize their specific role in the narrative is somewhat irrelevant—the important factor, as Tuan points out, is the participation that is essential both to the theme park ride and to the cinematic experience.

Beyond these individual attractions, however, Disneyland's larger geography also relates conceptually to Hollywood, through the link between Disneyland's "lands" and film genres. Disneyland's original lands, named and visually distinct from one another, correspond both to common Hollywood film genres and to the kinds of films that Walt Disney Productions was known for at the time. As Kathy Merlock Jackson notes: "In his television series, Disney used the same four divisions—Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland, and Tomorrowland—that categorized the realms of his theme park, corresponding with the studio's cinematic genres: its

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<sup>83</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan and Steven D. Hoelscher, "Disneyland: Its Place in World Culture," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, edited by Karal Ann Marling, (New York: Flammarion, 1997), 196.

signature animation, as well as action-adventure, the Western, and science-fiction.”<sup>84</sup> Marling briefly traces the history of these Disney genres:

Adventureland, for example, was inspired by the True-Life Adventure nature documentaries the studio had begun to make in 1948, and the first of these featurettes, *Seal Island*, was seen during the premiere season of the *Disneyland* show. Frontierland corresponded to live-action westerns for television currently in production, including the wildly popular *Davy Crockett* hours aired on Wednesday nights in 1954 and 1955. Tomorrowland was less closely tied to existing Disney films but reflected Walt’s ongoing interest in new technologies and in corporate research: television features organized around this subject would include updates from the Bell Laboratories and other contractors working for the space program. Fantasyland, of course, alluded to the animated features. And Walt Disney had the best film library in the animation business.<sup>85</sup>

So, while Peter Pan’s Flight might correspond more or less faithfully to Disney’s *Peter Pan* (1953), the land in which it was situated—Fantasyland—similarly corresponded to the corpus of Disney’s animated fantasy features. This structure, of lands/genres, was reflected in the structure of the *Disneyland* television show. Marling notes that, “television also provided the physical structure for the park. The show was organized around a menu of themes, each one corresponding to a part of the park, or to a sprawling roster of ‘lands’ that began to whittle itself down to a manageable four as budgets were fixed and construction began.”<sup>86</sup> Each week, the *Disneyland* series would focus in on a virtual “land,” which corresponded with a physical land at or planned for the park, and that week’s programming would be related to the selected genre.

However, the connection between Hollywood production genres and Disneyland’s lands was not just through the *Disneyland* show and Disney’s feature films. Frontierland and Main Street, U.S.A., for example, had their roots much deeper than Disney’s own catalog. Frontierland

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<sup>84</sup> Kathy Merlock Jackson, “Synergistic Disney: New Directions for Mickey and Media in 1954-1955,” in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 21.

<sup>85</sup> Marling, *Imagineering*, 73.

<sup>86</sup> Marling, “*Imagineering*,” 73.

reflects Disney's own Western productions, but even those derive from a cinematic genre that is highly specific to cinema (and before it literature), rather than to any real history of the West. Richard Francaviglia observes that "so powerful is the name 'Frontierland' that its mere mention evokes images of 'the West' to most people. Those images are derived from television and novels rather than serious historical research."<sup>87</sup> In other words, Walt's Frontierland was a "western town that was the movies' idea of the West," not the actual West. Walt even, according to Marling, "instruct[ed] Harper Goff to model the saloon after one that Goff had designed for the recent film *Calamity Jane*. He imagined a jungle cruise ride that would be modeled after another recent film, *The African Queen*, which Goff loved."<sup>88</sup> On opening day, *Davy Crockett* actors Fess Parker and Buddy Ebsen, helped with the festivities. For Francaviglia, their presence "confirmed a basic fact about the entire theme park. It was an elaborate set where Disney's films could be further dramatized, and where the park's visitors could actually take part in the drama they had seen on movie and television screens."<sup>89</sup> The distinction is significant, as visitors were not meant to be engaging with the "real" West in an historical sense, but with Disney's, and Hollywood's, version of it. Like Frontierland, Main Street, U.S.A. was derived from "the movies." As architect Mel Kaufman described it, "It's a stage set of Main Street circa 1900," that had more to do with how "main streets" in movies had been portrayed than with any actual Main Street, including Walt's own Marceline, Missouri.<sup>90</sup> In drawing on established film genres, these

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<sup>87</sup> Richard Francaviglia, "Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West," in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, eds. Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 61.

<sup>88</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 497-498.

<sup>89</sup> Francaviglia, "Frontierland as an Allegorical Map," 70.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Peter Blake, "The Lessons of the Parks." In *The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms*, edited by Christopher Finch (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 432.



lands went beyond Disney's own generic categories—they were built on intrinsically cinematic conceptual foundations.

From its first conceptions and earliest years, Disneyland was inextricably tied to Hollywood movies and television, both industrially and conceptually. Tracing these connections throughout the park's later history, we can see that these complex relationships between film, television, and park space have both increased in frequency and changed in form throughout the park's history. In 1955, Disneyland started with just a handful of media spaces, primarily film-based attractions. Now, sixty-seven years later, it is full of not only film-based attractions, but also film-based lands. Moreover, in more recent decades, we have seen the reverse impact of this connection between the park and Hollywood: films and games that, like the early *Disneyland* television series, have translated the park back onto the screen. From early 1990s video games to late 1990s and early 2000s movies like *Tower of Terror* and *The Haunted Mansion* to the ever-growing blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, Disney has also been adapting its park spaces into moving image media. By charting the early cinematic and televisual histories of Disneyland, we can see that the relationship between Hollywood and the theme park is not new at all, but rather part of its very birth.

Given these early and continuing connections between the park and screen media, I read the park and its sub-spaces like cinematic, televisual, and game texts, while being attentive to the spatial dimensions of these “texts” and the experience of them. Scholars like Jason Sperb and Angela Ndaliansis advocate considering park spaces as coherent and significant texts by themselves, with their own sets of concerns, separate from their source texts.<sup>91</sup> This perspective

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<sup>91</sup> Angela Ndaliansis, *The Horror Sensorium: Media and the Senses* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2012), 3, 39; Jason Sperb, *Disney's Most Notorious Film: Race, Convergence, and The Hidden Histories of the Song of the South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 164.

of treating park spaces and media texts as having equal integrity and meriting the same kind of textual consideration is at the heart of my methodological approach to this dissertation. I argue that not only do attractions, which more closely resemble films with their typically clear narrative constructions, function as media texts, but that the larger, and arguably less narratively coherent, levels of park spaces, including lands and entire parks themselves, can similarly be read as media texts. Therefore, I propose to extend Sperb and Ndalianis's textually egalitarian perspective even further to allow for a multiplicity of possible media texts within the media park.

My approach to analyzing media park space foregrounds a close textual analysis of case studies, which include both screen media texts like films and physical park "texts" like rides and even park lands. Yet the experience of park spaces, like the rides and lands discussed here, is intrinsically different from that of a screen-based film, television, or game text. As Sperb suggests, "the physical nature of the Disney theme parks requires a different method of 'textual' analysis—one more closely attuned to how much the body is literally put in motion."<sup>92</sup> While they can be analyzed in a similar way to cinematic or televisual texts, from which they frequently derive their narratives, the addition of three-dimensional space and the kinetic audience to the narrative adds an additional phenomenological level to the experience of these kinds of texts. In other words, park texts are physical narrative environments that are experienced in three dimensions, while the narrative spaces of entertainment media, such as the cinematic, televisual, and game texts discussed here, are separated from the audience by the screen. Thus, the textual analysis of park space that I engage in here draws on multiple methodologies, including the narrative, formal, spatial, architectural, and visual analysis. In this dissertation, I "read" the narrative, visual, spatial, architectural, geographical, and somatic elements of park attractions

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<sup>92</sup> Sperb, *Disney's Most Notorious Film*, 164.

and lands, which I then compare to the film, television, and game texts from which they are adapted or which adapt them.

This textual analysis is bolstered by a consideration of secondary published sources, including material put forth by Disney itself. From these texts, I can understand, to some degree, how these spaces were developed and the corporate strategy and intent behind them. However, discerning corporate intent is not my central goal here. Rather, I seek to demonstrate how we can, independent of creators' intent, read park spaces given their material characteristics, their relation to their related screen media, and our experiences of them. Thus, I consider these texts from multiple angles, looking in part at how these spaces were made (or their "encoding," to borrow from Stuart Hall) as well as our experiential responses to the park spaces and their source media (or "decoding").<sup>93</sup>

This analysis is deeply informed by my fieldwork in the parks, which has allowed me to undertake first-hand analysis of my own fully-embodied narrative experiences. I acknowledge that as someone who has spent extensive time at the parks over several decades and who has an in-depth experiential familiarity with them, I approach this analysis from a unique vantage point. While this position may not (likely does not) account for how most visitors experience the parks, it allows me to engage in finely-grained analysis of these spaces, how they have changed over the years, and their connections to their source media. Of course, the type of analysis presented here suggests still other questions that bear further consideration, including, but not limited to, the role and significance of corporate intent, the wider cultural impacts of these spaces and discourse about them, a consideration of how these spaces may work for visitors unfamiliar with

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<sup>93</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 507-517.

these source texts or who have a more casual relationship to park space, and other possibilities of experience.

What I offer here is a deep sense of these texts and a framework for how they operate. In order to construct this framework, in this dissertation I create a “poetics” or formal breakdown of media park space. I consider the relationships between more “generic” media spaces that draw on broader film and television conventions (as with genre-based lands like Fantasyland) as well as more “mimetic” park spaces that engage with specific narrative worlds (like Indiana Jones Adventure or Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge). Since I am arguing for a reconsideration of the theme park as a media park, a core part of my methodology is to define the spaces, their relationships with one another, and how they position the park visitor.

## **Chapter Breakdown**

My study begins with Disneyland’s opening in 1955 and continues through the present day. Drawing on case studies from Disneyland’s entire history, this dissertation presents not only detailed analyses of different aspects of the media/park relationship, but a sense of the historical trajectory of these spatial media texts as they have changed and become more prominent over the decades. To address their widely varying formal construction and experiential effects, to avoid over-emphasizing any single text as a universally applicable example, and to give a more comprehensive sense of the media park landscape as a whole, I have selected a variety of examples of attractions and media texts.

The chapters in my dissertation are organized according to formal categories of interaction between screen media and park space. The first two chapters trace the movement from virtual screen space to physical park space, considering how park spaces—attractions and

lands—relate to their cinematic and televisual sources. Chapter One looks at film- and television-based attractions, while Chapter Two takes up film-based lands. The third chapter reverses this movement by analyzing park spaces that have been translated into media: park-based films and digital games. The first two chapters are each organized largely chronologically, while the third takes a more thematic approach to its analysis of park-based media. While the historical changes over time are vital to this study, and I track patterns of development in these spaces and texts, this chapter structure emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between park space and media that lies at the heart of this study. Moreover, this conceptual and formal structure supports the close narrative textual analysis that takes place within the individual chapters themselves.

Chapter One explores one of the earliest, most common, and most fundamental intersections of park space and media: film- and television-based attractions. Media-based attractions were part of Disneyland from its earliest inception and have taken a variety of forms over the years, including dark rides, walk throughs, motion simulators, drop towers, and transportation attractions, to name a few. As such, this chapter spans the period from 1955 to 2021, and examines a number of key case studies that each provide insight into a different form of immersive media/park experience. These attractions, and their various forms, in turn, evoke a variety of affective experiences, and this chapter pays special attention to not only how these attractions relate to their source media—films and television—but also to how they relate to us, the visitor. This chapter is organized chronologically in order to give a sense of how the park, and its media-based spaces, have changed over the years and to trace a general—though not rigid—development toward experiences that focus on interactivity, participation, and personalization. This chapter thus aims to both historicize and theorize how these media-based attractions adapt their source narratives into three-dimensional, livable space, while also

revealing how they position park visitors inside their narratives. I consider techniques like narrative positioning, direct address, point-of-view, kinetic storytelling, and world-building, to reveal how these spaces draw from their cinematic and televisual foundations yet operate in distinct ways with regard to the visitor and their body. Ultimately, I seek to uncover how these attractions attempt to bridge the fundamental gap between impermeable screen space and livable physical space by opening fixed narratives and screen-bounded story worlds to the visitor.

I begin by looking to Disneyland's early film-based rides as examples of kinetic storytelling that minimize or manipulate their source narratives in favor of recreating the emotional and affective experiences of their characters, which riders are meant to inhabit. I look to *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride* (1955) as a prime example of this impulse, as I consider how the ride not only eschewed narrative fidelity but deliberately remixed its source film's narrative components to manifest Toad's affective emotional and physical experiences for the rider. I then turn to *Swiss Family Treehouse* (1962) and its later incarnation as *Tarzan's Treehouse* (1999) as an attraction that recreated the sensation of a visit to a film set while also immersing visitors in a physical narrative world. Looking next at *PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON* (1982), I trace how that attraction used its ride vehicles to thrust visitors into the screen world of the film *TRON* (1982), thus merging the cyberspace of the film with the "real" space of the park. Another screen-based ride, *Star Tours* (1986), provides the following case study, which considers another way in which a ride can use technology and cinematic style to dissolve the barrier of the screen and blend the virtual with the physical. Next, I turn to the "kinetic narrative" of the *Indiana Jones Adventure* (1995), which is characterized by multiple kinds of motion, from the literal movement of the rider through the ride space to the ride's ever-changing haptic sensations, and from the rider's position as narrative catalyst to their movement through narrative points from multiple

*Indiana Jones* films. Considering another way of positioning the visitor in the ride's narrative, I next analyze how two attractions—The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (2004) and Radiator Springs Racers (2012)—use both spatial and narrative recursion, or *mise en abyme*, to immerse riders in their narrative worlds. Finally, I consider how Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters (2005) illustrates a larger trajectory traced throughout the chapter toward increasing interactivity. This ultimate movement toward not only the centrality of the visitor in the narrative but to their participatory agency, is also reflected in the texts in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two, I move outward from media-based attractions to media-based lands to explore how they operate differently from attractions in relation to both their source texts and to the visitor's physical, embodied experience. Because they are larger spatially, more freely navigable, and less temporally bounded than individual attractions, park lands employ unique strategies of immersion that affect the visitor's subjective experience in different ways, as can be seen in the various case studies analyzed here. Tracing the development of the film-based lands at Disneyland and Disney California Adventure over time, from the early 1990s to the early 2020s, also reveals a growing emphasis on cinematic accuracy and realism as well as interactivity. As with the individual attractions discussed in Chapter 1, the lands explored here demonstrate a more general trend in the parks toward greater personalization, participation, and narrative agency for the visitor.

I begin with Mickey's Toontown (1993), Disneyland's first land based not on a genre or location like earlier lands, but on the screen world of a specific film. I consider how Mickey's Toontown, though it is not entirely screen-accurate, nevertheless attempts to create in three dimensions the hybrid animated space of its source film, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1989). I then turn to the Disney California Adventure land a bug's land (2002) to examine how it uses

scale-play and layout to immerse visitors in the fictional geographies of *A Bug's Life* (1998). This concern with recreating cinematic geographies is exhibited by my next case study, Cars Land (2012), which displays a preoccupation with geographical verisimilitude as it more faithfully recreates the specific architectural and topographical landscapes of its source film *Cars* (2006). Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge (2019) provides the focal point for the chapter, as it deviates from previous film-based lands by not simply replicating environments seen on screen, but by literally building a new narrative world. I map how Galaxy's Edge uses geographical storytelling, that is, how the land's spatial and conceptual layout opens narrative space for the visitor as (inter)active participant, a project reinforced by the land's literary and ludic transmedia paratexts. I conclude the chapter with a look at how Avengers Campus (2021), Disney California Adventure's newest land, expands its narrative world beyond the bounds of a single park through its connections to other Marvel-based lands in Hong Kong and Paris while exhibiting the same tendency toward personalization evident in earlier lands and attractions.

Chapter Three reverses the movement of the previous chapters as they trace park spaces inspired by media texts by considering the converse: media texts inspired by park space. Where the earlier chapters considered how screen-based texts are adapted into whole-body experiences and environments, this chapter asks what happens to these rich multi-sensory spatial narratives, which are often characterized by their direct address and participatory nature, when they are translated onto the screen. Furthermore, it seeks to uncover how the visitors, who are so central to the stories of park spaces, relate to these narratives as viewers. Just as the film-based attractions and lands in the previous chapters show how new park spaces are increasingly tied to explicit media texts, the park-based films and park-based video games in this chapter demonstrate how Disney is increasingly bringing its non-film-based attractions and lands into



screen media. The result of both movements is the further breakdown of the permeable boundaries between physical park space and virtual media space.

While the previous chapters largely progressed chronologically through their case studies, the texts in this chapter are organized more thematically, according to the different methods of bringing physical park experiences to the screen. I begin by exploring how Disney's park-based films function in bringing the parks into the home, thus helping to dissolve the spatial and temporal boundaries of the physical parks. In the next section, I consider how three films—*Tower of Terror* (1997), *The Haunted Mansion* (2003), and *Muppets Haunted Mansion* (2021)—reflect the narrative structures and embodied experiences of their source attractions. In doing so, these films make room for the viewer, even as they are distanced from the primary narrative roles they occupy in the parks. This is further demonstrated in the next section, which investigates how films like *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion*, and *Jungle Cruise* (2021) use cinematic direct address to acknowledge and maintain the presence of the visitor/viewer. The issue of presence informs the following section, which examines how spatial nostalgia functions in park-films like *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion*, and *The Country Bears* (2002) to evoke the materiality of their source spaces. While each of these sections speaks to the nature of the relationship between park space and screen, the next section takes a closer look at two examples of reciprocal spatial storytelling: *Mission to Mars* (2000) and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise (2003-2017). The spatial play between these films and their physical park counterparts demonstrates the ongoing and persistent malleability of media/park space. The plasticity of park space vis-à-vis media also features in the following section, which analyzes how the land-based film *Tomorrowland* (2015) visually and conceptually invokes Disneyland's Tomorrowland in an attempt to reconcile and reshape the land's shifting ideologies. Finally, as a

complement to these discussions of the ways in which park-based films transcend material and virtual boundaries through film, I turn to a discussion of how park-based video games adapt the corporeal park experience into a digital realm. Tying into discussions of interactivity and personalization in Chapters One and Two and looking at games from the Nintendo Entertainment System's *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* (1990) and Microsoft Xbox 360's *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* (2011) to the Play Disney Parks mobile app (2018) and *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* (2020) virtual reality game, the chapter concludes with an exploration of how park space and virtual screen space are increasingly converging.

## **Chapter One: Built Narratives: Living the Movies in Film- and Television-Based Attractions**

Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy.  
—Disneyland entrance plaque

This chapter traces the development of one of the earliest intersections of modern-day theme park space and moving image media: film- and television-based attractions. The case studies analyzed here offer distinct yet complementary entry points for exploring the relationship between screen space and built cinematic space at Disneyland and at media-based parks more broadly. They create an opening for understanding the complex relationship between ride narrative and park visitor. Media-based rides represent the earliest and most plentiful mode of crossover between media park space and television and film narratives and characters—the kind of media hybrid that has dominated much of Disneyland’s history. As such, this chapter spans the period from 1955 to 2021, and examines a variety of examples, each chosen as a representative of a different form of media park experience with different, though interrelated, effects on the visitor.

Because of the diversity of types of attractions in the parks (dark ride, walk through, motion simulator, drop tower, transportation, etc.) as well as the variety of affective experiences they evoke, this chapter will focus on a relatively large cluster of case studies as a means for understanding the different media experiences offered by park space. The texts will be mostly analyzed chronologically to lay the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and evolution of media-based park spaces. This evolution is intertwined, in part, with developments in theme park technology—innovations in which have opened new storytelling possibilities over the decades, and which continue to shape how park spaces tell cinematic stories. It is important to note that this chapter is not exhaustive in its survey of screen media-

based attractions—further examples will be discussed in Chapter Two as they relate to a different category of immersive park spaces: film-based lands.

By looking at media-based park attractions as a subcategory of media park experiences, this chapter approaches many of the larger research questions that inform this dissertation, including: what is media/park space? How have its forms changed or evolved in the park's sixty-six-year history? How can we study these texts from a media studies perspective? More specifically, this chapter looks at how rides and other smaller-scale attractions—as the earliest media/park spaces—intersect with and activate film and television texts. How do attractions adapt narratives or contribute to world-building? How do their narratives relate to their source materials? How is space used? Moreover, I am particularly interested in considering the phenomenological questions raised by such spaces. What is the constructed relationship between the visitor and the narrative? How does the visitor's body come into play? From whose point of view is the story told? Who is the protagonist? Where is the rider positioned in relation to the original media text? How do the embodied narratives of park attractions relate to their screen counterparts? Have the ways in which the visitor's body is figured within the space changed over time?

These questions speak to similar issues raised by cinema and media scholars about the boundaries of cinema, the screen, and the body. In her analysis of *Star Tours* and other ridefilms, one example of a media-based attraction, Lauren Rabinovitz argues that “across the history of cinema, ridefilms best represent an experience unaccounted for by theories of cinema spectatorship that have generally represented moviegoing as a passive experience where

spectators are increasingly drawn out of their bodies and into the screen.”<sup>94</sup> Rabinovitz uses ridefilm texts to push back against the ways in which some scholarship has understood movie viewers as lacking agency, as inert recipients of an experience mediated through a screen. Moreover, she points to the way media has been discussed in relation to the body, as a decidedly disembodied experience, where the viewer becomes a spectral figure defined by their perception via their eyes and brain, but not their body as a whole. Rabinovitz denies the barrier between spectator and screen as something that removes us from our bodies. As Geoff King observes of another film-based ride, Universal Studios Hollywood’s Terminator 2: 3D attraction: “it offers the illusion of the interpenetration of the worlds on and off screen...theme park attractions such as this claim to take us into the physical and experiential space of the movies.”<sup>95</sup> Scholars like Rabinovitz and King consider how rides and attractions act to connect the body and screen, to connect our world with the worlds of the movies.

A similar point has been argued by other scholars about cinema more broadly. Vivian Sobchack has argued that:

Even at the movies our vision and hearing are informed and given meaning by our other modes of sensory access to the world: our capacity not only to see and to hear but also to touch, to smell, to taste, and always to proprioceptively feel our weight, dimension, gravity, and movement in the world. In sum, the film experience is meaningful not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies. Which is to say that movies provoke in us the “carnal thoughts” that ground and inform more conscious analysis.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, “From Hale’s Tours to Star Tours: Virtual Voyages and the Delirium of the Hyper-Real,” *Iris* 25 (Spring 1998): 134.

<sup>95</sup> Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 175-176.

<sup>96</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew: The Kinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh,” in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 60.

Sobchack's description of the sensorial contours of the watching movies affirms that we are always necessarily embodied viewers bound by the full input of our various senses. The kinds of rides and attractions discussed here address similar issues of somatic cinematic experience, though the ways the body is engaged may, at times, be different.

As Rabinovitz notes, this impulse to “foreground the body itself as a site for sensory experience” can be traced back to early cinematic history, with ridefilms like *Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World*.<sup>97</sup> In his book *Spectacular Narratives*, Geoff King looks to other moments throughout cinematic history where movement was combined with the screen, from the 1950's “gimmick” exhibitions of William Castle, to the widescreen envelopment of Cinerama, to the enhanced audio theaters of Sensurround, where sounds were felt as much as they were heard.<sup>98</sup> These innovations, and their filmic counterparts, suggest a recurring desire to explore new technologies and methods of exhibition that expand the visual dimension of the screen more concretely into other senses. The rides discussed in this chapter can be seen in this historical context, as further efforts to make the movies more sensorial, more full-bodied, even as we understand classic cinema to be, as Sobchack argues, “carnal” in its own ways. They thus speak to larger questions about what it is to experience cinema.

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<sup>97</sup> Rabinovitz, “From Hale's Tours to Star Tours,” 133. Running from 1904 to around 1915, Hale's Tours combined a faux train car as theater with a screen projected at the front on which scenes shot from the front or rear of a moving train would be projected, giving the illusion of travel. These faux train cars were rigged with mechanical apparatus to make them move and tilt, adding physical motion to the experience. Other effects were incorporated too, such as fans that simulated wind, bells, whistles, and other ambient sounds, and lecturers that acted as tour guides for the ersatz passengers. To add to the sense of total immersion, the building's façade in front of which these attractions were set up was often made over to look like a train station, and the audience members purchased their tickets from attendants dressed as rail employees. See Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 74-94; Philippe Gauthier, “The Movie Theater as an Institutional Space and Framework of Signification: Hale's Tours and Film Historiography,” *Film History* 21, no. 4 (2009), 327.

<sup>98</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 178-179.

The goal of this chapter is therefore to both historicize and theorize film-based rides and how they adapt media narratives, giving particular attention to how they figure us—the visitors—in their stories differently from primarily screen-based cinematic, televisual, and game experiences. By considering park-specific elements like narrative positioning, direct address, point-of-view, kinetic storytelling, and world-building, we can understand how film-based rides rework the traditional screen-based moviegoing experience in a way that compels visitors—through their bodies—to “live out” the movies. By sampling variety of film-based attractions, I break down how their myriad forms and varied narrative/spatial approaches represent different attempts at solving the fundamental problem of how to translate impermeable screen space into livable physical space and how to open fixed narratives to the visitor.<sup>99</sup>

Although I do not propose a rigid teleological progression of these attractions—“early” forms like the traditional dark ride live alongside newer rides and continue to be used as models for more recent attractions (such as Ariel’s Undersea Adventure)—a loose, general tendency toward increased visitor interactivity and agency emerges when taking a broader view of the historical trajectory of these film-attractions as a whole. Geoff King notes such a progression in reference to Aladdin’s Magic Carpet Ride, an attraction at DisneyQuest, an indoor interactive theme park located in Walt Disney World’s Downtown Disney district. Writing of the ride, which operated from 1998-2017, King observes that it “offers an extra dimension to the theme-park experience: the freedom for riders to choose their own way through the imaginary landscape and to affect the way the story unfolds.” King goes on to note that “this is a significant development, a shift from a form of ‘immersive’ attraction to one that offers a degree of

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<sup>99</sup> Impermeable both in the sense that a film is typically concretized into a single, unchanging version and in that the screen itself cannot be penetrated.

‘interactivity,’” asserting that “most ride-films seek to act physically on the body of the viewer/rider, but allow little space for their subjects to respond.”<sup>100</sup> The shift that King identifies here becomes apparent through the examples discussed in this chapter and when considered in conjunction with the discussion of park lands in Chapter Two.

By creating a taxonomy of sorts, we can begin to break down the different methods and techniques used to create these immersive spaces and reveal how attractions’ forms affect their narratives and our experience of them. Just as there are different kinds of attraction mechanisms and approaches—from dark rides and walkthroughs to motion simulators and drop tower-thrill rides to rides that hybridize two or more of these forms—so are there different techniques used to convey stories and to place our mental, emotional, and physical subjectivities within them. It is important to note, however, that these categories are neither fixed nor exhaustive—there are more techniques and types of rides than can be discussed at length here. Moreover, the boundaries between them and the types of experiences they create are both blurry and constantly being remixed. Though I will highlight certain strategies or effects in particular case studies, it is important to remember that there is a large degree of overlap, even amongst the examples discussed here. Moreover, many of the phenomena, approaches, and techniques discussed in earlier examples are applicable to later case studies and vice-versa.

It is crucial to note that the analyses presented here are based in textual analysis that considers the narrative, physical, and architectural structures of the parks and how they are tied to Disney’s narratives and story worlds. Though they are vital areas of inquiry, I do not delve too deeply into considerations of reception, spectatorship, or fandom, and it is crucial to keep in mind that park visitors come from a variety of backgrounds, interests, and familiarity with the

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<sup>100</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 184.



film properties discussed here and, as such, their perceptions of, pleasures in, and engagement with these attractions can vary widely. Where some visitors may derive pleasure from their intense fan knowledge of and engagement with a story world, for example, others may have a more casual investment in the story, and others still may instead privilege the physical sensations of a ride while taking little note of its narrative.

The case studies for this chapter have been selected to broadly cover a range of forms and levels of narrative and spatial immersion within these media attractions to explore different modes of screen/space interplay. A survey of some of Disneyland's original opening day rides and other early dark rides serves as the starting point for my analysis, both because of their archetypal position as "original" attractions and because as extant original examples, they provide a useful historical touchpoint for considering how attractions have changed over the years. I follow this discussion with a more in-depth consideration of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride (Disneyland, 1955) as an example of early kinetic narrative strategies. As one of the park's original opening day film-based rides, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride demonstrates the foundational presence of screen media forms in the park. It is also an example of the ubiquitous "dark ride" style attraction which is representative of many of these early screen-narrative-based rides and speaks to a type of ride that is still being created in more recent years, even as newer ride technologies push the limits of the medium.

I also discuss non-ride attraction texts like Swiss Family Treehouse (Disneyland, 1962) and PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON (Disneyland, 1982) for their unique approaches to dealing with film narrative and positioning the visitor's body. The former, a walkthrough attraction, engaged visitors in the pleasure of visiting both a narrative world and a film set. In

contrast, its 1999 re-theme as Tarzan's Treehouse signals a push away from focusing on the production of a film and toward immersion in an animated film world.

Though it attempts to create immersive experiences based on screen stories (both of which originated as novels), the Treehouse creates a distinctly different embodied experience from the highly screen-mediated immersion of the PeopleMover's experience of the 1982 film *TRON*. In this case study, I consider how the use of actual screens in conjunction with typical ride forms (here, a transport-style attraction) refigured the visitor's embodied relationship to the screen, allowing riders to permeate the screen and, in some ways, dissolving the boundaries between the digital world of the film and the "real" world of the park.

Following this discussion, I look to the original version of Star Tours (Disneyland, 1987) as the park's first modern motion simulator ride that was also an important step in queue-based storytelling. I consider how the ride used its pre-show space to situate visitors in the cinematic world of *Star Wars* while simultaneously extending it, as well as how the cinematic elements of the ridefilm itself combined with the ride's physical design to dissolve the barrier between film and physical space. I contrast this original incarnation with the attraction's more recent update: Star Tours – The Adventures Continue (Disneyland, 2011), a version which destabilizes the immersive pretext of the original ride as its variably narrative remixes pre-existing and newly released film worlds.

The next key text in this chapter is Indiana Jones Adventure (Disneyland, 1995). An enhanced motion vehicle dark ride, Indiana Jones Adventure is another example of queue-based storytelling that connects the ride back to the original films while establishing its own unique narrative. The attraction itself, I argue, is an example of a "kinetic narrative" on several levels. The ride experience is dependent on motion: both literal motion through the ride space and

narrative motion, as riders oscillate between subjective positions, simultaneously as Indy and as their own selves-as-protagonists, while they move through the scenes and plot elements of the original films.

Next, I consider a rather unique media-based attraction: The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (DCA, 2004). This attraction is the only one at the Disneyland Resort where a screen text (here a television series) was made into a ride that was then made into a film based on the ride itself, rather than the original television series. The attraction is narratively integrated into the series world of *The Twilight Zone*, using episode-inspired props and a mock-episode prologue in the queue, while also creating its own unique narrative. I return to The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror in Chapter Three, as it is my only example of a media property that crossed over from television series to ride to made-for-television movie (from screen to space to screen).

This chapter closes with a look at a pair of more physically interactive rides: Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters (Disneyland, 2005) and Toy Story Midway Mania (DCA, 2008). With these rides, park visitors are invited to physically interact with the attraction via on-ride laser guns, joysticks, and pull-string cannons. I consider this interactive aspect as a signal of an increasing focus in Disney Parks on more actively participatory spaces—spaces made more immersive by the increased fostering of active engagement with the narrative via the visitor’s body. These interactive rides presage a larger movement toward greater immersion through interaction that will play out on a larger scale in park lands, as discussed in Chapter Two.

### **C’mon Everybody, Here We Go!: The Rider-Protagonist, Emotional Affect, and Embodiment in Early Film-Rides**

“Have an apple, dearie?”  
—The Evil Queen to riders, Snow White’s Scary Adventures

Despite the newness of Disney's "theme park" as a type of public entertainment space in the mid-1950s, the opening day film-based rides already capitalized on the unique experiential potential of the new medium. From a synergistic standpoint, these attractions provided another means for Disney to expand on—and profit financially from—existing film properties. However, these spaces were also experimental means for new ways of storytelling based not only on audio-visual narrative, but also on physical sensations. Where theater presents a three-dimensional space from which the audience is barred by the proscenium arch, and cinema further flattened narrative space at the plane of the proscenium, built cinematic space invites the viewers beyond that separation and into the space behind it.

Looking at these early efforts at three-dimensional storytelling, a tension emerges between simply recreating or adapting the narrative of a film by recounting its plot and eschewing narrative coherence in favor of foregrounding haptic bodily experiences and their creation of emotional affect. Here, as an introduction to this chapter's larger discussion of film-based rides and attractions, I explore the potential for park rides to tell physical and emotional stories. They do this by moving the visitors' bodies in specific manners through scenes, using characters and locations from their film referents. In other words, I consider how many early film-based rides take advantage of the differences in narrative expression afforded by three-dimensional park space to do more than merely "adapt" their source films. In these rides, kinetic storytelling opens movie viewers—now park visitors—to the extra-cinematic embodied experiences offered by media park forms.

Of the attractions operating on Disneyland's opening day in 1955, four rides directly evoked individual Disney films: the Mad Tea Party, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, Peter Pan Flight, and

Snow White and Her Adventures.<sup>101</sup> All are extant today, though most have been substantially altered over the years. Disney's animated films were the early sources of experimentation in cinematic park space, and all these attractions were in Fantasyland. As Kathy Merlock Jackson and others have observed, the different park lands "correspond[ed] with the studio's cinematic genres: its signature animation, as well as action-adventure, the Western, and science-fiction."<sup>102</sup> According to an official Disneyland souvenir book published in 2000, "Fantasyland was planned as the domain of Walt Disney's animated characters. Peter Pan, Mr. Toad, Snow White, Casey Jr., Dumbo, Mickey, and The Mad Tea Party from *Alice in Wonderland* were represented there within the first year of the Park's opening."<sup>103</sup> With its original film-based attractions, Fantasyland became not just the space of a film genre, but a location for telling specific cinematic stories.

At the entrance to Fantasyland, Sleeping Beauty's Castle serves as a generic unifier, bringing each of these storybook experiences together into one larger environment mediated by associations with both the fantasy genre and fairy tales more broadly and The Walt Disney Company's own production catalog more specifically. In Fantasyland's early years, the attractions' show buildings were tied together visually through medieval fair-style façades. Their exterior style reinforced the rides' associations with one another generically as well as in terms of Disney's cartoon fantasy productions. With their bright candy colors and geometric shapes,

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<sup>101</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions* (N.p.: Disney's Kingdom Editions, ca. 1993), 20. This Disney-produced souvenir book lists twenty-one operating opening day attractions. Other very early Fantasyland attractions, including Casey Jr. Circus Train and Storybook Land Canal Boats, originally named Canal Boats of the World, also draw on Disney animated classics, the former being based on the train of the same name from the 1941 film *Dumbo*.

<sup>102</sup> Jackson, "Synergistic Disney," 21.

<sup>103</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions*, 101.

the buildings recalled the visuals of Disney's animated features, particularly the stylized aesthetic and palette of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959).<sup>104</sup> Their cartoon-like physical appearances also signaled a transition between the primarily audio-visual world of the films and the more haptic experiences of the rides.

To understand how these rides create immersive affective experiences through kinesthetic storytelling, it is important to consider a few factors that are distinct from the traditional moviegoing experience. Park visitors are generally not stationary—they either move through or are moved through an attraction. Duration is another key difference, as the logistics of a park attraction often necessarily limit their experiences to just a few minutes, as opposed to the ninety-minute-plus duration of most feature films. The boundaries between film and viewer and film story and rider are also quite different. Unlike films, where the conceit of the proscenium serves to separate the viewers from the world of the film, even as they are asked to immerse themselves in it, film-based rides often play with, challenge, or seek to dissolve this boundary. This distinction in experience has in large part to do with the presence or absence of the camera and screen. Thinking of these rides in cinematic terms, in early film rides—particularly dark rides—the rider, often combined with the ride vehicle, approximates the position of the camera, their eyes substituted for the camera's lens. As Christopher Finch argues of *The Haunted*

*Mansion's Doom Buggies*:

these cars carry the guests through a sequence of spooky environments...the cars, each wired for stereo sound, are built in such a way that the rider can see only what is directly in front of him. Each car is on a swivel so that it can be turned, by electronic signals, to face just what the designer wants it to face at any particular moment. In this sense, then, it is used exactly like a movie camera. The rider is traveling through a programmed show which unfolds in time. The choice of where to look is not his to make—it has already

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<sup>104</sup> These original fair facades were the result of time and budget constraints. See Dorene Koehler, *The Mouse and the Myth: Sacred Art and Secular Ritual of Disneyland* (Herts, England: John Libbey Publishing, 2017), 141.

been made by the designer, who determines what will be seen, just as a director determines what a movie patron will see.<sup>105</sup>

Of course, Finch implies here that riders' viewpoints are identical to the positioning of the vehicle, which is not always true. While certain views may be privileged, riders also exist in a three-dimensional environment, and can choose to subvert these preferred views by looking elsewhere.<sup>106</sup> Attractions are also not fixed in the same way films are. Rather, the rider/viewer acts as a co-creator of the experience, their eyes and bodies enacting the story as they move through the ride spaces. These attractions both compel and assume the active participation of the visitor in the storytelling conceit.

Considering such issues, a central question arises when considering media park spaces that is typically overlooked (or already implied) in the film-viewing experience: who are you, the visitor? In the world of a film-based ride, the rider activates the ride narrative through their presence within the space. As such, park-goers in early rides were frequently figured *as* a character in the ride. Main characters often only appeared on ride murals or signage (or, in the case of Alice, as a voice-over narration), leaving room for the rider as the protagonist. While the characters in a film are understood to have experienced the film's narrative, regardless of the presence of an audience to perceive the film itself, absent a rider, these rides often have no protagonist.

In these spaces, we can also consider other issues, including "where" the riders are and how they move through the space. Many of the early film-based rides were dark rides, which are

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<sup>105</sup> Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 415.

<sup>106</sup> This recalls Stuart Hall's theorization of encoding and decoding. See Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 507-517.

indoor rides where riders sit in vehicles on a track and progress through a series of scenes. Riders are moved through the experience at a controlled pace, through consciously selected and presented scenes. The ride vehicles, often incorporated into the story as Toad's car or a pirate ship, for example, suggest where we are and what role we play in these experiences. It is also important to consider "where" we are in the narrative of the film. Which scene or scenes are we in? What part are we playing and how does that factor into the larger story (or not)?

Questions like this are not always asked, and these early dark rides have often been discussed—or dismissed—as straightforward adaptations of films and their scenes. In her analysis of *Snow White and Her Adventures*, Suzanne Rahn observed that "one might assume that these rides [dark rides of Fantasyland] simply retell the stories told in the films, reducing them to a few key scenes which the audience views as it rides past."<sup>107</sup> This, as she rightly suggests, is a reductive generalization. However, in her following point, Rahn assumes as much: "In fact, the designers developed two distinct approaches to pre-existing films. The first, recapitulating the film, was used for *Peter Pan's Flight*. For *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride* and *Snow White's adventures*, however, the designers used material from the films to create what were essentially new stories."<sup>108</sup> Rahn is correct that such rides do play with their source narratives in ways that can amount to new stories, and she rightfully acknowledges how these rides play with subject position, pointing out that in such rides, the riders play the part of the protagonist, such as Mr. Toad or Snow White. However, Rahn overlooks other equally significant elements of these

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<sup>107</sup> Suzanne Rahn, "The Dark Ride of Snow White," in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, eds. Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 89.

<sup>108</sup> Rahn, "The Dark Ride," 89.



rides, such as how they position riders' bodies—in addition to their subjective viewpoint—to create experiences that transcend mere adaptation, or “recapitulating the film.”

As Rahn points out in her discussion of *Snow White's Adventures*, in many early film-based rides, the rider was meant to take the place of the film's protagonist. This is accomplished in part through the direct address of the ride and characters in it as well as through the absence of the film's protagonist, whose place we are meant to subsume. However, we are not merely passively viewing the events of a familiar film from the protagonist's point of view. Rather, because these are kinetic experiences taking place in three-dimensional spaces, these rides compel us, as protagonists whose bodies are moving through these narrative spaces in a literal way, to explore extravisual elements of storytelling and story-being. These early rides most often accomplish this by heightening the focus on a physical sensation or emotional state—or a combination of the two—where the ride's scenes and motion recreate a character's subjective experience for the rider. This is typically framed within either a condensed shorthand narrative or even a single scene from the ride's referent film. In other words, these rides are about sensations, not simply retelling the story in a different medium.

In the original version of *Peter Pan Flight*, for example, the narrative is truncated. Familiar tableaux comprise the space, like the children's bedroom or Captain Hook's pirate ship. However, the focus is on the physical sensation of flying like Peter himself—the wonder and magic of flight through these fantastical spaces—rather than on narrative continuity or clarity. This kinetic experience is framed shorthand versions of select scenes from the film's narrative. In the ride's original 1955 version, riders departed the Darling nursery, flying over London, into Neverland, and down through Skull Rock. At the end of the ride, they encountered Captain Hook, who ordered his second-in-command Smee to “Shoot them down, Smee...shoot them

down!”<sup>109</sup> While the ride is in some ways an adaptation of the film’s basic narrative—the children meet Peter, learn to fly, explore Neverland, and come out victorious over the villain—it hardly “recapitulates” the actual story in more than a referential way. In fact, the focus for nearly half of the ride’s roughly two-minute duration is on the sensation of flying. This is a central experience for the film’s characters and the focus of some of its key scenes—most notably as the Darling children first take flight, soaring out of the nursery with Peter out over London and on to Neverland to one of the film’s most memorable songs, “You Can Fly! You Can Fly! You Can Fly!” Indeed, the message of this song seems to be the same as the ride itself.

Unlike many other contemporary dark rides, like *Snow White* or *Mr. Toad*, *Peter Pan Flight* does not use cars on a floor track. Instead, riders are seated inside pirate ship vehicles that “fly,” suspended from an overhead rail. The inversion of the track system mimics the sensation of flight, as the ships sail through the skies of the ride’s various scenes. The riders’ gaze in the scenes is therefore directed not just laterally, as with other dark rides, but beneath riders as well. The design of the ships reinforces this by guiding riders’ eyes below rather than forward, back, or up. The high seat backs block the view behind, and the large sails obscure the view in front of the vehicles. As a feature story on *Peter Pan’s Flight* in *E-Ticket Magazine* observed: “this was intentional, since most of the scenes presented to passengers were located below, and around the boat.”<sup>110</sup> Riders were discouraged from looking up at the ride’s conveyance system, too: “in the queue area and throughout the ride, scene elements were positioned to obscure the steel track and trolley system. As the boats ascended, circled, even approached each other in the black-lit gloom,

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<sup>109</sup> Leon Janzen and Jack Janzen, “Disney’s *Peter Pan’s Flight*,” *The E-Ticket* 26 (Spring 1997): 18-21. See <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/1955-2015-disneylands-peter-pans-flight-e-ticket>.

<sup>110</sup> Janzen and Janzen, “Disney’s *Peter Pan’s Flight*,” 16.

riders were not conscious of what held them up above London and Never Land.”<sup>111</sup> The suspended track allowed the ships to ascend and descend at key moments in the ride—an element often absent from the flat ground-level tracks of most older standard dark rides.<sup>112</sup> This verticality heightened the sensation of flight, and was often accompanied by a rush of air aimed at riders. Elements like these suggest that the focus was less on recreating the story itself than on manifesting the somatic experiences of the film’s characters for the riders. The emphasis is on the sensation of flight, rather than the plot of the film.

This is evident in one of the most memorable scenes in the ride: the flight over London and Never Land. This scene has remained a constant focal point throughout the ride’s updates over the years. In both the original and current versions of the ride, after leaving the loading zone, riders pass through the Darling nursery before soaring over London and then Never Land. These two scenes give the impression of changes in distance through the change in scale from the life-size nursery to the miniature London landmarks below the suspended ride vehicle. Departing from the nursery, the ships pass through a transitional space as they soar alongside buildings that decrease in scale before riders emerge into the London room. Identifiable London landmarks like the Tower Bridge and Big Ben are rendered in miniature below and illuminated with black lights. The motion of the suspended ride vehicle positions riders’ bodies in the kinetic experiences of the characters, while they are addressed by auditory cues—including the song “You Can Fly! You Can Fly! You Can Fly!” and Peter’s voice-over of “Come on, everybody!

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<sup>111</sup> Janzen and Janzen, “Disney’s Peter Pan’s Flight,” 16.

<sup>112</sup> Alice in Wonderland is two stories, but the change in elevation occurs outside the show building and seems to be primarily functional.

Here we go!” These situate riders in the characters’ emotional states of mind as riders are encouraged to marvel at the magic of flight and fantasy.

The layout of the track and pacing as the ships pass along it also encourages riders to spend time looking at the sites and reveling in the sensation of flying. Dark rides typically progress relatively quickly through a succession of scenes along a relatively linear route. In Peter Pan’s Flight, however, the track in the London and Never Land aerial scenes follows a serpentine route that folds back on itself, giving riders additional time to view the same scene from different vantage points. Moreover, these two scenes combined comprise approximately three-quarters of the total ride time on Peter Pan’s Flight. The remaining thirty seconds or so are focused on closer encounters with the characters at the end of the ride, as the narrative concludes and riders transition back to “real world” elevations and back into the light of the park.

The ride was re-named “Peter Pan’s Flight” in 1983, a seemingly minor change which suggests that the experience has been reframed in some ways.<sup>113</sup> The original name implies that a rider is embarking on *their own* flight—a “Peter Pan Flight”—and that in doing so they become Peter himself. In contrast, the possessive in the later name—“Peter Pan’s Flight”—suggests that the experience belongs to him, that riders are more distanced, accompanying Peter on *his* flight. Though riders would see Peter Pan’s shadow in the opening nursery scene, he was not visually present in the original version of the ride. He was added in the 1983 update along with the name change, which shifted the ride from an experience *as* Peter Pan to an experience alongside him, as riders are relegated to a slightly more passive role in the narrative. The kinetic movement is much the same, with the ride mechanics staying mostly consistent between revisions, but the

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<sup>113</sup> Early ticket books and maps show how the ride was referred to as “Peter Pan Flight” rather than the later “Peter Pan’s Flight.” See Caroline Chamberlain, “Disneyland’s Evolution Through Maps,” *KCRW*, May 28, 2015, <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/design-and-architecture/disneylands-evolution-through-maps>.

addition of Peter to the narrative distances the rider from inhabiting the role of the protagonist to accompanying the film's characters on their adventures.

In *Snow White and Her Adventures*, another opening day attraction, the experience is centered on fear as an affective emotional state that is created through movement within the ride space. In its original 1955 incarnation, *Snow White and Her Adventures* took riders through a series of frightening scenes as one wrong turn after another led to multiple encounters with the evil witch, who was attempting to poison riders/Snow White with the poison apple. Aboard the ride cars, visitors would “flee” the witch in the darkness, through the shadowy forest with its grotesquely anthropomorphized trees. As Suzanne Rahn observes, the spaces in the ride are all familiar locations from the film—mine, cottage, forest and so on—but here, the sequence in which they appear is altered. Moreover, as she notes, “a major shift in the cast of characters reinforces the darkness of the narrative,” with Snow White and the Prince completely absent and the friendly dwarfs and forest animals only appearing at the ride's start.<sup>114</sup> As in *Peter Pan Flight*, the protagonist was noticeably missing from her own ride, the implication being—through both that absence and the framing of the scenes—that the riders themselves were to take up that position in the story.

Rahn argues that the early version of the ride, where riders were presented with “choices” in the form of signs directing them to “Beware of the Witch” or asking them to choose between the path to the “Dwarf's Cottage” and the “Witch's Castle,” positions the rider not as Snow White, but as themselves inside her world.<sup>115</sup> She reads these “choices” as participatory,

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<sup>114</sup> Rahn, “The Dark Ride,” 91.

<sup>115</sup> Rahn, “The Dark Ride,” 94-95.

suggesting an “almost interactive effect” upon visitors.<sup>116</sup> However, according to Ken Anderson, the art director of the original *Snow White* film in 1937, riders were supposed to understand that they were Snow White, but “nobody got it. Nobody actually figured that they were Snow White. They just wondered where the hell Snow White was.”<sup>117</sup> The absence of the protagonist and riders’ pursuit by the witch invited identification with Snow White and her story specifically. While the ride may have played with the idea of choice as an immersive technique, the choices in the ride were, of course, not actually real, and the track-controlled vehicle was always fated to follow the same path.

In contrast, I suggest that the ride encouraged subjective identification with the story’s protagonist to recreate a particular emotional experience of Snow White herself, as she was relentlessly pursued through various settings (the forest, the mines) by the Evil Queen (in witch form). Rahn suggests that Snow White’s “role, in folktale and film, is static and almost passive once she becomes the guest of the Dwarfs. Since movement and action are essential to the dark ride, the designers were forced to create an *alternative* story about Snow White, filled with thrilling adventures she never had.”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, some the scenes in the original ride—and certainly their order—were not present in the 1937 film. However, these scenes recreate emotional experiences that Snow White is understood to have had. The ride’s design was used not to completely depart from Snow White’s story as much as to put riders squarely in her affective state of fear. This emotional experience is a key part of the film, particularly in the sequence where Snow White flees into the forest.

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<sup>116</sup> Rahn, “The Dark Ride,” 95.

<sup>117</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 258.

<sup>118</sup> Rahn, “The Dark Ride,” 94.

By placing riders in Snow White's shoes, ride's designers played with new narrative potentials offered by the ride form. A rider's eyes took the place of the camera lens, putting the rider in the subjective position of Snow White herself. Rare was the film, particularly in the 1930s, that put the viewer entirely in the protagonist's point of view. Even films that experimented with offering the POV of the protagonist, like the 1947 film *Lady in the Lake*, were seen as limited in their capacity to place the viewer in the position of the protagonist, particularly in terms of physical sensation. As one contemporary reviewer of that film remarked:

The picture is definitely different and affords one a fresh and interesting perspective on a murder mystery. YOU do get into the story and see things pretty much the way the protagonist, Phillip Marlowe, does, but YOU don't have to suffer the bruises he does. Of course, YOU don't get a chance to put your arms around Audrey Totter either. After all, the movie makers, for all their ingenuity, can go just so far in the quest for realism.<sup>119</sup>

Disney's animated *Snow White* was no different from most films in that it adhered to classical Hollywood narrative conventions, where the audience was encouraged to identify with the protagonist but was kept separate from her. In the forest sequence of *Snow White*, there are several close-up shots of the frightening trees and logs that could arguably be interpreted as POV shots. The affective impact of these shots is emphasized, amplified, and extended in the ride. Using the immersive three-dimensional spaces of the ride, riders, unlike viewers, were encouraged to align their point of view with the protagonist—to take up the narrative position of Snow White as well as her physical and emotional state.

As Anderson pointed out, however, the idea that “you” are supposed to be Snow White was apparently not always clear to riders—possibly due to the newness of park rides as a cinematic storytelling format, the aforementioned rarity of subjective POV films, or

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<sup>119</sup> T.M.P., “At the Capitol,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1947, <https://www.nytimes.com/1947/01/24/archives/at-the-capitol.html>.

unfamiliarity with the source material. Perhaps as a response to this, a new version of the ride, renamed Snow White's Scary Adventures, debuted in 1983, during the refurbishment of Fantasyland into the so-called New Fantasyland.<sup>120</sup> This version included changes to the facade and new technology.<sup>121</sup> However, the most significant change during this refurbishment was the addition of the figure of Snow White herself to the ride. She appeared in this version just once at the beginning of the ride in the dwarfs' cottage. Where the riders could assume the role of protagonist in the original ride, the version made for the New Fantasyland overhaul somewhat complicated this subjective identification. As with the addition of Peter Pan to Peter Pan's Fight, Snow White's presence displaced riders to a secondary position as spectators observing her story, rather than as its protagonist, even though much of the direct address of the rest of the ride was retained. Riders could still witness her adventures and experience her emotions by proxy, but with Snow White's presence, it became less clear what narrative position riders were intended to occupy.

In early 2021, Snow White's Scary Adventures again reopened as Snow White's Enchanted Wish, following another redesign. Once more, new technologies were added to the ride, including updated animatronics (Snow White now dances in the cottage) and the projection mapping technology Disney has been introducing throughout the park in recent years.<sup>122</sup>

Notably, this version includes even more Snow White and less Witch. Snow White now appears

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<sup>120</sup> Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom featured an alternate version of the ride from WDW from 1971-1994. It was revamped in 1994 and closed altogether in 2012 to make way for the Princess Fairytale Hall meet and greet.

<sup>121</sup> Brady MacDonald, "Snow White's Scary Adventures to Get New 'Happily Ever After' Ending at Disneyland," *Orange County Register*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.ocregister.com/2019/11/26/snow-whites-scary-adventures-to-get-new-happily-ever-after-ending-at-disneyland/>.

<sup>122</sup> Michael Ramirez, "First Look of Snow White's Enchanted Wish at Disneyland Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, December 21, 2020, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2020/12/first-look-of-snow-whites-enchanted-wish-at-disneyland-park/>.



three times throughout the ride, rather than just once, notably in the newly added ending scenes. The Evil Queen/Witch, who once appeared six times in the ride, now only appears four times. Where the ride used to end abruptly with the vanquishing of the Evil Queen, this scene is now followed by the “true love’s kiss” and a new ending, where Snow White and the Prince go on to live happily ever after. Even more than the 1983 update, this version distances the rider from the protagonist, relegating them more to a passive, third-person experience of the story as an audience member. The Witch no longer offers riders the poison apple, as she did three times in the 1983 version (“Have an apple, dearie?,” “Apples, apples!,” “Taste the apple!”). The fear-filled flee through the haunted forest, which once simulated Snow White’s emotional state for riders, is now gone.

While the original Snow White and Her Adventures and Peter Pan Flight foregrounded the subjective haptic and emotional experiences of the protagonist through select scenes from or inspired by the film, other early rides focus almost exclusively on a specific bodily sensation. These rides include only minor narrative framing, often of a single scene taken from the film. Another opening day attraction, The Mad Tea Party, for example, expands on a single scene from the film, where Alice happens upon the Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse celebrating the Hatter’s “unbirthday.” The party’s absurdity is at first joyous and delightful, but quickly descends—for Alice—into a frustrating madness. The ride is a spinning ride where visitors are seated in oversized teacups, which they can help to spin faster via a central wheel. Each cup rotates individually while also rotating on a platform of six teacups. There are three such platforms, each rotating clockwise, on a single large platform that itself rotates counterclockwise. The vertiginous effects of the ride’s spinning movement replicate the mental confusion and illogical absurdity of the Mad Hatter’s unbirthday party along with its frenzied

excitement. There is little similar spinning in the actual film scene, save for a few moments when the Mad Hatter and March Hare briefly join hands and dance around Alice in recognition of it being her unbirthday, too. Instead, rather than directly replicating visuals from the film, the ride takes scene's visual movement of the teaware dancing on the table and combines it with the rotating mechanisms to reproduce Alice's physical-emotional sensations. The spinning teacups are at once delightful and disorienting, like Alice's experiences during the tea party scene itself.

Like the Mad Tea Party, *Dumbo the Flying Elephant* privileges the "pure" sensation of embodying a specific character in the film with almost no narrative framing. While not quite an opening-day attraction, *Dumbo* opened shortly thereafter in August 1955. In this ride, originally named *Dumbo Flying Elephants*, riders fly as *Dumbo* does, soaring through the air: up, down, and around. Originally, ten *Dumbo* elephant vehicles circled around an ornate central hub, atop which Timothy Q. Mouse sat as "rodent ringmaster," conducting the pachyderms' flight in center ring.<sup>123</sup> The ride has since been updated, though the basic design remains the same. The elephants are supported via huge mechanical arms, which riders may raise or lower as they wish. Seated on the rides, visitors "become" *Dumbo* as their bodies are carried in the elephant-shaped vehicles. Like *Peter Pan's Flight*, the sensation of flying is a key point in *Dumbo* that is capitalized on for its kinetic potential as it is expressed in ride—rather than screen—form. Instead of simply *showing* scenes from the film, riders here are invited to *feel* the sensations that the characters on screen feel: the wonder of a gravity-defying magical elephant. Though the story has been largely stripped away, narrative framing is present enough to pinpoint the film scene in riders' minds: the center ring layout and the presence of Timothy Q. Mouse as ringleader suggest

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<sup>123</sup> "Dumbo the Flying Elephant Attraction Opens at Disneyland," Walt Disney Archives, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://d23.com/this-day/dumbo-the-flying-elephant-attraction-opens-at-disneyland/>.

that this is Dumbo's climactic circus performance, where he finally experiences the exhilaration of flight and success under the big top. The focus is on Dumbo's triumphant feeling coupled with the wondrous sensation of flight rather than the plot.

Alice in Wonderland, another dark ride added to Fantasyland in 1958, places riders in an ambiguous subject position, even as it recreates the main character's emotional experience for riders. It contains narration by Alice, suggesting her presence, though riders are also, in a sense, figured as the protagonists. As Walt Disney said of the ride, "Alice in Wonderland lets the visitor share the nonsensical experiences of Lewis Carroll's bewitched heroine."<sup>124</sup> As Alice is telling her story, riders experience it, living her dream from the film. Phrases like "Off with their heads" and "Stop them!" are directed at the riders, as the cards try to block their passage and escape back outside to the "real world." As with Snow White and Her Adventures, the film's narrative has been rearranged, ending with the mad tea party and riders' "unbirthday" cake. Notable sequences from the film, such as the Tweedles' story within a story of Walrus and the Carpenter have been omitted. Other key experiential aspects of the film, such as the focus on Alice's changing scale, are only hinted at here by changing scale of flowers. Original concepts for the ride imagined it as a walkthrough which resembled a funhouse that more actively played with scale and required visitors to move through the space in prescribed ways.<sup>125</sup> While that version of the ride may have engaged more directly with Alice's physical experiences, like Snow White and Her Adventures, the completed version of the ride focused on her psychological experiences in Wonderland. Riders experience confusion, joy, and fear as they experience the absurd situations,

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<sup>124</sup> Walt Disney, "My Newest Dream," *The American Weekly*, March 9, 1958, ProQuest.

<sup>125</sup> Justin Arthur, "11 Curious Facts to Celebrate 60 Years of Disneyland's Alice in Wonderland," *D23*, June 14, 2018, <https://d23.com/11-curious-facts-disneylands-alice-in-wonderland/>.

wacky characters, and bizarre environments that make up Alice's story. The jumbled scenes contribute to the recreation of Alice's emotional states (wonder, bewilderment, and even fear), rather than simply recounting the plot points of the film.

Decades later, film-based Fantasyland rides began to stray from these bold early attempts at subjective positioning. Pinocchio's Daring Journey opened in 1983 as part of the refurbished New Fantasyland. Pinocchio is visually present in the ride, and while riders can identify with him, they occupy a distinct subject position. The ride's characters and design suggest that riders are present and active in the film world—Jiminy Cricket directly addresses riders in an attempt to assist their escape from Stromboli—but Pinocchio's own presence suggests riders are more in the position of the young boys captured and taken to Pleasure Island. During several moments on the ride, the ride vehicle evades "capture" in cages or crates, avoiding the fate of the less fortunate characters in the film. The ride recreates the emotional experiences of the film's characters, but in a less direct way. Pinocchio's kinetic aspects are also not used to the same effect as in the earlier dark rides. Where those rides combined the physicality of the ride with the condensed narrative to produce a particular haptic or emotional response, later rides like Pinocchio often depart from this in favor of a more straightforward re-telling of the film narrative. The ride roughly follows a shorthand retelling of the story, complete with Pinocchio's initial performance on stage, his capture, his journey to Pleasure Island, his encounter with Monstro, and his happily-ever-after reunion with Geppetto. A much later ride, *The Little Mermaid: Ariel's Undersea Adventure* (2011) similarly does not capitalize on the kinetics to invite riders into the story. Because the characters, most significantly Ariel herself, are present throughout the ride, riders are largely left outside of the narrative, even within the attraction's three-dimensional physically immersive spaces.

Splash Mountain (1989) creates a similarly distanced effect, where the main characters—Br'er Rabbit, Br'er Bear, and Br'er Fox—are present throughout the ride and subjective identification with their emotional state is present but distanced. Splash Mountain is described by a Disney souvenir book as “a full-scale, wraparound experience, putting guests in the center of a cartoon world inhabited by characters from Walt Disney’s movie, ‘Song of the South.’”<sup>126</sup> When riding Splash Mountain, we are encouraged, through the dialogue and address of the scenes and characters, to identify and align our subject position with Br'er Rabbit as he tries to escape the other characters’ scheme to capture and eat him. Though we are “in” the characters’ world, they are there, too; their presence acts as a barrier to our complete identification as Br'er Rabbit, even as we take the final plunge into the briar patch to escape the animal villains. As a log flume ride, the attraction narratively and physically builds up to the dramatic climactic moment: the final big drop. This moment is also the most kinetic and thrilling, where riders reach the greatest speed. This is the point at which riders’ identification with the character, and his subjective and kinesthetic experiences, is arguably the strongest. Riders affectively assume the position of Brer Rabbit, as they are encouraged by the ride’s design—its suspenseful big hill climb and portentous music—and cues from the animatronic characters—Brer Rabbit trembles in fear and other animals warn riders of the dangers of the “Laughin’ Place”—to empathize with his experience.<sup>127</sup> Riders are encouraged to fear the big drop as Br'er Rabbit does, after which they

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<sup>126</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions*, 99.

<sup>127</sup> The animatronic Mother Possum and Mother Rabbit sing the “Burrow’s Lament” song and a pair of vultures situated above riders during the pre-drop climb provoke feelings of fear:

VULTURE #1: Laughing Place?

VULTURE #2: We’ve got your Laughing Place. Right up here.

VULTURE #1: So, you’re looking for a Laughing Place, eh?

experience the exhilaration of escaping the villains. Our/his victory is celebrated during the ride's denouement by the singing characters and triumphant music, and at the ride's conclusion, riders are presented with photographic proof of our narrative and "real" triumph (via souvenir photos and "I survived Splash Mountain" merchandise).

The experiences offered by these rides are not unlike the pleasures of narrative identification in watching a film or television show or the emotional catharsis offered by such identification. But where these types of cinematic identification are accomplished through particulars of film form, such as editing, cinematography, and sound, rides like Splash Mountain use the rider's embodied experience as shorthand to immerse the rider in the story and in the subjective position of the character, even when placing riders in an ambiguous subject position.<sup>128</sup> Next, I consider Mr. Toad's Wild Ride in further depth, to analyze how it creates "motor mania" as an affective experience for the rider and how narrative play in the ride foregrounds the extra-cinematic potential of three-dimensional media spaces to foster a haptic experience for the rider/viewer.

### **Nowhere in Particular: The Curious Case of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride**

We're merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily on our way to nowhere in particular  
—Mr. Toad

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VULTURE #2: We'll show you a Laughing Place!

VULTURE #1: Time to be turnin' around.

VULTURE #2: If only you could!

<sup>128</sup> In mid-2020, Disney announced plans to revamp the ride to dissociate it from the racist themes of its source film, *Song of the South*. The ride will reportedly be rethemed to the 2009 film *Princess and the Frog*, notable as the first Disney film to feature a Black princess, Tiana. See Michael Ramirez, "New Adventures with Princess Tiana Coming to Disneyland Park and Magic Kingdom Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, June 25, 2020, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2020/06/new-adventures-with-princess-tiana-coming-to-disneyland-park-and-magic-kingdom-park/>. For an in-depth analysis of Splash Mountain and *Song of the South*, see Sperb, *Disney's Most Notorious Film*.

Mr. Toad's Wild Ride provides a window into how early film-based rides at Disneyland explored the unique potential of built cinematic spaces and kinetic narratives that are distinct from the screen sources on which they are based. An original opening day attraction, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride is based on the 35-minute *The Wind in the Willows* segment of Disney's package film *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949)—itself based on Kenneth Grahame's 1908 children's novel *The Wind in the Willows*.<sup>129</sup> *The Wind in the Willows* subsequently aired as part of the *Disneyland* anthology series on February 2, 1955, five months before it opened as an attraction at Disneyland.<sup>130</sup> The story of *The Wind in the Willows* follows the misadventures of wealthy J. Thaddeus Toad as he chases after exhilarating new experiences (here the primary focus is the new technology of the motor car) while his friends try to save him from his own reckless behavior and from falling prey to ne'er-do-wells.

Located in Fantasyland, the film's built corollary Mr. Toad's Wild Ride was originally considered a "C-ticket" attraction, a designation reserved at the time for the most thrilling, popular, or advanced rides in the park.<sup>131</sup> Due to budgetary constraints at the time of the park's opening, the original façade, like those of all the Fantasyland dark rides, was styled like a medieval pavilion.<sup>132</sup> Both the façade and the ride itself were updated in 1983 as part of

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<sup>129</sup> Notable among other adaptations of this story was A.A. Milne's 1929 play *Toad of Toad Hall*. Rights to A.A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh and friends were sold to the Walt Disney Company in 2001. The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh attraction replaced Mr. Toad's Wild Ride at the Magic Kingdom park at Walt Disney World in 1999. Versions of The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh were also constructed at Disneyland (2003), Hong Kong Disneyland (2005), and Shanghai Disneyland Park (2016). See Reuters, "MediaTalk; Disney Buys the Rights to Winnie the Pooh," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/05/business/mediatalk-disney-buys-the-rights-to-winnie-the-pooh.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Telotte, *Disneyland TV*, 12.

<sup>131</sup> Later versions of the Disneyland ticket book would go up to E, which was reserved for the "biggest" or most thrilling rides in the park, such as rollercoasters like the Matterhorn Bobsleds.

<sup>132</sup> As mentioned previously, this architectural aesthetic united Disney's disparate fairy tales with each other outside of their narratives as well as with the land's (and park's) central focal point—or "wienie" in Disney Imagineering

Disneyland's "New Fantasyland" expansion.<sup>133</sup> Gone were the bright, cartoon-like original exteriors. The new Mr. Toad's Wild Ride façade features an architecturally realistic brick and stone Toad Hall that more closely recalls the design of both Toad Hall in the film and the miniature Toad Hall in the Storybook Land Canal Boats. Interestingly, it is closer in design to the latter, suggesting the prioritizing of fidelity to the park's aesthetics over the film.

In contrast to the Mad Tea Party and Dumbo the Flying Elephant's elision of narrative in favor of emphasizing "pure" sensations, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride uses the events of its source film, rearranging them to materialize an emotional and physical experience for the visitor. As Leon and Jack Janzen observe in an article in the fan magazine *The E-Ticket*: "the confusing but catchy lyrics of 'The Merrily Song' were both the inspiration and the definition of the Toad dark ride as it was first experienced in 1955. The quickly passing scenes illustrated, not the plot of the film (with Winkie, his weasels and the deed to Toad Hall), but Toad's 'motor mania' as he (and Cyril) might have experienced it from behind the wheel of their runaway motorcar."<sup>134</sup> The current version of the ride, too, not only illustrates Toad's "motor mania," it puts the rider in Toad's shoes—or rather his car—to directly experience his "mania" in a more literal, physical way than is experienced when watching the screen-mediated film.

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parlance—Sleeping Beauty's Castle. The castle had been used from the earliest years as a symbol for the parks as a whole, appearing, for example, on early park tickets. Its later use as the logo for Walt Disney Pictures further united the park with the company's film production and corporate identity. The castle has further linked to Walt Disney himself as the contemporary backdrop for the now-iconic *Partners* statue, which was erected in the park's central "hub" in 1993.

<sup>133</sup> Erin Glover, "Opening Day to Today: 'The New Fantasyland' at Disneyland Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, July 26, 2016, <https://disneylands.disney.go.com/blog/2016/07/opening-day-to-today-the-new-fantasyland-at-disneyland-park/>.

<sup>134</sup> Leon Janzen and Jack Janzen, "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride," *The E-Ticket* 20, Special Limited Edition (October 28, 1999): 2-15. See <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/1955-2015-disneylands-mr-toads-wild-ride>.



The film's narrative is clear and simple: a wealthy, thrill-seeking, and fun-loving yet careless Toad is at risk first of bankruptcy and then of prison time due to his reckless behavior. As the plot unfolds, we see his obsession with, as Angus MacBadger observes, "rampaging about the county in a canary yellow gypsy cart" give way to "motor mania" as Toad first spies a horseless car. Despite his friends' attempts to "save Toad from himself" by placing him under house arrest, Toad breaks out. The film then cuts to a courtroom scene where Toad is accused of theft. This scene includes a flashback sequence describing how Toad came to legitimately acquire the stolen red car by trading Toad Hall for it. A contradictory witness (Winkie, the barman) leads to Toad's wrongful conviction and prison sentence. With the aid of a disguise and his friend Cyril, Toad's new "escape mania" (replacing his "motor mania") leads to another action sequence as he flees first on foot then by commandeering a train engine. Returning to Toad Hall, MacBadger informs Toad and friends that the weasels and Winkie, who he has discovered to be their leader, are carousing at Toad Hall and in possession of the deed which will vindicate Toad. The friends hatch a plan to sneak into Toad Hall and acquire the proof of Toad's innocence. They fight the weasels, escape, and Toad is exonerated. The film's story ends with Toad off to a new mania ("plane mania") as we see him fly into the sunset in his new biplane.

While the film itself is not entirely linear—an extended flashback during the courtroom scene illustrates how Toad acquired his new motor car—Mr. Toad's Wild Ride deliberately rearranges the narrative to resist narrative logic or cohesion in favor of emotional and physical sensations. Seated in motor-car ride vehicles, riders begin inside Toad Hall where they encounter the villainous weasels (this takes place at the end of the film), burst outside where they flee police through farmer's fields, docks, and streets (Toad's "escape mania," which occurs before the weasel fight in the film), careen through a tavern as they pass by barman Winkie, who is in

cahoots with the weasels (even earlier in the film), head back outside then into a courtroom where they are judged guilty (again, this happens relatively early in the film). Riders escape the courtroom straight into the headlights of an oncoming train, after which they are immediately sent to what appears to be hell before abruptly appearing back at the ride loading area to disembark.

Though key characters, scenes, and details from the film are identifiable in these ride spaces (though perhaps difficult to focus on due to the ride's movement and brevity), they are presented as a montage. Instead of the continuity editing of the film, which supports its basic narrative progression, the ride has the equivalent of smash cuts. Moreover, I would argue that their order is deliberately jumbled to disrupt the plot of the film. Although riders unfamiliar with the original film source may not recognize that the order has been altered, the ride inherently lacks a clear progression of scenes that logically lay out the story: the introduction of characters, dialogue, and establishment of central conflict. It also resists the film's narrative resolution. Instead, the ride progress through a rapid succession of vignettes, that break down and recombine snippets from the film, freed from their logical continuity and chronology. The fight with the weasels at the climax of the film is presented right at the beginning of the ride, while the film's earlier guilty sentence comes at the end. Moreover, chase scenes from the film that do not place Toad in a car—such as his on-foot escape from prison or fight sequence with the weasels—are here entirely collapsed into the film's "motor mania" sequence. Unlike Toad, we are in a car the entire time. This serves to situate the rider not in the film's narrative, but rather in the emotional ("motor mania") and physical (whipping and crashing through environments in a motor car) positions of its main character.

The name of the attraction itself points to the kinetic emphasis of the ride's own narrative. It is not "The Wind in the Willows" or even a vague "The Adventures of Mr. Toad" (to take from the film's title), but Mr. Toad's *Wild Ride*. The name frames the ride in terms of its wildness, expressed through the whipping of the ride vehicle and the frenzied succession of images, characters, scenes, and effects. As mentioned above, Peter Pan's Flight is part of this same impulse to foreground embodied sensations over narrative coherence. More so than Mr. Toad, the present-day version of Peter Pan's Flight only minimally references film's narrative via key narrative beats—the Darling children meet Peter, soar over London to Neverland, vanquish Captain Hook, and return home. Rather, over half of its two-minute duration is spent on the single scene of flight over London in the suspended ride vehicle as riders bask in the aerial view of the miniature city and the whooshing air sounds that simulate whipping wind.

Walt Disney himself emphasized the kinetic potential of these built cinematic spaces in the rhetoric he used to describe Fantasyland's film-based rides: "What youngster hasn't dreamed of flying with Peter Pan over moonlit London? Here in the 'happiest kingdom of them all,' you can journey with Snow White through the dark forest to the diamond mine of the Seven Dwarfs; flee the clutches of Mr. Smee and Captain Hook with Peter Pan; and race with Mr. Toad in his wild auto ride through the streets of old London Town."<sup>135</sup> Here, the verbs used are decidedly kinetic: park goers are figured as flying, journeying, fleeing, and racing with—rather than watching—these characters. The medium of the ride is used not to simply recapitulate a plot, but to facilitate an embodied experience within cinematic space made possible by the physically immersive built environments and kinetic capacities of these rides.

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<sup>135</sup> Randy Bright, *Disneyland: Inside Story* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), 81.

Mr. Toad's Wild Ride offers not just a distinct plot sequence, but an original narrative that departs from that of the film itself. This provides an experience for the park-goer that is unique from that of a movie viewer because of the way riders embody narrative space and point of view differently from film audiences. Rides like Mr. Toad shift the focus of the narrative from visual to visual *and* physical while also playing with narrative identification, as riders inhabit a central POV position that de-centers the main characters from their own stories. In their discussions of early Fantasyland rides, Erika Doss and Suzanne Rahn both draw attention to this decentering. As Doss observes, "the rides in Fantasyland were designed to allow children to 'step into' and become a part of their favorite animated films. Central figures in several rides were downplayed to allow their riders to 'become' Snow White or Peter Pan."<sup>136</sup> Rahn, too, points out how "in the original ride, Snow White was never depicted—just as Toad was never depicted in Mr. Toad's Wild Ride—because the designers intended visitors to imagine *themselves* as Snow White."<sup>137</sup> Indeed, Mr. Toad himself does not appear in the ride—instead, *riders* have "motor mania," *they* are pursued, told to stop, judged guilty, die, and are sent to hell.

It is this last point that is particularly significant in terms of how different the narrative of the ride is versus that of the film. In the film, although the follies of excess, reckless behavior, and even new technology are manifested in Toad's "motor mania," which his friends acknowledge as risky and problematic, Toad himself is ultimately vindicated. The viewers are given a happy ending as Toad flies off to his next adventure, reckless, perhaps, but happy and well-intentioned. The narrator, Basil Rathbone, even encourages us to not judge Toad too harshly: "really now, don't we envy him a bit? I know I do." In Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, however,

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<sup>136</sup> Doss, "Making Imagination Safe," 180-181.

<sup>137</sup> Rahn, "The Dark Ride," 94.

our narrative is different from Toad's in the film: we are thrust into a car chase, judged for our wrongdoing, killed, and sent to hell. Whereas in the film Toad steals a train to escape the police and is figured as justified in doing so, in the ride, the train bears down on riders, presumably killing them and sending them to hell for their recklessness. The ride thus takes the morality tale of the film and displaces it from the film's central character by thrusting it upon the rider, whose point of view (riders act as the camera) determines the focus of the narrative (in the absence of Toad, riders act as the protagonist). In Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, riders are denied both moral absolution—we are sent to hell for our “motor mania”—and narrative resolution—the abrupt “cut” to the disembarkation area leaves potential doubt as to whether the extra-filmic hell sequence is “real” or not. There is a certain fatalism to this construction, as riders activate the narrative through their eye/camera and presence on the ride (the narrative does not exist without someone experiencing it and acting as the protagonist) but are powerless to stop it as they are compelled to re-enact the same route, “choices,” and fate each time they choose to ride. As such, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride doesn't simply attempt a straight adaptation of the film into the ride through key set pieces or even offer a single embodied experience of a kinetic or psychological aspect of the film (like Dumbo the Flying Elephant), rather it explores the possibilities of using the new park medium to expand on and play with the original narrative *as well as* its bodily affect.

### **On the Set and in the Film: Swiss Family Treehouse and Tarzan's Treehouse**

This abode, fashioned among these branches with patience, ingenuity, & the steadfast perseverance of all hands—is the safest & most charming home in the world. Completed Oct. 16, 1805.

—Sign, Swiss Family Treehouse

As the years passed, Disney added more film-based attractions to the park, often in support of the studio's recent cinematic releases. As discussed in the introduction, Disneyland's origins were steeped in the world of cinematic and televisual production, from studio tours as one of the earliest inspirations for the park to early discussions of building next to the Walt Disney Productions studio lot in Burbank to unrealized plans to build actual television production spaces within the park.<sup>138</sup> As Disney biographer Neal Gabler notes, "almost from the moment Disney first imagined it, he had thought of Disneyland in cinematic terms—a 'cute movie set is what it really is,' Walt told his staff."<sup>139</sup> While much of this was not realized in the park's final design, studio backlot design strategies and inspiration are evident in the design and construction of the park as well as within its lands and attractions. This is particularly apparent in the Swiss Family Treehouse.

The Swiss Family Treehouse harkens back to Disneyland's early backlot and studio tour roots. It evokes the pleasures of being on the actual film set, which are heightened by the association of the space with the film's real-life stars, yet the narrative space is simultaneously imagined to be "real." In other words, Swiss Family Treehouse acts both as an authentic film production space as well as the "real" story world of the film transported into the park. Based on the 1960 film *Swiss Family Robinson*, the Swiss Family Treehouse opened at Disneyland two years after the film premiered. *Swiss Family Robinson* was a major commercial hit, and as such, the attraction can be thought of as a way to capitalize on that success.<sup>140</sup> As Deborah Philips has

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<sup>138</sup> Barrier, *The Animated Man*, 212, 234; Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 488; Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," 63; Neuman, "Disneyland's Main Street," 43.

<sup>139</sup> Gabler, *Walt Disney*, 533.

<sup>140</sup> The film grossed over \$40 million domestically in 1960. As of January 2022, Box Office Mojo ranked *Swiss Family Robinson* 96th on its all-time box office chart, adjusted for inflation to 2019 ticket prices. See "Swiss Family Robinson," Box Office Mojo, IMDbPro, accessed January 13, 2022, [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0054357/?ref=bo\\_cso\\_table\\_100](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0054357/?ref=bo_cso_table_100); "Top Lifetime Adjusted Gross," Box

observed: “*The Swiss Family Robinson* feature film in 1960 was another example of the synergy of the corporation, which made use of the film sets as an attraction for the theme park and brought its stars...to the opening of ‘The Swiss Family Treehouse’ at Disneyland.”<sup>141</sup> This suggests that not only was the attraction inspired by the film it was based on, but it incorporated actual parts of the set. As Hayley Mills, actor and daughter of *Swiss Family Robinson* star John Mills noted of the attraction, “This is the exact replica of the treehouse that was built on the island of Tobago for *Swiss Family Robinson*.”<sup>142</sup> The treehouse invited visitors to immerse themselves in both the setting and set of *Swiss Family Robinson*.

Fans of the film could enjoy seeing the props and sets in person as a pilgrimage of sorts. In this way, Swiss Family Treehouse can be seen in terms of Nick Couldry describes as “media pilgrimages,” or “journeys to points with significance in media narratives.”<sup>143</sup> The elaborate handmade treehouse is the epicenter of the narrative in *Swiss Family Robinson*, which saw the Robinson family marooned on a remote island, left to rebuild their lives and home from scratch. The treehouse’s significance to the story of the Robinsons, as well as the ingenuity and novelty of the structure itself, made it appealing as a site to visit. Couldry further defines media pilgrimages as “journeys to media theme parks and other tourist sites which market their status as current or past filming locations.”<sup>144</sup> The authenticity lent by the fact—or suggestion—that

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Office Mojo, IMDbPro, accessed January 13, 2022,  
[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top\\_lifetime\\_gross\\_adjusted/?adjust\\_gross\\_to=2020](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top_lifetime_gross_adjusted/?adjust_gross_to=2020).

<sup>141</sup> Deborah Philips, *Fairground Attractions: A Genealogy of the Pleasure Ground* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 184.

<sup>142</sup> Hayley Mills noted this in a special feature for the *Swiss Family Robinson* DVD. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqg0VpG8S0I>.

<sup>143</sup> Couldry, *Media Rituals*, 76.

<sup>144</sup> Couldry, *Media Rituals*, 77.

these are “real” props and sets would thus add to its status. Couldry suggests that these places have “special significance” because of “the hierarchy of places ‘in’ the media over those which aren’t.”<sup>145</sup> A later Disneyland souvenir book describes how the Swiss Family Treehouse is filled with “genuine household antiques like ship instruments, cookware, and a sewing basket, and genuine artificial antiques like beds, tables, chairs, and bookshelves made by Disney craftsmen.”<sup>146</sup> Swiss Family Treehouse thus gains significance through its connections to the film story and production; it is marked as “special” through its “genuine” ties to a famous and successful film, more so than if it were merely a run-of-the-mill fantastical treehouse.

A plot point and central pleasure in the film is the exploration, through the camera, of the home created by the Robinson family. Howard Thompson of the NY Times noted the significance of the treehouse in his 1960 review of the film: “The early scenes are exactly what might be expected from a Disney-claimed island—a mountainous, palm-fringed paradise of turtles, tigers, zebras, birds and baby elephants. Some are even recruited to help the folks construct the most impressive tree house we've ever laid eyes on (why kids leave home—wait till you see it).”<sup>147</sup> In the film, the characters themselves marvel at the ingenuity of the spaces they’ve created. The boys say: “Hurry, Mother, you’re just gonna love this new house!” and “This way, Mother. Wait’ll you see what we’ve done! There's all sorts of things inside. You just wait.” The characters note that the house has “All the latest innovations. Running water. Genuine imported tortoiseshell.” In the film, as Elizabeth explores the treehouse built by her husband and

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<sup>145</sup> Couldry, *Media Rituals*, 80.

<sup>146</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland*, 65.

<sup>147</sup> Howard Thompson, “New Version of ‘Swiss Family Robinson,’” *The New York Times*, December 24, 1960, <https://www.nytimes.com/1960/12/24/archives/new-version-of-swiss-family-robinson.html>.



children, we the viewers do, too. Disneyland's Treehouse invites visitors to take the same pleasure in built space, made even more significant through its connection to the film.

Moreover, as Couldry argues, "the media pilgrimage is both a real journey across space, and an acting out *in space* of the constructed 'distance' between 'ordinary world' and 'media world.'" <sup>148</sup> At the Swiss Family Treehouse, visitors are invited to traverse that distance and enter that media world through the immersive three-dimensionality of the space. The mobility of visitors' bodies accomplishes this in both a literal way, as they enter and progress through the space, and a metaphorical one, as they enter the media space of the Treehouse. Climbing, looking, and listening are main ways of interacting with the space, including reading narrative signs and listening to the "Swissapolka" and working water features.

As a "walkthrough" style attraction, the Swiss Family Treehouse has no ride vehicle or track. <sup>149</sup> Visitors must navigate the space by walking along a pathway through a space—they must "act out" the exploration of the treehouse like the characters in the film. The path takes visitors up several stairs, as they encounter different rooms in the Robinson family's treehouse. The progression is linear—narrow paths, elevated walkways, and staircases mean that visitors must follow a single route and there is little alternate space to explore. However, because visitors are not conveyed through the space via a ride vehicle, there is a small element of free exploration

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<sup>148</sup> Couldry, *Media Rituals*, 76-77.

<sup>149</sup> Many individual attractions, including most of the early Fantasyland rides, were originally envisioned as walkthrough rides before being reworked as dark rides. This form recurred throughout Disneyland's first few decades, as later attractions like *Pirates of the Caribbean* (1967) and *Haunted Mansion* (1969) also originally began their lives envisioned as walkthroughs. While walkthroughs allow visitors to explore spaces at their own pace and to inject more of their own narrative play into these spaces, many attractions originally designed as walkthroughs were eventually switched to track-based rides, which afford more consistency in terms of pacing and ride capacity, as well as the ability to control and direct the attention of riders.

of the space. Visitors may proceed through the space at their own pace (depending on crowd density), pausing if they like to observe the scenes before them.

Though the pacing depends on the visitor, the linearity of Swiss Family Treehouse controls the order in which they encounter the scenes.<sup>150</sup> The succession of scenes suggests a condensed version of the film's narrative. As Deborah Philips notes: "The Disney version [of the film] provided a further condensation of what was already a long line of adaptations and abridgments of Wyss's text. According to the film's director, Walt Disney instructed the producer to compress the novel into its basic elements," which, according to the director, included "throw[ing] the whole book out the window!"<sup>151</sup> The Swiss Family Treehouse condensed the film (and by proxy the book) narrative even further, by eliminating much of its context (the non-treehouse scenes). The story is thus reduced to its barest bones: a shipwrecked family's handcrafted castaway home.

The details of the vignettes also imply a kind of basic narrative. The bamboo and straw-thatch materials used to construct the house convey its makeshift nature, suggesting that the characters must have gathered what they could from their island surroundings. Local materials and rough workmanship are juxtaposed with more finely made objects brought with the family from Switzerland: books, ceramics, textiles, furniture, and even an organ. There are also items obviously salvaged from the ship itself, including the ship's wheel and lanterns. In combination, these elements tell the simple story of the Robinson family, a family of Swiss heritage who was

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<sup>150</sup> Visitors' ability to break with the intended progression of the space and go backward, for example, notwithstanding.

<sup>151</sup> Phillips, *Fairground Attractions*, 184.

shipwrecked on a tropical island and who chose to build a new life making do with what they recovered and what they could build themselves.

In addition to the set design, much of the Treehouse's narrative positioning was accomplished by signs posted throughout the ride, positioned as being within the conceit of the film world, left behind by the characters themselves. These signs conveyed the narrative from the perspective of Father Robinson (John Mills) to the visitors: "On this site July 17, 1805 the Swiss Family Robinson composed of myself, my good wife and three sons, Fritz, Ernst and little Francis...were the sole survivors by the grace of God, of the ill-fated ship Titus. From the wreckage we built our home in this tree for protection on this uncharted shore." The signs framed the audience not as tourists on a film set, but as actual visitors to the authentic story space of the film.

Posted at the entrance to the walkthrough as well as next to each vignette, the signs told the story of the Robinson family while situating the visitor within the story world. The signs made it clear that park visitors were meant to experience the Treehouse not as visitors to the film's set, but as visitors to the actual island that the Robinsons called home. The kitchen sign read "Our Kitchen...and dining room—complete with running water, volcanic stone hearth & oven...utensils of our own making & salvage from the wrecked 'Titus' ...plus nature's bounty & my good wife's cooking, amply fulfill our wants."<sup>152</sup> References to the ship and its salvage, combined with references to the natural "volcanic stone," "utensils of our own making," and "nature's bounty," suggested the broad-strokes plot points of *Swiss Family Robinson*, from the wreck to the establishment of a new life on the uncharted island. Near the Jungle Lookout, a sign

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<sup>152</sup> The ship's name apparently varied between Titus, Recovery, and Swallow (this latter name is still on the sign at Walt Disney World today). The ship was not named in the original novel or the Disney film adaptation.

read “Jungle Lookout...in this compound we often pause to contemplate our small world...here adventure beckons...with every view & every sound, the jungle & its river call out their mystery...& invite us to new discovery.” This sign went beyond the plot, addressing the tone, themes, and even sonic textures of the film.

Visitors were positioned within the story in time as well as space. The signs laid out a specific timeline for the shipwreck (July 17, 1805) and the home’s construction. According to the signs, “This abode” was established on October 16, 1805, while “The Crow’s Nest” (the children’s room) was “completed on the anniversary of our deliverance. July 17, 1805.” Though these references to previous events (the wreck, the building of the home) were in the past, other language used in the signage suggested that the treehouse was currently inhabited. The kitchen and dining room “fulfill” their needs and they “often pause” in the Jungle Lookout. A sign titled “God Bless Our Home,” stated that “This abode, fashioned among these branches with patience, ingenuity, & the steadfast perseverance of all hands—is the safest & most charming home in the world. Completed Oct. 16, 1805.” Functional elements like the working water wheel and bamboo bucket transport reinforced the feeling that the space was presently inhabited through their living sounds. The “Swissapolka” soundtrack also enlivened the space, suggesting that it was presently inhabited. This temporal framing suggested the attraction’s central conceit that visitors were visiting the “real” living spaces of these characters.

Thus, there was a tension at play in the Treehouse as the visitor occupied an ambiguous position that potentially oscillated between being a visitor to the *Swiss Family Robinson*’s film set and a visitor to the Swiss Family Robinson’s “real” castaway home. Like some early Fantasyland dark rides, there were no actual characters here (these would be added in the later Tarzan’s Treehouse), though the voice of Father Robinson came through the signs and multiple

design elements suggested that this was a “real” live space. At the same time, visitors could not enter the spaces—they were cordoned off, like a set or museum exhibit, with fences and bars (styled like “bamboo”) preventing visitors from inhabiting them except as outsiders or tourists. Though visitors were invited to identify with the characters and inhabit the story, they were only allowed to look at—not fully inhabit—the spaces.

This aligns Swiss Family Treehouse with other early exhibits at the park, such as the 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea exhibit which was open in Tomorrowland from 1955 to 1966. This exhibit, originally a “stopgap attraction” intended to fill out unfinished space in the park’s early days, featured actual sets and props from Disney’s hit 1954 film *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.<sup>153</sup> These scenes, similarly cordoned off with chains and stanchions, and the building, with its overhead scaffolding and modernist architecture, certainly did not invite the same level of immersion as Swiss Family Treehouse. However, even here there was a tension between the “reality” of the sets and that of the story world itself. The exhibit’s overhead sign read that the attraction featured “Actual interiors of Captain Nemo’s Submarine,” “The Giant Squid in Action,” and “The Last Resting Place of the Submarine Nautilus.”<sup>154</sup> The sign also touted “Jules Verne’s Dream of the Future Come True,” referring to the source book’s author, but not the film or its sets. These signs suggested a deliberate blurring of fantasy and reality. These were not merely film sets, but rather the “actual interiors of Captain Nemo’s submarine.” As with Swiss Family Treehouse, the space invited a dual pleasure in immersion within both the production space of a film and the authentic world of its story.

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<sup>153</sup> “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Exhibit,” Disney A to Z, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://d23.com/a-to-z/20000-leagues-under-the-sea-exhibit/>.

<sup>154</sup> For photos, see <https://www.davelandweb.com/tomorrowland/20k.html>.

Swiss Family Treehouse closed in 1999 to make way for a re-theme based on the then-upcoming animated feature film *Tarzan* (1999), whose story also follows the aftermath of a shipwreck.<sup>155</sup> Though it might seem like a simple re-skin update of an aging attraction (even though another Swiss Family Treehouse is still operating at Walt Disney World in Florida), the new version illustrates a different narrative approach to the same space. While Swiss Family Treehouse highlighted the pleasures of both a set and a story world, *Tarzan's* Treehouse emphasizes interactivity and an increased focus on plot and character presence.

Unlike its predecessor, the narrative of *Tarzan* is more overtly referenced here, but like Swiss Family Treehouse there is a pronounced tension within the physical space between positioning the visitor as a film viewer and fostering immersion within the film's narrative itself. Key scenes from the film's plot are recreated in the first sections of the treehouse via life-size statues of its animated characters. These scenes include Sabor's attack, Kala and baby *Tarzan*, and a scene of Jane sketching *Tarzan*. Frozen in space, these static characters arguably distance the visitor from immersion within the narrative. Though they might vividly recall notable scenes from the film, the fact that these scenes take place in the "past" precludes the feeling of visiting a living story world, even as this conceit is suggested by other elements of the design. Indeed, the Treehouse was imagined as taking up where the film left off. As Tony Baxter, the Imagineer who headed up the conversion from the old Swiss Family Treehouse, recalled, "It just seemed obvious that if Jane was going to stay in the jungle with *Tarzan* and there was this treehouse that his parents had built that it was where they would set up their home. When we talked to the co-directors Kevin Lima and Chris Buck, they kind of smiled because they had the same idea if

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<sup>155</sup> Although the Disneyland Anaheim version of the Swiss Family Treehouse no longer exists, sister attractions are still present in three other Disney parks worldwide, including Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom, Disneyland Paris, and Tokyo Disneyland.

there was to be a sequel to the film.”<sup>156</sup> However, the presence of these static scenes from the film in the space complicates the idea of the treehouse as sequel.

“Books” sprinkled throughout the space attempt to convey the sequel idea, by telling the story of Tarzan, with passages like “Under Kala’s watchful eye, Tarzan grew tall and strong, never realizing he was human.” Told from the perspective of Jane, they suggest the treehouse is a real living space, as Jane and Tarzan “invite you to explore our home in the trees and discover its secrets and adventures.” This positions the visitor within the story world, which is in turn positioned as “real.” However, even here there is tension. The verso page to this caption credits Edgar Rice Burroughs, the original author of Tarzan, again creating distance between immersion in the story world of Disney’s animated film and its actual fictional nature. At times, these captions prompt visitors to think of memories of the animated film: “Together they share many memories. What is your favorite?” Combined with the recreated film scenes, and other elements like Phil Collins’s score, which is played throughout the attraction, these design choices demonstrate an uneven approach to the relationship between the visitor and the story.

While one “book” encourages the visitor to reflect on the film, another invites physical interaction with the space itself. Framing the Treehouse as Tarzan and Jane’s current home, it reads: “Today we live happily here amongst the trees, close to our gorilla family and our jungle friends. Please explore the treehouse grounds. You may make a discovery of your own!” Upon descending from the treehouse, visitors enter the camp on the ground level below, which includes interactive elements. Those familiar with *Tarzan* can reenact scenes from the film, making improvised music like the gorillas in the trashing the camp scene, yelling into the tube,

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<sup>156</sup> Jim Korkis, “The Story of Tarzan's Treehouse,” *MousePlanet*, April 18, 2018, [https://www.mouseplanet.com/12070/The\\_Story\\_of\\_Tarzans\\_Treehouse](https://www.mouseplanet.com/12070/The_Story_of_Tarzans_Treehouse).

like Tarzan, or swinging from vines. These behaviors are encouraged by the immersive tension in Tarzan's Treehouse, where visitors encounter some of the events from the film, then are primed to "be" Tarzan, playing with pots and pans, swinging on ropes, or recreating his famous call. Absent the static character scenes from the upper treehouse, this lower level more solidly immerses the visitor within the story world through their bodies as it invites active participation.

Converting the treehouse from a live-action-based space to one based on an animated film further suggests ontological tension. Mixing cartoon-like "animated" figures with "realistic" versions of the film's environments helps to connect the visitors' presence with the animated film's world through the Treehouse's built space, as visitors' bodies relate to the "real" props and sets. One can consider, for example, how this space might be different if the Imagineers had simply created an all-cartoon world. For a more direct comparison, we can look to Chip 'n Dale Treehouse in Mickey's Toontown, whose cartoon materials, textures, and proportions create a relatively consistent animated space. Ultimately, like Swiss Family Treehouse before it, Tarzan's Treehouse clearly exhibits a tension between the film as a cinematic product and the actual story world "made real" for our bodies to inhabit.

## **Into and Through the Screen: PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON and Permeable**

### **Screen Space**

Here goes something and here comes nothing!  
—Dr. Gibbs, *TRON*

Unlike the case studies discussed thus far, the 1982 attraction PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON incorporated actual movie screens and projections inside a built space, providing a different perspective from which to explore the boundaries between screen and space



in the parks.<sup>157</sup> Movie screens have been part of Disneyland since opening day, operating in a variety of modes that forge different relationships between bodies, screens, built space, cinematic space, and digital technologies. Several of the earliest attractions at Disneyland used screens to immerse viewers in projected images. An original 1955 attraction, Circarama (later renamed Circle-Vision 360) projected 16mm films in the round, using a system of eleven interlocking projectors to produce a single continuous 360° overlapping image.<sup>158</sup> Visitors were free to move about and focus on different aspects of the film in the immersive projected environment. Even Main Street Cinema, another original opening day attraction, ran Disney animated shorts simultaneously on six different screens projected around a circular theater.<sup>159</sup>

Since these early years, other kinds of attractions have incorporated screens in a variety of new ways. Star Tours (1987), discussed in further detail below, uses a screen in conjunction with hydraulic motion-simulator cabins to simulate space travel.<sup>160</sup> Disneyland Resort parks have also created “4D” theatrical attractions such as Captain EO (1986), Honey, I Shrunk the Audience (1994), and It’s Tough to Be a Bug (2002). These combined 3D films with “4D” special effects, including lasers, animated seating, bursts of air, and water sprays. Soarin’ Over California (2001) consists of suspended seating lifted into an 80-foot, 180° curved screen to simulate flight.<sup>161</sup> Attractions like Toy Story Midway Mania! (2008) put 3D screens, video

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<sup>157</sup> There is another TRON-based attraction at Disney Parks: the TRON Lightcycle Power Run at Shanghai Disneyland (2016). A cloned version was originally scheduled to open at the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World by 2021 but was delayed in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>158</sup> John Belton, “The Curved Screen,” *Film History* 16, no. 3 (2004): 277.

<sup>159</sup> It still does—Main Street Cinema has been operational since Disneyland’s opening day.

<sup>160</sup> Star Tours had a “soft opening” in December 1986.

<sup>161</sup> Later renamed Soarin’ Around the World, the ride film was changed from an aerial tour of California to an aerial world tour.

games, and interactive vehicles together in a traditional dark ride setting. In recent years, Disney Imagineering has also increasingly implemented new projection mapping technologies to enhance rides that do not otherwise prominently feature screens by projecting special effects such as simulated fire and water directly onto the built environments.<sup>162</sup> Each of these attractions figures a particular relationship between park visitors, the cinematic experience, and the spatial environs of the park. Moreover, these texts allow for a deeper understanding of modes of subject address that complements that of the built rides without screens (like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride or the Swiss Family Treehouse).

PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON originally opened July 2nd, 1982, exactly one week before the film *TRON* was released in theaters.<sup>163</sup> This promotional timing speaks to the emphasis on the film's ancillary marketing and merchandising; as Aljean Harmetz of the *New York Times* observed, "'Tron' was more successful as a video game than as a movie."<sup>164</sup> It also served to align ride and park space with game space more broadly. PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON was not a brand-new attraction, but rather a re-skin of a small portion of the already present PeopleMover, a transportation ride where small train cars moved through Tomorrowland on elevated tracks. The PeopleMover originally opened in 1967 as part of the "New Tomorrowland" refurbishment, but it was the 1977 addition of the SuperSpeed tunnel that set the stage for the eventual addition of the PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON experience. The SuperSpeed tunnel was a large, enclosed room where footage of race cars was projected on the tunnel walls surrounding the ride track.

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<sup>162</sup> For example, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad was updated with new projection mapping special effects in 2014.

<sup>163</sup> The PeopleMover would run until August 21, 1995, when it was closed to make way for a new thrill ride, Rocket Rods, which were part of the New Tomorrowland renovations that opened in 1998.

<sup>164</sup> Aljean Harmetz, "The Man Re-Animating Disney," *New York Times*, December 29, 1985, ProQuest.

In 1982, this projection was swapped out for images from *TRON*, and the entire PeopleMover attraction was renamed and advertised as “PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON,” even though the *TRON* portion of the ride only comprised around one and a half minutes of its approximately sixteen-minute duration. As the PeopleMover moved along the raised track above Tomorrowland, it offered panoramic vistas of the park exterior spaces as well as interior glimpses into several of Tomorrowland’s attractions and locations, including Star Tours, Space Mountain, and Circle-Vision 360. As the trains prepared to enter the show building, a voice-over signaled the beginning of the *TRON* experience: “Warning: you have invaded the electronic realm of the master computer program. Prepare for the Game Grid of TRON.” After passing through a transitional dark vestibule space (likely intended to prevent light leakage from the outside world), the train entered the large tunnel projection space. The film projected there took riders through a series of scenes extracted from different parts of the *TRON* film.

On a basic level, the re-skin can be understood as an instance of Disney using pre-existing ride setup of the PeopleMover and the SuperSpeed Tunnel to promote a current film. Beyond that, however, there was something deeper happening—something that reoriented the way in which the body relates to digital space and new technology. The initial voice-over heard on the ride referred to the “master computer program,” rather than the “Master Control Program” as the main antagonist is referred to in the film. This shift from control to computer (perhaps unintentionally) reorients the focus from the bleak, dystopian, and overtly political connotations of “control” to “computer,” foregrounding the technological project at work here where the trains and riders’ own bodies penetrate the space of the screen and the digital world figured on it.

The early 1980s marked, in some ways, the beginning of a cultural shift in the presence of gaming and personal computing in consumers’ lives, as well as mounting excitements and

anxieties around the effects of that change. Personal computers were not yet widespread in American homes: only eight percent of American households reported owning a computer in 1984, and that number wouldn't reach over fifty percent until around 2000.<sup>165</sup> *TRON* was released the same year that *Time* deemed the personal computer the “Machine of the Year,” replacing for the first time the magazine’s traditional human recipient of the honor.<sup>166</sup> In the issue’s cover story, Roger Rosenblatt hints at the idealist and democratic potential of computers in the cynical voice of a “snake oil salesman,” touching on the tension between the promise of new technology and skepticism and fear of its threats.<sup>167</sup>

*TRON* itself marked a threshold in the development and use of new digital cinematic technologies, as it used special effects to place actors inside digitally visualized computer spaces. According to Peter Sorensen, writing in the early 1980s, “*Tron* is a double-barreled breakthrough in that it makes use of two very exciting new tools for the special effects kit—computer generated imagery and back-lit, enhanced live action.”<sup>168</sup> This is reflected in the film’s themes—as J.P. Telotte observes, *TRON*’s thematic focus on the duality between the “real world and an electronic simulacrum” was a major focus of the science fiction genre at the time.<sup>169</sup> Within the narrative of the film, new technological advances like lasers and computers bridge the gap

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<sup>165</sup> Camille Ryan, “Computer and Internet Use in the United States: 2016,” U.S. Census Bureau, August 2018, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/acs/ACS-39.pdf>.

<sup>166</sup> Tony Long, “Dec. 26, 1982: Time’s Top Man? The Personal Computer,” *Wired*, December 26, 2012, <https://www.wired.com/2012/12/dec-26-1982-times-top-man-the-personal-computer/>.

<sup>167</sup> Roger Rosenblatt, “A New World Dawns,” *Time*, January 03, 1983, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,953631-1,00.html>; Terri Favro, *Generation Robot: A Century of Science Fiction, Fact, and Speculation* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2018), 87.

<sup>168</sup> Peter Sorensen, “Tronic Imagery,” *Cinefex* 8 (April 1982), Cinefex iPad Edition.

<sup>169</sup> J.P. Telotte, *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 151.

between the analog world and the digital one, enabling the human characters to enter into and interact with digital spaces and programs. In the park, separated from all but the most basic narrative referents from the film, the ride itself became the technological apparatus that allowed for this commingling of virtual and “real” space. *TRON* visualizes the transportation of not just matter but human subjectivity into digital space through the cinematic apparatus. The ride did the same, transporting (via a transportation-style ride) visitors into the digital space of the screen/computer.

As the PeopleMover train entered the tunnel/projection room, the ride’s projections began with a kaleidoscopic geometric fractal sequence that corresponded to the point about thirty minutes into the film when Flynn is “rezzed up” into the digital world of the computer against his will by the Master Control Program. Rider agency here was framed in somewhat contradictory ways—though the voice-over accused riders of “invad[ing] the electronic realm,” riders were “rezzed up” into this digital space by a force outside of their direct control (though they, of course, made the initial choice to ride the ride). Riders became and were addressed as “users” like Flynn. As Scott Bukatman observes of the film, viewers are thrust, through the apparatus of the camera, “into a once-inconceivable space.”<sup>170</sup> What Bukatman terms the “cinematic kinesis” of *TRON* was materialized in the attraction, as the viewer/rider’s body was quite literally thrust, independent of its own autonomous movement, into the virtual space of the film.<sup>171</sup> Images that suggested tunnel-like movement were mapped onto the interior of a physical tunnel that riders moved through—the literal forward motion of the ride vehicle compounded the

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<sup>170</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 224.

<sup>171</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 223.

perceptual forward motion of the images as riders were thrust *in*-screen. As in the film, planar geometric shapes whizzed by as riders drop down further into the “electronic realm” and onto the “Game Grid.” The high-pitched whirring of the light cycles signaled their arrival, as riders began to see them catch up to the PeopleMover and weave from side to side in front of the ride vehicle.<sup>172</sup> At this point, riders were now competing on the Game Grid.

There are two light cycle sequences in the film *TRON*. The first—a brief scene immediately following the opening credits—depicts two light cycle drivers competing inside the Light Cycle video game at Flynn’s Arcade. Though there are a few closeups of the riders’ faces inside the cycles, this first sequence is primarily characterized by non-subjective camera movements independent of any character’s POV. As Bukatman observes, here “‘camera’ movement, simulated by the computer’s graphics capability, is partly tied to vehicular movement, but it is also somewhat autonomous, swinging from high angles to low in a giddy display of its own cybernetic power.”<sup>173</sup> Indeed, in this sequence, the audience is denied POV shots that would allow for closer subjective identification with the characters. It is not until Flynn himself is forced to play later in the film that the audience sees from this perspective in the digital space of the Game Grid.

The second light cycle scene, in which Flynn must compete in a light cycle match, allows for closer identification with the film’s protagonists through its subjective POV shots. In this sequence, close ups of the characters inside the “cockpits” of their light cycles are intercut with central POV shots as from the rider’s perspective. It is significant that this is the scene from

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<sup>172</sup> In *TRON*, light cycles are the motorcycle-like vehicles ridden by programs on the Game Grid, in a battle to the death (by “de-rezzing”).

<sup>173</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 27.

which the footage for the PeopleMover ride appears to have been taken. While in the film the POV shots are interspersed with sweeping aerial shots of the grid that appear independent of any character's perspective, the PeopleMover ride film omitted these aerial shots in favor of almost exclusively using the light cycle POV shots.

The ride both compelled *and* precluded subjective identification with the “characters” (light cycles) as well as seamless immersion into the digital space of the screen through the selection and arrangement of shots. There were points when the image of a light cycle appeared squarely in front of riders’ field of vision/the ride track and riders seemed to almost merge with it as the subjective perspective and peripheral motion lined up with their own physical position and movement.<sup>174</sup> However, this effect was brief and riders’ subjective identification with the light cycles in the ride film was disrupted when a light cycle diverged from the train’s path, cutting in front of it, creating the “jet wall” which, in the film, is fatal when crashed into. On the ride, however, the PeopleMover simply passed through as each shot transitioned to the next until riders were ultimately thrust back out into the exterior space of the park. These shots, where the light cycles wove “in front of” the PeopleMover train, do not take place on the Game Grid at all, but were rather taken from a sequence in the film just after Flynn, Tron, and Ram break out of the Game Grid. So, too, did riders “break free” from the cyber world of the computer as they were thrust back out into the “real world” of Disneyland. As the train exited the tunnel, the computer voice warned that, “You have escaped TRON’s Game Grid for now, users, but take heed, next time you may not fare so well.”

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<sup>174</sup> This is assuming the rider is looking “forward,” although half of the seats on the PeopleMover faced the rear of the train and riders were free in their movement to twist and look around, so this forward and centered perspective may not account for all experiences of the ride.

Riders' "escape" from the digital world of the game back into the space of the park recreated the three-layered ontological structure of the film each time it was ridden. As both Telotte and Bukatman point out, *TRON* operates on three "levels" or "dimensions": the traditional live-action "real world," the computer-generated sequences, and the hybrid sequences which combine digital effects, animation, and live-action.<sup>175</sup> The ride can be similarly understood as having been comprised of three layers: the virtual computer-generated world inside the screen, the blended world of the screen and the viewer/rider, and the fully "real" analog world of the park. In the ride, *riders* replaced the human actors, and as they penetrated the digital world of the screen, they recreated what Bukatman describes as the "mingling digital and analogic technologies of reproduction."<sup>176</sup> This complex relationship between the digital world and the physical world is visualized in the film; Bukatman observes the transitions between cityscapes and abstract geometric shapes in the film as "urban and cybernetic spaces are again overlapped and interchanged."<sup>177</sup> The transition between "real world" and digital world that Bukatman identifies in the film's dissolve from the cyber grid to an aerial shot of a city was replicated in the ride's transition from exterior to interior digital screen space and back again, a transition that was facilitated by the ride's linear track and its spatial "editing" as it entered and left the projection building. The film's aerial views, such as those from Mr. Dillinger's office, thus recall the aerial views of the park provided by the PeopleMover ride itself.

Significantly, riders encountered *only* pure-digital shots while inside the PeopleMover tunnel. Unlike the film, riders did not see any closeups of characters from the film because *they*

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<sup>175</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 222; Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 151.

<sup>176</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 226.

<sup>177</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 216.



were the user/program, and their PeopleMover became, for those moments, a surrogate lightcycle. It was their presence as the “real” human actors that placed their experience into the “middle” level identified by Bukatman—that of the anthropomorphic “Flynn-program,” where digital effects blend with “real world” cinematography. Riders’ own penetration into the screen-bounded space disrupted the “unrelentingly flat” space of the film and the screen.<sup>178</sup> The barrier between the analog/digital Flynn program and the film viewer which is maintained by the plane of the cinema screen of the *TRON* film is blurred by the rider’s physical immersion “in” the screen in tandem with the absence of the film’s characters in the ride space. The combination of the physical forward motion of the train, the virtual forward motion of the “camera” and its subjective POV perspective fostered a blending of the ride/rider and the projected image—riders were meant to be like characters on a light cycle on the Game Grid.

Bukatman argues that the subjectivity established within the terminal spaces of *TRON* (the film), “is analogous to Flynn’s, in that the viewer is also propelled into cyberspace, but it is hardly identical to Flynn’s—the viewer’s experience is bounded by the purely visual engagement with a two-dimensional screen.”<sup>179</sup> For Bukatman, the narrative serves as a framework for viewer presence in these disembodied spaces, and the characters serve as their surrogates in the two-dimensional space of the screen: “the narrative thus encourages an identification with Flynn to enhance the phenomenological impact of the film’s electronic spatiality.”<sup>180</sup> In *TRON*, character identification and narrative are used to bridge the gap between two-dimensional film space and real embodied space. Or, in Bukatman’s words, “the surrogate experience of narrative

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<sup>178</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 223.

<sup>179</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 226-227.

<sup>180</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 226-227.

replaces bodily engagement.”<sup>181</sup> However, on PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON, the film’s story was largely absent from the ride, aside from the brief narration at the beginning and end of the tunnel. These voice-overs merely established a bare-bones story: that riders have invaded the electronic realm, that they are on the Game Grid, and that they escape. The ride’s duration was also key here, as the compressed temporality of the ride similarly precludes narrative development, thus distancing the narrative of the film in favor of the immediate embodied experience. Rather, the ride and the riders’ own bodies, rather than the narrative, connected the two spaces, uniting the abstract digital realm with the tangible one through their subjective physical experiences. The rider and ride vehicle penetrated the two-dimensional space of the screen, which was configured not as a flat plane, but as an envelope of space. In her discussion of representations of both electronic and outer space, Vivian Sobchack observes that “both are spaces we regularly experience and yet cannot ‘inhabit’ without technological mediation, without some transformation or mutation of our bodies.”<sup>182</sup> In PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON, it was the ride itself that served the function of mediator, bringing together screen cyberspace and “real” space through the presence and “bodily engagement” of the rider.<sup>183</sup>

### **“A Certain Point of View”: World-Building, Point of View, and Narrative Variability in**

#### **Star Tours**

I know this is probably your first flight, and it’s...mine, too.  
—Captain “Rex” RX-24

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<sup>181</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 226.

<sup>182</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999), chap. 4, Kindle.

<sup>183</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 226.

In 1987, five years after PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON opened at Disneyland, another significant attraction named Star Tours opened in Tomorrowland. Set in the universe of the *Star Wars* film franchise, it “was the first attraction ever designed for Disneyland around intellectual property belonging to someone else.”<sup>184</sup> The original 1987 version of the ride was a 2-D motion simulator, where visitors boarded an ersatz tour ship en route through space to the forest moon of Endor.<sup>185</sup> In 2011, Star Tours was updated to Star Tours – The Adventures Continue. The revamp included the addition of 3-D technology and the introduction of new story elements and locations over subsequent years that adapted the ride to include the films added to the nine-episode franchise since the original ride and original film trilogy in the 1970s and 80s.

At the core of both versions of the Star Tours attraction is the combination of screen and haptic input to simulate movement through space. Following an immersive queue area, large groups of riders are seated in the cabin of a transport vehicle, styled as a StarSpeeder, an interstellar starship. The ride vehicle moves on multiple axes via hydraulics to approximate the POV movement of the film displayed on the large front screen, which stands in as the ship’s front windshield. The film and the motion technology combine to simulate a journey through space.<sup>186</sup> Thus, this attraction provides a key avenue for thinking about the visitor’s embodied relationship to the screen and its virtual worlds vis-à-vis movement, physical space, and screen space.

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<sup>184</sup> Joseph Zornado, *Disney and the Dialectic of Desire: Fantasy as Social Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 252.

<sup>185</sup> Though the first modern, high-tech motion simulator at Disneyland Star Tours was arguably not the first motion simulator in the park. Rocket to the Moon, which simulated a lunar voyage, was an opening day attraction in Tomorrowland. This attraction will be discussed further in the context of *Mission to Mars* in Chapter 3.

<sup>186</sup> This attraction’s roots in things like Hale’s Tours have been noted and explored by Lauren Rabinovitz. See Rabinovitz, “From Hale’s Tours to Star Tours.”

Considering the modes of queue-based storytelling used in Star Tours also illuminates how the ride functions as a world-building mechanism that expands the Star Wars universe while immersing visitors in it. In addition, Star Tours combines motion simulation technology and the ride's screen with film techniques and *Star Wars* tropes, specifically pilot POV shots and the *Star Wars* "trench run," to create a single ride/screen space that merges the world of the films with the physical reality of the visitor. The updated version of the attraction, Star Tours – The Adventures Continue, further complicates this immersion in the Star Wars universe through its variable structure and by mixing locations and characters from all nine Star Wars Episodes. Ultimately, Star Tours offers a productive case study for the ways in which rides are used to expand the story worlds of their parent texts as well as how technology and cinematic style can be used to dissolve the barrier of the screen. In this way, it also provides context for further discussions of world-building and technology in *Star Wars* park spaces in this dissertation, particularly in the case of the Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge land and its attractions, which will be discussed in Chapter Two.

### ***Queue-Based Storytelling and World-Building***

Star Tours is notable, in part, for the way its queue is integrated into the experience of the ride as a whole. In its early years, Disneyland attraction queues were typically simple, with visitors lining up in switchbacks separated by metal fencing or chains before boarding the attraction vehicles. These queues were often located at least partially in the open spaces of the park, and often little was done to envelop visitors in the ride's story, aside from some general thematic decoration.

In the decades following opening day, rides like Pirates of the Caribbean (1967), The Haunted Mansion (1969), Mission to Mars (1975), and Space Mountain (1977), began to feature

more elaborate queue spaces. Once inside the show building of Pirates of the Caribbean, for example, visitors load onto the ride via Lafitte's Landing, a lantern-lit weathered dock on the shores of the ride's indoor watery bayou. The Haunted Mansion's queue was similarly integrated into the ride's narrative world. The outdoor environment is made up as the grounds of the eponymous mansion, with its manicured lawn, which has since been updated with additional details like the pet cemetery, added in the 1980s.<sup>187</sup> Once inside the mansion itself, visitors move through several spaces before boarding the ride vehicles: the foyer, the gallery or "stretching room," and the portrait corridor. These are incorporated as part of the ride narrative through the ominous voice-over of the Ghost Host, who introduces visitors to the mansion and its illusory inhabitants. As will be discussed in the Chapter Three, Mission to Mars (1975) also employed an extensive pre-show, which was populated by Audio-Animatronic figures that established the setting and atmosphere for the main attraction.

Also located in Tomorrowland, the queue for Space Mountain is styled as a space station, with pre-show architectural design and elements like a "an "intergalactic probe" hanging from the ceiling," a "'Mission Status' readout board" and a control tower (inhabited by a living park employee) signaling to riders that they are in about to launch into space.<sup>188</sup> Writing in 1977, the year the ride opened, Charlie Haas remarked in *True West Magazine* that "At WED (Walter Elias Disney) Enterprises, the Glendale complex where rides for the Disney parks are designed and built, Space Mountain is referred to as a 'packaged experience,' a fulfillment of Disney's intention to take the spectator out of his theater seat and put him in the middle of a drama that he

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<sup>187</sup> "Disneyland's Pet Cemetery," D23, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://d23.com/d23-presents-disneylands-pet-cemetery/>.

<sup>188</sup> Charlie Haas, "Spaced Out in Anaheim: The Greatest Ride of All," *New West Magazine*, July 4, 1977, 62.

could believe not only aurally and visually, but viscerally.”<sup>189</sup> Despite this emphasis on the extra-theatrical total experience of Space Mountain, the ride still lacks more than the basic story framework that visitors are embarking on a rocket journey into outer space. Unlike these earlier rides, Star Tours’s queue was significant both in terms of its depth and detail, consisting of several distinct rooms, and as it was tasked not only with immersing visitors in a general theme or location, like the bayou of Pirates of the Caribbean, but within an existing cinematic world.

Star Tours’s queue situated visitors in the narrative world of *Star Wars* long before they boarded the actual ride vehicle. This process began just inside the entrance to the show building, which was framed not as a ride queue, but as a spaceport boarding terminal.<sup>190</sup> Various aspects of the set design worked to suggest a larger narrative backstory for the fictional Star Tours tour business. In the first room, a large screen displayed messages that suggested a real tour agency advertising the “Endor Experience,” notifying visitors of its “limited availability” and encouraging them to “make reservations now.”<sup>191</sup> Videos on the screen showed the various destinations offered by Star Tours as an announcer described the various tour packages “available” to visitors. These packages included “tour packages to Hoth,” the “Trek to Tatooine,” and “convenient daily departures to the exotic Moon of Endor.” Of course, the “Endor Express” was the tour package riders all invariably “chose.”<sup>192</sup> While the announcer described the forest moon, the screen displayed footage of Ewoks, familiar from *Star Wars: Episode VI Return of the Jedi* (1983). The planets mentioned in the video were all locations inhabited or visited by

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<sup>189</sup> Haas, “Spaced Out,” 62.

<sup>190</sup> The exterior of the building undermined the immersion, as signage noted that Star Tours came “From the Creative Forces of Disney & George Lucas” and was “Sponsored by Energizer.”

<sup>191</sup> These displays and their messages changed over the years.

<sup>192</sup> There being only one version of the ride at this time, this choice was always predetermined.

characters in the *Star Wars* films, and the announcements and videos further referenced details familiar from the films, including Tatooine's infamous Mos Eisley Cantina and Hoth's snowy Echo Base and fuzzy Tauntauns.<sup>193</sup> However, the videos also added new details not present in the films, such as Tatooine's Galactic Zoo or skiing on the ice planet Hoth. In doing this, they immersed visitors in the *Star Wars* galaxy by invoking familiar elements from the films while simultaneously building out the larger story world.

Lauren Rabinovitz notes the multiple screens used in the Star Tours queue, observing how these screens and “the animated three-dimensional displays and light effects provide an atmospheric direct address.”<sup>194</sup> Beyond directly addressing the visitor as the imagined Star Tours customer, these screens also spoke to their corporeality by visualizing the StarSpeeder vehicle that would shortly contain and move their bodies. This began before visitors even entered the show building, as images of the StarSpeeder 3000 appeared on the large mural that covered the building's exterior. Once inside, the ship was again visualized in videos on the large display screen as well as in the security camera footage used in the boarding video at the end of the queue. Similar ships were also visible in the ridefilm itself, particularly at the beginning, where riders saw other tours departing the Star Tours gates. The depictions of these vehicles helped sell the illusion of a “real” ship rather than an artificial ride space. Since the ride vehicles' actual exteriors were obscured, these depictions primed riders to imagine, once settled inside, what their vehicle looked like. In other words, they helped to unite the interior as riders experienced it with the exterior as they'd been shown.

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<sup>193</sup> Elements in the motion simulator portion of the ride also functioned to situate it within the larger Star Wars universe. These include the inclusion of familiar locations like Endor, characters like R2-D2, and even Star Wars tropes like the recurrent line “I have a very bad feeling about this!”

<sup>194</sup> Rabinovitz, “From Hale's Tours to Star Tours,” 147.

Another large-scale three-dimensional version of the StarSpeeder 3000 appeared in a repair bay scene in the first room of the queue, adjacent to the large video display.<sup>195</sup> Visitors passed closely by it as the line wended through this first room. This Speeder, with visible carbon scoring damage on the side, was being “worked on” by C-3PO and R2-D2. The presence of these familiar droid characters from the films further connected the new addition of the Star Tours agency to the cinematic canon. Overhead on the other side of the room, two Mon Calamari animatronics appeared to supervise the operations below. As riders progressed through the line, they next moved through a maintenance room, littered with security droids, repair droids, parts, and containers. They passed G2-9T, a repair droid working on an R5 astromech droid, one of the “pilots” or “navigators” for the Star Tours tour company. G2-9T would talk to visitors as they passed by, making jokes and small talk. Another maintenance droid, G2-4T, engaged visitors as they neared the room’s exit, reinforcing their position as tourists and travelers by asking them, for example, if they have “the necessary paperwork to go on this tour? Y-you know, passports, visas, tickets, flight insurance.”

Finally, upon reaching the end of the queue, as visitors were directed to line up in rows in preparation for entering the ride vehicle, a video was displayed that detailed the impending “boarding process.” The video was styled like a pre-flight announcement given by flight attendants, noting proper boarding and safety procedures.<sup>196</sup> It was interspersed with video clips of the ride vehicle cabin, where actors playing interstellar passengers appeared as a mix of contemporarily-dressed humans, humans dressed as *Star Wars* denizens, and non-human *Star*

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<sup>195</sup> Some of these core elements and scenes are still present in the current version of Star Tours, though most have been modified to some degree during more recent updates to the ride.

<sup>196</sup> In fact, cast members were referred to as “attendants” in the video.



*Wars* species like Wookiees, Ewoks, and Mon Calamari.<sup>197</sup> This video absorbed the standard pre-ride safety spiel within the world of *Star Wars* to extend the conceit while minimizing elements that might distance riders from their immersion in the story.

Rabinowitz points to the “atmospheric weight” of these preshow spaces, which “extend the narrative...beyond the movie theater” in a way that “prefigures the spectatorial processes inside the auditorium.”<sup>198</sup> Since rides themselves are typically brief—the actual motion simulator portion of *Star Tours* lasted only four and a half minutes—this immersive prefiguring allows for more seamless integration into the virtual narrative space once the ride begins. The “real” interior spaces of the queue, with life-size working animatronic figures of famous *Star Wars* characters like C-3PO, R2-D2, as well as familiar *Star Wars* species like the Mon Calamari supervisors in the control booth, serve to establish the reality of the story world for riders and prepare them for their experience aboard the ride proper. However, as I have illustrated, these spaces simultaneously build the story world of *Star Wars* by adding to their existing narratives, rather than simply extending the experience of *Star Wars* outside of the theater.

This is done in part through the queue’s framing of the ride as an expedition to visit another planet’s moon, which was an effective choice in that it reflected the status of the park itself as a site of tourism. In other words, as a ride for “tourists,” *Star Tours* used the park’s status as a tourist destination as a means of bridging the ontological gap between the fictional ride narrative and the “real” lived narrative of park visitors throughout an entire day at the park. By adapting riders’ actual roles as visitors to Disneyland into the story of the ride, the queue

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<sup>197</sup> The people in the video dressed to fit the *Star Wars* universe were actors, and it doesn’t appear that cosplay was widespread in the parks in the 1980s and 1990s. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, cosplay, particularly “Disneybounding” and “Batuubounding,” which is specific to *Galaxy’s Edge*, has become an extremely prolific fan practice.

<sup>198</sup> Rabinovitz, “From Hale’s *Tours* to *Star Tours*,” 146.

lessened the degree of suspension of disbelief that was asked of them. Such a technique also characterizes the story of other rides like Indiana Jones Adventure and Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT!, both of which acknowledge and integrate the visitor-as-tourist.

With its tourism angle, the Star Tours story was distinct from the narrative of the *Star Wars* films—“Star Tours” as a travel company is not mentioned in the films. Yet Star Tours’s position in relation to the events and locations of the original trilogy was triangulated via elements in the ride. Even within the queue, it was implied that the events of the ride take place after the forest moon of Endor became renowned during the events of *Return of the Jedi* and the destruction of the second Death Star.<sup>199</sup> This framing explains why riders might be interested in visiting Endor as a familiar, famous location. While the ride did not attempt to recreate the films—its chronology suggested that this is a distinct third Death Star—it drew heavily on set pieces, plot points, characters, and scenes from them. Ultimately, while Star Tours’s queue functioned, along with the rest of the ride, to “extend the narrative” by connecting the attraction to the story world of *Star Wars*, it also illustrates how the ride expanded the narrative universe of *Star Wars* beyond what is shown in the films.<sup>200</sup>

Beyond expanding the Star Wars universe, Star Tours used the motion simulator framework—the combination of environment, motion, and screen—to immerse the rider in cinematic space. This immersion was accomplished via several techniques, including elements of the set design of the physical space as well as stylistic aspects of the ridefilm itself. The original ridefilm seized on a stylistic element of *Star Wars* films—the pilot POV shot—and expanded it

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<sup>199</sup> An article on the official starwars.com site supports some of these details, even though the events of the ride are not considered to be canon. See James McFadden, “Convenient Daily Departures: The History of Star Tours,” *Star Wars Blog*, August 22, 2013, <https://www.starwars.com/news/convenient-daily-departures-the-history-of-star-tours>.

<sup>200</sup> Rabinovitz, “From Hale’s Tours to Star Tours,” 146.

out to the entire ride film itself. The ridefilm also featured key sequences that capitalized on the highly kinetic qualities of the recurring “trench run” trope from the *Star Wars* films. The combination of these elements of physical design and film style helped to join visitors’ perception and physical bodies with cinematic space.

### ***Destabilizing the Proscenium***

While the proscenium boundary of a traditional movie theater or television screen typically separates the narrative world from the “real world” of the viewer, the screen in *Star Tours* functions differently. The ride space itself, specifically the interior of the ride vehicle, is designed in such a way that it envelops riders within the story world by dissolving the barrier of the screen. This is facilitated by the design of the physical space—as a spaceship—and through the inclusion of specific set elements—including the animatronic pilot figure and multiple screens—that blend both virtual and physical space into a unified perceptual experience.

Discussing the “role of the screen,” Anne Friedberg notes that: “For the film spectator, the darkness that surrounds the frame both minimizes its borders and calls us to play upon its boundaries. The frame of the screen forms either a tableau-like proscenium, forcing our vision to center its gaze or it implies a continuum of space lingering just off-screen/off-frame.”<sup>201</sup> On *Star Tours*, the screen does not function as a boundary forcing our gaze or hiding the discrepancy between screen space and our physical environment, but as an interstitial element—a kind of semipermeable membrane fusing the world on screen with riders’ physical world. Combined with the haptic sensations of the hydraulic cabin, it entangles the rider’s perception with film space and its fictional story world. Presented as the front windshield of a spaceship, the screen’s

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<sup>201</sup> Anne Friedberg, “Urban Mobility and Cinematic Visuality: The Screens of Los Angeles – Endless Cinema or Private Telematics,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no.2 (August 2002): 188.

artificiality is disguised as it is architecturally and visually tied to other tangible elements of the space that are presented as within the Star Wars universe. The screen becomes merely a continuation of riders' physical experience. If the proscenium is a boundary between the theater and the world of the movie, in Star Tours, that boundary lies not at the plane of the screen but at the entrance of the ride. Once inside the show building, riders exist inside the proscenium and are meant to experience continuous space that is both tangible (the seats, the floor) and virtual (the film footage).

The proscenium boundary was further blurred by other elements of the set design. The cockpit shield—a gray physical shield that was lowered at the start of the ride—seemingly acted as a theatrical curtain, revealing the screen behind it. Yet, unlike a theater, where the curtain reveals yet another flat plane behind it, behind the cockpit shield but in front of the actual film screen sat a physical animatronic droid RX-24 (Rex), the “pilot” for the Starspeeder 3000/ride vehicle. The droid's physical presence thus penetrated the proscenium space, helping to traverse riders' “real” and the screen's “virtual” space. A smaller cockpit screen embedded in the wall of the Starspeeder's main cabin to the right of the main screen similarly acted to bridge the physical/virtual divide, particularly as it showed the pilot RX-24 before the cockpit shield was lowered to reveal the physical animatronic figure.

As with PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON, Star Tours demonstrates the permeability of cinematic space on screen-based rides, where physical motion is used in sync with the screen in a way that destabilizes the perceived boundary between camera movement and stationary body. Like TRON, Star Tours combines a screen with movement in conjunction with a particular kind of built space. As discussed previously, PeopleMover Thru the World of TRON used the structure of riders being surrounded by a screen and passing into and “through” it to

unite the virtual world with the physical world outside the ride. In contrast, on *Star Tours*, the ride vehicle is synchronized with on-screen movement such that the screen becomes unified with the haptic experience of the rider. The camera/screen view acts as the windshield view of the starship. Because the rider is seated inside the artificial but realistic space vehicle, the screen is united with the rider's vision and proprioception into a single experience that unites body, eye, windshield, screen, and camera. In conjunction with the synchronized vehicle movement, this configuration meshes the screen world with the real-world experience of the visitor. The visitor not only reacts to the screen through their body, but experiences the movement on screen along with it in real time.

### ***Pilot POV: Unifying Motion and Screen Space***

The ridefilm itself extended the fuzziness of these boundaries through its POV perspective. Combined with the motion simulation of the hydraulic mechanisms, motion simulation films unite riders' haptic sensations and visual perception with the camera movement and thus the space of the screen. On *Star Tours*, this effect was most obvious during the most kinetically vigorous segments of the ride: as riders navigate through the icy comet and during the final climactic trench run assault on the Death Star. Of course, motion simulators, both modern and dating back to the earliest examples like Hale's Tours, are typically comprised of POV shots—this is part of their basic structure. However, what is significant is the way in which *Star Tours* takes a particular element of *Star Wars* film style—the “pilot POV”—and expands it out to the entire ride as a means of absorbing riders into *Star Wars*'s cinematic space.

The pilot POV is a recurring visual element in *Star Wars* films, where the camera shoots from the perspective from inside or on a vehicle, looking out from the cockpit. If the vehicle doesn't have a cockpit or windshield, as with the motorcycle-like speeder bikes, the camera

looks forward from the pilot or rider's position as the vehicle moves through space. In *Star Wars* films, POV shots occur primarily during action sequences where one or more characters are piloting starships or riding other small vehicles like speeder bikes or snowspeeders. Strict pilot POV shots are sometimes interspersed with ship POV shots, where the camera appears to be placed on a ship's exterior, like the wing of an X-wing.<sup>202</sup> The camera moves in unison with the ship itself. Shots like these occur almost exclusively during high-stakes action sequences.<sup>203</sup> For example, when Luke calmly flies to Dagobah in *Star Wars: Episode V The Empire Strikes Back*, we do not see the view from the cockpit of his X-wing. When he crashes, however, we do.

Pilot POV shots in the *Star Wars* films are interspersed with other, non-subjective shots: of the ship in question as it moves through space, its interior cockpit displays and control panels, and closeups of the pilots' faces. Such shots are often clearly linked to the shots preceding or immediately following them, both through juxtaposition and by the framing of the cockpit windshield, which suggests which character's perspective is being shown. Some shots lack this cockpit framing, appearing as though shot from the front of the ship rather than inside its cockpit. While it is generally still clear through the sequence of shots whose perspective they are, these unframed shots create a more neutral point of view that can perhaps be occupied by the audience more directly, without the pilot character as an intermediary. These shots function similarly to the POV construction of a ridefilm, making these sequences natural templates for the thrilling sequences in *Star Tours*.

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<sup>202</sup> Such shots also occur earlier in this film and in other *Star Wars* films.

<sup>203</sup> One exception occurs when the Millennium Falcon detaches from the side of a Star Destroyer in *Star Wars: Episode V The Empire Strikes Back* and floats away. The POV shot from the cockpit of the Falcon is a rare instance of tranquility for this visual technique.

Many of these pilot POV shots include elements of the vehicle that would appear in the pilot's field of vision, such as the windshield structure, within the frame of the shot. These structures suggest what vehicle we are "in": the angular honeycomb windshield of the TIE fighter clearly distinguishes it from the wedge-shaped windows of an X-wing or the concentric circles of the Millennium Falcon's cockpit window. Some vehicles lack windshields, so other shots, like the "chase through Coruscant" sequence of *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones* or the speeder bike chase on Endor in *Return of the Jedi*, do not include any framing. Interestingly, pilot POV shots do not always place the audience in the position of a heroic character. At times, the camera assumes the position of an antagonist, such as Zam the assassin in *Attack of the Clones*, the TIE fighter pilots in *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*, or the stormtroopers in *Return of the Jedi*.

From the first film in 1977, pilot POV shots became, like the opening crawl or wipe transitions, part of a signature visual language that recurred throughout the nine-episode franchise.<sup>204</sup> As I will discuss below, POV shots are used to great effect during the final Death Star trench run in *A New Hope*. Yet they also occur earlier in the film, when the Millennium Falcon exits light speed into the remains of Alderaan and is pulled into the Death Star's tractor beam. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, we see the pilot POV from the cockpits of snowspeeders on Hoth, from the Millennium Falcon as Han, Leia, and Chewy navigate the asteroid field and escape the exogorth, or space slug, and at the end of the film as the Falcon evades the Imperial ships. There are occasional non-pilot POV shots, such as when Luke peers through his binoculars and, arguably, as he is attacked by the wampa and as he reaches for his lightsaber inside the

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<sup>204</sup> Originally simply titled *Star Wars*, this film has been retroactively retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*.

wampa's cave during the opening scenes on Hoth.<sup>205</sup> POV shots are used in *Return of the Jedi* during the speeder bike chase on Endor, where we see through the POV of an unnamed scout trooper. POV shots also pepper the scenes of final assault on the second Death Star, a sequence that shares some visual similarities with the trench run in the original *Star Wars*. These shots occur from different cockpits, as we see views from the perspective of Lando Calrissian in the Millennium Falcon, Wedge Antilles in his X-wing, and an unnamed TIE fighter pilot. In this sequence, the distinct windshield structures of these three ships help indicate whose perspective is being assumed.

Like other stylistic elements of *Star Wars* that were maintained throughout the series, POV shots were incorporated in the styles of subsequent *Star Wars* trilogies. In the prequel trilogy (1999-2005), pilot POV shots can be seen in *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*, during the tribubble bongo and podracing scenes, as well as during the final climactic Naboo battle scene, where Anakin pilots an N-1 starfighter. In *Attack of the Clones*, we see the pilot's perspective during the chase through Coruscant and Obi Wan's approach to Geonosis. *Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith* uses POV shots during the opening battle above Coruscant and during the Order 66 montage.

The sequel trilogy likewise included pilot POV shots in its climactic vehicle sequences. They appear in *Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens*, during the climactic Battle of Starkiller Base. Again, during the opening of *Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi*, we assume the pilot's perspective during Poe's attack on the Dreadnaught and the battle that ensues, and as Kylo Ren attacks the Resistance ship. Later, as Finn and Rose escape Canto Bight, there are

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<sup>205</sup> Similar shots occur in *Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker*, as Finn searches for Rey on the turbulent seas of Kef Bir and later during the Battle of Exegol.



POV shots from their perspective on the back of a fathier (though this is an animal, not a vehicle). Pilot POV shots again appear from the cockpits of the ski speeders and TIE fighters occur during the final climactic Battle of Crait. Similarly, pilot POV shots are present during the climactic Battle of Exegol in the final film in the so-called “nonology,” *Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker*.<sup>206</sup> Even the standalone films, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018) incorporate pilot POV shots into vehicular action sequences, as in the latter’s Kessel Run sequence.

### ***The Trench Run: Extending the Pilot POV Shot***

On Star Tours, the conceit of the pilot POV shot is expanded into the entire ridefilm, where the riders occupy the position of a camera looking out of the cockpit. During the four minutes or so of the ride proper, after a bit of a rough start, the haphazard pilot of the ship, RX-24, accidentally overshoots its destination of Endor’s moon, after which the ship navigates through a comet before becoming ensnared in a space battle between the Galactic Empire and the Rebellion. Narrowly escaping capture by an Imperial Star Destroyer, the tour ship then assists the Rebel fighters in their assault, ultimately successfully bringing down a Death Star.<sup>207</sup> The ship and its passengers then return safely to the original point of departure, though not before nearly crashing into a fuel tanker.

The ridefilm’s plot draws on imagery familiar from the *Star Wars* films. The opening jump to lightspeed, with its blue tunnel of streaking stars, the tractor beam pull of the Imperial

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<sup>206</sup> A trilogy of trilogies.

<sup>207</sup> Which Death Star is featured in Star Tours’s trench run sequence is somewhat unclear from the context of the ride. Unofficial online sources like Fandom’s Wookieepedia refer to it as Death Star III, which places the events of the original ride after the events of *Return of the Jedi*, which included the destruction of Death Star II in the Battle of Endor. The timeline of the ride becomes more complicated in the updated version Star Tours – The Adventures Continue. See “Death Star III,” Wookieepedia, Fandom, accessed January 6, 2022, [https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Death\\_Star\\_III](https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Death_Star_III).

Star Destroyer, the dynamic space dogfights, and the iconic image of the looming Death Star are all signature parts of the *Star Wars* visual language. The comet sequence, where the StarSpeeder enters a field of icy crystalline comets, dodging and smashing into them, recalls the asteroid field of *The Empire Strikes Back*, where Han, Leia, and Chewbacca seek to escape pursuing Imperial TIE fighters. Though the settings are quite different, this sequence also resembles the final assault into the Death Star in *Return of the Jedi*, where Lando Calrissian and Wedge Antilles penetrate the inner core of the second Death Star to reach and destroy the main reactor. As they fly, they dodge scaffolding as they weave through the Death Star's inner ducts toward its central core. In the ride, the Starspeeder 3000 careens through the winding frozen passageways of the comet before finally, upon finding a dead end, blasting through an ice wall and back into space.

The Death Star “trench run” sequence serves as the climax for Star Tours, and it draws heavily on *Star Wars*'s trench run trope. In the *Star Wars* universe, a “trench run” is an assault tactic and common plot element that has recurred throughout in the *Star Wars* franchise since its first occurrence in the original 1977 film.<sup>208</sup> It involves smaller starships navigating a trench as a tactical maneuver, often to exploit a vulnerability in the target. The original trench run involved the polar meridian trench on the Death Star, where a weakness in its exhaust port has the potential to destroy the entire moon-sized space station if fired upon. Trench runs have been featured in other *Star Wars* media, such as in the 1996 novel *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*, the *Star Wars: Trench Run* (2009) video game, and even toys like the 2011 Hasbro “Death Star Trench Run” set and the LEGO “Star Wars Death Star Trench Run Diorama,” released in April

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<sup>208</sup> A very similar trench run sequence was included in Disneyland's 1986 attraction *Captain EO*. Though not a part of the *Star Wars* universe, *Captain EO* was written by *Star Wars* creator George Lucas.

2022. Another brief trench run occurs in *The Force Awakens*, as Poe and the red squadron descend close to the surface of Starkiller base during the battle.

The trench run in *Star Tours* most closely resembles the original trench runs that occur during the final Battle of Yavin in *A New Hope*.<sup>209</sup> Indeed, *Star Tours*'s trench run occupies the climactic position in the ridefilm, just like the triumphant trench run in *A New Hope*, which is the film's "single longest scene."<sup>210</sup> The original film sequence begins with a frameless POV shot (as though from the tip of the X-wing's nose) as it swoops down into the trench, dodging turbolaser shots from the surface-mounted cannons.<sup>211</sup> The camera here is kinetic, falling into the trench and bobbing as the ship stabilizes. Aside from the front-of-the-ship POV shots, we also see pilot POV shots from the perspectives of the TIE fighter pilots, including Darth Vader, other Rebel Red Squadron pilots, and, of course, Luke himself. His is the point of view we are meant to identify with, particularly during the final moments of the sequence, as he, alone, hurtles toward the critical target of the exhaust port, his final run the last-ditch hope for a Rebellion victory. There are also rear-of-the-ship POV shots, where the camera appears mounted on the ship behind R2-D2, who sits just behind the cockpit on the roof of the ship. The sequence is not entirely shot in POV—these shots are interspersed with closeups of the other Red Squadron pilot's faces as well as Luke's, framed inside their cockpits, closeups of the laser cannons, Luke's scope and control panels, and R2-D2, and front, rear, and side shots of the X-wings and TIE fighters as they fly down the trench.

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<sup>209</sup> There are technically three runs, with Luke's final assault ultimately being successful.

<sup>210</sup> Alex Kane and Amy Ratcliffe, "From a Certain Point of View: What is the Best Scene in Star Wars: A New Hope?," *Star Wars Blog*, May 25, 2017, <https://www.starwars.com/news/from-a-certain-point-of-view-what-is-the-best-scene-in-star-wars-a-new-hope>.

<sup>211</sup> This shot appears to be used twice—first during the initial trench run and again during Luke's third and final attempt.

Pilot POV shots, unique to vehicle action sequences like these, were meant to involve the viewer more directly in the action. According to special effects supervisor John Dykstra, who pioneered effects for *A New Hope*, “We talked about how the camera would be in motion with the aircraft, much like gun cameras were in the Second World War...so that was really the conceit: how do we get these images on film and make the audience feel as though they’re a participant on an individual basis?”<sup>212</sup> This made the climactic trench run, with its more direct address of the audience, the natural choice for the climax of *Star Tours*.

*Star Tours*’s trench run sequence is very similar to that of the film. The initial approach to the Death Star’s trench is nearly shot-for-shot, though the footage from the film does not appear to have been reused in the ride. The POV camera swoops down to the left, entering the trench at a canted angle and bobbing before it stabilizes, parallel to the floor of the trench. Like in the film, the ship must dodge laser blasts, though on the ride, it also ducks under and over scaffolding that spans the trench, an architectural element that is not present in the trench in the film.

The Death Star in *Star Tours* is ultimately destroyed by an X-wing fighter, flying in front of the StarSpeeder, that shoots into an exhaust port, replicating how Luke Skywalker destroys the Death Star in *A New Hope*. Behind this ship, with its unnamed pilot, *Star Tours*’s passengers are positioned almost as though they are watching Luke during his heroic final run. It is as if they are there, behind Luke as *he* fires the proton torpedoes into the reactor core. The ridefilm, however, inverts the point of view in *A New Hope*. In the ride, riders are behind the X-wing, whereas in the film, we see from Luke’s POV right as he fires the triumphant shot, which then cuts to a closeup of the proton torpedoes. Passengers on the ride are not framed as affecting the outcome of the

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<sup>212</sup> Kane and Ratcliffe, “From a Certain Point of View.”

battle at hand but are given a first-person view of it as though they are actually there, in the Star Wars universe. While the set design works to destabilize the boundaries between screen and physical ride space, these subjective POV shots, expanded to the duration of the ridefilm and in conjunction with the haptic sensations of the motion simulator, merge rider perception with cinematic perspective as a single continuous experience, providing the rider a sense of presence within *Star Wars*'s previously inaccessible cinematic space.

### ***Star Tours – The Adventures Continue: Narrative Variability and Participation***

The 2011 update of the ride, renamed Star Tours – The Adventures Continue, illuminates how changing certain elements of the ride, particularly the addition of a variable ridefilm, complicates the original version's immersion and world-building effects. In the new version of the ride, the overarching premise—that Star Tours is a tourism agency—remains the same. Many queue elements, such as the scene of C-3PO and R2-D2 repairing the StarSpeeder (now the 1000 model) were only slightly changed. However, other elements in the queue, the ride vehicle, and the ridefilm, have been altered in significant ways in subsequent years.

Some of the updated elements of the queue more closely connect to the events of the ridefilm, explaining or foreshadowing what will happen during the ride. The new video on the large display in the first room includes footage that references destinations and sights from more recent films, such as the planets Alderaan and Naboo and the Imperial Senate, locations depicted in the prequel trilogy.<sup>213</sup> These appear alongside planets from the original trilogy, like Tatooine, Bespin, and the forest moon of Endor, the destination for the original version of the ride. Some of these specific locations, like Naboo's underwater Gungan City, are possible destinations

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<sup>213</sup> The depiction of Alderaan in this video complicates the chronology of the ride significantly, as it was famously destroyed by the Death Star in *A New Hope*. The video refers to this by mentioning that it was "recently voted safest planet in the galaxy."

during the now-variable ridefilm. C-3PO and R2-D2's banter in the first room of the queue also establishes the possibility of a "spy" being present, foreshadowing the later events of the ridefilm, where a passenger is identified as a "Rebel spy." The new pre-flight safety video in the boarding area has also been updated, including a scene that shows C-3PO becoming trapped in the cockpit, explaining why he ends up piloting the flight.

More drastic, though, are the changes to the primary motion simulator ride experience. Instead of a single fixed film, the simulation ride film now consists of five segments, each of which is randomized from a select number of scenes. As of late 2020, there were three possible opening escape encounters, five initial planet destinations, seven hologram transmissions, five second planet destinations, and two landing locations.<sup>214</sup> In total, there are over fifty different possible combinations, though reportedly the ride is randomized to either select all scenes from Episodes 1-6 or all scenes from Episodes 7-9, to maintain a semblance of continuity.<sup>215</sup> The effect of this structure is that each ride on Star Tours is presented as *more* of a unique experience than the fixed version of the ride could provide.

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<sup>214</sup> Opening escape: Darth Vader, stormtroopers/probe droid, or Kylo Ren

Planet 1: Tatooine, Hoth, Kashyyyk, Jakku, or Kef Bir

Hologram: Princess Leia, Admiral Ackbar, Yoda, Lando Calrissian, Maz Kanata, BB-8, or Poe Dameron

Planet 2: Naboo, Geonosis, Coruscant, Crait, Exegol

Ending: Spaceport THX1138 or Batuu

See "Star Tours: The Adventures Continue," Wookieepedia, Fandom, accessed January 13, 2022, [https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Star\\_Tours:\\_The\\_Adventures\\_Continue](https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Star_Tours:_The_Adventures_Continue).

<sup>215</sup> When the ride originally opened in 2011, there were 54 possible combinations. Subsequent additions have likely changed the exact number of combinations over the years. See Brady MacDonald, "Review: Disneyland's New Star Tours Ride is Light-Years Better than the Original," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2011, <https://www.latimes.com/travel/deals/la-trb-star-tours-disneyland-review-05201120-story.html>; Fandom, "Star Tours: The Adventures Continue."

The opening encounters, holograms, and final landings scenes frame the two planet sequences. These planet scenes draw on the most “ride-like” moments in the movies—all the planet variants correlate with high-stakes action sequences in the *Star Wars* films. Moreover, most of the planetary scenes on Star Tours are scenes that, in the films, contain pilot POV shots. For example, one of the variants for the first planet segment is the ice planet Hoth, where riders end up in the middle of the Battle of Hoth, following the snowspeeders of Rogue Squadron as they fly into battle, dodging under and around the looming legs of the warring Imperial AT-ATs. At present, all the options for the second planet segment draw on scenes from the films where pilot POVs are used: the Battle of Naboo and underwater encounter on Naboo from *The Phantom Menace*, Jango Fett’s chase through the Geonosis asteroid belt from *Attack of the Clones*, the Battle of Coruscant with its buzz droids from *Revenge of the Sith*, the Battle of Crait from *The Last Jedi*, and the Battle of Exegol from *The Rise of Skywalker*.

Unlike the original story of the original Star Tours, which could more easily fit in relation to the events of the original film trilogy, certain options of the updated Star Tours complicate the chronology of the films. Some options, like the Battle of Kashyyyk, seemingly recreate scenes from the films, fixing their occurrence to a particular moment in the *Star Wars* timeline (here, events depicted in *Revenge of the Sith*). Such sequences conflict with the established cinematic canon, as with the variant where the Star Tours ship ends up in the middle of *The Force Awakens* chase sequence between Rey and Finn on the Millennium Falcon and First Order TIE fighters on Jakku. There is no suggestion in the film that a Star Tours tour ship is present there, though on the ride, Finn appears on the side screen and addresses the Star Tours ship. Other scene options tie in more logically to the films. In one variant, Lando Calrissian’s hologram message exhorts Star Tours to come to aid the Resistance against the rallying First Order forces. This is followed

by the Exegol planetary sequence, as Star Tours is plunged into the climactic battle at the end of *The Rise of Skywalker* where thousands of citizen ships from all over the galaxy have arrived to combat the massive fleet of First Order Star Destroyers.

Whereas the original incarnation of Star Tours was a fixed experience which used a single ridefilm, Star Tours – The Adventures Continue introduced narrative variability by splitting the ride film into these randomized segments. This move toward variable ride experiences has its roots in attractions like Indiana Jones Adventure. However, where Indiana Jones Adventure was limited by its technical/physical design in terms of which aspects were variable (which “room” you enter, minor special effects cues, dialogue), Star Tours’s use of a screen allows for more substantial variations in the plot of the ride, which has several effects. For one, this plays with the typical limitations of films—because they are mass-distributed, movies are overwhelmingly standardized and limited to a single version (directors’ cuts, special editions, and the odd *Clue*-like multiple-ending gimmicks notwithstanding). Variability was also intended to increase the potential repeatability of the ride by enticing visitors to ride the attraction multiple times, thus increasing its value. An easily—and relatively inexpensively—updatable ride design also increases the ride’s longevity, as evident by the multiple updates since the ride’s reopening in 2011. This repeatability also laid the foundation for future interactive rides, which would further develop the concept of a malleable narrative. Later rides, like Millennium Falcon: Smuggler’s Run in the Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge land, take up variable ride narratives in ways that allow visitors further degrees of agency, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Star Tours’s variability also operates according to Disney’s larger strategy of franchise synergy through the ability to incorporate new films as they are produced and released. Enabled by the variable plot structure of the ride and its reliance on screen-based effects, scenes are easily



swapped out. Since its opening in 2011, Star Tours – The Adventures Continue has been updated significantly at least three times. Following the release of *The Force Awakens*, Jakku was added as a possible destination in 2015. In 2017, after the opening of Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge and *The Last Jedi*, the new park land’s planetary setting Batuu and the film location of Crait were incorporated into the ride. Most recently, the ocean moon of Kef Bir and the Sith planet Exegol were added concurrently with the 2019 release of *The Rise of Skywalker*, the film in which they were introduced.

While the ride’s variability has several upsides, the inclusion of so many different characters, settings, and events from across the various *Star Wars* episodes destabilizes the new version of the ride’s narrative in time. Unlike the original version, which occupied a stable position in relation to the events of the original film trilogy, the new version can shift in its relation to the films depending on which variables of characters and planets are randomly selected. As additional elements from the more recent films (Episodes VII-IX) have been added, modifications to the system seem to have been made to avoid mixing incongruous elements from the earlier films (*A New Hope*-era Princess Leia, Darth Vader, or Yoda) with those of the later films (BB-8, the First Order, or the final battle of *The Rise of Skywalker* on Exegol). Nevertheless, some combinations produce a curious mixture of elements that make the events of the ride difficult to understand in the larger context of the *Star Wars* film narratives. For example, one video uploaded to YouTube provides a glimpse of a particular sequence that featured podracers on Tatooine, with what appears to be Sebulba’s ship from *Episode I*, a hologram of Princess Leia evoking her appearance in *Episode IV*, and the Battle of Coruscant

with its buzz droids and ARC-170 ships, which appear in *Episode III*.<sup>216</sup> The events and ships depicted in these disparate scenes span a narrative period of more than thirty years.

Yet, while the mixing of different films and their characters and timelines arguably makes the narrative conceit of the ride more incongruous and thus less immersive than the original version in terms of narrative continuity and stability, other aspects of this version increase other types of immersion. For one, this type of flow across the different *Star Wars* films could strengthen immersion in the franchise or story world as a whole, by invoking a multitude of intertextual references, even if it is at the expense of narrative coherence. It is important to note that some riders privilege other aspects of the Star Tours experience. As the lone comment on the YouTube video above notes, the excitement of the variability itself and the verisimilitude of the special effects and performances: “I love the way they have it now where it's a little bit different each time. plus, Julie Doran as Leia really, really sounds a ton like a young Carrie. The other voice actress that does modern Leia (in the newer cartoons) sounds a lot like her, too.”<sup>217</sup> This fan appears to take particular pleasure in immersion in the knowledge of the ride and its production and in the evaluation of the quality of the ride’s voice-over work, themselves sources of fannish pleasures in the franchise. Additionally, the updated ride increases immersion through technology with the introduction of 3D. By adding digital depth to the screen, the 3D technology further softens the boundary of the cinematic plane. As discussed in the original version of the ride, a physical droid (R-3X has been replaced with C-3PO) still helps to bridge the ontological gap between the physical space of the vehicle and the screen itself. The physical C-3PO on the

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<sup>216</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axcGL1MShWE>.

<sup>217</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axcGL1MShWE>.

left of the screen combined with the on-screen R2-D2 on the right creates a continuum from ride space to staged space to screen space.

Additionally, while *Star Tours – The Adventures Continue* still uses the “tourist” setup, tying the ride into both the film world and the park world, in the current version, riders are more actively involved in the rebel narrative of the films. According to the ride, the ship is transporting a “rebel spy,” hence its pursuit by the villainous Empire or First Order. Each ride, one of the passengers is chosen as the “rebel spy,” and during the first sequence, regardless of which sequence is randomly chosen, their photo is displayed on the smaller cockpit screen to the right of the main screen. This indicates that the villains, be they Imperial or First Order, are looking for the spy and have their sights set on *Star Tours*. The characters in this first sequence, either Darth Vader, stormtroopers, or Kylo Ren, all attempt to seize the ship, instigating the rest of the events on the ride. This implies that the ride’s story, as a tale of a tour derailed by the presence of a rebel spy, is motivated by that specific rider, whose presence drives encounters with both the villains trying to capture them and the heroes endeavoring to save them. Where the events of original *Star Tours* were caused by happenstance—the ineptitude of the droid pilot—the events of the updated ride are set in motion by one of the riders. This participatory impulse will be taken to further levels in the *Star Wars*-based park space in *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge*, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.

### **Looking Into the Eyes of Mara: Kinetic Narratives in Indiana Jones Adventure**

You looked into my eyes! Your destiny now lies beyond the Gates of Doom!  
—Mara, Indiana Jones Adventure

Recalling Sperb’s argument that “the physical nature of the Disney theme parks requires a different method of ‘textual’ analysis—one more closely attuned to how much the body is

literally put in motion,” I turn to Disneyland’s *Indiana Jones Adventure* as a means to explore another way in which motion operates in relation to a ride’s narrative and the riders’ embodied experience of it.<sup>218</sup> *Indiana Jones Adventure* can help us to better understand film-based theme park ride spaces as permeable and participatory media spaces and to explore how their design and narrative structures both stimulate and necessitate motion in a variety of ways.

On *Indiana Jones Adventure*, riders move and are moved through ride space in multiple ways, from walking through and manipulating the queue to being physically transported via the ride vehicle. The ride itself is also variable, with different combinations of story path and visual, auditory, and haptic sensations changing in each iteration, encouraging riders to repeat their experience. Riders are also framed as setting the narrative in motion by activating the space with their presence. Then, once on the ride, visitors occupy a doubled narrative position, shifting between audience and protagonist. The ride’s scenes rework and recombine the films’ narratives into new configurations, remediating riders’ relationship to the source material. Thus, *Indiana Jones Adventure*’s narrative is another example of a “kinetic narrative,” in multiple senses of the word. It is a narrative that is inextricably defined by motion, from the ways in which riders literally move through the physical spaces of the *Indiana Jones* films, to the ways in which they move through and across the films’ narratives.

*Indiana Jones Adventure* opened to much fanfare at Disneyland Park in Anaheim in March 1995. Based on the *Indiana Jones* film series, the attraction is an enhanced motion vehicle dark ride that takes up to twelve riders in a truck through the fictional Temple of the Forbidden Eye. On the most basic level, the ride’s narrative is kinetic because riders experience it as they literally move—and are moved—through physical spaces. Before embarking on the “ride”

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<sup>218</sup> Sperb, *Disney’s Most Notorious Film*, 164.

proper, riders wend their way through the extensive and detailed pre-show queue. The ride's story is communicated to visitors through architecture and set design, as well as through a series of props, including telegrams and letters, and videos, in the form of newsreels, which they encounter as they move through the queue's different scenes. Some elements in these scenes, like the prop truck from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), connect the ride back to the original films, while many of the others, like the written and audiovisual material, establish the ride's own unique narrative. As Geoff King observes, the shape and organization of the queue not only obscures the seemingly interminable wait, but it also creates a kind of narrative flow:

Something akin to a kind of narrative manipulation of expectations is constructed as the audience moves closer to the end of one section, a miniature crisis of expectation, fulfillments and often disappointment created as we wait to find out if we are 'really' at the end of the line, at last, as we pass from one chamber to the next. It is possible to see the overall experience of the ride-film as in one sense similar to that of the 'classical' narrative pattern...: a lengthy and gradual build-up leading to a relatively brief and spectacular climax.<sup>219</sup>

Like *Star Tours*, here the "story" of the ride is expanded beyond the time spent in the actual ride vehicle. The queue extends the duration of the time spent within the story world beyond the necessarily brief time spent in the ride vehicle itself. It also acts as an introduction to the story world and the ride narrative, establishing the temporal and geographical setting (circa 1935, in "the Lost Delta of India") and the broad backstory: Indy has discovered the location of the "lost" Temple of the Forbidden Eye, which promises spectacular gifts and treasures, but has since gone missing.<sup>220</sup> Indy's friend Sallah is now facilitating tours through the temple, upon which the riders are about to embark. As with *Star Tours*, positioning riders as tourists reinforces their

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<sup>219</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 181.

<sup>220</sup> This plot bears similarities to the plot of *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*, where Indy must track down his missing father, Henry Jones, Sr.

alignment with the story and lessens the leap necessary for them to inhabit the ride's narrative and story world.

The ride's queue design prompts visitors to interact with the physical spaces around them, encouraging them to actively shape their experience of the story. "Booby traps" built into the queue invite visitors to manipulate them. In the queue's spike room, jiggling a flexible bamboo pole will trigger the spiked ceiling to lower, threatening to impale visitors as suggested by tableaux of skulls and skeletons to either side of the line path. This recalls scenes in both *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). In another room, pulling on a rope can trigger a vocal response from the archaeologist working below, sometimes even causing him to "fall," as he exclaims "Blast it all — don't pull the rope! You don't want to break an art- (*Crash*) Oh, dear..."<sup>221</sup>

Other design elements, such as the diamond-shaped stones in this passage, do not move, yet they also encourage riders to move their bodies through the space in specifically prescribed ways. In this instance, floor tiles marked with diamond-shaped symbols mirror stone slabs overhead, which appear to be precariously held from falling by small wooden shims. This is an apparent reference to similar scenes in both *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) where Indy must carefully watch his own step to avoid perilous booby traps in the Temple of the Chachapoyan Warriors and Temple of the Sun.<sup>222</sup> A sign entreats riders: "Don't step on diamond-shaped stones!" Riders standing in the queue may "play along" by

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<sup>221</sup> This is one of several alternating lines triggered by pulling on the rope. For a fan-compiled ride script, see: <https://www.disneyparkscripts.com/indiana-jones-adventure-disneyland/>.

<sup>222</sup> The diamond symbols on the stones more faithfully recall the opening scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but the "Word of God" challenge in the Temple of the Sun in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* involves a similar construct of dangerous ground necessitating careful movement through a space to avoid certain doom. In the latter film, selecting incorrect letters to spell the Latin word "Iehova" threatened to send Indy to his doom in a chasm below the floor.

moving to avoid triggering these blocks that threaten to crush them. In this way, the design of the queue already encourages riders to imitate Indy and, by doing so, to reenact scenes from the films.

These kinds of interaction with the ride's built spaces were particularly encouraged in the early years of the ride when decoder cards were distributed to riders to encourage them to decipher the "maraglyphics" painted and carved throughout the queue. These cards added a ludic element to the experience of waiting in line. The hidden messages riders could decode attempted to establish a deeper, more immersive story world while actively engaging them in it. One, for example, reads "BEWARE THE DEADLY BOOBYTRAPS THAT LURK WITHIN." Of course, one goal of encouraging riders to decode the messages on the wall was to keep them occupied during the, at times, seemingly interminable wait times.<sup>223</sup> More than that, it engaged visitors in "inhabiting the text," in *acting out* their character role in it as 1930s tourist/explorers.<sup>224</sup> Even in the queue, riders' experience of the ride is mobile, with the potential to change depending on how they move through the space and/or choose to interact with it.

The ride's technology also contributes to this experiential fluidity—its material and mechanical aspects ensure that the experience is in constant flux. An "enhanced motion system" ride, Indiana Jones Adventure's ride mechanics were built to allow for the randomization of various elements, including special effects like explosions and lights, pacing (the ride vehicle stalling or speeding up), the physical sensations of the car as it simulates bumps in the road, and

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<sup>223</sup> When the ride first opened, wait times of two to three hours were anticipated and, indeed, were not uncommon. See David Kronke, "He Built a Temple of Zoom: Picking Up Where Lucas and Spielberg Left Off, Tony Baxter is the Mastermind Behind Disneyland's Indiana Jones Adventure. It Opens Friday, But You Might Want to Get in Line Now." *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1995, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-02-26-ca-36186-story.html>.

<sup>224</sup> Anderson, "Disneyland," 153.

character dialogue. This was a “unique feature” of the ride, and early press for the ride touted the ride’s “160,000 possible combinations of show programming.”<sup>225</sup> To ride them all would be a virtually unachievable feat for any single rider, and many of the special effects variables are difficult to distinguish from one ride to the next, allowing Disney to promote the ride’s inexhaustible combinations while still offering a somewhat limited experience.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, the ride’s variability suggests its repeatability.

While this variability promised to provide a new and unpredictable experience each time, the broader strokes of the story stayed mostly consistent. One of the more noticeable variables is the “choice” of three rooms presented at the beginning of the ride proper, which represent the treasure promised by Mara: the Fountain of Eternal Youth, the Chamber of Earthly Riches, or the Observatory of the Future. This, of course, is not really a choice, but a result of randomized programming, where vehicles full of riders go through one of three possible doors, each of which actually leads to the same ride track. The doors rotate to give the illusion of entering a particular room, and special effects such as lighting and projections “skin” the chosen room to reflect its promised reward. This initial “choice” in turn can affect the dialogue heard later in the ride.

This highlights a key difference between a ride narrative and the film narrative on which it is based. Because of the variability enabled by the ride’s design and technology, there exists no single “original” version of the story, as there does in an *Indiana Jones* film.<sup>227</sup> Even if the

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<sup>225</sup> Kronke, “He Built a Temple of Zoom.”

<sup>226</sup> With a typical duration of 3.5 minutes per ride, it would take someone around 9,333 hours, or around 389 days to experience all potential combinations, not including the wait time.

<sup>227</sup> Hollywood films more broadly tend to be more fixed in terms of story, though many films have multiple versions in the form of director’s or extended cuts versus theatrical cuts. These are often perceived as having various degrees of authenticity. See, for example, the debate over the different versions of *Blade Runner* (1982), or popular responses to George Lucas’s multiple iterations of *Star Wars*. Other films play with the idea of a single version by



stories are similar in broad strokes (a rider visits and escapes the dangers of the lost temple), the particulars of the story and the physical sensations experienced inside are different. This idea of making a ride variable prefigures the 2011 update of Star Tours as Star Tours – The Adventures Continue, whose variable narrative increases the ride’s repeatability, making the story potentially different each time. On each of these rides, though perhaps to different degrees, there exists no single original version of the ride’s story.

Moreover, on Indiana Jones Adventure, the visitor is central in “activating” the story. As Tony Baxter noted around the time of the ride’s opening, unlike other attractions, such as Pirates of the Caribbean, where the riders are positioned more as observers of a story “Here, everything is happening *because of you*.”<sup>228</sup> As his comment suggests, absent a rider, the narrative does not exist. Riders activate the narrative through their corporeal presence, and their movement through the ride scenes is what enables the story to progress. In other words, the narrative only happens when visitors move through and experience these spaces. The story is created anew for each rider and each occurrence of the ride. While the ride itself exists as a concrete show building made of physical components that are constructed as a sequence of carefully planned and designed elements, its narrative can only be “activated” once a visitor enters the space and experience it. This is accomplished in part by framing each rider as the story’s original protagonist. Unlike early dark rides, where “you” may be Mr. Toad, here, you are you, the protagonist of the story.

A visitor is positioned as the protagonist in Indiana Jones Adventure through the direct address of visual and auditory cues built into the space. When riders confront the “choice” of

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existing with multiple endings, like *Clue* (1985), or by employing a choose-your-own-adventure form, like Netflix’s interactive film *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018).

<sup>228</sup> Randy Lewis, “Disneyland’s Indiana Jones an Interactive Thrill Ride,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-12-26-ca-13161-story.html>.

earthly riches, eternal youth, or the future at the outset of the ride, Mara addresses them directly through voice-over: “You have chosen wisely. This path leads to timeless youth and beauty.” Riders are repeatedly advised not to “look into the eyes of Mara” throughout the ride, although the large (and multiple) images of Mara entice them to defy this exhortation. Whether riders actually look or not, the ride assumes that they do—they can’t not look. Riders are thus positioned as the instigators of the narrative, the catalysts of the events that follow their “looking” into the eyes of Mara. It is their presence, their “look,” that sets the events of the ride in motion. Riders’ roles as “activators” are again reinforced throughout the ride by the voice-over’s direct address, as Mara may tell them, for example: “You looked into my eyes. Your path now leads to the Gates of Doom!”<sup>229</sup>

This highlights a fraught issue at the heart of *Indiana Jones Adventure*: how riders as subjects are positioned in relation to the story. In most traditional Hollywood films, a viewer’s relationship to a film narrative is typically as an external observer of its events and/or through identification with the perspective and experience of one or more of its characters. In the *Indiana Jones* films, for example, viewers are encouraged to identify primarily with the protagonist, Indy himself. Viewers are meant to root for him to win; his quest is their quest. The same may be true in a ride: *The Little Mermaid — Ariel’s Undersea Adventure*, for example, consists of key vignettes from the film’s plot, and riders are but mere spectators of the story—their eyes, in a sense, replace the camera’s lens. In *Indiana Jones Adventure*, however, riders are positioned as the main character and the story is told, and experienced, from their point of view.

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<sup>229</sup> Again, each of these examples is one of a few options determined in part by randomization and in part by what “path” the ride takes in any given instance.

Even the ride's name subtly underscores this: it is "Indiana Jones Adventure," *an* Indiana Jones Adventure for the visitor to experience, rather than Indiana Jones's Adventure.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, Indy's own journey through the temple is kept mostly separate from the riders. In the queue, the newsreels note that Indy has returned to the temple to seek out tourists who have gone missing in the temple:

The Temple of the Forbidden Eye continues to beckon visitors from around the globe! They've all heard the tantalizing tales — the matronly movie star made young again; the paupers who became Rockefellers in these ruins. But a darker tale has surfaced. Many visitors are claiming loved ones have disappeared inside. Could it be they looked into the eyes of the idol? The reports reach Indiana Jones, who returns to the site of his great discovery. Our newsreel camera follows Dr. Jones as he enters the temple. One week later, and still *no* Indiana Jones. Could Jones himself have locked eyes with the idol? Or will he solve the riddle of the lost tourists? When, and if, he does, Eye on the Globe will be there.

In the queue, riders also encounter Indy's gear and notes, but he himself is absent. Once the on-ride portion of the attraction begins, riders encounter Indy briefly and infrequently. There are only three animatronic Indys in the ride: first as he holds back the Gates of Doom and implores riders to escape by driving away from him, second as he dangles above the transport vehicle, begging riders to let him in as the giant boulder rolls toward them, and finally at the ride's conclusion as he punctuates the adventure through the temple with a comedic one-liner, like "Next time, you wear blindfolds, okay?"

Although the rider is positioned as the key to "activating" the narrative as the story's protagonist, the rider's point of view and subjective identification has the potential to shift, as certain aspects of the ride destabilize the rider's central status as protagonist. This is in part because on Indiana Jones Adventure, riders also "move" through the narratives of the source

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<sup>230</sup> As discussed previously, this is similar to the original name of the Peter Pan ride, which was originally "Peter Pan Flight" and later changed to "Peter Pan's Flight."

films. In addition to its strong similarities to the opening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the basic premise of the ride—that Indy has gone missing in his search for the temple and its treasures—also broadly recalls the setup of *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*, for example, where Dr. Jones Sr. has gone missing in his search for the Holy Grail. Riders are given a “new” story, with a new setting (the Temple of the Forbidden Eye) and new mythology (Mara), but much of the ride itself is comprised primarily of scenes that strongly recall iconic sequences from the *Indiana Jones* films.

In recalling established scenes and locations from the films, the ride sets up the potential conflict of a “double protagonist,” where the visitor-as-protagonist comes into conflict with Indiana Jones as film protagonist. Discussing “Hollywood-based attractions” including Indiana Jones Adventure, Geoff King notes that rides like this or Jurassic Park: The Ride “mov[e] around tracks that purport to take us through the landscape of the relevant films.”<sup>231</sup> Indiana Jones Adventure, too, takes riders through environments and situations that, though they are framed as “new,” strongly recall identifiable locations, images, themes, and tropes from the films. For example, the claustrophobia of the ride’s mummy chamber, where decaying corpses surround riders and lurch toward the transports evoke Indy and Marion’s mummy encounter as they escape the Well of Souls in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The bug room recalls Indy, Short Round, and Willie’s creepy-crawly encounter in the secret tunnels in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. The rat cave calls to mind the rodent-infested passageway in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* as Indy and Elsa make their way to the Knight’s tomb. Familiar elements from the franchise are thus remixed in ways that feel both new and familiar. They operate almost like narrative shortcuts, to quickly situate riders within the film world. Thus, as riders progress

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<sup>231</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 178.

through the space of the ride, they are also moving in and around the narratives of the *Indiana Jones* films like Indy himself. The ride's narrative becomes a kind of composite narrative, comprised of both original and referent scenes, where the rider's position within this narrative is constantly shifting within the imaginary spaces of the films, as both spectator and protagonist.

The riders' corporeal experiences of these spaces also encourage their subjective identification with Indy. As King observes of other park rides like *Jurassic Park: The Ride*, "What we are given to inhabit in many of these attractions is akin to the position of the Hollywood hero, experiencing the thrills that are found on the wild or rebellious domain juxtaposed to all that is corporate, controlled, or immersed in technology."<sup>232</sup> On *Indiana Jones Adventure*, while riders move through settings familiar from the films, they may also become "like" Indy as they are encouraged by the ride's design to adopt the same postures while they occupy the same spaces as him. As with the queue's diamond-shaped stones, which encourage riders to step around them like Indy in the opening scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it is common to see riders ducking during the "dart room" portion of the ride, just like Indy does as he escapes the collapsing temple in that same scene. Riders' experience of the ride—in relation to its source material—is, therefore, a dynamic one, as elements from the franchise are remixed into a narrative that is simultaneously new and familiar, and riders are encouraged to both be the protagonist of the new story as well as to "act out" Indy's adventures from the films.

This is illustrated by the ride's climax, where riders confront a massive rolling boulder like that in the opening sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Because the film's scene is so iconic, the boulder's inclusion reinforces associations between the attraction and the film. As riders escape the giant stone, they can imagine that they are living the famous scene from

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<sup>232</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 182.

*Raiders* as Indy himself. Indy's animatronic presence, however, simultaneously denies subjective identification with his character just as the ride invites it through its recreation of one of the franchise's most enduring visuals. In the ride's version of the film's famous set piece, however, Indy is not escaping the boulder, the riders are. In *Raiders*, Indy triggers the boulder when he botches the idol switch and triggers a booby trap. In the ride, riders trigger the boulder and the need to escape the temple when they activate the idol through their forbidden gaze. Indy dangles from the ceiling, suspended between riders and the boulder only to somehow meet back up with them after it finally crashes to a stop. It is *the riders'* thrilling escape, not his.

A rider's identification with Indy as protagonist is thus destabilized by his technological "presence" in the ride. As J.P. Telotte notes, Audio-Animatronics in Disney park rides "[help] to negotiate our own place" in the park.<sup>233</sup> It is partly through our positioning *in relation to them* that we can triangulate our position in the narrative. Unlike other rides where the main character is notably absent, suggesting that the rider *is* that character—as in the original incarnation of Snow White's Adventures, where riders were supposed to "be" Snow White and Snow White herself was nowhere to be found—Indiana Jones Adventure figures riders as their own protagonists while simultaneously fostering their identification with Indy himself as well as his previous adventures.

Leading up to the opening of the Indiana Jones Adventure ride at Disneyland, Los Angeles Times staff writer Randy Lewis observed that "the biggest difference between the Indiana Jones Adventure and other theme park attractions is that this one is, in essence, a large-scale interactive video game."<sup>234</sup> The narrative strategies used by Indiana Jones Adventure

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<sup>233</sup> Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 123.

<sup>234</sup> Lewis, "Disneyland's Indiana Jones."

represent several different ways in which this interactivity is fostered through the kinetic positioning of the rider within its physical and story spaces, which ultimately reconfigure the rider into a more active participant in the production of the attraction's narrative. As Tony Baxter, Disney Imagineer and designer of Indiana Jones Adventure observed around the time of the ride's opening, "What's happened in the computer generation is we've given away linear control and let people make up their own path, navigating their way through different media. A young crowd today is intrigued by non-linear events, finding and re-creating different things."<sup>235</sup> This new generation, he remarked, is "used to taking control, pushing the buttons, and being part of the action."<sup>236</sup>

Indiana Jones Adventure's methods suggest that riders have agency as narrative catalysts for the story. However, true agency is limited, as riders only directly interact with elements in the queue, while the ride's variables, such as which room riders "choose" in the beginning, are randomized and thus not under riders' control. Drawing, as Baxter suggests, on a cultural shift away from a focus on linearity and narrative coherence, this attraction privileges the sense of participation and presence rather than true narrative agency. Indiana Jones Adventure, as discussed above, offers the feeling of consequential participation, as it suggests the rider is present and active in the story and that the story is changeable, while really only offering a limited number of noticeably different experiences and never truly ceding control to the rider.

Nevertheless, Indiana Jones Adventure represents an important moment in the long-term turn toward more active and more truly *interactive* narrative experiences in media-based theme park space. Since Indiana Jones Adventure, rides such as Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters (2005)

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<sup>235</sup> Kronke, "He Built a Temple of Zoom."

<sup>236</sup> Lewis, "Disneyland's Indiana Jones."

and Toy Story Midway Mania (2008), which will be discussed further below, have quite literally “gamified” park space, putting literal controllers into riders’ hands. In Chapter Two, I discuss how Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge, which opened in 2019, further illustrates this ever-increasing emphasis on participatory storytelling and new methods of interactive immersion. As interactivity becomes an increasingly large focus of cinematic spaces in theme parks, where visitors are encouraged to manipulate and co-create the stories they experience, it is important to understand how earlier attractions like Indiana Jones Adventure laid the groundwork for these changing relationships to narrative.

### **You Have Just Crossed Over Into...the Abyss: Locating the Visitor and Narrative *Mise en abyme* in The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror**

You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension—a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You are moving into a place of both shadow and substance—of things and ideas. You’ve just crossed over into *The Twilight Zone*. Hollywood, 1939. Amid the glitz and the glitter of a bustling young movie town at the height of its golden age, the Hollywood Tower Hotel was a star in its own right, a beacon for the show business elite. Now, something is about to happen that will change all that. The time is now, on an evening very much like the one we have just witnessed. Tonight’s story of *The Twilight Zone* is somewhat unique and calls for a different kind of introduction. This, as you may recognize, is a maintenance service elevator, still in operation, waiting for you. We invite you, if you dare, to step aboard, because in tonight’s episode, *you* are the star. And this elevator travels directly to *The Twilight Zone*.

—“Rod Serling,” The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror in-queue video

While Indiana Jones Adventure illustrates how movement can be used to situate the visitor within the narrative, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror suggests a different immersive strategy: one of spatial and narrative recursion. Though I have focused primarily on Disneyland for the case studies discussed thus far, in part to develop a comprehensive picture of a single park, it is also important to consider spaces in Disney California Adventure where they offer



meaningful complementary examples. This is the case for The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, which is uniquely both an attraction based on a (non-Disney) television series, as well as a ride that was also later turned into a film, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. Because of its unique relationship to outside media texts, and the specific nature of the narrative and immersive methods employed in the ride, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror is a unique example of an attraction whose physical and narrative layers are used to envelop visitors in a story world. However, this process can also lead to fissures in immersion, as the visitor/rider is placed in a somewhat precarious position with respect to the ride's story and the source story world. I argue that the concept of *mise en abyme* can illuminate how the experience of this ride is constructed and how it shapes the visitor's experience.

The first Twilight Zone Tower of Terror was built in 1994 at the Disney-MGM Studios Park in Orlando, Florida. A slightly altered sister version opened at Disney California Adventure's Hollywood Land in 2004, where it operated until its closing in January 2017, when it was rethemed to the Marvel franchise *Guardians of the Galaxy*. California Adventure's Twilight Zone Tower of Terror was a drop-tower ride, which took visitors into the long-deserted Hollywood Tower Hotel, where they entered the "Twilight Zone" by riding, and ultimately plummeting, in a vehicle themed as a maintenance service elevator. To reveal the recursive layers of The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror and to explore *mise en abyme* as a narrative strategy, this section considers two intertwined manifestations of *mise en abyme*: the physical and the virtual. The narrative experience of The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror is intertextually complex, including not only the architectural spaces of the ride and its surrounding park environs but also its related screen media: the Twilight Zone TV series. I argue that these structural layers

create, reinforce and, at times, disrupt narrative immersion in the story world of *The Twilight Zone*.

The term *mise en abyme* derives from a heraldic device first appropriated by and applied to literature and the visual arts by André Gide in 1893.<sup>237</sup> In heraldry, it refers to an escutcheon, or shield, that contains within it a miniature replica of itself.<sup>238</sup> Writing in 1989 and drawing from André Gide's basic theorization of *mise en abyme*, literary scholar Lucien Dällenbach states that, "a *mise en abyme* is any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it."<sup>239</sup> In its most general sense, it is a nesting or layering of formal and/or visual elements, either repeated wholes or repeated parts of a whole. Dällenbach identifies a few basic points that define it as a concept: "the *mise en abyme*, as a means by which the work turns back on itself, appears to be a kind of reflexion [sic]; its essential property is that it brings out the meaning and form of the work."<sup>240</sup> Dällenbach stresses the importance of meaning, that for something to be classified as an expression of *mise en abyme*, it must not only repeat a formal element of itself, but it must also reflect the work's significance. English scholar Moshe Ron defines *mise en abyme* more liberally, stating that, "any diegetic segment which resembles the work where it occurs, is said to be placed en abyme... 'the work' (as that which is resembled) denotes any continuous aspect of the text."<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Moshe Ron, "The Restricted Abyss: Nine Problems in the Theory of Mise en Abyme," *Poetics Today* 8, no. 2 (1987): 417.

<sup>238</sup> Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>239</sup> Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, 8.

<sup>240</sup> Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, 8.

<sup>241</sup> Ron, "The Restricted Abyss," 456.

While *mise en abyme* has long been a theoretical topic of interest to philosophers, fine arts scholars, and literary theorists, cinema and media scholars such as Lynn Spigel and Thomas Elsaesser have also productively applied it to analyses of television and film. In her discussion of *The Burns and Allen Show* (1950-1958), Lynn Spigel describes how “the fundamental principle of this program was a *mise-en-abyme* structure, an endless stage within a stage, a bottomless pit of representation.”<sup>242</sup> Here, I consider how the physical and narrative structures of *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* placed the rider “*en abyme*,” within layers of physical, cinematic, and televisual space that operated on both physical and virtual levels. Visual culture scholar Margot Bouman suggests how *mise en abyme* can operate on multiple levels: “textual and visual *mise en abyme* narrative structures include flashbacks, a story within the story, a telescoping inward of recessionary space, and the emplacement of a self-contained image within an image.”<sup>243</sup> In *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*, *mise en abyme* was used to create a narrative media park space that situated visitors both physically and subjectively inside it on multiple textual and visual levels as well as on a physical one, as visitors occupied built televisual space while engaging with multiple levels of media texts. *Mise en abyme* thus provides another critical lens through which to read such complex cinematic and televisual park spaces and to understand how they function narratively as immersive media texts.

Notably, the Disney California Adventure park itself is a layered space. When it first opened in 2001, the park was designed as a themed microcosm of California, situated within the

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<sup>242</sup> Lynn Spigel, “Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948–1955,” in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press), 16.

<sup>243</sup> Margot Bouman, “The *Mise en abyme* Effect: Politics and the Fantasy of Total Visibility,” in *Space (Re)Solutions: Intervention and Research in Visual Culture*, ed. Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 61.

real California. The park was originally comprised of several lands and named areas that presented a narrative “multiverse” of smaller Californias. Each evoked different eras and/or specific geographical places: from the turn of the century beach boardwalks of Paradise Pier to the Monterey-inspired Pacific Wharf to the industry-focused Hollywood Pictures Backlot. In these themed areas, visitors were immersed in different geographical and temporal versions of California. Though it didn’t open until four years after the park did, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror added another California-centric layer *en abyme*, as it evoked the glamour of Hollywood in 1939, a year often cited as the “greatest year in Hollywood history,” the height of its Golden Age.<sup>244</sup> Within the more temporally ambiguous Hollywood Pictures Backlot land, itself nestled within Disney California Adventure, which in turn is geographically located in Southern California, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror was already securely nested in several layers of symbolic geographical meaning and historical references.<sup>245</sup>

While the theming of the park has changed over the past twenty years, as Disney has re-themed old lands and added new film and television-based lands and attractions, park visitors are still situated within cinematic and televisual narratives via multiple layers of media texts. For rides based on films or television series, like The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, the source material is an important representational layer. The referent cinematic or televisual texts are the foundations of the narrative worlds that the physical spaces execute in three dimensions. These textual layers are “virtual” in that they exist outside of the built space of the park, partially in the mind and memory of the visitor. A visitor likely does not watch *The Twilight Zone* in the park,

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<sup>244</sup> Jack Mathews, “1939: It was the greatest year in Hollywood history: 365 films were released and moviegoers were buying tickets at the rate of 80 million a week! What did they get for their money? A feast of light and shadow: The movies of 50 years ago,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1989, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-01-01-ca-223-story.html>.

<sup>245</sup> This has since been renamed “Hollywood Land,” and its contours have changed some since opening day.

but they may bring their memories of or nostalgia for it into their physical experience in the park.<sup>246</sup> Other in-park media paratexts are in dialogue with these immersive spaces as well, including in-queue and in-ride media. As with *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*, these may be videos or screens that display their own narratives or photographic images that further situate the visitors within the built narrative spaces.

*Mise en abyme* in *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* depended largely on the relationship between the ride and the original *Twilight Zone* television series, which aired on CBS from 1959 to 1964. As displayed in the park, the title of the ride conflated the attraction and the television series—while the largest sign on the front façade of the show building labeled it as the Hollywood Tower Hotel (in keeping with the ride’s narrative), the entrance sign on the ground level greeted “hotel” guests with the attraction’s full name, *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*, which was superimposed in glowing lights over the carved words “Hollywood Tower Hotel.” This sign simultaneously supported the conceit of the ride as an actual hotel, reinforcing immersion in the story of the ride as a “real” space, while also clearly announcing that it belonged to the heritage of *The Twilight Zone* TV series.

Disney’s own discourse around the ride also foregrounded this connection with the television series, suggesting that the visitor was inside an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. As recounted on the Disney Parks Blog, at the opening ceremony for the Disney California Adventure *Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*, *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling’s wife, Carol, “invited everyone to ‘step into a ‘lost episode’ of *The Twilight Zone*.”<sup>247</sup> Visitors were meant to

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<sup>246</sup> Of course, not all visitors can be assumed to be familiar with all texts, nor are all levels of familiarity the same.

<sup>247</sup> George Savvas, “A Look Back: Grand Opening of the *Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* at Disney California Adventure Park,” *Disney Parks Blog*, May 5, 2014, <http://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2014/05/a-look-back-grand-opening-of-the-twilight-zone-tower-of-terror-at-disney-california-adventure-park/>.

be immersed in their own episode, but one that did not replicate any actual episode of the series, a “lost” one. Disney’s official park website also reinforced this link between the show and the ride with the headline “Based on the Classic Television Series.” The blurb below read: “The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror is based on the popular anthology series *The Twilight Zone*, which aired on CBS from 1959 to 1964. Created, hosted and written by Rod Serling, the award-winning show—with its imaginative storylines and unexpected twist endings—was wildly successful.”<sup>248</sup> The emphasis on the ride’s televisual heritage here is clear, particularly as it stresses Serling’s connection to the ride.

Even when framing the storyline of the ride, the narrative was always intertwined with the television series. Another official Disney blog entry describes the basic narrative of the ride:

Step back in time, to 1939 and a stormy Halloween Eve. A fateful bolt of lightning strikes the Hollywood Tower Hotel. An elevator plunges to the basement and its five passengers vanish. Guests hastily flee the hotel, leaving an ‘Out of Order’ elevator with bent and damaged doors and a creepy library where the old-fashioned television suddenly comes alive—with the voice and image of ‘The Twilight Zone’ host Rod Serling.<sup>249</sup>

This description underscores the ride’s connection with the television series and with Serling, but it also connects the ride to a third textual layer—the 1997 made-for-television film based on the ride called *Tower of Terror*.<sup>250</sup> The seemingly minor detail of “Halloween Eve” is part of the film’s narrative, but not the story of the ride as presented in the park. I will return to this film in Chapter Three’s discussion of park-based media.

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<sup>248</sup> “The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/attractions/disney-california-adventure/twilight-zone-tower-of-terror/>.

<sup>249</sup> Michele Himmelberg, “The Frightful Tale of Twilight Zone Tower of Terror at Disneyland Resort,” *Disney Parks Blog*, October 29, 2013, <http://disney Parks.disney.go.com/blog/2013/10/the-frightful-tale-of-twilight-zone-tower-of-terror-at-the-disneyland-resort/>.

<sup>250</sup> *Tower of Terror* is a supernatural thriller that originally aired on ABC in 1997 as part of *The Wonderful World of Disney*. Some shots were filmed at the original *Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* ride at the Disney-MGM Studios park at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida.

The physical elements of the attraction further situated visitors inside the narrative by both creating an original *Twilight Zone* story world and referring to the series as it exists outside the park. Once inside the “hotel,” while still in the queue, visitors first entered the hotel lobby and the library, before proceeding to the boiler room basement where they would board the elevator ride vehicle. These spaces were littered with props and decor that referred to specific episodes or characters from the TV series. The glass display cases at the entrance to the libraries, for example, held replica props that refer to clearly identifiable *Twilight Zone* episodes.<sup>251</sup> A gold thimble sat next to a card that read, “Looking for a gift for mother? It’s the very thing you need. Available in our gift shop,” referring to the 1960 *Twilight Zone* episode “After Hours,” where a woman searches for a gift for her mother, unaware that she is, in fact, a department store mannequin. The prop’s placement situated the visitor who viewed it in a liminal intertextual space. The reference to the gift shop ties into the hotel narrative, where the riders were 1930s visitors to the Hollywood Tower Hotel, and thus immersed in their own *Twilight Zone* experience. However, the reflexive reference to an actual 1960 television episode, to the knowing visitor, may have disrupted this narrative immersion by drawing the visitor out of the “current” lived episode, and, virtually, into another. Moreover, an actual gift shop was part of the show building, but one that sold Disney and *Twilight Zone* branded merchandise rather than period 1930’s items like gold thimbles, further complicating this intertextual dialogue. Because of this tension between ride, show, and park, the integrity of the diegetic space was perforated, yet the visitor was, arguably, still immersed in a larger “text” of “The Twilight Zone” as a franchise.

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<sup>251</sup> Erin Glover, “Things You Might Not Know About the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror at Disney California Adventure Park,” *Disney Parks Blog*, October 17, 2011, <http://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2011/10/things-you-might-not-know-about-the-twilight-zone-tower-of-terror-at-disney-california-adventure-park/>.

The interruptive effect of these in-queue references was complicated by their quantity. Moving through the queue, dozens of references to various episodes could be spotted, from the “Mystic Seer” fortune-telling machine of the 1960 episode “Nick of Time,” to the broken reading glasses from the famous 1959 episode “Time Enough at Last,” to the chalk markings from the 1962 episode “Little Girl Lost.” While these props and decor presumably reinforced the visitors’ immersion in the larger “world” of *The Twilight Zone*, they again had the potential to disrupt the internal narrative logic of the ride itself. If the ride was meant to be a closed narrative, an episode of *The Twilight Zone* as experienced from within as a character in 1930s Hollywood, then meta-level external references such as these potentially distanced visitors from the immediate story of the Hollywood Tower Hotel. Paradoxically, this suggests that the more knowledgeable the visitor, the less immersed they may have been in the story conceit of the ride. Yet, while these Easter eggs may have made the ride’s narrative less cohesive, they arguably further immerse visitors in *The Twilight Zone* as a media property. This narrative tension—the push and pull between immersion and reflexivity, between enveloping and distancing the audience from the diegetic world of the ride—was further reflected in the in-queue introduction video.

Inside the hotel library, groups of riders were gathered to watch a pre-show video that established the attraction’s basic story. This video was displayed on a period-styled television and was modeled on the introduction to a traditional *Twilight Zone* episode. The opening sequence included the classic imagery (eyeball, floating door,  $E=MC^2$  equation), traditional *Twilight Zone* music, and the show’s logo. It appeared to be hosted by Rod Serling, the legendary creator of the original *Twilight Zone* series. However, since Serling had died almost thirty years prior to the attraction’s opening, the video was instead hosted by a composite “Rod



Serling,” which was a compilation of actual footage of Serling from the 1961 episode “It’s a Good Life” digitally enhanced and edited together with a Serling impersonator filling in the voice-over, its own kind of representational abyss as a simulacrum of Serling with no single original.<sup>252</sup>

This video, like the in-queue props and decor, situated visitors in a peculiar space, where they were both inside the diegesis of their own episode of *The Twilight Zone*, but also distanced from it as they were overtly reminded that this is all actually just an episode of a television series. Margot Bouman argues that “visual *mise en abyme*” is characterized by “a synecdochic relationship to the overall narrative.”<sup>253</sup> Here, the pre-show video acts as a synecdoche for *The Twilight Zone* as a television series. In this way, *mise en abyme* can act as a narrative shorthand for what is ultimately a relatively brief experience, as the “ride” part of the attraction only lasts two minutes, even though the entire experience, including the queue, could be much longer.<sup>254</sup>

In particular, the replication of the television show’s familiar opening sequence abruptly removed the visitors from the world of the ride, potentially pushing them back into a televisual space of watching the original series in their living room or even mobile device. Yet the purpose of the video was also to establish the story of the ride itself, and to expediently figure the visitors within that narrative premise.<sup>255</sup> The video itself was also a visual *mise en abyme*, as it depicts

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<sup>252</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1-3.

<sup>253</sup> Bouman, “The *Mise en abyme* Effect,” 62.

<sup>254</sup> At its longest, the queue could wind through outdoor switchbacks before moving into the entrance lobby, through the library and into the boiler room basement, where it could be diverted into upper and lower sections. At its peaks, the queue wait time could be well over an hour.

<sup>255</sup> “Rod Serling’s” dialogue of the in-queue video is as follows: “You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension—a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You are moving into a place of both shadow and substance—of things and ideas. You’ve just crossed over into *The Twilight Zone*. Hollywood, 1939. Amid the glitz and the glitter of a bustling young movie town at the height of its golden age, the Hollywood Tower Hotel was a star in its own right, a beacon for the show business elite. Now, something is about to happen that will change all that. The time is now, on an evening very much like the one we have just witnessed.

the Hollywood Tower Hotel in which visitors are standing while watching the video. Visitors were, therefore, placed inside the screen itself, even as they stood watching it on a television. They were both inside and outside of the story, inside and outside of the *Twilight Zone* series. The hotel was the supposed site of a “real” strange 1939 incident, but also the location for a television episode, while it was also meant to be a space real lived story of the visitors. Riders thus fluctuated in and out of the screen: they were simultaneously *inside* the screen itself in a television episode of *The Twilight Zone* while they were also acting out an “actual” real-life episode of *The Twilight Zone* by riding the ride as “hotel guests.”

*Mise en abyme* was used here as an expedient tool for narrative orientation and the reinforcement of immersion in park space—spaces that are inherently textually heterogeneous. Marian Hobson notes that “in literary theory, with the *mise en abyme* as a series of reflections or internally contained scale-models of the literary work, such doubles might give consistency and coherence to the literary or pictorial work by encapsulating images which reflect the whole, by reinforcing and repeating it.”<sup>256</sup> This is what Carol Serling invoked when she asked visitors to “step into” *The Twilight Zone*. The attraction’s *mise en abyme*, by enfolding layers of *The Twilight Zone* into one another, created a system of reference that bound the audience in layers of narrative space. The structural repetition of media and physical layers reinforced the rider’s experience of being “in” the story world, though which story world they were in may have been unclear. Were visitors supposed to be in the story world of their own “episode”—the world of

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Tonight’s story of *The Twilight Zone* is somewhat unique and calls for a different kind of introduction. This, as you may recognize, is a maintenance service elevator, still in operation, waiting for you. We invite you, if you dare, to step aboard, because in tonight’s episode, *you* are the star. And this elevator travels directly to *The Twilight Zone*.”

<sup>256</sup> Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 75.

the Hollywood Tower Hotel—or was the story world that of *The Twilight Zone*, as an episodic television show? Were they characters or actors?<sup>257</sup>

Jacques Derrida, Hobson observes, rejects a closed interpretation of *mise en abyme* as representing an entirely contained, self-referencing—and thus self-reinforcing—system.

According to her analysis of Derrida:

The work on the contrary ‘has’ he says (the obligation is interesting) to be both open and closed...The determination of self-reference and reference to other writing is to be done not just through the textual equivalent of mirror images, that is unit-like symbols, but through textual operations of quotation: by grafts, borrowings, incisions...A work will not then be a mirroring of a mirroring through tidy embedding, but a palimpsest of excerpts, an overlapping stratification of quotations. This complexity of intertextual relations...open out rather than embed.<sup>258</sup>

As the examples above suggest, rather than entirely “embedding” the visitor in a cohesive narrative space, these texts have the potential to “open out” to a variety of levels and types of immersion through a multitude of references. The *Twilight Zone* Tower of Terror could be, simultaneously, an “actual” haunted hotel and a television episode. Visitor experiences, of course, also varied according to the individual visitor at the center of each encounter with the parks. While nostalgia for evenings spent watching the original *Twilight Zone* on CBS might have resonated for one visitor, another might have recalled SyFy channel rerun marathons. A third might have learned the storyline and narrative along the way, unfamiliar with the series and thus oblivious to any extratextual references. Hobson and Derrida’s “openness” accounts for the multiplicity of intertextual relationships discussed above, and potential inconsistencies, contradictions, or heterogeneous paratexts that combine in a variety of ways. It also allows for potential narrative disruption. In his analysis of *Avatar* (2009), Thomas Elsaesser discusses the

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<sup>257</sup> Arguably, visitors who pretend along with the conceit of a ride are always, in a sense, acting.

<sup>258</sup> Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 75.

tensions between immersion and recursiveness and reflexivity in film. Elsaesser argues that *Avatar* “evokes the idea of self-forgetful immersion, but achieves this effect through layers of self-reference and feed-back loops that generate intense but floating forms of identification.”<sup>259</sup> Similarly, in *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*, the recursive elements of *mise en abyme* had the potential to immerse visitors in the story while the reflexive aspects of the ride distanced them, allowing them to “float” between layers of identification and meaning.

In addition to the examples discussed above, another reflexive moment occurred at the end of the attraction. In *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* (and many other park rides), photographs were taken of the visitors during the ride, which were then available for purchase in the ride’s gift shop (one needed to walk past these displays to exit the ride building).<sup>260</sup> These images re-situated visitors within the narrative, as they were framed in the photo as being within the attraction’s “world,” sitting in the haunted elevator. Visitors were shown *back inside* the ride narrative from which they had just emerged, but were simultaneously displaced from their immersion in the story world by viewing themselves in the for-purchase souvenir photograph. As Vivian Sobchack argues in her discussion of cinematic perception:

Only the spectator, who is outside the film’s activity (though within her own), is privileged to ‘see’ the film’s perception of expression, and that occurs because her own conscious experience *includes* the film’s movement of perception and expression. This inclusion is not reversible. Whether film or spectator, we cannot physically stand behind our own backs.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, “Immersion between Recursiveness and Reflexivity: *Avatar*,” in *Immersion in the Visual Arts and Media*, eds. Burcu Dogramaci and Fabienne Liptay (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 251. Incidentally, *Avatar* is now the basis for a land at Walt Disney World’s Animal Kingdom park.

<sup>260</sup> Visitors often use their cellphones to photograph the pictures as they are displayed on screens after the ride.

<sup>261</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 282.

Sobchack points to surrealist René Magritte's *Not to Be Reproduced (La reproduction interdite)* as an illustration of this distance, which depicts the impossibility of a spectator seeing their own perceiving self. The distancing effect of reflecting on the artificiality of one's own immersive experience, much like the effect of the intertextual prop references discussed above, can fracture immersion while it attempts to reinforce it. But even as they compromised diegetic immersion, these layers could yet re-situate the visitor within the *Twilight Zone* as media property.

Ultimately, while *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* illuminates the strategy of *mise en abyme* as an effective method for immersing visitors in narrative park space, it also points to the fissures in this strategy. The multiplicity of layers can have the inverse effect of distancing the audience from the narrative while simultaneously reinforcing their identification with a series or movie. In this way, Tower of Terror's *mise en abyme* sent its visitors into a representational abyss, where they were left to navigate various layers of identification, distancing, and immersion in a complex multitextual space.

### ***Reusing Narrative Space in Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT!***

On January 3, 2017, The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror at Disney California Adventure closed to make way for a reimagin(eer)ed version, retitled Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT! Themed to the Marvel *Guardians of the Galaxy* franchise, the updated attraction opened on May 27, 2017. Just as a movie theater uses the same architectural space to present different narratives, Mission: BREAKOUT! uses the same ride building and ride mechanics, recovered with new façades, décor, and, most importantly, a new story. In Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT!, riders enter the lair/fortress of Taneleer Tivan, an antagonist from the *Guardians of the Galaxy* Marvel films also known as The Collector. The Collector has captured the Guardians of the Galaxy (Peter Quill/Star-Lord, Gamora, Drax the Destroyer,

Groot, and Rocket) for his collection, and park visitors are ostensibly there to take a tour and view his new acquisitions. The queue area that was formerly the lobby to the Hollywood Tower Hotel is now the home of the Tivan Collection. The room is filled with display cases containing odd artifacts and strange specimens. Riders enter the Collector's private office (formerly the hotel library), where they encounter an animatronic Rocket, who has managed to escape his display case and implores the park visitors to help break his friends free. Rocket enlists visitors to raise their hands to use their security "clearance" to allow him access to the gantry lift. The plan is that Rocket will ride the lift to the top of the tower, where he can sabotage the generator control room to destroy control systems, thus freeing his fellow Guardians. Since *Mission: BREAKOUT!* lacks the conflicting presence of the *Twilight Zone* narrator in the queue, the diegetic immersion is smoother and lacks some of the distancing effects of the *Tower of Terror*'s queue elements. Moreover, except for Rocket, who is present as both an animatronic figure and a shadowy silhouette at the beginning of the ride proper, the other main characters are present in the attraction only via screens. Riders relate to them in a similar way to how they may have already encountered these characters—on a screen.

While both *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* and *Mission: BREAKOUT!* center the rider in the narrative, the latter is more physically participatory. To enter the elevator, riders are asked to "raise your hands for clearance," where they are then "scanned." By this point, riders had already been conditioned to physically participate by raising their hands "for clearance" to enter the Collector's office. This gesture invokes a common behavior for riders on a thrill ride. Imagineers thus absorb this typical bodily movement into the conceit of the story, helping to further mask the reality of a park ride by cloaking a common physical phenomenon in the ride's narrative. The incorporation of this gesture also serves to make the ride more participatory. The

narrative is framed such that riders are “helping” the escape effort, with the newly freed characters thanking riders at the end of the ride. This small change marks a distinction from the previous version of the ride, where visitors are incorporated into the story, but in a less active manner.

As a reworking of The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT! adapts the previous attraction’s ride system. Because of this, the narrative of the new ride had to be shaped around the kinetic qualities of the old one. Rather than a haunted elevator traveling to the Twilight Zone via a non-existent thirteenth floor, here riders are taken up and down the accelerated drop tower as Rocket executes his plan to free his friends. The lift’s erratic movements are tied into this conceit: riders travel to the floors where the Guardians are imprisoned, and Rocket has trouble getting the gantry “back online” as riders zoom up and down the tower. As a retheme of an existing ride, then, the repurposed space of Mission: Breakout is implicitly shaped by the spectral layers of preceding physical and virtual narratives, particularly for riders familiar with the ride’s former incarnation. Perhaps coincidentally, Disney’s teaser synopsis of the new ride’s story described how the Guardians of the Galaxy “are trapped in customized display cases, suspended over a vast abyss.”<sup>262</sup>

### **To Interactivity and Beyond: Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters**

Your spin control is now active. You are now in command of your space cruiser. Spin at will.

—Ride spiel, Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters

We’ve got Zurg on the run, blast him with everything you’ve got!

—Buzz Lightyear, Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters

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<sup>262</sup> Joe Rohde, “Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT! Coming to Disney California Adventure Park Summer 2017,” *Disney Parks Blog*, July 23, 2016, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2016/07/guardians-of-the-galaxy-mission-breakout-coming-to-disney-california-adventure-park-summer-2017/>.

To conclude this chapter, I look to Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters as an example of the continued movement toward more interactive attractions. Of course, participation in the narrative has always been a part of Disneyland attractions. In a 1958 newspaper essay, Walt Disney noted that forthcoming additions to the park, which included The Haunted Mansion and Alice in Wonderland, “all have this in common: active participation by the visitor.”<sup>263</sup> However, as this chapter has illustrated, in recent years Imagineers have increasingly turned toward more overt methods of physical participation, where riders directly manipulate the physical spaces of the rides, and even the narrative, with their bodies. Visitors are thus increasingly asked to take a more central role in the active co-production of their narrative experiences by more directly physically and mentally engaging in the spaces around them as a means of storytelling. An example of this, Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters asks riders to play with the ride space quite literally, using the ride vehicle as interface.

Of course, interactive ride vehicles have been a part of Disneyland since opening day. The Mad Tea Party, an opening day attraction, invites riders to spin their teacup’s central wheel in order to spin the vehicle as it in turn spins and rotates around the ride platform. This, however, is the extent of the interaction; the ride privileges the physical sensation of spinning and its approximation of the “mad” mindset of the Hatter. Physical interaction here allows the rider to heighten this sensation by making their cup spin faster, thus enhancing their physical and psychological experience through active participation.

In 1994, Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin was added to the recently opened Mickey’s Toontown. This ride, too, was designed to let riders, seated in their own Benny the Cab ride

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<sup>263</sup> Walt Disney, “My Newest Dream.”



vehicle, spin their car by manipulating the steering wheel mounted on the dash in front of them. This causes the vehicle to spin as it progresses along a track and through an otherwise typical dark ride environment. Much like the Mad Tea Party, interaction with the ride vehicle here enables the rider to “amp up” the physical sensations in the ride. Riders can choose to spin quickly or slowly, or not at all. Because of the nature of the dark ride space, here the ability to control the direction the vehicle faces also enables the rider to choose their point of view.

Typically, dark rides have fixed orientations, allowing the Imagineers to design the ride with some degree of control over where the rider looks at any given point. This control is, of course, somewhat loose. Riders can be faced toward a certain part of a scene, but Imagineers cannot control exactly what they look at (though design elements and composition are certainly used to attract attention and focus to certain points in these spaces). The Doom Buggies in the Haunted Mansion, for example, twist and turn to provide certain vantage points to riders and limit or preclude others.<sup>264</sup> Once turned so that their bodies face a certain way, elements within the riders’ view—particularly those that are moving, large, brightly colored, or to which other compositional or sonic elements point—draw their attention. On Haunted Mansion, as riders descend to the “outside” graveyard scene after leaving the attic, the Doom Buggies first give a bird’s-eye view of the coming scene before abruptly swiveling so that riders move backwards, facing up toward dark, gnarly trees. Here, a raven with glowing red eyes attracts riders’ gaze as it caws and darts its head around. A spotlight helps to maintain riders’ attention before they reach the bottom of the ramp, where their vehicles pivot to reveal the graveyard groundskeeper and his

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<sup>264</sup> Of course, there will always be riders who will contort around in their seats to view these non-privileged perspectives.

sickly skeletal dog—a “surprise” scene that has greater impact because it is happened upon suddenly.

On Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin, however, the interactive steering mechanism allows riders to play with this paradigm and to control their own viewpoint. Riders can choose to, for example, turn their vehicle to linger a bit longer on an interesting scene or favorite character. They may choose to face backward the entire time or to simply keep spinning and heighten the dizzy sensation, not focusing on any single scene. This grants riders more agency in how they experience the ride than more rigid vehicle and track systems. Though the scenes and track are still highly controlled and designed, riders are invited, through the ride mechanism, to use their bodies to interact with the ride itself in a way that helps shape the experience. Like Mr. Toad and other early Fantasyland rides, this ride is similarly focused on a particular bodily sensation (spinning and careening out of control) as well as mindset (the wacky perception and personality of a typical toon). However, those early rides are arguably more passive in their positioning of the rider, whereas Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin, by engaging riders’ bodies through the steering wheel, eases their transition into the physical and mental sensation of its story world through physical participation.

The mechanism of using physical interaction with a ride vehicle to foster increased immersion via the body is similarly employed in Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, a *Toy Story*-based attraction that was added to Disneyland’s Tomorrowland in 2005.<sup>265</sup> Like Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin, this ride is also a dark ride that allows riders seated in two-person cars to control the orientation of the ride vehicle. Using a centrally mounted joystick, riders can spin their car as

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<sup>265</sup> The first incarnation of the ride opened as Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin at Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World in 1998. Sister attractions are also present in Tokyo Disneyland, Hong Kong Disneyland, Disneyland Paris, and Shanghai Disneyland, under varying names.

it progresses through the space along its prescribed track. As such, it includes similar interactive qualities to Roger Rabbit. Riders can control their field of vision by spinning their car (or not) as they choose.

However, the Astro Blasters have an additional element that heightens riders' interaction with the space by inviting them to use their bodies to manipulate the ride experience. This mechanism effectively turns riders into players, literally gamifying the ride experience. Each car is fitted with two laser "astro blaster" pistols in addition to the joystick. Using these guns, riders are invited to become "Space Rangers" in the fight against Evil Emperor Zurg (an antagonist from Buzz Lightyear's own fictional story within the *Toy Story* world) and to shoot at targets placed throughout the ride's physical environments. Targets correspond to different point values based on their shape and whether they are lit or not, and a digital readout in front of each rider tallies their scores. At the end of the ride, riders see how they have fared. Seven point tiers grant riders status titles ranging from "Star Cadet" (0-1,000 points) to "Galactic Hero" (+999,999 points). After disembarking, riders may email a photo taken during the ride, which shows their car's riders and scores. The phrasing of the email continues the conceit of the ride story and foregrounds the interactivity of the attraction, while also advertising the park: "Galactic Greetings Space Ranger, You have received an intergalactic transmission from a friend who has just completed a mission on the new Buzz Lightyear Astro Blaster interactive experience at Disneyland® Park in California. To Infinity and Beyond!"

*Toy Story Midway Mania* (DCA, 2008), a later ride also based on the popular *Toy Story* franchise, takes this game element to the extreme, such that the physicality of the built environment is significantly minimized in favor of the virtual screen spaces in front of riders. In this attraction, the emphasis is almost exclusively on the video game itself, rather than on the

built space. In this ride, rider/players are seated in a four-person car, with two pairs of players seated back-to-back. Riders are given a pair of 3-D glasses and instructed on how to use the pull-string shooter cannons in front of them. The ride progresses along a track, stopping at six different screens where riders are instructed to play the video minigames in front of them. These games simulate typical boardwalk or carnival midway games, and include standards like shooting galleries, ring toss, and darts and balloons. The emphasis here is on interacting with the 3-D screens rather than the built environment, which in this ride is typically flat in design and glimpsed only briefly between game stops. Rather than physical immersion in built space, this ride reveals a privileging of virtual space that foregrounds interactivity and gameplay over narrative or emotional immersion in a story world.

This chapter's discussion is, of course, not exhaustive of the myriad ways in which rides and other attractions have adapted cinematic and televisual texts, worlds, and narratives, but suggests a variety of methods of immersion and the experiential effects they produce. I discuss additional examples in the following chapter as I move from analyzing discrete media-based attractions to entire film-based lands. In these case studies, I consider how these lands and their networks of attractions and ambient spaces create immersive—and increasingly participatory, interactive, and customized—media experiences.

## Chapter Two: From Screen to Space: Media-Based Lands

You fill this place with people, and you'll really have a show.  
—Walt Disney<sup>266</sup>

Upon entering the gates of Disneyland, the first souvenir a visitor might pick up is a park map to guide them through the physical and imagined spaces of the park. Disneyland is defined in large part by its geographical layout, particularly its different “lands,” which were originally shaped by the genres of Disney’s industrial production categories. These lands are sections of the park comprised of multiple attractions, shops, dining, and ambient environmental spaces united around a central concept: a time, location, genre, or story world. The paper maps available at the park entrances reflect how the park is divided into these spaces and how visitors are meant to conceive of the park by its lands. The map’s color-coded sections match color-coded keys, which categorize all park attractions and dining according to their respective lands. The smaller spaces in the park—from attractions, shops and restaurants to pathways and seating areas—are thus intrinsically linked to their larger “land” environments.

As this chapter demonstrates, in park expansions of recent decades, Disney has increasingly focused on the construction of not only individual media-based ride experiences of the kind discussed in Chapter One, but larger, more complex, and more mimetic media-based lands. While Disney park lands have always been connected to the film and television industries, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, these connections used to be characterized by how the lands evoked film genres or how film and television techniques were used in their construction. The past few decades, however, have seen Disney turn toward lands that are based on either single films like *A Bug’s Life*, on film franchises like *Star Wars* or *Cars*, or even on a

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<sup>266</sup> Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 14.

single film studio like Pixar.<sup>267</sup> Other entertainment and theme park companies like Universal and Merlin Entertainments (operators of Legoland parks) have similarly turned toward immersive media environments, most notably Universal’s Wizarding World of Harry Potter. These new media-based lands are not defined by general theming, but by the specific story worlds they are built on and that they physically manifest.

Picking up Chapter One’s discussion of media-based park space, this chapter thus examines the creation of film-based lands in Disneyland Park and Disney California Adventure. I begin in 1993 with the opening of Mickey’s Toontown—the first explicitly film world-based land—and continue through a bug’s land in 2002, Cars Land in 2012, Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge in 2019, and Avengers Campus in 2020.<sup>268</sup> Moving from earlier discussions of single attractions to entire lands, I build on Chapter One’s analysis of methods for individual media-based attractions to juxtapose the ways in which park lands operate distinctly from attractions as complex immersive environmental experiences. I also assert that the move to creating entire lands based on film worlds can be seen as an outgrowth of the initial impulse to create film-based attractions. I consider how these spaces expand the immersive qualities of rides in both space, as lands are physically larger than single attractions, and time, as lands lack the discrete durational constraints of most rides and allow for variable temporal experiences and more

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<sup>267</sup> Partially for the sake of space and scope, I have chosen to omit Pixar Pier, which is a retheme of the former Paradise Pier section of Disney California Adventure that opened in 2018. While this space has interesting implications given that its theming is based on properties united by their ties to a film studio rather than a single film or franchise, Pixar Pier does not quite fit the rest of my case studies as far as invoking a particular, unified, and coherent film world. However, it would be a rich site for analysis, particularly of how studio brand identity and continuity in industrial production operates in park space.

<sup>268</sup> a bug’s land was typically stylized using all lowercase characters, to emphasize its “bug’s eye” perspective. I maintain this styling throughout, as my analysis addresses the land’s scale play. The film’s logo also uses the lowercase, though it is often written about using the uppercase. The land’s D23 page, for example, uses lowercase for the land’s title, but not the film. See “a bug’s land,” Disney A to Z, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://d23.com/a-to-z/bugs-land-a/>.

sustained immersion. Consequently, I explore how these changes in spatial and temporal qualities evoke embodied experiences and world-building narrative structures that are different from the oftentimes more tightly focused narrative of a single attraction.

Themed lands were essential to Disneyland's original design. In 1955, Disneyland was created as a single park, organized into five areas, four of which were termed "-lands": Main Street, U.S.A., Adventureland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. Each original land is unified around a single theme, which, as scholars like Christopher Anderson have observed, were tied to "four familiar movie industry genres: Fantasyland (animated cartoons), Adventureland (exotic action-adventure), Frontierland (Westerns), and Tomorrowland (science fiction)."<sup>269</sup> Main Street, U.S.A., as Robert Neuman has argued, had roots in both Hollywood backlot set construction and in the ideologies and aesthetics of "small-town" films.<sup>270</sup> While these genres existed in Hollywood production more broadly, they were also reflections of Disney's own studio productions at the time, including its animation, "true life adventures" documentaries starting in 1948, and action films like *Treasure Island* (1950). These generic themes allowed these lands the potential to contain and make thematically coherent heterogeneous attractions and spaces, both film-based and not. Later lands were added that had less to do with these early genre categories, including the now-gone Holidayland in 1957.<sup>271</sup> Other lands, like New Orleans Square, which opened in 1966, and Bear Country (later renamed

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<sup>269</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 141.

<sup>270</sup> Neuman, "Disneyland's Main Street," 45.

<sup>271</sup> Holidayland was originally located outside the main park gates, with a separate entrance. It was a large open space that contained picnic facilities, small playgrounds, and an entertainment stage. The area that was Holidayland later became New Orleans Square. See Mark Eades, "Part 2: This is how Disneyland changed from 1956 to 1959," *Orange County Register*, July 14, 2016, <https://www.ocregister.com/2016/07/14/part-2-this-is-how-disneyland-changed-from-1956-to-1959/>.

Critter Country), which opened in 1972, evoked particular times and places. Eventually, as will be discussed in this chapter, Disney began to add lands that were not based on broad categories of genres, themes, or geographical locations, but on specific film story worlds.

Media scholars have considered the ways in which transmedia spaces like park lands function as particularly embodied, immersive spaces. Considering Disneyland's early history, Christopher Anderson describes the "inhabitable text" opened up within the multimedia space of the parks, as a narrative that remains incomplete until the viewer becomes the visitor, who is given "a chance to perform in the Disneyland narrative, to provide unity and closure through personal experience, to witness the 'aura' to which television's reproductive apparatus could only allude."<sup>272</sup> Fan studies scholar Matt Hills has called for the "need to consider transmedia not just as storytelling but also as a kind of experience; not just as a 'flow' across platforms and screens, but as potentially and spatially located."<sup>273</sup> Rebecca Williams has discussed park space in terms of what she calls "haptic fandom," looking at how this mode of engagement "offers unique opportunities for fans to become immersed in its transmedia world and to move their fandom from the textual into the bodily and the spatial."<sup>274</sup> Though they are not necessarily discussing lands specifically, these scholars suggest the importance of our embodied presence in parks—that as spaces that we are inside, it is important to consider their spatiality and physicality in conjunction with our own physical subjectivities. Less attention, however, has been paid to

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<sup>272</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 153.

<sup>273</sup> Matt Hills, "From Transmedia Storytelling to Transmedia Experience: Star Wars Celebration as a Crossover/Hierarchical Space," in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, eds. Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 224.

<sup>274</sup> Rebecca Williams, "From Star Tours to Galaxy's Edge: Immersion, Transmediality, and 'Haptic Fandom' in Disney's Theme Parks," in *Disney's Star Wars: Forces of Production, Promotion, and Reception*, eds. William Proctor and Richard McCulloch (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2019), 136.



exactly how the physical and conceptual geographies of such spaces create story worlds and shape visitors' embodied experiences.

As a demarcation of park space, lands are inherently different from attractions. They are, most basically, coherent environments linked together by a concept, which can be a theme, genre, time period, location, and/or specific story world (which itself often evokes a time, location, and even genre). Lands both contain other discrete spaces, experiences, and narratives—like attractions, restaurants, or shops—and are also experiences in themselves, with their own distinct features and, indeed, narratives. They are larger than their individual components and are navigated differently. A visitor's movement through an attraction or other individual park space is generally scripted. Attractions, for example, are highly controlled, as visitors' bodies are guided through queues and then typically physically moved through the space of the ride. They are also usually linear, with a single prescribed path. Other discrete park spaces, like restaurants and shops, are less controlled: visitors have a greater degree of freedom in terms of how they navigate the space and how much time they spend within it. However, as commercial and social environments, these, too, are spaces that often have a defined beginning, middle, and end, whether that is the checkout counter or the dining table.

In contrast, lands are multidirectional and navigation through them is less structured. Visitors may be influenced by design, as with Disney's famed "wienies," typically large and/or tall focal-point visual or architectural features like Sleeping Beauty's Castle that are designed to draw visitors in toward certain points in the park and along particular pathways. As Imagineer Marty Sklar recalled, "wienie" was Walt Disney's term for "the beckoning finger that says,

‘Come this way or you’ll miss the fun.’”<sup>275</sup> Moreover, Disneyland’s “hub-and-spoke” design, where lands radiate out from a central nexus point, leads visitors along certain trajectories. Elements like these can be used to construct a sequence of experiences, as visitors enter the park and proceed down Main Street toward the Castle before branching out into one of the neighboring lands. Despite the way in which architecture and spatial design can encourage movement through the park and its lands in certain ways, lands are, unlike rides, typically open to the visitor to navigate as they please.<sup>276</sup> Visitors may stop at or revisit points they find interesting, or they may elide certain areas completely. Lands are also less temporally structured. They are ambient spaces where visitors may—and are sometimes encouraged to—linger.<sup>277</sup> As will be discussed in further detail in this chapter, lands have distinctly identifiable story worlds, and even narratives, yet they are experienced differently from the focused, linear, and brief stories of attractions and other smaller park spaces.

This chapter is thus focused on media-inspired park lands as spaces that share similarities with, yet operate in distinct ways from, attractions. However, because of the close integration between rides and their larger land environments, I will necessarily discuss certain rides in the context of their lands. While all rides/attractions are integrated within larger park spaces, that

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<sup>275</sup> Marty Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!: My Half-Century Creating Disney’s Magic Kingdoms* (New York and Los Angeles: Disney Editions, 2013), 107.

<sup>276</sup> There are times during operating hours, such as at the conclusion of shows like Fantasmic! or the fireworks, when visitors are ushered through the pathways of the land in highly controlled ways. During these times, they may be prevented from moving in certain areas or directions and guided along Disney’s preferred paths of ingress and egress.

<sup>277</sup> Disney has also taken steps in the past to make lingering more difficult, as when the company removed a number of benches and planters in 2018, seemingly to improve flow and alleviate congestion in the face of rising crowds. There was, predictably, backlash against this decision. See Marla Jo Fisher, “Disneyland is Quietly Removing Seating and Planters for Star Wars Land Access,” *Orange County Register*, September 20, 2018, <https://www.ocregister.com/2018/09/20/disneyland-is-quietly-removing-seating-and-planters-for-star-wars-land-access/>.

relationship can be more tangential (Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters as loosely related to Tomorrowland through a shared outer space theme) or conceptual (Peter Pan's Flight and Fantasyland as film genre and category of Disney industrial production) for rides situated in non-film world-based lands. Attractions in film-based lands tend to be more seamlessly integrated with the surrounding land through a unified narrative, necessitating an analysis that considers the complexity of how all these elements function together to create unique media experiences.

As a corpus, these lands suggest a variety of approaches to adapting screen-based cinematic worlds to large-scale immersive physical environments. Certain elements of these lands, including their different approaches to realism, interactivity, personalization, and direct address/narrative centering, highlight shifting strategies of creating large-scale and long-span ambient immersion. Of course, the examples discussed here are limited to a single location (Disneyland Resort in Anaheim), so while they may suggest, for example, a movement toward realism within these specific parks, it is important to remember that there are other examples of film- and media-based lands and spaces in the U.S. and internationally both constructed by Disney and by other companies that complicate any idea of a strict progression toward more realistic spaces.<sup>278</sup>

While earlier Disneyland lands were situated within common film genres, themes prevalent in the company's own production catalog, or geographical locations, it wasn't until the creation of Mickey's Toontown in 1993 that Disney Imagineers turned toward lands that were unified by a single film text. Later, this concept would be expanded to lands that were based not only on a single film, but on entire franchises. As such, I begin this chapter with an analysis of

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<sup>278</sup> These include Legoland parks, which bring to life the plastic-block world of Lego, the Super Nintendo World lands at several Universal Studios parks, which bring to life the computer-animated worlds of Nintendo games, and Disney's own plans for upcoming lands based on the animated films *Frozen* and *Zootopia*.

Mickey's Toontown as the earliest example of a park land that was inspired by a single cinematic text—*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)—making it the first Disneyland land that departed from the more generally (and generically) themed lands that comprised the earlier version of the park. Instead, Mickey's Toontown brought the discrete animated environment of Toontown from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* to life, radically reconfiguring the visitor's relationship to both the animated screen and built park space. This space invokes a specific location from the film, yet it does not mimetically replicate what appears on screen. Rather, Mickey's Toontown replicates the ontological construct of the film, where live-action and animated realities collide, inviting the visitor to play in its hybrid space.

Next, I look at the ways in which a bug's land—based on the 1998 Pixar film *A Bug's Life*—materializes animated screen space as it uses architectural design and materials, scenery, and kinetic attraction design to play with the scale of its human inhabitants. Departing from Mickey's Toontown's bubbly two-dimensional animation aesthetic, a bug's land instead brings to life the “compromise aesthetic” of Pixar's animated features, which rests somewhere between the extremes of “too realistic and too cartoony.”<sup>279</sup> The result is a space that is, in some ways, more realistic than Mickey's Toontown, while still being very much stylized. While the land directly recreates some visual elements from the film, like P.T. Flea's red-and-white umbrella big top, it more generally adapts the schema of the film's settings, including those where insect characters have used human detritus to construct living and working spaces. The land combines these insect-built manmade spaces with large-scale faux natural elements, such as colossal clovers, as well as real greenery. Together, these design elements show a concern with recreating

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<sup>279</sup> J.P. Telotte, *Animating Space: From Mickey to WALL-E* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 207; Lawrence French, "Toy Story: Art Direction: CGI Problems Found Solutions in the Sketches of Designer Ralph Eggleston." *Cinefantastique* 27, no. 2 (1995): 33.

the film's sensation of transmuted scale as well as with recreating its specific narrative geographies.

This latter concern is a project taken up by Disney California Adventure's next land, and my next case study: Cars Land, based on the 2006 Pixar film *Cars*. In this section, I consider how Cars Land, to a greater degree than the film-lands before it, mimetically recreates screen space. Though still acting with the visual realm of Pixar's "compromise aesthetic," Cars Land differs from both Toontown's cartoon/live-action hybrid space and a bug's land's scale-play and basic geographical schema. Cars Land more closely approaches cinematic fidelity as a geographical and architectural rendering of digital film space as it takes the actual geography of Radiator Springs and faithfully recreates it in the park. Moreover, Cars Land, like the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror discussed in Chapter One, uses *mise en abyme*, or visual and spatial layering, to situate visitors not only in the narrative world of Radiator Springs, but also in its real-world geographical analogue. Cars Land invokes both the screen world of Radiator Springs as well as the historical sights of Route 66 and the natural landscapes of the American Southwest to ultimately invite play in the interstices between real and imagined spaces.

The focal case study for this chapter is an in-depth analysis of Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, the park's most ambitious immersive film-based land. The fourteen-acre land is the largest expansion in Disneyland's history to date, and the park's first new land in sixteen years (since the addition of Mickey's Toontown in 1993). As a land set entirely in a live-action cinematic space, Galaxy's Edge builds on earlier Disney efforts in lands like Shanghai Disneyland's *Pirates of the Caribbean*-inspired Treasure Cove (2016) or the Valley of Mo'ara of Walt Disney World Animal Kingdom's Pandora—The World of Avatar (2017) while departing from the

park's earlier forays into animation-based lands.<sup>280</sup> However, Galaxy's Edge does not simply recreate a cinematic story world, but instead seeks to act as a new narrative space for visitors to inhabit and in which they can co-create stories. World-building at Galaxy's Edge is accomplished through a number of mechanisms, including geographical storytelling that invites visitors to choose a moral alignment within the narrative world and multi-sensory design that attempts to create a fully-embodied narrative experience. The integration of technology and game-play mechanisms makes the land more interactive and the visitor's narrative more personalized than any land before it. Galaxy's Edge ultimately positions visitors as protagonists in an original narrative environment that is spatially and temporally grounded in the existing transmedia world of *Star Wars*.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of Avengers Campus, the newest film-based land at Disney California Adventure. Like Galaxy's Edge, Avenger's Campus doesn't merely recreate screen space, but adds to it by manifesting a new physical location previously unseen on screen. Set in a version of our real-world Earth, however, the emphasis in Avenger's Campus is less on immersion through world-building and more on close personal interactions with the characters of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, who are made accessible through the land from across their films, television series, and various timelines. Unlike Galaxy's Edge, Avenger's Campus is temporally ambiguous, operating in its own timeline within the MCU multiverse, but it retains Disney's more recent focus on personalization and interactivity, casting visitors as "recruits" to the Avengers cause.

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<sup>280</sup> The Valley of Mo'ara of Pandora – The World of Avatar is not named in the film. In fact, the floating mountains that are the centerpiece of the land's visual landscape are referred to in the script as the "Hallelujah Mountains."

Ultimately, by analyzing film-based lands at the Disneyland Resort, I trace a variety of approaches to immersion in larger and more complex ambient spaces that complement the previous chapter's analysis of individual attractions. The case studies here exhibit a historical trajectory toward increasing realism, story world fidelity and integrity, personalization, and interactivity. From Mickey's Toontown through Avengers Campus, we can see how, on a macro scale, Disney has moved away from the early genre-based lands and toward specific film-based lands that emphasize original-location-based geographical storytelling that focuses on the visitor as the centerpiece for—and primary actor within—the narrative. In this way, we can see how, through the lands that define their park spaces, Disney Parks are increasingly becoming media parks.

### **“It’s a Brand New Land!”: Hybrid Animated Space in Mickey's Toontown**

Say, have you ever wondered what it would be like to visit the cartoon town where Mickey, Minnie, Donald, and Goofy live? Well, in just a few moments you can find out for yourself, because our next stop is Toontown Depot—official train station for Mickey's Toontown!  
—Disneyland Railroad Announcer

Opening in 1993, Mickey's Toontown was Disney's first step in a larger trend of building lands based in a film (or film franchise) world at the Disneyland Resort.<sup>281</sup> As an all-encompassing environment that sought to recreate specific screen spaces and whose concept was inspired by a single film—*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)—Toontown was different from previous park lands like Tomorrowland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Adventureland, and Main Street U.S.A. As mentioned above, the original park lands as built in 1955 were, in part, related to broad genre and production categories like Disney's animated fantasies or the Western genre,

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<sup>281</sup> For the epigraph above, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afFzKVg-Y9M>.

even when they were intimately tied to specific existing or emerging films or television productions like *Davy Crockett*. These lands were film-based in that they were themed according to film genres and production categories as well as in the ways in which they were conceived of and crafted by filmmakers using filmmaking techniques. However, they did not recreate specific story worlds, but rather broader cinematic motifs, modes, and tropes.

Subsequent additions to the park, including New Orleans Square, which opened in 1966 as a “replica of the Crescent City as it appeared in the 1850s,” or Bear Country, the park’s “seventh themed land” that was designed as a “lighthearted re-creation of the Great Northwest,” were centered on themes that evoked geographical and temporal locations, rather than films or genres.<sup>282</sup> Bear Country was even situated in the Northwestern portion of the park, mirroring the real geographical placement of its source landscapes.<sup>283</sup> These lands did not reflect cinematic story worlds, even when attractions contained within, such as Critter Country’s 1989 *Song of the South*-based attraction Splash Mountain, did.<sup>284</sup> Though Disney began to pivot away from these real-world spatiotemporally-themed lands in Anaheim with Mickey’s Toontown, this concept was revisited in 2001, with the construction of Disney California Adventure, an entire park laid out as a conceptual map of California’s geographical and historical landscapes. However, this strategy ultimately did not pan out, and Disney soon began re-theming spaces in DCA based on films and franchises, taking up the strategy pioneered by Mickey’s Toontown and other similar spaces.

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<sup>282</sup> William McPhillips, “Mayor of Real New Orleans Praises Disneyland Replica,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1966. ProQuest; “Bear Country Coming to Disneyland,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1971. ProQuest.

<sup>283</sup> “Bear Country Coming to Disneyland.”

<sup>284</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Splash Mountain, see Sperb, *Disney's Most Notorious Film*.



Mickey's Toontown at Disneyland had important precedents in Walt Disney World, Florida.<sup>285</sup> In 1988, Mickey's Birthdayland opened at the Magic Kingdom as the first (and to-date only) newly added land in the park. Constructed in commemoration of Mickey Mouse's 60th "birthday," the land included Granny Duck's Farm (a petting zoo), a "Mousekemaze," and Mickey's House, a meet-and-greet space that foreshadowed important architectural features of Disneyland's eventual Toontown.<sup>286</sup> Mickey's Birthdayland was not overtly connected to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, though it opened the same year as the film's theatrical release and was similarly imagined as a cartoon realm. It was instead stylized as Duckburg, a fictional town that was the home of Donald Duck and his family and friends, seen in Disney comics and cartoons dating back at least to the 1940s.<sup>287</sup> Mickey's Birthdayland was renamed Mickey's Starland in 1990.<sup>288</sup> At this time, Disney also proposed plans for expansions to its Anaheim park, which included a sister version of Mickey's Starland that would eventually become Mickey's Toontown.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> These include never-realized plans for a "Roger Rabbit's Hollywood" land at Disney-MGM Studios in Florida. According to a New York Times article, "This will be a kind of Toontown, where - as in the movie - only cartoon characters may live. Visitors will meet the movie's eponymous cartoon hero, ride a Toontown trolley rocked by flight simulators, hop into Benny the cartoon cab, and careen in overaged Baby Herman's baby buggy through a Toontown hospital." See "Movie Themes at Disney Park," *New York Times*, February 11, 1990, ProQuest.

<sup>286</sup> "Welcome the Newest Land in the Magic Kingdom: Mickey's Birthdayland," *Chicago Tribune*, January 22, 1989. ProQuest.

<sup>287</sup> Duckburg first appeared in the *Donald Duck* story *High Wire Daredevils* in Walt Disney's *Comics and Stories* #144. See "Duckburg," Darkwing Duck Wiki, Fandom, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://darkwingduck.fandom.com/wiki/Duckburg>.

<sup>288</sup> Nate Rasmussen, "Disney Days of Past: Mickey's Birthdayland Becomes Mickey's Starland at Magic Kingdom Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, May 28, 2015, <https://disneyarks.disney.go.com/blog/2015/05/disney-days-of-past-mickeys-birthdayland-becomes-mickeys-starland-at-magic-kingdom-park/>.

<sup>289</sup> Mary Ann Galante, "Disney Proposes \$1-Billion Park: Entertainment: Anaheim and Long Beach are Pitted in Competition for \$1-Billion Plum. A Major Expansion of the 35-Year-Old Original Park Also is in the Works," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-01-13-mn-359-story.html>.

Three years after Disneyland's Mickey's Toontown opened, Mickey's Starland in Florida was again updated in 1996 as Mickey's Toontown Fair. It was marketed as a "new land," timed alongside the park's 25th anniversary.<sup>290</sup> The land included new attractions like Minnie's Country House and the Barnstormer roller coaster at Goofy's Wiseacres Farm.<sup>291</sup> Mickey's Toontown Fair closed in 2011, and its space was reworked as the "Storybook Circus" segment of a major Fantasyland expansion. Some original elements were removed, though others were absorbed into Fantasyland, such as the Barnstormer at Goofy's Wiseacre Farms, which was restyled as "The Great Goofini's Barnstormer," to better fit the area's new circus theme.

While Mickey's Toontown at Disneyland clearly drew on its Florida predecessors, particularly in its direct adoption of specific spatial elements like Mickey's House, the land was also notably "inspired by" *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, as discussed by contemporary journalists. Animation historian Charles Solomon, writing for the *Los Angeles Times* at the time of the land's opening in 1993, remarked that "the 1988 live action/animation hit 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' provided the inspiration for the attraction: Toontown was the community where the animated characters lived when they weren't working in cartoons."<sup>292</sup> As Solomon observed, while a Roger Rabbit ride was to be added to the space later that year, the connection to the film was largely conceptual: "There are few references to specific incidents in 'Roger Rabbit' and none to the non-Disney characters who contributed so much to the film."<sup>293</sup> Visually, Mickey's

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<sup>290</sup> "Walt Disney World is Cooking Up the Most Magical Year Ever," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 15, 1996, ProQuest.

<sup>291</sup> Knight-Ridder Newspapers, "Disney Turns 25 with 15-Month Bash," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 8, 1996, ProQuest.

<sup>292</sup> Charles Solomon, "Loony Toontown Made Just for Kids," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-27-ca-1998-story.html>.

<sup>293</sup> Solomon, "Loony Toontown."

Toontown does not directly replicate what appeared on screen; the architecture depicted in the land is not geographically mappable to that seen in the film. Instead, Mickey's Toontown can best be understood as an adaptation of the film's live-action/animation hybrid form, a cinematic space where humans and cartoons mix and move across a blended real-world and animated environment.

As Disneyland's first land based on a cinematic world, Mickey's Toontown at Disneyland is distinct from both the genre-associated lands of the park's earlier years and the historical and geographically-based additions of the 1960s and 1970s. However, it is also different from the more mimetic and realistic film-based lands that Disney would later focus on, and which comprise the rest of the case studies in this chapter. As such, this section will provide a foundational case study of how visitors relate to screen space in film-based lands that also lays the groundwork for understanding the ways in which this relationship has fundamentally changed in more recent park history. Looking at Toontown's design and architecture reveals how the built animated space of the land, along with its "live-action" visitors, attempts to physically recreate the hybridity of the film. I consider in particular how the space attempts to bridge the gap between worlds, what it looks like when visitors are invited to "enter" cinematic space without the divide of the screen or the boundaries of a ride, and what that does to our experience of these spaces.

### ***Hybrid Animation in Who Framed Roger Rabbit***

The 1988 film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* was notable for its live-action/animated hybrid world, where cartoon figures appear in real-life settings. For much of the film, Roger Rabbit and other toons inhabit 1947 Hollywood. At times, human actors appear in animated environments, as when Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins) visits the toons' animated home of Toontown. Other

spaces play with these distinctions, blurring the boundaries between the cartoon and live-action worlds using animation and special effects. Though such techniques may seem old hat in the age of hyper-realistic CGI, they were groundbreaking at the time. Roger Ebert remarked in his original 1988 review of the film that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* was:

the first film to convincingly combine real actors and animated cartoon characters in the same space in the same time and make it look real. I've never seen anything like it before. Roger Rabbit and his cartoon comrades cast real shadows. They shake the hands and grab the coats and rattle the teeth of real actors. They change size and dimension and perspective as they move through a scene, and the camera isn't locked down in one place to make it easy, either - the camera in this movie moves around like it's in a 1940s thriller - and the cartoon characters look three-dimensional and seem to be occupying real space.<sup>294</sup>

Ebert's review emphasizes the film's realism (he repeats the word "real" five times in this brief passage), which is remarkable specifically because it is accomplished in the creation of a world where toons and humans coexist.

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* plays with this dynamic between the real and the fantastic from the very beginning, as the opening scene establishes the film's destabilization of the boundaries between real life and the animated realm. The film opens with a "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" title card, followed by a cartoon introduction sequence with titles that read "R.K. Maroon Presents A Maroon Cartoon in Color," and "Baby Herman and Roger Rabbit," "in 'Somethin's Cookin.'" These titles set up the expectations for what follows, which is a fairly typical cartoon short where chaos ensues as Roger babysits Baby Herman. The sequence is filled with pratfalls and sight gags, all enabled by exaggerated cartoon physics. The short comes to an end after a refrigerator lands on Roger's head and the director yells "Cut," scolding Roger for having birds circling his delirious head, rather than stars as specified in the script. As the director

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<sup>294</sup> Roger Ebert, "Who Framed Roger Rabbit," RogerEbert.com, originally published June 22, 1988, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/who-framed-roger-rabbit-1988>.

approaches the toon actors and the camera pulls back, the toon kitchen environment is revealed to be a “real” set as we transition between the wholly animated world of Roger’s short and the hybrid world of the film, where the toon spaces are simultaneously physically built sets on a soundstage. The transition occurs in a hidden cut, where a closeup of the animated white door of the refrigerator pulls back as the animated door opens to reveal a “real” interior, complete with physical, though cartoon-style, props. Roger, birds, and Baby Herman—still animated—now appear to be the only cartoon elements in an otherwise real, though still cartoon-like in style, physical environment.

This reveal immediately calls into question the spaces of the previous cartoon short, whose extreme and ever-changing proportions suggest not just an exaggerated space, but an impossible one. With this opening, the boundaries between “real” and fictional animated space are established as plastic in the world of the film. This continues throughout the film’s duration, where visual effects destabilize real and animated space as disparate dimensions, textures, and physics are combined to present a world where human and cartoon experience and perception coexist and coalesce.

Even the characters themselves complicate the distinctions between toon and human. At the film’s climax, it is revealed that the film’s villain, the maniacal Judge Doom, played by Christopher Lloyd, is actually a toon himself. Leading up to this reveal, Eddie performs a vaudeville-esque comedic routine to cause Doom’s weasel henchmen to “laugh themselves to death.” This routine plays with the boundary between toon and real, as Eddie takes a series of standard cartoon pratfalls, like dropping spherical cast iron ACME bombs on his head and being electrocuted by a ceiling lamp. These props all appear to be “real,” physical, i.e., not cartoon, objects. Whereas any one of these things would realistically cause serious injury, this scene

operates according to cartoon logic, as the heavy objects and electrocution do not appear to significantly hurt Eddie. Cartoon physics are also evident as Eddie bounces dozens of feet in the air on a pogo stick, defying real-world gravity.

The boundaries between the cartoon and real physics, however, appear to be unstable. After defeating the weasels, Eddie must fight Doom to save Roger and Jessica Rabbit, who are suspended above a vat of toon-killing “Dip.”<sup>295</sup> In this sequence, Eddie turns to actual animated cartoon props, including the Acme Singing Sword, which proves to be an ineffective weapon as it simply croons Frank Sinatra tunes, and an oversized Acme Super Strength Magnet. When Eddie becomes pinned between the cartoon magnet and a real-life steel drum, he uses an Acme Portable Hole on the magnet to allow his escape. Where many of the “real-life” props proved nonthreatening, as they failed to injure Eddie, the cartoon props seemed all-too-real, strictly adhering to real-life physical laws.

The final twist occurs when Judge Doom is completely flattened by a steamroller, only to slowly re-inflate as he reveals himself to be the very toon that killed Eddie’s younger brother Teddy. As he returns to three-dimensionality, Doom’s eyes pop out, exposing his blood-red cartoon eyes. Here, animation and live-action are blended in a single character: Doom’s eyes bulge and even transform into daggers to punctuate his words. His voice, too, transforms into the high-pitched screech that has haunted Eddie’s memories since his brother’s traumatic death. Doom’s body further transforms as cartoon springs emerge from his shoes and he removes a glove to reveal an anvil—and then a circular saw—in place of a hand. With his part-real, part-toon body, Doom uses his saw hand to cut through objects around him, including a real-life steel chain and some wooden debris. Eddie ultimately defeats Doom by using a toon boxing glove

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<sup>295</sup> The “Dip” is said in the film to be made of turpentine, acetone, and benzene, which all act as paint thinners.

mallet to open the Dip valve. As Doom melts into the pool of Dip, his eyes and voice are his only animated aspects—his whole toon form is never revealed.

In playing with the contours and elastic boundaries between live-action and animated space, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* evokes longstanding issues at the heart of what J.P. Telotte identifies as the “conflicted attitude toward spatial representation [that] has always been a part of our animated films.”<sup>296</sup> Part of this, Telotte suggests, has to do with the nature of animated films, whose

essential flatness has consistently evoked the specter of depth and spatial presence—or underscored, even capitalized on, the almost necessary absence of those characteristics. And in the process it has also inspired a consistent debate about their relationship to our traditions of realistic representation, and thus about the proper aim and province of animation and cartooning.<sup>297</sup>

As a result of this conflict, Telotte describes opposing perspectives on animation, one of which “sees animated film as finding its aesthetic maturity in an increasingly realistic, three-dimensional vision,” while the other, “comes to see this vision as working against the subversive potential of its essential flatness.”<sup>298</sup> As Telotte argues, both of these views “fundamentally mentally proceed from a vision that wants to simplify the complex space—and potential—of animation, on the one hand by offering a model of historical evolution, one in which, for example, greater depth equals better animation, and on the other by resorting to an essentialist view, wherein real animation equals flatness.”<sup>299</sup> Instead, Telotte suggests that cartoons are effective

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<sup>296</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 9.

<sup>297</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 9.

<sup>298</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 14.

<sup>299</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 14.

not because they either closely approach or radically distance themselves from the real, from the world in which their audiences live, but because they seem to be alive, and living within a kind of parallel universe that has its own curious design and operates according to its own laws, even if that universe roughly resembles and thus inevitably manages to comment on our own.<sup>300</sup>

The result is an in-betweenness, “an animating space that always seems to point in the direction of both a real space and a fantastic space (or dimensional and flat worlds), but which is neither.”<sup>301</sup> It is not because they are either close to or drastically far from the viewer’s world, but because they offer an alternative world to our own that is still analogous to it that these spaces are effective and affecting. The both-but-neither characteristic Telotte identifies in animated space is evoked by the story world of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, which quite literally offers a vision of an environment where toon and human characters and experiences combine, whose spaces and physics are fantastic, but also recognizable.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 14.

<sup>301</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 15.

<sup>302</sup> This kind of spatial play, between our human world and the animated world of cartoons, is central to a separate series of Roger Rabbit shorts. Following the release of the film in 1988, three additional Roger Rabbit shorts were released as accompaniments to theatrical films: Tummy Trouble (1989) accompanied Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989), Roller Coaster Rabbit (1990) accompanied Dick Tracy (1990), and Trail Mix-Up (1993) accompanied A Far Off Place (1993). These shorts continued the conceit that Roger and his toon cohorts are “real” actors and that the cartoons we see are shot like movies. Trail Mix-Up, for example, begins like a classic cartoon, but ends by breaking the fourth wall. The final scene finds Baby Herman atop a boulder atop Roger Rabbit, a log, and some forest animals plugging the “Old Predictable Geyser.” The geyser erupts and a voice yells “Cut! Cut!” as the camera pulls back, revealing the production set, and pans up to show how the toons have blown through the roof of the studio. The subsequent shot shows the toons soaring over a photorealistic-looking Hollywood sign, across the earth, and into South Dakota, where they collide with the face of Mount Rushmore. As the toons approach, realistic-looking footage of the actual Mount Rushmore is overlaid with animation, as the photorealistic faces come to life, screaming at the impending impact. As the toons collide with the mountain, the shot cuts to a real-life sculpted model of the cartoon mountain faces, which explodes on impact. The combination of animation, realistic images of actual landmarks, and real-life footage of the sculpted animation blurs the boundaries between worlds, suggesting that the fictional animated and the real photographic are in fact part of the same reality. In the short’s final moments, Roger Rabbit plants a flag in the ground, puncturing it. As the camera pulls back to a view from space, the animated planet spins and deflates like a popped balloon. Like the feature film, the final scenes of this short suggest an alternate space, where our live-action real world and the animated world of the toons are one in the same.



One scene in the film self-reflexively draws attention to our spectatorial relationship to this hybrid space by explicitly visualizing the spectatorial process. This scene calls into question our own relationship to the screen and its worlds. Midway through the film, Eddie finds Roger (who is supposed to be hiding out) in a movie theater which is showing the 1949 cartoon short “Goofy Gymnastics.” Like the film’s opening, this scene begins with the cartoon nearly full screen (though the proscenium framework of the movie screen and its curtains are visible on the sides of the frame). This cuts to an aerial shot of the all-human audience. The camera tilts up to the movie screen, with Goofy’s antics still playing, after which the back of Roger’s head and ears rise, unfocused, in the foreground. Roger’s hands seem to blur the boundaries. His left hand, which holds a carton of popcorn, looks to be the work of puppetry while the right appears animated. In the following shot, Roger is entirely animated, though the popcorn still appears to be a practical prop. The scene is another example of the film’s fluid spatial boundaries, where not only is a toon shown integrated into a “real world” space, but the toon himself appears to be a blend of real and animated effects.

Moreover, in addition to the clever special effects used to place Roger in a physical theater, this scene also enfolds our (i.e., the audience of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*) “real world” into the film’s “real” world as a blended live-action/animated space. As we saw in the film’s opening, in the screen world of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, the animated world of cartoon shorts and features is part of the same reality as the so-called “real” world: the toons are actors with props on a set. Roger praises Goofy’s performance in the short as though he were an actor: “What timing! What finesse! What a genius!” Of course, the short shown in this scene, *Goofy Gymnastics*, is a famous classic Disney short, released by RKO Radio Pictures in 1949, that has been exhibited many times over the years, including on television and via home video. As a part

of “our world,” but shown also to be a part of the film’s world, the short’s presence in the film suggests that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*’s hybrid screen world is the same as our own. This is, ultimately, the central project of Mickey’s Toontown.

### ***Hybrid Space in Mickey’s Toontown***

J.P. Telotte argues that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* itself is “fundamentally about spatial change,” with a “narrative that, appropriately, is spatially arranged around the division between the real world and the animated one, the worlds of people and of ‘Toons.’”<sup>303</sup> Telotte observes how the film ultimately “offers a hopeful vision of the possibility of integrating its very different spaces, ending, in fact, with the destruction of a wall between the human and ‘Toon’ realms.”<sup>304</sup> Mickey’s Toontown at Disneyland takes on the project of building that integrated space. If Mickey’s Toontown itself is meant to replicate the all-animated space of the film’s Toontown, the interplay between the architecture, animatronics, and living human visitors creates the world of the film itself, where human, toon, and their respective realities intermix. In other words, Mickey’s Toontown physically realizes the film’s vision of spatial integration in a way the screen can only approximate.

The town is spatially divided between Downtown Toontown to the east and Mickey’s Neighborhood to the west. Downtown Toontown is filled with densely packed storefronts like the Gag Factory and the Toontown Five and Dime, which are actual retail spaces, as well as blind façades, like the Clock Repair or Camera shops, which cannot be entered. Other spaces, like the Dog Pound or Toontown Post Office, have interiors that are open for visitors to explore. The eastern portion of Downtown Toontown is also home to the Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin

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<sup>303</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 21.

<sup>304</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 21.

attraction, while the western portion contains Mickey's Neighborhood as well as a small food court, with quick-service restaurants themed to different toons. Mickey's Neighborhood is less dense, instead resembling a more sprawling suburban space. Characters' homes are arranged around a central fountain, and include Mickey's House, Minnie's House, Donald's Boat, and Goofy's Playhouse. Set a short distance back are Gadget's Go Coaster, a junior roller coaster attraction inspired by the Disney animated television series *Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers*, and Chip 'n Dale Treehouse. This spatial arrangement gives a sense that Toontown is a real lived-in space, where toons can go about their daily lives, from their quiet neighborhood to the bustle of downtown, with its shops, restaurants, and even infrastructure.

Karal Ann Marling remarks that "Mickey's Toontown was an effort to rethink the relationship between architecture and fantasy, between animation and the theme park."<sup>305</sup> However, it is not just the architecture, but the presence of the visitor that calls this relationship into question. In Mickey's Toontown, the tension between human and toon—between real and animated—becomes a site of pleasure and play between visitor and built space. Where *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* combined traditional hand-drawn animation and live-action film to achieve the hybrid world of the humans and toons, the hybrid world of Mickey's Toontown is primarily a result of the combination of human visitors and stylized architecture and set decoration. If the built space is intended to be animated, visitors are the "live-action" characters in it. Mickey's Toontown accommodates this as it is, like the animated world in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, mostly scaled to human-size. This means that some adjustments in scale were made for architectural elements like Mickey and Minnie's houses, which accommodate the

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<sup>305</sup> Marling, "Imagineering," 129-130.

human-sized versions of the characters played by actors in costumes in the parks.<sup>306</sup> The Chip 'n Dale Treehouse is rendered not in chipmunk-size, but as though the duo were of average human height.

In part, we can look to early Fantasyland as a precedent for this kind of combined animated and realistic space. An original park land since Disneyland's opening in 1955, Fantasyland was the location for rides and attractions based on Disney's catalog of animated films. In its earliest days, the show buildings that housed rides like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride and Peter Pan Flight were styled like medieval tournament tents. Their façades were planar and geometric, with bright colors reminiscent of contemporary Disney animated feature films and the styles of Disney artists like Eyvind Earle and Mary Blair. This is unsurprising because "animators and artists, still employed by the studio arm of Disney, pitched in with the painting and final staging of Fantasyland dark rides."<sup>307</sup> These façades, along with the brightly colored exterior portions of attractions like Alice in Wonderland, the Mad Tea Party, Casey Jr. Circus Train, and even the Chicken of the Sea Pirate Ship and Restaurant, recalled the general aesthetic of Disney's animated films as a genre, rather than a single unified film world. In 1983, with the "New Fantasyland" renovation, the animated exteriors were renovated and transformed into a European village, where each attraction's exterior architecture reflects the settings of the stories told within: from the English style of the clocktower exterior of Peter Pan's Flight and the stonework of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride's Toad Hall, to the wood-framed Bavarian village façades of

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<sup>306</sup> Actors playing costumed Mickey and Minnie in the parks must be between 4'8" and 5'2", while actors playing Chip and Dale are generally required to be between 5'2" and 5'4" in height. Donald and Daisy Duck must be shorter at 4'6" to 4'10", while Goofy is among the tallest of the masked characters with a 6'0" to 6'3" range.

<sup>307</sup> Todd James Pierce, *Three Years in Wonderland: The Disney Brothers, C. V. Wood, and the Making of the Great American Theme Park* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2016), 187.

the Snow White and Pinocchio attractions.<sup>308</sup> This new exterior design scheme, with its realistic faux rock and wood textures, references to real-world architectural conventions, and more muted color palettes, bridges our real world with the animated worlds contained within. However, with this new realism, the sense of an all-encompassing animated environment receded, until Mickey's Toontown opened a decade later.

Mickey's Toontown is characterized by its exaggerated architecture and bright colors. The buildings appear to bulge and swell, their curvilinear forms suggesting a rhythmic bouncing, and providing a sense of kinetic energy despite their static construction (i.e., the buildings do not actually move). Visual gags and references to classic cartoon tropes abound, such as the tableau in front of the Safe Company façade, where a cartoon safe has apparently fallen from the rope and pulley above into the now crushed street below. A yellow warning sign on the nearby lamppost declares it a "Falling Safe Zone," and clearly the "Safe Company" is not quite safe. Disney's own rhetoric emphasizes the kinetic novelty of Toontown's architectural style, as a souvenir book from 1995 notes how: "Designed as the home of cartoondom's brightest stars, it comprises a collection of bulbous, topsy-turvy buildings never seen outside a comic strip or an animated cartoon."<sup>309</sup> An Imagineer is quoted in the book as stating that "No one has ever built buildings that look fat and inflated with air with no right angles. In many cases our drawings and character elevations and the structures holding them up had very little to do with each other."<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Erin Glover, "Sixty Years of Innovation: New Fantasyland at Disneyland Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, May 13, 2015, <https://disneyarks.disney.go.com/blog/2015/05/sixty-years-of-innovation-new-fantasyland-at-disneyland-park/>.

<sup>309</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions*, 34.

<sup>310</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions*, 34.

Stylistically, Mickey's Toontown is reminiscent of the aesthetic of early animation, rather than the contemporary animated styles of the 1990s, when the land was built. Jessica Seigel, writing for the *Chicago Tribune* at the time of Toontown's opening, referred to the land's "new school of architecture" as "Joke Modern." She notes that "the roots for Joke Modern can be found in the 1930s cartoons where Mickey Mouse made his debut for Walt Disney. There are no straight lines or angles. The modest bungalows painted in vivid purple, blue and yellow are built to lean. The hills in the distance are a rolling backdrop of pale green cutouts."<sup>311</sup> Charles Solomon, however, points out that, "ironically, the general look of Toontown is closer to some of the rival Fleischer studio's cartoons of the early '30s than to Disney's 'Silly Symphonies,' which boasted a more subdued palette and elegant styling."<sup>312</sup>

Mickey's Toontown, with its dynamic forms and kaleidoscopic palette, recalls the Toontown visualized in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Although the film contains few shots of its Downtown Toontown, the buildings in these appear to be characters in and of themselves. With windows for eyes and awnings and other architectural details for noses and mustaches (one building even wears actual glasses), the film's buildings move, blink, and make facial expressions. The architectural forms of the buildings in Mickey's Toontown, while they do not appear to have actual cartoon eyes, suggest movement, if not facial expressions. The façade to the right of the entrance to the Five and Dime recalls a face, its two upper windows suggest eyes, with brick window lintel eyebrows and awning eyelids, while the lower semicircular window suggest a mouth and, perhaps, a mustache.

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<sup>311</sup> Jessica Seigel, "Mickey's Toontown: It's All-and We Mean All-So Silly in Disneyland's Newest Neighborhood," *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1993, ProQuest.

<sup>312</sup> Solomon, "Loony Toontown."

The architectural and other physical elements of the land were not meant to be static, but rather were “designed to encourage interaction with guests.”<sup>313</sup> When visitors push the TNT detonator outside the Fireworks Factory, it either results in a dud or triggers an explosion in the nearby Factory, indicated by sounds, lights, and smoke effects. Next to Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin, several crates make different sounds when opened; opening the crate labeled for delivery to Clarabelle’s Yogurt Shop causes it to moo. The lobby of the Toontown Post Office contains P.O. Boxes for some of Toontown’s residents; turning the knobs on each box plays audio of its owner. A musical fountain near the characters’ houses may be activated by standing on medallions engraved with different cartoon instruments, which causes audio of that instrument to play. As Karal Ann Marling observes, “Despite the opportunity to have kids’ photos taken with Mickey, Toontown was the show, the entertainment, the thing people came to see.”<sup>314</sup> The interactive elements built into the land bear this out.

Some parts of Toontown, including these interactive elements, were designed to suggest not only the appearance of a cartoon world, but its physics. Several of the seemingly fixed bars in Toontown’s “Dog Pound” are in fact rubbery, inviting visitors to manipulate them as they stand inside or pose for pictures in “jail.” The bars’ malleability suggests the kind of cartoon physics of an animated world, where the forms of apparently solid objects can distort. This is reminiscent of visual gags in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and the cartoons on which it draws. The cartoon subversion of normal reality and its physics is similarly suggested by the population sign atop the land’s entrance. An ever-changing nonsensical mixture of numbers, pictures, and punctuation marks, the sign suggests an absurd reality different from our own.

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<sup>313</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions*, 34.

<sup>314</sup> Marling, “Imagineering,” 130.

Toontown's attractions similarly operate in a live-action/animated hybrid mode that suggests the subversion of normal physical laws. The now defunct Jolly Trolley, which operated from 1993 to 2003, epitomizes how Toontown manifests cartoon physical movements. Running along a track that loops around the length of Toontown, from Downtown Toontown to Mickey's Neighborhood, the Jolly Trolley's movements reflected its animated milieu. The Trolley was not level like a standard trolley or train. Instead, it undulated on multiple axes as it moved along the curvilinear tracks that snaked through Toontown. Its animated movement reflected the movements of classic cartoons like those referenced in the Toontown of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and its earlier precedents.<sup>315</sup> Wobbly and bouncy like classic Silly Symphonies, it allowed riders to feel the movement of the cartoons, recalling Marling's observation that "Mickey's Toontown was made to be seen in motion."<sup>316</sup> Running through the center of Toontown, the Jolly Trolley offered a central visual representation of the kind of animated movement in space suggested by the buildings in Toontown and visualized in the film; the Trolley enacted the motion suggested by the static architecture.

Opening in 1994, the Roger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin dark ride takes riders, seated in their very own cartoon cab (Benny's cousin Lenny), through a series of spaces reminiscent of both the animated Toontown of the film and the physical Mickey's Toontown of Disneyland as they follow Roger and Benny's efforts to stop the Toon Patrol weasels from "dipping" the city of Toontown while also rescuing Jessica Rabbit from her musteline kidnappers. This narrative framing is established primarily in the ride's queue and opening scene. The queue is elaborately

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<sup>315</sup> This is particularly apparent in the sequence where Eddie drives through the animated landscape leading into Toontown in the film.

<sup>316</sup> Marling, "Imagineering," 130.



detailed and far longer than that of Disney's earlier dark rides, reflecting broader developments in immersive queue-based storytelling and world-building, as discussed in Chapter One. A series of rooms and vignettes use visual and auditory elements to communicate the story to visitors before they even load onto the ride, as they pass by Baby Herman listening to a radio broadcast announcing that the weasels are on the loose. Visitors go on to move through the weasels' secret hideout and dip production area, where the villains can be heard plotting to trap Roger. By doing the narrative heavy lifting, the queue leaves the kinetic portion of the ride to simulate the feeling of being a toon, complete with cartoon physics.

Though it appears to be a traditional dark ride, Roger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin is unique in the way it combines the dark ride format with the spinning mechanisms of the teacups in Fantasyland's Mad Tea Party attraction. The "steering wheel" in each cab ride vehicle is a rotating mechanism that allows riders to spin their vehicles in a full three hundred sixty degrees of motion.<sup>317</sup> Though the track prescribes their movement through the scenes, the perspective within these scenes is controlled by the riders, who may spin their vehicle at will. The spinning of the ride further animates riders within its animated space, as the cartoon cabs move riders through the cartoon scenes in a way that challenges traditional modes of movement, as riders are whirled and spun through the toon environments.

This added element of being "out-of-control" mirrors the progression of scenes in the ride, which emphasize a sense of cartoon zaniness, inside ever-more-wacky environments and situations, over narrative coherence. Riders spin through the streets and alleys of Toontown, the Bullina China Shoppe, and the Power House power plant. As Roger is electrocuted in the power

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<sup>317</sup> The idea of allowing riders to control the direction the car faces in a dark ride was used again in Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, though ride vehicles there are controlled by a joystick. That ride built on this concept by adding interactive laser guns as well.

plant, an explosion apparently causes riders to be blasted into the sky. Spinning cartoon arches suggest the cognitive effects of this explosion on the riders (much like the birds—not stars—that spin above Roger’s head in the film’s opening). The following scenes imply that the explosion has shot riders into the sky; as they move through these scenes, riders appear, despite their lateral movement, to fall “downward” amongst clouds and cartoon skyscrapers (including New York’s Empire State and Chrysler Buildings), and then “down” through the winding stairwell of one of the buildings. After a spatially impossible transitional space reminiscent of M.C. Escher’s *Relativity*, riders then pivot back to the planar ground level and into the Gag Warehouse, where a final showdown between Jessica, Roger, and the weasels is taking place. Riders are nearly sprayed with Dip, the threat of which implies that riders are, themselves, toons, as Dip in the film is shown to have no effect on humans. Roger, however, saves the day with a Portable Hole that allows riders to escape through the wall. A title card reading “The End” on the final doors back to the loading area suggest that riders have just been in their own Roger Rabbit cartoon. The ride thus continues the land’s project of allowing visitors to inhabit a hybrid animated space, while framing them as participants in the narrative. The ride’s spatial design and transportation mechanisms simulate the physical sensations of inhabiting a world that is part “real”—as embodied by the human visitors—and part toon.

Gadget’s Go Coaster, the only ride present when Mickey’s Toontown originally opened in 1993, likewise simulates a toon experience, though perhaps in a less sophisticated way. Inspired by the Disney Afternoon television series *Chip ’n Dale: Rescue Rangers*, the ride is styled as one of Gadget Hackwrench’s inventions, seemingly built using miscellaneous found objects. Set decoration, including oversized buttons, popsicle sticks, acorns, and straws, imply

that visitors are tiny, inviting them to see from Gadget’s “mouse-size point of view.”<sup>318</sup> Though neither as environmentally immersive nor narratively complex as Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin, Gadget’s Go Coaster nevertheless puts visitors into the role of a Rescue Ranger embarking on a miniature cartoon adventure.

Other Toontown attractions like the characters’ houses similarly suggest ways of inhabiting the space that subvert the limitations of the “real world.” In part, they enliven Toontown by suggesting that toons actually live there. Of course, unlike the animated Toontown of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, practical limitations preclude the population of the physical Toontown with a multitude of characters. Mickey’s Toontown is instead primarily occupied by visitors, who outnumber toons on any given day. It is the visitors’ physical presence that creates the hybrid animated/live-action world of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. The toons, on the other hand, are present primarily via their voices, which can be heard throughout the land, as stationary images in windows, as animatronics on the rides, or as “head characters,” i.e. human actors in head-to-toe costumes (although logistics necessarily limit the latter category).<sup>319</sup> That toons actually inhabit Mickey’s Toontown is also suggested by their houses, which likewise indicate the ways in which Toontown’s spaces are inhabited by its animated denizens.

Goofy’s Bounce House, Donald’s Boat, and Chip ’n Dale Treehouse provide areas for visitor free play but also suggest the presence of their inhabitants by evoking their personalities. Like the rest of Toontown, these buildings are brightly colored and seem to defy both normal physics and architectural principles. Goofy’s Bounce House, with its oblique angles and apparent

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<sup>318</sup> “Gadget’s Go Coaster,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/attractions/disneyland/gadgets-go-coaster/>.

<sup>319</sup> “Head characters” are those who wear full, face-covering costumes, as opposed to “face characters” like Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, or Mary Poppins, whose faces can be seen by visitors.

lack of structural integrity, originally functioned as a bounce house with padded walls and inflatable furniture, encouraging children to break out of normal sensations of gravity, to be extra silly like Goofy by bouncing around like a toon.<sup>320</sup> Donald's Boat—the Miss Daisy—and the Chip 'n Dale Treehouse proclaim their character owners' presence as well, while providing a glimpse into their supposed home lives. The surfaces and proportions of these spaces recall their cartoon inspiration, while their physical, three-dimensional nature translates them into the “real world,” for visitors to touch and through which they can move their bodies.

Mickey's House and Minnie's House similarly allow visitors to explore the cartoon worlds of their inhabitants. Both also provide permanent spaces to meet the “real” Mickey and Minnie in the form of costumed actors. These attractions each consist of a self-guided tour of the resident's home followed by an optional character meet-and-greet photo and autograph opportunity. The interiors of the houses are designed, like the rest of Toontown, using exaggerated proportions, bright colors, and bulging curvilinear forms. Props and three-dimensional cartoon furniture fill out the spaces and can be touched and climbed on—visitors can sit at Mickey's desk, open Minnie's refrigerator, or sit on Pluto's dog bed in Mickey's House. Much of the pleasure here, as with the rest of Toontown, is in physically inhabiting these three-dimensional cartoon spaces—here on a more intimate interior scale.

The second half of the walkthrough through Mickey's House suggests his career as an actor, recalling *Who Framed Roger Rabbit's* premise, where toons are actors and the films and shorts we see are their work. Continuing on the path through Mickey's House takes visitors through Mickey's Movie Barn, which is filled with various props, costumes, and backdrops.

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<sup>320</sup> Intended exclusively for children, the attraction originally had a maximum, rather than a minimum, height limit. The attraction has since been revamped as Goofy's Playhouse, without the bounce features.

Visitors are led through Mickey's Screening Room, a space where Mickey presumably exhibits his film footage and where visitors can view several old shorts featuring Mickey and the gang. An adjacent storage room is lined with cartoon-looking film reels of Mickey cartoons. Finally, visitors enter another room where they are invited to meet the costumed Mickey character.<sup>321</sup> The character's presence here, in a permanent location styled as his home, reinforces the premise that Toontown is a residential space for its toon denizens. Moreover, the meet-and-greet interaction itself parallels the hybrid scenes from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, where live-action actors (here visitors to Disneyland) encounter "real" toons.

### ***Stepping Into the Movie Screen: Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway***

The upcoming Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway attraction even more explicitly addresses Toontown's hybrid nature.<sup>322</sup> Runaway Railway takes Toontown's transgression of the boundaries of live-action/animated worlds as its subject. To be located in the "El Capitoon Theater" (modeled on Disney-owned El Capitan Theater in Hollywood), the Runaway Railway is a trackless dark ride that takes riders through a series of spaces whose set design is reminiscent of the animation style of contemporary Mickey Mouse short cartoons airing on the Disney Channel.<sup>323</sup> Like Roger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin, and as a dark ride based on an animated source,

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<sup>321</sup> Meet and greets for Minnie are held outside in her backyard.

<sup>322</sup> Originally slated to open in 2022, the attraction's opening date has been pushed to 2023 due to the pandemic and will coincide with a land-wide renovation of Mickey's Toontown. However, a sister version of the ride opened at Walt Disney World's Disney's Hollywood Studios park in March 2020. This analysis is based on reports, photographs, and video footage of that ride. While some elements (such as the attraction's exterior facade) will be different, recent sister attractions and lands, like those in Galaxy's Edge, suggest that, in essence, the rides will largely be identical.

<sup>323</sup> According to Attractions Magazine, "the art director, composer, and supervising director of the shorts at Disney Television Animation" worked on the attraction. See "Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway is replacing Great Movie Ride at Disney's Hollywood Studios," *Attractions Magazine*, July 15, 2017, <https://attractionsmagazine.com/mickey-minnies-runaway-railway-replacing-great-movie-ride-disneys-hollywood-studios/>.

this ride clearly draws on some of the park's earliest Fantasyland attractions, such as Peter Pan's Flight and Alice in Wonderland. Arguably, even for those rides, the visitor's presence in the animated sets also create a kind of hybrid space, where live-action riders enter entirely animated story worlds. In the Fantasyland rides, however, riders were often intended to *become* the animated characters themselves. As such, the relationship between the real and the animated was elided, rather than overtly addressed. Runaway Railway, however, is quite different in the way in which it self-reflexively attends to the idea of hybrid space, where live-action and cartoon worlds confront and commingle with one another.

This conceptual foundation was foregrounded by Disney officials in their discourse surrounding the new attraction. At Disney's D23 Expo in 2017, where the ride was first publicly announced, Imagineer Kevin Rafferty proclaimed that,

no human being has ever been able to literally step through the movie screen and join Mickey and his friends in their animated world...until now. In Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway, you'll get to ride inside the wacky and unpredictable world of a Mickey Mouse cartoon short. Think of it as your own fish-out-of-water story in which you're the star and anything can happen.<sup>324</sup>

This is accomplished using what Disney is calling "2 1/2 D" technology, which "turn[s] the flat world of a colorful cartoon short into a 'dimensional display of amazingness,' using advanced projections to bring the 'flat not-flat' world of the cartoons to life without the need for 3-D glasses."<sup>325</sup> This discourse associates the ride's excitement and innovation with the interplay between our 3-D world and the 2-D world of the toons.

Runaway Railway takes the relationship between animated and "real" space as the subject of the ride itself. Looking at the already-open Florida version of the ride, in the ride's

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<sup>324</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8BTPJ9Yp0I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8BTPJ9Yp0I).

<sup>325</sup> "Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway."

queue pre-show, visitors view a contemporary Mickey Mouse short titled “Perfect Picnic.” In it, Mickey, Minnie, and Pluto head out for a picnic day in the country. Along their drive, they encounter Engineer Goofy, who is driving a train when a mishap causes an explosion at the “Runamuck Railroad” station. The onscreen explosion appears to rend a hole in the very surface of the movie screen, as animated and real-life smoke billows and the edges of the screen curl. The animated Goofy then speaks directly to the audience: “Oh, hiya folks! Wanna take a ride on the train?” The cartoon Goofy then asks the “real” cast member standing by: “Do you mind helping these good people into the cartoon here while I fix this here lo-key-motive?”<sup>326</sup> This leads to, as Kevin Rafferty teased at the D23 announcement of the ride, the “one magical moment when you get to step into the movie screen and onto Goofy’s train.”<sup>327</sup> Riders do just that, stepping through the literal hole in the screen as they proceed to the loading area for the ride.

Runaway Railway’s ride environments make use of traditional physical decoration and practical effects combined with advanced projection-based special effects. Through this, two-dimensional surfaces are made to appear three-dimensional, while three-dimensional animatronics are given a two-dimensional effect. Conflating the 2-D and 3-D realms, the characters in the rides appear both as flat projections and as animatronic figures. One moment in the ride takes visitors from an underwater scene on a flat screen to a visually similar but now physically constructed underwater scene. By blurring the boundaries between the two- and the three-dimensional, the ride’s effects help to bridge the cartoon world of the animated characters with the physical reality of the riders.

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<sup>326</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjvKxrX\\_WNU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjvKxrX_WNU).

<sup>327</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8BTPJ9Yp0I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8BTPJ9Yp0I).

Similarly, the ride’s trackless nature conveys a sense of freedom of movement. Unlike traditional dark rides, which are constrained to a visible track, Runaway Railway plainly subverts such a restrictive framework early in the ride, when Goofy, driving the engine car, becomes separated from the rest of the train car ride vehicles. After this point, each car glides separately through the ride spaces, free of the linear restrictions of a track. Trackless movement is overtly emphasized in parts of the ride; when Daisy Duck instructs riders to first waltz and then conga through her dance studio, the ride vehicles oblige by dancing through the room.

As riders leave the ride through the burst screen they originally entered through, the wall is styled as a “The End” title card, signaling that, like on Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin, riders are leaving the cartoon world. The text and logos appear in reverse as riders approach it, as though viewed from “inside” the screen. Looking back after passing through, the text reads correctly—visitors are now back in the “real world.” The “real world” they will find themselves in, however, is still the hybrid space created by Mickey’s Toontown.

As a park land based on a live-action/animated hybrid film, Mickey’s Toontown is unique in its approach to building an all-encompassing cinematic space. Its core impulse, however, to use all elements of the park, from its attractions and shops to the ambient spaces in between, to bring forth the sensation of inhabiting a specific film world, is not. Looking at subsequent film-based lands at Disneyland and Disney California Adventure demonstrates how the strategies used to create these spaces, and the experiences created by them, have continued to evolve over the past few decades.

### **“It’s Tough to Be a Bug”: Film Scale and Immersion in a bug’s land**

Now you’re all honorary bugs!  
—Flik, It’s Tough to be a Bug



Disney California Adventure's a bug's land, Disneyland Resort's second land-based on a specific cinematic world, builds on Mickey's Toontown's project of translating film space into inhabitable physical space. With a title consistently styled in lowercase to signal its focus on scale, a bug's land opened at Disney California Adventure Park in 2002, nearly ten years after Mickey's Toontown. Disneyland Resort's second park gate, Disney's California Adventure, had just opened the year before in 2001. It was conceived as a collection of lands that reflected the geography of California, including the four named areas of Golden State, Hollywood Pictures Backlot, Paradise Pier, and Sunshine Plaza. The park failed to meet expectations in its first year, due in part to larger cultural and economic conditions of the post-9/11 world, but also due to the nature of the park itself, which, while ambitious, lacked the characters and child-appropriate attractions of the older park.<sup>328</sup> Disney looked to address the attendance slump by reworking and retheming several park areas, even though the park had just recently opened. This included the modification of the Bountiful Valley Farm area of the Golden State land into Flik's Fun Fair, an area primarily targeted at small children and themed on the 2002 Pixar film *A Bug's Life*. This reworking tied the space in with the existing It's Tough to be a Bug 3D attraction. The entire area was subsequently renamed "a bug's land" in the fall of 2002.

Like Mickey's Toontown, a bug's land also adapted a kind of hybrid screen space, though this hybridity is quite different in nature. *A Bug's Life* is not a mixture of live-action and animation like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, but rather a wholly computer-animated film. Nevertheless, its animation style takes a hybrid stylistic approach to its representation of a

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<sup>328</sup> Attendance in DCA's first year was projected to be 7 million, but estimated to only have been 5 million, in contrast to Disneyland's 12 million visitors that same year. See Bonnie Harris, "Disney Looks to Boost Adventure," *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 2002, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-feb-06-fi-disney6-story.html>.

fictional world. While some of the film's visual elements are heavily stylized, particularly the design of the characters, others capitalize on the digital technology's potential for rendering realistic textures, contours, and lighting. This results in what J.P. Telotte has described as Pixar's "compromise aesthetic," a visual approach that lies somewhere between cartoonish stylization and realism.<sup>329</sup> As an adaptation of the film, the land followed the film's aesthetic style. However, in adapting the film's "negotiated style," the land also helped facilitate the entrance of the visitor, firmly grounded in the "real world," into the film's screen world.

To bring the film's world to life, a bug's land takes the digitally rendered miniature spaces of *A Bug's Life* as its inspiration. Through this, it recreates one of the film's distinct perceptual effects—the ability to experience the world on a miniature scale—as a means of immersing visitors in the film's world. By conveying the effect of transporting visitors to a different scale, a bug's land fosters different kinds of physical and perceptual experiences from Mickey's Toontown. Whereas *A Bug's Life* allows audiences to look into a miniature world, the land enables visitors to physically inhabit this world, to be perceptually immersed in another scale rather than merely viewing it through a screen. Though a bug's land closed in 2018 to make way for Avengers Campus, it urges us to consider how issues of scale factor into our experiences of built cinematic space, and to consider how park space can be used to physically realize cinematic effects like the scale-play in films like *A Bug's Life*.

### ***a bug's land and Pixar's Hyper-Reality***

While Mickey's Toontown is presented as a fictional space that blends the "real" and the animated, a bug's land recreates the world of its source film, whose imagined version of the "real world" was visualized through the help of digital animation. Unlike Toontown, the spaces and

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<sup>329</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 207.

laws of physics of this film's world mirror our own but are viewed from a smaller perspective. Thus, a bug's land was more realistic—i.e., less exaggerated and absurd—than Mickey's Toontown. However, like Toontown, a bug's land was still stylized according to Pixar's own kind of hybrid aesthetic. As a computer-animated creation, *A Bug's Life* takes a different approach to realism from the traditional animation discussed in the previous section. J.P. Telotte describes Pixar's animation style as a “negotiated style [that] would eventually come to be known at Pixar as ‘hyper-reality.’”<sup>330</sup> Pixar's “hyper-reality” is defined by David A. Price as “a stylized realism that had a lifelike feel without actually being photorealistic.”<sup>331</sup> As John Lasseter, director of *A Bug's Life* and its predecessor *Toy Story*, remarked, he “didn't want the audience to think it was a real world. I want the audience to say, ‘I know this isn't real, but my gosh, it looks real.’ It was very important that this be a caricature of reality.”<sup>332</sup> Where *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* approached realism in animation through the combination of animated figures with real environments and real figures with animated environments, *A Bug's Life* used the verisimilitude enabled by computer technology to create a hyper-real animated world.

Telotte discusses how Pixar's “compromise aesthetic” lies somewhere in between the overtly cartoony on the one extreme and the hyper-realism made possible by emerging digital technologies on the other.<sup>333</sup> The compromise is in part due to the fact that, as Telotte describes, animators found it necessary to stylize certain visual elements, going, as John Lasseter reveals,

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<sup>330</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 205.

<sup>331</sup> David A. Price, *The Pixar Touch: The Making of a Company* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 213.

<sup>332</sup> French, “Toy Story,” 32.

<sup>333</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 207.

“beyond reality, caricaturing to make it more believable.”<sup>334</sup> Stylization was deemed necessary in part as a means of avoiding the “uncanny valley,” the creepy, unsettling effect of too-closely approaching realism.<sup>335</sup> Though Telotte does not address *A Bug’s Life* in his analysis of Pixar films, his discussion helps us to understand the film’s combination of stylized character design and realistic environments. Though representations of insects may not approach the same uncanny valley as images of humans, the characters are nevertheless caricature versions of bugs—their faces, bodies, and especially eyes are stylized like cartoons to avoid the unsettling effects of photorealistic insect bodies rendered in close-up.

While *A Bug’s Life*’s characters are caricatured versions of real insects, the film’s depiction of its environments leans far more toward photorealism. This is particularly apparent in the film’s opening sequence. The film opens with a shot of the sun in an azure sky, amidst wispy cirrus clouds. The lens flares in this opening shot imply that it was “shot” with a physical lens, which is, of course, artifice, as the film is entirely rendered on a computer. Viewer expectations are perhaps subverted as a leaf lands in what we realize is water reflecting the sun and sky above it. The leaf’s fine veins and brown spots and the water’s ripples and reflections appear consistent with real-world physical textures and optical laws. The “camera” pans up to an establishing shot of the small tree-marked island inhabited by the ant colony, the dry creek bed that surrounds it, and the lush green fields beyond. This is one of the few moments in the film where the audience is given a long shot of the larger environment; most of the film takes place on its characters’ tiny scale.<sup>336</sup> This long shot appears quite photorealistic and is certainly a far cry from the bouncing

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<sup>334</sup> Rita Street, "Toys Will Be Toys." *Cinefex* 64 (1995): 83.

<sup>335</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 208.

<sup>336</sup> A complimentary long shot bookends the film’s conclusion. The tree is abloom with pink blossoms and the creek is now flowing.

Technicolor natural spaces depicted as surrounding Toontown in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. The world in *A Bug's Life* is a natural world of dirt, blades of grass, snail shells, mushrooms, flowers, and seeds.

It is also a world of human detritus: tires, thimbles, matches, and discarded cotton swabs. The surfaces and textures of the man-made materials and structures in the film similarly convey a sense of realism. The man-made (or, rather, bug-made) settings, where objects from the human world have been assembled into architectural environments, like P.T. Flea's Circus tent, appear faithful to their real-life counterparts. Ben-Day dots, telltale signs of a mechanical printing technique pioneered in the nineteenth century, can be seen on the surfaces of the "Casey Jr. Cookies" boxes that have been fashioned by the bugs into circus wagons. From discarded peanut butter cup wrappers to the dull sheen of an old thimble and the painted surface of a No.2 pencil, the rendering of inanimate materials in the film seems to approach, if not completely capture, the detailed reality of these objects.<sup>337</sup>

Following the film's animation style, a bug's land had a visual schema that was far more realistic than those in Mickey's Toontown—there were no bulging, absurd lines here—while still being comfortably distanced from "reality." Much of the architecture in a bug's land was composed of stylized "garbage" (popsicle sticks, broken records, discarded packaging). A few visuals from the film were replicated, such as the red and white umbrella big top of P.T. Flea's Circus (though different in its details, as it appeared without its candy box and ice cube tray grandstands). However, instead of directly replicating the film's scenes and tableaux, a bug's land seemed more concerned with adapting the film's perspective and overall visual design. We

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<sup>337</sup> While Pixar's early animation was groundbreaking for the time, further advancements were needed before such visuals could be truly indistinguishable from actual photographic representation.

don't, for example, get a shot-accurate remake of the downtown "city" that Flik first encounters, though the repurposed man-made materials suggest the same aesthetic.

As a result of its insect subject matter and cinematography, the film emphasizes the pleasures of seeing the world from a different perspective, yet Pixar's "compromise" animation aesthetic also included playing with scale, where "in some instances size and volume become curiously fluid."<sup>338</sup> Telotte describes how the scale relationships between objects and their environments could change from scene to scene, citing examples from *Toy Story* (1995). Such fluidity was also apparent in a bug's land, where mammoth clovers towered over an already-giant garden hose and faucet and a cross-section of watermelon appeared similar in height to the shortest dimension of a cereal box and a bendy drinking straw. Employing Pixar's hyper-real style, the land was ultimately predicated on playing with scale and our perception of it, with visitors adopting the position of "being" a bug.

### ***Film Scale and Immersion on Screen and in the Park***

Part of the pleasure *A Bug's Life* is in experiencing an extraordinary perspective: life on a miniature scale, envisioned using cinematic language and digital technologies. What is primarily a visual pleasure in the film became the full-scale embodied experience that made up the foundation of the land. The conceit of the land was that visitors were transmuted to insect size, and could explore, play, and ride attractions in the now-oversized world of the insect characters of *A Bug's Life*. The emphasis on the pleasure of experiencing the world at a different scale was hinted at by the scale-play present in the film/land's title, its stylized lowercase emphasizing size as a site of perceptual play and proportional pleasure. As with some early Disneyland rides which attempted to make physical for the visitor the experiences of the on-screen characters, like

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<sup>338</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 207.

Toad's motor mania or Wendy, John, and Michael Darling's flight, this land focused on the sensation of being a dramatically different physical size and the perceptual effects of relating to the physical world on a micro scale.

This sensation parallels the scale-play of the land's source film as it uses the technology of computer animation to digitally render a world seen from the perspective of insects, yet the use of special effects to play with scale and perception has its roots in cinema's earliest years. Since the turn of the century, techniques like film masking and multiple exposures, camera movement and placement, practical effects like oversized or miniature props and sets, and staging/optical illusions like forced perspective, have been used to achieve the illusion of altered scale. One of the earliest examples of this was George Méliès's 1901 short film *The Dwarf and the Giant*, which used masking, forced perspective, and camera movement to achieve the illusion of figures growing and shrinking.<sup>339</sup> Such effects were also used in Hepworth and Stow's 1903 *Alice in Wonderland* to depict Alice's fluctuations in size, her changing height depicted through special cinematographic and editing effects and reinforced by set design.

Special effects techniques continued to be developed in the following decades to depict altered senses of scale, some of which became standard practice for decades. Janet Wasko remarks how *King Kong* (1933) "represented a landmark in special effects and incorporated many of the same techniques used by today's special effects teams: models, matte paintings for foreground and backgrounds, rear projections, miniature or enlarged props and miniature sets, combined with live action."<sup>340</sup> While these effects were used in *King Kong* to create the illusion

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<sup>339</sup> Similar techniques were used in Méliès's other short films in 1901, *The Devil and the Statue* and *The Man with the Rubber Head*.

<sup>340</sup> Janet Wasko, *How Hollywood Works* (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 53.

of a colossal ape, other films, like *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) depicted people shrunken to miniature size.

Other films began to envision the experience of a human shrunken down to miniature scale as seen from their perspective. Many of these “VFX intensive” films were, naturally, situated in the “imaginary realms of the ‘horrific,’ the ‘fantastic,’ and the futuristic’ in particular.”<sup>341</sup> Among the earliest of these was Tod Browning’s 1936 horror film *The Devil Doll*, in which humans and animals appear to have been shrunk down to one-eighth size. In the 1940 film *Dr. Cyclops*, shrunken people are the protagonists of the film, and are shown navigating the dangers of an oversized world. *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) and the television series *Land of the Giants* (1968-1970) envisioned the experience of altered-scale humans in a normal-scale environment. *Fantastic Voyage* (1966) took this concept to the extreme, as its protagonists shrink to a microscopic scale to enter and remove a man’s blood clot.<sup>342</sup>

Camera tricks and practical effects were used to create the effect of miniaturization through the 1980s. The special effects for the 1989 film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, directed by visual effects specialist Joe Johnson, were largely done by combining practical effects, “primarily through oversized sets and props filmed directly in front of the camera,” with blue-screen.<sup>343</sup> This film later became the basis for the 1998 Disneyland attraction *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience* (1998, Disneyland) which used “4D” theater technology to play with scale, though

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<sup>341</sup> Rama Venkatasawmy, *The Digitization of Cinematic Visual Effects: Hollywood's Coming of Age* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 12.

<sup>342</sup> *The Incredible Shrinking Man* suggested, but did not show, its protagonist eventually shrinking to microscopic and then sub-atomic size.

<sup>343</sup> Jim Fanning, “Find Out What Honey, I Shrunk the Kids and Captain America Have in Common,” D23, June 20, 2019, <https://d23.com/honey-i-shrunk-the-kids-facts/>.



these effects were experienced in a stationary theater and mediated by the screen.<sup>344</sup> Though the effects in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* were largely practical, other films of the mid-1980s often combined practical and digital visual effects. By the late 1990s, however, use of analog effects began to wane as studios increasingly employed digital techniques.<sup>345</sup>

Animation has always provided a more flexible avenue for exploring perceptions of scale in film. Yet along with digital effects in live-action films, advances in computer animation allowed filmmakers to explore cinematic scale in computer animated films. Pixar's 1995 film *Toy Story* set the precedent for this, as the first entirely digitally animated feature film.<sup>346</sup> Though it was a landmark in computer animation, even *Toy Story* shared a heritage with previous cinematic exercises in imagining the world at a different scale, harkening back to films like *Babes in Toyland* (1961), which depicted humans in a toy-sized world. Where *Toy Story* looks at life from the perspective of a toy, *A Bug's Life* uses similar computer animation to envision what it's like to experience the world on an even smaller scale, as insects do. Although *A Bug's Life* uses digital animation to give a "bug's eye" view of the world, practical effects like those used in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* and films before it inform some of a bug's land's design, where oversized set design and props give the impression of an altered scale.

The immersive effect of being miniaturized was conveyed primarily by the land's design elements. At the primary entrance to the land, visitors passed under a large sign announcing the name of the land and decorated with images of some of the film's characters. The sign appeared to be constructed by the characters, made of faux giant twigs and leaves. The front section of the

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<sup>344</sup> Honey, I Shrunk the Audience originally opened at Walt Disney World's EPCOT in 1994.

<sup>345</sup> Venkatasawmy, *The Digitization of Cinematic Visual Effects*, 4.

<sup>346</sup> Venkatasawmy, *The Digitization of Cinematic Visual Effects*, 28.

land was repurposed space from Bountiful Valley Farm, an original sub-area/attraction in Disney California Adventure's Golden State "district."<sup>347</sup> This area was more natural in appearance, and primarily consisted of open space, walkways, and living landscaping. This was the location of the It's Tough to be a Bug 4D show, which was an original feature of the park and formerly a part of Bountiful Valley Farm. The Farm's mural, which originally decorated the It's Tough to be a Bug theater building, was eventually repainted to depict giant grasses from a ground-level, bug's point of view, in keeping with the re-theming of Bountiful Valley Farms as a bug's land in 2002.

The area leading into the It's Tough to be a Bug theater, situated below the grassy mural, was a transitional space between the aboveground world and the underground world of the ants. The queue took visitors down into the ants' subterranean nest, as they appeared to descend, like bugs, down amongst the (artificial) strata of dirt, rocks, and roots. The It's Tough to be a Bug attraction itself was a "4D" film attraction like *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*.<sup>348</sup> In it, a nine minute 3-D film was projected on a screen in a modified theater. To view the attraction's 3-D film, visitors were given "bug eye" 3-D glasses, complete with decorative antennae. At the start of the show, Flik, the film's protagonist, informed the audience, "now you're all honorary bugs." Visitors to the show and, assumedly the land, were thus not quite meant to be bugs themselves, but to experience the show—and the land—from a place of empathy.

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<sup>347</sup> Disney California Adventure was original divided into four "districts" or themed areas: Golden State, Hollywood Pictures Backlot, Paradise Pier, and Sunshine Plaza. Golden State was then divided into six sub-areas, each representing a geographical or historical aspect of California: Bountiful Valley Farm, Pacific Wharf, The Bay Area, Grizzly Peak Recreation Area, Condor Flats, and Golden Vine Winery.

<sup>348</sup> The original version of the attraction opened at Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom in 1998, seven months before the film debuted in theaters.

The show was framed as the bugs' attempt at getting the audience to "see" them and to experience how difficult their lives are. The show began with a variety of demonstrations of bug survival techniques. Lighting and audio-animatronic characters were synchronized with the on-screen events. Audiences' bodies were affected as well: air cannons simulated a Chilean rose tarantula shooting quills at acorns, while water sprayers gave the impression of a soldier termite shooting acid. Smells were triggered when a stink bug aimed her defenses at the audience.

These displays were interrupted when Hopper, the film's grasshopper antagonist, "broke into" the theater, angry that the other bugs are hosting humans, who, he points out, see insects as "monsters" they want to "destroy." Arguing that "friends don't exterminate friends, do they?," Hopper decided "maybe it's time you 'honorary bugs' got a taste of your own medicine!" At this point fog filled the theater, simulating the "bug spray" being sprayed on screen and into the audience. As the theater went dark, Hopper instructed his hornet fighters to "arm your stingers, and attack" as rubber apparatuses in the seat backs jabbed audiences as though they were being stung. At this point, animatronic black widow spiders descended on the audience from the ceiling, mirroring those descending on screen as well. Hopper was finally driven away by a chameleon, and the bugs wrapped up the show with a musical finale about how humans depend on bugs for survival, including for pollination and waste disposal. This underscored the show's theme—of empathy for insects—which tied into the land's premise as a way for visitors to take on a bug's perspective.

The second section of the land, Flik's Fun Fair, was located behind the natural setting of the front part of the land, toward the outer edge of the park. To enter this space, visitors passed under an apparently bug-made banner, strung between a stick, a giant pencil, and a drinking straw. This marked the transition between the natural landscape surrounding the ant nest theater

and the space of the Fun Fair, as constructed from human castoffs. Visitors then passed through a giant overturned box of Cowboy Crunchies cereal, featuring images of Woody from *Toy Story*, to access the Fun Fair.<sup>349</sup> The interior of the cereal box featured oversized type and “cutouts” of characters from *A Bug’s Life*, which helped to establish the altered scale of the environment (or, rather, the visitor), while also self-reflexively invoking the film’s characters.

The juxtaposition of these two spaces—the natural setting of the ants’ nest in the front of the land and the manmade materials of Flik’s Fun Fair in the rear—reflects Flik’s journey in the film, as he leaves his home in search of “bigger bugs” to help defend his formicine family and friends against the greedy grasshoppers. In this way, the land’s geography reflects and suggests the film’s general plot. The film begins in Flik’s home, where we see a natural setting (a small island in a riverbed) somewhat like that of the front part of the land. This landscape is rendered in greens and browns and is dominated by natural elements and textures. Once Flik travels to “bug city,” the landscape is defined more by the human-made debris that the insects have fashioned into their homes and businesses.

The set design in this rear Fun Fair part of the land consisted of a combination of large-scale faux-natural elements like the shade-providing colossal clovers with oversized human artifacts like No. 2 pencils, a paper airplane, a broken record, and a tissue box. Princess Dot Puddle Park, a water play-area attraction, illustrated the land’s scale play. Its jumbo spigot, garden hose, and huge fan-spray nozzle suggested the scale of insects and their experiences as they may be confronted with typical elements of lawn and garden irrigation (though the actual fountains in the play area were much gentler, with jumping jets playfully spurting gentle streams from the ground). The landscaping in Flik’s Fun Fair was both taller and denser than that in the

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<sup>349</sup> *Toy Story* was Pixar’s only other film at the time.

Bountiful Farms area—and indeed most areas of the parks. Varieties of closely planted tall trees and other plants obscured most views outside of the land.<sup>350</sup> Combined with the area’s winding, curvilinear pathways, the landscaping gave the sense of a bug’s-eye view from the ground.

The Fun Fair was also where the land’s rides were located, and these rides further encouraged visitors to experience the world from a bug’s perspective. Rides in a bug’s land were typical of lands geared toward small children.<sup>351</sup> They included Flik’s Flyers (a hanging balloon spinning ride), Heimlich’s Chew Chew Train (a small train), Francis’ Ladybug Boogie (a spinning teacup ride), and Tuck and Roll’s Drive ‘Em Buggies (bumper cars). Three of the four rides had ride vehicles shaped like bugs, inviting riders to physically inhabit the different bodies, and species, of the film’s characters. Like the 3-D glasses given to visitors to the It’s Tough to Be a Bug show, riders only temporarily (or “honorarily”) became bugs themselves. On Heimlich’s Chew Chew Train, for example, the train itself was styled as Heimlich the caterpillar. Riders sat in cars painted as Francis the ladybug for Francis’ Ladybug Boogie and the buggies of Tuck and Roll’s Drive ‘Em Buggies were styled as the pill bugs Tuck and Roll. The ride vehicles for the fourth ride, Flik’s Flyers, were not shaped like insects, but they appeared to be constructed by them. The hot air balloon-shaped vehicles were styled as discarded containers, (applesauce, raisins, animal crackers, and takeout box) suspended beneath a balloon structure of sewn-together leaves and sticks. The ride’s central support was likewise a combination of faux “natural” materials and human trash (a sour cream container and modified pie tin).

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<sup>350</sup> Although the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, however, could still be seen, due to its height and proximity.

<sup>351</sup> Theme parks and amusement parks often have separate areas with tamer rides dedicated to younger visitors, such as Knott’s Berry Farm’s Camp Snoopy or Six Flags Magic Mountain’s Bugs Bunny World, which contains most of the attractions the park categorizes as “kid rides.”

Just as *A Bug's Life* was not the only Disney or Pixar film to experiment with altered scale, a bug's land was not the only Disney park land to play with scale and animated aesthetics. Eight years after a bug's land opened at Disney California Adventure, Disney's first *Toy Story*-inspired land, Toy Story Playland, opened at Walt Disney Studios park in Paris. Sister lands, subsequently named Toy Story Land, opened at Hong Kong Disneyland in 2011 and at Shanghai Disneyland and Disney's Hollywood Studios in Florida in 2018. Like a bug's land, these spaces feature oversized objects that would be appropriately scaled vis-a-vis the film's toy characters. The buildings and backdrops are stylized as toy sets and packaging, picture books, and lunchboxes, while other decorative elements appear as Tinker Toys, pencils, crayons, and straws: all elements that are either toys or artifacts of childhood that would be available to them. These lands in many ways replicate the conceit of a bug's land by invoking the imagined pleasure of being toy sized. Single attractions outside of these lands have played with scale as well, such as Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, also set in the *Toy Story* world, which positions riders as "toy-size" through oversized elements in the set decoration of the ride, including giant screw-head details on the walls and a huge Etch-a-Sketch. While a bug's land was removed in 2020 to make way for the Marvel-themed Avengers Campus, which I will discuss in further detail at the end of this chapter, its impulses, as a place where a hyper-realistic animated world enables a different perspective, appear to endure elsewhere in Disney Parks.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Incidentally, Avengers Campus also contains some scale-play in the form of Pym Test Kitchen, themed on *Ant Man and the Wasp* (2018). The restaurant offers both large and tiny food, like the massive 453.8 gram "Quantum Pretzel" or the "Not so Little Chicken Sandwich," which features an oversized fried chicken breast juxtaposed with a tiny slider bun. The conceit is that "Pym Particles" from the film have been used to enlarge or shrink the food.

## “Is This Where They Filmed the Cars Movie?”: Geographical Verisimilitude and *Mise en abyme* in Cars Land

On the opening day of Cars Land, I overheard one little boy asking his mother if this was where the movie was filmed.

—Tom Staggs, chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts<sup>353</sup>

Ten years after a bug’s land opened, Cars Land opened right next door. Both lands were based on a digitally animated Pixar film, yet where a bug’s land adapted *A Bug’s Life*’s concept and the pleasures in experiencing the world from a bug’s eye point of view, Cars Land more precisely replicates the cityscapes, natural landscapes, and geographical layout as they appear in *Cars* (2006) to manifest the film world as a livable space. Apocryphal though it may possibly be, the quote above highlights how Cars Land’s city- and landscapes are intended to be recognizable from the film and rendered navigable via one’s experience of it. It is as if the land itself were a film set, despite the fact that the film takes place in a non-material, digitally-rendered space.<sup>354</sup> This fosters a different kind of spatial immersion: one that deemphasizes the ontological spatial immersion of Mickey’s Toontown or the perceptual spatial immersion of a bug’s land in favor of immersion in a more cinematically and geographically faithful space. Cars Land thus illustrates another strategy in Disney park lands—one that focuses primarily on screen-accuracy, realism, and geographical verisimilitude.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Marc Graser, “From ‘Harry Potter’ to ‘Hunger Games,’ How Theme Parks Have Caught Franchise Fever,” *Variety*, June 5, 2014, <https://variety.com/2014/film/news/from-harry-potter-to-hunger-games-how-theme-parks-have-caught-franchise-fever-1201210671/>.

<sup>354</sup> Even if the story isn’t accurate, Staggs’s telling of this anecdote suggests that Cars Land’s screen accuracy is a point of pride for the land’s creators—a desired effect.

<sup>355</sup> Of course, recognizing the screen accuracy of Cars Land is dependent upon a visitor having at least some familiarity with the world of the film franchise or any of a number of related shorts or merchandise.

As the above epigraph suggests, part of the appeal of Cars Land is its visual accuracy, an aspect that was also foregrounded by its creators. Brady MacDonald of the *Los Angeles Times* marveled in his 2012 review of the then-new land that, “Like opening the door to Oz, walking into Cars Land at Disney California Adventure is like stepping into a real-life version of the fictional town of Radiator Springs from the 2006 animated movie.”<sup>356</sup> Younger visitors to the land similarly noted its realism and accuracy to the film. As 11-year-old Nicole Cann remarked upon visiting the land in 2012, “It’s like real life...but ‘Cars’ real life.”<sup>357</sup> This was clearly an intended effect; John Lasseter also highlighted Cars Land as a manifestation of its screen world: “It’s an amazing feeling I have right now to see the world we created actually come to life.”<sup>358</sup> In addition to directing *Cars*, Lasseter also helped with the design of Cars Land.<sup>359</sup>

This framing and reception are quite different from that of Cars Land’s predecessor, a bug’s land. Disney executives seemed to frame a bug’s land as an attempt to retrofit the failing park for families with younger children. As Disneyland chief Paul Pressler, who oversaw the creation of the California Adventure Park remarked, “What we missed the mark on was not having enough for young kids compared to the Magic Kingdom.”<sup>360</sup> The quick addition of a bug’s land (as a partial retheme of the previous Bountiful Valley Farm original area), was meant

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<sup>356</sup> Brady MacDonald, “Review: Disney’s Cars Land Feels Like Walking Into a Movie,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/travel/deals/la-trb-disney-cars-land-review-06201213-story.html>.

<sup>357</sup> Jesse McKinley, “Test Driving Disney’s New Cars Land,” *New York Times*, July 19, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/travel/test-driving-disneys-new-cars-land.html>.

<sup>358</sup> Lisa Liddane and Sarah Tully, “Red Carpet, Ceremony Mark Cars Land Opening,” *Orange County Register*, June 14, 2012, <https://www.ocregister.com/2012/06/14/red-carpet-ceremony-mark-cars-land-opening/>.

<sup>359</sup> Richard Verrier and Dawn C. Chmielewski, “Fabled Film Company May Get a Reanimator,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-jan-25-fi-lasseter25-story.html>.

<sup>360</sup> Merissa Marr, “Disney’s \$1 Billion Adventure,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2007, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119257768823361264>.



to remedy this. However, the land's conceit, as a world where visitors appear to be shrunken and to see things from a bug's perspective, seemed to have been lost on some of the small children toward whom a bug's land's rides appear to have aimed. As Robert Niles of the *Los Angeles Times* remarked in his review of the then-new land in 2002: "none of the four young children I brought with me to a preview day understood that they were supposed to be bug-size, even after it was explained to them."<sup>361</sup> Perhaps Tom Staggs sought to address and rectify this failure with his account of the little boy who asked if Cars Land was where *Cars* was filmed.

The contrast in framing and reception between a bug's land and Cars Land highlights how the latter is predicated on screen verisimilitude not only as a draw for visitors, but as its *raison d'être*—its driving force. Cars Land recreates the film's city- and landscapes with such accuracy that, but for the presence or absence of animated cars or real-life visitors, it is difficult to distinguish at a glance between photographs of the land and stills of the film. The fact that both physical and virtual spaces can so closely resemble one another is enabled both by the screen accuracy of the land as well as the photorealistic aspects of Pixar's animation, as discussed in the previous case study.

Cars Land replicates the film's geographical layout, including its central townscape, the larger landscape that surrounds it, and the spatial relationships between the two. This, of course, makes sense for a movie whose characters are vehicles; the film spends a large amount of screen time on the spaces navigated and inhabited by its characters. As discussed in the previous case study, a bug's land roughly follows Flik's geographical progress in the film, from the ants' home to the bug circus. However, viewing *A Bug's Life* gives little real sense of the geography of a

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<sup>361</sup> Robert Niles, "But Where's Disney's Sense of Adventure?," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 2002, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-oct-03-wk-family3-story.html>.

bug's land. Instead, a bug's land is predicated more on the sensation of being small than on the replication of on-screen geography.

Cars Land, however, is easily navigable after watching the film in part because of the amount of time the film spends on navigating and orienting viewers in its spaces. In the film, the first establishing shot of Radiator Springs, a small town along Route 66 that provides the setting for most of the film, looks down the town's main street, itself a segment of Route 66, which terminates at the Radiator Springs Courthouse and Fire Department building. This shot is dimly lit, reflecting both McQueen's distress as he enters the town lost and afraid and the town's decrepit state before its revitalization later in the film. Its dilapidation is symbolic of the loss of American small-town values associated with the heyday of Route 66. Despite the dim lighting, other significant buildings and landmarks can be seen in this first view, including Flo's V8 Cafe on the right side of the street and the "Leaning Tower of Tires" of Luigi's Casa Della Tires to the left, both of which give a sense of the overall layout of the town. The subsequent shots present details of these and other buildings in the town, such as Radiator Springs Curios, all rendered in near photorealistic detail via the film's digital animation.

Despite Cars Land's faithfulness to the film version of Radiator Springs, film space is compressed in the park. Just inside the entrance to Cars Land, on the right-hand side, lies Fillmore's Taste-In, a groovily-painted geodesic dome, while Tow Mater Towing & Salvage yard, the location for the Mater's Junkyard Jamboree attraction, sits across the street. As in the film, where these buildings are located on the "outskirts" of the town, these locations mark the boundaries of the park land, though they are in far closer proximity to the "downtown" portion of Radiator Springs than they appear on film. Some run-down buildings shown on the outskirts of Radiator Springs in the film, such as the Budville Trading Company, a closed-down building

depicted in the film as located just beyond Fillmore's Taste-In, are missing from Cars Land. Similarly, the row of shops at the end of the street, closest to the City Hall, is truncated, with several storefronts that appear in the film having been left out of the land.<sup>362</sup> In the film, one of the earliest shots of Radiator Springs shows the expanse of flat road and desert stretching out behind Flo's V8 Cafe. Other similar shots suggest that Radiator Springs is set in a rather barren stretch of desert. The distances between the buildings are also more expansive in the film than in the park land. In one shot, a wide street separates Flo's from Ramone's House of Body Art. In Cars Land, the cafe and the body shop are much closer, as the street here is far narrower than it appears on screen. In Cars Land, the street leads to a pathway running alongside the Radiator Springs Racer attraction that provides a wide view of the desert rock formations of the surrounding natural landscape, which, in the film, appear much further away.<sup>363</sup> In another sequence in the film, McQueen races around town in an out-of-control panic. This scene gives viewers a sense of just how spread out the town is in the film versus the compactness of the park land, where the most important buildings and other visual elements have been brought in much closer proximity.

This indicates that Cars Land's verisimilitude to its on-screen counterpart is in some ways conditional, in that it is most effective when viewed from specific viewpoints, such as from the ends of the main street, where perspective condenses what are shown to be greater distances in the film. In *Cars*, the overall geography of Radiator Springs—the general layout of the town and the relationship between the buildings in it—is clearly laid out and easily understood via the

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<sup>362</sup> The land retains the Sparky's Spark Plugs and Mr. Curb Feeler facades, which curiously appear in the opposite order as they do in the film. Other storefronts, like the Rusty Bumper and the Foggy Windshield, are missing from the land.

<sup>363</sup> In the film, a small house sits on this street, behind Ramone's. It is absent in the land.

“camera’s” (and character’s) repeated movement in and around the space. Despite these compressed distances between the buildings of downtown Radiator Springs, in Cars Land, their relationships with one another seem to have remained faithful to the film. The buildings all appear on their respective sides of the street, and in the same order in which they appear in the film. The buildings also generally face what they do in the film: Flo’s V8 Cafe, for example, sits across from Radiator Springs Curios shop in Cars Land. The crossroad in the film (aptly named Cross St.) that divides Luigi’s Casa Della Tires and the Curios shop on one side and Flo’s and Ramone’s on the other is similarly reproduced in the land, imparting a clear sense of spatial relations.<sup>364</sup>

Other sequences in the film give a consistent impression of where Radiator Springs is in relation to natural landmarks surrounding it. Moving down Route 66 in Cars Land, visitors can take two paths that lead off to the right toward “Ornament Valley.” This reflects the natural landscape surrounding Radiator Springs in the film. The large “Cadillac Range” rock formation rises in the distance above the valley and behind the town. This formation evokes the textures and contours of natural geological formations of places like Monument Valley, but takes the shape of the man-made landmark Cadillac Ranch, an art installation constructed in 1974 in Amarillo, Texas out of ten Cadillacs half-buried nose-down in the ground. Viewed from the side, the mid-century tail fins of the cars of Cadillac Ranch form a distinctive skyline that is replicated by the rock formations in the film and the artificial rockwork in Cars Land. In both the film and the park, Cadillac Range appears behind the courthouse building that stands at the terminus of the town’s primary thoroughfare.

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<sup>364</sup> Where the main street that runs through Cars Land as a segment of Route 66 is marked with broken white lines, Cross St. is not, suggesting that this road, which leads out to the Ornament Valley section of the land, is a back country road.

As McQueen tries to skip town before completing his community service, “aerial” shots of the surrounding Ornament Valley, including Cadillac Range and the flat-topped Radiator Cap mesa, establish just how vast this landscape is. Later sequences in the film similarly emphasize wide stretches of land, with long shots reminiscent of John Ford’s expansive views of Monument Valley. In Cars Land, of course, these distances are necessarily truncated, though forced perspective and specific color palettes are used to give the illusion of distance. Nonetheless, the approximate relationship between these landmarks is generally maintained in Cars Land, signifying the importance of these spatial relations. The flat-topped “Radiator Cap” mesa lies between the courthouse and the mountain range behind it in both land and film. To the south of downtown Radiator Springs lies Willy’s Butte, the location in the film of the racetrack where McQueen and Doc Hudson race. In *Cars 2*, Willy’s Butte is home to the Radiator Springs Grand Prix, while in the park it provides the setting for the Radiator Springs Racers, Cars Land’s sole E-ticket attraction. Cars Land is thus not only a replica of the Radiator Springs from the film, but it also recreates Radiator Springs’s spatial relationship to its surrounding landscape.

Like the narrative progression implicit in the spatial layout of a bug’s land, as it mirrors Flik’s journey from the ants’ home to Bug City, Cars Land’s spatial layout, from its entrance down along Route 66, which runs thorough Radiator Springs, and then out to Ornament Valley, replicates the sequence of events as the film’s plot advances. Though there are other passages into the land from other areas of the park—one can currently enter from either Avengers Campus to the East of Cars Land or the Pacific Wharf from the West—visitors are encouraged by the layout of the park’s central paths to enter along the land’s main Route 66 axis. The visitor, like McQueen, is guided by the design and positioning of the land’s entrance to move through the town, passing shops and sights familiar from the film. This means that visitors generally pass

through downtown Radiator Springs before arriving at the Radiator Springs Racers, which takes them, in part, through the natural Southwestern landscape surrounding the town proper. This mimics the events of the film, where viewers, along with McQueen, first encounter the town and its inhabitants before engaging in a race down by Willy's Butte or a scenic drive with Sally Carrera.

Past downtown Radiator Springs, toward Ornament Valley, visitors can take a path to the right to the entrance of Radiator Springs Racers. The attraction is a dark ride that uses slot car technology, pitting two competing ride vehicles against one another.<sup>365</sup> Like other dark rides, this attraction invokes key moments from the *Cars* film, though it does so out of sequence. Though many scenes and moments from the film are referenced, riders are not implied to be occupying the role of Lightning McQueen. The ride vehicles in which they sit are unmarked cars of various colors. Riders do not ride inside Lightning McQueen, but rather encounter him twice during the ride. Riders themselves are instead framed as cars coming to Radiator Springs to prepare for and take part in a race, ultimately to experience the feeling of being a car in the world of *Cars*. As Mater addresses them in the ride: "Here for the big race, huh?"

The first part of Radiator Springs Racers recalls Lightning McQueen and Sally Carrera's bucolic drive through the countryside as it takes riders briefly through some Ornament Valley vistas. As riders leave the loading zone, idyllic music and a leisurely speed suggest a peaceful and picturesque ride through the landscape. Riders pass under a natural rock arch reminiscent of the contours of a 1940s or 1950s car, and the soundtrack crescendos as riders emerge from a tunnel, revealing a waterfall like that seen in the film, suggesting the wonder of the "natural"

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<sup>365</sup> Similar to the Test Track attraction that opened at EPCOT in 1998.

majesty of the landscape.<sup>366</sup> In the film's parallel sequence, Sally teaches McQueen to slow down and enjoy life, reinforcing the film's overarching themes of small-town values and nostalgia for days gone by. These themes are hinted at during this part of the ride.

After this sequence, riders enter the interior dark ride portion of the ride, where other scenes from the first *Cars* film are invoked. Riders encounter McQueen's hauler semitruck Mack, lost tourists Minny and Van, have a brief run-in with Sheriff, go tractor tipping with Mater, escape Frank the angry combine, and finally get either a paint job at Ramone's House of Body or new tires at Luigi's Casa Della Tires.<sup>367</sup> These sequences appear in a different order in the ride, suggesting that the ride is not necessarily directly recreating the specific story of McQueen, but rather allowing riders to have a similar experience.

After their preparations, two ride vehicles on parallel tracks enter the race, which serves as the ride's climax. This race recalls several moments in the films. It evokes McQueen's "race" against Hudson, which takes place at Willy's Butte.<sup>368</sup> It also recalls a scene where McQueen observes Hudson racing alone on the same track. However, combined with the earlier scenic drive, the ride's final race also recalls the ending of *Cars*, where Sally challenges McQueen to a race back to Flo's, and the two cars speed through the same landscape, but at a quicker pace. The two exterior portions of the ride feel like these two parallel experiences, the first a peaceful drive

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<sup>366</sup> The music used on the ride appears to be the "McQueen and Sally" track from the film.

<sup>367</sup> In *Cars*, the sequence is as follows: 1. Mack truck; 2. Train; 3. Sheriff; 4. Minny and Van; 5. Race (against Hudson); 6. Tractor tipping with Mater; 7. Combine scare; 8. Scenic drive (with Sally); 9. New tires; 10. New paint; 11. Race Sally to Flo's

Parallel events occur as follows on Radiator Springs Racers: 8. Scenic drive; 1. Mack truck; 4. Minny and Van; 2. Train; 3. Sheriff; 6. Tractor tipping with Mater; 7. Combine scare; 9/10. New tires/new paint (vehicles alternate between the two); 4/11. Race

<sup>368</sup> Hudson doesn't actually race, since he knows McQueen, in his arrogance and impatience, will crash on the unfamiliar dirt track.

and the second a thrilling, but playful, race. While the ride replicates McQueen's own experiences in *Cars*, the premise—that riders are there as visiting cars ready to race—is more in line with the end of *Cars 2*, which sees visiting race cars taking part in the Radiator Springs Grand Prix. Thus, the ride conflates the events from the two *Cars* films in a way that remixes cinematic elements while weaving them into an original story for the riders.<sup>369</sup>

While Radiator Springs Racers invokes and remixes scenes from the film, it also reworks the geography of the land. The dark ride portion of the attraction layers a scaled-down replica of Radiator Springs within the life-size Radiator Springs. Riders enter the interior town through the “drive thru” of Flo's V8 Cafe before turning to the right and proceeding down Radiator Springs' Route 66 main drag. The spatial relationships between the town's buildings are fudged here: Flo's V8 and Radiator Springs Curios, which are across the street from one another in the film and the land proper, are instead set at an oblique angle that allows the curvilinear vehicle track to move through a space that would have otherwise necessitated a hard right turn. Extreme forced perspective is used to depict the portion of the street beyond the intersection where the vehicles alternately enter Ramone's or Luigi's. These shop interiors, however, appear more “life-size,” smoothing the transition from the small-scale dark ride version of Radiator Springs to the actual life-size scale of the exterior park.

The uncanny effect of this spatial nesting and manipulation of scale is heightened further in the exterior portions of the ride, which occur during the ride's opening scenic drive and during the climactic second half, when the ride vehicle exits the dark ride space to race alongside its opponent. The exterior track winds through the Monument Valley-themed environment of Cars Land, plunging riders from the indoor version of the town back into the “real” Radiator Springs.

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<sup>369</sup> *Cars 3* had not yet been released when Radiator Springs Racers was created.



After the race is finished, the riders once again enter the show building for some final scenes and disembarkation before entering back into the Radiator Springs of Cars Land. The effect of this is to suspend riders in a state of spatial fluctuation, as they are moved in between the “fake” Radiator Springs of the ride and the “real” Radiator Springs of the land itself, which are both replicas of the Radiator Springs seen on screen.

Recalling the discussion of *mise en abyme* from Chapter One, we can understand Cars Land as representing another kind of *mise en abyme*: one that focuses on geographical nesting and spatial repetition. This layering reinforces the land’s emphasis on screen verisimilitude by constantly resituating the visitor within the accuracy of the geographical space. The land’s concern with maps and spatial models aids its navigability. Cars Land’s own geography—and by extension that of the film’s Radiator Springs and its surroundings—is recapitulated elsewhere in the land. Inside Sarge’s Surplus Hut, a scale model once again replicates the layout of downtown Radiator Springs.<sup>370</sup> The model depicts the stretch of Route 66 running from the Radiator Springs Municipal Impound/Tow Mater Towing and Salvage on one end to the Courthouse and Fire Department building on the other.

This model is a mixture of the on-screen Radiator Springs from the *Cars* films and the physical Radiator Springs of Cars Land. For example, the model is populated by *Cars* characters, with cars like Flo, Sarge, Sally, and Fillmore each appearing at their respective establishments. The model also, somewhat curiously, includes Radiator Springs’s Racing Museum, a building seen in the films, but not built in the park land.<sup>371</sup> However, the buildings toward the far end of

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<sup>370</sup> These or similar models are available for purchase as Mattel’s *Cars* Precision Series. See “*Cars* Precision Series,” Cars, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://cars.disney.com/cars-precision-series>.

<sup>371</sup> Formerly the Glen Rio Motel. This building is distinct from Doc Hudson’s Clinic/Doc Hudson Racing Museum.

the street, nearest the Courthouse, correspond more directly to the layout of the land, with its truncated series of storefronts. These multiple representations of the *Cars* landscape in the land reinforce visitors' spatial awareness of their environment and further collapse park space with screen space.

Moreover, just as Cars Land reproduces the visuals and geography of the spaces seen in *Cars*, it also recreates the film's own references to real-world locations and geography. Radiator Springs itself—that is, the fictional town depicted in *Cars*—also represents a *mise en abyme* of actual geographic reality. The Radiator Springs of the film, and by extension the Radiator Springs of Cars Land, evokes historical landmarks of U.S. Route 66. These physical locations served as the inspiration for the film's Radiator Springs, and their reimagined forms are replicated in the various layers of film, land, ride, and model. For example, Radiator Springs Curios figures in the film as a souvenir and knick-knack shop run by Lizzie, a 1923 Ford Model T. In Cars Land, it is a souvenir shop, offering both Cars and Disney memorabilia. In the Radiator Springs Racers ride, the Curios shop, and Lizzie, are part of the backdrop of Radiator Springs, as the ride vehicle moves through the miniature downtown. But all these incarnations are in reference to the original inspiration for the shop: the Sandhills Curiosity Shop in Erick, Oklahoma.<sup>372</sup>

The fictional Radiator Springs of the film and land is rife with other references to Route 66 landmarks. As previously mentioned, the largest of these—Cadillac Range—provides the backdrop to the entire land. The conical architecture of the Cozy Cone Motel recalls the concrete tipi-style rooms of the Wigwam Motel chain, which had locations along Route 66 in Holbrook,

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<sup>372</sup> Brady MacDonald, "The Real Route 66 Inspirations Behind Disney's Cars Land," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 2013, <https://www.latimes.com/travel/la-xpm-2013-jan-05-la-trb-route-66-cars-land-disney-california-adventure-11201228-story.html>.

Arizona and Rialto, California (amongst others). The geodesic dome of Fillmore's Taste-In evokes the shape of Ortega's Indian Market in Lupton, Arizona. Flo's V8 evokes the Streamline Moderne aesthetics of the 5 & Diner in Tulsa, Oklahoma and the 66 Diner in Albuquerque, New Mexico, while Ramone's House of Body Art was inspired by the U-Drop Inn gas station in Shamrock, Texas. The "HERE IT IS" sign is a riff on the red, yellow, and black roadside billboard of the Jackrabbit Trading post in Joseph City, Arizona, though with a car instead of a rabbit.<sup>373</sup>

Thematically, the film itself meditates on shifting spaces, as it recalls the history of Route 66 and the changing American landscape, as superhighways degrade—and ultimately replace—the experience of open road adventures and small-town values. One sequence of the film ruminates wistfully on the lost "heyday" of Radiator Springs, as a desaturated montage set to James Taylor's nostalgic "Our Town" shows the devolution of Radiator Springs from a lively stop along a thriving Route 66 to a bypassed relic of a long-gone, too-slow era. Geography is emphasized in this sequence, as a close-up of a road map shows the bright red line of Route 66, snaking through the landscape, fade to an unmarked skinny blue line while the larger, more direct line of Interstate 40 cuts past it.<sup>374</sup> At the end of the film, the town is re-enlivened by Lightning McQueen, who has learned the joys of slowing down. As J.P. Telotte notes, with McQueen's "shift in speed, it seems, space itself has been rediscovered and reconfigured, as the blur of modern life (Virilio's 'speed-space') finds its complement in the lost dimensions of the

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<sup>373</sup> MacDonald, "The Real Route 66."

<sup>374</sup> The contrast between the old Route 66, which seems to respect the contours of the landscape around it, and the rigidity of the new Interstate, as it steamrolls through that same landscape, underscores the film's thematic nostalgia for the older, slower times versus the dangers of the modern era.

past.”<sup>375</sup> In the film’s final moments, Radiator Springs re-appears on the map with a “new spatial status” as a reinvigorated historic town.<sup>376</sup>

The film’s geographical nostalgia reflects the geographic themes and implicit nostalgia of Disney California Adventure park as a whole. Moreover, Radiator Springs’s spatial nesting reflects how Disney California Adventure park itself was originally designed as a *mise en abyme* of geographical space. The original areas of Disney California Adventure were direct references to real California locations and eras, including Pacific Wharf, which is reminiscent of the waterfronts of Monterey and San Francisco, Paradise Pier, which recalled turn-of-the-century coastal boardwalks, and Hollywood Pictures Backlot, which evoked the Golden Age of 1930s Hollywood. As the park has changed over the years, actual architectural landmarks continue to be represented even in more recent additions to the park, as with the Carthay Circle Restaurant. Located in the park’s Buena Vista Street, a recreation of Los Angeles in the early 1920s, the restaurant is a replica of the theater where *Snow White* premiered in 1937. These spaces recall Edward Soja’s description of Orange County, California as “a resplendent bazaar of repackaged times and spaces [that] allows all that is contemporary (including histories and geographies) to be encountered and consumed with and almost Edenic simultaneity.”<sup>377</sup> Nested in the park and varied in temporal references, these spaces present the park as a miniature California within California itself. To the individual *mises en abyme* of the land and its attractions, we can add a final outer layer: the geographical *mise en abyme* of the park itself.

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<sup>375</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 219.

<sup>376</sup> Telotte, *Animating Space*, 219.

<sup>377</sup> Edward Soja, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2014), 89.

Cars Land acts thus as a representation of its real-world analogue as it recreates ersatz versions of the historical sights of Route 66 and the natural landscapes of the American Southwest. The spaces of Cars Land, therefore, operate on multiple levels: both as recreations of an immersive film world and as an immersive simulacrum of the American Southwest and its landmarks, situating visitors in both real and imagined spaces and inviting them to play in the interstices between them. As such, Cars Land recalls other geography-based park lands like Frontierland or New Orleans Square, layered with the aesthetics and characters of a Pixar franchise. In this same vein, Cars Land represents both a lingering adherence to the early concept of the Disney California Adventure park as a California-themed space (though Radiator Springs is set in Arizona, it draws on locations throughout the length of Route 66, including those in the California desert) and its subsequent pivot toward film and franchise-based lands that privilege realism and screen-accuracy, as will be seen in the following case studies.

### **“Live Your Star Wars Story”: Geographical Storytelling, Immersion, and Interactivity in Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge**

Explore Star Wars land inside Disneyland Park! This is the chance to live your Star Wars story—and discover who you truly are in a galaxy far, far away...  
—Disneyland website<sup>378</sup>

Where Cars Land replicates a digitally rendered screen world in real life, Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge uses geographical storytelling to construct a new narrative space for visitors to inhabit. Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge opened in 2019 at both Disneyland in Anaheim and Disney’s Hollywood Studios in Orlando. At fourteen acres, it is the “largest and most technologically

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<sup>378</sup> “*Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge*,” Disney Parks, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://disney parks.disney.go.com/star-wars-galaxys-edge/>.

advanced single-themed land expansion ever in a Disney park.”<sup>379</sup> Instead of re-creating planets or towns from the *Star Wars* films, Galaxy’s Edge is instead designed to represent a new settlement called Black Spire Outpost and its surroundings on the planet Batuu, a new planetary location created specifically for the parks. Geography in Galaxy’s Edge is used as a storytelling mechanism, both in how its newly created environment is laid out according to a narrative schema based on moral alignment and how this spatial mapping invites visitors to enter their own *Star Wars* narrative.

This section thus analyzes how Galaxy’s Edge builds an original story world—in other words, how the physical and conceptual geographies of the park land function to create narrative space. I examine how placemaking in Galaxy’s Edge suggests a departure from established approaches to creating transmedia theme park lands, as the immersive focus shifts from imitations of screen space to the participatory co-creation of a new narrative world. As such, Galaxy’s Edge represents a new type of land-building—one where the visitor is not simply a tourist but the protagonist—that invites new modes of interacting with cinematic story worlds. Where earlier media-based theme park lands adapt their cinematic referents, “Batuu,” the setting for Galaxy’s Edge, was notably not represented on the film or television screen prior to the land’s creation. As a new location, the land itself not only functions as an extension of the larger *Star Wars* transmedia galaxy, but is simultaneously positioned as the urtext for a new story world. As such, Galaxy’s Edge’s geography de-centers pre-established cinematic stories, creating narrative openings for visitors and inviting distinct modes of interactive story building. The primary cinematic tales of Anakin, Luke, and Rey give way to new narratives that frame the

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<sup>379</sup> “Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge Opens at Walt Disney World Resort,” The Walt Disney Company, August 29, 2019, <https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/star-wars-galaxys-edge-opens-at-walt-disney-world-resort/>.

visitor as protagonist. Galaxy's Edge creates both literal and imaginary narrative spaces that can be filled by the visitor as (inter)active participant.

To explore geographical storytelling in Galaxy's Edge, I consider how the land acts as a conceptual map, charting the moral alignments and core ideological conflicts that shape the overall narrative of the Star Wars universe and inviting visitors to participate by aligning themselves along the continuum that pits the sinister First Order against the rebellious yet righteous Resistance. I examine how the land's all-encompassing cinematic environment is comprehensively built out through multi-sensory design (visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory), giving the space a sense of coherence and realism that deepens its immersive potential. The sense of a totalizing story world—one that is both firmly situated in the Star Wars universe but also left narratively open for the visitor—is further developed by transmedia texts, including Galaxy's Edge books, comics, and interactive video games. The books and comics introduce new characters and histories to the park space, while the interactive media reinforces players/visitors as protagonists in the Galaxy's Edge story. I investigate the ways in which visitors are invited to activate this fleshed-out space and to create their own narrative via its interactive elements, including its shop experiences, rides, and the Play Disney Parks app. Though different in nature, the two rides—Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run and Rise of the Resistance—both use interactive structures to cast riders as protagonists while aligning them along *Star Wars's* moral continuum. The app, too, uses interactive ludic mechanics to gamify the park space, fostering active narrative participation and immersion. These interactive aspects of the land reinforce visitors' positioning in the narrative world as they are asked to make choices, to move through the space in particular ways, and to co-create their own stories within the Star

Wars universe as they, as the epigraph above states, “discover who [they] truly are.”<sup>380</sup>

Ultimately, Galaxy’s Edge and its transmedia paratexts position the visitor as an active participant at the center of the land’s narrative. I close with a look toward Florida’s new Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser, an interactive immersive hotel experience that expands the visitor-protagonist’s personal story beyond the confines of the park.

### ***Geographical Storytelling in Galaxy’s Edge***

The initial choice of what Star Wars location to build in Galaxy’s Edge undergirds how the land functions as an immersive story world. Unlike many other media-based park spaces, whose settings are integrally tied into already-depicted stories, Galaxy’s Edge is set on Batuu, an original planet in the Star Wars universe created specifically for the parks. Thus, Galaxy’s Edge does not recapitulate settings already familiar from—and visualized in—the *Star Wars* films. As a new location, Galaxy’s Edge contributes to world-building by adding a fully developed setting and accompanying narrative to the existing Star Wars universe. Rather than simply recreating an existing planet or city like Hoth or Tatooine’s Mos Eisley, Galaxy’s Edge is instead tied into the Star Wars universe through thematic similarities, unified style, and familiar elements, rather than the direct mimetic recreation of screen space.<sup>381</sup> Moreover, because it is a new original location, Galaxy’s Edge de-centers the established characters, locations, and events from the films. This, I argue, leaves the land more narratively open for the visitor than spaces like Cars Land or a bug’s land, which are already inhabited by the characters and narratives depicted in their source films.

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<sup>380</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “*Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge*.”

<sup>381</sup> The land’s name also situates it in the larger Star Wars story world. As *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge*, it is formulated like the titles of the episodes in the main series, with the franchise identifier “Star Wars” followed by a colon and the episode name subtitle. This arguably places it at a higher status than the two Star Wars standalone films *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018).



Though it may seem obvious, this is quite different from the nature of other film-based park spaces like Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The Wizarding World, as Abby Waysdorf and Stijn Reijnders have observed, "is presented as a complete reconstruction of locations from the *Harry Potter* series."<sup>382</sup> The spaces of the Wizarding World, in Hollywood, California, Orlando, Florida, and Osaka, Japan, appear faithful to the films as they recreate the village of Hogsmeade, Diagon Alley, or Hogwarts castle. At the end of Diagon Alley in Orlando, for example, a dragon clings to the cupola atop Gringott's Bank. More than simply replicating the architecture of Diagon Alley and Gringott's, the unmoving dragon suggests a specific moment in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011), when Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley escape after having broken into Gringott's in order to steal a Horcrux.<sup>383</sup> By evoking a moment that lasts only a moment or two in the film, Diagon Alley appears to be fixed in time and inextricably linked to a particular point in the films and books. The ride inside, Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts, allows riders to witness events like those depicted in the film, further tying the attraction to a particular point in Harry's story.<sup>384</sup>

Waysdorf and Reijnders argue that theme parks, as commodified zones, are frequently critiqued as "inauthentic spaces—either in that, as artificial landscapes, they substitute for 'real' experiences of place, or, because of their lack of connection to actual filming and/or their commercial purpose and design, they are unsuitable for authentic engagement with favourite

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<sup>382</sup> Abby Waysdorf and Stijn Reijnders, "Immersion, Authenticity and the Theme Park as Social Space: Experiencing the Wizarding World of Harry Potter," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no.2 (2018): 176.

<sup>383</sup> At the park, the dragon periodically breathes fire from atop the building, while in the film it does not.

<sup>384</sup> Riders are directly addressed in the ride, but their adventure occurs simultaneously with Harry, Hermione, and Ron's experiences in the film.

texts or fandoms.”<sup>385</sup> Despite its strong fidelity to the screen world of the *Harry Potter* films, the dragon in the Wizarding World’s Diagon Alley arguably calls attention to the space’s artificiality by fixing it at a single moment within the eight-film series. While Galaxy’s Edge is also located at a particular time in the timeline of the *Star Wars* films, the land deliberately cultivates an aura of authenticity through its status as an original creation for the parks. As such, Galaxy’s Edge gives the sense of being a real landscape rather than a facsimile of a space depicted on screen. It does this in part by presenting a comprehensive new story world, complete with its own history, culture, and mythology. By creating a “new” planet, Galaxy’s Edge allows visitors to enter the narrative as active participants, creating their own stories rather than visiting a location seen in the films in a more passive, touristic fashion.

Visitor immersion in the Galaxy’s Edge story is accomplished through a technique I call “geographical storytelling,” that is, storytelling that is accomplished via the imagined setting and physical layout of the land. In Galaxy’s Edge, geographical storytelling situates the land within a broader transmedia world while telling an original story. This shapes the visitor’s ability to locate themselves in the *Star Wars* galaxy and to situate themselves in its broader narrative, which pits the light side of the Force against the dark side. Ultimately, geographical storytelling affects how visitors immerse themselves within a story world. Like some of the individual attractions discussed in Chapter One, *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* casts visitors into their own role as protagonist, rather than framing them either as outside the story or as existing characters (i.e., how visitors were intended to “be” Snow White in the earliest version of *Snow White and Her Adventures*). Moreover, visitors are positioned as not only experiencing the narrative as protagonist, but they are invited by the land’s design to actively participate in shaping how that

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<sup>385</sup> Waysdorf and Reijnders, “Immersion, Authenticity and the Theme Park,” 175.

narrative plays out. This is distinct from previous film-based lands at the Disneyland Resort, which either lack a sense of narrative structure, like Mickey's Toontown, or present that structure as fixed and unchangeable by the visitor, as with a bug's land or Cars Land. While visitors may imagine themselves to be cars or bugs during their visits to these spaces, their presence as potential characters in those lands does not appear to significantly affect the events that occur in their story worlds.

The layout of Galaxy's Edge suggests not just a single location, but a complex geography that spans a heterogeneous central village and more distant outskirts. As discussed previously in this chapter, the use of spatial shorthand to give a sense of complex geographical relations has precedence in other park lands. Mickey's Toontown is divided into the more urban Downtown Toontown district and the suburban zone of Mickey's Neighborhood. Similarly, a bug's land was divided between the more bucolic natural landscape of the ants' home and the carnival-like area of Flik's Fun Fair in a way that reflected the film's plot. Cars Land, too, not only recreates Radiator Springs, but its relationship to the natural environment around it, and even to real-world locations beyond that, as it also reflects the protagonist's journey in the film. Galaxy's Edge, however, is distinct in the way it maps not only the relationships between different kinds of spaces (urban and rural, natural and fabricated), but in how it uses those relationships to create a central conflict that defines the land as a narrative space. This conflict creates a framework for not only the visitor's story, but for how the land's events affect its larger transmedia story world.

Maps of Galaxy's Edge suggest how the land's literal spatial makeup establishes this structure for the visitor's story. The land itself is roughly divided into two general zones along an east-west axis, with the Resistance Encampment on one end and the settlement Black Spire

Outpost on the other.<sup>386</sup> Black Spire Outpost is located closer to the center of the park, with entrances leading into it from Frontierland. It is designed as a microcosm of a vibrant city center, from the marketplace that recalls old-world bazaars, to the spaceport where the Millennium Falcon is docked, to merchant row, with its shops and cantina. Within the settlement of Black Spire Outpost, farthest away from the Resistance Encampment, lies the First Order District, a portion of the town that has been taken over by the sinister First Order, personified by Kylo Ren and the First Order officers and various stormtroopers that populate it. Savi's Path leads away from the main settlement, undulating through natural landscaping, to the Resistance Encampment in Batuu's Surabat River Valley. This region is placed closer to the park's outskirts and is accessible via a third entrance that leads to Critter Country. Here, nature serves as a spatial and ideological boundary separating the two factions.

The architecture and design of these spaces emphasize their differences and adversarial relationship, while employing preexisting design and iconography familiar from *Star Wars* films. The "old outpost" of the Resistance camp, set in Black Spire's ancient ruins, is covertly hidden in nature and makeshift in appearance. In contrast, the First Order district is overt, imposing in scale, and almost Brutalist in form. Through the design and placement of the Resistance camp, we can understand the Resistance's underdog status and their struggle to fight against the more powerful and more merciless First Order, which intrudes into the space of Black Spire Outpost. The colors and contours of the First Order area mark it as distinct from the surrounding settlement. The buildings taken over by the First Order, particularly Docking Bay 9, which houses the First Order Cargo shop, are colder and grayer than their surroundings, starker and less

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<sup>386</sup> The layout of the sister land at Disney Hollywood Studios (or "GE East" as it is known in fan circles) is opposite, with the First Order area in the West and the Resistance encampment in the East

curvilinear than the warmer, softer buildings of the rest of the town. Positioned between these two poles, the Outpost itself—the settlement, with its shops, restaurants, marketplace, and spaceport—becomes a liminal space, a contested space at stake in the conflict between the two factions. This is also the space of a third type of alignment: the more morally ambiguous “scoundrel” faction.

That Black Spire Outpost is a contested space is further communicated by environmental details. Blood-red banners bearing the insignia of the First Order signal that this is an occupied and militarized space, as do the imposing life-size TIE Echelon ship and giant blast doors. A catwalk occupied by patrolling stormtroopers suggests the omnipresent surveillance of an occupying force. Blaster marks sprinkle the surface of the buildings, indicating past conflict and violent incidents. The stormtroopers’ presence extends this aesthetic of occupation beyond the First Order stronghold and into some of the surrounding contested areas, as they patrol around the spaceport and other ambient spaces. Similarly, the fact that the Resistance Encampment is hidden and removed from the main settlement suggests the power dynamic between the dominant First Order and the underdog Resistance forces, who must operate in the shadows.

The geographical layout of Galaxy’s Edge thus maps out the central ideological conflict between good and evil—the basic thematic framework most often expressed in the *Star Wars* franchise as the struggle between the light side and the dark side of The Force. This central conflict defines, amongst other texts, the core nine-film “Skywalker Saga,” which traces the struggle between the powers of good and evil on a macro scale, as battling political and military forces, and as it affects individual characters’ lives. However, the space of Galaxy’s Edge not only reflects this struggle between opposing factions and ideologies, but also uses this geographically established story framework to open narrative space for the visitor to enter into

and co-create a story set in that world. In other words, this is not only a contested space mapped along a scale of moral alignment, but one where the ideological conflict is positioned as active and ongoing, where the visitor is implied to have agency in how the larger events play out. Temporally, Black Spire Outpost is set between Episodes VIII and IX, as suggested by its design, the presence of certain characters, and its transmedia paratexts. This places the land canonically inside the nine-film series and suggests that the events that occur there are important not only to the visitor, but to the outcome of the core texts of the *Star Wars* franchise.

As a site of conflict, then, Galaxy's Edge can adapt to each visitor's preferred narrative, whether they align themselves squarely with the "good guys" of the Resistance, the villains of the First Order, or somewhere in between as a scoundrel, perhaps with allegiances to one side or the other. How visitors navigate this ideological space shapes their experiences, as they are, at times, prompted to "choose" between the light side and dark side. It is important to remember that *Star Wars* characters themselves tend to be identifiably mapped along this ideological continuum, their character arcs at times depending on their movement from one side to the other (and sometimes back again). This is, perhaps, most iconically reflected in Anakin Skywalker's journey from the light side-affiliated Jedi Order to the dark side-affiliated Sith as Darth Vader and back again, with his final redemption in *Return of the Jedi*, which fulfilled the prophecy of his bringing balance to the Force. By visiting and navigating this narratively charged space, visitors are likewise invited to choose an alignment, to cast themselves in a role, and thus step into the story world of *Star Wars*.

Both of the land's attractions—Rise of the Resistance and Smuggler's Run—fall along the ideological lines that define the rest of Galaxy's Edge, according to their placement in the land. Riders on *Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance* are cast as aides to the Resistance effort and,

appropriately, enter the ride in the Resistance Encampment area of Galaxy's Edge. Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run, located in the spaceport in the contested central portion of Black Spire Outpost, assumes a more morally ambiguous visitor. Riders on Smuggler's Run are framed as taking a less-than-legitimate job from Hondo Ohnaka, who operates partly as a shipping company owner and partly as smuggler, pirate, and outlaw. Interestingly, neither attraction overtly positions riders as First Order-affiliated.<sup>387</sup> This aligns with the overall moral position of the films, whose ideological schema upholds the Resistance as the righteous "good guys."

In addition to locating the rider in a moral and political space, the two rides also situate the rider in the larger imagined geography of Batuu and Black Spire Outpost, as they visualize the environment beyond the confines of the park via their use of screens. Smuggler's Run takes riders from Batuu to Corellia, a location in the Star Wars universe visualized on screen in the film *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018). Set in the ancient ruins, which have become the covert Resistance base, *Rise of the Resistance* further reveals the landscape of Black Spire Outpost, tying it to the settlement's histories as told in further detail in Galaxy's Edge paratexts. Both rides use digital visualization and technologies like motion simulation to expand the geographical experience of Black Spire Outpost into the surrounding environment and outer space. Perhaps counterintuitively, the plot of *Rise of the Resistance* centers on keeping geographical information—the location of the Resistance Base—secret.

Each attraction includes take-off and landing sequences that use digital technologies to depict Black Spire Outpost's environmental surrounds, giving a sense of what lies outside the boundaries of the park land. Instead of the actual spaces that border the park land (Frontierland,

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<sup>387</sup> Of course, riders can imagine their own storylines and are enabled to take up a First Order alignment elsewhere in the land, including in the app and through the purchase of First Order merchandise. Employees may also interact differently with riders wearing First Order affiliated clothing.

Critter Country, or even Anaheim), these visions of Black Spire Outpost suggest the broader planetary environment that spatial constraints prevent from being built. On *Rise of the Resistance*, for example, the rear window of the transport ship ridden by visitors shows Black Spire Outpost as it recedes into the distance, revealing the lush green landscape, punctuated by the giant “spires,” or petrified tree trunks, plus the rivers, and other natural features that are imagined as surrounding it. The return to Black Spire’s spaceport at the end of *Smuggler’s Run* features similar aerial views of the landscape around the outpost. Similar imagery is seen at the end of *Rise of the Resistance*, as riders’ escape pods return to Batuu’s surface. These panoramas give a sense that Black Spire Outpost itself is larger than what is experienced in the boundaries of the park land. It also indicates how isolated the settlement is within the largely natural landscape of Batuu, and suggests how alone its denizens may be in the struggle against First Order control.

The geography, history, and culture of Batuu are similarly developed via the various transmedia texts created for and about the land. *Galaxy’s Edge*-specific video games, books, and comics expand the sense of Black Spire Outpost and Batuu as a fully-realized, livable environment while reinforcing elements of the park land—like its shops, characters, food, and drinks—as real and authentic. The novels *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire* and *A Crash of Fate*, for example, add further details about the planet, the settlement, and its inhabitants. *Black Spire* centers around the story of Vi Moradi, a character who first appears in the 2017 novel *Phasma*, but who becomes a central part of the events of *Galaxy’s Edge* and is, notably, a live character in the parks, played by an actor.<sup>388</sup> The novel details how Moradi has been sent to Batuu by General Leia to establish a Resistance outpost and bring allies to the cause, endeavors which shape the

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<sup>388</sup> Delilah S. Dawson, *Star Wars: Phasma* (New York: Del Rey, 2017).



political and physical space of Black Spire Outpost in the book and inform how that space appears in the land. In *A Crash of Fate*, readers are introduced to Batuu residents like Julen Rakub and Volt, a clerk at Bina's Creature Stall, which is a location in both the book and the parks. Salju, mechanic and proprietor of Black Spire Station, is a character developed in multiple *Galaxy's Edge* books.<sup>389</sup> Though she does not appear in the land, Black Spire Station does, and familiarity with the transmedia paratexts lends depth to the space, as one can imagine that she is simply away from the shop at the moment.

As these books cite geographical markers from the lands, including specific shops and restaurants, like the Creature Stall or Oga's Cantina, they give a sense of the atmosphere of Black Spire—of how characters live in these spaces. This suggests how visitors, too, might experience them. In one *Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire* scene, Kriki, a small-statured Chadra-Fan, darts through some of the “less public spaces of the outpost.” The book describes how she “Seemed to know the small spaces of the market well, and she led Vi through shops, out back doors, past garbage yards, and even through a private home with a lovely courtyard with its own sparkling blue fountain and an angry Toydarian who shook her fist and shouted, ‘Hey! Get out of here, you!’”<sup>390</sup> This gives a sense not only of Black Spire Outpost as a lived-in space, but of a larger imagined geography that exists beyond the relatively constrained dimensions of the land. These texts also establish the backstory for why certain parts of the settlement are as they appear in the park. For example, *Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire* details, over the course of the novel, how the ancient ruins came to become a stronghold for the Resistance; the epilogue describes how

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<sup>389</sup> Zoraida Córdova, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge: A Crash of Fate* (Los Angeles and New York: Disney Lucasfilm Press, 2019); Delilah S. Dawson, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire* (New York: Del Rey, 2019); Amy Ratcliffe, *Star Wars: Elee and Me* (Los Angeles and New York: Disney Lucasfilm Press, 2020).

<sup>390</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 194.

“the encampment had expanded beyond the ruins and out into the clearing, as Vi had imagined it would, and an old X-wing was parked there when it wasn’t being used for flight training.”<sup>391</sup>

This reflects the layout of the clearing in the Resistance Encampment section of the park land where, across from the entrance to the Rise of the Resistance ride, set in the ancient ruins, rests a life-size X-wing starfighter.

The *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* five-issue comic series similarly connects the space to its surrounding geographies while tying it to other established locations and characters. Through a number of flashbacks, the series weaves “present-day” events at Black Spire Outpost, concurrent with the arrival of the First Order, with the past adventurous smuggling exploits of Dok-Ondar and his associates. Dok-Ondar, the proprietor of Dok-Ondar’s Den of Antiquities, a real shop in Galaxy’s Edge, is another core figure in the sociopolitical landscape of Black Spire Outpost. The first comic in the series, *Galaxy’s Edge 1*, for example, explains how the baby sarlacc in the Den of Antiquities, which can be seen inside a glass display case in the park shop, was smuggled to Dok by Han Solo and Chewbacca. Greedo, a Rodian infamously killed by Solo in the original *Star Wars* film, figures into the flashback events of *Galaxy’s Edge 2*, further tying the space to pre-established on-screen characters. *Galaxy’s Edge 3* depicts Dok-Ondar and Hondo Ohnaka, another significant character in the land, meeting up with Chirrut Îmwe on Jedha, a character and location familiar from the film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016). The comics intermix these established characters and locations with the new locations of Batuu and its characters. Panels in the comics depict the Batuan outskirts as well as the outpost itself, replicating the layout seen in the parks. From the interiors of real Galaxy’s Edge establishments like Savi’s Workshop and Oga’s Cantina to small details like the green R5 unit shown in the final panel of *Galaxy’s Edge*

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<sup>391</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 373.

5, which recalls the green-accented Sprite droid on the drink vending cart that can be seen in-land, the comics tie the park space into larger imagined social, political, and natural geographies.

Stylized as an in-world guidebook, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Traveler's Guide to Batuu* further develops the backstory of Batuu and Black Spire Outpost as it outlines the planet's political, cultural, ecological, and geographic history. The *Traveler's Guide* develops these details, while also using the guidebook conceit to further situate Batuu in context with other planets from the Star Wars galaxy and associated transmedia texts. The Galaxy Map indicates where Batuu is located in the Star Wars galaxy. Its position as part of the galaxy's "Outer Rim" factors into the stories told in and about Galaxy's Edge as well as the larger astropolitics of the Star Wars galaxy. The "Day Trips From Batuu" section links the setting for the physical land with planetary locations featured in the films, such as Endor, most well-known as the climactic setting for *Return of the Jedi*, or Takodana, the location of Maz Kanata's cantina as pictured in *The Force Awakens*. The guide ties Batuu to planets mentioned in other canon texts, such as the *Thrawn* novel series (the planets Umme, Yakorki, Mokivj, Cermu), *Star Wars* video games like *Vader Immortal* (Bakura), and television series like *Star Wars Resistance* (Castilon). It also describes surrounding Batuan communities like the Galma District, the Surabat River Valley, and the Peka community, locations which are also invoked in the novels, Play Disney Parks Datapad app, and games like *Sims 4*, which will be discussed in further detail below.

The geography of Galaxy's Edge, and of Batuu as described in its ancillary texts, ultimately creates both a literal and an imagined story space. As original creations, the spaces of Batuu and Black Spire Outpost, both as a park land and as they are described in the books and other texts, are left open for the visitor in a way that is different from park lands that mimetically replicate their on-screen counterparts. Though they are inhabited by fictional characters who

provide a context for the land's culture and conflicts, they are also framed as in-progress, active, and living spaces. The contours of Galaxy's Edge create the opportunity for the visitor to, should they choose, explore a fully realized narrative environment and to imagine themselves as a primary narrative actor in that environment. This amounts to a different kind of immersive space—one that is predicated on its status as an original and authentic location.

### ***Multi-Sensory Transmedia Storytelling***

To convey the sense of an authentic and autonomous story space without the benefit of audience familiarity fostered by on-screen representation, Black Spire Outpost is presented as a fully immersive environment through its multi-sensory storytelling techniques. Many scholars have noted that theme parks operate not only as visual or auditory experiences, but as fully sensorial spaces that engage not only our tactile or kinesthetic sensibilities, but our senses of taste and smell, too. Scott Bukatman, in his description of the “hypercinematic” at Disneyland, considers how elements like “artificial breezes, sounds, and even smells extend the sensory address,” even noting how one EPCOT attraction “includes a change in humidity.”<sup>392</sup> Margaret King defines theme parks as “a total-sensory-engaging environmental art form built to express a coherent but multi-layered message.”<sup>393</sup> Gordon S. Grice pushes back against the “supremacy of the visual” asserting that in immersive environments “all modes of sensory perception need to be considered, otherwise, what does ‘immersive’ mean?”<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Scott Bukatman, “There's Always Tomorrowland: Disney and the Hypercinematic Experience,” *October* 57 (Summer 1991): 75-76.

<sup>393</sup> King, “The Theme Park,” 3.

<sup>394</sup> Gordon S. Grice, “Sensory Design in Immersive Environments,” in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press, 2016), 131.

Rebecca Williams has discussed park space from a fan studies perspective in terms of what she calls “haptic fandom,” looking at how this mode of engagement “offers unique opportunities for fans to become immersed in its transmedia world and to move their fandom from the textual into the bodily and the spatial.”<sup>395</sup> Quoting Abby Waysdorf and Stijn Reijnders, Williams defines haptic fandom as the “tastes, smells, sounds and physical movements that are part of the narrative world are experienced through the park. This gives them an embodied sense of a story world that, while familiar, was previously only cerebral or audiovisual.”<sup>396</sup> These scholars importantly call for greater emphasis on the material and embodied aspects of park spaces. As they suggest, a consideration of placemaking in Galaxy’s Edge should not be focused solely on the visual, but on a whole-body understanding of media experience.

Though aspects of the land connect it clearly to the *Star Wars* films and other media, many features throughout Galaxy’s Edge suggest that the land is a comprehensive original space, rather than a recreation of an existing cinematic environment. At Galaxy’s Edge, details that engage a range of sensory experience—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, haptic, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory—create a feeling of immersion not just in a “Star Wars” land, but in a “real” location with its own culture and history. This critical mass of unique details contributes to a sense of “saturation,” a level of immersion which Mark J.P. Wolf identifies as “the pleasurable goal of conceptual immersion; the occupying of the audience’s full attention, concentration, and imagination, often with more detail, nuances, and subtleties than can be held in mind all at

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<sup>395</sup> Williams, “From Star Tours to Galaxy’s Edge,” 136.

<sup>396</sup> Waysdorf and Reijnders, “Immersion, Authenticity and the Theme Park,” 180. Quoted in Williams, “From Star Tours to Galaxy’s Edge,” 143. While it may be considered to be primarily audio-visual, it is important to remember that cinema itself is also, as scholars like Vivian Sobchack argue, fully embodied and multi-sensory.

once.”<sup>397</sup> For example, animal, vehicle, and droid tracks stamped into the concrete suggest intertwining natural ecosystems and built communities that are actively inhabited beyond what one may see during a single visit. These details urge the visitor to imagine creatures and people moving through the space in their daily lives. Tableaux sprinkled throughout the space similarly suggest that this is a real, living community; a pile of debris and droids conjure images of an old wreck. Speeders can be seen and heard humming and whirring at Black Spire Station, which, though it is a mostly static scene, appears to be a well-patronized part of the local commerce. Wind chimes adorning the doors outside of locals’ homes and the ribbons and fabric scraps tied to the Trilon Wishing Tree outside of Savi’s Workshop suggest local cultural and artistic traditions.<sup>398</sup>

Of course, it is important to remember that Galaxy’s Edge—like all theme parks—is a commodified space, where interactive storytelling is intertwined with consumption.<sup>399</sup> However, unlike many of the souvenirs offered in shops elsewhere in the park, the merchandise in Galaxy’s Edge is all visually and tactilely designed to communicate a sense of authenticity—to appear as though it belongs in a cohesive story world. As Imagineering portfolio creative executive Scott Trowbridge stated, “One of our mantras is, ‘If doesn’t feel like it would be at home in a movie, it

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<sup>397</sup> Mark J.P. Wolf, “Beyond Immersion: Absorption, Saturation, and Overflow in the Building of Imaginary Worlds,” in *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 206.

<sup>398</sup> The significance and rituals of the Trilon Wishing Tree are described by Salju, a Batuan local, in the *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire* novel: “This is how we send our hopes and wishes out into the universe. You tie a piece of fabric to the tree and make your vow or ask your wish, and when it disintegrates, the galaxy’s grants your boon.” The tree is similarly described in Zoraida Córdova’s novel *A Crash of Fate*. It also appears in the *Sims 4 Star Wars: Journey to Batuu* computer game. See Dawson, *Black Spire*, 60; Córdova *Crash of Fate*, 89.

<sup>399</sup> Of course, merchandising and Star Wars have always been intimately connected.

shouldn't feel at home in the land.”<sup>400</sup> Merchandise does not feature extra-diegetic wording or logos that read “Galaxy’s Edge” or “Disneyland,” for example, though it can use in-world terms like “Black Spire Outpost” or “Batuu.”<sup>401</sup> Logos are downplayed so much that special packaging was developed for the Coca Cola products sold in the land; Coke, Diet Coke, and Sprite are all sold in “reclaimed” thermal detonator bottles with stylized Aurebesh labels.<sup>402</sup> Overall, though, packaging is minimal or, where it cannot be, themed as “in-world.” Some packaging, like that of the Creature Stall, lends itself to a sense of immersion and authenticity. When a visitor buys a “creature,” such as a purring loth cat, plush porg, or cackling Kowakian monkey-lizard, their purchase is packaged in a windowed box that resembles a live animal crate, complete with “caution” written on the side in both English and Aurebesh. Nearby, a caged and slumbering animatronic loth cat suggest that the toys available for purchase are not merely stuffed animals, but “real” living creatures.

The merchandise at Galaxy’s Edge are items that are imagined to be authentic to Black Spire Outpost and the larger Star Wars universe. The Toydarian Toymaker shop, for example, sells toys designed to look handmade. These objects tend to prioritize “natural” materials like wood and cloth over artificial plastics to appear more authentic. Trowbridge emphasized this point while promoting the new land in 2019: “You’re going to find that everything on this planet

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<sup>400</sup> Brady MacDonald, “Toydarian Toymaker: Step Inside an Interstellar Toy Store at Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge in Disneyland,” *Orange County Register*, April 17, 2019, <https://www.ocregister.com/2019/04/17/toydarian-toymaker-step-inside-an-interstellar-toy-store-at-star-wars-galaxys-edge-in-disneyland/>.

<sup>401</sup> Practical concerns necessitate that these identifiers are still present on price tags and copyright fine print, however.

<sup>402</sup> Peter Sciretta, “First Look: Aurebesh Coke Coming To 'Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge', Served in Reclaimed Thermal Detonator Packaging,” *SlashFilm*, April 13, 2019, <https://www.slashfilm.com/565712/aurebesh-coke-at-star-wars-galaxys-edge/>. The thermal detonator packaging was apparently so authentic looking that it caused a controversy when it was banned by the TSA in August 2013. The ban was reversed a few weeks later. See Niraj Chokshi, “T.S.A. Reverses Ban on ‘Star Wars’-Themed Thermal Detonator Coke Bottles,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/us/tsa-star-wars-coke-bottles.html>.

feels like it was made by people on this planet for people on this planet.”<sup>403</sup> Wooden Stormtrooper dolls, wooden puzzle cubes, and etched Imperial music boxes appear to be handmade. A carved wooden conxor whistle alludes to the owl-like creatures depicted in the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Ragdoll-style plush versions of Star Wars characters like Lando Calrissian or Yoda suggest that inhabitants of the planet may have heard about such legendary figures from myths and stories. Musical instruments suggest artistic traditions unique to the Star Wars galaxy. Some souvenirs, like the t-shirts, mugs, and postcards for sale at Jewels of Both, are styled as just that: mementos of a visit to Batuu (i.e., not “Galaxy’s Edge,” but the “real” planet). Keychains, magnets, and ornaments prominently display that they are keepsakes from “Batuu” or “Black Spire Outpost,” where the fine print noting that they are from Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge (copyright Disney and Lucasfilm LTD) is minimized on the bottom or back of the object. Other merchandise at Galaxy’s Edge shops, such as the Jedi and Sith robes sold at Black Spire Outfitters and the First Order hats and jackets at First Order Cargo, appear to be screen-accurate, encouraging visitors to engage in cosplay.<sup>404</sup>

This merchandise points to an important distinction held by Galaxy’s Edge. Unlike other *Star Wars* paratexts, including most pre-2014 books, comics, toys, films, television series, and even parts of Star Tours, Galaxy’s Edge is official canon, meaning that anything in the land is considered part of the official Star Wars universe and timeline.<sup>405</sup> As a result, the accuracy and

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<sup>403</sup> MacDonald, “Toydarrian Toymaker.”

<sup>404</sup> Cosplay in Galaxy’s Edge is both encouraged by Disney and subject to particular restrictions, including the prohibition of adults wearing full Jedi robes or full screen-accurate costumes, though the enforcement of these rules appears to be variable. “Batuubounding,” or dressing up like a Batuu local rather than a specific character from the films, is particularly encouraged.

<sup>405</sup> Brady MacDonald, “Which Star Wars Characters Can — and Can’t — Appear in Disneyland’s Galaxy’s Edge,” *Orange County Register*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/01/07/could-disney-bring-the-mandalorian-and-grogu-to-star-wars-galaxys-edge/>.



continuity of all elements of the land with that larger story world is particularly important. This includes the merchandise discussed above, which is not only in-world, but an official part of the Star Wars narrative universe. Galaxy's Edge's canonicity crucially also informs which characters can appear in the land and how the events that occur in the land's stories connect to the larger course of events in the Star Wars universe. For example, since Galaxy's Edge is set between the final two films in the Skywalker Saga—*The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker*—cinematic characters that are dead at this point in the story cannot appear in-land. To have Darth Vader or even Han Solo, who dies in *The Last Jedi*, appear in Galaxy's Edge would be to break canon continuity.

The land's boundaries thus act as a physical manifestation of the limits of the franchise's canon. This was most apparent after the release of the hit Disney+ series *The Mandalorian* in late 2019, around six months after Galaxy's Edge opened at Disneyland. Building on the great demand for *Mandalorian* merchandise, particularly that featuring the character of Grogu, or “Baby Yoda,” a merchandise cart popped up around February 2020 that sold *Mandalorian* Spirit Jerseys, t-shirts, magnets, and more. This cart was placed at the entrance to—but, crucially, not inside—Galaxy's Edge.<sup>406</sup> There are other instances of slippage in the canonicity of Galaxy's Edge merchandise. While lightsabers built by visitors to Savi's Workshop, for example, could be considered canon—visitors assemble pieces from “scrap” collected by the Gatherers, as described in *Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire*—so-called “legacy” lightsabers available for purchase in Dok-Ondar's are arguably not. As screen-accurate reproductions of characters' lightsabers, it would not make sense in the context of the story world for multiple visitors to purchase Kylo Ren or Rey's actual lightsaber from Dok, since presumably the characters themselves may still

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<sup>406</sup> For a photograph of the cart, see <https://twitter.com/dlnt/status/1228457833584152576>.

be in possession of their own unique lightsaber.<sup>407</sup> As Redditor “Automaticman01” observed on the Galaxy’s Edge subreddit, it appears that the term “legacy” in this instance is code for non-canon.<sup>408</sup> Ultimately, however, canonicity is a primary concern in Galaxy’s Edge, even to the point where, as mentioned above, the theming of Coca Cola bottles take precedence over Coke’s own brand identity.

The characters and personalities of local shop owners like Dok-Ondar are also part of the immersive conceit and are developed via set design as well as in Galaxy’s Edge transmedia texts. At the back of the Toydarian Toymaker shop, a screen disguised as a frosted window occasionally shows the silhouette of shop owner “Zabaka the Toydarian.”<sup>409</sup> The shop sign, which simply reads “toys” in Aurebesh, is adorned with the figure of a toydarian, apparently made from scrap metal. Galaxy’s Edge books and comics further describe the inhabitants of Black Spire Outpost, including the shopkeepers, as well as their relationships and conflicts with one another. *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire* mentions how “Zabaka the Toydarian toymaker was deeply loyal to Oga,” another key Batuan personality, but “Kat Saka, who ran the popped-grain stall, was a fourth-generation Batuan who owned several farms and was therefore unlikely to want to get involved in any conflict.”<sup>410</sup> Even the apparently unstaffed Black Spire Station, a repair shop and filling station that can be seen in Galaxy’s Edge, is brought to life in multiple texts. Salju, the proprietor of Black Spire Station, is described in *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire, A Crash of Fate*, and the children’s book *Elee and Me*, which describes Salju’s childhood friend

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<sup>407</sup> Indeed, Kylo Ren’s lightsaber can be seen on his belt when he appears in the land.

<sup>408</sup> See [https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/eij8eh/how\\_much\\_of\\_galaxys\\_edge\\_is\\_canon/](https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/eij8eh/how_much_of_galaxys_edge_is_canon/).

<sup>409</sup> “Toydarian Toymaker,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/shops/disneyland/toydarian-toymaker/>.

<sup>410</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 60.

Elee, a therii she kept as a pet until she grew so big that she had to be relocated to the neighboring Surabat River Valley.<sup>411</sup>

Oga Garra and Dok-Ondar, two of Galaxy's Edge's most powerful original characters, are developed in detail in the physical locations of Galaxy's Edge as well as its paratexts. Oga Garra, local crime boss and proprietor of Oga's Cantina, is focused on her own self-interests and the stability of the town, as she is described as being concerned primarily with "support[ing] Oga. And Black Spire Outpost. In the order...According to Oga, what's right is whatever maintains order and balance."<sup>412</sup> She is, according to these transmedia texts, "the only government" the residents of Black Spire have.<sup>413</sup> Her morally ambiguous work in Black Spire's underworld is reflected in the rules posted in Oga's Cantina in the park, which allude to fighting and her involvement in local commerce, as she demands approval "all deals over 10,000 credits."<sup>414</sup> Dok-Ondar's Den of Antiquities shop similarly reflects the economic structures of Black Spire Outpost. The domain of Dok-Ondar, an antiquities collector and trader, the physical

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<sup>411</sup> Ratcliffe, *Elee and Me*, np.

<sup>412</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 52.

<sup>413</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 53.

<sup>414</sup> The rules, as translated from Aurebesh, are:

"Kowakian monkey-lizards are prohibited

No staring

No fighting, biting or tearing off of limbs

Take nothing, leave nothing

Clean up after your animal, creature or droid

Wookiees: Two drink maximum. No exceptions.

Oga Garra's approval needed for all deals over 10,000 credits"

shop's exterior and interior set design allude to a rich history and to connections with the larger Star Wars universe.<sup>415</sup> Dok-Ondar figures into several of the Galaxy's Edge paratexts, particularly the *Galaxy's Edge* comic series, which centers its stories around the antiquities dealer and his exploits.

The variety of shops and their placement throughout Galaxy's Edge suggests a complex society as well as a space of conflict. Black Spire's Market is designed with a variety of shops tailored to everyday life, from clothing and trinkets to toys and pets. Kat Saka's Kettle, a quick service popcorn stall, suggests a bustling marketplace filled with busy inhabitants. As mentioned above, the two faction-oriented shops—Resistance Supply and First Order Cargo—are situated in their respective zones of control. First Order Cargo is set in a large, imposing building, while Resistance Supply kiosks are styled as portable cargo pods. The aesthetic design of the latter illustrates their transitory status; dropped in a hurry, they might be ready to go at a moment's notice. Merchant Row—which includes Dok-Ondar's Den of Antiquities as well as the Docking Bay 7 Food and Cargo restaurant, Oga's Cantina, and the quick-service Milk Stand—occupies the middle part of the land, filling it with the sights, sounds, textures, smells, and tastes of a living settlement. Oga's Cantina, like Mos Eisley Cantina as depicted in *Star Wars*, reflects the murky moral middle of Black Spire Outpost, as the location “where bounty hunters, smugglers, rogue traders and weary travelers of all ages come together to refuel, enjoy music and conduct meetings—no questions asked.”<sup>416</sup> The material details and physical placements of the shops and

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<sup>415</sup> For a breakdown of sixty-seven Easter eggs in Doc Ondar's Den of Antiquities, see: Charlie Hall, “A Guide to Dok-Ondar's Den of Antiquities at Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge,” *Polygon*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.polygon.com/2019/7/22/20695275/star-wars-land-dok-ondars-den-of-antiquities-guide-photos>.

<sup>416</sup> “Oga's Cantina at the Disneyland Resort,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/dining/disneyland/ogas-cantina/>.

restaurants thus communicate information about the longstanding culture and politics of Black Spire Outpost, along with its current status as a site of conflict between two opposing factions.

Aural immersion is fostered by the music played in Galaxy's Edge. A number of original popular music tracks were created to be played in particular parts of the land, including the dining areas and even in the restrooms (or "refreshers" as they are known in-land).<sup>417</sup> The conceit is that these songs, as well as audio of Galactic news and coverage of sports like pod racing, are being played over the local Radio Batuu station, BSO 401.72, deejayed by local Black Spire resident Palob Godalhi.<sup>418</sup> Inside Oga's Cantina, the animatronic DJ-R3X plays the original songs as part of his set, which is interspersed with dialogue and jokes.<sup>419</sup> The songs created for Galaxy's Edge use existing languages from the Star Wars universe, like Huttese (in the tracks "Yocola Ateema" and "Goola Bukee"), Jawaese ("Utinni"), or Gungan Basic ("Una Duey Dee"), or made up languages.<sup>420</sup> All of these tracks portray a sense of unfamiliar, and were deliberately crafted to avoid any real, i.e. Earth-based, languages. According to Disney Imagineer Matt Walker, Imagineers

started with the known alien languages established by Lucasfilm, and that was the springboard. And then we wanted to encourage the writers to have fun and to create their own alien languages. But then of course we would have to make sure that those alien

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<sup>417</sup> Galaxy's Edge's original songs were released on a 19 track Spotify playlist titled "Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Oga's Cantina: R3X's Playlist #1." The playlist also contains John Williams's "Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Symphonic Suite."

<sup>418</sup> Brady MacDonald, "Radio Batuu Broadcasts Star Wars Music, News and Sports in Disneyland's Galaxy's Edge," *Orange County Register*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/07/15/radio-batuu-broadcasts-star-wars-music-news-and-sports-about-disneylands-galaxys-edge/>. The station call sign number refers to Batuu's galactic coordinates.

<sup>419</sup> R-3X is the same character as the former pilot of Star Tours, RX-24. Both are voiced by Paul Reubens.

<sup>420</sup> For Reddit fan translations of Huttese songs, see: [https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/eapdrn/yocola\\_ateema\\_song\\_translation\\_drink\\_now/](https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/eapdrn/yocola_ateema_song_translation_drink_now/); [https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/duplicates/f49mxj/goola\\_bukee\\_song\\_translation/](https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/duplicates/f49mxj/goola_bukee_song_translation/). According to Wookieepedia, "Una Duey Dee" is Gungan Basic for "one two three." See "Una Duey Dee," Wookieepedia, Fandom, accessed January 14, 2022, [https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Una\\_Duey\\_De](https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Una_Duey_De).

languages that were created by our writers didn't inadvertently mean something questionable in Brazilian Portuguese [or other languages].<sup>421</sup>

*Star Wars* composer John Williams created an original score for the land: the “Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge Symphonic Suite.” However, to further the sense of immersion, Williams’s theme, which sounds like a film score rather than a diegetic pop song, is not heard in its entirety inside the ambient spaces of Galaxy’s Edge.<sup>422</sup> It is, however, used inside the land’s rides, as will be discussed below.

Beyond music, spoken and written language gives Galaxy’s Edge a sense of authenticity as well as cultural depth.<sup>423</sup> Many original phrases have been developed for use in Galaxy’s Edge. These are communicated in-land by park employees, as well as in paratexts like the *Traveler’s Guide to Batuu*.<sup>424</sup> Some terms and phrases used in Galaxy’s Edge are standard to larger *Star Wars* franchise, such as “younglings,” “padawans,” or the classic “May the Force be with you.” Visitors are asked by employees to pay in “credits,” and they may be told where they can visit the “hydrators” (water fountains) or the “refreshers” (bathrooms) during their visit. Such language reinforces the ties between Galaxy’s Edge and the larger *Star Wars* franchise while distancing the experience from the theme park milieu. Visually, in-world language is

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<sup>421</sup> Keith Caulfield, “How the Music from Disney’s *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* Goes Beyond the Cantina on ‘Playlist #1’ Album: Exclusive,” *Billboard*, August 23, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/8528161/disneys-star-wars-galaxys-edge-cantina-music-album-playlist-one/>.

<sup>422</sup> Interestingly, as a Williams composition, the theme lends the land a rarified position amongst the main *Star Wars* films. Williams won a Grammy for the composition—the first Grammy awarded for a piece of theme park music. See Ben Pearson, “*Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* Guests Will Never Hear John Williams’ Full Orchestral Theme Song in Disneyland,” *SlashFilm*, May 20, 2019, <https://www.slashfilm.com/566545/galaxys-edge-theme-song-disneyland/>.

<sup>423</sup> For a discussion of this, see Brady MacDonald, “All the *Star Wars* Lingo You Need to Know to Speak Like a Black Spire Native While in Disneyland’s *Galaxy’s Edge*,” *Orange County Register*, May 27, 2019, <https://www.ocregister.com/2019/05/27/all-the-star-wars-lingo-you-need-to-know-to-speak-like-a-black-spire-native-while-in-disneylands-galaxys-edge/>.

<sup>424</sup> Cole Horton, *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge: Traveler’s Guide to Batuu* (Bellevue, Washington: becker&mayer!, 2020), 131.

distinguished in Galaxy's Edge via the use of Aurebesh throughout the land. A writing system that first appeared in *Return of the Jedi* (1983), Aurebesh is a basic substitution cipher, swapping out symbols for letters as a written representation of "Galactic Basic" (i.e., English).<sup>425</sup> Like the decoder cards at Indiana Jones Adventure, the use of Aurebesh encourages participation in Galaxy's Edge by inviting visitors to decode untranslated signs and messages sprinkled throughout the land.

Some of the terms developed for and used in Galaxy's Edge are unique to Batuan culture. Phrases like "bright suns" (good day/good morning) and "rising moons" (good night) evoke the planet's skyscape, with its imagined three suns and two moons. Other phrases refer to the planet's geography and environment. "May the spires keep you" (a formal goodbye) and "'til the spire" (farewell) both refer to the natural setting of Black Spire Outpost. The spires themselves—the petrified trees that lend the settlement its name—conjure the impression of a space with a long history that predates the "present" experienced in the parks. This history is further invoked in Batuan slang, which is used both in-park and in the Galaxy's Edge transmedia texts. These texts illustrate how Batuan inhabitants incorporate these phrases in their daily interactions. Some phrases, like "only the ancients know," a Batuan expression for "I don't know," reinforces a sense of ancient history. Phrases like this are not only unique to Batuu, separating it from more generic Star Wars references, but they also integrate the specific geography of the planet/region to create the impression of a real, specific location.

Yet beyond simply increasing immersion by encouraging visitors to think about Batuu and Black Spire Outpost in particular ways, these unique Batuan phrases also invite visitors to engage in the immersive environment by adopting the local language during their interactions

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<sup>425</sup> "Aurebesh," Wookieepedia, Fandom, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Aurebesh>.

with Batuan “residents” and travelers (i.e., both anonymous park employees and named characters like Rey or Vi Moradi). Some terms are associated with factions in Black Spire Outpost, allowing visitors to use them to align themselves—or not—with certain movements. For example, the call-and-response Resistance greetings “ignite the spark” and “light the fire” imply a visitor’s sympathy for, or participation in, the Resistance cause. This participatory linguistic immersion invites visitors to role-play as inhabitants of the Star Wars story world.

Olfactory and gustatory design and naming also contributes to full sensorial immersion in Galaxy’s Edge’s narrative world. Of course, themed names for food and drink offerings are typical at Disney parks. Some Disneyland dining locations are themed to specific films: the *Beauty and the Beast*-themed Red Rose Taverne, for example, offers cinematically themed dishes like the “Enchanted Cauli-Flower Sandwich” or “Grey Stuff Gâteau.” It is also common to see more generically themed food on park menus, such as the “Tiger Tail Breadstick” from the Bengal Barbecue, which suggests a vague jungle theme in keeping with its location in Adventureland. The food and drink in Galaxy’s Edge are similarly designed to incorporate details from the larger Star Wars universe. The “Ronto Wraps” served at Ronto Roasters imply that the meat is from the Ronto, a brachiosaur-like animal native to Tatooine that was added in the 1997 Special Edition of *A New Hope*. The Milk Stand’s “Blue Milk” refers to Luke Skywalker’s (in)famous bantha-based beverage that first appeared in *A New Hope*, while the “Green Milk” recalls the thala-siren milk harvested by Luke in *The Last Jedi*.

However, where Disneyland cuisine typically exists only in the parks, Galaxy’s Edge paratexts incorporate the land’s food and drink in their stories and thus in the larger narrative world. Texts like *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire* and *A Crash of Fate* distance the land’s food and drink from their context as park cuisine, grounding them instead in the narrative world of Batuu



and Star Wars. Tying them in with Galaxy's Edge paratexts confers a sense of historical context to these dishes and beverages, and with it, narrative legitimacy. In a scene in *A Crash of Fate*, one of the book's protagonists orders a "Fuzzy Tauntaun," an alcoholic beverage available for purchase in Oga's Cantina in the parks. The passage describes how the drink is "one of the most expensive available, dusted with the golden lichen that shimmered in the night sky."<sup>426</sup> Though, of course, this is in part a sales pitch for would-be park customers, the passage describing it also links the drink back into the natural environment of Black Spire Outpost, as well as its economy. Elsewhere, the book describes "the rare golden lichen that grew on the spires," or petrified trees, and how it's an organism that "only grew on Batuu."<sup>427</sup> *Traveler's Guide to Batuu*, among other paratexts, describes how Oga Garra has a monopoly on the collection and trade of the golden lichen.<sup>428</sup> The Fuzzy Tauntaun, therefore, connects the physical land to the story world and its imagined histories, politics, and even ecology. References to food and drink offered in Galaxy's Edge have also been woven into non-Galaxy's Edge media like *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order*, which contains references to dishes like "oven-roasted tip yip" and beverages like the "Bloody Rancor," both of which are available for purchase in the land. Both tip yip and Batuu itself were also mentioned in *The Lego Star Wars Holiday Special*, a show that premiered on Disney+ in November 2020.

*The Official Black Spire Outpost Cookbook* uses the land's cuisine to further deepen its sense of history and culture, fleshing out the fully detailed and interconnected world of Batuu as well as its place in the larger Star Wars galaxy. The *Cookbook's* introduction ties the fictional

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<sup>426</sup> Córdova, *Crash of Fate*, 329. The drink is not the most expensive at Oga's Cantina in the park.

<sup>427</sup> Córdova, *Crash of Fate*, 43, 75.

<sup>428</sup> Horton, *Traveler's Guide to Batuu*, 18, 130.

“author” Strono “Cookie” Tuggs to the film world through his backstory, which explains that he used to work at Maz Kanata’s Castle before its destruction during the Battle of Takodana (as depicted in *The Force Awakens*). While Cookie first appeared in *The Force Awakens*, he is also further tied to the transmedia story world of Black Spire Outpost through the *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire* and *A Crash of Fate* novels. These reference Cookie’s “current” position as a chef at Docking Bay 7 Food and Cargo, which is also a real-world restaurant in Galaxy’s Edge. Some of the cookbook’s recipes are for food and drinks available for purchase in the park, such as the “Fried Endorian Tip Yip,” the “Ronto Wrap,” and the “Cliff Dweller.” These allow Galaxy’s Edge fans to replicate the land’s culinary flavors at home, though it can lead to disappointment when the book’s recipes aren’t entirely authentic to the tastes available in the land. As one member of the Galaxy’s Edge subreddit remarked, “My only gripe about the cookbook is the Ronto Wrap is different from the one sold in the park.”<sup>429</sup> Other recipes, like the “Nerf Kebabs,” are new creations for the cookbook that further expand the olfactory and gustatory aspects of the land.

By creating the sense of a place with unique geography, history, culture, and atmosphere, these details, as presented in the land and reinforced through its paratexts, contribute to the impression of Black Spire Outpost and Batuu as living—and livable—environments. In his discussion of different levels of immersion, Mark J.P. Wolf discusses how, in order

to ensure that absorption will follow immersion, world builders must introduce their worlds with the right balance of familiarity and strangeness, drawing audiences in with invention while not changing so many defaults that confusion or even alienation occurs. Glimpses of a world’s infrastructures, though they may be tantalizing, must still present a coherent picture, and should also convey a sense of the world’s underlying logic, so as to

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<sup>429</sup> See [https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/g6e3oi/first\\_time\\_attempting\\_homemade\\_ronto\\_wraps/](https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/g6e3oi/first_time_attempting_homemade_ronto_wraps/).

set up some framework into which the audience can mentally begin placing world information as they learn it.<sup>430</sup>

The coherence between the in-land details and the Galaxy's Edge paratexts contributes to a sense that there is an underlying logic to the world of Batuu and Black Spire Outpost that upholds the integrity of the pre-existing, massively detailed Star Wars universe. The land must navigate, as Wolf suggests, the familiarity not only of our own "Primary World," which is a necessary part of world-building, but of the overarching Star Wars universe that dates to the original 1977 film.<sup>431</sup>

With this total sensory immersion, developed in-park and via transmedia connections, the world of Galaxy's Edge begins to approach the immersive level that occurs "when world data continues to be added after the point of saturation," a point which Wolf describes as "overflow."<sup>432</sup> At this stage, "the amount of detail and information, which overwhelms the audience, imitates the vast amount of Primary World information that cannot be mastered or held in mind all at once."<sup>433</sup> The information added in the Galaxy's Edge novels, cookbook, guidebook, children's book, comics, and (as discussed below) interactive games, contributes to the critical mass of details and backstories that allows saturation to become overflow, while connections with the larger Star Wars universe further enmesh Galaxy's Edge in a narrative space that has an almost unknowable depth of detail.<sup>434</sup> Overflow, Wolf argues, "encourages

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<sup>430</sup> Wolf, "Beyond Immersion," 205-206.

<sup>431</sup> Wolf, "Beyond Immersion," 211. The "Primary World" is "our world," the "real-world."

<sup>432</sup> Wolf, "Beyond Immersion," 207.

<sup>433</sup> Wolf, "Beyond Immersion," 207.

<sup>434</sup> As Wolf mentions, "on 20 July 2012, Leland Y. Chee, Lucasfilm's keeper of the Star Wars franchise bible known as the Holocron, reported that it contained a total of 55,000 entries, including over 2100 different types of vehicles, 2900 species, 5300 planets, and 19,000 characters (Chee 2012)." Of course, these numbers have no doubt increased in the nine years since Chee made this observation. Wolf, "Beyond Immersion," 207. See Leland Y. Chee, "What is the Holocron?," *Star Wars Blog*, July 20, 2012, <https://www.starwars.com/news/what-is-the-holocron>.

audiences to make return visits, during which they can re-experience and re-conceptualize a world, improving their understanding and mental image of it; the pleasurable challenge of trying to hold everything in mind is something one finds often among fans, as discussions of small details, and the respect given experts in Internet forums, can attest.”<sup>435</sup> Of course, revisiting the parks is a desired goal of Disney, and Galaxy’s Edge Reddit forums and Discord servers, among other fan expressions, attest to the fannish pleasure of discussing and debating details of the land.<sup>436</sup>

### *Interactivity and the Customizability of the Galaxy’s Edge Experience*

These multi-sensory immersive elements create not just a more fleshed-out story world, but also contribute to the creation of an environment that invites interactive participation. Of course, all park lands are active and participatory spaces, in that they require movement, engagement, and for visitors to make choices in how they navigate through them. More so than on individual rides, visitors to park lands have the agency to stop and consider details, determine how much time they spend exploring, and make decisions about the order in which they choose to experience different parts of the space. Galaxy’s Edge, however, invites a different kind—and greater degree—of participation in part because its geographical and multi-sensory world-building creates a narrative opening for visitors in a living story world. Immersion and story co-creation in Galaxy’s Edge is further reinforced by the land’s personalized and customizable experiences, including its character interactions and premium bespoke activities like droid building. Other interactive aspects, including attractions and paratextual interactive games

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<sup>435</sup> Wolf, “Beyond Immersion,” 210.

<sup>436</sup> See, for example, <https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/>. Not only do fans engage in online discussions on these and other platforms, but they have also organized in-person gatherings, including “lightsaber meetups,” where fans congregate to ignite their lightsabers at night in Galaxy’s Edge. See [https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/dacb9r/lightsaber\\_meetup\\_at\\_batuu\\_west/](https://www.reddit.com/r/GalaxysEdge/comments/dacb9r/lightsaber_meetup_at_batuu_west/).

similarly prompt active participation. This added degree of interactivity, which is unusual compared to previous park lands, prompts visitors to engage with Galaxy's Edge's physical and narrative space more deeply. In an environment that positions them as active participants, and even players, visitors are encouraged to participate in a narrative exchange and co-creation.

One interactive aspect of Galaxy's Edge that sets it apart from previous park lands is its character encounters. In the 1990s and early 2000s, characters at Disneyland typically appeared in theme-appropriate lands (i.e., Disney Princesses could be in Fantasyland, but not Frontierland), often stationed at outdoor meet-and-greet locations. Snow White, for instance, might have been found near her wishing well next to the castle. These characters could also be seen walking to or from these spots; Mary Poppins, for example, would travel the length of Main Street before stopping near the Plaza Inn to meet visitors. Over recent decades, purpose-built character experience venues like Ariel's Grotto (1996-2008), Pixie Hollow (2008-present), home of Tinker Bell and her fairies, or the Royal Hall in Fantasy Faire (2013-present), where princesses like Ariel and Aurora can be found, have further tied characters to static locations.<sup>437</sup> While characters could still be seen walking around the parks, this shift toward fixed sites of interaction reduced the chances a visitor would stumble upon a magical encounter with a beloved character. At Star Wars Launch Bay (2015-present) in Tomorrowland, for example, characters like Darth Vader and Chewbacca are sequestered in separate rooms that allow for intimate interactions, but that simultaneously exclude the possibility of witnessing another visitor's interaction in the ambient park space.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Shawn Slater, "A Visit to the Royal Hall at Fantasy Faire in Disneyland Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, January 15, 2013, <https://disney Parks.disney.go.com/blog/2013/01/a-visit-to-the-royal-hall-at-fantasy-faire-in-disneyland-park/>.

<sup>438</sup> Erin Glover, "Details on Season of the Force, Coming November 16 to Disneyland Park in California," *Disney Parks Blog*, September 24, 2015, <https://disney Parks.disney.go.com/blog/2015/09/details-on-season-of-the-force-coming-november-16-to-disneyland-park-in-california/>.

In Galaxy's Edge, however, characters from the *Star Wars* films appear throughout the ambient spaces of the land, moving throughout Black Spire Outpost according to their own character motivations.<sup>439</sup> While these characters often stop for photos and autographs, they are typically not stationed in any single location. In and around the Resistance Encampment area, characters like Rey and Chewbacca and what appears to be an autonomous R2-D2 may be seen walking around and stopping to interact with park visitors; R2 is accompanied by human handlers who help translate his beeps and boops to visitors. Unlike most other character actors in the parks, Galaxy's Edge characters like Rey don't only pose for pictures or engage in brief conversations, but also role-play with visitors. The characters act in ways that suggest that the space is an active site of conflict, and even inviting visitors to participate in missions against the First Order or, conversely, interrogating them for information on Resistance activity.

These characters thus not only fill out the space, but they also use the contours of the land as an interactive space in which to engage visitors. At times, Rey can be found recruiting visitors to be part of the Resistance and engaging them on "missions," such as distracting stormtroopers.<sup>440</sup> She may take visitors aside to whisper plans to them and take them through the Black Spire Outpost, crouching and hiding from the First Order, assisting visitors in completing tasks from the *Star Wars* Datapad app, and even recruiting Chewbacca, another costumed character, to the mission.<sup>441</sup> Throughout Black Spire Outpost, stormtroopers and Kylo Ren may

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<sup>439</sup> These standards changed when the parks reopened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some character interactions were put on hold, while others were modified so that characters were separated from visitors, often by a barrier. In Galaxy's Edge, for example, Rey or Vi Moradi could be found in the Black Spire Station area, behind fencing or on top of the garage. Tiana, Jack Sparrow, and Redd the pirate were stationed on balconies or stairways at the Royal Street Veranda in New Orleans Square, ensuring distance from visitors.

<sup>440</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aY\\_8\\_J8qwI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aY_8_J8qwI).

<sup>441</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdcGH8GuQQ&t=434s>.

interact with visitors by interrogating whether they've seen Resistance activity, asking to see their identification, or questioning their use of their "datapad" (cellphone) to transmit to a Resistance Spy. In one interaction, after a visitor admits to Kylo Ren that she is "transmitting to the Resistance," he asks his accompanying stormtroopers to "extract the transmission logs from that datapad, and wipe them."<sup>442</sup> As they patrol the streets of Black Spire Outpost or stand guard on catwalks above, the stormtroopers' presence gives the sense that the space is being actively surveilled and patrolled, suggesting an air of dramatic tension, where visitors' own alignments (for or against the Resistance or First Order) can affect their experience in the land.

Vi Moradi, a character that is central to the events of *Galaxy's Edge*, can also be found throughout the land, at times interacting with, or attempting to evade, stormtroopers.<sup>443</sup> As a character unique to this space, she further distinguishes it from the already-established locations of the films. Moradi is developed through ancillary media, including the Play Disney Parks app, the books, and the *Sims 4* video game expansion. Like Rey, Vi Moradi engages with visitors as though she is a real spy hiding from the First Order. She may ask them for intelligence, such as where they last saw First Order forces in the area. Moradi may even be "captured" and taken away by stormtroopers after a lengthy chase throughout Black Spire Outpost.<sup>444</sup> These interactions are fundamentally different from other character interactions in the parks, which can feel more akin to a celebrity encounter, rather than an authentic interaction within a cohesive story world.

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<sup>442</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPompoz5vPo&t=398s>.

<sup>443</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvDoc8vvyys>.

<sup>444</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xr9NflWzGJo>.

Certain areas in Galaxy's Edge were designed as purpose-built sets for character performances that involve visitors as participants. Subtle stages are sprinkled throughout the land. Character shows occur throughout the day in these zones, helping to create a living atmosphere. A platform in the First Order area, for example, holds a TIE Echelon ship where Kylo Ren can be seen first arriving on Batuu.<sup>445</sup> In these performances, a First Order Lieutenant addresses the crowd, telling them that a Resistance Spy (Vi Moradi) was sent to Batuu and that "She cannot be operating alone. Someone is helping her, someone is hiding her, and someone knows where to find her." He then suggests that it is, in fact, "you" that they may be looking for: "If we believe that you know something or that you are hiding something, we will find out. If you are stopped for questioning, I suggest you do as you are ordered."<sup>446</sup> Though other Star Wars characters are involved in the show, the visitor is implied to be the focus. Kylo Ren then disembarks from the ship and, after castigating the Lieutenant for his failure to locate the spy, steps down from the stage and into the crowd, determined to locate information on the spy himself. Again, the focus is on the information about Vi Moradi, which, presumably, the visitor may know, rather than the spy herself. This re-centers the story on the visitor, suggesting their active role in the wrestle for the ultimate fate of the galaxy.

Even non-character park employees participate in the interactive atmosphere of Galaxy's Edge. As managing story editor for Walt Disney Imagineering Margaret Kerrison states, "We're encouraging them to create their own identities and personas...They are local Batuuans ... but remember, some of these cast members might know nothing about Star Wars. We are encouraging them to know about their daily lives. Where you work, you know what you're

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<sup>445</sup> The specific model of TIE Echelon was created for Galaxy's Edge.

<sup>446</sup> Author visit, January 18, 2020.



selling, and who you're working for."<sup>447</sup> These employee characters should, as Kerrison remarks, “have an opinion of what's recently taken place here, which is the First Order arriving a couple weeks ago... There's a lot of gossiping, there's a lot of whispers and rumors about what's going on. There might be cast members who are Resistance sympathizers helping them out. There might be some cast members who are First Order loyalists who are like, 'Finally! Order! My gosh, someone's going to do something about this place, right?'”<sup>448</sup> As these comments suggest, not only should these characters be suited to the story world of the land, but they are also, like visitors, supposed to be mapped onto the land’s overall continuum of alignment, from the Resistance to the First Order.<sup>449</sup>

Interactivity, personalization, and customization are central qualities of other hands-on experiences in Galaxy’s Edge, like the Droid Depot or Savi’s Workshop, which further encourage visitors to role-play in Galaxy’s Edge. In these stores, visitors can (for a premium price) experience building a working droid or constructing their own lightsaber.<sup>450</sup> At Savi’s Workshop, small groups of visitors use “scrap” parts to build their own lightsaber.<sup>451</sup> The experience emphasizes customizability, as visitors choose their lightsaber theme, each of which carries a different association that suggests the alignment and values of the person wielding it.

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<sup>447</sup> Anthony Breznican, “How Disney Theme Parks Made Galaxy's Edge Part of the Star Wars Storyline,” *Entertainment Weekly*, February 28, 2019, <https://ew.com/movies/2019/02/28/disney-parks-galaxys-edge-star-wars-storyline/>.

<sup>448</sup> Breznican, “How Disney Theme Parks.”

<sup>449</sup> I qualify this with “supposed to” because cast member commitment to and enthusiasm for role-playing can vary much more with unnamed roles like shopkeepers or bartenders than with named characters like Rey or Kylo Ren.

<sup>450</sup> At the time of writing, a lightsaber at Savi’s Workshop cost \$219.99 plus tax, a \$20 increase from their cost when the land first opened, while custom droids go for \$99.99.

<sup>451</sup> While the ability to put together a toy lightsaber has long been offered at the Star Trader gift shop in Tomorrowland, there the experience is set amidst a variety of other Star Wars and more general Disney merchandise, lessening the immersive illusion.

The “Peace and Justice” style is aligned with the Jedi, as it is made from “salvaged scraps from fallen Jedi temples and crashed starships” and its “Republic-era designs honor the galaxy’s former guardians.” The “Power and Control” style, however, is connected to the Sith, as it was “originally forged by dark side warriors,” and “features rumored remnants from the Sith homeworld and abandoned temples.” In the films, these alignments support the Resistance and the First Order, respectively. The other two styles, “Elemental Nature” and “Protection and Defense” are perhaps more ambiguous in their alignment. Within each theme, the specific parts of the sabers—the emitters, sleeves, pommel caps, and switches—are also customizable, and visitors also choose the color of their kyber crystal, which affects the color of the finished saber’s blade. After assembling the parts, visitors participate in a sacred ceremony where they activate their finished weapons.

Savi’s Workshop is framed as an authentic in-world experience, which (to a degree) deemphasizes its commercial aspect. The workshop itself is supposedly “hidden” as part of Savi’s more above-board work as proprietor of Savi and Son Salvage. Though it appears on park maps, the exterior of the building is relatively nondescript. It is festooned with pieces of scrap metal and bins of discarded detritus, befitting its front as a scrap outlet. A cash register station that sits outside the entrance is similarly unmarked. Discrete cabinets with previews of the different lightsaber options are available upon request, but otherwise the only indication that the building has to do with lightsabers is a worn blue banner with a lightsaber symbol that hangs next to the shop door. The Disneyland Galaxy’s Edge guide map cautions would-be customers: “Builders beware—you must protect the shop’s secrecy to avoid being discovered by the First Order!”<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> The same language can be found here: “Savi’s Workshop,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 21, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/shops/disneyland/savis-workshop-handbuilt-lightsabers/>.

Similarly, lightsaber parts are not referred to as such, but as “scrap” or “parts.” In the *Traveler’s Guide to Batuu*, the “author,” Eloc Throno, recounts how “standing inside the shop I heard a traveler tell the Gatherers, ‘I’m here to gather some parts. Savi sent me.’ With this seemingly ordinary request, the traveler was whisked away. A bit later, this traveler emerged wearing what looked to be a lightsaber on her belt!”<sup>453</sup> This mirrors the visitor’s experience in the park. The conceit of the shop is not only immersive as a shop owned by an in-world character, but also is tied into the political landscape of the land, where its operations cannot be made known due to the occupation of Black Spire Outpost by the First Order forces.

Mubo’s Droid Depot offers a similarly interactive and customizable experience, where visitors can build a custom BB- or R-series droid from among the parts at the shop. While the commercial aspect of the Droid Depot is a bit more apparent here—additional droid accessories are available for purchase—it, too, is integrated with the rest of the land. Most park shops are decorated according to their environments, such as the space-age-looking Star Trader in Tomorrowland or the rustic architectural design of Pooh Corner in Critter Country, and they also clearly function more as straight retail spaces than storytelling environments. The building room of Mubo’s, however, is styled as a functioning droid workshop, where visitors choose from amongst the parts scattered on a moving conveyer belt. Moreover, Mubo is given a backstory in Galaxy’s Edge paratexts like the *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy’s Edge VR* game. Once finished, the droids visitors build at Mubo’s can interact with elements throughout Galaxy’s Edge, responding through sounds, lights, and motion to different trigger points throughout the land. Droids passing by full-scale droids in Black Spire Outpost, for example, may activate and communicate with them. Depending on their “personality chips,” droids can respond differently

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<sup>453</sup> Horton, *Traveler’s Guide to Batuu*, 42.

to different locations. A droid enabled with the Resistance-affiliated chip may, for example, make nervous sounds while in the First Order-controlled areas of Black Spire Outpost. This is in the same vein as other interactive Disney spaces, like Toontown, whose built environment can be activated by visitors, though here it not only requires an extra purchase, but it is also turned into a more personalized experience. It also recalls the more recent examples of Universal Studios' Wizarding Worlds of Harry Potter, where visitors can purchase wands that interact with elements in the land. Interactive features built into the land thus further deepen this sense of it as a real, living space.

### ***Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run and the Ride/Game***

The two rides inside Galaxy's Edge—Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run and Rise of the Resistance—also capitalize on interactivity as a mechanism for directly integrating the visitor in their own original story. A hybrid ride, Smuggler's Run blurs the lines between a traditional motion simulator like Star Tours and a video game, fostering narrative immersion through active participation and ludic mechanisms. "Hired" as flight crews by "legitimate businessman" Hondo Ohnaka, riders crew the Falcon, which is being temporarily used by Ohnaka Transport Solutions in exchange for providing Chewbacca, the Falcon's co-pilot, supplies for his Resistance efforts.<sup>454</sup> Crews are charged with stealing containers of coaxium from a First Order train on Corellia. This plot shares similarities with events central to the plot of the 2018 film *Solo*, where Han Solo and Chewbacca endeavor to steal coaxium, ultimately leading to their completion of the legendary Kessel Run. While some visuals in the ride, such as the coaxium-laden trains, are reminiscent of visuals in the *Solo* film, and others, like the final navigation through an asteroid

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<sup>454</sup> Hondo Ohnaka originally appeared in the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars Rebels*. See Dan Brooks, "The Aliens, Droids, and Shops of Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge," *Star Wars Blog*, February 27, 2019, <https://www.starwars.com/news/the-aliens-droids-and-shops-of-star-wars-galaxys-edge>.

field, recall similar scenes from films like *The Empire Strikes Back*, the ride's events are intended to be “new” and not direct recreations of events depicted in any of the *Star Wars* films. This is because, like many other Disney rides, Smuggler's Run frames riders as the attraction's protagonists—the adventure is theirs and the ride, like Star Tours, is centered on a first-person POV ride-film.

The queue for Smuggler's Run takes riders in and around the spaceport before entering the Falcon itself. It winds behind the Falcon, giving exclusive views of the rear and top of the ship that are only accessible via the queue. Riders pass through a maintenance bay before entering a briefing room, where a life-size Audio-Animatronic Hondo explains the mission and the riders' role in it. Following their role assignments, riders enter the interior spaces of the Falcon itself. The replica ship interior is a highlight of the queue, particularly the Chess Room, which is seen in multiple *Star Wars* films, but perhaps most iconically in its first appearance in *A New Hope*, when R2-D2 engages Chewbacca in a game of dejarik and C-3PO advises him to “let the Wookiee win.” As they wait, riders are allowed to sit in the booth and pose for photographs. The screen-accuracy of these spaces, which, unlike the rest of Black Spire Outpost *do* directly recreate spaces seen in the films, evokes the pleasures both of inhabiting the films and visiting a movie set.

Riders are assigned in the queue to one of three different interactive roles: pilot, gunner, or engineer. Each attraction vehicle seats six riders total, arranged in three rows inside the cockpit of the Falcon, with two riders of each role. The roles are charged with completing different tasks during the ride which involve interacting with the physical elements of the ride vehicles in different ways. Pilots, for example, are tasked with steering, braking, and acceleration. Even within that role, each pilot's tasks differ: the left pilot uses levers to control

left and right steering and buttons to control the brakes and boosters, while the right pilot is in charge of the vertical control levers, the ignition button, and the much-coveted ability to “punch it” to light speed using a dedicated lever. Gunners oversee defense, hitting buttons to fire at enemy fighters, but also are responsible for launching missiles and shooting the cars that contain the coaxium. As in many video games, riders can choose their difficulty, opting for either automatic or manual targeting. Engineers hit buttons to fix damage to the Falcon and harpoon and reel in the cargo.

With six players working together to operate the Falcon, *Smuggler’s Run* is not just an interactive ride, it is a cooperative or “co-op” style video game. This differentiates it from other interactive park rides like *Toy Story Midway Mania!*, where players play next to each other, but not exactly with one another. If anything, rides like *Midway Mania* or *Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters* encourage competitive gameplay, where riders playing together attempt to one-up one another. This is evidenced by the latter ride’s souvenir email photos, which display the contrasting ranks and final scores of each pair of riders. As veteran game designer and programmer Tim Skelly defines co-op gameplay, “unlike competitive gameplay, cooperative gameplay requires players to work together as a team. To succeed, they must gain a mutual understanding of each other’s style of play, anticipate each other’s moves, and be willing to sacrifice for the good of the team.”<sup>455</sup> *Smuggler’s Run* is built around such cooperation: players must work together and quickly adapt to other players’ style of play—here generally how accurate they are—to accomplish the game’s goal. As the animatronic Ohnaka tells riders in the queue, “The better you work together, the more you earn. Your lives and my profit depend on

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<sup>455</sup> Tim Skelly, “Cooperative Gameplay,” in *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2021), 218.

it.” Moreover, players’ actions affect one another, both in the outcome—i.e., how successful the mission is—and during the ride, as the collective efforts of the group are translated into visual and haptic feedback. As Disney’s official “Guide to Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run” notes, “If the Falcon sustains damage—such as smashing into obstacles or taking enemy fire—and is not properly repaired, the ship’s handling is affected.”<sup>456</sup> The roles of the pilots in steering and the gunners in defending thus rely on the engineers to repair the Falcon, with the collective consequences of all players felt by the group as a whole. The end result even affects the physical space of the ride as players exit, where “If you beat the hell out of Chewbacca’s ship, you’ll see lights flicker and hear voices on the intercom remarking on the terrible condition of the Falcon.”<sup>457</sup>

During the ride proper, Smuggler’s Run incorporates rider/player interaction into both the visuals and the story as the events unfold on screen. The motion simulator screen at the front of the riders’ perspective is visually responsive to the physical actions of the riders. The steering and timing of the pilots as they push and pull the levers, the timing of blaster shots by the gunners and of the harpoons by engineers as they hit buttons in the ride cockpit, are all rendered graphically in real-time.<sup>458</sup> Riders’ physical interactions also affect the story by determining whether the mission to obtain coaxium is ultimately successful (and how successful it is).

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<sup>456</sup> “Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge – Guide to Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run,” Walt Disney World News, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://wdwnews.com/releases/star-wars-galaxys-edge-guide-to-millennium-falcon-smugglers-run/>.

<sup>457</sup> Matt Singer, “Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run Tips for Every Role in the Cockpit,” *ScreenCrush*, August 29, 2019, <https://screencrush.com/millennium-falcon-smugglers-run-tips/>. This can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL96ElxFfKs&t=305s>.

<sup>458</sup> Haleigh Foutch, “Galaxy’s Edge: Disney Imagineer Steve Goddard on Turning the Millennium Falcon into an Immersive Ride,” *Collider*, June 29, 2019, <https://collider.com/millennium-falcon-smugglers-run-interview-steve-goddard/>.

Physical rider input also affects the haptic feedback of the ride, as the “motion cues” respond to the actions of the riders, letting them feel the consequences of their action and accuracy (or lack thereof) as they steer, crash into, and hit (or miss) their targets.<sup>459</sup> How well riders play the game affects not only the visual and haptic feedback generated by the simulator, but the narrative outcome and “score.” A better performance will earn more credits and higher ranked titles for players, such as “Master Pirate,” while lower scores garner titles like “Privateer,” “Smuggler,” and “Scoundrel.”

In this way, Millennium Falcon: Smuggler’s Run is arguably more interactive than previous participatory rides. While interactivity has long been an element of park attractions, it has often been as a more limited or one-sided interaction; riders interact with the spaces, but the spaces and stories are either minimally or not at all affected by rider participation. For example, on two other gamified attractions at Disneyland Resort, Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters and Toy Story Midway Mania!, riders interact with the space by shooting at targets. The only measurable effects of these interactive efforts are in the targets’ response: by lighting up in Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, or through on-screen animation in Midway Mania. Though riders are given final scores, the stories and events of the ride are unaffected. Regardless of how well or poorly riders fare on Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, the outcome is always the same: Evil Emperor Zurg is vanquished, thus saving the toy aliens’ batteries.

Moreover, Smuggler’s Run’s interface is different from those of ride/games like Astro Blasters or Midway Mania. Riders on each of these rides interface with the sets or screens in front of them using a single mechanism, either a laser gun or a pull-string pop gun. This recalls

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<sup>459</sup> Foutch, “Galaxy’s Edge.”



bodily interactions involved in carnival games or arcade-style light gun games.<sup>460</sup> Of course, Midway Mania simulates carnival games like duck shooting games, but we can also consider how games like this invoke the style of play fostered by video games like Nintendo's *Duck Hunt* (1984), in which players use the gun-style NES Zapper controller to interface with their television screens. In contrast, Smuggler's Run asks riders in each role to interact with multiple input mechanisms in the form of buttons and/or levers. If we consider corollaries in the video and computer game world, Smuggler's Run's interface recalls arcade games that require players to push buttons and manipulate joysticks or other inputs like throttle quadrants.<sup>461</sup> We can also consider, however, how Smuggler's Run shares similarities with contemporary AAA console and computer games. In combining multiple inputs akin to gaming using a multi-button controller or keyboard and mouse setup with AAA-level graphics and game engine architecture, Smuggler's Run is not simply a cross between arcade games and motion simulator rides like Star Tours, but a mixture of these legacy elements and cutting-edge game technology.

Indeed, Smuggler's Run itself was built on current game software. In developing the ride, Walt Disney Imagineering worked with NVIDIA and Epic Games to develop a "custom multi-GPU implementation for Unreal Engine."<sup>462</sup> Unreal Engine is Epic's game engine, originally created in 1998 for building video games, but now widely used outside of the game industry for

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<sup>460</sup> A light gun game uses "a controller that mimics the behavior of a firearm, allowing players to shoot objects on the screen." See Eitan Glinert, "Controllers," in *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2021), 216.

<sup>461</sup> A throttle quadrant is a game input device that simulates throttle levers.

<sup>462</sup> Rick Champagne, "Walt Disney Imagineering, NVIDIA Develop New Tech to Enable Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Millennium Falcon Attraction for Disney Parks," *NVIDIA Blog*, March 28, 2018, <https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/2018/03/28/walt-disney-imagineering-nvidia-star-wars-galaxys-edge-millennium-falcon/>.

other tasks, such as “power[ing] the sets and backdrops of TV shows like ‘The Mandalorian.’”<sup>463</sup> On Smuggler’s Run, eight graphics processing units render visuals in real time that are displayed via five synchronized projectors to simulate the riders’ adventure on the Falcon.<sup>464</sup> Smuggler’s Run also incorporates other game mechanisms that were absent from previous rides, such as cheat codes. The so-called “Chewie Mode” can be unlocked by completing a series of steps to trigger a special alternate version of the ride. Triggering the mode “replaces instructions from space pirate Hondo Ohnaka with a new Easter Egg version of the ride filled with Chewbacca roaring at riders for 5 minutes in the Wookiee dialect of Shyriiwook.”<sup>465</sup> All riders must work activate to trigger Chewie Mode, which includes pushing buttons and moving levers in coordination.

Ultimately, Smuggler’s Run blends the motion simulator POV experience of a ridefilm like Star Tours, to which it closely correlates both thematically and technologically, with video game mechanics. While it certainly draws on the impulses toward interactive “gamified” arcade-style attractions like Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, it also adopts other video and computer game elements, including its co-op structure, game engine architecture, and visual technology. Simultaneously, Smuggler’s Run, like predecessors like Star Tours, elicits a sense of being “in the movies,” as the spaces and events of the ride suggest events previously seen on screen while creating a new story where the rider is the protagonist.

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<sup>463</sup> Gene Park, “Epic Games Believes the Internet is Broken. This is Their Blueprint to Fix It,” *Washington Post*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2021/09/28/epic-fortnite-metaverse-facebook/>.

<sup>464</sup> Champagne, “Walt Disney Imagineering.”

<sup>465</sup> Brady MacDonald, “Disneyland Launches Secret ‘Chewie Mode’ on Smugglers Run in Galaxy’s Edge,” *Orange County Register*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/02/25/disneyland-launches-secret-chewie-mode-on-smugglers-run-in-galaxys-edge/>.

### ***Rise of the Resistance: Role-Play and Spatial Fluidity***

Galaxy's Edge's other attraction, Rise of the Resistance, is interactive in a different way from Smuggler's Run's gamified approach. While both attractions cast visitors as ride-story protagonists, on Rise of the Resistance, riders are asked to live action role-play as new recruits for the Resistance, caught in the middle of an active conflict between the Resistance and the First Order.<sup>466</sup> Formally, the ride is a hybrid of a walkthrough, a motion simulator, a trackless dark ride, and a drop tower, with an elaborate queue and pre-show that recall the world-building- and story-focused queues of rides like Star Tours and Indiana Jones Adventure. With Smuggler's Run, there is arguably still a clear distinction between the pre-show and queue and the ride proper, which begins after riders are seated in the Falcon's cockpit and instructed on how to interact with the physical ride controls. Rise of the Resistance, however, goes further in disguising the queue and pre-show by integrating them with kinetic ride elements, setting the stage for a more realistic experience that downplays its status as a park attraction to foster the kind of immersive role-play encouraged of the riders.

The queue entrance is located in the Resistance Outpost zone of Galaxy's Edge. Passing under defense turrets and among scattered pieces of scrap, visitors wend their way back through

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<sup>466</sup> According to the Disney Parks, Experiences, and Products website, the premise of the story, styled as a *Star Wars* opening crawl is the following:

“It is a dark time for the RESISTANCE. Following the devastating Battle of Crait, the freedom fighters have fled with General Leia Organa to an undisclosed location.

Meanwhile, hunted by the FIRST ORDER and Supreme Leader Kylo Ren, a band of Resistance supporters has established a temporary outpost on the remote planet of Batuu, thanks to scouting by Resistance spy Vi Moradi.

Here on the Outer Rim, the Resistance is rebuilding and searching for recruits to join the cause and help save the galaxy from tyranny ...”

See “Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance Invites Guests into an Immersive Adventure of Galactic Proportions,” Disney Parks, Experiences and Products, The Walt Disney Company, January 13, 2020, <https://dpep.disney.com/star-wars-rise-of-the-resistance-invites-guests-into-an-immersive-adventure-of-galactic-proportions/>.

the trees and brush and into the hidden caves behind. This space is described in paratexts like *Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire* as ancient ruins, a “serene” yet “perilous” place filled with ancient booby traps, the remains of a long gone civilization.<sup>467</sup> *Black Spire* elaborates on the history of the Resistance base, established by Vi Moradi, who was sent to Batuu by General Leia in order to “establish an outpost for the Resistance, and collect as much support as possible among the locals and visitors.”<sup>468</sup> Riders are positioned as these “visitors” who have been called to support Resistance efforts against the First Order.

The inside of the caves is styled as the covert base, located after the events of *Black Spire* in the cleared out ancient ruins. Evidence of the caves’ earlier history is apparent in the form of niches, aged surfaces, and decorative vaulted ceilings, in contrast to apparently more recent Resistance efforts like the makeshift wiring set up by the character Kriki in the book.<sup>469</sup> The surfaces and contours of the interior rockwork suggest where Resistance members opened new rooms and passageways from the narrow ancient chambers. The queue snakes through these spaces and past the Resistance’s tactical display screens, weapons and armor caches, and miscellaneous cargo. Visitors are led into a briefing room, where Rey, appearing in a holographic “transmission,” addresses the visitors as “recruits” and explains that:

A covert Resistance team lead by my friend Finn has infiltrated a First Order Star Destroyer that is now headed to this system. Your outpost on Batuu is no longer safe. We have transports waiting to take you to General Organa’s secret base on Pacara. I’ll regroup with you there. The Resistance desperately needs your help in the fight against Kylo Ren and the First Order. Remember, it is vital that you keep the location of the Pacara base secret. Lieutenant Bek, one of our top commanders, will lead you.

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<sup>467</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 138.

<sup>468</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 8.

<sup>469</sup> Dawson, *Black Spire*, 247.

Passing by Poe Dameron's X-wing, passengers board a transport ship. With Bek in command and Nien Nunb at the helm, riders are to be escorted to the rendezvous point on Pacara by a squadron of X-wings led by Poe, who addresses visitors as "a fine-looking group of recruits." Bek and Nunb appear as Audio-Animatronics, while Poe can be seen on small screen, as he appears in the cockpit of his X-wing.

This transport ship portion of the attraction, though it occurs early on and is integrated into the queue, is actually a brief ride itself. The Intersystem Transport Ship that riders board is a motion simulator positioned on a turntable. While "in transit" to the Resistance base and before being able to make the jump to light speed, the transport ship is assaulted by a squadron of TIE fighters before being captured by a First Order Star Destroyer. During the flight sequence, the transport moves in conjunction with the events displayed on screens in the front and rear of the vehicle, simulating the sensation of taking off, maneuvering in a space battle, and landing in the docking bay of the Star Destroyer. During these events, the vehicle itself is rotated on the turntable so that the doors in which the visitors originally entered now open into the Star Destroyer. The effect of the transport sequence is somewhat surprising because visitors remain standing, unlike typical motion simulators like Star Tours, where riders are both seated and seat belted. To riders entering it for the first time, it may seem like another part of an otherwise static queue until it unexpectedly moves.

Another walkthrough segment follows the transport sequence. The doors to the transport surprisingly open into a cavernous Star Destroyer hangar bay, whose striking scale suggests not just a set from one of the *Star Wars* films, but the real thing. A life-size TIE fighter docked inside recalls sequences from the films set in similar hangars, as when Poe and Finn steal a TIE fighter from a Star Destroyer hangar in *The Force Awakens*. Dozens of white-suited

stormtroopers stand in formation, blasters at the ready. A massive screen displaying the space beyond it, with stars, clusters of TIE fighters, and another Star Destroyer in the distance gives the impression of being in space. Visitors are escorted away by First Order officers past the ranks of stormtroopers and into hallways where they are split into smaller groups awaiting “interrogation.”

The blurred boundaries between queue and ride proper are apparent in the design and scale of these queue, pre-show, and walkthrough environments. Queues at the parks typically need to balance the need to accommodate large numbers of people with the need to maximize limited space, particularly as the parks expand.<sup>470</sup> Older ride queues often use switchbacks to maximize space, as in the Matterhorn Bobsleds or Fantasyland dark rides. Even in rides with more elaborate, story-focused queues, like Indiana Jones Adventure or Star Tours, the space often tightly conforms to the line space. Rise of the Resistance, however, devotes additional non-enterable space to striking reveals that appear designed for both visual and spatial impact. When riders pass by Poe’s life-size X-wing to board the transport ship, they move through an open space far larger than necessary for the volume of people moving through it.<sup>471</sup> The Star Destroyer hangar acts as an even grander show-stopping moment, rather than part of a queue, specifically because of its monumental scale, with fifty-odd stormtroopers, a full-size ship, and a massive screen. These big-impact moments are alternated with more confined spaces. As Imagineer John Larena remarked about the ride: “There’s going to be this whole language of experience you’re going to have, that feeling of confinement and that feeling of breaking out and the awe and

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<sup>470</sup> In contrast to Walt Disney World, the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim is particularly constrained by space.

<sup>471</sup> Scenes like this beg for visitors to take photos or video, as can be seen in recordings of the ride experience. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWbWghpV0Q8&t=39s>.

wonderment at the scale of things.”<sup>472</sup> This is illustrated by the contrast between the gaping hangar, which suggests the First Order’s might, and the low-ceilinged, winding narrow hallways and claustrophobic interrogation cells that follow.

After being split into groups, visitors are ordered to enter enclosed interrogation cells, where on-screen versions of General Hux and Kylo Ren confront them. But before Ren and Hux can return to finish the interrogation, Resistance agents cut through the wall to break the “recruits” out of the cell.<sup>473</sup> This segment of the ride, like interactions with First Order officers in the hangar and hallways before it, has an atmosphere of role-playing. Visitors have been primed by the ride’s Rey pre-show and transport sequence that they are Resistance recruits who hold a valuable piece of information: the location of the Pacara base.

These walkthrough sequences of the ride encourage visitors to live-action role-play as Resistance recruits in part by their position in opposition to the real-life cast members playing as First Order officers.<sup>474</sup> Visitors’ own role-play is thus encouraged by the role-play of the park employees. Disney workers on Rise of the Resistance are dressed as, and take on the personas of, members of the First Order or Resistance. As visitors disembark from their transports at the behest of imperious First Order officers onto the Star Destroyer, First Order officers address them using curt, formal tones that contrast with the polite and cheery demeanor typical of many other rides, as they keep riders in order while they await their “interrogations.”<sup>475</sup> In contrast,

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<sup>472</sup> Matt Cabral, “5 Reasons We’re Excited for Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance,” *Star Wars Blog*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.starwars.com/news/5-reasons-were-excited-for-star-wars-rise-of-the-resistance>.

<sup>473</sup> When this happens, a hidden door is revealed. That this moment comes as a big surprise to riders is apparent in this video, where visitors audibly gasp, and one visitor exclaims “What? No way!” See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWbWghpV0Q8&t=39s>

<sup>474</sup> “Live action role-play” is also known as “LARP.”

<sup>475</sup> Though employees are generally polite on all rides except this one, the degree to which they act as though they are part of the ride’s world can vary. Employees working at the Haunted Mansion, for example, particularly in the

when park employees playing Resistance fighters break visitors out of their interrogation cells in order to board the “prisoner transports,” they act with the urgency and friendly encouragement of compatriots as they furtively whisk visitors onto the ride vehicles.

The final five minutes or so of the attraction are more akin to a traditional “ride,” as this segment takes place aboard “prisoner transport” vehicles, which are being guided by Finn and Ben and piloted by droids programmed to help them escape. Even so, innovative ride design, including its non-linear path and multiple integrated ride systems, deemphasizes that this is a fictional ride, attempting to create, rather, a realistic story experience. The ride vehicles run on a trackless system, allowing them to glide and swivel through the spaces and even to be lifted to different levels. This lends an unpredictability to the experience, making it feel more authentic to the story, in contrast to linear track-based rides where the ride path is generally obvious. As they try to evade capture, the transports weave under life-size AT-ATs, elude droids and blasters, and dodge Kylo Ren and his lightsaber. Large screens styled as windows display the space battle between Resistance and First Order fleets taking place outside the Star Destroyer, suggesting a much larger context for the conflict aboard the ship. In the final portion of the ride, the transports enter escape pods. Riders experience a brief tower drop as the pods “fall” from the Star Destroyer, followed by a second motion simulation sequence as the pods re-enter Batuu’s atmosphere and crash to the surface. Back on Batuu, riders finally exit the vehicles and attraction having evaded the First Order’s grasp and having successfully kept the location of the Resistance base secure.

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ride’s queue, typically act with a macabre mien befitting their spooky surroundings. They will often add themed flourishes to more ordinary instructions to visitors, asking them, for example, to “*drag* their *bodies* away from the walls and into the *dead* center of the room” in the queue’s stretching room.



The integration of these multiple ride systems helps to build a seamless experience where the technology aids in the creation of a realistic narrative rather than itself being the focus of the attraction, as with many thrill rides. In most amusement park rides, such as roller coasters, the thrill itself is the draw. As Margaret King observes, the attraction of amusement parks “focuses on the immediate physical gratification of the thrill ride as it mimics near-death risk-taking experiences.”<sup>476</sup> In contrast, as she argues, theme park “rides expand the narrative experience with appropriate physical sensations, never for effect alone, but always to advance the storyline.”<sup>477</sup> Some Disney park attractions sit somewhere in between. At heart, for example, Space Mountain is an indoor rollercoaster with a space theme. The ride does not give much of a sense of a story, beyond a trip to space. Even deeply story-focused rides, like Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: Breakout, still focus somewhat on the thrill of the ride mechanics, in this instance as the ride builds up to its exhilarating drop-tower climax. In contrast, the pacing and layout of Rise of the Resistance help absorb ride technology into the story; although there is somewhat of a buildup, there is arguably no single moment or segment that dominates over the rest. Moreover, the blending of the queue, pre-show, and ride portions of the ride enhances Rise of the Resistance’s realism while masking its essence as a park attraction. This allows for the visitor/rider to suspend disbelief more easily as they take up the position of story protagonist.

Like its use of multiple ride mechanisms (walkthrough, dark ride, motion simulator, drop shaft), Rise of the Resistance also takes a hybrid approach to its use of screens and projections, blending them with the ride’s built spaces rather than making them the focus of the experience. This contrasts with both traditional Disney dark rides, which tend to privilege physical sets and

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<sup>476</sup> King, “The Theme Park,” 3.

<sup>477</sup> King, “The Theme Park,” 3.

effects, and screen-heavy rides like Star Tours or Toy Story Midway Mania!, whose experiences wholly depend on the rider's relationship to the screen. Rather, Rise of the Resistance's built spaces are often used to disguise the presence of the screens or projections. When visitors are sequestered in the interrogation rooms, for example, projections of General Hux and Kylo Ren appear above visitors, set into the architecture of the room behind physical railings. Hux and Ren enter into view from the sides of the screen, as though they are walking through a hallway that overlooks the chambers where visitors are held captive. Other screens, like the large windows on the Star Destroyer, are used to give a sense of the environment and events surrounding the spaces inhabited by the riders, here depicting the space battle that is the context for the events on the Destroyer.

Though Rise of the Resistance's design attempts to immerse visitors in a realistic experience, some ride elements still connect to the story world's cinematic origins, positioning riders not only as story protagonists, but as cinematic characters themselves. Characters from the films, including Rey, Finn, Poe, BB-8, Kylo Ren, General Hux, and Nien Nunb, appear on screens, as projections, and as Audio-Animatronics throughout the ride as accessories to the riders' own experience, suggesting that riders inhabit the same cinematic world as they do. Moreover, as in Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run, parts of the *Star Wars* film scores can be heard throughout the queue and pre-show, as well as during the ride proper. When Rey addresses the new recruits, "Rey's Theme" can be heard behind her dialogue. Foreboding First Order music plays as visitors walk the hallways of the Star Destroyer, while the Galaxy's Edge Symphonic Suite can be heard during the transport sequence. Notably, the same track also accompanies events in Smuggler's Run, particularly during the opening sequence when players

first take off in the Falcon.<sup>478</sup> The main theme of *Star Wars* plays during the dark ride portion of Rise of the Resistance. These extra-diegetic soundtracks lend a cinematic feel to the rides, in contrast with the in-world sound effects and dialogue. The experience is thus framed both as a “real” experience and as a cinematic one.

### ***Galaxy’s Edge as a Participatory Digital Space***

Rise of the Resistance’s story is woven into a mission in the Star Wars Datapad portion of the Play Disney Parks app. The Play Disney Parks app is an official Disney mobile app that is, according to Disney, intended to bring “unique in-park experiences and family-friendly activities to life—including games for select attractions, interactive land-wide experiences and trivia.”<sup>479</sup> The app can be used in conjunction with rides and spaces throughout the parks, but the Star Wars Datapad is specifically tailored to and integrated with Galaxy’s Edge, offering missions and tasks for visitors to complete inside the land. One of these missions ties directly to the events of the Rise of the Resistance attraction. During the “Distress Signal Received” mission, visitors/players seeking to align themselves with the Resistance efforts can assist Finn in his mission “to delete Resistance intelligence off of the First Order’s databanks” while aboard a Star Destroyer.<sup>480</sup> Players do this by solving puzzles and completing tasks like transferring data, hacking doors and terminals, unscrambling encryptions, and using maps to guide Finn through the spaces of the Star

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<sup>478</sup> Interestingly, a rider in one YouTube video documenting this sequence on the Walt Disney World Smuggler’s Run can be heard saying “I feel like I’m in a movie” immediately after the initial launch and during the jump to lightspeed. See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2kuVG17\\_g8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2kuVG17_g8)

<sup>479</sup> “Play Disney Parks Available on iOS and Android!: Interact with the Parks Like Never Before,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/guest-services/play-app/>.

<sup>480</sup> Jessica Figueroa, “Two New Rise of the Resistance Jobs Added to Star Wars: Datapad on Play Disney Parks App,” *WDW News Today*, December 4, 2019, <https://wdwnt.com/2019/12/two-new-rise-of-the-resistance-jobs-added-to-star-wars-datapad-on-play-disney-parks-app/>.

Destroyer, all via the app. Players choose dialogue during the mission to interact with and “talk to” Finn, and the presence of a player’s name on their “datapad”/cellphone’s screen gives the impression of personal interaction with the character. Finn’s appearance on screens inside the Rise of the Resistance attraction reinforces the connections between the app, the ride, the films themselves, and the visitor’s own participation in the narratives.

Beyond this specific mission, the Star Wars Datapad section of the Play Disney Parks app uses gameplay mechanisms to encourage visitors to interact with the land’s ambient spaces, while role-playing as protagonists in the Galaxy’s Edge narrative. Visitors are encouraged to use the digital interface to interact with their physical surroundings.<sup>481</sup> Through the app, they are instructed to complete tasks like “hack,” “scan,” “translate,” and “tune.” Players must use the app and their smartphone’s built-in hardware (camera, GPS, and accelerometer) to complete these tasks. To do this, they must move throughout the land itself, locating specific sites in which to “hack” control panels or ships, scanning QR codes on the sides of cargo containers using their phone’s camera, or aiming their phones in specific directions to receive radio transmissions. This app thus shapes how player/visitors move their bodies: how they navigate the different areas of Galaxy’s Edge, interact with the space and even its characters, and how they potentially operate within these spaces as active participants. Completing these tasks sometimes generates auditory or visual feedback from parts of the physical set, like blinking lights on control panels or sounds from an antenna. This gives the impression not only that the players are interacting with the environment, but that it is in turn responding to them. They influence the land and, it is implied, the outcome of the larger narrative events that happen there.

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<sup>481</sup> The app is likely simultaneously gathering data on these behaviors.

Like the geography of the land and the rides, the Play Disney Parks app is similarly structured around a scale of alignment. The app instructs visitors to: “Use tools to discover secrets of Black Spire Outpost, take on Jobs to earn credits, and ally yourself with a faction - the Resistance, First Order, or Scoundrels as they battle for control of the outpost.” Player/visitors are invited to complete tasks for the Resistance, First Order, or Scoundrel factions. Completing these tasks increases (or decreases) visitors’ standing with these groups and earns them achievements and titles, such as “Resistance Lieutenant.” Some titles suggest a certain progression in alignment, like “Turncoat,” which is earned by switching between opposing factions. Others are tied to a visitor’s performance in the land, like “Hot Shot,” which is tied to scores on the Smuggler’s Run ride. Through these quests and alignments, the app activates Galaxy’s Edge as a kind of tactical space where visitors adopt role-playing behaviors of spying, decoding, and hacking, and are, through these actions and their choices, encouraged to position themselves within the story world.

Text dialogue from characters from the *Star Wars* films and Galaxy’s Edge transmedia texts further enmesh visitors into the story. Dialogue trees, a gameplay mechanic that allows players to choose from a predetermined set of dialogue options, allow users of the Datapad to “chat” with characters from the films like Rey, Finn, and Lieutenant Connix. Users can also interact with Vi Moradi, the spy character developed in detail in the *Galaxy’s Edge: Black Spire* novel and materialized by actors in the land. Some minor characters, like Cooper and Kel’Cy, are newly created for the app. The dialogue options are often limited in terms of depth. For example, characters may ask whether a player/visitor wishes to help with a mission or not, as when Rose Tico asks for help with medical supplies. In this instance, users can choose from among three options: the emphatic “Of course I’ll help a Resistance Hero!,” the less-sanguine “What do you

need me to do?,” or the dismissive “No thanks - I’m staying out of this conflict.” This choice reflects how they align themselves along the land’s moral scale.

More than simply being integrated into the story world, visitors are framed as actively helping to shape the ultimate turn of events there. In the app, upon reporting the success of Finn’s mission to wipe the First Order databanks of Resistance intelligence to Rey, she tells the user: “That’s excellent news! Thank you for sharing this information with me—because of you, the Resistance can fight another day. I hope we can count on you to help us again in the future.” Users who successfully complete this mission are praised as essential to the Resistance effort and, following this exchange, are informed that their “Resistance affiliation [has been] increased.” Users’ impact on the events of Batuu is also key to the “Outpost Control” mini game, which aggregates multiple visitors hacking control panels throughout the land, pitting those working on behalf of the First Order against those siding with the Resistance. A color-coded map in the app leads visitors to real-world control panels. Visitors who choose the Resistance can opt to “Install Defense,” while those who wish to increase their standing with the First Order can “Install Surveillance.” Choosing the third option, to “Install Skimmer” aligns players with the more morally ambiguous Scoundrel faction. A progress bar displays how close either of the main two sides is to achieving “Outpost Control.” This game parallels game mechanics in some MMORPGs, like Amazon Games’s *New World* (2021), where opposing factions compete for control of territories and their settlements.

More importantly, the app’s framing of Galaxy’s Edge as a strategic site of conflict between factions—and the alignment choice this schema fosters—replicates a game system similar to that of other Star Wars video games, such as Bioware’s *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (2003), where a player’s actions and dialogue choices affect their “alignment” with

either the dark or light side of The Force (or perhaps somewhere in between as a more neutral “gray Jedi”). This concept is also present in the *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (2011) MMORPG, which uses a points system (light side points versus dark side points) to determine a player’s affinity. At Galaxy’s Edge, this alignment choice is not only imagined as affecting the struggle occurring in Black Spire Outpost, but is built into the land’s geographical layout.

This system is similarly reflected in the alignment choices available in the *Sims 4 - Star Wars: Journey to Batuu* (2020) expansion pack. A supplement to the strategic life simulation game *Sims 4* (2014), the *Star Wars: Journey to Batuu* game pack also urges players to choose a path with the Resistance, the First Order, or as Scoundrels. As an add-on to the main *Sims 4* game, *Journey to Batuu* positions Black Spire Outpost as a vacation destination for the player’s Sims. In the game, Batuu is a “real” place, i.e., Sims do not visit Disneyland. The geography of the *Sims* version of Black Spire Outpost closely correlates to the layout of the physical park lands, navigated here through the third-person perspective of a player’s Sim. More so even than the actual park maps, the *Sims* map is clearly split into alignments, with quests tied to the different zones: Resistance Encampment, Black Spire Outpost, and the First Order District. These areas are not contiguous; players must travel between the three zones by selecting the zone they wish to visit from a map. Fast travel between sections suggests a clearer distinction between these zones than is present in the park.

Like the Play Disney Parks app, these sections are clearly associated with different quests offered to a player’s Sim, which in turn affect the Sim’s alignment with the three factions of Resistance, Scoundrels, or First Order. Moreover, several of these quests replicate actual physical tasks visitors can act out via the Play Disney Parks app in the real-world Galaxy’s Edge. Players are asked, for example, to interact with control panels and supply crates. Like the in-park

app, the completion of these quests offers the choice of whether to align their Sim with the Resistance or the First Order or whether to remain relatively neutral as a “scoundrel.” This is framed as affecting the turn of events in Black Spire Outpost. The expansion pack’s introductory welcome page instructs players to “Create Your *Star Wars* Story,” informing them that “The Resistance, First Order, and scoundrels are fighting to control Batuu, but your Sims’ actions determine who will succeed. As Sims undertake challenges and special missions, you’ll tip the balance of power.”

Players aligning their Sim with the Resistance, for example, can undertake missions like “Risks and Rewards,” which asks them to complete a series of tasks: “Acquire a Dataspike from the Scoundrel Contact,” “Obtain Comm Tower Access Codes,” “Disrupt First Order Transmission,” and, finally, “Report Back to Any Resistance Member.” The “Risks and Rewards” mission prompts Resistance-affiliated players to accept help from Scoundrel faction NPCs (non-player characters), suggesting the complex political networks at play in Black Spire Outpost. Missions in *Journey to Batuu* are given by prominent characters like Kylo Ren, Rey, Vi Moradi, and Hondo Ohnaka. As in the in-park Datapad app, Sims players earn ranks and titles like “Sympathizer with the Resistance” or “Sergeant with the First Order.” Similarly, the Sim’s standing with each of the three factions is reflected via an alignment chart, where bars reflect positive and negative standings with each faction (increasing standing with the Resistance inversely affects standing with the First Order, while Scoundrel alignment is independent).

Some in-game interactions encourage behaviors of consumption that mirror experiences offered in the park. Players can have their Sim visit Docking Bay 7 Food and Cargo and purchase Fried Endorian Tip Yip or a Felucian Garden Spread.<sup>482</sup> Sims can purchase souvenirs

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<sup>482</sup> As in Disneyland, this dish is marked in-game as “vegetarian-safe.”



like kyber crystals or Batuan Spira from Dok-Ondar’s Den of Antiquities.<sup>483</sup> Players of *Journey to Batuu* are encouraged to “Get Your Own Lightsaber and Droid,” mirroring the premium merchandise experiences available in-park at Savi’s or the Droid Depot. Sims can then take these and other souvenirs back “home” (i.e., to their main residence in the game) to decorate their house with them.<sup>484</sup> This reflects—and reinforces—typical consumption patterns of park visitors, who are encouraged to commodify their fandom by purchasing souvenirs and taking them home.

Like other Galaxy’s Edge paratexts, the *Sims* expansion uses its digital medium to visualize—and thus virtually expand—the space outside of Black Spire Outpost’s park boundaries. Some missions, like the First Order “Patrol Batuu” mission, asks players to take the TIE echelon to explore the “Batuu Communities” surrounding Black Spire Outpost, including the Surabat Vicinity, the Galma Vicinity, or the Peka Community. Others connect Batuu to planets like Takodana (depicted in *The Force Awakens*) or Cantonica, the location of Canto Bight (depicted in *The Last Jedi*). When a player’s Sim takes off to embark on such missions, the wider landscape of Batuu, with its green expanses punctuated by giant petrified trees, is visible. Similarly, the game allows players access to buildings that are seen in the physical park land but not currently visitable, such as the interior headquarters of the First Order building that sits beside the First Order Cargo shop in Docking Bay 9.

Where the Play Disney Parks Datapad app asks users to play the physical park space and the *Sims 4* game pack encourages play in the digital version of the park, the imagined outskirts of Black Spire Outpost are the primary setting for interactive virtual reality play in the 2020 Oculus

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<sup>483</sup> Styled as a local Batuan currency, metal Spira are offered in Galaxy’s Edge as special Disney gift cards.

<sup>484</sup> The expansion pack also comes with several furniture and building options (windows, doors, wall, and floor textures) that allow players to decorate their sim’s entire residence in a *Star Wars* theme.

Quest 2 virtual reality game *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*. In this game, players primarily play as a droid repair technician, and most of the gameplay is set in the Batuu Wilds surrounding the Outpost.<sup>485</sup> Like the books, rides, and other games, *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* builds out the geography of Black Spire in a way that capitalizes on both the visuality and interactivity of the medium to make Batuu into a more fully realized, inhabitable space. Batuu's environs are in turn made accessible through virtual reality technology. Since much of the gameplay is spent in the natural terrain surrounding the settlement, *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* gives a "firsthand" sense of Batuu's fully developed ecosystem. The gameplay also gives the sense of Batuu's cultural and political history as players interact with different characters and environments. Ultimately, *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* uses VR technology to expand beyond the geographic and temporal constraints of the physical park in a way that more closely approximates the sensation of actually "being there."

Seezelslak's Cantina, a new creation for *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*, serves as the player's primary home base: a safe, non-combat space overlooking the Black Spire Outpost spaceport below where the player can "hang out" between ventures into the Batuu Wilds. Seezelslak himself points out the landing of the Millennium Falcon, which can be seen down in the spaceport. The presence of both the spaceport and the Falcon in the game ties it spatially as well as temporally with the physical park land as built at Disneyland, as presumably the Falcon is not always docked there. One real-life park shop, Mubo's Droid Depot, is a visitable location in the game, though it is quite different from the Droid Depot shop in *Galaxy's Edge*. As discussed previously, the park shop is dominated by the droid-building conveyor belt and the

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<sup>485</sup> During the recounting of the titular "tales," players temporarily step into the shoes of other characters like Jedi padawan Ady Sun'Zee.

merchandise that covers the walls. The virtual Mubo's of *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*, however, includes other elements necessary for gameplay and story world ambiance, like the parts vacuum that sucks up the scrap players gather during gameplay and can turn in for credits or the display shelves that house the miniature droids collected by the player in the game.

Aside from Mubo's Droid Depot, Black Spire Outpost itself, that is, the environment that is physically accessible in the park, is conspicuously inaccessible in the game. *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* instead focuses on building out the surrounding environments, like Three Suns Overlook and Hissiq Springs, which are quite different from the spaces available to visit in the physical park. Three Suns Overlook, for example, gives an elevated view of Batuu's natural landscape, including an aerial perspective of Black Spire Outpost in the distance, from among the mossy spires and stones, while Dead Root Refuge puts players in the middle of arid rocky outcroppings. In the Hissiq Springs zone, players navigate underground caves and natural pools filled with neon green ooze while Splintered Spire takes them further into the sky on the top of one of Batuu's ancient spires, up amongst the clouds. These landscapes are sprinkled with cargo pods and shipping containers, suggesting they have their own histories. They function as the primary sites for game combat: players navigate these spaces while fighting hostile NPCs in the form of droids, Guavian Death Gang operatives, and hostile animals.

By keeping nearly all the park-specific parts of Batuu and Black Spire Outpost “physically” off-limits to the virtual player, the VR medium uses the illusion of presence (which is different from, say, replicating Black Spire Outpost in *The Sims*) to expand the geography of Galaxy's Edge, rather than recreate park space. That Black Spire Outpost is visible from these environments gives the impression that they are contiguous with it—that these spaces are all part of the same story world. As Scott Stein of CNET writes, "Where the park ends, my virtual world

begins.”<sup>486</sup> He observes that exploring the game’s spaces is “like visiting the back room to the actual park. I’m so close to places in the actual Galaxy’s Edge park, but they’re right next door. I imagine that, maybe, beyond that door near me, I could just step into the park. Sometimes I wonder, if you were at the park, would you possibly be able to peer through a window and see me?”<sup>487</sup> Stein’s comments highlight the way in which the game acts as a complement to the park, allowing access to and expanding the world of Galaxy’s Edge while, to invoke Walter Benjamin, simultaneously preserving the “aura” of the physical park land as the “authentic” and “real” Black Spire Outpost.<sup>488</sup>

In addition to allowing access to areas of Batuu not present in the park, the virtual reality technology gives players a sense of how their bodies might relate to those environs—how they would inhabit, navigate, and interact with them as a real-life visitor to the planet. The game allows players to move somewhat freely through selected landscapes on Batuu, though some of the environments are relatively linear in structure. Players can use not only their hands but their whole bodies when interacting with the environment itself and objects within it.<sup>489</sup> Players can duck behind cover by crouching in real life and peeking around a virtual corner is done by moving one’s body and head around. These movements suggest ways of physically inhabiting Batuu’s environments, where dangerous adversarial factions and game-prompted tasks may necessitate moving in ways quite different from how one typically moves inside a park. Players

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<sup>486</sup> Scott Stein, “Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy’s Edge is a VR Step Away from Virtually Visiting Disney,” *CNET*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.cnet.com/tech/computing/star-wars-tales-from-the-galaxys-edge-is-a-vr-step-away-from-virtually-visiting-disney/>.

<sup>487</sup> Stein, “Star Wars.”

<sup>488</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 4.

<sup>489</sup> It is possible to play the game primarily using one’s hands and arms and while seated.

can grab and throw objects, shoot blasters, and use their All-Kit Tool for "repairing a remote in the middle of combat, hotwiring a broken blaster door, or slicing open a supply container."<sup>490</sup>

The VR setting requires greater bodily engagement than traditional controller or keyboard and mouse games. Combined with the game's exploration of Batuu's environments, the physical participation encouraged by the game mechanics gives a sense of spatial presence that enhances the sense of Galaxy's Edge as a real narrative world.

In-game interactions with the characters that populate Batuu and Black Spire Outpost similarly expand on the in-park experience. *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* capitalizes on the game's ability to personalize interactions not easily fostered in the park. Some characters who are not present or depicted in the park are developed in detail in the game. Mubo, a small Utai, employs the player as a droid repair mechanic and communicates with them throughout the game.<sup>491</sup> Dok-Ondar, an Ithorian, is present in the park as an Audio-Animatronic, as he observes the goings-on in his shop from inside his office, though he is not available for interactions with visitors. However, in the game's expansion, *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge—Last Call* (2021), he hires the player for a special job. The droids C-3PO and R2-D2 are also integral to the game experience, adventuring with the player and requiring rescue.<sup>492</sup> *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* also includes new characters like Seezelslak, who was created specifically for this game and helps to expand the Galaxy's Edge story world.<sup>493</sup> While players cannot talk back to the characters—the game offers no in-game dialogue options to players—they do interact with them

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<sup>490</sup> "Discover Your Role in Tales from the Galaxy's Edge," ILMxLAB, Lucasfilm Ltd., November 18, 2020, <https://www.ilmxlab.com/news/discover-your-role-in-tales-from-the-galaxys-edge/>.

<sup>491</sup> Though a small image of Mubo does appear in the Datapad app.

<sup>492</sup> While R2-D2 is a character that can be encountered regularly in the park, C-3PO is not.

<sup>493</sup> Dok-Ondar was added in the game's second installment, *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge — Last Call*.

virtually. At one point, for example, the player must reassemble 3PO by locating his missing parts and placing them on his body, and the droids assist in the final battle of the game's first installment.

Just as the game uses VR to spatially expand the park land, character interactions expand the player's feeling of and knowledge about the story world in a way that feels personalized. As the game's director Jose Perez III notes, "After you've played through this experience and you go to the park, it's awesome and weird — there's this extension that you feel, like 'I know who owns this droid repair place,' and, 'Okay, this dude right here behind the counter, I just helped him do this thing.'"<sup>494</sup> More than simply depicting these characters, the game fosters participatory interactions, giving players a sense of having agency within the spaces of Black Spire Outpost and special knowledge of it. This is akin to how the Datapad app functions, both to expand the space and to increase immersion and investment in it through participatory gameplay.

Furthermore, these characters offer players quests and dialogue that suggest the kinds of events that transpire around Black Spire Outpost and allude to the economic and political structures that govern it. In their role as a droid repair technician, players traverse Batuu's wild spaces, gathering materials and items for their bosses and confronting members of hostile factions. This suggests that Batuu is a somewhat lawless place and that a kind of Wild West ethos exists beyond the confines of the settlement proper. Dok-Ondar's quest suggests the economic structures and business dealings that take place in Black Spire Outpost, as he asks players to locate a Jedi artifact for him. The game's eponymous "tales," side stories told to the player's main character by Seezelslak which the player then experiences firsthand via a

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<sup>494</sup> Vanessa Armstrong, "How Star Wars' New VR Experience Deepens What We Know About Dok-Ondar, Hondo, and More," *SYFY Wire*, September 14, 2021, <https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/star-wars-tales-from-the-galaxys-edge-last-call-interview>.

participatory flashback, also expand on the history of Batuu and its denizens. In the first of these stories, players play through a flashback as Ady Sun'Zee, a Jedi apprentice who had encountered a dark and ancient Sith artifact in a hidden Batuan Jedi Temple. As Sun'Zee, players must fight dark side corruption with the help of Master Yoda, allowing them to experience events that provide a historical context beyond the “present-day” events of Galaxy's Edge.

Through these elements, the game also compels the player to visit the parks, to complete the experience through their own live-action play in the land. Galaxy's Edge—in its physical and transmedia incarnations—is very much a gamified space, whose narrative immersion is integrally connected to and defined by its interactivity. Operating according to gameplay logic, it invites visitors to engage with it as a participatory space and, in doing so, to co-create Black Spire Outpost's story. As Jose Perez III, the director of *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*, remarked:

We're trying to build out stories that are on the outskirts, that bleed in and expand that world. For me, it's really exciting to hang out in Seezelslak's Cantina and look out the window, see the Falcon, and know that I'm going to be able to go back there at some point, but right now I've got another job to do. I'm going to go out to Batuu and do my droid repair technician jobs and know that when I'm done with all of that, I'm going to go back to Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge in the Parks and all these new stories will be in my head. I'll know who Mubo is, I've hung out with him. We want to give people another medium to experience Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge in the meantime, and then when you do return to Disneyland Resort or Walt Disney World Resort, it'll be an even richer experience because of the stories that we've told.

As these comments suggest, we can understand *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* in terms of Anderson's “inhabitable text,” as a virtual text that necessitates a physical site visit to fully enact the story. Through the game's participatory digital space, players are thus compelled to become visitors, who are then asked to become players in the parks as protagonists in the land's story.

## *Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser and Immersive World-Building Beyond the Park's Boundaries*

Galaxy's Edge has not been without its detractors, who have, in some instances, pushed back against the land's immersive tactics, even arguing that they are *too* immersive. Jeff DePaoli, writing for *Attractions Magazine*, laments that "I'm so immersed in my very own Star Wars experience that sometimes I miss having my theme park experience. Batuu feels like a real place to me. So real in fact, that I don't feel like I'm in Disneyland."<sup>495</sup> Other critics have decried the temporal setting, arguing that Imagineers have "paint[ed] themselves into a storytelling corner" by choosing to situate the land between Episodes VIII and IX of the so-called sequel trilogy.<sup>496</sup>

Disney itself has displayed some hesitation about whether visitors could handle the depth of immersion in Galaxy's Edge. Fairly soon after opening, Disney changed the names of some of the food offerings to include references to Earth-familiar ingredients. The "Endorian Tip Yip" became "Endorian Fried Chicken Tip-Yip," despite the redundancy, since "Tip Yip" is a fictional species of chicken. This predictably led to fan backlash.<sup>497</sup> The discord over even a seemingly small point of contention like food naming conventions underscores how park space is still being defined and its boundaries as a paracinematic form are still being explored and negotiated with its audience, both fan and lay. Like cinema and television, it is an expressive

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<sup>495</sup> Jeff DePaoli, "Is Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Too Immersive? – DePaoli on DeParks," *Attractions Magazine*, May 29, 2020, <https://attractionsmagazine.com/star-wars-galaxys-edge-too-immersive-depaoli-on-deparks/>.

<sup>496</sup> Brady MacDonald, "How Avengers Campus Already Stands in Stark Contrast to Disneyland's Galaxy's Edge," *Orange County Register*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/06/10/how-avengers-campus-already-stands-in-stark-contrast-to-disneylands-galaxys-edge/>.

<sup>497</sup> Dirk Libbey, "Walt Disney World Has Made a Change to Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge and Fans Aren't Happy," *CinemaBlend*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2482601/walt-disney-world-has-made-a-change-to-star-wars-galaxys-edge-and-fans-arent-happy>.



form that is in constant flux, particularly as new technologies and modes of reception and consumption are developing. Although there has been some tension in response to this degree of immersive and interactive space, however, Disney is expanding on the strategies employed at Galaxy's Edge, building the immersive experience out even further.

This is evidenced by the development of the Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser at Walt Disney World, which promises to extend “your Star Wars story.” Described as “part live immersive theater, part themed environment, part culinary extravaganza, part real-life role-playing game—and yet so much more,” the Galactic Starcruiser operates similarly to a cruise ship, though it is a stationary hotel.<sup>498</sup> Guests “board” the *Halcyon*, a Corellian starship, for a set three-day, two-night stay, which is described as consisting of “ongoing, immersive and interactive entertainment, where choices determine your experience.”<sup>499</sup> A sample itinerary from the Disney World website lists activities like “muster,” “lightsaber training” and “Sabacc lessons,” “special entertainment” and “live music,” and meals like the “Taste Around the Galaxy Dinner.”<sup>500</sup>

Interspersed with these scheduled events are what Disney calls “Story Moments,” which “will pop up with Characters and special invitations that move your story forward in exciting new directions. Some Story Moments are called out in the sample itinerary, while others will

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<sup>498</sup> “Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser: A 2-Night, Immersive Adventure,” Walt Disney World, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/star-wars-galactic-starcruiser/overview/>.

<sup>499</sup> “Start Planning Your Voyage Aboard Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser,” Walt Disney World, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/star-wars-galactic-starcruiser/planning/>.

<sup>500</sup> “Experience Highlights During Your Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser Adventure,” Walt Disney World, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/star-wars-galactic-starcruiser/experience-highlights/>.

develop from onboard activities that don't always go exactly as planned."<sup>501</sup> The Walt Disney World website notes that the Play Disney Parks app Datapad is integral to these experiences. As in Galaxy's Edge, role-play is encouraged as part of the immersion. Guests are told to "don [their] galactic best," since they are "becom[ing] a unique character in the Star Wars galaxy." The language also focuses on customization, as guests are asked: "How will you come dressed? In your Jedi best? Ready to rumble for rough and tumble smuggling? Dressed to impress in your Coruscant best? Or in your most comfortable garb from your home planet? The choice is up to you!"<sup>502</sup> The notion of role-play as part of the experience of the Galactic Starcruiser, particularly role-play expressed through merchandise and consumption, connects back to the shops of Galaxy's Edge as well as the Disney-encouraged practice of Batuu-bounding.

Extending the conceit of Galaxy's Edge, the concept that the visitor is the protagonist is a central to the Galactic Starcruiser experience, which is tightly coupled with its interactivity. The language used on the Galactic Starcruiser's site emphasizes that this is "your" story, and that it is customized:

See it. Feel it. Live It. Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser is a revolutionary new 2-night experience where you are the hero. You and your group will embark on a first-of-its-kind Star Wars adventure that's your own. It's the most immersive Star Wars story ever created—one where you live a bespoke experience and journey further into a Star Wars adventure than you ever dreamed possible.<sup>503</sup>

Echoing the game-influenced language of Galaxy's Edge, prospective guests are told that beyond simple interactions with characters, they will have agency over the development of their story:

"As the itinerary continues, you'll take the story further and deeper. Choose your path. Seek out

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<sup>501</sup> The Walt Disney Company, "Experience Highlights."

<sup>502</sup> The Walt Disney Company, "Experience Highlights."

<sup>503</sup> The Walt Disney Company, "Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser."

the inner workings of the legendary starship, learn the traditional art of wielding a lightsaber and even jump on a transport to the planet Batuu—where your mission continues at Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge!”<sup>504</sup> Choice is foregrounded as a core part of the experience, connecting to the idea of choice and moral alignment that permeates throughout Galaxy’s Edge spaces, experiences, and paratexts.

As the website suggests, the Starcruiser experience is integrated with the park space. On the second day of a stay, guests are allowed entrance to Disney Hollywood Studios park for a “Planet Excursion to Batuu.” “Transports” take visitors “down to Black Spire Outpost on Batuu and continue your adventure on the remote planet.” The Disney website notes that visitors’ “missions” in the land and on its rides “will influence events back on the ship.”<sup>505</sup> The site emphasizes how the experience of the Galactic Starcruiser and that of the park land are “all connected—and all part of your personal Star Wars story!”<sup>506</sup> Via its connection with the park land and by extending the land’s experience, the Starcruiser further illustrates how Galaxy’s Edge functions as a personalized, interactive, and participatory destination, an environment that opens narrative space for the visitor to inhabit a story world and its narrative.

## **“Avengers Assemble!”: Global Immersive Storytelling and Personalization in Avengers**

### **Campus**

Our world needs more heroes. This Centralized Assembly Mobilized to Prepare, Unite, and Safeguard was forged to bring heroes together. May this CAMPUS act as beacon to inspire and empower a new generation of Earth's champions. Grow with the strongest. Build with the brightest. Unite as one team. Avengers Assemble!

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<sup>504</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser.”

<sup>505</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Experience Highlights.”

<sup>506</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Experience Highlights.”

—Sign in Avengers Campus, Disney California Adventure, Anaheim

In July 2017, Disney announced plans for a Marvel-themed land in Disney California Adventure that would be built on the site of a bug's land.<sup>507</sup> At the Disney convention D23 in August 2019, it was revealed that the land would be tied to two other Marvel-themed lands to be built around the world: Stark Expo Hong Kong (Hong Kong Disneyland) and Avengers Campus Paris (Walt Disney Studios Park).<sup>508</sup> Designed as part of a dispersed global network of Marvel-based lands, Avengers Campus expands the concept of a Disney park land beyond the confines of a single park. Of course, lands like Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge (and many other lands before it, such as Frontierland) exist in multiple locations, but these are cloned lands that are essentially repeated instances of the same geography. Both versions of Galaxy's Edge, for example, tell the story of the same Black Spire Outpost settlement on the planet Batuu. Though there are minor variations in layout, which arise from practical differences in location and spatial constraints, Galaxy's Edge East and West are mostly identical iterations of the same conceptual space that include the same essential physical elements and experiences.

In contrast, the new Marvel-themed lands that are being built in Disney Parks around the world are conceived of as existing in conjunction with one another, together forming a larger narrative that transcends their individual park and national boundaries. Though they may share similarities—it is, of course, cheaper to repeat some elements than to create entirely new ones for each location—they are framed as distinct locations, not iterations of the same space, as with

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<sup>507</sup> Jacob Hall, "Marvel-Themed Land Officially Coming to Disney California Adventure [D23 Expo 2017]," *SlashFilm*, July 15, 2017, <https://www.slashfilm.com/552099/marvel-land-officially-coming-to-disney-california-adventure/>.

<sup>508</sup> Conspicuously absent from this announcement was any such land being built in the Florida parks, due to licensing arrangements that existed prior to Disney's acquisition of Marvel in 2009, which include Marvel Super Hero Island at Disney's primary competitor Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure Park. EPCOT at Walt Disney World, however, is set to open the Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind roller coaster in 2022.

Galaxy's Edge. This is communicated in part by their names: Avengers Campus in California and at Paris's Walt Disney Studios Park and Stark Expo Hong Kong at Hong Kong Disneyland. More importantly, though, the different lands will feature different attractions, layouts, and aesthetics that will individualize their focus and distinguish the lands from one another.

Avengers Campus in Anaheim opened in June 2021. It incorporates the existing Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT! attraction into the new land while adding new features, such as the Spider-Man-based WEB SLINGERS: A Spider-Man Adventure attraction. Restaurants, including the Ant-Man and the Wasp-based Pym's Test Kitchen and Shawarma Palace food carts, shops like WEB Suppliers, and character shows and meet-and-greet areas like Doctor Strange's Ancient Sanctum and Avengers Headquarters, fill out the land. A third and as-yet unopened attraction based on the Avengers Quinjet will be housed in or adjacent to the Avengers Headquarters building that currently hosts costumed actors for live shows and character interactions.<sup>509</sup> Though still under construction, it appears that the Avengers Campus in Paris will be similar to the one in Anaheim. It is slated to feature some shared attractions, including a sister version of the WEB SLINGERS ride. Concept art suggests that it will also have its own version of Pym's Test Kitchen and the Quinjet attraction.

Still, while these two Campuses will share some similarities and cloned attractions, they will not be nearly as identical as the two Galaxy's Edge lands are to one another. While Avengers Campus Paris lacks the Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: BREAKOUT! attraction, which was a re-skin of the old Twilight Zone Tower of Terror at Disney California Adventure, it does feature its own re-themed former attraction. The former Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring

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<sup>509</sup> Brady MacDonald, "Disney Reveals and Quickly Hides More Details About Quinjet E-ticket Ride Coming to Avengers Campus," *Orange County Register*, June 24, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/06/24/disney-reveals-and-quickly-hides-more-details-about-quinjet-e-ticket-ride-coming-to-avengers-campus/>.

Aerosmith is being revamped around a new Iron Man theme, as a "a high-speed, hyper-kinetic adventure, in which guests will team up with Iron Man and their favorite Avengers."<sup>510</sup>

Moreover, models exhibited at the 2019 D23 convention, concept art, and early construction photos suggest that the two lands will be aesthetically distinct.<sup>511</sup> Their geographies are different as well. The layout of the Anaheim Avengers Campus is roughly L-shaped, bounded by Mission: BREAKOUT! on one end and the WEB SLINGERS ride on the other, with the Ancient Sanctum, Pym's Test Kitchen, and Avengers Headquarters clustered in the middle. Avengers Campus Paris, according to models displayed at the 2019 D23 Expo, is much more condensed, with the rollercoaster, Pym's Test Kitchen, WEB SLINGERS, and Quinjet clustered together in a more circular arrangement.<sup>512</sup> While some of these differences naturally have to do with the logistical concerns and existing geographical constraints of their home parks, the differentiation between the two campuses also serves the larger storyline, that these are distinct locations in a global network rather than repeated instances of the same exact story space.

While the two Campuses share many similarities, including the premise that both serve as headquarters for the heroes and as places to "train" recruits, Stark Expo in Hong Kong appears to be different both in conceit and in contents. Two existing attractions—the 3D motion simulator Iron Man Experience (2017) and the interactive shooting dark ride Ant-Man and the Wasp: Nano

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<sup>510</sup> Jennifer Fickley-Baker, "Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith at Walt Disney Studios Park to Receive Marvel Transformation," *Disney Parks Blog*, February 11, 2018, <https://disney parks.disney.go.com/blog/2018/02/d23j-japan-rock-n-roller-coaster/>.

<sup>511</sup> For concept art for Avenger's Campus Anaheim and models for both parks, see Matthew Soberman, "A Closer Look at 'Avengers Campus' Projects Coming to Disney Parks at D23 Expo 2019," *WDW News Today*, August 23, 2019, <https://wdwnt.com/2019/08/photos-a-closer-look-at-avengers-campus-projects-at-the-2019-d23-expo/>. For concept art for Avenger's Campus Paris, see Thomas Smith, "New Experiences Coming to Disneyland Paris in 2020 and Beyond," *Disney Parks Blog*, September 10, 2019, <https://disney parks.disney.go.com/blog/2019/09/new-experiences-coming-to-disneyland-paris-in-2020-and-beyond/>.

<sup>512</sup> Soberman, "A Closer Look."

Battle (2019)—are already in place at Hong Kong Disneyland and will be folded into the new land.<sup>513</sup> The Iron Man Experience attraction itself is already styled as a “Stark Expo,” whose interior “exhibition halls” displays showcase technological artifacts and detail the history of Stark Industries. In the world of *Iron Man*, Stark Expos are Stark-sponsored events that showcase new innovations, as depicted in the film *Iron Man 2* (2010). The motion simulator ride itself takes riders on a tour in a new Iron Wing drone vehicle. Their tour is interrupted when Iron Man must stop Hydra’s attempt to steal the arc reactor from Stark Tower Hong Kong and the ride vehicle gets caught in the battle.<sup>514</sup> It appears that the theme of this attraction will be expanded into the entire land, differentiating Stark Expo Hong Kong from the two Avengers Campuses in California and Paris. The Iron Man Tech Showcase, a meet and greet attraction that opened in 2017, will also likely be included in the Hong Kong land. Hong Kong’s Stark Expo will also reportedly include a version of the Quinjet ride that is being built in Anaheim and Paris. This ride appears to be the one attraction element that connects the three lands.

Disney CEO Bob Chapek stressed the interconnectedness of the three lands in a presentation at the 2019 D23 Expo, stating that “these campuses are going to be linked together in a global story.”<sup>515</sup> The Disney Parks Blog describes the Avengers lands as part of a single narrative that essentially turns the entire planet into the story world and setting for the park lands:

There was an idea. To bring together a group of remarkable people, to see if they could become something more. It was called the Avengers Initiative.

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<sup>513</sup> Ant-Man and the Wasp: Nano Battle is a reworking of the park’s Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters.

<sup>514</sup> The vehicle, and by proxy the riders, ends up helping to save the day, as is typical in simulator rides like these. Iron Man remarks “J.A.R.V.I.S., those aren’t just guests, they’re heroes!” toward the end of the ride.

<sup>515</sup> Kirsten Acuna, “A Massive Marvel-Themed Expansion is Coming to Disneyland with a Spider-Man Ride This Summer. Here’s What to Know About Avengers Campus,” *Insider*, Aug 25, 2019, <https://www.insider.com/disneylands-avengers-campus-photos-2019-8#this-is-avengers-campus-1>.

That original idea has now evolved into a brand-new global Avengers Initiative. One that brings us—the next generation of remarkable people—together. To find our power and become something more. To see if we can work alongside the Avengers so we may all become stronger together.

The Stark Expo in Hong Kong was to be a first step: A world exposition whose theme of ‘A Better Tomorrow Today,’ was meant to inspire and motivate through technological innovation. However, shortly after it opened, the Expo was attacked by the forces of Hydra. When even more powerful forces threatened the entire planet, the Avengers realized that the Earth needs more heroes.

So today, to better defend the planet, the Avengers are setting up new Headquarters and technology sharing exchanges around the globe to empower and inspire all potential recruits willing to step up and become heroes.

In California and Paris, Tony Stark is retrofitting two of his father’s Stark Industries sites into new hubs for training and innovation. Through partnerships with S.H.I.E.L.D., Pym Technologies, Masters of the Mystic Arts and the new Worldwide Engineering Brigade, The Avengers and their allies will forge new global campuses to champion the next generation of heroes. Who’s ready to answer the call?<sup>516</sup>

In this description of the larger narrative world of Avengers Campus, the Stark Expo in Hong Kong is framed as the genesis of Stark’s initiative. This is despite the fact that the Anaheim location was the first to open as a fully-fledged land in 2021, though the story described here suggests that the Hydra attack may be the cause of the delayed opening in Hong Kong.<sup>517</sup> The California and Paris campuses are positioned as global expansions of the Avengers Initiative, additional locations made necessary by the “attack by the forces of Hydra” in Hong Kong. This framing establishes a timeline for the three Avengers lands, relative to one another, while also explaining why two of the lands (Anaheim and Paris) will appear to be more similar to one another, while the Hong Kong location is different.

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<sup>516</sup> Scot Drake, “Global Avengers Initiative to Assemble Earth’s Mightiest Heroes at Disney Parks Around the World,” *Disney Parks Blog*, December 10, 2018, <https://disney Parks.disney.go.com/blog/2018/12/global-avengers-initiative-to-assemble-earths-mightiest-heroes-at-disney-parks-around-the-world/>.

<sup>517</sup> See Brooks Barnes, “Hong Kong Disneyland, Seeking Return to Profit, Plans \$1.4 Billion Upgrade,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/business/media/disney-hong-kong-resort-upgrade.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/business/media/disney-hong-kong-resort-upgrade.html?_r=0).



In this way, these Marvel-based lands are a departure from earlier strategies of either repeating spaces—whether they be whole parks like Disneyland Paris, cloned lands like Galaxy’s Edge, or individual rides like “it’s a small world”—or building one-off lands like Pandora: The World of AVATAR. Rather, this strategy combines the two, leading to lands that are sufficiently unique, yet interconnected through an overarching narrative world. This enables a different kind of storytelling, where the “experience” of a land is imagined to be connected across great distances and even time (assuming one has the resources to make multiple trips to Disney Parks throughout the world). The experience of Avengers Campus is interwoven geographically and temporally with our “real world,” suggesting that the entire globe is part of a mammoth story world accessed by the three Avengers-based Disney park lands.

Despite this complex geographical narrative framework, the core focus of Avengers Campus seems to be on the characters themselves. The Disney California Adventure land stresses its live characters as a primary draw, while framing visitors as new recruits—potential heroes themselves. In this way, Avengers Campus, like Galaxy’s Edge, also foregrounds personalized and interactive experiences. However, Avengers Campus is focused less on the environment itself as the primary means for creating these personalized and interactive experiences (the way Galaxy’s Edge does). As discussed in the previous section, personalization and interactivity in Galaxy’s Edge are built into the space itself, through its layout along a scale of moral alignment, its integration with technology like the attractions and interactive app, and its character encounters. Avengers Campus, however, emphasizes characters as a main source for interaction and personalization in the land. Their presence in the land lies at the heart of its immersive experience, while they also serve as models for visitors to “become” heroes themselves.

The narrative complexity of the larger Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), including the deaths and evolutions of several significant characters present in Avengers Campus, necessitates that the land operates within its own timeline that both connects to and diverges from the main timeline presented in the MCU. This “Marvel Theme Park Universe,” as it has been dubbed in the popular press, draws on the MCU’s multiverse structure to foster its immersive, interactive, and personalized experiences, and to open narrative space for the visitor.<sup>518</sup> In the Marvel Theme Park Universe (MTPU), the visitor can be a hero, too.

***“Across Time and Space”: Geographical and Temporal Setting in Avengers Campus***

Unlike Galaxy’s Edge, which is imagined to be a settlement that exists a long time ago on a planet in a galaxy far, far away or Pandora: The World of AVATAR, which brings to life a wondrous alien planet with glowing flora and floating mountains, the world of the Avengers is presented as, at least geographically, an analogue of our “real” world, though an imagined version that also includes mystical elements, scientific superpowers, and otherworldly realities and locales. Despite these fantasy elements, scenes in MCU films are often set in real locations like New York City, while real-life historical events like World War II factor into their storylines and popular music from Earth exists in their narrative world. This recalls the narrative context of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter and its source texts, whose hidden and archaic magical world of wizards and witches exists alongside our “real,” or “muggle,” world.

However, where story worlds like those of Harry Potter or Star Wars present coherent fictional worlds, as Robert Niles of *Theme Park Insider* observes, Marvel’s “universe offers way too many diverse settings to wrangle into cohesive world-building. With Marvel, setting usually

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<sup>518</sup> James Whitbrook, “Not Even Disneyland Can Escape Marvel's Love of Teasers,” *Gizmodo*, May 29, 2017, <https://gizmodo.com/not-even-disneyland-can-escape-marvels-love-of-teasers-1795634943>.

flows from story. In franchises that lend themselves well to theme park lands, it's the other way around.”<sup>519</sup> Regarding the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, he adds that “Harry Potter is not a superhero who drives the narrative in J.K. Rowling's books. The Wizarding World drives that story, and Harry's largely along for the ride.”<sup>520</sup> The story worlds Niles cites as examples of sources for successful park lands are all fantastic in nature and aesthetically cohesive. While similar settings arguably exist in the MCU, like Asgard or Wakanda, these locations’ intricate ties to specific characters (Thor and Loki; Black Panther) and films could be seen as limiting were they to be chosen to be the basis for a park land. Moreover, as Niles suggests, Marvel stories are primarily character, rather than location, driven, suggesting that a Marvel-themed land would be better served by focusing on characters rather than a particular environment.

To accommodate this multiplicity of Marvel settings and characters, then, Stark Industries appears to have been chosen as the central theme uniting the three Avengers lands, which are in turn connected to the “real world” through the global storytelling framework.<sup>521</sup> Rather than building out a specific location from the MCU films, Avengers Campus instead creates new spaces that are centered around their characters. Still, Avengers Campus adheres visually to its screen counterparts, invoking imagery consistent with the MCU in its design and aesthetics alongside its supposed real-world setting. In this way, and through the global network of interconnected lands, Avengers Campus blends the fictional MCU with the “real world.” Though it provides a new setting established by a fictional character, the land is imagined as part

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<sup>519</sup> Robert Niles, “When and Where Should Disney Set its Marvel Land?,” *Theme Park Insider*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.themeparkinsider.com/flume/201809/6278/>.

<sup>520</sup> Niles, “When and Where.”

<sup>521</sup> Robert Niles, “Disney's Marvel Lands: It's a Stark World After All,” *Theme Park Insider*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.themeparkinsider.com/flume/201812/6461/>.

of the same reality as the space outside it. In contrast, Galaxy’s Edge is very insular, like a narrative bubble inside the parks. In Florida, the Galactic Starcruiser experience provides an “exclusive transport to the planet Batuu,” suggesting that the transition between the spaces is controlled so as not to break the illusion of a hermetic story world. Avengers Campus, on the other hand, is imagined to be part of our “real world” Earth and to share its larger geography and history.

Avengers Campus is presented as having a unique history of its own that connects it to both Earth’s real-world history and fictional Marvel histories. A plaque near the land’s entrance informs visitors that “Originally, this site was a restricted Stark Industries complex, dedicated to top-secret research.” A Stark Industries Complex map on the obverse of the sign gives a sense of the site’s historical layering. The map appears to be antique—its fonts and logos are reminiscent of 1930s and 40s design aesthetics; the parallel lines of the Stark Industries and Stark Motors logos recall the Streamline Moderne style of Art Deco, with connotations of speed, sleekness, and progress.<sup>522</sup> The map depicts the former layout of the complex, including the large buildings where Stark Motors, Pym Labs, and Stark Aeronautics were housed. These buildings have apparently since been “repurposed” to house the attractions seen in the land today. The map’s supposed age suggests that the Stark complex predates the park in which it sits; labels at the edges of the map identify the space beyond the buildings as leading “to Stark Vineyards & Tasting Room” or “to aircraft runways.”<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> This style of design can be seen in consumer products and in vehicles like the 1933 Cadillac Aerodynamic Coupe, with its parallel horizontal chrome trim.

<sup>523</sup> Interestingly, both “vineyards” and “runways” can be seen in Disney California Adventure in the winery-themed area surrounding the Wine Country Trattoria (formerly Golden Vine Winery, now part of Pacific Wharf) and in the aviation-themed Grizzly Peak Airfield area (formerly Condor Flats) surrounding Soarin’ Around the World and the Smokejumper Grill. The implied location of the “Stark Vineyards” on the map corresponds roughly to the winery-themed area as it sits across from the entry to Avengers Campus, implying, perhaps, continuity with other areas of the park. Even the area labeled “scrap yard” on the map appears to correspond to the rough location of Mater’s

The historical layering suggested by the map is brought to life by the land's set design and aesthetics. Parking signs indicate where characters like Howard Stark, Peggy Carter, and Edwin Jarvis used to park in the mid-twentieth century. The WEB SLINGERS show building appears to be retrofitted from the "original" Stark Motors building, as suggested by the map. What is meant to look like the original Stark Motors logo and tagline appears faded on the side of the brick building, juxtaposed with the modern silhouettes, shiny finishes, bright colors, and graffiti mural that represent the more modern additions to the building. These design elements give the sense of temporal layering, that the space of the land has a history of its own.

The lore created for the Ancient Sanctum, a Doctor Strange-themed show area, similarly helps to establish the geographical setting for the California Avengers Campus in particular. According to the Disneyland website, the Ancient Sanctum is: "An Ancient Site, Hidden for Centuries." The website describes how

For as long as anyone can remember, rumors of unexplained events and energies have emanated from a remote location in the hills outside Los Angeles. In the late 1940s, a Stark Industries complex was built on the location. Decades later, Tony Stark invited Doctor Strange to the Avengers Campus to enlighten recruits about the mystic arts. Doctor Strange suspended the area's cloaking spells and revealed the Ancient Sanctum to the world. Come, discover for yourself what has been hidden for centuries. See the ancient ruins and learn from Doctor Strange about the amazing Orb of Cagliostro.<sup>524</sup>

The geographical location of Avengers Campus is made clear in this description, orienting it in relationship to the real-life geographies of Southern California.<sup>525</sup> The placement of the Ancient Sanctum within Avengers Campus appears to line up with the area labeled "Quarantine Zone" on

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Junkyard Jamboree, a junkyard-themed attraction in the neighboring Cars Land, which exists in an entirely different narrative world.

<sup>524</sup> "Ancient Sanctum," Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/entertainment/disney-california-adventure/ancient-sanctum/>.

<sup>525</sup> Though to call its real-life location in Orange County the "hills outside Los Angeles" is quite a stretch.

the vintage map displayed in the park, further helping to establish the timeline of the location and communicating it to visitors. Design elements in and around the Ancient Sanctum itself reinforce this story. The irregular contours of the partially-there Sanctum walls, with their crackled and damaged edges, appear to fit the idea of “ancient ruins,” while reflective stones and paints suggest how the space has been magically “revealed.”

Just as Avengers Campus invents a new history for its geographical location, it also invents its own temporal history, as it is set in its own branch of the MCU multiverse. In contrast, Galaxy’s Edge is clearly located in a specific time and place between the events of *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker*, as communicated through its paratexts as well as by certain temporal indicators in the land. These include the presence of certain ships (Poe’s X-wing) and certain characters (Rey, R2-D2, and Kylo Ren) in combination with the absence of characters from other films (Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, or Han Solo, to name only a few). Avengers Campus, however, exists in a more nebulous temporal location within an alternate timeline that allows the land to include any and all characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The choice to make Galaxy’s Edge’s timeline so specific while leaving Avengers Campus temporally open is a comparison that has been seized upon by journalists covering the opening of the newest land. Brady MacDonald, writing for the *Orange County Register*, describes how “Avengers Campus isn’t trapped in a restrictive fictional timeline like Galaxy’s Edge—which keeps some of the most iconic Star Wars characters and newest Disney+ stars out of Batuu, the intergalactic setting for the 14-acre land.”<sup>526</sup> He also argues that Imagineers made sure that they did not “paint themselves into a storytelling corner” with Avengers Campus in the

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<sup>526</sup> MacDonald, “How Avengers Campus.”

same way he argues they did with *Galaxy's Edge*.<sup>527</sup> Writing for *Wired*, Adam Rogers suggests that “Galaxy’s Edge’s ruthless enforcement of chronotopic status builds loyalty—critically important to the transnational corporation that owns the intellectual property—while limiting narrative flexibility.”<sup>528</sup> This highlights what he sees as the tradeoff inherent in the choice of not only where, but when to set a park land: temporal rigidity can enhance immersion but brings with it a rigidity in terms of narrative.

Avengers Campus’s temporal openness is enabled by the MCU’s multiverse structure, which has been explored in Marvel films like *Doctor Strange* (2016), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), and *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022). William Proctor defines the multiverse as “comprising alternate worlds, parallel dimensions, and multiple timelines.”<sup>529</sup> Within the comic worlds of DC and Marvel, Proctor describes how the multiverse is a “concept that allows multiple iterations, versions, and reinterpretations of their character populations to coexist within a spatiotemporal framing principle.”<sup>530</sup> This allows for what Proctor terms “‘quantum seriality’—that is, a labyrinthine narrative network that incorporates a wide array of transmedia expressions into an ontological order that rationalizes divergent textualities as part and parcel of the same story-system that canonizes all Marvel creations—whether in film, TV, or, indeed, comics—as official and legitimate.”<sup>531</sup> The MCU multiverse’s “quantum seriality,” as

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<sup>527</sup> MacDonald, “How Avengers Campus.”

<sup>528</sup> Adam Rogers, “The Best Made-Up Worlds Are Made Up of Real Parts,” *Wired*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.wired.com/story/the-hidden-palace-star-wars-avengers/>.

<sup>529</sup> William Proctor, “Schrödinger’s Cape: The Quantum Seriality of the Marvel Multiverse,” in *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe*, ed. Matt Yockey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 319.

<sup>530</sup> Proctor, “Schrödinger’s Cape,” 319.

<sup>531</sup> Proctor, “Schrödinger’s Cape,” 320.

Proctor suggests, is what enables the sometimes dissonant storylines and competing continuities that are seemingly inherent to the realm of comic book and comics-based media to gel together as a single coherent corpus—a unified, if varied and diffuse, story world. Proctor goes on to argue that “Marvel’s stratagem works to canonize its diverse catalog, creating a structure that legitimizes disparate and alternative narrative texts as exemplars of quantum seriality.”<sup>532</sup> This suggests that the Marvel multiverse not only enables disparate texts to coexist, but reabsorbs their differences as an essential part of the story world.

Avengers Campus, then, exists within its own alternate timeline in a way that is consistent within the ontology of the MCU multiverse. This enables it to happen outside of, yet alongside, the timelines presented in the films, series, and comics as its own “Marvel Theme Park Universe.” That this is an intentional choice on Disney’s part is clear. As Imagineer Joe Rodhe remarked of the events depicted in *Guardians of the Galaxy — Mission: BREAKOUT*, the precursor to Avengers Campus, “It is distinctly meant to be its own universe...The universe will grow and expand and there are elements in there that will link to a dimensional universe. We really tried to not simply reflect on an existing narrative but to extend narrative and expand it.”<sup>533</sup>

This proved to be a starting point for the concept that undergirds the entire land. Jillian Pagan, a staff writer with Walt Disney Imagineering admits of the land’s relationship to the films that “clearly, there was a divergence somewhere, because there are some characters who are

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<sup>532</sup> Proctor, “Schrödinger’s Cape,” 338.

<sup>533</sup> Germain Lussier, “The New Guardians of the Galaxy Ride Exists in Its Own Unique Marvel Universe,” *Gizmodo*, May 25, 2017, <https://gizmodo.com/the-new-guardians-of-the-galaxy-ride-exists-in-its-own-1795437971>.



alive and well in our land who have sadly sacrificed themselves in another timeline.”<sup>534</sup> Pagan goes on to state that

But [just like] in *Avengers: Endgame*, where they go back to 2012 and everything about the universe is the same up until that point, and then they divide start spinning off into multiple timelines, we see ourselves as having that same shared history, with what we’ve seen in the films. And then clearly there was just that point in time where they’ve split off and now have created in one timeline these new campuses for us to assemble alongside them.<sup>535</sup>

The Avengers Campus alternate timeline, in other words, adheres to rules already established in the MCU.<sup>536</sup>

The continued exploration of the multiverse is a contemporary focus of Marvel films and series. The multiverse is a core narrative element in television series like *Loki* (2021), which centers around Loki’s capture by and escape from the Time Variance Authority, a bureaucratic organization that manages the ever-expanding multiverse and its branching timelines. “Set in the infinite vastness of a multiverse,” each episode of the animated series *What If...?* (2021) explores a “different alternate-universe scenario.”<sup>537</sup> *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022) film similarly engages with the MCU multiverse, as the title announces, building on themes of

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<sup>534</sup> Petrana Radulovic, “Disney’s New Marvel Land Takes Place in Parallel to the MCU, Thanks to the Multiverse,” *Polygon*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.polygon.com/2020/3/11/21173315/disneyland-marvel-land-marvel-movie-connections-timeline-avengers-campus-easter-eggs>.

<sup>535</sup> Radulovic, “Disney’s New Marvel Land.”

<sup>536</sup> It is important to note that Marvel comics have invoked the idea of the multiverse, including alternate realities, timelines, and dimensions, for decades. See George Marston, “The Marvel Multiverse and the Meaning of Earth-616 Explained,” *Newsarama*, GamesRadar+, August 31, 2021, <https://www.gamesradar.com/marvel-multiverse-earth-616-mcu/>.

<sup>537</sup> Angie Han, “Disney+’s ‘What If...’: TV Review,” *Hollywood Reporter*, August 10, 2021, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-reviews/marvel-what-if-review-1234994938/>.

alternate dimensions and timelines explored in the first *Doctor Strange* film, a film whose director Scott Derrickson cited as “the beginning of the Marvel Cinematic Multiverse.”<sup>538</sup>

Avengers Campus, too, is an extension of Marvel’s multiverse. A sign at the entrance of the land declares that “Originally, this site was a restricted Stark Industries complex, dedicated to top-secret research. Now, its doors have been opened. It has been remade into Avengers Campus to be a home where Earth’s mightiest heroes can assemble from across time and space to freely share their technology, skills, and knowledge with all.” Being situated as a nexus point “across time and space” enables Avengers Campus to invoke any element from its cinematic, televisual, or comic paratexts. Most importantly, the multiverse allows characters that audiences have seen die in the films to be present in the land. Tony Stark, for example, is alive in the land’s timeline, as is Black Widow. Both characters died in *Avengers: Endgame*. That film also saw Steve Rogers, a.k.a. Captain America, return to the past to stay with Peggy Carter, resulting in him reappearing as an old man in the film’s present day. In Avengers Campus, however, Captain America appears as he does in his prime, as he does before his return to Peggy.

If positioning Avengers Campus in its own timeline allows Disney to include any character it wants, this in turn allows the company to capitalize on new releases like the *Loki* series, which premiered on the Disney+ streaming service just five days after the land opened on June 4, 2021. As Brady MacDonald of *The Orange County Register* observed, this meant that “Marvel fans can watch “Loki” on Disney+ and walk into DCA later that day and see the God of Mischief in the same prison garb he wears on the show.”<sup>539</sup> If Avengers Campus were tied to a

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<sup>538</sup> Brandon Davis, “Scott Derrickson Says Doctor Strange Starts the Marvel Cinematic Multiverse,” *ComicBook.com*, September 6, 2017, <https://comicbook.com/marvel/news/scott-derrickson-says-doctor-strange-starts-the-marvel-cinematic/>.

<sup>539</sup> MacDonald, “How Avengers Campus.”

certain point in the timeline of the films, continuity may have precluded his appearing the land. In contrast, following the smash success of *The Mandalorian* in 2019, Galaxy's Edge's strict temporal setting and emphasis on in-world continuity meant that "Baby Yoda" merchandise could not be introduced into the land, as it did not fit the timeline.

Avengers Campus's all-inclusive timeline, however, sidesteps any issues surrounding character presence. For Julie Tremaine of SFGate, the "true feeling of immersion" of Avengers Campus has to do with the character interaction enabled by the lack of rigid temporal boundaries, where "guests have so much more opportunity to interact with characters than if the land was placed in the context of any of the MCU movies."<sup>540</sup> She observes how during her visit to the park, "both Avengers and enemies of the Avengers freely roamed the campus all day, interacting with each other and socially distanced guests, putting on stunt shows and warrior demonstrations, providing an unprecedented level of face time and entertainment for Disneyland."<sup>541</sup> Characters and characters interactions are, as she reports, a core focus for the land, particularly as a means for cultivating the sense of a personalized and interactive experience. The spatiotemporal setting of Avengers Campus appears designed specifically to maximize the presence of its heroes—and the potential for us to join them.

***"Live Out Your Own Heroic Story!": Personalization and Character Interaction in Avengers Campus***

Like Galaxy's Edge, Avengers Campus privileges personalized experiences. This is communicated to visitors via official Disney discourse even before they visit the land. On DCA's

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<sup>540</sup> Julie Tremaine, "What Disneyland Got Right About Avengers Campus That It Got Wrong with Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge," *SFGate*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.sfgate.com/disneyland/article/What-Disneyland-got-right-about-Avengers-Campus-16231345.php>.

<sup>541</sup> Tremaine, "What Disneyland Got Right."

website, prospective visitors are encouraged to “Team up with the Avengers.”<sup>542</sup> One commercial displays the words “Heroes Assemble” as a family stands with determined looks on their faces and Avengers heroes land all around them.<sup>543</sup> The family appears to be included amongst the “heroes,” and their placement in the center of the frame suggests that they are the stars of the story. Elsewhere, Disney refers to visitors to Avengers Campus as “recruits,” casting them not only as visitors to the space, but as future heroes joining the Avengers cause. A Disney Parks Blog post celebrating the opening of Avengers Campus on June 4, 2021 describes how “this entirely new land is dedicated to discovering, recruiting and training the next generation of Super Heroes,” and how “at Avengers Campus, you can now find your power alongside some of your favorite Super Heroes, with a chance to live out your own heroic story!”<sup>544</sup> Performing as a “recruit” is linked to consuming specific food and merchandise inside the land as well. Covering the land’s “first recruits,” the *Disney Parks Blog* describes how “When hunger strikes, recruits sampled the innovative fare throughout the campus, including Pym Test Kitchen featuring Impossible, where Pym Particles produce tiny treats and big bites. Aspiring WEB members also shopped the inventive selection of merchandise, from the latest gadgets to accessories and fashions.”<sup>545</sup>

As discussed in the previous section, visitors to Galaxy’s Edge are framed as protagonists in their own Galaxy’s Edge story, as narrative space for their presence in the Star Wars universe

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<sup>542</sup> “Avengers Campus,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/destinations/disney-california-adventure/avengers-campus/>.

<sup>543</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNuuWyat3Ow>.

<sup>544</sup> Gabriel Gibaldi, “Now Open! First Recruits Assemble at Avengers Campus at Disney California Adventure Park,” *Disney Parks Blog*, June 4, 2021, <https://disney Parks Blog.com/blog/2021/06/now-open-first-recruits-assemble-at-avengers-campus-at-disney-california-adventure-park/>.

<sup>545</sup> Gibaldi, “Now Open.”

is opened by the land's geography and interactive elements. In Avengers Campus, visitors are similarly imagined to be protagonists, in that they are "recruits" to the Avengers Initiative, but their participation as protagonists is enabled by the land's temporal setting and framed in large part around their interaction with other superheroes. Visitors are imagined as joining the Avengers Initiative and thus the heroic ensemble that is characteristic of many MCU films. The narrative of the land is thus the story of their visit to it as they bring that Initiative to life, as they test out new food in Pym's Test Kitchen, aid Spider-Man in stopping a Spider-Bot invasion, or assist the Guardians of the Galaxy in escaping captivity. As Scot Drake, creative executive for Walt Disney Imagineering's Global Marvel Portfolio, notes, with the Avengers lands in Anaheim, Paris, and Hong Kong, Disney is "expanding this epic story universe in a way that, for the first time ever, will allow you to take on an active role alongside these Super Heroes."<sup>546</sup> Like Galaxy's Edge, Avengers Campus is not a recreation of screen space, but a way to further build out its umbrella franchise's story world while incorporating the visitor in the narrative.

Many elements of Avengers Campus point to how the personalized experience is dependent on the visitor's connection to Marvel superheroes. Visitors' own framing as participating in the narrative as "new recruits" reflects how the core Avengers narrative centers on the superheroes themselves. However, while Avengers Campus emphasizes the visitor's personal story, it does not necessarily suggest that that visitor has much agency to affect larger turns of events in the Avengers world. That power appears to remain in the hands of the name-brand heroes. This is underscored by the emphasis on the characters—and their powers—that pervades the land. Character shows and meet-and-greets in particular are positioned as main draws for visitors. Prior to the opening of Guardians of the Galaxy — Mission: BREAKOUT!

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<sup>546</sup> Drake, "Global Avengers Initiative."

and later Avengers Campus, character meet-and-greets with characters like Captain America and Spider-Man were the Avengers' main presence in Disney California Adventure.<sup>547</sup> When Guardians of the Galaxy — Mission: BREAKOUT! debuted in 2017, Disney stepped up character presence with its “Summer of Heroes” event, which ushered in the new ride alongside the Avengers Training Initiative show that featured Avengers characters Black Widow and Hawkeye. Black Widow became available for “Heroic Encounter” meet-and-greets, as did Guardians characters Star Lord and Groot. The summer event also saw the launch of the “Guardians of the Galaxy: Awesome Dance Off!,” which “invite[d] guests to join a rock ‘n’ roll bash alongside Star-Lord.”<sup>548</sup>

The emphasis on character-centered shows and meet-and-greet interactions reinforces the idea that it is the characters themselves, rather than the physical environment or even the narrative itself, that is the primary focus of Avengers Campus. Wilson Koh considers how superhero characters, rather than the actors that play them or even the central plot conflicts, are the main focus of Marvel films, as evidenced by “textually privileged assertions of superheroic identity” in the films.<sup>549</sup> Koh argues that “it is the superhero, at the level of the franchise-commodity, who must remain a clear and present fetish-object for audiences, with threats in the film’s diegesis marketed as being centred around it, not the other way around.”<sup>550</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>547</sup> Josh Pimentel, “Disney California Adventure’s Guardians of the Galaxy ride to open May 27,” *Orange County Register*, February 15, 2017, <https://www.ocregister.com/2017/02/15/disney-california-adventures-guardians-of-the-galaxy-ride-to-open-may-27/>.

<sup>548</sup> “Guardians of the Galaxy: Awesome Dance Off!,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/entertainment/disney-california-adventure/guardians-galaxy-dance/?CMP=SOC-DPFY17Q3SummerofHeroesBeginsTomorrowatDisneyCaliforniaAdventurePark0006>.

<sup>549</sup> Wilson Koh, “‘I am Iron Man’: the Marvel Cinematic Universe and Celeactor Labour,” *Celebrity Studies* 5, no. 4 (2014): 485.

<sup>550</sup> Koh, “‘I am Iron Man,’” 495.

Avengers Campus is framed not as an independent community in its own right like Galaxy's Edge's Batuu, but rather a location where "heroes assemble," including the visitor.<sup>551</sup>

The primacy of the characters in Avengers Campus, to a greater degree than in Galaxy's Edge, is apparent when comparing Disney's "first look" maps of the two lands.<sup>552</sup> Both maps are similar in style as online corollaries to the parks paper guide-maps, which are available at park entrances and kiosks. The Galaxy's Edge map appears devoid of characters. On the Avengers Campus map, however, the figures of Black Widow, Iron Man, and Spider-Man appear to be standing, flying, and slinging through the land. Zooming in on the Disneyland Resort's interactive online map similarly displays an empty Galaxy's Edge, while scrolling down to Avengers Campus reveals oversized images of Spider-Man, Black Panther, and Black Widow. In fact, these appear to be the only characters currently visible in either park on the map, underscoring the primacy of the celebrity hero in the Avengers Campus experience.<sup>553</sup>

Termed "heroic encounters," shows and meet-and-greets with costumed actors occur primarily at three character performance locations—in front of Guardians of the Galaxy—Mission: BREAKOUT!, on and outside Avengers Headquarters, and in the Ancient Sanctum—as well as in the land's ambient spaces. As with Galaxy's Edge, these performance spaces are integrated into the land's architecture and design. At Avengers Headquarters, visitors can watch brief shows that take place on the building's balconies, walls, exterior spaces, and in the air above. During Spider-Man's appearances, for example, the costumed character addresses the

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<sup>551</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNuuWyat3Ow>.

<sup>552</sup> Disney's map of Galaxy's Edge may be found here: <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2019/05/first-look-guidemap-for-star-wars-galaxys-edge-at-disneyland-park/>. Disney's map of Avengers Campus may be found here: <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2021/05/first-look-guide-map-for-avengers-campus-at-disney-california-adventure-park/>.

<sup>553</sup> Aside from the anonymous cars that appear—as ride vehicles—in Cars Land on the map.

crowd as he tumbles on the building's elevated walkways. This live-action performance is seamlessly blended with Disney's next-generation robotic Spider-Man, which is shot high into the air to perform death-defying acrobatics too dangerous for live actors. After it lands behind the scenes, a costumed actor returns to perform stunts on a wire, including crawling upside-down down the exterior wall of the Headquarters. This gives the illusion that the actor and animatronic are a single character with fantastic special powers. Spider-Man is typically then available for more close-up interactions with visitors, including posing for photos.

Some character shows reinforce the land's emphasis on participation and invite visitors to role-play. Adjacent to the Avengers Headquarters building, a trio of Dora Milaje, Black Panther's personal bodyguards, perform the "Warriors of Wakanda: The Disciples of the Dora Milaje" show. The Dora Milaje is led by the character Okoye, the General of the Dora Milaje, who announces that the group is "on a special assignment from the Black Panther himself to personally train all of you recruits to become warrior-allies of Wakanda." The show stresses audience participation, encouraging visitors to learn the five tenets of the Dora Milaje as well as chants and body movements.<sup>554</sup> In this way, this show recalls previous park shows like Disneyland's Jedi Training Academy in Tomorrowland, where children, or "Jedi Younglings" learn to be a Jedi from a Jedi Master.<sup>555</sup>

In the Ancient Sanctum show space, the Doctor Strange: Mysteries of the Mystic Arts show finds the hero revealing the "secrets of the mystic arts" to audience "recruits" as he enlists

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<sup>554</sup> The five tenets are: tradition, honor, strength, courage, and compassion.

<sup>555</sup> The original Jedi Training Academy ran from 2006 to 2015. An updated version titled Jedi Training: Trials of the Temple ran from 2015 to 2018. Children were given robes and lightsabers and trained by a Jedi Master before facing a *Star Wars* villain.



their help in defeating the evil Dormammu.<sup>556</sup> The show gives the effect of time travel, as Doctor Strange disappears through the portal only to reappear as though he has come back to a point five minutes earlier (he repeats several lines like “Ah, you’re here. Excellent. We don’t have much time,” to the audience’s amusement). Like the Dora Milaje show, *Mysteries of the Mystic Arts* asks for audience participation, though it is similarly limited in scope. Doctor Strange asks visitors to replicate hand movements and chants to create a “spectral shield” of protection. When he seeks the name of the hero that can help him defeat Dormammu, he asks the audience for suggestions until he gets the answer of Thor, who, in some performances, emerges from the doors behind him. Though audience participation is typical of Disney park entertainment, particularly shows and parades, the Avengers Campus shows frame participation in terms of the land’s larger conceit, addressing visitors as recruits who are learning to be part of the Avengers Initiative from its veteran heroes.<sup>557</sup> The Disneyland website suggests that this might be useful in the “real world”: “Who knows, someday you may need this knowledge to defend the earth, and our reality, from threats beyond your imagination!”<sup>558</sup>

The attractions, shops, and restaurants in Avengers Campus likewise emphasize personalized experiences centered around the idea of the visitor as a recruit to the Avengers’ cause—as a hero themselves. The two existing rides, *Guardians of the Galaxy — Mission: BREAKOUT!* and *WEB SLINGERS: A Spider-Man Adventure*, both frame the visitor as “helping” heroes in one way or another. Though it opened in 2017, four years before Avengers Campus, *Guardians of the Galaxy — Mission: BREAKOUT!* stresses visitors’ participation in

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<sup>556</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Ancient Sanctum.”

<sup>557</sup> The now-defunct Jedi Training Academy in Tomorrowland similarly framed its young participants as “padawans,” or Jedi apprentices.

<sup>558</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Ancient Sanctum.”

the story. As discussed previously, placing the rider in the story, even as the protagonist, is not a new strategy and has been present since the park's earliest rides and throughout its history.

However, when contrasted with *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror*, the earlier version of the ride, small changes in how active visitors are both conceived as (in terms of the story) and asked to be (in terms of their bodies) become apparent. As discussed in Chapter One, *Mission: BREAKOUT!* positions riders as part of the story, and quite literally asks riders to move their

bodies in specific ways in order to trigger certain events in the ride's story. Their participation in the mission to free the Guardians of the Galaxy ultimately enables their successful breakout.

*WEB SLINGERS: A Spider-Man Adventure* likewise asks riders to assist the hero in a way that is both interactive and customizable.<sup>559</sup> In concept and form, the ride is quite similar to *Toy Story Midway Mania*. In what is essentially a dark ride, riders sitting in vehicles interact with a series of 3-D screens. However, unlike *Midway Mania*, which uses pull-string pop-guns to generate on-screen elements that interact with the digital games, or even *Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters*, which uses laser guns aimed at real-world laser targets, *WEB SLINGERS* eliminates the external physical interface, allowing riders to simply use their arms and hands to “shoot” virtual webs at the screen, just like Spider-Man himself.<sup>560</sup> The ride does this using gesture-recognition technology to identify the rider's body position and hand movements, which it interprets in relation to the images on screen.<sup>561</sup> Inside the digital world of the screen, different

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<sup>559</sup> WEB is an acronym for “Worldwide Engineering Brigade.”

<sup>560</sup> In Marvel/Disney *Spider-Man* films, Peter Parker designs and uses mechanical wrist mounts to shoot webs. In the Sam Raimi *Spider-Man* trilogy, however, Peter Parker develops organic webs that shoot from his wrists when he acquires his powers.

<sup>561</sup> This appears to be similar, at least in effect, to Microsoft's Kinect technology, as discussed in Chapter 3.

colored bots, the targets visitors are supposed to shoot, indicate different point values.<sup>562</sup> Like Midway Mania and Astro Blasters, WEB SLINGERS is also gamified in that riders earn scores for how well they do. Riders can also interact with the on-screen environment by moving its elements around using their physical bodies and virtual webs. As executive creative director for Walt Disney Imagineering Brent Strong noted, “People are just slinging as fast as they can at Spider-Bots, but don’t realize that the webs can actually interact with the environments as well...you can grab onto shipping containers, open doors, grow things and shrink things in the Pym labs, open up some of those vitrines in the Collector’s fortress—and we’ve hidden a million easter eggs and fun surprises in there for people to discover.”<sup>563</sup> WEB SLINGERS is thus arguably more interactive than its predecessors, in that riders use their bodies, rather than a physical interface like a blaster, to engage with and manipulate the attraction’s screen space.

Moreover, interactivity in WEB SLINGERS is focused on the character of Peter Parker, and as riders assist him, they also help to save the Campus, suggesting a kind of agency in the events of the land. In the ride’s in-queue pre-show, Peter Parker explains that visitors are there to test the new “Web Slinger Vehicle,” whose “on-board tech” allows them to “sling webs, just like [his] buddy Spider-Man.” When W.E.B.-made Spider-Bots begin wildly self-replicating during his presentation, Parker returns as Spider-Man to ask visitors to “team up to stop the Spider-Bots before they destroy the campus.” “We can handle it,” Spider-Man says on the ride, creating a connection between the hero and the riders.

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<sup>562</sup> Rachel Paige, “Avengers Campus: Behind-The-Scenes Details on the New Spider-Man Attraction,” Marvel, March 11, 2020, <https://www.marvel.com/articles/culture-lifestyle/avengers-campus-web-slingers-spider-man-attraction>.

<sup>563</sup> Samantha Davis-Friedman, “Tips to Boost Your Score on WEB Slingers: A Spider-Man Adventure,” *Attractions Magazine*, June 11, 2021, <https://attractionsmagazine.com/tips-boost-your-score-web-slingers-a-spider-man-adventure/>.

WEB SLINGERS is integrated into the story of the land, which positions Avengers Campus's Worldwide Engineering Brigade as a "global initiative" developed by Tony Stark to "develop advancements in super-powered technology, including new enhancements to Spider-Man's suit as their debut project."<sup>564</sup> "Escaped" Spider-Bots can be seen outside the attraction in the land's ambient spaces, apparently having been neutralized by Spider-Man himself. As they appear stuck in webs on walls and beams, they suggest that riders' efforts in the attraction to assist Spider-Man have perhaps had an effect on the land outside.

WEB SLINGERS encourages further customization of this experience through consumption. At the WEB Suppliers shop, riders can purchase special WEB Tech Power Bands to further customize their experience on the ride. WEB Power Bands enable new abilities within the attraction, particularly when equipped with the different character attachments that are sold as add-ons to the basic band. Each character's upgrade attachment allows for multi-fire webs and enables different capabilities: the Iron Man themed Repulsor Cannon "engages high-energy repulsor blasts," which generate electrically charged webs on screen to hit more Spider-Bots.<sup>565</sup> The Ghost-Spider add-on allows for electro-charged webs. An add-on, according to Strong, "allows you to role-play as your favorite hero on the ride."<sup>566</sup> Of course, they also mean that the ability to unlock all of the ride's elements is now tied to the purchase of one or more pieces of merchandise.<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Scot Drake, "New Recruits to 'Suit Up' Alongside Spider-Man with Cutting-Edge Tech from the New Worldwide Engineering Brigade at Disneyland Resort and Disneyland Paris," *Disney Parks Blog*, March 21, 2019, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2019/03/new-recruits-to-suit-up-alongside-spider-man-with-cutting-edge-tech-from-the-new-worldwide-engineering-brigade-at-disneyland-resort-and-disneyland-paris/>.

<sup>565</sup> Davis-Friedman, "Tips to Boost Your Score."

<sup>566</sup> Davis-Friedman, "Tips to Boost Your Score."

<sup>567</sup> At the time of this writing, the base Power Bands cost \$35, while the character add-ones were \$30 each.

Park ephemera like the Avengers Campus Recruit Guide encourages visitors to embrace the role-playing aspect of Avengers Campus merchandise, characterizing WEB Suppliers as a “one-stop hero shop,” where visitors can “find everything to accept important missions at a moment’s notice.” Visitors are urged to “suit up with the latest Super Hero gear.” At the Campus Supply Pod, where WEB Tech Power Bands are also sold, visitors can “power up with official Avengers Campus gear.”<sup>568</sup> In addition to the Power Bands, visitors can also purchase, customize, and battle Spider-Bots of their own inside Avengers Campus. Like the personality chips sold for droids at the Galaxy’s Edge’s Droid Depot, these “Interactive Remote Control Bots” are further customizable via the purchase of skins, or “tactical upgrades,” that reflect specific heroes’ personalities. These “upgrades” snap on to alter the appearance, lights, and sounds of the bot in line with a specific hero while also conferring additional “powers” to it, which are intended to provide perks when battling bots against one another. The red and gold Iron Man tactical upgrade “provides digital life regeneration,” while the gray and violet Black Panther add-on “provides deluxe blaster regeneration.”<sup>569</sup>

Like the WEB Tech Power Bands, the Spider-Bots tie the idea of a personalized park experience back in with consumption. These products confer upon the visitor, as a consumer, associations with and the attributes of specific heroes, allowing them to identify with particular characters as they inhabit the land as new “recruits.” This is in some ways akin to consumption behaviors encouraged at Galaxy’s Edge, particularly as they reflect the land’s moral alignments. While participation in the Galaxy’s Edge narrative is not necessarily directly dependent on

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<sup>568</sup> For a digital copy of the “Avengers Campus Recruit Guide,” see <https://cdn1.parksmedia.wdprapps.disney.com/media/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AvengersCampus.pdf>.

<sup>569</sup> “Spider-Bot Merchandise and Battle Arena Crawls into Hollywood Land at Disney California Adventure,” Disneyland News Today, June 3, 2021, <https://dlnewstoday.com/2021/06/photos-spider-bot-merchandise-and-battle-arena-crawls-into-hollywood-land-at-disney-california-adventure/>.

consumption—the framing of the land itself folds visitors into the story—consumption promises to enhance the immersive experience, whether through cosplay or the additional purchase of interactive experiences and products. The consumerist aspect of a park land’s immersive experience is heightened in Avengers Campus because of the combination of the centrality of Marvel superheroes with the framing of visitors as potential heroes themselves. In Galaxy’s Edge, visitors can choose their alignment, and buy merchandise to match. Similarly, though all visitors to Avengers Campus are framed as recruits to the heroic cause, they are encouraged to buy merchandise that expresses their preferred heroic affiliations.

### ***Avengers Campus and the Future of Film-Based Lands***

Ultimately, Avengers Campus illustrates many of the historical trends discussed in this chapter, though its approaches to world-building and storytelling are in some ways different. Like the lands discussed throughout this chapter, Avengers Campus incorporates geography in unique ways. As in Galaxy’s Edge, it imagines a new environment for visitors to experience. Moreover, it also creates its own separate timeline, which allows the land to play in the multitude of Marvel characters and storylines. This unique spatiotemporal setting, combined with the network of interconnected Marvel lands in Anaheim, Paris, and Hong Kong, departs from other efforts at world-building in Disney Parks. Avengers Campus also reflects the growing emphasis in recent Disney Park lands on interactivity, personalization, and role-play. Building on the conceit that the visitor is a protagonist in the story, the land focuses on aligning visitors with the characters in a story world that envelops the entire planet.

Avengers Campus also privileges realism and fidelity, reflecting the general shift toward film-based lands that are screen-accurate recreations of film space, like Cars Land or Pandora — The World of *Avatar*, or all-encompassing realistic original worlds like Galaxy’s Edge that

nevertheless remain faithful to their transmedia worlds. Like Galaxy's Edge, Avengers Campus is set in a new, original location created specifically for the parks. While notable differences contrast it with Galaxy's Edge's notion of immersion—for example, Marvel cinematic music can be heard inside the land's ambient spaces, something that would threaten the carefully crafted immersive world-bubble of Galaxy's Edge—its design and basis in “real-world” settings gives the land a sense of realism. Though the land's buildings and scenery may not directly recreate cityscapes from the films, like Galaxy's Edge, Avengers Campus's architecture and set design appear consistent with the aesthetics of both the films and our “real world.”

Like previous film-based lands, Avengers Campus also draws on popular and lucrative IP for its story world. *Forbes* estimates that Marvel was worth, as of September 2021, “almost \$53 billion,” which would make it “about 16% of Disney's market value.”<sup>570</sup> According to *Forbes* writer Dawn Chmielewski, the “twenty-four Marvel titles collectively grossed \$21.9 billion in Disney's hands, making it bigger than Bond, more potent than Potter and massive compared to *The Fast And The Furious*.”<sup>571</sup> The focus on such blockbuster IP puts Avengers Campus in line with recent lands like the two Galaxy's Edges, as they draw on the hugely successful *Star Wars* franchise.<sup>572</sup> Such a strategy is similarly illustrated by upcoming lands that will also bring to life locations based on blockbuster IP. One major example of this is the upcoming *Arendelle: The World of Frozen* land, versions of which are under development at Walt Disney Studios Park in

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<sup>570</sup> Dawn Chmielewski, “From Avengers to Shang-Chi, What Marvel Studios Is Really Worth to Walt Disney,” *Forbes*, September 4, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dawnchmielewski/2021/09/04/from-avengers-to-shang-chi-what-marvel-studios-is-really-worth-to-walt-disney/?sh=3b0d2b6b6d9c>.

<sup>571</sup> Chmielewski, “From Avengers to Shang-Chi.”

<sup>572</sup> While the same *Forbes* article points out that Disney's *Star Wars* films have grossed “just \$6 billion” in comparison to Lucasfilm's purchase price of \$4 billion, the *Star Wars* franchise and its associated products, which include current and upcoming Disney+ streaming series and, of course, merchandise, add to the value generated by the films themselves. See Chmielewski, “From Avengers to Shang-Chi.”

Paris, Tokyo DisneySea, and Hong Kong Disneyland. The two *Frozen* films hold the top two spots for highest-grossing Disney animated films, with *Frozen* (2013) earning over \$1.28 billion at the box office and *Frozen II* (2019) taking in just over \$1.45 billion.<sup>573</sup>

Disney's preference for realistic and/or screen-accurate lands based on popular IP appears to continue, judging from concept art for upcoming lands. Concept art for the new *Frozen*-based Arendelle: The World of Frozen suggests that the land will adhere faithfully to the Arendelle of the screen, recreating the city's cinematic geography, with an icy blue Arendelle Castle looking over the Norwegian-styled village as snow-covered mountains rise in the background.<sup>574</sup> Similarly, "City of Zootopia," currently under construction at Shanghai Disneyland Park, promises to bring to life the eponymous city from the 2016 film *Zootopia*, which was wildly successful in China.<sup>575</sup> Concept art for this land appears to directly recreate imagery from the film, including the architecture of "Zootopia Central Station," with its antelope horn spires, and Jumbeaux's Café, with its red scalloped awnings.<sup>576</sup> Then-chairman of Disney Parks Bob Chapek commented at the announcement of the new land at the 2019 D23 Expo that in the new *Zootopia*-based land, "guests will experience the mammalian metropolis of 'Zootopia'

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<sup>573</sup> Kevin Pantoja, "The 10 Highest-Grossing Walt Disney Animation Studios Movies Ever," *ScreenRant*, August 16, 2021, <https://screenrant.com/disney-animation-studios-highest-grossing-movies/>.

<sup>574</sup> Brooks Barnes, "Disney Is Spending More on Theme Parks Than It Did on Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm Combined," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/16/business/media/disney-invests-billions-in-theme-parks.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

<sup>575</sup> Silvia Wong, "'Zootopia' biggest animated film in China," *ScreenDaily*, March 22, 2016, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/zootopia-biggest-animated-film-in-china-/5101783.article>.

<sup>576</sup> These are significant locations from the film, the first appearing at the culmination of a montage where protagonist Judy Hopps first travels to Zootopia, and the second the site of Judy's first encounter with Nick Wilde, Judy's eventual friend and partner.

See Brittani Tuttle, "New Concept Art for Zootopia-Themed Land Coming to Shanghai Disney Resort," *Attractions Magazine*, August 25, 2019, <https://attractionsmagazine.com/zootopia-concept-art-shanghai/>.



where anyone can be anything.”<sup>577</sup> Though it remains to be seen exactly how visitors will figure in the narratives of this and other future park lands, such language suggests that the emphasis remains on creating park lands as immersive cinematic spaces that bring the visitor into the story and the story world.

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<sup>577</sup> Kirsten Acuna, “A 'Zootopia' Land is Coming to Shanghai Disney Based on the Popular Movie. Here's What We Know,” *Insider*, August 25, 2019, <https://www.insider.com/zootopia-land-shanghai-disney-photos-2019-8>.

### Chapter Three: From Space to Screen: Park-Based Media

Hang on for the ride of your life as you experience four fantastic films based on Disney's classic theme park attractions. Together for the first time, these family favorites bring the magic from the parks straight into your home!<sup>578</sup>

—Disney Thrills and Chills DVD 4-Movie Collection

The previous two chapters examine how built park space was adapted from film and television texts. However, a converse phenomenon has also arisen in the past few decades: Disney's adaptation of original physical park spaces into moving-image media, including films and video games. This chapter considers how film and video game media inspired by Disney's park spaces renegotiate our embodied relationship to the parks. As they attempt to "bring the park home," these "park-films" and "park-games" confront the boundaries and contours of media forms to translate three-dimensional park spaces and haptic experiences into cinematic and ludic ones. The case studies discussed in this chapter complement those of the previous chapters by looking at media that works back out from rides/lands/parks and thus further exploring the spatiotemporal boundaries of fluid, permeable, and embodied media experiences.

In a 2019 interview with *Empire* magazine, director Martin Scorsese made headlines when he criticized Marvel films: "I don't see them. I tried, you know? But that's not cinema...Honestly, the closest I can think of them, as well made as they are, with actors doing the best they can under the circumstances, is theme parks. It isn't the cinema of human beings trying to convey emotional, psychological experiences to another human being."<sup>579</sup> Underscoring his earlier sentiments, Scorsese noted at a press conference in October 2019, "It's not cinema, it's

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<sup>578</sup> The Disney Thrills and Chills DVD 4-movie collection, released in 2012, includes *Tower of Terror* (1997), *The Haunted Mansion* (2003), *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride* (1996), and *The Country Bears* (2002)

<sup>579</sup> BreAnna Bell, "Martin Scorsese Compares Marvel Movies to Theme Parks: 'That's Not Cinema,'" *Variety*, October 4, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/martin-scorsese-marvel-theme-parks-1203360075/>.

something else... We shouldn't be invaded by it. We need cinemas to step up and show films that are narrative films."<sup>580</sup> Director Francis Ford Coppola echoed Scorsese's sentiments, calling such films "despicable," and stating that "When Martin Scorsese says that the Marvel pictures are not cinema, he's right because we expect to learn something from cinema, we expect to gain something, some enlightenment, some knowledge, some inspiration... I don't know that anyone gets anything out of seeing the same movie over and over again."<sup>581</sup>

These comments suggest a particularly restrictive definition of "real" cinema that is defined in part by an emphasis on narrative and in part by a focus on "emotional" and "psychological" experiences.<sup>582</sup> "Theme park" here seems to stand in as a marker for what is popular, lowbrow, unintelligent, sensory, and derivative, as opposed to "real" cinema, which is rarified, cerebral, and authentic.<sup>583</sup> Such narrow definitions of what constitutes meaningful cinema denigrate the so-called non-narrative pleasures of cinematic experience while presuming to know what different spectators find meaningful. While Scorsese and Coppola are specifically referring to Disney's Marvel superhero films, and not the films I discuss in this chapter (that is, films based on actual theme park spaces), their comments suggest a multitude of issues at play in

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<sup>580</sup> Lexy Perez, "Francis Ford Coppola Defends Scorsese Marvel Comments, Calls Films 'Despicable,'" *Hollywood Reporter*, October 20, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/francis-ford-coppola-defends-scorsese-calls-marvel-films-despicable-1248929>.

<sup>581</sup> Perez, "Francis Ford Coppola." Coppola, it should be noted, directed *Captain EO*, a 4-D park attraction that opened at Disneyland in 1986. *Captain EO* was written by George Lucas.

<sup>582</sup> Theme parks, as discussed by their creators, numerous scholars, and this dissertation, are certainly narrative spaces, and to say that they, or the films that are categorized as "theme park-like," are non-narrative and do not reach audiences on an emotional or psychological level, is inaccurate.

<sup>583</sup> This is not to say there isn't some undercurrent of valid concern running through such critiques, particularly anxiety about reduced variety in the cinematic landscape as studios like Disney consistently dominate the box office and seem to increasingly focus on a limited number of blockbuster film franchises like the Marvel Cinematic Universe films that drew Scorsese and Coppola's ire. Sequels, prequels, and reboots have indeed grown to dominate the theatrical landscape, often to the exclusion of original stories and new voices.

films often considered to be less than worthy of serious consideration, including questions of embodiment, narrative, adaptation, cinematic pleasure, and cultural legitimacy. While they occurred in a popular forum, Scorsese and Coppola's comments recall longstanding debates within academia over what merits serious concern or study, what constitutes "real" cinema, what kinds of experiences are more or less legitimate than others, and the privileging of narrative over non-narrative or spectacular cinema.

Writing a decade earlier, Thomas Leitch addresses similar criticisms. In his discussion of postliterary adaptations, Leitch argues that:

So far, however, neither reviewers nor theorists have developed a way of talking about postliterary adaptations that has progressed much beyond sarcasm or outrage. The problem is especially acute in the case of movies whose sources are not only nonliterary but nonnarrative. Michael Wilmington, reviewing *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003) for the *Chicago Tribune*, observed that 'this is a movie based not on a novel, history or even another old movie, but on a theme park ride...and that means we're lucky if we get any wit, imagination or character at all,' as if such a source placed the film beyond the pale of civilized discussion. The summary dismissal of such adaptations is evidently based partly on a literary bias that assumes cinema should adapt only originals more culturally respectable than cinema itself and partly on a narrative bias that assumes that stories are the ingredients that make the best movies.<sup>584</sup>

Here, Leitch calls attention to dismissive attitudes towards adaptations of "lesser" cultural sources like theme parks. He highlights a "narrative bias" that relates to longstanding discussions in academia about different cinematic pleasures and their merits. This in some ways recalls Tom Gunning's theorization of the "cinema of attractions" and its "direct assault on the spectator" in the mid-1980s.<sup>585</sup> Situating the cinema of attractions in the context of the spectacular pleasures

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<sup>584</sup> Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 258.

<sup>585</sup> Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, eds. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 61. This concept was revisited in the 2006 anthology *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, where scholars explored the legacy and ongoing relevance of the "cinema of attractions" as a critical framework.

of early cinema, Gunning defined it as “a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator.”<sup>586</sup> Gunning argues that “Clearly in some sense recent spectacle cinema has re-affirmed its roots in stimulus and carnival rides, in what might be called the Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects,” suggesting the persistence of what he saw as the tension between narrative and spectacle evident in more recent, effects-driven Hollywood cinema of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>587</sup>

Other scholars have discussed narrative and spectacle not as in opposition to one another, but as interrelated impulses. In *Spectacular Narratives*, Geoff King considers more recent spectacular cinematic experiences that speak to what he calls the “extra-cinematic dimension”—such as theme park attractions, computer games, IMAX, and VR—as a continuation of this early cinematic urge. King explores the attendant concerns that have arisen alongside these experiences, arguing that “each of these new dimensions, often seen as exacerbating existing trends in contemporary Hollywood cinema, has been greeted as a threat to the existence of narrative.”<sup>588</sup> King identifies this threat as having to do with the prevalence of “spectacular and visceral thrills [which] are the principal and more immediate stuff of contemporary attractions,” pointing out that “for some they confirm the worst tendencies identified within the Hollywood blockbuster: the epitome of apparently vacuous rollercoaster experiences.”<sup>589</sup> Despite recurring laments about the loss of narrative raised by cinema purists and critics of more corporeally-addressed forms of cinematic expression, King argues that embodied immersion and spectacle

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<sup>586</sup> Gunning, “Cinema of Attractions,” 57.

<sup>587</sup> Gunning, “Cinema of Attractions,” 61.

<sup>588</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 176.

<sup>589</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 179.

are always tied to narrative. Despite the great appeal of spectacle, narrative remains both necessary and desired, as evidenced by the central role narrative plays in actual theme park attractions like those discussed in this dissertation. Moreover, King notes that “immersion” has always been a goal of even non-spectacular Hollywood cinema: “We should not forget, amid all the immersive and interactive frills of rides and games, that the impression of ‘immersion’ is precisely one of the illusions of the Hollywood style of filmmaking seeks to create through its continuity editing patterns and emotional identifications with character.”<sup>590</sup> In other words, narrative and spectacle are inextricably tied together.

In 2019, Coppola also remarked that “Theaters have become amusement parks. That is all fine and good, but don’t invade everything else in that sense. That is fine and good for those who enjoy that type of film and, by the way, knowing what goes into them now, I admire what they do. It’s not my kind of thing, it simply is not. It’s creating another kind of audience that thinks cinema is that.”<sup>591</sup> Such comments suggest that audiences are divided into those that watch (legitimate) “cinema” and “another” audience that enjoys the baser pleasures of “theme park” films. Implicit in this dichotomy is the favoring of a certain kind of cinematic experience as it separates experiences of the mind from those of the body, privileging the former so much that the latter is described as “not cinema, it’s something else.”<sup>592</sup> Such definitions not only imagine narrative as the primary definition of legitimate cinema, but suggest that the “something else” of

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<sup>590</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 185.

<sup>591</sup> Perez, “Francis Ford Coppola.”

<sup>592</sup> Perez, “Francis Ford Coppola.”

so-called theme park films represents an existential threat to cinema, something that is “invading it” and “creating another kind of audience.”<sup>593</sup>

This value divide, between “real” cinema and the perceived “base” pleasures of “other” cinema, has been challenged by cinema studies scholars such as Linda Williams and Carol Clover. Williams’s analysis of so-called “body genres,” like melodrama, horror, and pornography, considers how these films specifically address the “spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion.”<sup>594</sup> Williams importantly notes that such body genres are typically gendered, which is connected to their devaluation: “the bodies of women figured on the screen have functioned traditionally as the primary embodiments of pleasure, fear, and pain.”<sup>595</sup>

Geoff King identifies many examples throughout cinematic history of attempts to integrate cinema with the body in ways that stretch the boundaries of traditional 2D, audio-visual narrative cinema that came to be considered the dominant form. Cinematic phenomena spanning the twentieth century like Hale’s Tours, Cinerama, William Castle’s special effects-equipped theaters, and Sensurround speak to a persistent desire to expand the visual dimension of the screen into other senses.<sup>596</sup> In their direct engagement with the fully-sensual cinematic body, such films share a heritage both with cinematic park spaces and with the park-inspired films discussed in this chapter, as they more directly address the somatic aspects of cinematic experience.

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<sup>593</sup> Perez, “Francis Ford Coppola.”

<sup>594</sup> Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44, No. 4 (Summer 1991): 4.

<sup>595</sup> Williams, “Film Bodies,” 4.

<sup>596</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 178-179.

These scholars push back against assumptions and theories that separate out the visual, cognitive, and conscious levels of film experience, illuminating the ways in which all cinema addresses the senses and what Sobchack calls “the viewer’s corporeal-material being.”<sup>597</sup> As Sobchack writes:

Our sensations and responses [to movies] ... pose an intolerable challenge to the prevalent cultural assumption that the film image is constituted by a merely two-dimensional geometry. Positing cinematic vision as merely a mode of objective symbolic representation, and reductively abstracting—“disincarnating”—the spectator’s subjective and full-bodied vision to posit it only as a “distance sense,” contemporary film theory has had major difficulties in comprehending how it is possible for human bodies to be, in fact, really “touched” and “moved” by the movies.<sup>598</sup>

Sobchack counters notions that true cinema is defined as primarily cerebral or “psychological,” as the cinema of “enlightenment,” “knowledge,” and “inspiration.” Sobchack importantly points out that “we look at and carry around photographs or sit in a movie theater, before a television set, or in front of a computer not only as *conscious beings* engaged in the activity of perception and expression but also as *carnal beings*. Our vision is neither abstracted from our bodies nor from our other modes of perceptual access to the world. Nor does what we see merely touch the surface of our eyes.”<sup>599</sup> Indeed, all cinema, as Sobchack argues, is carnal, even films considered to be “cerebral.”

This chapter engages with these critical discussions of adaptation and embodiment and takes up the call of scholars who question rigid cinematic boundaries and limited views of cinema as disembodied, as only or even primarily visual and cognitive. As such, the analysis

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<sup>597</sup> Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew,” 55-56.

<sup>598</sup> Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew,” 59.

<sup>599</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic ‘Presence,’” in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 139.



here aims to challenge preconceived notions of the limits of cinematic modes and perception as well as the spatiotemporal boundaries of cinematic experience. This chapter considers how media can be used to expand physical spaces—and experiences—beyond park boundaries and how such films speak to issues of embodiment in film, television, and video games.

It is important to put the previous chapters' discussions of how the body works is addressed in cinematic spaces within the physical park in dialogue with this converse movement: how Disney park-based screen media addresses the visitor/viewer's body and subjectivity vis-à-vis the parks. By looking the other direction, at how Disney has taken the physical and made it virtual, we can better understand how our bodies, perceptions, and subjectivities fit within these increasingly hybrid physical/virtual story worlds. Moreover, I consider how these films and games speak to how we, the viewers/visitors, occupy this in-between space through our distinctively subjective and embodied perception. As texts that traverse the borders and fissures between different cinematic forms, I argue that park-films and park-games, like the attractions and lands discussed in the previous chapters, provide fertile grounds for understanding our fully embodied media experiences precisely because they are firmly embedded in both the physical and the virtual. These films and games illuminate the boundaries of cinematic and physical space and the ways in which these boundaries can be negotiated, blurred, and dissolved.

To do this, this chapter first explores a cluster of frequently dismissed (and often maligned) films produced by Disney based on its own original physical park spaces (attractions and lands). In the late 1990s, Disney began to release films based on its theme park spaces, first via a made-for-television movie, then in theatrical releases and streaming specials. The case studies in this chapter thus range from the first park-based Disney film, the 1997 made-for-television film *Tower of Terror* through the most recent release at the time of writing, 2021's

Disney+ special *Muppets Haunted Mansion*. To paint a comprehensive picture of the range of strategies of spatial adaptation as well as their experiential effects, I consider the entire corpus of these films, including less-than-successful films like *The Country Bears* (2002) and *The Haunted Mansion* (2003) as well as the hit blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise (2003-2017). Disney's first, and at present only, land-based film *Tomorrowland* (2015) provides a look into how larger park spaces are spatially and ideologically translated into film. The texts in this chapter are diverse in kind, scale, success, and genre, from supernatural mystery and science fiction to musical comedy road film and epic swashbuckling adventures. They demonstrate a variety of strategies for translating park to screen, but they are all united by their shared basis in immersive physical park spaces. Rather than work through them chronologically, as in the previous chapters, I group these films in terms of the techniques they use as they attempt to "bring the magic of the parks straight into your home," to adapt physical park experiences to screen-based media.<sup>600</sup>

I begin by discussing these films' broader functions, as they act not only as synergistic efforts to capitalize on existing park IP, but also as attempts to use media to further expand the park experience beyond its spatiotemporal boundaries. I consider how adapting the experience of these rides can be seen as another expression of Anderson's "inhabitable text," where these films bring the park experience into the home, calling them to visit the parks and complete the story by taking their places as ride protagonists. I then examine how these films attempt to bridge the physical park and screen media experiences. Pulling from amongst the ten theatrically released park-based films, as well as one made-for-tv film and one streaming special, I consider select

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<sup>600</sup> This quote is taken from the packaging of the 2012 Disney Thrills and Chills DVD 4-Movie Collection.

techniques and aspects of these films as they adapt physical park space for screen media.<sup>601</sup> First, I consider how some park-films have adapted the physical environments of the attractions on which they are based as well as the visitor's corporeal experiences within these environments. I look primarily to *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion*, and, most recently, *Muppets Haunted Mansion*, to explore how such park-films not only reference their source attractions, but mirror their structure, reflecting the visitor's experience of them. I also look to how such films employ cinematic genre tropes to adapt the embodied experiences of their source attractions.

I pick this thread up in the next section, where I look at how these park-films recreate the viewer's spatial presence in part through cinematic direct address, adapting a key part of the physical park experience that is also, typically, a crucial difference between park narratives and traditionally cinematic narratives. To illustrate this, I examine Disney's earliest park film *Tower of Terror* as well as in other films like *The Haunted Mansion*, and *The Jungle Cruise* (2021). As I examined in Chapters One and Two, many attractions—and even entire lands—situate visitors in their narratives in the role of a protagonist. While these park-films do not quite go that far—they each include conventional protagonists of their own—I argue that moments of direct address acknowledge the visitor/viewer's absent presence in the story. In this way, these films adapt their source rides' narrative positioning of the visitor as a means of allowing the viewer to access a park experience through the cinematic medium.

This leads to a discussion of what I call these films' "spatial nostalgia," or their preoccupation with their source attraction's architecture, scenery, and space as a means of adapting the materiality of the park experience. This spatial nostalgia is expressed via the films'

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<sup>601</sup> This analysis is not exhaustive, but rather gives a sense of some of the different ways in which these films attempt to adapt the physical park experience into a cinematic or ludic one.

narrative and visual preoccupations with their source rides' architectural and visual spaces—spaces that can be physically inhabited by park visitors. From the Hollywood Tower Hotel in *Tower of Terror* to Country Bear Hall in *The Country Bears* (2002) or Gracey Manor in *The Haunted Mansion*, park spaces become not only the springboard for, but the focus of, these films' settings and plots.

This raises the question of how park-films and park attractions further converge in the creation of a reciprocal narrative space, where an attraction's story informs a film, which is then grafted back onto the physical attraction itself. This process highlights how, despite their seemingly fixed nature as concrete, material spaces, park attractions are paradoxically less fixed than their cinematic counterparts, as they can be endlessly updated both narratively and physically. Looking particularly at the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, the most successful of these park-films, as well as *Mission to Mars* (2000), reveals how park rides are very much plastic spaces that can be reworked by their transmedia texts, a process which then alters how visitors relate to their spaces and stories.

Similarly, I consider how Disney's 2015 film *Tomorrowland* attempts to renegotiate the space on which it is based. Based on a park land, rather than a single attraction, *Tomorrowland* acts as a different kind of spatial adaptation: one that appropriates the land's architecture and aesthetics as a means of attempting to update the space's ideology. I examine how, through nostalgic visions of the past and an ethos of corporate optimism, *Tomorrowland* attempts to present an alternative to, and solution for, contemporary dystopian science fiction depictions of the future. Ultimately, however, the film reinforces the land's original midcentury vision of the future as a consumerist utopia brought about by corporate scientific advancements. By

reappropriating the physical spaces of the park, the film repositions the future as an ideal destination, both within the diegetic space of the film and as a visitable park location.

I conclude the chapter with a complementary discussion of representations of park space in Disney video games to consider how Disney has also used the video game medium to “bring the parks home.” Looking at several games that span three decades, from *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* (Capcom, 1990) to *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* (Microsoft Studios, 2011) to *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* (ILMxLAB, 2020), I consider how, like park-films, park-games use media forms and technologies to dissolve the boundaries between the physical and the virtual. I explore how, like the other case studies in this chapter, park-based games must negotiate players’ bodily presence as they adapt physical park experiences to virtual ones. This final section also ties back to Chapter Two’s discussion of Disney park lands as increasingly interactive sites of digital, virtual, and physical convergence.

### **Park-Films: Cinematic Adaptations of Park Space and Re-Inhabiting the Inhabitable Text**

Disney’s motivations for making these types of films appear to be multifaceted. Of course, park-films are, like any Disney productions, presumably intended to make a profit in their own right. However, it is important to note that despite Disney’s attempts to churn out hits based on its park properties, this strategy has not always been successful. Many of the films discussed in this chapter have turned out to be critical or financial failures (or both). The first park-film, *Tower of Terror*, was a made-for-television movie that aired in 1997 on the *Wonderful World of Disney* on ABC.<sup>602</sup> Disney’s first theatrical attraction-based film, *Mission to Mars*

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<sup>602</sup> *Wonderful World of Disney* tied for 30th in the Nielsen ratings during the 1997-1998 season with 13.5 million viewers. See Entertainment Weekly Staff, “What Ranked and What Tanked,” *Entertainment Weekly*, May 29, 1998, <https://ew.com/article/1998/05/29/what-ranked-and-what-tanked/>.

(2000), made up its \$100 million budget in the worldwide box office, but performed poorly with U.S. critics.<sup>603</sup> Elvis Mitchell of the *New York Times* praised the film's "spectacular" visual design and technology, while also noting that "There doesn't seem to be an original moment in the entire movie, and the score is so repetitive that it could have been downloaded directly from EnnioMorricone.com."<sup>604</sup> *The Country Bears* (2002), however, was a financial failure, recouping just over half of its \$35M budget, while also being poorly received critically.<sup>605</sup> Roger Ebert opened his review of the film by noting that "The formidable technical skills in 'The Country Bears' must not be allowed to distract from the film's terminal inanity."<sup>606</sup> The film proved to be a critical failure as well.

With the release of *Pirates of the Caribbean* in June 2003, however, Disney finally had a smash hit that earned more than \$650 million internationally on a \$140 million budget. The film subsequently spawned a blockbuster film franchise, with five films that have generated more than \$4.52 billion worldwide, making it, as of January 2021, the thirteenth highest-grossing film franchise.<sup>607</sup> However, *The Haunted Mansion*, released later in 2003, again demonstrated the difficulty in translating park space onto the big screen. While not quite the blockbuster that *Pirates* was, the film was a financial success, grossing more than \$182 million worldwide on a

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<sup>603</sup> "Mission to Mars," Box Office Mojo, IMDbPro, accessed January 12, 2022, [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0183523/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0183523/?ref=bo_se_r_1).

<sup>604</sup> Elvis Mitchell, "Film Review: Small Step for Man, but a Big Whoop for Martians," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/10/movies/film-review-small-step-for-man-but-a-big-whoop-for-martians.html>.

<sup>605</sup> "The Country Bears," Box Office Mojo, IMDbPro, accessed January 12, 2022, [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0276033/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0276033/?ref=bo_se_r_1).

<sup>606</sup> Roger Ebert, "The Country Bears," RogerEbert.com, originally published July 26, 2002, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-country-bears-2002>.

<sup>607</sup> Sarah Whitten, "The 13 Highest-Grossing Film Franchises at the Box Office," *CNBC*, January 31, 2021, <https://www.cNBC.com/2021/01/31/the-13-highest-grossing-film-franchises-at-the-box-office.html>.

\$90 million budget, though it struggled with critics and audiences alike.<sup>608</sup> At present, *The Haunted Mansion* holds a 13% “fresh” rating on RottenTomatoes.com, with an audience score of just 30%, with more than 100,000 ratings.

Disney stuck with the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise through the 2000s and 2010s, only branching out from the franchise with the release of *Tomorrowland* in 2015. Disney’s first park land-based film, *Tomorrowland*, like *Mission to Mars*, barely recouped its production costs, earning \$209 million worldwide on a \$190 million budget. It was deemed a “relative bust” over its opening weekend and likewise fared relatively poorly with critics.<sup>609</sup> A.O. Scott, of the *New York Times*, writes of the film’s “enormous lapses in narrative and conceptual coherence—its blithe disregard for basic principles of science-fiction credibility.”<sup>610</sup> Following the most recent installment of the *Pirates* franchise in 2017, Disney released *Jungle Cruise* in 2021, after a pandemic-related release delay. *Jungle Cruise* earned over \$213 million worldwide on a budget of more than \$200 million, with “lukewarm reviews.”<sup>611</sup> However, that figure does not include the more than \$30 million earned globally from sales of Disney+ Premium Access, nor does it factor in potential value for Disney as a means of turning more subscribers onto their streaming platform.<sup>612</sup> Later in 2021, Disney released *Muppets Haunted Mansion*, a near-hour-long musical

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<sup>608</sup> “The Haunted Mansion,” Box Office Mojo, IMDbPro, accessed January 12, 2022, [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0338094/?ref\\_=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0338094/?ref_=bo_se_r_1)

<sup>609</sup> Brooks Barnes, “‘Tomorrowland’ Is a Box-Office Disappointment,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/25/arts/tomorrowland-is-a-box-office-disappointment.html>.

<sup>610</sup> A.O. Scott, “Review: ‘Tomorrowland,’ Brad Bird’s Lesson in Optimism,” *the New York Times*, May 21, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/22/movies/review-tomorrowland-brad-birds-lesson-in-optimism.html>.

<sup>611</sup> “Jungle Cruise,” Box Office Mojo, IMDbPro, accessed January 13, 2022, [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0870154/?ref\\_=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0870154/?ref_=bo_se_r_1); Brooks Barnes, “Sunken ‘Jungle Cruise’ Sales Reflect Hollywood’s Delta Variant Troubles,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/01/business/sunken-jungle-cruise-box-office.html>.

<sup>612</sup> Barnes, “Sunken ‘Jungle Cruise.’”

comedy special, on its Disney+ streaming platform, illustrating Disney's persistent interest in mining the parks for cinematic and televisual content.

Overall, the *Pirates* franchise is the standout success amongst these park-based films, and the recent release of *Jungle Cruise*, which is heavily modeled on the *Pirates* formula—with its period setting, bankable stars, and action-adventure genre that mixes both comedic and supernatural elements—indicates an attempt by Disney to recreate the smash success of the *Pirates* franchise. Reports of upcoming releases, too, including potential additions to the *Pirates* franchise and rumored remakes of *The Haunted Mansion* and *Tower of Terror*, suggest that Disney is not likely to abandon park-based films any time soon.<sup>613</sup>

However, these films suggest other motivations besides attempting to use beloved attractions to cash in at the box office. In part, they represent an attempt to ensure all park spaces are convergent spaces that either adapted from or adapted into screen media. In almost all cases, the attractions chosen for adaptation into films are those not already tied into existing IP.<sup>614</sup> This allows Disney to further capitalize on existing park narratives by building films or franchises on park spaces that have pre-established fan bases but are not already depicted on screen. As we have seen in Chapters One and Two, newly constructed spaces in the park are increasingly based on existing film IP. As classic attractions and lands—the ones that were not already based on film or television properties—are mined for film material, while new rides and lands are being

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<sup>613</sup> Patrick Hipes, “Rosario Dawson Books A Room in Disney’s ‘Haunted Mansion’ Movie,” *Deadline*, September 9, 2021, <https://deadline.com/2021/09/rosario-dawson-haunted-mansion-movie-casting-1234828943/>; Jeff Sneider, “Exclusive: Scarlett Johansson to Produce and Star in ‘Tower of Terror’ Movie for Disney,” *Collider*, June 23, 2021, <https://collider.com/scarlett-johansson-tower-of-terror-movie-disney/>. The legal settlement between Disney and Scarlett Johansson over the SVOD release of *Black Widow* is apparently tied to the upcoming *Tower of Terror* film. See Ryan Northrup, “Scarlett Johansson’s Disney Lawsuit Settlement Tied to Tower of Terror,” *ScreenRant*, October 5, 2021, <https://screenrant.com/scarlett-johansson-disney-lawsuit-settlement-tower-terror-movie/>.

<sup>614</sup> The exception is *Tower of Terror*, though, as we will see, that film is an adaptation of the ride, not the *Twilight Zone* television series.



built on existing films and franchises, eventually every part of the parks becomes a hybrid media space.

These films also capitalize on and further extend the company's network of synergistic products by creating films that refer, and thus direct consumers, back to the company's other offerings, in this case its physical parks and other media properties. In this way, they adhere to what Christopher Anderson identifies as Disney's strategy of "total merchandising," where different Disney products "weave a vast commercial web, a tangle of advertising and entertainment in which each Disney product, from the movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to a ride on Disneyland's Matterhorn, promoted all Disney products."<sup>615</sup> These films can thus be seen as an expression of "Disney synergy," defined by Janet Wasko as "the ultimate in cross-promotional activities."<sup>616</sup> As J.P. Telotte reminds us, synergy was present from the park's very beginnings alongside the *Disneyland* television show, as "the park experience would also draw on the various Disney films (for example, as ride inspirations), which in turn would provide raw material for additional episodes, which would further attract viewers/consumers to the park and to later theatrical releases."<sup>617</sup> Park-films can be seen as a contemporary extension of this strategy, as they further tie existing Disney properties—park and film—closer together, reinforcing the totalizing network of Disney products.

In addition to expanding Disney's synergistic transmedia connections, these films take texts (attractions and lands) that are site-specific and bring them "into the home." The parks, of course, are limited spaces, both in the number of their location (currently in only six cities

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<sup>615</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 134.

<sup>616</sup> Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 71.

<sup>617</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 75.

worldwide), and as insular bubbles that are tightly—and deliberately—bounded in space. Disneyland’s design was intended to insulate the fantasy space of the park from the influence of the outside world, limiting what visitors see or hear from beyond its limits. The berm that surrounds the park allows Disney near total control of the space within by excluding the “real world” without.<sup>618</sup> Just as they are spatially bounded, the parks are also temporally bounded, as they are, for many visitors, limited to rare, relatively brief, and often not easily repeatable visits. This lends the parks a rarity and singularity of experience, while beneficial for storytelling and world-building, limits the parks’ reach. Media offers a way for Disney to maintain the controlled experience of a physical park visit while also confronting the challenge of selling experiences that are inherently temporally bounded and site-specific to a wider audience.<sup>619</sup>

In this, we can recognize Christopher Anderson’s “inhabitable text,” where the films, rather than the original *Disneyland* television show, call viewers to “inhabit” the physical park spaces by visiting the park. Anderson argues that the “inhabitable text” is

one that would never be complete for a television viewing family until they had...made a pilgrimage to the park itself. A trip to Disneyland—using the conceptual map provided by the program—offered the family viewer a chance to perform in the Disneyland narrative, to provide unity and closure through personal experience, to witness the ‘aura’ to which television’s reproductive apparatus could only allude.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> See Wasko, *Understanding Disney*, and Alan Bryman, *Disney & His Worlds* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) for discussions of Disneyland as a space of control.

<sup>619</sup> Park-films also may, in some ways, tap into visitors’ longstanding impulse to take memories of the park home, as evidenced by the ubiquity of Disney park home videos over the years. It has always been a common sight to see cameras, and later camcorders at the park. It’s now common to see visitors with phones or GoPros recording their ride experiences and posting them online, which has led to a rich archive of on-ride POV videos on YouTube and elsewhere (as in the multitude of fan blogs, Instagram pages, etc.), made by park fans. See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp8Sx\\_1cfo4&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp8Sx_1cfo4&feature=emb_title).

<sup>620</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 153.

As Anderson observes, “while Walter Benjamin predicted that mass reproduction would diminish the aura surrounding works of art, Disney seems to have recognized that the mass media instead only intensify the desire for authenticity by invoking a sublime, unmediated experience that is forever absent, just beyond the grasp of a hand reaching for the television dial.”<sup>621</sup> With settings that reference their source rides’ buildings and recreations of real park space, these films similarly act as a call to come to the parks. In the earliest park-film *Tower of Terror*, for example, shots in the film recreate scenes from the ride, and the ride’s passenger vehicle, the service elevator, is referred to throughout the film. Not only does the built ride space provide a basic location for the events of the film, but the repeated establishing shots, the shots that linger over physical details of the ride space, and the way in which the characters explore and inhabit these spaces invite audiences to do the same: to make the pilgrimage to the park to live their own story. The title card at the film’s conclusion that announces that the film is “Based on Disney-MGM Studios ‘Tower of Terror’ attraction at Walt Disney World resort” emphasizes this call for viewers to become visitors, who can then be viewers again as the experiences of cinema and the physical park converge.<sup>622</sup>

As discussed previously, Anderson argues that “Television made the entire Disney operation more enticing by fashioning it as a narrative experience which the family TV audience could enhance—and actually perform—by visiting the park.”<sup>623</sup> Of course, Anderson is writing about the *Disneyland* television series in the mid-1950s, noting its function for Disney as a means of exposing the broader public to the Disneyland concept using the then-new mass

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<sup>621</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 153.

<sup>622</sup> A similar title card at the beginning of *The Haunted Mansion* announces that it is “Based on Walt Disney’s Haunted Mansion.” The end credits for *Muppets Haunted Mansion* read the same.

<sup>623</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 152.

medium of television. The context of a film like *Tower of Terror* is inherently different, in part because the park was more than forty years old by this time, and had already attracted more than 350 million visitors.<sup>624</sup> While the park did not need public exposure in the mid-1990s in quite the same way it did in the 1950s, *Tower of Terror*'s potential as a call-to-action nevertheless functions similarly to the original *Disneyland* series, not least because it originally aired on the *Wonderful World of Disney* (the successor to *Disneyland*).<sup>625</sup> *Tower of Terror* and films like it invoke park space and narratives as experiences that could be lived by the audience if they were to visit the park, and, indeed, the first-person address of many of these rides fulfill this promise to live the movie.

For those viewers who have also already been visitors, however, these films can function in a different way. They offer not only the pleasure of seeing a recognizable real-life place as the setting for a cinematic narrative and the promise of perhaps visiting that space someday, but also the nostalgic pleasure of watching the characters experience the “ride” of the Hollywood Tower Hotel or move through the haunted corridors of The Haunted Mansion, which recall their own embodied experiences. In this way, such films are a way for an attraction, once visited, to be re-experienced in the viewer's home, via their television. This allows for the original texts—the attractions themselves—to expand beyond their geographic confines, beyond their specific, discrete physical locations. Similarly, these films enable the physical park space to expand in time, giving the audience the ability to revisit an experience that might be once-in-a-lifetime, or

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<sup>624</sup> Greg Hernandez, “40 Years of Magic: As Disneyland Celebrates Its Anniversary, Anaheim Deals with the Pains of Middle Age,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1995, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-07-16-mn-24628-story.html>

<sup>625</sup> At the time of broadcast, the only *Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* that had yet been built was the one at Walt Disney World.

at least somewhat rare.<sup>626</sup> For viewers/visitors who purchase the DVD or watch the film on YouTube or Disney+, these movies allow for memories of the park experience to be repeatedly revisited. Viewers are, in a way, able to re-enter the Mansion or “Zone” of the park experience at will. Moreover, these films often add layers of meaning to the ride, expanding on the backstories of their characters and scenes in a way that can deepen audience engagement with their stories. As Rebecca Williams argues about *The Haunted Mansion*, “the film has been used as a resource for fans of the Mansion to expand their understandings of the narrative of the attraction.”<sup>627</sup>

As discussed in further detail below, these films thus act as a kind of reciprocal inhabitable text or, perhaps more accurately, an inhabitable text that doesn’t only engage the viewer in a single direction—out of the home and to the park—but in the reverse as well, directing park visitors back to the theater, DVD, or streaming service, where they can not only revisit an attraction, but deepen their knowledge of and engagement with it. These films, as suggested by Disney’s DVD packaging cited in this chapter’s epigraph, are intended to bring the park into the home, expanding physical ride experiences and allowing them to transcend the fixed spatial boundaries of the physical park. While these motives may explain the “why” of adapting rides into films, how these films have attempted to adapt park space and the effects of these adaptations emerge as more interesting and complex questions. The following sections consider in further detail some possible answers.

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<sup>626</sup> Of course, park visitors range widely from those who visit once to the annual pass holders who visit every day.

<sup>627</sup> Rebecca Williams, “Extending the Haunted Mansion: Spatial Poaching, Participatory Narratives and Retrospective Transmedia,” in *Theme Park Fandom: Spatial Transmedia, Materiality and Participatory Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 113.

## “From Regions Beyond”: Spatial Narrative Structure, Embodiment, and Materializing the Visitor’s Narrative in *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion*, and *Muppets Haunted*

### *Mansion*

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.

—*The Twilight Zone* opening narration, Season 1

Perhaps Madame Leota can establish contact. She has a remarkable head for materializing the disembodied.

—The Ghost Host, *The Haunted Mansion*

As the previous chapters have shown, visitor experiences in the Disney park lands and attractions are centered around the visitor’s presence and movement through physical narrative spaces. As they negotiate how to translate the essence of park space—the visitor’s journey—to film, park-films often not only adopt the basic aesthetics of or incorporate characters and props from these attractions, but they also adapt the visitor’s narrative experiences of them. This results in film structures, imagery, and scenes derived from park space that serve not just as synergistic intertextual references, but as adaptations of the park visitor’s experience. This is particularly apparent in films like *Tower of Terror* (1997), *The Haunted Mansion* (2003), and the streaming holiday special *Muppets Haunted Mansion* (2021). Just as film scenes are sometimes remixed in rides, as discussed in Chapter One, ride scenes are often remixed in such park-films. Yet, even as ride elements are reworked, a film’s structure nevertheless can approximate a visitor’s journey through the film’s source attraction. Examining park-films like these reveals how they adapt the sensorial effects of these spaces and experiences via cinematic structure, techniques, and generic tropes. As the previous section discussed, as they do so, these films also engage with Anderson’s

concept of the “inhabitable text,” bringing the park experience back into the home by adapting the visitor’s experience.

The opening narration of the original *Twilight Zone* television series presents the eponymous Zone as a liminal space that the stories within the series explore. Somewhat fittingly, Disney’s first attempt at bridging physical space and media space through park-to-film adaptation was *Tower of Terror*, a made-for-television film based on the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror ride that originally premiered on ABC during the October 26, 1997 episode of *The Wonderful World of Disney*.<sup>628</sup> The film sticks quite close to the structure of its source ride: the ride’s basic structure, where the narrative backstory is established at the beginning of the queue and then repeated by the protagonists during the kinetic “drop” portion of the ride, is mirrored in the film, with *Tower of Terror*’s protagonists, Buzzy and his niece Anna, acting as narrative surrogates for riders. The film’s opening prologue is a flashback to the fateful night five people went missing from the elevator of the Hollywood Tower Hotel. This prologue reflects the ride’s in-queue video, which reveals a nearly identical (if more barebones) backstory to visitors before they proceed on their own adventure in the hotel’s elevators.

Following the film’s opening prologue, a sequence in the film establishes the present-day story: newspaper journalist Buzzy meets an elderly woman named Abigail, who recounts the mysterious disappearance of five hotel guests on Halloween night, 1939.<sup>629</sup> As she tells the story, black-and-white flashbacks recapitulate some of the events in the prologue, again recalling the ride’s black-and-white in-queue video. Buzzy and Anna then set out to solve the mystery, and

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<sup>628</sup> “*The Tower of Terror* Airs on *The Wonderful World of Disney*,” Walt Disney Archives, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://d23.com/this-day/the-tower-of-terror-air-on-the-wonderful-world-of-disney/>.

<sup>629</sup> The Halloween setting was no doubt added to tie into the film’s air date, which was the Sunday before Halloween, 1997.

their adventure roughly corresponds to visitors' experiences on the ride. The pair explore the spaces of the hotel, including the exterior grounds, the dust-caked and cobweb-swathed lobby, the dim and dirty service areas, and the elevator itself. This reflects how visitors must—via the controlled linear progression of the queue—move through these spaces as well. Beginning with a set of metal gates, the ride queue similarly winds through exterior garden spaces before moving into the lobby, reflecting Buzzy's entrance to the Hollywood Tower Hotel grounds in the film.

The film's ending, too, mirrors the events of the attraction. Though the film's opening sequence depicts the events leading to the five characters' presence on the elevator on Halloween night, 1939, it concludes with lightning striking the tower, but not the fateful plummet, as depicted in the ride's in-queue video. The final drop is reserved for the climax of the film, which builds up to a harrowing elevator plunge just as the ride does. Like the riders on The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, the characters in the film experience a thrilling drop through the tower on the maintenance service elevator during the film's climax; the embodied experience of the ride is thus shown through them. Both the ride and film have a happy resolution following this drop: in the film, Buzzy and Anna solve the mystery and the spirits are finally at peace, while on the ride, the visitors ultimately "survive" the plunge.<sup>630</sup> In overall structure, using characters as surrogates for the displaced riders-as-protagonists, *Tower of Terror* mirrors the structure of its source ride, from backstory to exploration to thrilling drop.

Like *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion* also adapts the park visitor's experience by not only referencing the ride's architectural spaces, characters, and scenes, but by reflecting the visitor's progression through these spaces via its narrative structure as well as its protagonists'

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<sup>630</sup> This framing is emphasized by merchandise offered in the ride's gift shop that declared of the rider's experience on Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, "I survived!"



own journey through these spaces. Moreover, the film also attempts to adapt the affective experience of the attraction, particularly as The Haunted Mansion attraction operates as a “horror dark ride.”<sup>631</sup> The film draws on generic horror tropes like jump scares to replicate the embodied experience of the attraction, which itself draws on some of the same cinematic elements.

Some previous scholarship has focused on finding the Haunted Mansion’s narrative or pointing to the lack thereof. In her analysis of fan engagement with, and contribution to, the Haunted Mansion story, Rebecca Williams refers to the “narratively fixed tour of the Mansion,” underscoring what she sees as the ride’s narrative limitations, which lack the fuller development she sees in its transmedia texts (video games, etc.) and participatory fan practices.<sup>632</sup> Remarking that the ride “lacks a coherent story,” Williams argues that *The Haunted Mansion* “offers fleeting moments of recognition to those familiar with the attraction, but little more.”<sup>633</sup> Similarly, Angela Ndaliansis argues that “In the Haunted Mansion, the montage of various disjointed horror stories epitomized Walt Disney’s lack of interest in narrative development and greater concern with immersing the audience into an ‘experience’ that radiated around the senses.”<sup>634</sup> However, this focus on the narrative of the space itself and its characters overlooks the narrative that is constructed around the viewer’s presence within that space. In other words, such discussions both assume and privilege a narrative that somehow exists separately from the visitor, despite the visitor’s central role in the Haunted Mansion story. As the ride’s direct address via the narration of the Ghost Host suggests, the visitor is not only inextricable from the story, they are central—

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<sup>631</sup> Ndaliansis, *The Horror Sensorium*, 56-72.

<sup>632</sup> Rebecca Williams, “Extending the Haunted Mansion,” 117.

<sup>633</sup> Williams, “Extending the Haunted Mansion,” 101-113.

<sup>634</sup> Ndaliansis, *The Horror Sensorium*, 65.

the Haunted Mansion story their story. While other characters on the ride may have backstories, as Williams productively explores, they may be better conceived of as supporting characters to the visitor's protagonist.

The narrative of The Haunted Mansion attraction is fairly straightforward. Whatever incoherence is perceived by attempting to read a narrative solely from the spaces of the ride is made coherent by the riders, as they experience, and then escape from, a haunted mansion. In his book *The Haunted Mansion: Imagineering a Disney Classic*, Imagineer Jason Surrell explains the structure of the Haunted Mansion narrative:

Though not as intricately constructed as a Shakespearean play, a story exists. In fact, Imagineering legend Tony Baxter believes that, in the end, combining the seemingly divergent work of Marc Davis and Claude Coats inadvertently gave the Haunted Mansion a fairly solid three-act structure. In Act One, which begins slowly and ominously in the Foyer, guests anticipate the appearance of the happy haunts, and experience poltergeist activity and unseen spirits. Madame Leota provides the curtain that separates Act One and Act Two. The medium conjures up the spirits and encourages them to materialize, which they promptly do in the swinging wake in the Grand Hall and the Attic. The descent from the attic window into the Graveyard takes guests into Act Three, in which they are completely surrounded by the ghosts who are enjoying the manic intensity of a graveyard jamboree. Finally, one of three Hitchhiking Ghosts materializes, beside guests in their Doom Buggy before the exit.<sup>635</sup>

While Surrell suggests that this may not have been intentional, the ride nevertheless exhibits a coherent narrative structure when one considers the essential role of the visitor within the space. As the Haunted Mansion's attraction poster announces, "They've been dying to meet you at the Haunted Mansion." This underscores the significance of the visitor's presence in the narrative, that this is not a story about the inhabitants of the Mansion, but the tale of what happens when "you" meet them.

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<sup>635</sup> Jason Surrell, *The Haunted Mansion: Imagineering a Disney Classic* (Los Angeles and New York: Disney Editions, 2015), 32.

The visitor's position in the narrative is made clear from the start of the ride through narration, as they are addressed directly by the "Ghost Host" in the queue pre-show, which sets the stage for the experience to come: "when hinges creak in doorless chambers, and strange and frightening sounds echo through the halls. Whenever candlelights flicker where the air is deathly still — that is the time when ghosts are present, practicing their terror with ghoulish delight!" This narration continues throughout the course of the queue and during portions of the ride itself, guiding riders narratively through the space. The narration in the foyer establishes the mood and sets riders' expectations that ghosts will be present during their visit. Visitors are then welcomed into the next room—the portrait gallery—where they are introduced to both the Ghost Host character and to the narrative framing of the ride: "Welcome, foolish mortals, to the Haunted Mansion. I am your host, your *Ghost Host*. Kindly step all the way in, please, and make room for everyone. There's no turning back now. Our tour begins here in this gallery, where you see paintings of some of our guests as they appeared in their corruptible, mortal state." As suggested by the "Ghost Host" voice-over, visitors embark on a tour of the Haunted Mansion, where they are then invited to attend a "swinging wake," a party where they meet (and are ultimately in danger of joining) a cadre of "999 happy haunts." Ultimately, visitors escape with their lives, albeit with a "hitchhiking ghost" that "will follow [them] home!"

As with the Indiana Jones Adventure, as discussed in Chapter One, visitors' presence in the ride is framed as activating the narrative. The Ghost Host reminds visitors at the start of their journey aboard their Doom Buggies, to "heed this warning: the spirits will materialize only if you remain safely seated with your hands, arms, feet, and legs inside." Though this phrasing helps to keep the standard safety spiel in theme, it also positions the events of the story as contingent on visitor presence and behavior. Later, after they meet Madame Leota in the seance

room, the Ghost Host informs visitors that “The happy haunts have received your sympathetic vibrations and are beginning to materialize,” suggesting that it is the visitor (facilitated by Leota) who causes the visible spirits to appear.

The centrality of the visitors to the Haunted Mansion story is reflected in the film’s narrative, which revolves around the Evers family as visitors to the titular Mansion, rather than its permanent inhabitants. Though the film incorporates existing characters from the ride, such as Madame Leota, the Hitchhiking Ghosts, and the singing busts, its narrative is not centered on them. Even Master Gracey, a figure who is often the focus of fan theories, acts as a secondary protagonist in the film.<sup>636</sup> While the film opens with a flashback montage that depicts the apparent suicide by poisoning of Elizabeth Henshaw, followed by the hanging suicide of Master Gracey, the film primarily follows the story of the Evers family throughout most of the movie. We learn the backstory of Gracey and his lost love, yet the Evers family are developed in the most depth, and their journey through the spaces of Haunted Mansion, from the portrait corridor and the attic to Madame Leota’s seance room and the graveyard outside reflect the park visitors’ journey through these spaces. This allows them to stand in as proxies for the viewers, which correlates to the way in which our direct experiences form the narrative of the park ride itself.

Although scenes from the attraction do not strictly appear in order in the film, the film nevertheless replicates some of the ride’s basic narrative structure, particularly via the Everses’ movement through the space. The film’s prologue begins with an entrance to the mansion through its front doors, bringing viewers into the space in the same way they enter the ride building. The opening credits close with Master Gracey’s suicide by hanging, recalling the hanging figure in the early moments of the attraction’s queue, at the conclusion of the stretching

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<sup>636</sup> Williams, “Extending the Haunted Mansion,” 117.

room sequence. The Everses' adventure in the Mansion likewise begins with their approach to the exterior gates of the Mansion property, movement through the exterior grounds, and approach through the front door. While they do not encounter a stretching room after the foyer, as in the ride, and instead move through the foyer into the Grand Hall (a point not reached until mid-way through the ride), later sequences in the film recreate similar sequences in the ride. About one-third of the way through the film, for example, Jim Evers walks through a hallway that resembles the portrait corridor in the ride's queue, complete with lightning flashes, changing portraits, and a pair of busts at the end of the hall that follow him as he walks past. At the end of the hall, he encounters a bulging door, recalling some of the first moments riders spend aboard the Omnimover Doom Buggies, as they pass through the corridor of doors, alive with spirit activity.

Moreover, the film partially recreates the ride's structure as identified by Surrell. During first half of the film, as the Evers family explores the Mansion, they experience otherworldly phenomena and "poltergeist activity."<sup>637</sup> As Surrell notes of the ride, in the film, Madame Leota is a catalyst for the materialization of the spirits, who until that point have either been "unseen," as those in the graveyard, or have appeared to be living human inhabitants and staff. After Madame Leota summons the "dark spirits from the grave [to] come forth," both the Everses and the audience encounter the spirits in their more ethereal forms, as wispy, translucent figures who do not abide by normal physical laws. As Surrell points out, this characterizes the latter part of the Haunted Mansion ride, where the "unseen spirits" become visible to the rider via special effects like Pepper's Ghost and as Audio-Animatronic figures.

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<sup>637</sup> Surrell, *The Haunted Mansion*, 32.

Following the reveal that the inhabitants of the Mansion are actually spirits, the Evers family, like visitors on the ride, descend into the graveyard, where they are now able to see the Mansion's myriad ghostly inhabitants.<sup>638</sup> The Everses then descend into one of the crypts in the graveyard, mimicking the final moments of the attraction, when riders, too, enter a large stone crypt before finally disembarking from the ride. The film diverges here in that, unlike the ride, the Everses then return to the Mansion to solve the mystery of Elizabeth's death and lift the curse, which finally releases the spirits from their earthly bounds. Ultimately, however, while *The Haunted Mansion* does not literally recreate the exact sequence of the park attraction, sequences within it and its overall narrative structure resonate with and reflect riders' experiences on The Haunted Mansion. This suggests that beyond its intertextual references to the ride, the film also adapts the ride's (and thus the visitor's) narrative through its structure and through the characters' movement through space.

Putting the 2003 *Haunted Mansion* film in dialogue with Disney's *Muppets Haunted Mansion*, which was released on Disney+ in October 2021, further illustrates how the core of the Haunted Mansion narrative is not the story of its inhabitants, but of its visitors. This Halloween special provides another example of how the visitor-centered narrative of a park ride can be translated into a cinematic experience. Like *The Haunted Mansion*, *Muppets Haunted Mansion* adapts the narrative of "our" story within the ride via the surrogate protagonists. *Muppets Haunted Mansion* ultimately stays true to the Haunted Mansion narrative, the core of which is the story of a visitor's experience entering, exploring, and then finally escaping the mansion. In this way, it reflects the experience of the park visitor on the original ride.

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<sup>638</sup> This is woven into the film's narrative, as Jim and the kids must find a key that will unlock the truth about Elizabeth's death.

During the beginning of the special, Gonzo establishes the premise for the film in a phone call with Kermit the Frog. He describes how, on the one-hundredth anniversary of the disappearance of the Great MacGuffin—Gonzo’s favorite magician—there is a “special, once-in-a-lifetime fear challenge,” “to spend the night in the most haunted mansion in the world,” where MacGuffin disappeared. Of course, the “Great MacGuffin” is an on-the-nose acknowledgement that this backstory is merely a device used as a catalyst for the plot. The special also draws on the trope of surviving the night in a haunted or otherwise menacing house.<sup>639</sup> This pretext suggests that the real focus of the story is Gonzo and Pepe’s experiences in the mansion, regardless of why they are there in the first place. Gonzo and Pepe’s experiences mirror riders’ own and, like the Evers family in *The Haunted Mansion*, they fill the narrative space left by the visitor when the visitor-focused attraction narrative is translated into cinematic space.

Like *The Haunted Mansion*, *Muppets Haunted Mansion* roughly mirrors the park visitor’s journey on the ride. Gonzo and Pepe first approach the exterior of the Mansion, which in this instance most closely resembles Disneyland Paris’s Phantom Manor, whose appearance and mansard roof “strongly resembles the Bates mansion from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960).”<sup>640</sup> As with the 2003 *Haunted Mansion* film, Gonzo and Pepe’s encounters with different characters and elements from the Haunted Mansion do not strictly follow the exact order visitors see them on the ride, as demonstrated by their encounters with the Mansion’s caretaker and his dog, characters like the opera singer ghost, and the singing busts before they actually enter the

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<sup>639</sup> See films like *House on Haunted Hill* (1959).

<sup>640</sup> Florian Freitag notes how invoking the appearance of the Bates house serves as “cinematic shorthand” or a quick way to “convey a specific atmosphere and to communicate the ride’s theme to its visitors.” See Florian Freitag, “Movies, Rides, Immersion,” in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press, 2016), 126.

mansion itself.<sup>641</sup> Nevertheless, overall, *Muppets Haunted Mansion* is relatively faithful to the structure of the visitors' visit to the physical Haunted Mansion, even more so than the earlier *Haunted Mansion* film.

The special's fidelity to the ride is particularly apparent as Gonzo and Pepe first enter the Mansion. The Ghost Host first invites Gonzo and Pepe into the foyer, saying "welcome foolish Muppets," a play on the famous "welcome foolish mortals" line from the ride. The ride's pipe organ music can be heard playing in the background, just as it does in the attraction's foyer. The Ghost Host even speaks to Gonzo and Pepe as though they are tourists, telling them "no flash pictures, please." They follow the Ghost Host into the stretching room, which appears nearly identical to that in the Haunted Mansion, though the gargoyle sconces and figures in the portraits have been replaced by Muppets. The Ghost Host repeats iconic lines from the ride, asking Gonzo and Pepe, "Is this haunted room actually stretching or is it your imagination?" Gonzo observes "I just realized this room has no windows and no doors," to which the Ghost Host responds, "which offers this chilling challenge...to find a way out."<sup>642</sup> The lights turn off, just as they do in the attraction, and the maniacal laugh and scream in the pitch-black recreate a similar moment from the ride. One of the stretching room walls opens to reveal a hallway, like that in the attraction, lined with changing paintings (again swapped with Muppet subjects). As they move through the interior spaces of the mansion, Gonzo and Pepe continue to encounter visual elements from the ride, like a suit of armor, the portrait corridor, and the staring busts that

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<sup>641</sup> "Rest In Peace," the song sung by the caretaker, played by Darren Criss, does refer to the headstones that surround the mansion, something that parallels visitors' encounters with grave markers in the Haunted Mansion's queue.

<sup>642</sup> These lines are so well-known that they are frequently recited by visitors during these moments in the ride.



appear, in the attraction, to turn their heads to follow visitors as they pass by (the busts are replaced in the special with Muppets Bunsen and Beaker, who are shown to actually move).

While some scenes appear out of order, Gonzo and Pepe's progression through the space generally reflects how riders progress through the Haunted Mansion. The pair continue to move through the eerie hallways with their staring wallpaper (styled as a damask print with sinister faces and eyes), into "Madame Pigota's" seance room, before entering into the grand hall, where the Mansion's spirits have assembled for a Halloween party.<sup>643</sup> The grand hall includes notable figures and visual elements from the park attraction, including ghostly dancing couples, the Organist (played here by Rowlf the Dog), the Dualists (a pair of dueling ghosts that emerge from portraits), and the central dining table even recreates the "Hidden Mickey" place setting from the ride.

From the grand hall, we move with Pepe into the attic, where he is courted by Constance, "The Bride," who aims to make him her next victim of mariticide. The mise-en-scene of the attic in *Muppets Haunted Mansion* more closely matches that of the actual ride than that of the 2003 film. Though the 2003 *Haunted Mansion* also featured a bride character prominently in the plot, she was not the archetypal "black widow" depicted in the ride and the Muppets special.<sup>644</sup> To escape the murderous bride, Gonzo and Pepe leap from the attic window and into the graveyard below, landing at the feet of the caretaker and his dog. This reflects how riders physically descend from the attic scene down into the graveyard below, where they encounter the same caretaker figure. Although the spirits Gonzo and Pepe encounter as they flee through the

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<sup>643</sup> Madame Pigota, played by Miss Piggy, is a stand-in for the Haunted Mansion's Madame Leota.

<sup>644</sup> "Black widow," named after the spider, refers to a stereotypical category of a woman serial killer who murders her husbands.

graveyard are not singing as they are in the ride (that sequence occurred earlier in the special), the end of the film sees them moving from attic to graveyard and ultimately escaping, as in the park attraction. As they leave the grounds, Constance waves from the window, calling “hurry back,” reflecting the final lines spoken to riders as they exit the Haunted Mansion in the park.

### ***Genre and Recreating the Embodied Narrative Experience***

Inspired by physical spaces, ride-films must contend with translating the haptic, fully sensorial experience of a park ride onto the screen. For rides like *The Haunted Mansion*, which engages with particularly embodied genres like horror, the ways in which the physically immersive experience of the ride is expressed on the screen reveals a complicated relationship between the ride, itself a product of horror tropes, and the film inspired by it. As Angela Ndaliansis has argued, while common themes and elements are “present across a variety of horror media,” horror dark rides like *The Haunted Mansion* are not simply a case of adaptation, or of “the simple transfer of codes and conventions from one medium to the next.”<sup>645</sup> Rather, she argues, “on closer analysis it becomes evident that each medium adapts common generic conventions to create experiences required of their own media form.”<sup>646</sup> Looking at both ride and film, we can see how generic conventions—particularly those involving bodily affect—work in both contexts to create an embodied narrative experience.

In the case of *The Haunted Mansion*, both the film and the attraction engage with the horror genre and in doing so elicit particular bodily affects. As riders move through the spaces of the Haunted Mansion ride, they experience somatic sensations deriving from conventions in the

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<sup>645</sup> Ndaliansis, *The Horror Sensorium*, 59.

<sup>646</sup> Ndaliansis, *The Horror Sensorium*, 59.

horror genre (both horror amusement rides and horror films) combined with comedic elements.

As Ndalianis observes:

From the moment the visitor enters the Haunted Mansion, they're confronted with many remediated media illusions whose aim is to engage the participant in as many sensory experiences as possible. But the participant no longer relies on the haptic and synaesthetic possibilities inherent to sight and sound as they do in the cinematic experience; they're now also immersed through an experience that requires body movement: they walk into and physically navigate the spaces of the Haunted Mansion and the gallery and then sit on Omnimovers that plummet their bodies through the mansion's architectural spaces.<sup>647</sup>

Ndalianis argues that where horror films rely on sight and sound to convey sensations of fear and terror, dark rides, as experiences where the audience is fully, physically present in the scene, utilize different methods to elicit sensations of horror. Indeed, while the attraction itself expresses generic tendencies that borrow from both cinematic horror and horror dark rides like those of early amusement parks, such as dark, moody color palettes, lighting that is used to both conceal and reveal certain elements, and eerie atmospheric effects, it also uses the physicality of the ride to create effects that are created via other means in horror films.

For example, the Omnimover "Doom Buggies" are used at various points in the ride to conceal and reveal certain spaces or tableaux, their movement throughout the space creating a sense of mystery and perhaps apprehension about what lies ahead. Riders are pivoted around at key moments; at one point, as they leave the attic, the Doom Buggies quickly swivel so that the riders suddenly face backwards at the same time that the ground slopes downwards, giving the sense that they are plummeting backward out of the mansion and into the unknown below. The free movement of the Omnimovers, regardless of the will of the rider, creates a sense of the loss of control or powerlessness in the face of frightening sights, sounds, and environments. Rightly named, once aboard their Doom Buggies with the safety bar lowered, riders are "doomed" to be

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<sup>647</sup> Ndalianis, *The Horror Sensorium*, 65.

carried through the Mansion's scenes, regardless of their internal fear. This mimics the use of offscreen space, camera movement, and editing in horror films to control the viewers' eyes—to conceal and reveal elements to create feelings of apprehension, surprise, and terror.

The Haunted Mansion attraction also incorporates other elements drawn from horror films, including the jump-scare, a much-used formal trope in horror. Jump scares serve, as Julian Hanich argues, as “cinematic shocks [that] work through abrupt and rapid visual change as well as a sudden and stabbing increase of loudness.”<sup>648</sup> Jump scares can come in a number of forms, from “the unexpected (anticipated yet frustrated) shock within a scene that was rather static,” to “the typical looking once into a wardrobe to find nothing and looking a second time, confident that there is nothing hiding in it, only to encounter the threat one initially expected,” to occurring “by deceiving the viewer and appearing from a different side or angle to the one seemingly prefigured.”<sup>649</sup> As Xavier Aldana Reyes observes, “a lot of these effects play with psychology: viewers' capacity to orient themselves spatially, to view and perceive threats and their origins, and even to apply cause and effect hypotheses (that may or may not be frustrated).”<sup>650</sup> Cinematic horror techniques like jump scares are also used in The Haunted Mansion attraction, though by different means.

In the Haunted Mansion, jump scares most obviously come in the form of “pop-up ghosts” that appear in the ride's climatic graveyard scene.<sup>651</sup> These ghosts are “strategically

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<sup>648</sup> Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 179.

<sup>649</sup> Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 154.

<sup>650</sup> Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect*, 154.

<sup>651</sup> Surrell, *The Haunted Mansion*, 114.

placed” animatronic figures, originally designed by Rolly Crump and Yale Gracey, that pop up suddenly, typically from their concealment behind gravestones, startling riders.<sup>652</sup> In the graveyard, these pop-up ghosts spring suddenly into view from behind what appear to be “normal” tombstones. In contrast to the numerous slow-moving ghost animatronics that populate the scene and likely draw the visitor’s attention, these pop-up ghosts emerge from the ride equivalent of offscreen space. The Mansion’s attic scene, too, used to contain pop-up ghosts, including small ghostly heads that would blast suddenly out of hatboxes. These were accompanied by an abrupt shriek, or, later, an “I do,” whose sudden loudness contrasted with the otherwise plodding dirge-rendition of Wagner’s “Bridal Chorus.” One such pop-up was located just as riders enter the attic from the darkened hallway between the attic and the grand hall.<sup>653</sup> The first such pop-ups in the ride, the hatbox pop-up ghosts acted as physical jump scares. Their concealment from and sudden appearance before the riders, via the Doom Buggies, which “spin, turn, and tilt to point the guests in any direction, narrowly focusing their attention just as film directors do with their cameras,” acts like a cinematic jump scare. This exemplifies how, as Ndalians argues, the ride medium adapted a generic element from film to fit its own form.<sup>654</sup>

As a film based on a ride that itself draws on horror tropes, *The Haunted Mansion* film readapts the narrative experience back into a cinematic context by reincorporating elements like jump scares akin to those on the ride. In *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media*, Adam Charles Hart explores how a film can use jump scares to “declare its sensational priorities,” observing how jump scares demonstrate how a film “privileges the provocation of

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<sup>652</sup> Surrell, *The Haunted Mansion*, 114.

<sup>653</sup> The attic’s pop-up ghosts were removed in 2006, but the example discussed here can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E60nt-\\_f6Sw&t=637s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E60nt-_f6Sw&t=637s)

<sup>654</sup> Surrell, *The Haunted Mansion*, 30; Ndalians, *The Horror Sensorium*, 59.

visceral, spectatorial responses over diegetic coherence—or, perhaps, diegetic depth.”<sup>655</sup> Absent the physical immersion of the somatic ride experience, films like *The Haunted Mansion* and *Muppets Haunted Mansion* access such visceral responses by turning back to cinematic methods of eliciting embodied reactions like jump scares. For example, in *The Haunted Mansion*, when Jim Evers looks into a mirror in a darkened room, he (and perhaps the viewer) is first startled by the abrupt caw of a raven, who had been concealed by camera angles until that moment.<sup>656</sup> Moments later, another jump-scare occurs when Jim’s reflection suddenly appears decayed, and a musical sting signals a moment of surprise and terror. *Muppets Haunted Mansion*, too, incorporates jump scares alongside its comedic elements as a means of adapting the mixture of horror and humor that is the Haunted Mansion’s signature. This can be seen when Pepe, looking for the “Famous People’s Room,” speaks to John Stamos (playing himself). Stamos asks Pepe to lean in so he can tell him a secret, when his head suddenly transforms into a purple dragon’s head. His roar and the accompanying musical sting startle both Pepe and, assumedly, the audience. Another jump scare occurs when the Ghost Host, after seeming to have left Gonzo, suddenly and unexpectedly reappears with a lightning flash and musical sting.

Ultimately, as films like *The Haunted Mansion* and *Muppets Haunted Mansion* attempt to adapt the physical park experience, which itself draws on cinematic tropes and effects, back onto the screen, they turn back to cinematic methods of eliciting embodied responses, here using horror tropes like jump scares. Similarly, *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion*, and *Muppets Haunted Mansion* all demonstrate an attempt to adapt the experience of the park ride, where the

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<sup>655</sup> Adam Charles Hart, *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 40.

<sup>656</sup> The raven is an allusion to similar animatronic birds that appear throughout the ride.

story is centered around the visitor's presence in the physical narrative space, to film by incorporating the narrative structures of the source ride even when they cannot directly incorporate the viewer. However, as I will explore in the following section, even as they use new characters to stand in place of the viewer, these and other park films still make room for the viewer's presence in part by using techniques of cinematic direct address.

### **“Hurry Back”: Spatial Presence and Cinematic Direct Address in Park-Films**

Ah, there you are! And just in time... there's a little matter I forgot to mention — beware of hitchhiking ghosts! They have selected you to fill our quota, and they'll haunt you until you return! Now, I will raise the safety bar, and a ghost will follow you home!  
—Ghost Host, The Haunted Mansion, Disneyland

While the park visitor is often positioned as the protagonist in ride and land narratives, the film viewer occupies a more distanced position in relation to the events of a park-film. As these films adapt the physical, multi-sensory experience of park space, they must confront the removal or distancing of the viewer from the narrative. Just as park strategies for addressing/incorporating the visitor have varied widely, park-films employ multiple strategies for dealing with this cinematic distancing of the viewer. As the previous section explored, some park-films attempt to adapt park spaces by reflecting their structure and recreating the visitor's embodied experience of them, at times through generic techniques. Another way in which these park-films approach this transference from park space to cinema screen, and the subsequent shift in audience position, is through direct address. By directly addressing the audience, these films acknowledge the viewer's sometimes-position as park visitor and suggest a means of traversing the differences between the park experience and the cinematic one.

For those who have already visited the parks, direct address in these films puts the viewer in a sort of “middle ground,” as they oscillate between the more distanced position of a cinematic

audience member and the position of narrative participant in the rides. These films can thus address the viewer as park-goer, their direct address recalling the experience of visiting the parks and potentially capitalizing on memories of and nostalgia for actual park visits. I take a somewhat broad interpretation of direct address in this examination, considering both instances of “breaking the fourth wall,” as when characters speak or look directly at the camera (and thus the audience), instances in these films where nonnarrative title cards similarly address the audience, and even select sequences where point-of-view shots suggest the perspective of the audience/park visitor rather than that of any character within the film’s narrative. To illustrate this, I consider how direct address locates the viewer in Disney’s earliest park-film, *Tower of Terror* (1997), as well as later films like *The Haunted Mansion* (2003) and *Jungle Cruise* (2021).

As discussed in Chapter One, the original Twilight Zone Tower of Terror attraction negotiated visitors’ place within both the discrete story of the ride and the larger world of the *Twilight Zone* television series.<sup>657</sup> The ride used visual, spatial, and narrative elements like mise-en-scene, direct address, and self-reflexivity to place visitors in a narratively layered space, simultaneously situating them within both the ride’s narrative and within the television series’ imagined story world. Coming from a ride that positions its riders as its story’s protagonists, the *Tower of Terror* film subsequently must navigate these complex narrative strata. Like the ride, the film negotiates different layers of presence, making a space in the story for the viewer as both a cinematic audience member and a park visitor.

*Tower of Terror* takes the source attraction’s backstory as the inspiration for its plot. The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror ride briefly orients viewers to the history of the Hollywood

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<sup>657</sup> The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror first opened at Disney MGM Studios in Florida in 1994. In 2004, a sister version was opened at Disney California Adventure, Anaheim.



Tower Hotel, the setting for their on-ride adventure: “One stormy night long ago, five people stepped through the door of an elevator and into a nightmare. That door is opening once again, but this time it’s opening for you.”<sup>658</sup> The five anonymous characters from the ride are, in the film, ghosts who haunt the now-abandoned Hollywood Tower Hotel in the present day. By developing the backstories of these characters, the film provides additional context to the events of the ride, allowing viewers access to more of the story than is provided while in the park.

The filmmakers take pains to establish the lineage between the ride and the film. This is particularly apparent in the establishing shots that recall the actual ride building, including the exterior and the interior lobby, as well as a title card at the film’s conclusion that reads “Based on Disney-MGM Studios ‘Tower of Terror’ attraction at Walt Disney World resort.” Despite this connection, however, the film contains no overt references to the original *Twilight Zone* TV series (including the name “Twilight Zone”), other than the familiar elements filtered through the intermediary of the park attraction. It becomes clear, then, that the film is an adaptation of the ride, not the series. The film is thus divorced from the ride’s original referent, it instead treats the ride itself as the primary source for its story world. By focusing on the ride narrative rather than the *Twilight Zone* story world, and because the visitor is central to that narrative, the film therefore must address the relationship between the rider/viewer and the physical ride itself.

In some ways, *Tower of Terror*’s plot, which follows two present-day protagonists solving the mysterious disappearance of five people on a stormy night long ago, frees the filmmakers from dealing directly with the ride’s positioning of rider-as-protagonist by allowing for a more traditional third-person cinematic experience. Because the film cannot put its primary

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<sup>658</sup> The direct address of the ride, and by extension the film, recall Rod Serling’s fourth wall-breaking direct address of television viewers in the original series.

emphasis on the kinetic sensations of the ride, it uses the character surrogates to address this element while simultaneously capitalizing on its ability, as a feature length film, to flesh out the story at greater length than is possible in the park attraction. Yet, certain visual elements of the film leave space for the rider/protagonist inside the film's otherwise-conventional third-person narrative structure. The film's opening sequence, as it introduces viewers to the story, simultaneously addresses them as potential former riders. This is accomplished in part through point-of-view shots, but also in the way the opening sequence mirrors the in-queue video in the ride itself. Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, the entirety of the film's structure itself recalls the sequence of events in the ride.

The film's opening sequence calls back to the ride's in-queue video while also using POV shots to incorporate the viewer as a participant in the narrative world. This sequence depicts the incident of the disappearance of five people on the elevator of the Hollywood Tower Hotel on their way to a glamorous party at the Tip Top Club in 1939. The ultimate cause of the disappearance of the elevator occupants is positioned as the mystery to be solved over the course of the film. Though the film does not contain the traditional *Twilight Zone* Rod Serling narrational preamble like the ride does, it begins with a narrational title card that reads: "It started on Halloween...1939." The camera then pans over a table filled with objects that appear to have a connection with magic or witchcraft, finally resting on a paper invitation. Topped with the Hollywood Tower Hotel logo—familiar as the same logo used in the context of the ride—the invitation reads "You are cordially invited to a party at The Tip Top Club on the top floor of The Hollywood Tower Hotel on October Thirty-First, 1939 Seven-Thirty Sharp." This invitation later makes sense in the context of the story, which revolves around this fateful event. However, its presence at the film's opening, situated as it is following the extra-diegetic title card, also acts as

a kind of bridge to “our” presence in the story. On the ride, visitors are addressed directly: “We invite you, if you dare, to step aboard because in tonight's episode you are the star. And this elevator travels directly to . . . The Twilight Zone.” Similarly, in the film, “we” are invited to the party at the Tip Top Club.

This sense that viewers are being “invited” into the story world is supported by subsequent shots. The image of the burning invitation cuts to an establishing shot of the Hollywood Tower Hotel, which is a composite image comprised of a version of the real-life Twilight Zone Tower of Terror show building and its fictional setting within the Hollywood Hills (as evidenced by the period appropriate “Hollywoodland” sign in the background). This shot connects the fictional space of the film with the real space of the ride, at least for those familiar with the parks. The film’s title “Tower of Terror” swoops in over the image of the ride building, unifying the larger narrative that spans film and ride. Following the title are shots of familiar elements from the ride itself: the exterior wrought-iron gates supported by pillars topped with glowing lanterns, the plaque noting the 1917 establishment of the Hollywood Tower Hotel, and the elevator floor indicator dial.<sup>659</sup> This sequence, with its zooms and tilts, suggests our first-person POV as we explore the space. The next shot reinforces this feeling, as we cut to a uniformed elevator operator who directly beckons the camera—us—to enter the elevator doors. It is important to note that there is no diegetic character whose POV this is suggested to be at this point in the film. These doors open on a ballroom scene—the party alluded to by the invitation. This next sequence adheres to a more conventional cinematic mode as we are introduced to

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<sup>659</sup> Though these are all quite similar to the actual ride, they are different in their fine details, suggesting that these shots were not actually filmed on the ride itself.

several of the film's central characters, though some of these shots also directly recall images and scenes encountered on the ride and in its queue.

These scenes are intercut with shots of the Tower's exterior, including of it being struck by lightning, which specifically recall images from the ride's in-queue film. As previously mentioned, the ride's in-queue video and the on-ride imagery relate a basic sequence of events: five people enter an elevator on a stormy night in 1939, the hotel is hit by lightning, and the elevator plunges to certain doom. Presented by "Rod Serling" in the style of the introduction to a *Twilight Zone* episode, the in-queue video invites riders to enter the same elevator where they are, we assume, destined to similarly "enter the Twilight Zone."<sup>60</sup> The exterior shots of the Hollywood Tower Hotel from the film's opening scenes parallel similar shots seen in the in-queue video, and both depict the Tower being struck by lightning. Shots of the five elevator occupants in these opening sequences similarly recall center-framed shots of the five ill-fated characters arranged in the period elevator car in the ride's in-queue film as well as the special effects projections seen during the latter drop portions of the ride. In this way, the film's opening sequence, with its direct address and references to the basic imagery and structure of the ride's in-queue video, addresses the cinema viewer similarly to how visitors are addressed on the ride.

*The Haunted Mansion* uses similar cinematic techniques to maintain the presence of the viewer in the film. The film opens with direct address, as a title card, accompanied by the Ghost Host in voice-over, welcomes the audience: "Welcome, foolish mortals." This phrase repeats, verbatim, lines from the ride, as the "Ghost Host" welcomes visitors from the foyer and into the portrait chamber or "stretching room." On the ride, this character, whom we encounter primarily through his voice, introduces riders to the history of the Haunted Mansion (a resting place for

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<sup>60</sup> While the film recalls the in-queue video, overt references to *The Twilight Zone* have been stripped out.

999 happy haunts) and situates them in the ride's narrative, conveying that they are there to tour the mansion. Following a brief credits sequence, the film's title fades to a POV shot, where we, the viewers "enter" the doors to the Mansion. These doors appear layered over a shot of the mansion's interior, where an elegant ball is underway. We are invited, as riders on the attraction are, to enter the narrative space. The shot of the doors bridges the opening direct address—with its references to us and our world, the real world of the Haunted Mansion attraction—with the story world of the film's characters. Interspersed with these moments of direct address, the opening credits also combine familiar Haunted Mansion iconography like a floating candelabra and tarot cards with new imagery that establishes the distinct backstory for some of the film's characters.

*The Haunted Mansion's* opening sequence thus roughly recreates the first events of a visit to the Haunted Mansion attraction. Establishing shots reflect the experience of walking up to the attraction and taking in the view of the building's exterior, which appears to be an amalgamation of architectural influences from both the Disneyland and Magic Kingdom (Walt Disney World) versions of the ride. Its neoclassical columned portico, with its triangular pediment, recalls the Greek-revival style of Disneyland's Haunted Mansion, while the prominent cupola atop the building and the glass conservatory on the side are features that reflect conspicuous features of the Magic Kingdom's version of the Mansion.<sup>661</sup> The POV shot of the opening doors suggests riders' first entrance into the Haunted Mansion foyer, and while the opulent room on-screen looks quite different from either of the more modest foyers of the Disneyland or Walt Disney World versions of the Haunted Mansion, it includes a grand staircase

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<sup>661</sup> Interestingly, the film version and not the park version is recreated in the 2003 video game *The Haunted Mansion*.

which, while not identical, resembles the grand staircase in the loading zone of Phantom Manor, Disneyland Paris's version of the Haunted Mansion. The opening credits close with an image of Edward Gracey's suicide by hanging, corresponding to the similarly shocking reveal of skeletal remains hanging from the rafters that punctuates the stretching room scene in the attraction.<sup>662</sup> Like *Tower of Terror*, *The Haunted Mansion*'s initial direct address of the audience quickly yields to more typical cinematic conventions that characterize most of the movie.

As with *Tower of Terror* and other park-films, for the majority of the film the viewer becomes a vicarious participant in the story, with on-screen characters acting as surrogates for the in-park experience.<sup>663</sup> For those familiar with the ride, the film offers the pleasure of watching protagonists inhabit recognizable spaces, like the grand hall dinner scene, with its cobweb enshrouded dining table, or the portrait corridor, which is very similar to the park's portrait corridor, if not a bit more ornate in its detailing. In this scene, we see realtor Jim Evers, played by Eddie Murphy, proceed tentatively through the space, as visitors do when approaching the loading area for the Doom Buggies. Like in the ride, the portraits change, and the busts follow Murphy, though the hallway's practical illusions (achieved through scrim, lighting effects, and optical illusions) are swapped for CGI effects in the film.<sup>664</sup> Other iconic scenes and elements from the ride, like the hearse that sits in front of the Mansion, the singing busts, or the hitchhiking ghosts, are remixed throughout the film's narrative as a means of adapting the ride experience, though again with on-screen characters experiencing these elements first-hand, in

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<sup>662</sup> The hanging figure is implied to be the remains of the "Ghost Host" who narrates the visit to the Haunted Mansion.

<sup>663</sup> It may be significant that the film's protagonists are a nuclear family, not unlike the primary target Disneyland visitor family unit.

<sup>664</sup> The bulging door is another example of this.

place of riders-as-protagonists. Thus, after the opening direct address, the film shifts to these proxy characters to resolve the fundamental issue that viewers cannot be “in” a movie quite the same way riders are “in” a ride.

Like its opening sequence, however, *The Haunted Mansion* closes with a direct address of the audience that echoes the ride’s direct address of its visitors. After the credits, Madame Leota’s disembodied head, floating in her crystal ball, again breaks the fourth wall as she gazes directly at the audience, imploring them to “Hurry back, hurry back. Be sure to bring your death certificate...if you decide to join us. Make final arrangements now. We’ve been dying to have you.” These are the exact words spoken by “Little Leota,” a small figure who appears just before visitors exit the Haunted Mansion attraction. Both the opening and closing sequences of direct address thus break the fourth wall with direct callbacks to the ride’s narration. But more than winking references to fans familiar with the parks, they also function to bridge the viewer’s position within the story by aligning the world of the film—and the audience’s entry and exit from that world—with the real-world experience of the ride. Like *Tower of Terror*, then, *The Haunted Mansion* serves in part as an advertisement, as a call to visit the parks. Just as the opening titles announce that the film is “Based on Walt Disney’s Haunted Mansion,” the end credits speak directly to viewers, telling them: “You’ve seen the movie, now ride the ride.”

Although *Jungle Cruise* (2021) does not go as far as either *Tower of Terror* or *The Haunted Mansion* in directly figuring the viewer’s presence in the film, a particular moment during the film’s cold open acknowledges the viewer-as-rider. In the film’s first fifteen minutes, viewers are introduced to Frank, a gregarious skipper who we first encounter as he guides a river cruise like that of the eponymous ride at Disneyland. During this sequence, narrow, winding waterways reveal both hidden threats and natural delights, some of which, we discover, are

rigged up by Frank himself.<sup>665</sup> As do the skippers on the ride, Frank narrowly averts disaster (here managing to avoid colliding with protruding branches that threaten to impale passengers). Visual vignettes allude to the ride as well, as the boat passes by a boa entwined in a tree, snapping piranha, and even a “deadly hippopotamus.”<sup>666</sup> Perhaps the most iconic of these references comes when Frank takes the passengers past the “backside of water,” referring to a perennial gag in the ride where skippers steer their boat behind a waterfall. The Disneyland Jungle Cruise ride is, it should be noted, known for its comedic skippers as much as its animatronic animals and humorous tableaux.

Accordingly, during his first scenes Frank cracks wise about the cruise and its sights, remarking, for example, how “of all the Jungle Cruises you could take in the Amazon, this one is undoubtedly...the cheapest.” Pointing out a pair of toucans beak wrestling, Frank observes that “The only drawback is...only two can play.” That the camera cuts to the silent, unamused expressions of the passengers (one of whom mouths “wow”) is a play on the running gag that jokes on Jungle Cruise are “groaners,” mostly puns of the “dad-joke” variety. The groans become literal as Frank continues his litany of corny jokes, the passengers visibly cringing as one girl asks “Mommy, can you please make him stop?” Frank continues the corny quips, hammering home the allusions to the attraction: “The rocks you see here in the river are sandstone, but some people just take them for ‘granite’...it’s one of my ‘bolder’ attractions.” After this line, as he scans the passengers’ reactions, Frank fleetingly looks at the camera,

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<sup>665</sup> An aerial shot of the Amazon is reminiscent of the shoreline contours of part of the ride, mapping the waterways of the attraction

<sup>666</sup> The hippo is revealed to be a fake, rigged up by Frank. He triggers the mechanism by shooting his pistol, severing a rope that causes the faux hippo to emerge from the water. This is a reference to a former practice on the Jungle Cruise at Disneyland, where skippers used to shoot blanks at the animatronic hippos. For information on how the hippos have changed over the years, see Kimi Yoshino, “Disneyland Is Now Safe for Hippos,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 2001, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-sep-03-me-41660-story.html>.



breaking the fourth wall in acknowledgment of the assumed knowing audience member's familiarity with the ride. This moment of direct address, though exceedingly brief, signals that the presence of the viewer-as-visitor is still at play in these park-based films even decades later. Yet in addition to acknowledging the viewer through direct address, these films also address the viewer as park visitor through their attention to the materiality of their corresponding attractions and viewer nostalgia for these spaces, as will be discussed next.

### **“Does This Building Look Familiar?”: Spatial Nostalgia and Materiality in Park-Films**

The idea of Disneyland is a simple one. It will be a place for people to find happiness and knowledge. It will be a place for parents and children to share pleasant times in one another's company; a place for teacher and pupils to discover greater ways of understanding and education. Here the older generation can recapture the nostalgia of days gone by, and the younger generation can savor the challenge of the future.  
—Walt Disney, Disneyland Prospectus<sup>667</sup>

Disneyland has always been associated with nostalgia.<sup>668</sup> Film historian and critic Richard Schickel famously wrote that if Walt Disney “had any politics at all, they were the politics of nostalgia.”<sup>669</sup> The park itself was predicated on a kind of nostalgia for older forms of public entertainment, though this nostalgia was positioned from the perspective of a white male in the mid-1950s. Richard Francaviglia notes that in building the park, “Disney also built upon the traditions of nineteenth and early twentieth century fairs and expositions.”<sup>670</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>667</sup> Andrew O'Hagan, “The Happiness Project,” *New York Times*, July 17, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/t-magazine/happiness-project-disneyland.html>.

<sup>668</sup> Nostalgia is an aspect of the Disney Parks that has been explored by multiple scholars including Koehler, *The Mouse and the Myth*. See also multiple chapters in Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West, eds., *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011).

<sup>669</sup> Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney*, 3rd ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019), 168.

<sup>670</sup> Francaviglia, “Frontierland as an Allegorical Map,” 80.

spaces within the Disney Parks, from the attractions to the lands, are bound up with different kinds of nostalgia. As Susan Ingram observes, “Nostalgia has long been recognized as an integral component of the Disney practice of theming.”<sup>671</sup> As noted by Ingram, Susan Willis has described Walt Disney World as “an immense nostalgia machine whose staging and specific attractions are generationally coded to strike a chord with the various age categories of its guests.”<sup>672</sup>

There is the nostalgia in the spaces themselves for times gone by, as expressed in lands like Main Street, U.S.A., Frontierland, and Adventureland. These lands’ imagined cityscapes and landscapes reflect largely conservative nostalgic visions of history that reflect the racist and sexist ideologies of their creators and of the time. As Eric Avila observes, this can be seen in Adventureland’s depiction of “cannibalistic natives” on the Jungle Cruise, Main Street U.S.A.’s “nostalgic recreation of a lily-White small town,” the “racialized caricature” of Frontierland’s early “Indian Village,” and the “Aunt Jemima’s Pancake House,” which featured a mammy figure portrayed by Black women employees and “embodying Black female servitude.” These women were, along with the Native Americans of the so-called Indian Village, some of the few non-white employees in the park’s early years, and their positions in the park suggested nostalgia for racist societal hierarchies.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Susan Ingram, “Nostalgia as Litmus Test for Themed Spaces,” in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press, 2016), 39.

<sup>672</sup> Susan Willis, “Disney’s Bestiary,” in *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions*, ed. Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 53–74, quoted in Ingram, “Nostalgia as Litmus Test,” 39.

<sup>673</sup> Eric Avila, “It Won’t Be Easy for Disneyland to Transcend the Rigid Hierarchies of its Founding,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/09/24/it-wont-be-easy-disneyland-transcend-rigid-hierarchies-its-founding/>.

Other scholars have noted the ideological implications of Disneyland's nostalgia as well. Francaviglia examines the "romanticized assemblage" of Main Street U.S.A.'s architecture and the way in which its setting expresses a "nostalgic longing" for "the halcyon days of the small town."<sup>674</sup> Michael Steiner argues that Frontierland is a place where "Disney merged his childhood memories with a long tradition of frontier nostalgia to build comforting versions of the western frontier that mirror many of the hopes and anxieties of the last half of the twentieth century."<sup>675</sup> Craig Svonkin asserts that "Disneyland is designed so as to create a strange blend of futurism and nostalgia or wishful primitivism. Disneyland's Fantasyland focuses its thematics on nostalgia for a lost youth, but it is also indicative of Walt Disney's intellectual colonization of European fairy tales."<sup>676</sup> From its conception through its design, Disneyland and its lands are suffused with various layers of nostalgia, along with their ideological ramifications.

While park lands themselves carry these currents of nostalgia, so do the attractions within them. For some attractions, nostalgia is expressed within their aesthetic and ideological themes. Svonkin describes how the Enchanted Tiki Room problematically expresses "a faith in technology and a firm belief that the United States was at the forefront of technological progress sure to bring about a better world, and a sense of nostalgia, wonder, and loss for those 'exotic' cultures thought to be not easily assimilated by the increasingly dominant American culture."<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Richard V. Francaviglia, "Main Street U.S.A.: A Comparison/Contrast of Streetscapes in Disneyland and Walt Disney World," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 143.

<sup>675</sup> Michael Steiner, "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 6.

<sup>676</sup> Craig Svonkin, "A Southern California Boyhood in the Simu-Southland Shadows of Walt Disney's Enchanted Tiki Room," in *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*, eds. Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 112.

<sup>677</sup> Svonkin, "A Southern California Boyhood," 119.

For many attractions, nostalgia has accreted to them through the years, as they have become signifiers of happy family memories as well as artifacts of bygone eras of the park's history. This can affect how rides are seen and experienced at different moments; Douglas Brode points out in his discussion of The Haunted Mansion's scariness that "everything exists in context; what frightened our collective consciousness in, say, 1959 attains with the passing of years its own aura of nostalgia."<sup>678</sup> Attractions once thought of as thrilling or frightening, like The Haunted Mansion, can become more nostalgic through the years as they become cemented as part of the park's "DNA." Moreover, they become the sites for cherished family memories, as the park is marketed and often functions as a destination designed to create those memories.

Emerging as they do out of these nostalgically charged spaces, Disney's park-based films carry similar associations, and can be seen to exhibit a particular kind of nostalgia through their relationship to the park's historically, ideologically, aesthetically, and personally charged physical spaces. There is a sense of nostalgia in these films for the rides as part of the Disney Parks' historical legacy; the attractions depicted in these films are, in most cases, several decades removed from the films that are based on them. Moreover, many of the attractions that inspire these films are particularly beloved mainstays of the Disney Parks, so much so that several of them have been recreated in multiple parks worldwide.<sup>679</sup> As such, these spaces carry with them a sense of nostalgia for the heritage and history of the Disney Parks themselves, which can then be seen in the films.

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<sup>678</sup> Brode, "Of Theme Parks," 190.

<sup>679</sup> There were, at one time, three Twilight Zone Towers of Terror, three Country Bear Jamborees, five versions of Pirates of the Caribbean, five versions of The Haunted Mansion, and four Jungle Cruises.

In his examination of what he calls the “nostalgia film genre,” Jason Sperb defines “four broad types of mediated nostalgia,” including affective, peripheral, representational, and narrative nostalgia.<sup>680</sup> The ride-based films discussed in this chapter can be understood according to several of these categories. Sperb identifies the first of these categories as “affective nostalgia,” which “triggers in the present a yearning for yesterday by virtue of its relationship to some distant audience memory.”<sup>681</sup> As Sperb notes, the nostalgia of such films is not planned in advance, but rather “acquired over time.”<sup>682</sup> While the films themselves may not belong to this category, particularly as several of them were financial, critical, and popular failures, the attractions on which they are based most definitely do.<sup>683</sup> Many of these attractions, the earliest of which (Jungle Cruise) dates back to the park’s opening in 1955, have come to be intimately associated with the parks themselves, particularly Disneyland and its sister parks. The second category Sperb outlines, “peripheral nostalgia,” describes films where some nostalgic appeal is brought by their star or franchise associations (he cites a Julia Roberts picture or James Bond movie as examples).<sup>684</sup> This element of nostalgia is certainly at play in Disney’s park-based films if one considers the franchise appeal of the parks themselves.<sup>685</sup> Within the parks, certain

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<sup>680</sup> Jason Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze: Toward a Definition of the ‘Nostalgia Film’ Genre,” in *Was It Yesterday?: Nostalgia in Contemporary Film and Television*, ed. Matthew Leggatt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2021), 15-19.

<sup>681</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 19.

<sup>682</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 19.

<sup>683</sup> *Mission to Mars and The Haunted Mansion* both hold a Rotten Tomatoes audience score of 30%, while *The Country Bears* stands at 33%.

<sup>684</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 19-20.

<sup>685</sup> For a discussion of the Disney’s Parks as a franchise, see Heather Lea Birdsall, “The Happiest Plays on Earth: Theme Park Franchising in Disneyland Video Games,” in *The Franchise Era: Managing Media in the Digital Economy*, eds. James Fleury, Bryan Hikari Hartzheim, and Stephen Mamber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 77-104.

attractions like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Haunted Mansion* have also been treated as franchises in their own rights, spawning lines of merchandise, books, and video games beyond their cinematic adaptations, which have, in turn, fed fandoms specific to those rides.<sup>686</sup>

“Representational nostalgia,” Sperb’s third category, describes “the ways in which...a text might seek to emulate a nostalgic time and place.”<sup>687</sup> Such films include nostalgic “period” films as well as those that “[visually evoke] an earlier film aesthetic.”<sup>688</sup> Several of the park-films explored in this chapter certainly evoke different historical periods (however ahistorically), from the early-eighteenth century romanticized pirate milieu of *Pirates of the Caribbean* to the early-nineteenth century colonial nostalgia of *Jungle Cruise*. Even the films that take place primarily in the present day tend to engage with the past through flashbacks. *Tower of Terror*’s characters seek to solve the mystery of Halloween night, 1939, *Tomorrowland* flashes back to the 1964 New York World’s Fair, and *The Country Bears* begins with a montage of ephemera and footage from the band’s heyday, from their beginnings in 1974 to their “final performance” in 1991. Additionally, the park spaces they evoke themselves can be representative of a nostalgic time and place, as sites that can be deeply associated with personal memories. Finally, Sperb defines “narrative nostalgia,” his fourth category, as stories with nostalgic plots, such as “major life events,” “forms of ‘home-coming,’” “time travel,” or even a “‘return’ to nature.”<sup>689</sup> Again, elements in certain of Disney’s park-films fit into this category. This is most obviously

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<sup>686</sup> See Williams, “Extending the Haunted Mansion.”

<sup>687</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 20.

<sup>688</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 20.

<sup>689</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 21-22.

illustrated by *The Country Bears*'s focus on "home-coming" as the band revives and returns to Country Bear Hall.

While Sperb's categories clearly apply to Disney's park-films, they do not necessarily account for their specific aesthetic and narrative focus on the materiality of the park spaces on which they are based. In other words, these films engage in another kind of nostalgia that is closely related to, yet not entirely accommodated by Sperb's categorizations. As they adapt the materiality of park space, these films often express a kind of "spatial nostalgia." Spatial nostalgia in these park-based films is a fixation on the materiality of their source attractions and the physical spaces within them. Spatial nostalgia is a nostalgia for the physical spaces of the park attractions on which they are based and is illustrated by the way the films' aesthetics and narratives treat these material sites.

Spatial nostalgia is expressed in the ride-films via narrative and cinematographic attention to the architectural and visual spaces of the rides. These films exhibit a preoccupation with the physicality of their source attractions' spaces, from lingering shots of buildings and scenes that directly recall imagery from corresponding park attractions to plots that revolve around the buildings themselves. The latter aspect is particularly apparent in *Tower of Terror* and *The Haunted Mansion* as well as in the 2002 film *The Country Bears*. These films center their plots around the attraction edifice itself, whether it be investigating the Hollywood Tower Hotel in *Tower of Terror*, saving Country Bear Hall in *The Country Bears*, or trying to sell—then escape—Gracey Manor in *The Haunted Mansion*. Other examples of spatial nostalgia can be seen in park-films like the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise and even the most recent film, *Jungle Cruise*, both of which include multiple recreations of ride tableaux that demonstrate a sentimentality for the rides on which they are based. While spatial nostalgia is arguably not

present in all park-based films—it is difficult to identify particular attention to the source attraction’s physical space in *Mission to Mars*, for example—it is a core impulse of several of Disney’s park-based films.

Spatial nostalgia within *Tower of Terror* is illustrated by the film’s aesthetic and narrative focus on the exterior and interior spaces of the ride’s physical setting: the Hollywood Tower Hotel. The film’s plot is set in motion when Abigail comes to Buzzy’s apartment to discuss the mystery of the events of Halloween 1939. “Does this building look familiar?” she asks as she shows him an old magazine with an image of the Hollywood Tower Hotel on the front cover. As she tells the story of the fateful Halloween night, Abigail describes how her sister came home to the hotel, how she followed her sister’s nanny into the basement, and how her evil magic “swallowed” the people on the elevator. Black and white flashbacks show the spaces where these events took place: the hotel lobby, basement, and elevator.

These are, importantly, also the spaces that visitors to the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror encounter as they progress into the lobby, down through the basement, and into the elevator during their experience of the Hollywood Tower Hotel. For viewers who have also been visitors, the characters’ and camera’s movement through these spaces may elicit not only general recollections of having ridden the attraction or the fannish pleasure of recognizing certain “Easter eggs,” but nostalgic pleasure in having physically been in the spaces shown on screen. In an interview on the *Beyond the Mouse* podcast, writer-director of *Tower of Terror* D.J. MacHale describes a favorite shot of his that he hoped would resonate with fans of the ride. The shot starts at the elevator floor indicator and “pulls directly back from that as the five iconic characters come past us and walk into the elevator and take their spot, so if you love that ride, you know



that ride you're going to go 'there we go! I know where this is going! This will not end well!'"<sup>690</sup> MacHale speaks not only of fan knowledge, but of fan "love" for the ride, suggesting that the acknowledgment of visitor nostalgia is baked into the film.

While much of the film was shot elsewhere, external establishing shots of the actual ride building in Florida tie the physical materiality of the attraction to the fictional world of the film. The wide shot exteriors of the hotel, details of the ride exterior like balustrades and carvings, and the POV shot as Buzzy approaches the Hollywood Tower Hotel were shot on-site at the Florida Tower of Terror attraction. As MacHale recalls, due to park operating hours, the filmmakers would have only been allowed shoot in the parks from midnight until four or five in the morning. Out of necessity, because they could not film extensively on-site, they replicated the hotel lobby in Los Angeles. This in turn directly affected the script. MacHale notes that around a quarter of budget went into exactly duplicating the attraction's lobby. To justify spending the budget on it, MacHale describes how he moved scenes that were originally going to take place elsewhere in the hotel (restaurants, corridors, guest rooms) to the lobby. Ultimately, the inability to shoot in the ride show building itself ironically led to an increased focus on the spaces familiar from the park, despite the potential for the film to explore elsewhere in the fictional hotel.<sup>691</sup>

Buzzy, and by extension the viewers, takes his time as he approaches the building and explores its dust-laden lobby and the artifacts within. The pacing and duration of these scenes suggest that these spaces are important, not only for the character, but for the viewer as well. The camera rests on the cobweb-covered bronze owl sculpture that is the centerpiece of the actual

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<sup>690</sup> D.J. MacHale, "Tower of Terror with D.J. MacHale," interview by Craig McFarland, Brett Rutherford, and Vanessa Ferguson, *Beyond the Mouse*, NPR Illinois, October 29, 2020, podcast, <https://www.nprillinois.org/community-voices/2020-10-29/beyond-the-mouse-tower-of-terror-with-d-j-machale>.

<sup>691</sup> MacHale, interview.

ride's lobby in Florida, California, and Paris. Buzzy touches props that recall similar props in the ride lobby—he rings the desk bell and touches the hotel register. Buzzy then explores the basement, which is both significant to the film's plot as the location where Abigail performed the curse and as a key environment of the ride, where park visitors load the elevator car ride vehicles. The music played during these sequences similarly indicates the wonder and importance of the building. A musical flourish as Buzzy looks up at the Hollywood Tower Hotel suggests that this is a significant moment. Similarly, as Buzzy scans the room with his flashlight and the space itself is revealed to the character and the audience, the sound of tinkling chimes and harp glissandi suggest that this is a magical and special space for viewers.

That the locations depicted in detail and for extended periods in the film overlap with visitable spaces in the parks creates a complex relationship between park space and media space. In *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age*, Nick Couldry discusses memory and “nostalgia tourism” in visits to “media tourist sites.”<sup>692</sup> Couldry suggests that physically visiting “media sites” implicitly changes one's “position in relation to the media frame.”<sup>693</sup> Certainly, film viewers can embark on pilgrimages to the physical ride as a means of accessing a media site. However, the film itself can act as a means of pilgrimage for those who have already visited the parks, a way to revisit and re-experience a physical and narrative space, particularly as it develops that space in additional depth.

Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs's argument that memory requires a material and social context or framework and Paul Connerton's “analysis of how rituals actually produce social

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<sup>692</sup> Nick Couldry, *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 33.

<sup>693</sup> Couldry, *The Place of Media Power*, 33. Couldry's example of Nick Hornby attending a major football match—something normally seen on TV—is quite different, but the point is applicable elsewhere.

memory through acts of repetition,” Couldry argues that film or television sets provide visitors with “an ordered space—a ‘framework’ (in Halbwachs’ term)—in which memories of viewing can be organized, shared and thereby reproduced.”<sup>694</sup> Couldry cites an example of how one viewer’s visit to the *Coronation Street* set affects his relationship to *Coronation Street*, Britain’s longest running soap opera: “for such visitors at least, visiting the set has a temporal depth connected not just with the programme’s history, but with their own lives.”<sup>695</sup> Visiting a mediated space, Couldry suggests, affects how visitors think about the related media because of its connection with their own memories.

Though different in type and temporal scale, Couldry’s analysis is useful for understanding park-films like *Tower of Terror* and their reciprocal relationship with physical park space. For former park visitors, the viewing of the film may recall memories of the attraction itself and as well as their presence in its narrative. As Couldry notes, “the discussion of memory...raises issues of narrative and connection: in particular, the connection with the storytelling frame of the program which visiting the set involves.”<sup>696</sup> Moreover, visits to the attraction are embedded in ones visit to the park as a whole, as a space that is particularly bound up with multiple layers of memory and nostalgia as both a media site and a site of social and often family interaction.

For those viewers who have already ridden the ride, the film’s focus on parts of the hotel that are also accessible parts of the ride acts as an extended return to these spaces. However, for viewers that are new to The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, the film’s extended presence in and

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<sup>694</sup> Couldry, *The Place of Media Power*, 75-76.

<sup>695</sup> Couldry, *The Place of Media Power*, 76.

<sup>696</sup> Couldry, *The Place of Media Power*, 78.

exploration of park spaces might be a chance to vicariously visit the ride space and even to prefigure a later pilgrimage to the park. The film acts as not only an advertisement, but a call to participate in the park narrative, recalling Anderson's "inhabitable text," which understands media's role in compelling viewers to enact the park or ride narrative by becoming visitors.<sup>697</sup> Because so much of the film is located in actual or simulated park space—space that is physically accessible to park visitors—viewers of *Tower of Terror* who are unfamiliar with the attraction can, potentially, physically visit spaces depicted in the film and linked to its production. Couldry notes of media site visits that "being on the set, however, does not only reproduce memories of the program. Being there is itself inherently memorable, transforming future watching of the program."<sup>698</sup> These visits thus have the potential to fundamentally alter viewers' relationship to the film, as visiting the film's setting transforms it from a more abstract space to a material one associated with the viewer's own personal memories.

Five years after *Tower of Terror*, Disney released *The Country Bears* (2002), another film whose setting, narrative, aesthetic, and cinematography evoke nostalgia for a physical park location. The film follows the story of Beary Bearington, an adolescent bear being raised by an adoptive human family who feels like he doesn't belong because he is different. When he decides to run away from home, he heads to Country Bear Hall, the former home of his favorite—though now broken-up—band, The Country Bears. Finding that the hall is due to be demolished, Beary seeks to bring the band back together for a benefit concert to raise money to save the beloved venue. As mentioned above, this plot has clear nostalgic undertones, with both Beary and the Country Bears reminiscing about the band's good old days. As discussed above,

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<sup>697</sup> Anderson, *Disneyland*, 153.

<sup>698</sup> Couldry, *The Place of Media Power*, 77.

“narrative nostalgia” films are “simply stories explicitly about nostalgic impulses.”<sup>699</sup> Amongst Sperb’s list of common nostalgic plots are films about “road trips, vacations, or other forms of ‘home-coming’—where there is the assumption or hope that at the end of the journey, one will enter into a physical space that is either literally or symbolically associated with an earlier period in one’s life (a place often, but not always, associated with childhood).”<sup>700</sup> *The Country Bears* certainly adheres to the road-trip genre, while also mostly adhering to the conventions of another kind of “prominent” nostalgia film described by Sperb: “the period, coming-of-age narrative, complete with a soundtrack of classic hits.”<sup>701</sup> The film combines multiple nostalgic themes of Beary’s adolescent coming-of-age journey, the road trip (complete with band tour bus), with a musical format that includes classic hits as well as new compositions in classic rock and country styles.

The film’s nostalgic tone is reinforced by its visual and aural design. As they travel around reassembling the band, Beary and the gang find themselves in spaces that recall a bygone era, particularly through their architecture. From the iconic late-1950s Johnie’s Broiler restaurant, with its retro interior and period-costumed servers, to the Toluca Lake Car Wash and the Motel Glen Capri, the mid-century Googie architecture featured in the film suggests affection for a time that was particularly associated with car culture and road trips. This past-looking nostalgia is further emphasized by the film’s soundtrack, with its mixture of genres, including country, classic rock, rockabilly, and pop. It includes diegetic music sung by the “Country Bears” themselves, including the Rockabilly duel between Zeb (a bear) and Brian Setzer of the Stray

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<sup>699</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 21.

<sup>700</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 21.

<sup>701</sup> Sperb, “Clearing Up the Haze,” 24.

Cats, and contemporary pop numbers by Jennifer Paige and Krystal Harris, along with non-diegetic music that includes classic songs from The Byrds and contemporary songs made for the film by classic rock icons like Bonnie Raitt and Don Henley of the Eagles.

These elements provide context for the film's nostalgia for Country Bear Hall. The Country Bear Hall in the film is based on the Country Bear Playhouse, the theater that housed the Country Bear Jamboree, an attraction that originally opened in Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom in 1971 as one of the park's original attractions. A sister version opened in Disneyland the following year as the centerpiece of "Bear Country" (later Critter Country) from what had been a part of Frontierland.<sup>702</sup> Operating at Disneyland until its closure in 2001, Disneyland's Country Bear Jamboree, like the others, was an Audio-Animatronic musical stage show.<sup>703</sup> In it, a cast of Audio-Animatronic bears played instruments and sang a series of country songs, with witty banter sprinkled in between.<sup>704</sup> The bears were joined by other woodland critters, some of whom appeared as mounted trophy heads on the walls of the theater.

The film expresses a deep nostalgia for the materiality of the original park attraction in part because the plot hinges not only on Beary's search for acceptance, which he ultimately finds in Country Bear Hall, but on the need to save the building itself from destruction.<sup>705</sup> When Beary leaves home to find in Country Bear Hall a place where he'll belong, he discovers that Country

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<sup>702</sup> The Walt Disney Company, *Disneyland: Dreams, Traditions and Transitions*, 93. At Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom, Country Bear Jamboree was part of Frontierland, while at Disneyland, it was originally located in Bear Country, which was renamed Critter Country in 1988. A third version opened at Tokyo Disneyland's Westernland in 1983.

<sup>703</sup> In 2003, it was replaced by The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh dark ride.

<sup>704</sup> The original Country Bear Jamboree was later replaced with the Country Bear Jamboree Vacation Hoedown and the seasonal Country Bear Christmas Special.

<sup>705</sup> This is despite the fact that the version at Disneyland (which opened a year after the original at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom) had just closed a year prior to the film's release. The result is nostalgia for a place that, at least in one incarnation, has been recently demolished by the very same company.

Bear Hall is slated to be demolished by villain Reed Thimple (played by Christopher Walken). The film's nostalgia for the physical spaces of the park is expressed stylistically through its mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing. In the film's opening moments, we see that the walls of Beary's room are papered with ephemera of not only the Country Bears band, but of the hall itself. One poster literally speaks to Beary as he packs to run away from home, saying "at Country Bear Hall, you could be different and still fit in." The camera tilts down over another poster with an illustration of Country Bear Hall, depicted with joyous, colorful musical notes emerging from its cupola.

When we first see Country Bear Hall in the film, its log cabin exterior evokes that of the park attraction, while the cinematography reinforces its significance as a beloved place.<sup>706</sup> Beary approaches Country Bear Hall through a covered bridge that is reminiscent of the one that marked the queue entrance to the Disneyland version of the attraction. As Beary approaches Country Bear Hall, the camera moves out from under a tree to reveal the building. During this reveal, he reverently exclaims, "Country Bear Hall!" As he looks at the building, he gasps: "Wow!" The camera, now in a closeup of the building, tilts upward, suggesting a reverence for the sign over the entrance that reads "Country Bear Hall." These first shots of the building's interior and exterior are affectionate in their framing, pacing, and movement, as they linger on Country Bear Hall and move over its details. As Henry, the owner of Country Bear Hall and manager of the Country Bears band, shows Beary the inside of the Hall, he reminisces about the artists that once played there (including Jimi Hendrix), and how he would climb up into the

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<sup>706</sup> Though not identical, the Country Bear Hall of the film is closer in appearance to the facade of the Florida version of the Country Bear Jamboree, particularly with its wooden construction and pitched gable roof with exposed wooden support beams. Beyond aesthetic differences, the film's Hall appears to be substantially larger than those in the parks.

rafters to hear the notes that floated up there. A little later, when Henry goes into the rafters, we see a vision of what the hall used to look like, filled with people and music. The music fades away as the shot of the crowded hall dissolves into one of an empty space, suggesting nostalgia for its long-gone heyday.

The focus on the attraction building itself is further illustrated by the presence of multiple miniature versions of Country Bear Hall in the film. These include Beary's homemade model, which sits in his bedroom amongst the memorabilia and ephemera he has collected. Villain Reed Thimple, too, has an entire collection of somewhat elaborately detailed wooden-model Country Bear Halls, which he delights in repeatedly crushing on his desk under a comically huge weight that drops from the ceiling as he sarcastically exclaims over and over: "Oh, no!"<sup>707</sup> His oddly-specific antagonism here seems fixated on the location itself, despite the fact that his motivation is supposed to be that he once came in as a runner-up to the Country Bears in a talent competition held elsewhere. Nevertheless, Country Bear Hall appears so deeply identified with the Country Bears that it becomes the fetishistic goal of his revenge.

At the end of the film, when the band's tour bus finally arrives at Country Bear Hall to play their big reunion concert and raise the funds to save the building, one character remarks, "I can't wait to see the ol' place." Beary again gasps as he beholds the structure. Country Bear Hall becomes the site of Beary's ultimate acceptance, as he is welcomed into the band and invited to play the concert with them. As the film closes, the bears continue to play as the camera pulls slowly back through the now packed and lively interior and through the front doors. As the shot continues to pull back outside, it lingers on the exterior of the building, lit up and returned to its halcyon days as a site of joy, music, and acceptance. As the Bears' song concludes, a title reads

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<sup>707</sup> We see him crush four models on screen, though the pile of debris on the floor suggests more.



“based on Walt Disney’s Country Bear Jamboree,” reinforcing the nostalgic connections between film and attraction.

Ultimately, *The Country Bears* operates with an expectation of viewer nostalgia for specific park spaces, their stories, and particular moments in park history, even though many audience members may have never even visited and those who visit Disneyland could no longer visit the attraction at all. However, comments on YouTube videos with old footage of the Country Bear Jamboree at Disneyland indicate a continued fondness for the now-gone attraction. The comments section of one video of the final performance in 2001 is filled with commenters lamenting the show’s closing (and replacement by the Winnie the Pooh attraction), sharing treasured memories of it, and even discussing the creation of petitions to bring it back. YouTube user TheMonsterGroovy remarked “Brings a tear to my eye. I used to watch this with my mom every time my family went to Disneyland. Sometimes twice. I was too little to do Splash Mountain, so my dad would take my sisters and my mom and I would do this. <3 Screw you, Winnie the Pooh.”<sup>708</sup> This kind of park nostalgia appears to be the target of the *Country Bears* film.

Similar veins of spatial nostalgia can be seen in other ride-films. Like *The Country Bears*, the exterior of the eponymous mansion in *The Haunted Mansion* (2003) is shown in multiple establishing shots, suggesting the significance of the building itself, beyond its function as a setting for the events of the film. The funeral dirge version of “Grim Grinning Ghosts” plays as we first see the mansion, recalling the music familiar from the ride. Establishing shots of the mansion and its gates recall a view familiar from the parks as visitors initially approach to the ride. As mentioned previously, the building appears to be a rather odd architectural

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<sup>708</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QU56qy2nZU&t=1312s>.

amalgamation of both the Southern antebellum style of the Disneyland Mansion with its Greek Revival pediment and The Walt Disney World Dutch Gothic-style Mansion with its rounded cupola.<sup>709</sup> A wider shot at the end of the title sequence suggests greater fidelity to the Disneyland version of the ride, with some additions from Walt Disney World’s Mansion, including the glass conservatory.<sup>710</sup> The mansion is shown surrounded by marshy bayou, which is suggestive of the original version’s physical setting in New Orleans Square at Disneyland.<sup>711</sup> Incorporating elements from multiple Haunted Mansions, but primarily those in Anaheim and Florida, allows the film to be accessible to fans of different versions of the beloved ride.<sup>712</sup> As discussed previously, the film’s opening titles begin with the famous line from the attraction, “Welcome Foolish Mortals,” and invoke imagery that is intimately associated with the Haunted Mansion, like the floating candelabra. The film includes a myriad of other iconic scenes from the ride, including Madame Leota’s crystal ball-encapsulated head, the lantern-holding caretaker and his skeletal dog, or the hitchhiking ghosts. These elements not only act as intertextual references to the knowing audience member, but have the potential to stir nostalgic feelings, particularly through associations with the parks as sites of memorable experiences. That these scenes are something more than mere references is suggested by their iconicity—many of these images

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<sup>709</sup> The disparate exterior architectural styles of the two U.S. Mansions are a product of their different settings. Disneyland’s Haunted Mansion is situated in New Orleans Square, while Walt Disney World’s Haunted Mansion is in the colonial-era setting of Liberty Square.

<sup>710</sup> An interior scene of Disneyland’s Haunted Mansion is set in a conservatory, but an exterior conservatory is visible only on the Walt Disney World version of the ride.

<sup>711</sup> This ties it in with other physical spaces, including the Blue Bayou restaurant, located in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride building, suggesting the interconnected network of park spaces.

<sup>712</sup> Again, there are other versions of The Haunted Mansion worldwide, including Paris’s Phantom Manor, which seems to be a reference for some of the interior space.

have been memorialized in Disney Parks merchandise, further emphasizing their importance, and cultivating a place in the memories of park visitors.<sup>713</sup>

More recently, *Jungle Cruise* (2021) also nostalgically invokes material aspects of its source ride. While much of the *Jungle Cruise* film departs from the attraction, particularly as it develops its narrative, part of the film's cold open directly references longstanding gags familiar from the park attraction. These include iconic scenes like the angry hippopotami and the famed "back side of water" gag. Some lines are taken directly from the attraction itself, including puns about not taking the stone "for granite" and headhunter territory not being a great place "to be headed." The ride's materiality is referenced when Frank shoots a rope, triggering a fake hippo that rises out of the water, or when he cuts a rope that releases water, creating the waterfall and the "backside of water." These gags hint at the ride's artificial nature. One such "deadly hippopotamus" is shown to be fake, frozen partially out of the water with its mouth fixed open, like a broken animatronic. This not only references the artifice of the ride, but its history as a park attraction, as the hippo looks to be old and covered in moss. These moments in the film seem to affectionately acknowledge the ride's history, artificiality, and even flaws as the springboard for its adventurous tale. Ultimately, these elements, like those in other park-films, serve not merely as intertextual references to the rides, but as nostalgic evocations of the physical spaces of the parks.

### **Dead Men Tell New Tales: Park-Films and Reciprocal Spatial Storytelling**

I wanted something live, something that could grow, something I could keep plussing with ideas, you see? The park is that. Not only can I add things but even the trees will

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<sup>713</sup> At the time of writing, ShopDisney.com was selling a show globe featuring Madame Leota's crystal ball in the center, with sculptures of the hitchhiking ghosts and the caretaker on the sides, combining multiple iconic scenes from the ride.

keep growing; the thing will get more beautiful every year. And as I find what the public likes—and when a picture's finished and I put it out—I find out what they like, or they don't like, and I have to apply that to some other thing; I can't change that picture, so that's why I wanted that park.

—Walt Disney<sup>714</sup>

Malleability was built into the parks as a constant process of change that Walt Disney described as “plussing.” This is something that has always been part of the parks’ fundamental conception as “living” spaces that were never intended to be static monuments to the past. Walt Disney remarked that “The park means a lot to me in that it's something that will never be finished. Something that I can keep developing, keep plussing and adding to—it's alive. It will be a live, breathing thing that will need changes.”<sup>715</sup> This is, according to Disney, in contrast to the more fixed nature of film: “a picture is a thing that once you wrap it up and turn it over to Technicolor, you're through. *Snow White* is a dead issue with me. The last picture I just finished—the one I just wrapped up a few weeks ago—it's gone; I can't touch it. There's things in it I don't like? I can't do anything about it.”<sup>716</sup> Disneyland has indeed never been fixed, but is in a constant state of revision, refurbishment, and reinvention.<sup>717</sup> As the earlier chapters have described, lands and attractions have been removed, altered, and added almost constantly since opening day in 1955. Even “original” opening day attractions have seen changes both minor and

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<sup>714</sup> Walt Disney, “In Walt's Own Words: Plussing Disneyland,” *The Walt Disney Family Museum Blog*, July 17, 2014, <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/walts-own-words-plussing-disneyland>.

<sup>715</sup> Disney, “In Walt's Own Words.”

<sup>716</sup> Disney, “In Walt's Own Words.”

<sup>717</sup> Of course, films themselves can be changed via subsequent releases like director’s or extended cuts or through censorship that removes or alters scenes. The special editions of the original *Star Wars* films, for example, included both updates to the special effects and more significant alterations like the infamous “Han shot first” cantina scene, which fans argue changed how the character is perceived. Extra content on DVD releases, including deleted scenes or alternate endings, can also change how a film or its narrative are perceived or experienced. Nevertheless, most films have a single static “original” or theatrical release version that can be considered a fixed text.

major, from the periodic updates to Sleeping Beauty Castle's paint job to the Autopia's major overhaul in 2000, which saw a complete reworking of the ride's track, cars, and overall look.<sup>718</sup>

Changes to park attractions have been in response to several factors. Changing social mores around representations of race and gender have led to alterations in rides like Pirates of the Caribbean, Jungle Cruise, Splash Mountain, and Roger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin, which have been (or are slated to be) altered to remove racist and sexist imagery.<sup>719</sup> Changing technology has led to old rides like The PeopleMover being replaced with more advanced ones like the Rocket Rods, or new technology like projection mapping being added onto old rides like Alice in Wonderland and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad.<sup>720</sup> More often, rides and park areas that are perceived to be outdated, unpopular, costly, or inefficient (or a combination of these factors) are removed or revamped, often being replaced by attractions that incorporate popular IP, as when the Submarine Voyage was reworked into the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage.<sup>721</sup> Re-

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<sup>718</sup> Andrea Romano, "Sleeping Beauty's Castle Got a Bright, Colorful Makeover — Complete with Pixie Dust," *Travel + Leisure*, May 21, 2019, <https://www.travelandleisure.com/trip-ideas/disney-vacations/disneyland-sleeping-beautys-castle-renovations>; Lisa Ferguson, "Renovation Marks Disneyland's 45th Anniversary," *Las Vegas Sun*, June 29, 2000, <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2000/jun/29/renovation-marks-disneylands-45th-anniversary/>.

<sup>719</sup> Todd Martens, "Pirates of the Caribbean Anchors a Disneyland on the Brink of Great Change," *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/hero/complex/la-et-hc-disney-pirates-50th-20170707-story.html>; Brady MacDonald, "Disneyland Seamlessly Blends in New Jungle Cruise Scenes While Erasing Ride's Troubled Past," *Orange County Register*, July 16, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/07/16/disneyland-seamlessly-blends-in-new-jungle-cruise-scenes-while-erasing-rides-troubled-past/>; Brady MacDonald, "Disneyland Splash Mountain Makeover is Going to Take Some Time," *Orange County Register*, August 16, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/08/16/disneyland-splash-mountain-makeover-is-going-to-take-some-time/>; Brady MacDonald, "Disneyland Covers Up Sexy Jessica Rabbit in a Detective's Trenchcoat and Fedora," *Orange County Register*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/12/09/disneyland-covers-up-sexy-jessica-rabbit-in-a-detectives-trenchcoat-and-fedora/>.

<sup>720</sup> Brian Krosnick, "The 10 Most Incredible Projection Mapped Effects in Disney Parks (With Videos to Prove It!)," *Theme Park Tourist*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.themeparktourist.com/features/20201002/29272/10-most-incredible-projection-mapped-effects-disney-parks-videos-prove-it>.

<sup>721</sup> Some rides have temporarily overlays for special occasions or holidays. During the Halloween season, for example, Space Mountain has become Space Mountain Ghost Galaxy, while it has also been re-skinned as Hyperspace Mountain to tie into *Star Wars* promotions. Since 2001, The Haunted Mansion is regularly transformed into Haunted Mansion Holiday when the ride takes on a Nightmare Before Christmas theme through the Halloween and Christmas seasons.

imaginings of attractions like Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage replace their previous iterations, using the existing vehicles and tracks while replacing the story.

However, a more complex reciprocal relationship between parks and their cinematic counterparts emerges when we begin to see not only rides being based on films or films adapting rides, but rides and films co-evolving together. The previous chapters have focused on how the parks were built on—and have changed in response to—cinematic, televisual, and video game influences, as new attractions and lands increasingly transform the park into media space. From the cinematic influences of its earliest days, where park attractions brought films to life, to later film-based lands, Disneyland clearly demonstrates the movement from screen to space. As this chapter explores, the converse movement is also apparent, as park spaces are translated into media, primarily in the form of movies and video games. Yet we also see instances where the translation process is not quite so simple. Instead of a unidirectional movement, these texts suggest a more reciprocal back-and-forth between ride and screen.

This can be seen in the *Tower of Terror* (1997) film, which was inspired by the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror attraction, that was in turn inspired by *The Twilight Zone* television series. This illustrates a kind of reciprocity, as the structure, themes, moods, and aesthetic of the original series informed the ride's original narrative, which was subsequently taken up and expanded on in the film, but without the ride's original references to *The Twilight Zone*. This appears to have been a more or less linear series of permutations, from TV series to ride to film. After *Tower of Terror* was released, it does not appear that significant changes were made to any of the physical attractions in response to the film.<sup>722</sup> Rather, the two iterations of the story—the film's non-

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<sup>722</sup> There were, between 2007 and 2017, three Twilight Zone Tower of Terror attractions worldwide, in Florida, Anaheim, and Paris. The Anaheim Tower of Terror was closed in 2017 to be reworked as Guardians of the Galaxy — Mission: BREAKOUT!

*Twilight Zone* version and the attraction's *Twilight Zone* version, complete with its reconstructed Rod Serling introduction—continued to coexist. However, other park-films—like *Mission to Mars* and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise—demonstrate how park spaces have been altered in response to their own cinematic adaptations, further illustrating the fluidity of the media/park relationship.

### ***From Ride to Film and Back Again: Mission to Mars***

Though it is perhaps less over in referencing its source attraction than other park-films, *Mission to Mars* illustrates how park-based films open a reciprocal relationship between fixed cinematic representations of park space and the malleable spaces of the physical parks themselves. Described by the Disney-produced “Oh My Disney” website as “the ouroboros of movies based on Disney theme park attractions,” *Mission to Mars* is a film that came from a park attraction only to be reincorporated back into park space as a different attraction.<sup>723</sup> *Mission to Mars* itself evolved from an opening day Disneyland attraction—Rocket to the Moon—before inspiring the film *Mission to Mars* that would eventually inform a new park attraction called Mission: SPACE at Walt Disney World's EPCOT park. The original *Mission to Mars* was an attraction both at Disneyland, Anaheim and at the Magic Kingdom Park in Walt Disney World. At Disneyland, it ran from 1975 to 1992, when it was replaced by Redd Rockett's Pizza Port, a

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<sup>723</sup> “Mission to Mars: The Ride that Inspired the Movie that Inspired the Ride,” Oh My Disney, The Walt Disney Company, June 26, 2015, <https://ohmy.disney.com/insider/2015/06/26/mission-to-mars-the-ride-that-inspired-the-movie-that-inspired-the-ride/>.

themed counter-service restaurant.<sup>724</sup> The Walt Disney World version of Mission to Mars ran from 1975 to 1993, when it closed to make way for the ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter.<sup>725</sup>

At Disneyland, similar space-voyage simulation attractions had been in the same Tomorrowland location since opening day in 1955. The attraction's first incarnation, Rocket to the Moon, was a simpler version of the later attractions. It was not quite a "ride," but more of a theatrical "4-D" show that gave the impression of movement. Visitors were seated inside a circular theater in rows of concentric seats surrounding a screen on the floor of the theater. A similar screen on the ceiling mirrored that on the floor and both were styled as "windows" to the spacecraft that was the theater. These screens showed the "passengers" where they were headed and where they had been, as the front and rearview screens of the spacecraft. Rocket to the Moon was updated with the addition of Audio-Animatronic characters in the pre-show and moving seats and reopened in July 1967 as Flight to the Moon, coinciding with the renovations for the "New Tomorrowland."<sup>726</sup> Just after Walt Disney World opened in 1971, a sister version of Flight to the Moon opened as well.

As their titles imply, both the Rocket to the Moon and Flight to the Moon attractions simulated a voyage to the moon and back. After astronauts first walked on the moon on July 20, 1969, however, Flight to the Moon lost its aspirational and futuristic aura. Just as Tomorrowland was continuously faced with the identity crisis of actual science and technology catching up to the present and making the "tomorrow" aspect of the land obsolete, Flight to the Moon had

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<sup>724</sup> Redd Rockett's Pizza Port was later re-themed as Alien Pizza Planet, a tie-in to the Toy Story franchise. This change opens an interesting spatial dialogue with Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, also located in Tomorrowland, though in separate parts of the land (one cannot be viewed from the other).

<sup>725</sup> That ride has itself since been replaced by Stitch's Great Escape!, which closed in 2018 to make way for a character encounter space.

<sup>726</sup> Descriptions of the former rides may be found here: <https://www.yesterland.com/moonrocket.html>.



shifted from a fantasy tomorrow to an already-realized past. Likely in response to this, Disney eventually reworked the attraction to instead simulate a manned flight to Mars, reorienting it around a farther, and more far-fetched, goal. The new attraction, aptly renamed Mission to Mars, opened at Disneyland in 1975.<sup>727</sup> Like its Anaheim counterpart, the Magic Kingdom's Flight to the Moon was also reworked as Mission to Mars in 1975.

Mission to Mars used a combination of theme park technologies to take visitors on a more technologically advanced simulated voyage through space. This began in the attraction's pre-show, which featured detailed Audio-Animatronic scenes. As audiences waited in the queue to enter the actual theater, an animatronic "Mr. Johnson," the Director of Operations, welcomed them to Mission Control. While science and technology were the thematic focus of the attraction, as audiences were invited to imagine being transported through interplanetary space, they were also the material of the attraction, where advances in Audio-Animatronics and attraction technologies would not only facilitate the audience's immersion but be something to marvel at in themselves. Audio-Animatronics were a newly developing field at the time they were added to the 1967 Flight to the Moon version of the ride, having only been implemented in the parks in 1963, with the opening of the Enchanted Tiki Room and its animatronic birds.<sup>728</sup> Though early Disney Imagineers had been developing miniature human-shaped Audio-Animatronics in the early 1950s, Disney's successful development of full-size human Audio-Animatronics was enabled by sponsorship related to the New York World's Fair in 1964.<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> George Savvas, "A Look Back: Launching Mission to Mars at Disneyland Park," *Disney Parks Blog*, March 20, 2015, <https://disney parks.disney.go.com/blog/2015/03/a-look-back-launching-mission-to-mars-at-disneyland-park/>.

<sup>728</sup> Keith Gluck, "The Early Days of Audio-Animatronics," *The Walt Disney Family Museum Blog*, June 18, 2013, <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/early-days-audio-animatronicsc>.

<sup>729</sup> Gluck, "The Early Days;" Lawrence R. Samuel, *The End of the Innocence: The 1964–1965 New York World's Fair* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 110.

Mission to Mars foregrounded its scientific, technological, and educational aspects. In the Mission Control queue area, visitors were surrounded by different screens, displays, and complex computers. Screens visualized bodies in motion under zero-gravity.<sup>730</sup> Waiting in the queue, you could see “your spacecraft waiting on the launchpad,” as screens were used to visualize where you “are” in the conceit of the attraction’s story. During the pre-show, alarms signaled a problem—which turned out to be a bird triggering the emergency system—foreshadowing the dramatic events of the “actual” mission to Mars passengers embarked upon during the attraction. Mission to Mars signaled an interest in science and education, with its mention of real-life geographical features of Mars, like Mariner Valley or Olympus Mons, which it included alongside science fiction elements like hyper-space travel.<sup>731</sup>

Once “welcomed aboard” the “spacecraft” and seated in the circular theater, visitors embarked upon the simulated mission to the red planet. As with earlier moon-themed versions, on Mission to Mars, screens were the primary basis of the simulation, with “one on the ceiling showing you where you were going and one on the floor, showing you where you had been.”<sup>732</sup> Data and schematic visuals appeared on side screens. The ceiling and floor screens gave illusion of blasting off into space; the attraction functioned like a Hale’s Tour where the screens have pivoted ninety degrees to the top and bottom of the theater, rather than the front. Like Hale’s Tours, the illusion of motion was aided by actual manipulation of visitors’ seats, with vibrating

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<sup>730</sup> This was not replicable by the attraction itself - audiences could not experience this using technologies of the time, and Disneyland would not get a more advanced motion simulator ride until the 1987 opening of Star Tours.

<sup>731</sup> There are even hints to the attraction’s own science fiction elements in its dialogue, as Officer Collins, who narrates part of the attraction, says of their “hyperspace jump” that “back in the 1970s and 1980s, this would have seemed like science fiction, but today it's routine.” He remarks upon exiting hyperspace that “we’re back in the real universe again.” For old footage of the ride, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XX9h2YmUvE0>.

<sup>732</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Mission to Mars.”

mechanisms in the seats synchronized with the visuals to provide the illusion of motion and suggest the physical sensations of space travel. This fits with Erkki Huhtamo's definition of the motion simulator as "a multiperson leisure attraction that uses a film projection synchronized with the hydraulic movements of either the seats, the floor, or the whole simulator 'capsule' to provide a simulated 'ride,'—a virtual voyaging experience"<sup>733</sup> While *Mission to Mars* and its predecessors *Rocket/Flight to the Moon* were precursors to more advanced motion simulator rides like Disneyland's *Star Tours*, which opened to the public in 1987, both the Anaheim and Orlando versions of *Mission to Mars* closed in the early 1990s.

In 2000, three years after the release of *Tower of Terror*, its first ride-film, Disney's first theatrical ride-to-movie adaptation—*Mission to Mars*—was released under its Touchstone Pictures label.<sup>734</sup> *Mission to Mars* draws on the attraction's themes; science and knowledge are positioned as noble goals that are fraught with the threat of the danger of space exploration. Like the park attraction, the film uses technology to "transport" viewers to a distant location and a new geological environment. Images of screens and techno-speak similarly recall elements of the park attraction. However, little else appears to be taken from the original *Mission to Mars*. Audiences are not directly addressed, and the film does not replicate the structure of the attraction like *Tower of Terror* or *The Haunted Mansion*. There are no overt references to real built park spaces that visitors may be familiar with. Unlike other park-films, *Mission to Mars* does not really reflect the source attraction's narrative structure, except in a very rudimentary

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<sup>733</sup> Erkki Huhtamo, "Encapsulated Bodies in Motion: Simulators and the Quest for Total Immersion," in *Critical Issues in Electronic Media*, ed. Simon Penny (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 166. Indeed, Huhtamo notes these attractions as "antecedents" to rides like *Star Tours*.

<sup>734</sup> Like *Tower of Terror*, Disney seemed to be testing out park adaptation films using non-primary distribution methods. It wasn't until the 2002 with *The Country Bears* that Disney would release a park-inspired film under the Walt Disney Pictures studio label.

way, if the plot is reduced to a mission to Mars interrupted by disaster. Unlike the attraction, the film lacks a launch sequence, simply cutting from the backyard party to the Mars landscape as a title informs us that it is now thirteen months later. Similarly, though there is some resolution at the end of the film—we see Jim (played by Gary Sinise) depart for the Martians’ new galaxy while the remaining surviving crew head back toward Earth—there is no return landing sequence in the film to match the attraction. In addition, the film’s last act turns more toward science fiction as it speculates on the origins of life on Earth, presenting a creationist fantasy of Martian life “seeding” Earth life. Although the launch and landing sequences provided some of the primary technological pleasures of the attraction’s simulation of a space mission, they are conspicuously absent from the film. Instead, the film replaces the wonder of simulated launch, space flight, and landing with the technological pleasure of the realistic special effects and digital imagery that transport the audience, visually, to Mars.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that *Mission to Mars* does not include some of the other aspects of spatial adaptation that we see in other park-based Disney films, it does provide an example of how films and park space can inform one another not just through single-sided acts of translation—from screen to physical park as explored in Chapters One and Two or from park to screen as discussed throughout the rest of this chapter—but through a process of continued exchange, where a different kind of convergent transmedia space is created through the dialogue between media and park.

*Mission to Mars* had been closed almost a decade in both its Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom locations before the film’s 2000 release. Yet just a few years after, in 2003, elements from the film were incorporated into a new attraction called *Mission: SPACE* at Walt Disney

World's EPCOT park.<sup>735</sup> Like its predecessors, Mission: SPACE is a motion simulation attraction that simulates an expedition to Mars, from the initial launch to a slingshot around the moon for a “lunar gravity assist,” to simulated hypersleep, which helps give the impression of deep space travel in the context of the short duration of the ride. Capsules hold four “cadets” each, and each rider “assume[s] an important role: navigator, pilot, commander or engineer.”<sup>736</sup> While the original version of the attraction only included the main mission to Mars, the intensity of the simulation led Disney to subsequently designate the original as the “Orange Mission” as it added a second, less physically taxing “Green Mission” that simulates an Earth orbit rather than a full mission to Mars.<sup>737</sup> While the original Orange version of the attraction “uses a centrifuge that spins and tilts to simulate the speed and G-forces of a spacecraft launch and reentry,” the Green version eliminates the spinning mechanism in favor of a more traditional, and less physically stressful, motion simulation experience.<sup>738</sup>

Mission: SPACE harkens back to its Mission to Mars forerunner, with a queue that “is designed to look like guests are walking through a space training center filled with prop displays, spacecraft models and replicas, a massive gravity lab, and a peek at a control room.”<sup>739</sup> Visitors enter the fictional International Space Training Center (ISTC) facility, which shares some

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<sup>735</sup> Although this dissertation focuses on the Anaheim parks for its case studies, this example necessitates looking to Walt Disney World.

<sup>736</sup> “Mission: SPACE,” Walt Disney World, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/attractions/epcot/mission-space/>. This shares similarities with Millennium Falcon: Smuggler’s Run, another flight simulation ride where visitors are assigned different roles and must work together.

<sup>737</sup> Charles Stovall, “Mission: SPACE ‘Relaunches’ Aug. 13 With Brand New Experiences,” *Disney Parks Blog*, July 27, 2017, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2017/07/mission-space-relaunches-aug-13-with-brand-new-experiences/>.

<sup>738</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Mission: SPACE.”

<sup>739</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Mission: SPACE.”

similarities with the Mission to Mars attractions' behind-the-scenes look at a space center. Mission: SPACE's mission control room in particular is reminiscent of the control room in the queue for Mission to Mars, with its retro-looking consoles filled with screens, switches, and colored lights, though without the animatronic figures that were a significant part of the Mission to Mars update in 1975.<sup>740</sup> Instead of Audio-Animatronics, videos in the queue for Mission: SPACE introduce visitors to the mission and provide them with “flight training” and a “pre-flight briefing” before they board their X-2 Deep Space Shuttle, which promises to send them to a robotically-prepared landing site near Mars's North Polar Cap. During the videos, each role is given assignments for what actions to take during the ride, such as “deploying the shields” or “activating manual control for landing.”<sup>741</sup>

Creating one of the strongest connections between the ride and the film, actor Gary Sinise, who starred as Jim McConnell in the film, originally starred in these orientation films.<sup>742</sup> His presence solidified the link between the Mission: SPACE ride and the *Mission to Mars* film. In the orientation videos, Sinise emphasizes the significance of the mission to visitors, telling them “You've been selected to train for an elite mission: the first mission to Mars.” He later repeats that this is a “historic liftoff—the first mission to Mars.” Sinise's voice was also used throughout the simulation portion of the ride, as he guided each role—navigator, pilot, commander, and engineer—through their required tasks at the appropriate time.

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<sup>740</sup> For a comparison, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XX9h2YmUvE0> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq0BAVIRanc>.

<sup>741</sup> This foreshadows the different roles assigned to riders in Millennium Falcon: Smuggler's Run.

<sup>742</sup> Sinise's character name is not mentioned in the videos. Gary Sinise also starred as an astronaut in *Apollo 13* (1995). Sinise was replaced with Gina Torres as the new CAPCOM in a new version of the queue video in 2017, lessening the overt connections between Mission: SPACE and the *Mission to Mars* film. See Tom Corless, “Gary Sinise Will Not Return to Mission: Space, Gina Torres is the New CAPCOM,” *WDW News Today*, August 9, 2017, <https://wdwnt.com/2017/08/gary-sinise-wilk-not-return-mission-space-gina-torres-new-capcom/>.

Where the original Mission to Mars attraction was more concerned with knowledge and exploration, as evidenced by the lengthy educational Audio-Animatronic queue pre-show, Mission: SPACE more directly adapts the *Mission to Mars*'s film's focus on the thrill of space flight. The ride still incorporates themes of scientific advancement and space exploration, not least because it was developed "with input from current and former NASA advisors, astronauts, and scientists."<sup>743</sup> However, the thrill of the experience is far more of a focus on Mission: SPACE than it was in the original Mission to Mars attraction. During the ride, visitors wake from hypersleep amidst a meteor storm, which they successfully navigate before their final thrilling descent and crash landing.

Mission: SPACE is centered around the physical intensity of the voyage, where "passengers experience sensations similar to what astronauts feel during liftoff, as they hear the roar of the engines and view computer-generated, photo-realistic imagery based on data taken from NASA's Mars-orbiting satellites."<sup>744</sup> That this is an extremely physical experience is emphasized within the ride, as a voice-over informs visitors who experience motion sickness or dislike enclosed dark spaces, simulators, or spinning that they "should bypass this experience." Sinise similarly warned visitors "as you can see, astronaut flight training isn't like anything you've ever experienced before. It is intense, and if you would like to opt out, you can sign up for Mission Control Training in the Advanced Training Lab."<sup>745</sup> Mission: SPACE is so intense that motion sickness bags are available for visitors, and the ride has been connected to two

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<sup>743</sup> NASA, "Blast-Off on Mission: SPACE," *NASA Spinoff*, 2003, [https://spinoff.nasa.gov/spinoff2003/ch\\_2.html](https://spinoff.nasa.gov/spinoff2003/ch_2.html).

<sup>744</sup> NASA, "Blast-Off on Mission: SPACE."

<sup>745</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq0BAVIRanc>.

deaths and other medical events.<sup>746</sup> The ride's physicality and emphasis on the thrill of the experience further links it to the film, whose thrilling sequences were the primary target of critics' praise, including Roger Ebert, who cites the film's "three sequences of real vision" and Bob Graham, who writes that "There are two missions to Mars. When the first meets apparent disaster, a rescue team is dispatched. Tim Robbins and Gary Sinise play the astronaut co-pilots. The second team also gets into trouble, and if the people behind 'Mission to Mars' had left it at that and played out the thrills, it might have been something."<sup>747</sup>

Ultimately, these texts illuminate the reciprocal relationship between the original Mission to Mars attraction (and its progenitors), the film *Mission to Mars*, and the later ride Mission: SPACE. While the simple core narrative, of a manned flight to Mars, remains consistent throughout, the focus shifted over the years from the emphasis on scientific knowledge and exploration that characterized the early attractions to the thrill of space travel that is the hallmark of the film, which later informed the new park ride. This reciprocity between ride space and its film adaptation is something that is also evident in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, where an attraction inspires a film franchise which is then mapped back onto the original attraction and beyond.

### ***The Pirates of the Caribbean Franchise and Reciprocal Spatial Storytelling***

*Mission to Mars* illustrates how the essence of a story about space exploration can move from one attraction to a feature film and back to another attraction. However, another kind of reciprocal spatial storytelling can be seen in the relationship between the *Pirates of the*

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<sup>746</sup> "Woman Falls Ill, Dies After Epcot Rocket Ride," *Tampa Bay Times*, April 13, 2006, <https://www.tampabay.com/archive/2006/04/13/woman-falls-ill-dies-after-epcot-rocket-ride/>.

<sup>747</sup> Roger Ebert, "Mission to Mars," RogerEbert.com, originally published March 10, 2000, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mission-to-mars-2000>; Bob Graham, "Spaced Out: 'Mission to Mars' Gets Lost in Mystical Mumbo Jumbo," *SFGate*, March 10, 2000, <https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Spaced-Out-Mission-to-Mars-gets-lost-in-3304655.php>.



*Caribbean* franchise and its source attraction *Pirates of the Caribbean* (1967). Beginning with *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* in 2003, the *Pirates* film franchise built a story world that incorporated the spaces and key narrative elements from its namesake attraction. Subsequently, the film—and its sequels—were then integrated back into the ride, with the addition of new Audio-Animatronic figures, projections, and dialogue. As the ride continues to change and evolve over time, what emerges are two ever-evolving, coexisting story worlds—an illustration of how park attractions, as mutable spatial media, are narratively open spaces that are always subject to change.

Even prior to the release of the first film, Disneyland’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* attraction had already been altered in response to sexist representations of women and gender dynamics. In 1997, a scene in the ride depicting male pirates chasing women was altered by adding plates of food to the female characters to suggest that the pirates were chasing after the food rather than the women’s bodies.<sup>748</sup> A similarly motivated revision came almost two decades later, in 2018, when a scene that originally depicted captive, shackled women being offered for sale under a sign that read “Auction. Take a Wench for a Bride” was altered to instead show pirates auctioning off stolen loot.<sup>749</sup> The redheaded Audio-Animatronic figure who was formerly positioned as the attractive lure to tempt pirates into purchasing what are positioned as “less attractive” women was recast as Redd, a female pirate now participating in, and profiting from, the criminal activity. “Redd” has since been added as a character to the parks.<sup>750</sup> While such

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<sup>748</sup> Michael Cranberry and Lily Dizon, “Disneyland in the '90s: A PC Life for Me,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1997, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-01-04-mn-15365-story.html>.

<sup>749</sup> Martens, “*Pirates of the Caribbean*.”

<sup>750</sup> Scarlett, a character in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, was also a reference to the original animatronic figure. There have been rumors that Redd may be the subject of her own *Pirates* film in the future. See Dirk Libbey, “*Pirates of The Caribbean: Everything We Know About the Future of The Franchise*,”

changes illustrate the endless malleability of park space, the changes in response to the *Pirates* films illuminate the unique reciprocal relationship between screen space and park space.

Like the majority of park-based films, the *Pirates* films draw on the spaces and imagery of their source ride, and include what Bobby Schweizer and Celia Pearce refer to as “a number of cross-referential indexical moments in the films.”<sup>751</sup> Indeed, almost every scene from the ride makes an appearance somewhere in the film franchise, though not in the exact sequence in which they appear in the ride.<sup>752</sup> Schweizer and Pearce point out that “older adults watching the movies will get the references to the original ride, while younger people seeing the ride for the first time, having seen the movie, will perceive the reciprocal connections between the two.”<sup>753</sup> From the famous jail dog in *Curse of the Black Pearl* to the scene in *On Stranger Tides* where Hector Barbossa and Jack Sparrow sit alongside a skeleton in an ornate bed with a skull-bedecked headboard, the films are filled with evocations of park space.<sup>754</sup> As the *Pirates* sequels were developed, they continued to weave scenes and dialogue from the ride into their narratives, furthering the reciprocal relationship between the ride and its cinematic counterparts.

Yet this movement from space to screen notably also occurred in reverse, as elements from the films were worked back into the original ride. Three years after the release of the first *Pirates* film, coinciding with the release of the first sequel *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s*

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*CinemaBlend*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2562590/pirates-of-the-caribbean-everything-we-know-about-the-future-of-the-franchise>.

<sup>751</sup> Bobby Schweizer and Celia Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas: A Pirates of the Caribbean Odyssey,” in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon ETC Press, 2016), 98.

<sup>752</sup> Additionally, some references ended up as deleted scenes that did not make the final cut of the film.

<sup>753</sup> Schweizer and Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas,” 99.

<sup>754</sup> For a list of references, see Caroline Fox, “Pirates of the Caribbean: Every Movie Scene Taken from The Disney Ride,” *ScreenRant*, October 18, 2020, <https://screenrant.com/pirates-caribbean-movies-disneyland-ride-scenes-copy/>.

*Chest* in June 2006, the ride was altered to incorporate elements from the films. Major alterations to the ride included the projected image of Davy Jones on the mist screen in the grotto, the replacement of the original pirate captain with an Audio-Animatronic Captain Barbossa, and the addition of three different Jack Sparrow Audio-Animatronics.<sup>755</sup> With the addition of Captain Barbossa, the pirate captain's dialogue was also changed from more general exclamations like "Fire at will! Stand by at your guns, mates! Strike your colors, ya bloomin' cockroaches! By thunder, we'll see ya to Davy Jones! Surrender, ya lily livered lubbers!" to ones directed at finding Jack Sparrow: "Captain Jack Sparrow—show yourself, you miserable cur! Strike your colors, ya bloomin' cockroaches! Surrender Cap'n Jack Sparrow—or, by thunder, we'll burn this city to the ground! It's Cap'n Jack Sparrow we're after—and a fortune in gold. Run up your white flag, ya scurvy scum and bring me Cap'n Jack Sparrow, or I'll be sendin' ya to Davy Jones!" These lines signaled the presence of the impudent pirate via Audio-Animatronics.

The first Animatronic Jack Sparrow appears hiding behind some mannequins. Nearby, Carlos, the magistrate of Puerto Dorado, the city being pillaged in the ride, is seen being repeatedly dunked in the well by a pirate captor looking for information on Jack Sparrow's whereabouts. As with the pirate captain's altered lines, this pirate's dialogue was updated, as he asks, "Where be Cap'n Jack Sparrow and the treasure, ya bilge rat?!" and "Where be Cap'n Jack Sparrow? Speak up—or do you fancy a swim with Davy Jones?!" Jack Sparrow later appears inside a barrel, spying on a drunken pirate's treasure map, and finally, at the end of the ride, lounging amongst the loot he has plundered.<sup>756</sup> Other smaller changes were made with the

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<sup>755</sup> Kimi Yoshino, "Disney Ride: Just Like in the Movies," *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-jun-19-fi-pirates19-story.html>.

<sup>756</sup> Chantal Lamers, "Cheat Sheet to Pirate Ride's Renovations," *Orange County Register*, June 26, 2006, <https://www.ocregister.com/2006/06/26/cheat-sheet-to-pirate-rides-renovations/>.

release of later films in the franchise. In 2011, for example, the projection of Davy Jones was replaced by a projection of Blackbeard, to tie into the concurrent release of *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, the fourth movie in the franchise.<sup>757</sup> In April 2017, timed with the release of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*, Johnny Depp surprised riders when he appeared inside the ride, in costume and in character, and interacted with riders as they floated by, his live performance blurring the boundaries between animatronic ride space and the “real world” of the films.<sup>758</sup>

Other changes were made to bring the world of *Pirates of the Caribbean* to the parks outside of the ride itself. In 2007, Tom Sawyer’s Island was reopened “Pirate’s Lair on Tom Sawyer’s Island,” coinciding with the release of the franchise’s third film, *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End* (2007).<sup>759</sup> Although the Disneyland website maintains the island’s ties with the island’s original Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn mythology, calling for visitors to “Travel by log raft across the Rivers of America and retrace the steps of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn when they ran away to live carefree lives as pirates,” Pirate’s Lair extends the world of *Pirates of the Caribbean* further outside of the bounds of the ride and into the park.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>757</sup> Eugene W. Fields, “Blackbeard Comes to Disneyland’s Pirates Ride,” *Orange County Register*, May 17, 2011, <https://www.ocregister.com/2011/05/17/blackbeard-comes-to-disneylands-pirates-ride/>. The mist waterfall and projection were removed altogether during the 2018 renovations to the ride, which restored the original Paul Frees narration. See “Disneyland’s Pirates of the Caribbean Reopens with New Scenes,” *Attractions Magazine*, June 9, 2018, <https://attractionsmagazine.com/disneylands-pirates-of-the-caribbean-reopens-with-new-scenes/>.

<sup>758</sup> J.D. Knapp, “Johnny Depp Surprises Guests Aboard Disneyland’s ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ Ride,” *Variety*, April 27, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/film/news/johnny-depp-pirates-of-the-caribbean-disneyland-ride-surprise-cameo-1202401220/>. For a video of this, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=50&v=FwauqxGbgQ0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=50&v=FwauqxGbgQ0&feature=emb_logo).

<sup>759</sup> David Reyes, “Pirates Overrun Tom Sawyer Island,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 2007, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-may-26-me-pirate26-story.html>.

<sup>760</sup> “Pirate’s Lair on Tom Sawyer Island,” Disneyland Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/attractions/disneyland/pirates-lair-on-tom-sawyer-island/>.

Several scholars have suggested that the changes to the original ride resulted in the linearization or closure of a formerly open ride narrative. In their discussion of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, for example, Schweizer and Pearce argue that after the ride was altered to include references to the films, “a more deliberate integration seems to occur, in which a conscious effort is being made to construct a cohesive story world from a vast collection of components across multiple media.”<sup>761</sup> They see the original Pirates ride as “a pastiche of intertextual references from different sources,” where Disney “piec[ed] together pirate mythology with imagery from swashbuckling tales, including Disney’s own early films *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan*.”<sup>762</sup> The release of the first film, Schweizer and Pearce contend, “signaled the universe of the Pirates ride transitioning from this series of fragments and tableaux into a cohesive narrative universe centered around the charismatic ne’er-do-well Captain Jack Sparrow played by Johnny Depp.”<sup>763</sup>

Citing Carolyn Jess-Cooke’s analysis, Schweizer and Pearce argue that the films become the new “original,” supplanting the original ride’s pastiche of scenes over time and retrofitting it into a story centered around the presence of the film’s main character, Jack Sparrow. According to Schweizer and Pearce, the first film, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*, references the ride, while its sequels build on the first film and its characters.<sup>764</sup> They argue that the insertion of Jack Sparrow into the ride via actor Johnny Depp’s likeness imposes a “more

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<sup>761</sup> Schweizer and Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas,” 99.

<sup>762</sup> Schweizer and Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas,” 95-96.

<sup>763</sup> Schweizer and Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas,” 100.

<sup>764</sup> Schweizer and Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas,” 100; Carolyn Jess-Cooke, “Sequelizing Spectatorship and Building Up the Kingdom: The Case of The Pirates of the Caribbean, Or, How a Theme Park Attraction Spawned a Multibillion-Dollar Film Franchise,” in *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel*, eds. Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Constantine Verevis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 205–224.

linear narrative in the ride,” particularly via “the ride’s conclusion, [when] Sparrow is seen sitting atop a pile of treasure singing ‘Yo Ho (A Pirate’s Life For Me),’ like at the end of *Curse of the Black Pearl*.”<sup>765</sup> Noting the altered dialogue in particular, Kevin Wong, writing for *Kotaku*, similarly argues that with these changes, the ride “is no longer Pirates of the Caribbean. This is Pirates of the Caribbean: The Search For Captain Jack. This new, linear narrative about Jack Sparrow trying to beat his fellow pirates to some treasure is far less interesting than the vague non-narrative that it replaced.”<sup>766</sup>

Similarly, Anne Petersen argues that *Curse of the Black Pearl* commodifies and synergizes the ride, asserting that the movie sought to “close” the text in a way that makes it more marketable.<sup>767</sup> Petersen argues that the film acts as a “synergistic complement to the Disney ride,” stating that “the film overtly references and pays homage to the ride in a number of places, allowing audience members to easily draw associations between the two—the exact sort of synergy Disney desires.”<sup>768</sup> Petersen argues that “a switch of the medium (from amusement park ride to a fully fleshed-out film) effectively cemented the ‘message’ of Pirates of the Caribbean, closing a text once ‘open’ to myriad interpretations into a singular, ‘closed’ rendition.”<sup>769</sup> Since the ride “provided no clear precedent for Sparrow’s character,” Johnny Depp and the filmmakers had the freedom to “[add] character ambiguity, a troubled story arc, anti-

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<sup>765</sup> Schweizer and Pearce, “Remediation on the High Seas,” 102.

<sup>766</sup> Kevin Wong, “Jack Sparrow Ruined Disney’s Pirates of The Caribbean Ride,” *Kotaku*, April 27, 2017, <https://kotaku.com/jack-sparrow-ruined-disneys-pirates-of-the-caribbean-ri-1794698739>.

<sup>767</sup> Anne Petersen, “You Believe in Pirates, of Course...Disney’s Commodification and ‘Closure’ vs. Johnny Depp’s Aesthetic Piracy of ‘Pirates of the Caribbean,’” *Studies in Popular Culture* 29, no. 2 (April 2007): 64.

<sup>768</sup> Petersen, “You Believe in Pirates,” 70.

<sup>769</sup> Petersen, “You Believe in Pirates,” 65.

heroes, and off-color humor to the traditionally chaste Disney text.”<sup>770</sup> In this way, Petersen reads the film—and Depp’s character— as “pirating” the original ride; by changing the medium, the film co-opted and closed a formerly open text.<sup>771</sup>

However, the continued malleability of the space suggests that narratively, *Pirates of the Caribbean* is perhaps not as closed as it seems. To start, it is important to keep in mind that the alterations to the original Disneyland ride have been relatively limited. Rather than being completely reworked, the scenes have largely stayed the same—Jack Sparrow coexists alongside the existing ride. Even Barbossa was simply a recast of an older character in an already-existing scene. Aside from the projections in the grotto, the first half of the ride, where the riders move from the bayou through the grotto scenes with their skeletal inhabitants, was left almost untouched. While the altered dialogue and new animatronics arguably impose a linear narrative on the ride—though only on the second half—this narrative is somewhat thinly developed. Rather than pirates looking for loot, as in the original version, Barbossa, alongside some of the original animatronic pirates who have now been co-opted through dialogue, are now looking for Jack, who is, in turn, looking for treasure. Many scenes in the ride, however, appear to have little connection with Jack Sparrow or any other recognizable elements from the film, aside from those scenes in the film that were already taken from the ride itself, like the jail dog scene. Ultimately, changes to the ride in response to the *Pirates* films suggest that it was perhaps not transformed into a single, cohesive narrative, but rather remained an open text that was merely expanded to accommodate the new cinematic narratives alongside the original scenes and tableaux.

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<sup>770</sup> Petersen, “You Believe in Pirates,” 70-75.

<sup>771</sup> Petersen, “You Believe in Pirates,” 76.

While Jack Sparrow and Barbossa (and later Davy Jones and Blackbeard) were added to the ride, the ride's narrative hardly reflects that of the films. To start, the first half of the ride still sees riders, as described by Walt Disney in the 1968 *Wonderful World of Color* episode, "Disneyland: From The Pirates of the Caribbean to the World of Tomorrow," traveling "back into the past into the days of the pirates."<sup>772</sup> Moving from the present-day bayou down a waterfall, where they encounter the skeletons of dead pirates, visitors originally moved through a misty tunnel that transports them back to the "past," where the pirates appear as they did when they were alive. Now, riders simply move into the world of the film, rather than an imagined historical past. Furthermore, the latter half of the ride, where visitors encounter Barbossa and Sparrow, was not changed to reflect the film as much as to graft characters from the film onto the ride without significantly changing its existing scenes. While the ride now sees Barbossa and his crew searching for Jack Sparrow during their assault on Port Royal, in the film *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*, Barbossa and his crew did not seek Sparrow, but rather the final piece of cursed Aztec gold and Bootstrap Bill Turner's child, both of which they need to release them from the curse. In other words, the altered ride does not accurately reflect the plot of the film. Overall, it appears that when the ride was changed, the film had to be altered to fit the existing ride, rather than the other way around.

Newer Pirates-related additions to Disney Parks internationally demonstrate the continued reciprocity between rides and films, where the older elements, scenes, and concepts from the original Pirates attraction are still present alongside the characters and narrative elements of the films. This can be seen in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for the Sunken Treasure* at Shanghai Disneyland, which opened in 2016 and is the second *Pirates*-based

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<sup>772</sup> For a copy of the program, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di77CDUSKTs>.



attraction to have been built after the release of the films.<sup>773</sup> A boat dark ride, Battle for the Sunken Treasure includes “large-scale media projection, as well as a new ride system in which boats can spin, travel sideways, and move backwards.”<sup>774</sup> Yet for all of its technological innovation and leaning into the cinematic version of the Pirates theme—the attraction is set in Pirates Cove, the first and only Pirates-based park land—the ride still reflects formal elements of the original Disneyland version. Structurally, it reflects the original Pirates of the Caribbean attraction’s division between the first half of the ride, with its grotto populated by skeletal pirates, and the second half, where visitors encounter the pirates in the (Animatronic) flesh.

Scenes in the first part of Battle for the Sunken Treasure parallel the original 1967 Disneyland attraction. Like the original ride, Battle for the Sunken Treasure begins with riders passing under a talking Animatronic skull and crossbones. Aboard much larger boats, visitors then move through a grotto and past a series of tableaux populated by skeletal pirates. Though not identical, these scenes recall those in the original ride, as they depict moments in the pirates’ lives. To the right of the boat, a skeletal pirate captain runs another skeletal pirate through with his cutlass as he kneels bent over an open treasure chest. To the left, a group of skeletal pirates is seated around a table. The boat then passes by the famous jail dog scene, now recreated with three skeletal pirates enticing a skeletal dog instead of the original full-bodied Animatronics. Finally, riders encounter a skeleton at the helm of a ship, which recalls a similar scene from the grotto of the original ride. However, here, the skeleton magically transforms into the very much alive appearing Jack Sparrow.

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<sup>773</sup> The first was Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Captain Jack Sparrow, a walk-through attraction that ran at Disney’s Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World Resort from November 2012 through December 2014.

<sup>774</sup> “Pirates of the Caribbean – Battle for the Sunken Treasure,” Disney A to Z, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://d23.com/a-to-z/pirates-caribbean-battle-sunken-treasure/>.

Jack Sparrow's appearance partway through the ride, and his transformation from skeletal captain to a recognizable film character, signals the transition from scenes that recall the original ride to those entirely derived from the films. This kicks off the ride's spectacular second half, where it abandons its forward movement through space as riders appear to be plunged under the sea, where they encounter elements from the later *Pirates* films, including the monstrous Kraken and Davy Jones, before emerging from the depths amidst a battle between Sparrow and Jones's massive ships.<sup>775</sup> Like the newer plot narrative imposed on the original *Pirates* attraction, the second half of this ride, too, is centered on an antagonist's—here Davy Jones—pursuit of Jack, himself in pursuit of treasure. The complex and fantastical narratives of the films themselves, which involve curses, blood debts, ancient goddesses, prophecies, and legendary artifacts, is downplayed in favor of the simple narrative of treasure-hunting, like the narrative that was grafted onto the original Disneyland ride. Thus, the essence of the original ride appears to persist alongside the newer, flashier narrative world of the cinematic characters.

The Shanghai Disney Resort Website addresses the mixture of original ride and film as it describes *Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for the Sunken Treasure*: “From Films to Full-Blown Attraction. Walt Disney's original vision receives a romantic remake honoring the most adored adventurer ever—Captain Jack...life once again imitates art as Shanghai Disneyland premieres *Pirates of the Caribbean Battle for the Sunken Treasure*, an all-new take on the classic attraction—inspired by the films!”<sup>776</sup> The attraction is presented not as a brand-new ride, but a “take” on the original that is, simultaneously, “inspired by the films.” This language

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<sup>775</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TVx9\\_HGWbs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TVx9_HGWbs). This video contains both of the ride's two endings.

<sup>776</sup> “*Pirates of the Caribbean Battle for the Sunken Treasure*,” Shanghai Disney Resort, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.shanghaidisneyresort.com/en/attractions/pirates-of-caribbean/>.

distinguishes between the original ride, which is framed here as distinct from the films, and the story world of the *Pirates* franchise. What both the original Disneyland attraction and the newer Shanghai ride demonstrate, therefore, is an ongoing reciprocal relationship between ride and film, where the original ride elements appear to stay consistent even as the stories told about Jack Sparrow continue to be developed.

While the ride story world opens to accommodate new narratives, the films themselves are arguably not neatly “closed” texts themselves. Referencing concepts taken from folklore studies, Petersen argues that “whereas an ‘open’ text, such as an oral narrative, is characterized by a dynamicism that allows cultural variation and nuance appropriate to time and location, the closed text remains constant.”<sup>777</sup> As *Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for the Sunken Treasure* suggests, the film’s narrative world can vary depending on its context, in this instance as it adapts to the legacy form of the original *Pirates* attraction. While Petersen sees the *Pirates* films (there were only two at the time of her writing) as “closing” the ride’s original openness, the continued presence of original ride scenes and structures alongside the expansion of the cinematic *Pirates* universe in the parks suggests a dynamism that accommodates both ride and film world simultaneously. In other words, even as park space continues to invoke the cinematic *Pirates* narrative and characters, the original ride elements persist. Moreover, the films’ continued references to ride space suggests that the attraction’s narrative world was not necessarily closed by its film counterpart, but rather expanded. Although the first film—*The Curse of the Black Pearl*—contained many visual and aural references to the ride, its sequels

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<sup>777</sup> Petersen, “You Believe in Pirates,” 66.

continued to include ride references.<sup>778</sup> In other words, the ride remained a coherent text from which the films continued to draw. While Shanghai Disneyland’s *Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for the Sunken Treasure* attraction could be seen as further “closing” the *Pirates* text (i.e., that of the original attraction) by emphasizing the cinematic story world, the persistence of original ride elements even as the films are emphasized on such a spectacular scale, suggests a lasting co-existence or comingling of the two texts rather than the eclipse of one by the other.

### **A Great Big, Beautiful *Tomorrowland*: Disney’s First Land-Based Film and the Experiential Ideologies of Immersive Park Space**

There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow/Shining at the end of every day  
There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow/And tomorrow's just a dream away  
—“There's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow,” Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman

While most of Disney’s forays into park-based films are based on single attractions, in 2015, the company released its first—and, to date, only—land-based film: *Tomorrowland*. As an adaptation that stems from a physical park space, *Tomorrowland* shares a kinship with the other park-films in this chapter. We can consider it along some of the same lines, as it raises similar issues regarding architectural adaptation and spatial nostalgia. However, as Chapters One and Two demonstrate, there are important distinctions between how single attractions and entire lands function in terms of narrative and experience. *Tomorrowland*, too, operates differently as a spatial cinematic adaptation. While ride-based films generally build on a single story, as a land-based film, *Tomorrowland* takes on a bigger, more complex space—one with a more nebulous

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<sup>778</sup> Fox, “Pirates of the Caribbean.” As Fox notes, the fifth installment, *Dead Men Tell No Tales*, contains the least out of any of the films.

narrative. As such, *Tomorrowland* provides a different example of the back-and-forth dialogue between two-dimensional screen media and three-dimensional physical space.

As scholars such as Davin Heckman have noted, beginning in 1955, Walt Disney used Tomorrowland to present an optimistic future that combined the promises of scientific and technological progress with rising corporate capitalism via attractions that presented an “obvious narrative of a better tomorrow through technology.”<sup>779</sup> Released in 2015 amidst a contemporary turn toward dystopian science fiction in screen media—and even dystopian theme parks specifically, such as those depicted in *Jurassic World* (2015) and HBO’s *Westworld* (2016)—*Tomorrowland*’s positive message for the future harkens back to the original utopian ideologies embodied by Disney’s physical park spaces. Analyzing *Tomorrowland* in comparison to the earlier philosophy and ideological work of Disneyland’s Tomorrowland illuminates how park space functions ideologically and how park-based media can be used to shape that ideology.

To map the film’s ideological use of space, this section considers the *Tomorrowland* film’s relationship to the original park spaces both visually, as physical park locations are invoked on screen, and conceptually, as the ideology of Disneyland’s Tomorrowland is recapitulated in the film’s message. *Tomorrowland* reappropriates the physical spaces of the park as a means of repositioning the future as a utopian destination, both within the film’s narrative and in the physical, visitable park. While the film appears to center progressive ideologies that counter the current dystopian visions of the future, it ultimately nostalgically upholds Tomorrowland’s optimistic vision of the future as inextricably tied to corporate progress. Instead of outside sponsors, however, progress in the film is tied directly to The Walt Disney Company

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<sup>779</sup> Davin Heckman, “Disney’s Immersive Futurism,” in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press, 2016), 272.

itself as a vehicle for “dreamers” to envision a utopian future that isn’t that far from its original 1950s vision of tomorrow.

### ***Ideology in Park Lands***

As discussed previously, Disneyland’s original lands correlated to Disney’s own existing and emerging production categories, which were showcased in the *Disneyland* television series. Fantasyland reflected Disney’s classic animated fantasy films, like *Snow White* (1937) and *Peter Pan* (1953). Adventureland connected with the so-called “remote and adventurous regions” that evoked the spirit and settings of Disney’s True-Life Adventures documentary series and later adventure films like *Swiss Family Robinson* (1960).<sup>780</sup> Frontierland was intimately tied to Disney’s Western offerings, particularly the *Davy Crockett* serial which originally aired as part of the *Disneyland* television series, though the landscape also connected to other recent Disney releases like the documentary film *The Living Desert* (1953) and *The Vanishing Prairie* (1954). Tomorrowland drew on Disney’s science fiction films like *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954)

These production categories, and thus the lands themselves, are linked with genres that come, in part, from film. Film genres themselves, of course, carry with them certain ideologies; as film scholars like Barry Keith Grant have argued, “entertainment inevitably contains, reflects and promulgates ideology.”<sup>781</sup> Referring to Roland Barthes’s discussion of cultural myth, Grant observes that

genre movies tend to be read as ritualized endorsements of dominant ideology. So the western is not really about a specific period in American history, but mantra of Manifest Destiny and the ‘winning’ of the west. The genre thus offers a series of mythic endorsements of American individualism, colonialism and racism. The civilization that is

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<sup>780</sup> As quoted in the 1955 television special *Dateline: Disneyland*. As early as 1953, Adventureland was conceived of as “True-Life Adventureland.” For more, see “How Walt Disney Invented the Nature Film,” Oh My Disney, The Walt Disney Company, April 22, 2016, <https://ohmy.disney.com/insider/2016/04/22/how-walt-disney-invented-the-nature-documentary/>.

<sup>781</sup> Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2007), 32.

advancing into the ‘wilderness’ (itself a mythic term suggesting that no culture existed there until Anglo-American society) is always bourgeois white American society. Similarly, the monstrous Other in horror films tends to be anything that threatens the status quo, while the musical and romantic comedy celebrate heteronormative values through their valorization of the romantic couple.<sup>782</sup>

Of course, all films are ideological, but genre films tend to reflect and engage with particular ideological themes that reflect “dominant ideology.”<sup>783</sup> Coming as they did out of film genres, the “lands” at Disneyland—and the attractions within them—likewise evoke genres and employ generic tropes, archetypes, themes, and symbols. In turn, they carry these genres’ symbolic and ideological meanings.

Media scholars have explored how Disney’s park lands function as cinematic spaces, including how their origins in film genres informs their ideologies. Richard Francaviglia explores the ideological meanings embedded in Frontierland by considering how the park land operates as a map. Arguing that “even shaped environments may be maps,” Francaviglia asserts that theme parks “are also three-dimensional topographic representations of places real or imagined, and are thus maps.”<sup>784</sup> Francaviglia’s analysis considers how the geography of Frontierland tells a simplified story of American empire-building, including the development of towns, forts, and transportation systems. Frontierland’s geography conveys not only messages of dominance over nature, as evidenced by the Mine Train Through Nature’s Wonderland and The Living Desert, but also ideologies of racial and ethnic segregation, domination, and assimilation through the “Anglo-centric cartographic order and design of Frontierland,” which originally

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<sup>782</sup> Grant, *Film Genre*, 33. Grant points out that while “popular culture does tend to adhere to dominant ideology...this is not always the case,” and that some genres/films “have been shown to question if not subvert accepted values.”

<sup>783</sup> Grant, *Film Genre*, 33.

<sup>784</sup> Francaviglia, “Frontierland as an Allegorical Map,” 60.

placed Native Americans on the periphery of the land.<sup>785</sup> Francaviglia speaks to how Frontierland's built space envisioned Anglo civilization overcoming both "natural hazards" and "cultural/social misfits": "By overcoming these physical and cultural hazards, Frontierland allowed proper Anglo American civilization to penetrate to the very interior of the untamed West."<sup>786</sup> Thus, as Francaviglia suggests, being immersed in these geographical spaces has ideological ramifications for the visitor. Frontierland, to use his example, is both an inhabitable interactive environment as well as an ideological map. As a map, he argues, Frontierland can be used for navigation, "but it was also didactically used to instruct individuals how to view places and the peoples who occupy (or should occupy) them. Disney used Frontierland as a stage on which to tell the story of how the western part of the country functioned in American history."<sup>787</sup>

Just as Frontierland imagines the American Southwest from an Anglo-centric colonizing perspective of the so-called "frontier," Adventureland depicts African, Asian, and Oceanian locations and cultures within an exoticized colonialist framework. During the live opening day Dateline: Disneyland broadcast on ABC on July 17, 1955, Bob Cummings described Adventureland from the colonizing perspective of Western exploration of so-called "primitive" lands: "We are now at the beginning of a True Life Adventure into a still unconquered and untamed region of our own world: a Tahitian village where you can experience a slice of life as it exists in the paradise of the Pacific, an African trading post, the spearhead of civilization in those primitive lands."<sup>788</sup> Craig Svonkin argues that "By confusing and mixing all of these 'exotic'

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<sup>785</sup> Francaviglia, "Frontierland as an Allegorical Map," 77.

<sup>786</sup> Francaviglia, "Frontierland as an Allegorical Map," 78.

<sup>787</sup> Francaviglia, "Frontierland as an Allegorical Map," 71.

<sup>788</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuzrZET-3Ew>.



foreign locales into one thematic melting-pot, the Disney Imagineers created the ultimate simulacrum of American primitivist desires.”<sup>789</sup> Noting how Adventureland celebrates colonialism, Deborah Philips identifies “attractions [that] explicitly celebrate the building of settlements,” like the Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse, and “retail outlets [that]...offer the tourist commodities from all the corners of the globe,” like “the Disneyland Adventureland Bazaar [that] carries shop titles that connote an imperial past when products were ‘Empire made.’”<sup>790</sup>

Adventureland had long been home to attractions like Jungle Cruise, with its racist portrayals of Indigenous African peoples, Walt Disney’s Enchanted Tiki Room’s appropriation and exoticization of Polynesian culture, and Swiss Family Treehouse’s representation of a white family’s colonialism (not to mention the film’s “racist representation of Asian and Middle Eastern peoples,” including actors in “yellow face” and “brown face”).<sup>791</sup> Yet even decades later, with the addition of Indiana Jones Adventure in 1995, colonialism and exoticization of non-Western culture were still at the heart of Adventureland. Indiana Jones Adventure, and its fictional Indian temple, presents its narrative from the perspective of 1930s archaeology that is deeply rooted in colonialism and a romanticized, yet threatening, cultural “Other.”<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> Svonkin, “A Southern California Boyhood,” 112.

<sup>790</sup> Philips, *Fairground Attractions*, 144.

<sup>791</sup> “Stories Matter.” The Walt Disney Company. Accessed May 15, 2022. <https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com>.

<sup>792</sup> This is, of course, in keeping with the imperialist tone of the films. See Tatiana Prorokova, “Translocations, Cultural Geography and Anthropological Imperialism in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*” in *Excavating Indiana Jones: Essays on the Films and Franchise*, ed. Randy Laist (Jefferson, N.C., McFarland & Company, Inc., 2020), 51-63; Sabrina Mittermeier, “Indiana Jones and the Theme Park Adventure,” in *Excavating Indiana Jones: Essays on the Films and Franchise*, ed. Randy Laist (Jefferson, N.C., McFarland & Company, Inc., 2020), 192-202.

Main Street, U.S.A., has similarly been analyzed in terms of its ideological bases. Robert Neuman explores how the “Small Town” film genre influenced Main Street, U.S.A. aesthetically and ideologically. He considers Disneyland’s Main Street in the context of the genre of small-town films that share three key features: railway station, main street, and residential district. Analyzing how cinematic set design influenced the construction of Main Street, Neuman points to how Imagineers turned to backlot design and filmmaking techniques including forced perspective, false fronts, signage, texture, and color to construct the space. These, he argues, recall techniques and aesthetics employed in small town films like *Our Town* (1940). Neuman also considers how Main Street, U.S.A. is imbued with the small-town ideals of these films, as it recalls so-called “basic American ideals” of community and nostalgic longing at a time of technological transition.<sup>793</sup> As Neuman observes:

employing Main Street as a point of transition between the real world outside the berm and the fantastic and exotic lands within, Disney located the architecture of this spine in a peaceful period of American history both familiar and comforting...In the words of Francaviglia, this choice of time and place, between the end of the gaslight era and the start of the age of electricity, is ‘archetypal and shared,’ satisfying a deep ‘nostalgic longing.’ Symbol of a less-troubled bygone era, Main Street reaffirms basic American ideals for each new generation of visitors.<sup>794</sup>

Of course, as Eric Avila notes, the specific small town Main Street, U.S.A. nostalgically longs for is a decidedly white small town, and in doing so it “superseded the racial and ethnic mix of an urbanizing region.”<sup>795</sup> These scholars thus emphasize how the very choice of these settings in conjunction with their design and presentation communicate viewpoints that are inextricably tied to political, racial, cultural, and social ideological positions.

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<sup>793</sup> Neuman, “Disneyland’s Main Street,” 42.

<sup>794</sup> Neuman, “Disneyland’s Main Street,” 41-42.

<sup>795</sup> Avila, “It Won’t Be Easy for Disneyland.”

As these observations suggest, many of Disneyland's ideological messages are entrenched in the park's genesis in the United States in the mid-1950s. As Avila asserts,

Disneyland

encapsulated the values built into the design of postwar suburban communities, and it anticipated the burgeoning political culture of suburban whiteness that overcame Southern California during the 1960s and 1970s. Extolling the virtues of consumerism, patriarchy, patriotism, and small-town midwestern whiteness, Disneyland issued a set of cultural motifs that emphasized a retreat from the public culture of New Deal liberalism and instead asserted a privatized, suburban alternative to that culture.<sup>796</sup>

Ideological messages emanating from its midcentury context pervade the individual lands as well. Francaviglia speaks to the appeal of Frontierland's Western mythology in the context of the Cold War:

Through [Frontierland's] creation, Disney shaped the West into a stylized iconic form, a place where heroes make history and pave the way for civilization. To do so, he called upon historical western figures such as Davy Crockett and Mike Fink to affirm the conservative tenet that there is no civilization without individual freedom. The fact that two famous and conservative actors, Fess Parker and Buddy Ebsen, were present at the opening of Frontierland confirmed a basic fact about the entire theme park. It was an elaborate set where Disney's films could be further dramatized, and where the park's visitors could actually take part in the drama they had seen on movie and television screens.<sup>797</sup>

Similarly, Svonkin writes of the Enchanted Tiki Room attraction in the context of post-war tiki culture of the U.S. 1950s and 1960s:

Walt Disney's Enchanted Tiki Room, opening as it did in 1963, arguably at the end of one era of American cultural and political history and the start of another, summed up much about post-World War II U.S. culture: a faith in technology and a firm belief that the United States was at the forefront of technological progress sure to bring about a better world, and a sense of nostalgia, wonder, and loss for those "exotic" cultures thought to be not easily assimilated by the increasingly dominant American culture.<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 107.

<sup>797</sup> Francaviglia, "Frontierland as an Allegorical Map," 70.

<sup>798</sup> Svonkin, "A Southern California Boyhood," 119.

Sabrina Mittermeier asserts that the “South Seas” myth of the Tiki Room, “provided a war-riddled nation (first the hot, then the cold) a sense of escapism.”<sup>799</sup> As Mittermeier notes, “a contemporary view on the Tiki phenomenon and its corresponding attractions at Disneyland inescapably brings up the problems of racism, cultural appropriation, and (post)colonial ‘orientalist’ ideas” that are inherent in the ideologies of these spaces.”<sup>800</sup>

Tomorrowland, like these other park lands, carries with it an ideological positioning linked to the particular futurism of its original 1950s context. Early Tomorrowland was inextricably connected not only to scientific advancement, but a future conceived in terms of capitalist modes of consumption and convenience. It was also not primarily focused on space or space travel, as it became in later years.<sup>801</sup> As a 1955 advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed, Tomorrowland envisioned a “new era,” the “future” of 1986, “where our hopes and dreams for the future become reality.”<sup>802</sup> “In Tomorrowland,” the ad promises, “you’ll marvel at the astounding exhibits of advanced science, developments presented by many of America’s leading industrial firms, all housed in buildings keynoted to futuristic architectural design.”<sup>803</sup> As this suggests, Tomorrowland’s particular vision of utopia was a branded one, aimed squarely at American consumers.

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<sup>799</sup> Sabrina Mittermeier, *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks: Middle Class Kingdoms* (Bristol, U.K., and Chicago: Intellect, 2021), 30.

<sup>800</sup> Mittermeier, *A Cultural History*, 30-31.

<sup>801</sup> Space exploration was an important part, but Space Station X-1 and the TWA-sponsored Rocket to the Moon were the only space-focused attractions open in Tomorrowland on opening day. For a list of opening-day attractions, see Mark Eades, “Disneyland Opening Day: These Were the Rides and Exhibits in 1955,” *Orange County Register*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.ocregister.com/2015/07/16/disneyland-opening-day-these-were-the-rides-and-exhibits-in-1955/>.

<sup>802</sup> “Tomorrowland,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1955, ProQuest.

<sup>803</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Tomorrowland.”

Attractions like the Kaiser Aluminum-sponsored Hall of Aluminum Fame and the Dutch Boy Paint Gallery foregrounded scientific progress of “modern” industrial and consumer materials. Referred to as “Kaiser Aluminum-Land” in the 1955 *L.A. Times* advertisement, the Aluminum exhibit asked visitors to “take a look at tomorrow” and “imagine your future home, at work and play” as you “personally participate in a delightfully told true story of how the sleeping giant of metals—aluminum—was awakened and how it became your friendly servant.”<sup>804</sup> An advertisement in the 1957 Dutch Boy Disneyland Coloring Book, which was handed out to visitors, details advancements in paint technology, including “new ‘Dutch Boy’ *Instant NALPLEX*.”<sup>805</sup> An opening day attraction, the Monsanto Hall of Chemistry promised to “[show] you the romance of chemistry, how chemically-made products benefit your life, how they can make a new and startling world tomorrow. Your food, clothing, housing, health, and transportation all depend on chemistry...and the future holds some exciting, wonderful things in store for you.”<sup>806</sup> This progress was always presented in terms of how it related to or could be applied in visitors’ everyday lives.

Monsanto also sponsored the House of the Future, an attraction that opened in 1957 and promised to be, according to a *Los Angeles Times* writeup, “a forerunner of the dwelling the typical American family of four may be living in 10 years from now.”<sup>807</sup> Described as having been “designed as part of a continuing plastics-in-building research project sponsored by Monsanto at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology,” the House of the Future was “the result

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<sup>804</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Tomorrowland.”

<sup>805</sup> For a copy of the coloring book, see <https://davelandblog.blogspot.com/2008/12/early-tomorrowland-exhibits-dutch-boy.html>.

<sup>806</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Tomorrowland.”

<sup>807</sup> “House of Future Previewed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1957, ProQuest.

of more than three years' study."<sup>808</sup> The *Times* article describes the House in stereotypically gendered and patriarchal terms, noting that it "includes features the housewife never dreamed possible," such as "an irradiated food center, including microwave cooking and ultrasonic dishwashing."<sup>809</sup> The *Times* writeup describes how a ceremonial key was presented to 11-year-old Wendy Stuart, dubbed "the Housewife of the Future," who reportedly responded "gosh, I must be dreaming" upon touring the house.<sup>810</sup> Monsanto's House of the Future epitomizes the early Tomorrowland ideology of technological progress and consumerist utopia created by capitalist consumption, where advancements come from industry and the marketplace and produce benefits that would specifically enhance the lives of middle-class families. These sponsored spaces support, as Avila notes, "the Disneyland premise that corporations could make the world not only more exciting, uplifting, and convenient, but also better-tasting and sweeter-smelling."<sup>811</sup>

From its earliest years, Tomorrowland also included promotional spaces linked directly to Disney's own properties. The 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea walkthrough exhibit, for example, opened in August 1955 and featured sets from the eponymous 1954 film. The exhibit also tied into the *Disneyland* television series, which had broadcast a promotional documentary episode on the making of the film titled "Operation Undersea" in late 1954. In later years, other Tomorrowland spaces were also used for Disney promotions. The Tomorrowland Theater (formerly Magic Eye Theater), which exhibited 3-D films like *Magic Journeys* and "4-D"

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<sup>808</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "House of Future Previewed."

<sup>809</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "House of Future Previewed."

<sup>810</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "House of Future Previewed."

<sup>811</sup> Avila, *Popular Culture*, 131.

attractions like *Captain EO* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*, has also been used to screen promotional films like “*Star Wars: Path of the Jedi*, previews of Disney feature films, and the Pixar Shorts Film Festival.”<sup>812</sup> The building that once housed the *Carousel of Progress* attraction, *America Sings*, and *Innoventions* was repurposed as *Star Wars Launch Bay* in 2015. Serving more as a promotional space than an immersive one—despite its character meet-and-greets, the space is dominated by retail merchandise—*Star Wars Launch Bay* opened as part of the “Season of the Force” seasonal event, which was timed alongside the launch of the “sequel trilogy,” following the release of *The Force Awakens* in late 2015.<sup>813</sup>

Since 1955, Tomorrowland has changed substantially, though a few of its original attractions and some of its original ethos as a space of scientific advancement mixed with corporate consumption persisted over the years. Some original or early attractions like the *Monorail*, *Autopia*, and the *Astro Orbiter* remain.<sup>814</sup> The original consumerist spirit of the land was maintained over the years in attractions like *Innoventions*, an exhibit of new and emerging technologies that occupied the original *Carousel of Progress* building from 1998 to 2015. While the exhibits inside changed over time, they were all sponsored or promotional spaces. In 1998, for example, the ground floor of the exhibit opened as the *Taylor Morrison / Microsoft*

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<sup>812</sup> “Tomorrowland Theater,” *Disney A to Z*, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://d23.com/a-to-z/tomorrowland-theater/>.

<sup>813</sup> Erin Glover, “Live Updates from Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Presentation at 2015 D23 EXPO,” *Disney Parks Blog*, August 15, 2015, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2015/08/live-updates-from-walt-disney-parks-and-resorts-presentation-at-2015-d23-expo/>. Disney also announced updates to *Star Tours – The Adventures Continue* that would incorporate “locations and characters from the upcoming film.” This publicity push for Disney’s new *Star Wars* films followed the company’s acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2012.

<sup>814</sup> The *Astro Orbiter* is the current incarnation of the original *Astro Jets*, which opened in 1956. The updated attraction has been moved from its original location.

Innoventions Dream Home, a walk-through model smart home sponsored by Microsoft, HP, Life|ware, and Taylor Morrison.

Despite these lingering strains of the land's original emphasis on corporate-sponsored futurism, over the years additions to Tomorrowland moved away from the focus on science and innovation and toward a space fantasy theme, exemplified in the 1980s with the addition of attractions like the *Star Wars*-based Star Tours and the Michael Jackson musical space fantasy 4D experience Captain EO. These attractions, while maintaining the association with space exploration that characterized some of early Tomorrowland, focused on adventures set in space rather than on space as a site of technological innovation or a means of gaining scientific knowledge. Even the 1977 attraction Space Mountain, an indoor rollercoaster that simulates a voyage through the dark of space, prioritizes the thrill of space exploration over its scientific implications.

These changes likely occurred in part because Tomorrowland suffered an identity crisis of sorts when the future as imagined in 1955 too-quickly became the present and then the past. Other Disney Park Tomorrowlands illustrate how Disney has attempted to deal with this crisis. As Disney attempted to adapt the layout of its flagship park in later years and in other cultural contexts, the company opted neither to recreate the original Tomorrowland's 1950s vision of the future nor to really attempt to predict the future at all. Tokyo Disneyland's Tomorrowland, which opened with the park in 1983, included copies of legacy attractions from U.S. Tomorrowlands like the Star Jets (a copy of the Astro Jets/Astro Orbiter/Star Jets of Disneyland and Florida's Magic Kingdom), the Grand Circle Raceway (an Autopia clone), and Circle-Vision 360°. Later in the 1980s, Tokyo Disneyland's Tomorrowland would add versions of Star Tours and Captain EO. In this way, it reflected the US parks' mixture of heritage attractions that evoked the original



1950s vision of a future characterized by car travel, space exploration, and technological innovation, and space-fantasy-themed attractions with big-name celebrity and IP draws. In 1992, Disneyland Paris opened with Discoveryland in place of Tomorrowland. Discoveryland eschewed the technological and consumerist visions of Disneyland's 1950s Tomorrowland in favor of more fantastical themes, using "design elements of steampunk and Art Déco as well as motifs and storylines from Jules Verne's novels to evoke a late-nineteenth century retrofuture."<sup>815</sup>

In recent years, changes to Disneyland's Tomorrowland have increasingly focused on new, popular IP, while still maintaining some of the older Tomorrowland attractions. While legacy attractions like the Astro Orbiter, Autopia, Monorail, Space Mountain remain in operation, Disney added the *Toy Story*-based Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters in 2005 and revamped the Submarine Voyage into the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage in 2007. As IP-based attractions, these join Star Tours, which was updated as Star Tours – The Adventures Continue in 2011. The *Star Wars* franchise has become more prominent elsewhere in Tomorrowland as well, with Star Wars Launch Bay replacing Innoventions in 2015 alongside seasonal *Star Wars*-based overlays of Space Mountain as "Hyperspace Mountain."

The more recent Tomorrowlands of Hong Kong Disneyland (2005) and Shanghai Disneyland (2015) reflect how legacy Tomorrowland is being supplanted by more contemporary IP-based attractions. Hong Kong Disneyland's Tomorrowland is increasingly focused on *Star Wars* and *Avengers*-themed attractions, with the permanent transformation of Space Mountain into its *Star Wars* overlay iteration Hyperspace Mountain and the closure of legacy attractions

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<sup>815</sup> Florian Freitag, "Autotheming: Themed and Immersive Spaces in Self-Dialogue" in *A Reader in Themed and Immersive Spaces*, ed. Scott A. Lukas (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press, 2016), 144.

like the Autopia as well as not-quite-legacy, but still longstanding attractions like Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters. These have both been shuttered to make way for attractions that will be folded into the new *Avengers*-themed Stark Expo land in the park.<sup>816</sup> At the most recently built Tomorrowland at Shanghai Disneyland, the only legacy attraction is the Jet Packs, an incarnation of Disneyland's original Astro Jets (now Astro Orbiter) attraction. Aside from the Jet Packs, Shanghai's Tomorrowland attractions are currently a mixture of popular science fiction or science fiction-adjacent franchises, including the *Avengers* (Avengers Training Initiative), *Toy Story* (Buzz Lightyear Planet Rescue), *Lilo and Stitch* (Stitch Encounter), and *TRON* (TRON Lightcycle Power Run and TRON Realm). Besides Paris's Discoveryland, however, most of these parks retain Tomorrowland name, suggesting that there is still a shared concept of "Tomorrowland," though it is far less ideologically coherent than its original 1955 incarnation.

### ***Tomorrowland's Regressive Futurism***

Connected through its title and visuals with the park's Tomorrowland, the *Tomorrowland* film reflects—while attempting to reshape—the larger ideological messages embedded in the land itself. More specifically, *Tomorrowland* illuminates Disney's attempt to reconcile Tomorrowland's heritage within a contemporary context, to clarify the ideology of "Tomorrowland" as a concept and a space. An analysis of the film's visual and thematic elements illustrates how Disney attempted to use imagery of park space in the film to re-engineer Tomorrowland to fit the contemporary ideologies of the 2010s.

The *Tomorrowland* film was released amidst a contemporary mediascape rife with popular dystopian media, and dystopian images of theme park space. Perhaps the most

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<sup>816</sup> Karla Cripps, "'Frozen,' Marvel and More: Hong Kong Disneyland's Huge Expansion Plans," *CNN*, November 23, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/hong-kong-disneyland-expansion/index.html>.

prominent of these is the *Jurassic Park* franchise (1993– ), which envisions the consequences of humanity’s technological and ecological hubris. Though the first *Jurassic Park* was released in 1993, the franchise saw a revival around the mid-2010s, with a theatrical 3-D re-release of the original film in 2013 and the revitalization of the franchise with *Jurassic World* in 2015, the same year *Tomorrowland* was released.<sup>817</sup> The year following *Tomorrowland*’s release, HBO’s *Westworld* (2016– ) presented a vision of violent and hedonistic theme parks populated by sentient robots and in which visitors can indulge their most violent fantasies. Beyond productions from major television and film studios, the 2013 independent film *Escape from Tomorrow*, which premiered at Sundance and was shot guerrilla-style inside the Disney Parks without Disney’s permission, depicts the Magic Kingdom as a nightmarish space.<sup>818</sup> Even the art world was engaging with dystopian theme parks at the time, illustrated by Banksy’s Dismaland, a collective art exhibition organized by the artist in 2015 and styled as a “bemusement park.” Banksy said of the exhibition, which reimagines Sleeping Beauty Castle as decayed and abandoned and includes a sculpture of Cinderella’s crashed carriage, with mangled horses and her lifeless body surrounded by paparazzi: “I guess you’d say it’s a theme park whose big theme is—theme parks should have bigger themes.”<sup>819</sup> *Tomorrowland* actively positions itself as a counterpoint to such dystopian visions.

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<sup>817</sup> This was followed by a sequel, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* in 2018, and another installation in the franchise, *Jurassic World: Dominion*, is due to be released in 2022.

<sup>818</sup> A.O. Scott, “Whoa, Are Snow White and Mulan Really Working the Street?,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/movies/in-escape-from-tomorrow-a-disney-park-feels-out-of-kilter.html>.

<sup>819</sup> Mark Brown, “Banksy’s Dismaland: ‘Amusements and Anarchism’ in Artist’s Biggest Project Yet,” *The Guardian*, August 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/aug/20/banksy-dismaland-amusements-anarchism-weston-super-mare>.

*Tomorrowland* is filled with imagery that invokes Disneyland's physical Tomorrowland. The film opens with the standard Walt Disney Pictures castle logo, which has been transformed into the futuristic skyline of the film's "Tomorrowland," with swooping structures, gleaming spires, and a building reminiscent of Space Mountain, as seen later in the film. The "castle" appears to be part of a larger futuristic landscape, suggesting an interconnected utopian world. During the film, this "Tomorrowland" realm is shown to be a futuristic alternate dimension accessed via a special pin.<sup>820</sup> While the Tomorrowland in the film is shown to be far more fantastic in scale and design than its real-life park counterpart, it shares an aesthetic continuity with elements familiar from park architecture and design, particularly that of Disneyland's 1967 "New Tomorrowland" update.<sup>821</sup>

In the film, Tomorrowland's white architecture, with its curvilinear elevated tracks and walkways, resembles the swooping parabolic struts that once supported the WEDWay PeopleMover. The elongated, pointed spires of the film's Tomorrowland resemble the 1967 entrance to Disneyland's "New Tomorrowland" as well as Space Mountain's iconic spiky white spires. A trackless hoveirail appears like a next-gen Monorail, snaking through the space like the Monorail at Disneyland. A building that clearly resembles Space Mountain can be seen in the distance in the film's Tomorrowland, though we never quite reach it. The Walt Disney Family Museum describes Disneyland's updated "New Tomorrowland" of 1967 as including a "stunningly sleek, modern, and futuristic promenade, blossoming flower beds giving way to the curving tracks of the PeopleMover, building façades impressed with geometric shapes, and in the

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<sup>820</sup> This, of course, calls to mind the Disney Parks practice of pin trading, and Disney did sell such pins in conjunction with the film's release.

<sup>821</sup> Lucas O. Seastrom, "'Next Stop, Tomorrowland!' Walt Disney's Future in 1967," *The Walt Disney Family Museum Blog*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/next-stop-tomorrowland-walt-disneys-future-1967>.

distance a twirling tower of rocket ships.”<sup>822</sup> This description could also describe the Tomorrowland in the film.

Disneyland—and its history—is further woven into the film with the relatively accurate depiction of the 1964 New York World’s Fair.<sup>823</sup> The first few minutes of the movie flash back to Frank’s childhood, where we see our protagonist, as a child, arriving at the fair. When young Frank steps off the bus, “There’s A Great, Big Beautiful Tomorrow” plays over the soundtrack. Written by Richard and Robert Sherman, the song was the theme for the Carousel of Progress, another 1964 World’s Fair attraction that, like It’s a Small World, would eventually move to Disneyland after the fair.<sup>824</sup> With lyrics like the epigraph at the beginning of this section, the song conveys a confident optimism about the future. The fair, though shown briefly, is likewise shown to be a brightly colored, wondrous space.

Disneyland is linked to Tomorrowland’s utopian dimension when Frank literally accesses the fantastical realm via the It’s a Small World ride, which was originally developed as an exhibit for the 1964 World’s Fair through a sponsorship from Pepsi-Cola, and eventually moved to Disneyland, where it has become an iconic part of the park landscape.<sup>825</sup> After being given a special pin, Frank sneaks onto one of the ride’s empty boats. While in the dark of the ride, his pin

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<sup>822</sup> Seastrom, ““Next Stop, Tomorrowland!””

<sup>823</sup> For photos of both, see Werner Weiss, ““it’s a small world’ Times Six,” *Yesterland*, updated June 28, 2019, <https://www.yesterland.com/smallworld.html>.

<sup>824</sup> Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, 110. Like Small World, the Carousel of Progress was also a product of corporate funding as it was sponsored by General Electric. In addition to It’s a Small World and the Carousel of Progress, there were two other Disney-created exhibits at this World’s Fair that became parts of Disneyland: the Ford Motors-sponsored “Magic Skyway,” which led to the WEDWay PeopleMover, and “Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln,” which was moved to the park after the fair.

<sup>825</sup> Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, 110. The attraction also served as a fundraiser for UNICEF. Replicas of It’s a Small World have since been created for The Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris, and Hong Kong Disneyland, indicating its status as a part of the Disneyland Park legacy.

is scanned, opening a trap door beneath his boat. His boat slides down the drop (recalling similar mechanisms in Disney attractions like Pirates of the Caribbean), bringing him to a transport, whose signage promises to take him from the “World’s Fair” to “Tomorrow.” Since the film shows that access to Tomorrowland is quite literally built into the Small World ride, it positions the Walt Disney Company itself as the entry point to the “great, big, beautiful tomorrow.”

Other elements of the film link Disney, Disneyland, and the ideal utopian future embodied by Tomorrowland. Tomorrowland is accessed later in the film through Paris’s Eiffel Tower, where Frank explains that Gustave Eiffel, Jules Verne, Nikola Tesla, and Thomas Edison were the “First Four” of Plus Ultra, the secret society that built Tomorrowland.<sup>826</sup> This connects the film further to other Disney Tomorrowlands, particularly Disneyland Paris’s Jules Verne-inspired retro futuristic Discoveryland, which stands in place of Tomorrowland in the park. Moreover, Walt Disney himself was counted amongst the later members of the fictional Plus Ultra in the world of *Tomorrowland*, as explored in the fictional alternate reality game “The Optimist,” which Disney ran in 2015.<sup>827</sup> This game clearly connects Disney, and his creations, to Tomorrowland’s utopian project. In the film, Athena—a recruiter for Tomorrowland who first recognizes Frank as a worthy dreamer and who helps the protagonists to save both Tomorrowland and the entire world—is an Audio-Animatronic being, a “living” manifestation of the technology pioneered by Disney through the parks. She represents the future, literally telling the young Frank, “I’m the future, Frank Walker.” Ultimately, these visual representations and narrative elements link the physical park space with the film and its ideological themes.

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<sup>826</sup> Frank tells Casey this in front of what appear to be wax figures of the four men, which recall Disney’s Audio-Animatronics, particularly those of Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln and Florida’s Hall of Presidents.

<sup>827</sup> Bryan Bishop, “How Disney Imagineering Revealed the Secrets of Tomorrowland Two Years Ago,” *The Verge*, May 23, 2015, <https://www.theverge.com/2013/8/20/4639110/the-optimist-disney-imagineerings-push-to-bring-alternate-reality>. See the fictional website at <https://www.stopplusultra.com/who-are-they/>.

The film's ideological message is conveyed in part through its main characters: Frank and Casey. During the film's opening moments, as Frank addresses the camera, he and Casey disagree over how to describe the future. As Frank argues that "the future can be scary. Unstable governments, overpopulation, wars on every continent, famine, water shortages, environmental collapse," Casey interrupts, noting that it can also be a source of "scientific breakthroughs, wonder and beauty." Continuing his dialogue with Casey in the film's opening moments, Frank says "When I was a kid, the future was..." Casey interrupts, "different, right?" Frank replies "Yeah." In contrast to his later cynicism, the film depicts young Frank as an optimist and his childhood in the 1960s is shown to be a time of hope for the future. He is shown bringing his homemade jetpack to the World's Fair Inventor's Competition, where he describes how he made it to be fun and inspiring.<sup>828</sup> The imagined future of Frank's childhood, however, and by extension, the optimistic future presented as characteristic of the 1960s, did not come to pass.

Frank's idealistic experience of the 1964 World's Fair and his childhood journey to Tomorrowland are contrasted with the film's present day and the imagined future as seen from the perspective of the present. Frank's present-day pessimistic description of the future—a world rife with war, famine, and environmental collapse—is shown on screens during the film's opening, as a probability machine and doomsday clock count down to the certain end of the world. At the beginning of the film, Casey takes over "telling the story" from Frank, saying "unlike you, I'm an optimist." As she begins to tell her story, we see Casey riding her motorcycle through a small-town Main Street. The camera starts on a run-down building with paper-covered windows, a "Space for Lease" sign, and a graffitied mural depicting a stylized atomic mushroom cloud. The camera follows her down the street, revealing that this Main Street is dirty, deserted,

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<sup>828</sup> When he is turned away because the jet pack does not work, he exclaims, "but I can make it work!"

and economically depressed. Casey, a dreamer who seems unique in her optimism for the future, is then shown sabotaging the demolition of a NASA launch platform, in an attempt to preserve what stands as a symbol of the scientific advancement and hope of the 1960s. Similarly, the alternate-dimension Tomorrowland in the film is shown to be decrepit and desolate in parts of the film; the promise for a better future that Frank saw as a child ultimately didn't come to pass. This is emphasized when the Blast from the Past store, with its copious displays of vintage science fiction artifacts, including Disney's own properties like *Star Wars* and *The Black Hole*, is spectacularly destroyed.

As part of the film's contrasting of the future of the past with the future of today, *Tomorrowland* positions itself as a commentary on apocalyptic visions of the future of the kind seen in contemporary dystopian films, television series, and franchises of the 2010s. Dystopian films and television series were particularly prominent at the time, from young adult franchises like *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015), *The Maze Runner* (2014-2018), and *Divergent* (2014-2016), to horror film and television series like *The Purge* (2013-2021) and *The Walking Dead* (2011-2022), to science fiction films like *Elysium* (2013) and *CHAPPiE* (2015), to reboots of and sequels to older films like the rebooted *Planet of the Apes* franchise (2011-2017), *Total Recall* (2012), *RoboCop* (2014), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015).<sup>829</sup> This is particularly evident in the film's references to a fake apocalyptic movie *ToxiCosmos 3: Nowhere To Go*. While on the Greyhound bus to the Blast from the Past store to find the origin of the Tomorrowland pin, Casey passes by a billboard for *ToxiCosmos 3*.<sup>830</sup> The billboard's burning cityscape starkly contrasts the film's hopeful soundtrack, as Casey is shown sketching the wondrous Tomorrowland in her

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<sup>829</sup> The genre's popularity appears to persist. Several of these franchises have future installments in progress.

<sup>830</sup> The bus recalls Frank's arrival to the World's Fair on a Greyhound bus in the beginning of the film.



notebook while wearing a NASA baseball cap, which aligns her with a sense of hope for the future.

Following *Tomorrowland*'s release, a parody movie trailer was released for *ToxiCosmos 3* that emphasizes the pessimistic doomsday outlook of dystopian films, presumably in contrast to *Tomorrowland*'s own optimistic take on the future. Opening with fake production company logos that reference "classic sci-fi films Terminator, Alien, RoboCop, Blade Runner, Soylent Green and District 9," the trailer is essentially "a sizzle reel of disaster footage from a ton of huge blockbuster hits."<sup>831</sup> Nix, *Tomorrowland*'s antagonist, is an embodiment of such films, believing that "to save civilization, I would show its collapse." However, as the film shows, he ends up creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, demonstrating that dwelling on global disaster causes it to come true. *Tomorrowland* thus frames itself as countering contemporary "pessimistic" dystopian films.<sup>832</sup> While the film shows that the futuristic visions of the mid-century (i.e., Disneyland's creation and the World's Fair) failed, it nevertheless attempts to rekindle their hope for a "great, big, beautiful tomorrow."

As an alternative to these negative visions of the future, the film proposes the power of imagination, dreams, and the individual to change the future, a vision of progress that ignores entrenched systemic problems and places the onus on the individual to spark change. Casey tells her brother in response to his questions about her sabotaging the destruction of the NASA platform that "even the teeniest of actions could change the future." In the middle of the film, when Casey sees the doomsday clock, she says to Frank "Don't we make our own destiny and

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<sup>831</sup> Germain Lussier, "A New Trailer Pokes Fun at Tomorrowland, While Being Part of Tomorrowland," *Gizmodo*, September 17, 2015, <https://gizmodo.com/a-new-trailer-pokes-fun-at-tomorrowland-while-being-pa-1731451710/amp>. See the trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw8Bxvd7cLk>.

<sup>832</sup> These films are typically critical of contemporary society and its structural problems.

stuff?” This causes the doomsday probability counter to shift from 100% probability to 99.9994%, as images of destruction on the screen temporarily switch to blue skies with puffy white clouds. Casey reminds her father of a story he has told her her whole life: “There are two wolves who are always fighting. One is darkness and despair. The other is light and hope. The question is: which wolf wins?” Her father replies, “Whichever one you feed.” In the following scene Casey is shown at school. Her teachers are shown talking about “mutually assured destruction,” “environmental entropy,” and “dystopia,” but Casey, with her hand in the air, desperate to be called on, asks “can we fix it?” Her teacher offers no response.

This message appears to be aimed directly at the audience—like other park-films, *Tomorrowland* begins and ends with a direct address to the viewer. At the start of the film, Frank looks into the camera and introduces himself: “Hi, I’m Frank...Ok, let’s get you up to speed. This is a story about the future, and the future can be scary.” Partway through the film, a young recruit in a flight suit addresses the camera: “Come on, we saved a seat just for you,” as she gestures toward the open hover-rail car. Frank directly addresses the camera again at the end of the film as he and Casey explain that they are looking for dreamers—as Casey says, “anyone who will feed the right wolf.” The film ends with a montage of people from all over the world and of all different interests, from ballet dancers and street musicians to engineers and conservationists, being given pins and arriving at Tomorrowland. The direct address, which positions the entire film as a flashback being told to those who will rebuild Tomorrowland, combined with the ending montage, implies that anyone watching the film could presumably be one of the “dreamers” who could help to build a better tomorrow.

A month prior to the film’s opening in May 2015, the film’s director Brad Bird tweeted a Pixar short film that gives additional backstory to the fictional Plus Ultra and presents a

condensed version of the film's messaging.<sup>833</sup> The short identifies "mankind's greatest resource" as "imagination." Describing a history of humankind that sees achievement coupled with atrocity, the short's narrator says that "in the hands of corporate interests bent on profit, and governments locked in perpetual war, the possibility of mutually assured destruction became inevitable." He describes how Plus Ultra,

Working in secret, free of the corruptions of money, politics, and power, the world's greatest minds have collaborated on another path for humanity, a tomorrow we need not fear but one we can aspire to. And that, fellow traveler, is why you have been invited here, at long last, we are building that tomorrow. You are about to enter a world of miracles and wonders, a shining beacon of hope for humankind. And in just twenty short years, we will share this extraordinary place with the entire world. So, would you like to see it?

This narration reflects *Tomorrowland*'s call for a return to nostalgic visions of the future shepherded by corporations like Disney itself. While the film champions the power of the individual, Disney itself is positioned in the film as a source of positive change and the access point for dreamers and their imaginations.<sup>834</sup> *Tomorrowland* offers its audience the comfort of a nostalgic look back to the past, specifically Disneyland's past, while framing that as, ultimately, a progressive vision for the future. Disney and Disneyland are positioned as the entry points to the future, quite literally through It's a Small World or through the figure of Athena, an Audio-Animatronic who guides the film's protagonists to a brighter tomorrow. In the film's wider mythology, Walt Disney himself is also framed as a creator of the alternate dimension of

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<sup>833</sup> Jason Guerrasio, "There Was an Important Scene Cut Out of 'Tomorrowland,'" *Business Insider*, May 23, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/tomorrowland-plus-ultra-origin-story-2015-5>. The short has since been removed from YouTube, but can still be viewed here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150601081213/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-US0Womb4&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>834</sup> Terms like "dream" and "imagination" are deeply rooted in the Disney brand. Myriad examples abound, from the term "Imagineering" to the name of Disney cruise ships like the Disney Dream. More recently, the "Dream Key" and "Imagine Key" are two tiers of Disney's new "Magic Key" annual pass program.

Tomorrowland itself. The film attempts to update park space by framing Tomorrowland as a democratic utopian world where anyone can make a better tomorrow, even as it positions the Walt Disney Company as the ultimate source for a more promising future.

However, *Tomorrowland*'s vision of the realm of Tomorrowland is ultimately not reflected in the actual park space. What visitors experience now in Disneyland's Tomorrowland is more of a muddled jumble of early park heritage—including some of the retro architectural design and legacy rides, with popular IP deriving from behemoth Disney properties like Star Wars, Pixar, and Marvel—rather than a coherent (or original) vision of a utopian futuristic space like that depicted in the film. Yet, in another way, the film aligns quite well with the true ethos of Tomorrowland. Both the film and the land, from its very beginning, present a particular image of the Walt Disney Company. In invoking park spaces and therefore the idea of “Tomorrowland,” a concept so intimately linked with Disneyland that it is replicated as part of the core structure of six Disneyland-style parks internationally, the film ultimately acts as a branding tool in much the way Tomorrowland always has and continues to do.

### **The Happiest Plays on Earth: Disneyland in Video Games and Disneyland as a Video Game**<sup>835</sup>

When you go to the park, there is no horizon. Just Disneyland. The park achieved a kind of reality. Like these virtual reality games the children are playing with. I told them we were doing this 40 years ago! Disneyland is virtual reality.  
—John Hench, Imagineer<sup>836</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> Parts of this section were previously published as Heather Lea Birdsall, “The Happiest Plays on Earth: Theme Park Franchising in Disneyland Video Games,” in *The Franchise Era: Managing Media in the Digital Economy*, eds. James Fleury, Bryan Hikari Hartzheim, and Stephen Mamber (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 77-104.

<sup>836</sup> Alain Littaye, “Disney Legend John Hench Grand Interview and Video.” *Disney and More*, November 21, 2012, <https://disneyandmore.blogspot.com/2012/11/disney-legend-john-hench-grand.html>.

Chapters One and Two explored several examples of the increasing “gamification” of built park space, as interactive elements and gameplay logics are brought into park attractions and lands. However, Disney Parks have also been gamified in another way, as park space has quite literally become game space in park-based video games. In this final section, I will briefly leave the discussions of film and television that have been the primary focus of the earlier parts of this dissertation to trace the history of the virtual recreation of theme park space in video games. I then expand this discussion to look at how the larger space of the park itself can be understood to function as a user-determined physical game space. While this chapter has considered some of the differences between screen media and park space in terms of the irreproducibility of the physical park experience—and Disney’s attempts to bridge the gap between the physical and the virtual through film—this section explores how these media boundaries also break down as physical park space and virtual screen space increasingly converge.

In 2010, in lieu of a traditional handheld controller, Microsoft released the Kinect, an input device for its Xbox 360 video game console that senses the gamer’s body in three-dimensional space. With it, the video-game industry took a tentative (though apparently ill-fated) step toward a new level of immersive and embodied home gaming. The following year, Microsoft Studios published *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* (2011) for the Xbox 360, which used the Kinect sensor to allow the player to move kinetically in real space in order to move a virtual avatar through a mimetic recreation of the Disneyland Park in Anaheim, California.<sup>837</sup> The official Xbox website for *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* (*KDA*) calls for players to

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<sup>837</sup> Kinect Disneyland Adventures was externally licensed by Disney and developed by Frontier Developments for release by Microsoft Studios.

Experience Disneyland magic like never before! Fly, dance and dive into iconic attractions, share special moments with beloved Disney characters and take on challenging quests with the controller-free magic of Kinect for Xbox 360—and a touch of pixie dust. Kinect™: Disneyland® Adventures is your ticket to explore the timeless lands of Disneyland® park right in your living room.<sup>838</sup>

This quote points to the many issues at play in a game that sits on the convergent crossroads of physical theme parks, virtual video games, and media franchises.<sup>839</sup> It combines references to immersion via digital technology (“controller-free magic”), Disney franchises (“beloved Disney characters”), embodied theme park experiences (“Fly, dance and dive into iconic attractions”), the blurring of geographical, physical, and virtual boundaries (“explore the timeless lands of Disneyland® park right in your living room”), and intellectual property (as the multiple registered trademark symbols indicate).

Though *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* represents a unique moment in the development of Disney park video games, video games had digitally recreated Disney theme park space for decades, from home consoles to mobile devices. Since 1990, video games have brought Disneyland into the home, digitally extending the parks beyond their material limitations as built, physical spaces. In much the same way that the ABC television series *Disneyland* (1954–58) used the televisual medium to free the parks from their geographical constraints and to reach consumers in the home, Disneyland video games capitalize on their medium’s embodied and interactive nature to further this project of virtual/physical dissemination. Similarly, these games

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<sup>838</sup> The blurb for the 2017 remastered, non-Kinect rerelease of *Disneyland Adventures* for Xbox One and Windows 10 reads: “Disneyland Adventures allows children and Disney fans of all ages to explore Disneyland park in 4K Ultra HD and HDR, enjoy immersive adventures based on 18 popular attractions, engage in 100 challenging quests, and interact with 35 beloved Disney characters. Disneyland Adventures is your ticket to the magical world of Disneyland right in your living room.” In this description, the physical references to flying, dancing, and diving are conspicuously absent, gone with the now-defunct Kinect sensor.

<sup>839</sup> “Official” according to game developer Frontier’s own webpage for *Kinect Disneyland Adventures*. See <http://disneyland.frontier.co.uk/>.

use interactive play to guide users and future park visitors toward the desired modes of interaction with park space. Just as Walt Disney used the park and television to synergistically promote one another, the Disneyland video games use digital media to cross-promote their different media franchises. As the parks themselves facilitate consumption of other Disney media, video games based on or in the parks reflect and repeat this in a reciprocal fashion. The parks promote Disney's other media, but media, in this case video games, can also be used to promote Disneyland itself.

Though analog (built) and digital (video game) theme parks may seem ontologically at odds with one another, video games are particularly apt tools for adapting what are ultimately similarly ludic and interactive virtual and physical park spaces. Both the parks themselves and their digital incarnations are interactive spaces cocreated through their active use. The players themselves constitute the virtual and physical parks through the negotiated and participatory construction of meaning within these game worlds, while visitors actively manifest Disneyland's built park spaces by inhabiting them.<sup>840</sup>

Though the immersive construction of these spaces seeks to guide the visitor experiences, it is not always successful and is rather a process of negotiation that produces an experience somewhere between control and free play.<sup>841</sup> This is arguably akin to the tension between free play and linearity in many "open-world" video games, such as the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise

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<sup>840</sup> While Disney's efforts are certainly intended to control and guide as much of the experience as possible, it is important to note that visitors are not simply naive objects of manipulation but have an impact on the creation of the park as narrative through their own knowledge and choices. They constitute the variables and the missing element of the narrative as they add not entirely controllable organic elements, including those of play, memory, and nostalgia, as well as knowing participation, to the park space.

<sup>841</sup> An oft-cited example is early visitors' failure to understand that they were supposed to be Snow White in the Snow White and her Adventures attraction, leading to a redesign where the Snow White figure was added to the ride, See Barrier, *The Animated Man*. See Jess-Cooke, "Sequelizing Spectatorship" for a discussion of immersion as control.

(Rockstar Games, 1997–present). In his discussion of audience participation in the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Show Spectacular at Disney’s Hollywood Studios, J. P. Telotte observes how their immersion “emphasizes the deceptive power that both [movies and theme parks] wield, how they are equally able to sell us their illusions.”<sup>842</sup> He further notes how such immersion “practically celebrates our participation in that deception, our complicity in the bargain being offered for our consumption, ultimately calling into question just who wields the ‘control technology’ here.”<sup>843</sup> Disneyland visitors co-create the park experience, and this interactive element of participatory creation is also present in Disneyland’s virtual game versions and thus in the Disney park franchise itself. As Dusenberry has explained regarding the use of Disneyland in *Disney’s Epic Mickey* (Disney Interactive Studios, 2010):

By using players’ knowledge of Disney and allowing them to make choices about how they will participate with the different media embedded in the game, *Disney Epic Mickey* highlights the potential of film, TV, and game convergence to create meaningful spatial and temporal stories, where each medium adds complexity to the player’s experience with the franchise and where nostalgia is used to initiate and sustain long-term engagement with a broad, transmedia story.<sup>844</sup>

Dusenberry’s argument points to the significance of choice and agency as well as individual experience and nostalgia in the active creation of story experiences across different media.

In promising to bring the Disney park experience into the player’s home, park-based games show a persistent impulse, if not strategy, to further the park experience by bridging the experiential gap between the physical theme park and the virtual (and reproducible) screen. This recalls what Lynn Spigel has identified as early television’s power to provide “technological

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<sup>842</sup> Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 138.

<sup>843</sup> Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 138.

<sup>844</sup> Lisa K. Dusenberry, “Epic Nostalgia: Narrative Play and Transmedia Storytelling in *Disney Epic Mickey*,” in *Game On, Hollywood!: Essays on the Intersection of Video Games and Cinema*, eds. Gretchen Papazian and Joseph Michael Sommers (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 184.



solutions to distance.”<sup>845</sup> Like television, these games attempt to address a significant obstacle of theme-parks as mass media: overcoming the physical specificity of the theme park as media object. In other words, to franchise the Disney parks, which are experience-based, Disney must work out how to deliver the park experience outside of the park gates. Despite repeated attempts and technological advances, however, these games ultimately fail to capture the nature of the Disney park experience. They may invoke typical park behaviors and sights, and often do serve as compelling advertisements or nostalgic trips down memory lane—or Main Street, U.S.A.—but they can only approximate or invoke the park experience, rather than truly replicate it. The later rerelease of *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* as *Disneyland Adventures*, with the loss of the “immersive” Kinect technology, emphasizes just how large this experiential gap is and the inherent challenges of using digital technology in an attempt to bridge it. Charting the history of Disney park-based games and apps and considering other ways in which the parks have been “gamified” reveals an ever-deepening trend of using digital game modalities to expand the Disney parks beyond their physical limitations.

Using select case studies from the history of Disneyland video games, this final section traces how Disney has recreated park space in video games in order to understand how and why these games elicit the experience of being in a Disney park.<sup>846</sup> While there are many other video games that connect in some way to the parks—whether they use loose interpretations of park space as settings for narrative storylines such as the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise (Square-Enix,

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<sup>845</sup> Spigel, “Installing the Television Set,” 7.

<sup>846</sup> While Disney parks games released exclusively outside of the United States exceed the scope of the present study, further analysis of such games could help to expand the present discussion, particularly into how Disney parks video games work in transnational contexts. Examples include *Adventure of TOKYO DisneySEA* (Konami, 2001) or *Mickey no Tokyo Disneyland Daibōken* (“Mickey’s Great Adventure in Tokyo Disneyland,” Tomy, 1994), which contain levels based on park attractions but little representation or independent navigation of park space and whose park map serves primarily as a menu screen locating in which land the coming level/attraction is set.

2002–present) or are based on films derived from rides like *LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game* (Disney Interactive Studios, 2011)—this discussion is limited to focus on games that recreate the park space and in which navigation of the park space is a central experience of the game.<sup>847</sup> In particular, I explore video games that recreate the Parks’ site-specific geography and architecture and invoke the specific interactive behaviors of a Disney theme park visitor. That is, I am interested in games whose core focus and attraction are inhabiting park space and reproducing park experiences. Disney’s impulse to recreate the embodied park experience, and to transmit it into our homes, pockets, and beyond reveals how the company uses digital technology to dissolve physical park boundaries not only within the park, but outside of it as well.

### ***Out of the Television and Into the Home: Disney and Disneyland***

For Disney, the origins of the theme park are inextricably linked to the idea of bridging gaps between media. Disneyland originated as a new kind of media/park convergence, beginning with the very idea of the newly conceived “theme park” itself. As J. P. Telotte has noted, “The first step in developing Disneyland—and its subsequent offspring—involved creating a kind of entertainment hybrid, an amalgam of the amusement park and movie experience.”<sup>848</sup>

Ontologically, in Disneyland, Walt Disney combined the embodiment of the amusement-park form with the narrative immersion of the movies to create the “theme park,” a new kind of media experience that has since been expanded on and replicated throughout the world. As Telotte, Christopher Anderson, and Jennifer Gillan have demonstrated, however, Disneyland also developed out of the television industry.<sup>849</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> For an analysis of nostalgia and space in Disney Epic Mickey, see Dusenberry, “Epic Nostalgia,” 183–96.

<sup>848</sup> Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 119.

<sup>849</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*; Anderson, “Disneyland”; Gillan, *Television Brandcasting*. Telotte complicates this discussion by arguing that Disneyland actually lies at the convergent point of film, television, and theme park: “a

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, in 1954, ABC signed a deal with Disney, whereby the network promised \$2 million for a fifty-two-week series with a seven-year option for renewal. More importantly for the park, ABC agreed to purchase a 35 percent share in what would be Disneyland for \$500,000, providing Walt Disney with the funds needed to finance his vision.<sup>850</sup> The series, produced by Walt Disney Productions under the *Disneyland* title from 1954 to 1958, took up the anthology format, allowing Disney to use the program synergistically to promote several different aspects of the burgeoning Disney media empire.<sup>851</sup> The *Disneyland* television series was something of a mash-up that combined preexisting content (including the studio's back catalog of short cartoons), promotional segments for new studio releases, and sections of (or even entire) episodes devoted to showcasing the new theme park, all tied together with Walt as the host and personal guide through the world of Disney.<sup>852</sup> The use of the series as a vehicle for promoting existing Disney content was such a central focus for *Disneyland* that the “only completely new programming” in its first season was the three-part *Davy Crockett* serial and Walt Disney's hosted lead-ins.<sup>853</sup> *Davy Crockett*—which was later expanded into films, merchandise, and tie-in theme-park appearances—proved an early lesson

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key element of that intersection is a shift in image technology that it heralds, the movement from early television's dominantly live or kinoscoped image to the filmed image.” Telotte, *The Mouse Machine*, 1.

<sup>850</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland,” 141.

<sup>851</sup> The series was renamed and reconceived throughout the next half-century, most notably for the development and depiction of the park as *Walt Disney Presents* (1958–61) and *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* (1961–69). See Telotte, *Disney TV*, for a concise but cogent analysis of the series.

<sup>852</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 64–79.

<sup>853</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 27. See Gillan *Television Brandcasting*, 206–211 for a discussion of the use of Walt's persona as a form of brandcasting.

for Disney in how to use the combination of television, movies, and theme parks to capitalize on (and later to build) a successful transmedia franchise.<sup>854</sup>

While *Disneyland* the series quite literally brought Disneyland the park into existence through the financial backing of ABC, Anderson argues that “television’s figurative representation of Disneyland actually called the amusement park into existence,” bringing the possibility of such a place into the minds of future park visitors.<sup>855</sup> Even before the park was finished, the program raised consciousness about this new phenomenon—the theme park—and, as Gillan has demonstrated, showed viewers how to *think* about Disneyland.<sup>856</sup> As Karal Ann Marling and Kathy Merlock Jackson have noted, the show’s structure divided *Disneyland* based on the park’s lands of Frontierland, Tomorrowland, Adventureland, and Fantasyland, “corresponding with the studio’s cinematic genres: its signature animation, as well as action adventure, the Western, and science fiction.”<sup>857</sup> This fused park structure *and* navigation to the park’s conceptual roots in Disney media through the television. In other words, the *Disneyland* television series conceptually brought the park into existence for the viewer while bringing the park virtually into their home through the television set. The same can be said for Disney’s park-based video games.

Reciprocally, the *Disneyland* show simultaneously brought home viewers *to* Disneyland, as in its first episode, “The Disneyland Story,” where scale models, maps, and aerial footage are used virtually to transport home viewers to the still-unfinished park. Following these maps and

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<sup>854</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 31-35.

<sup>855</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland,” 134–135.

<sup>856</sup> Gillan, *Television Broadcasting*, 227–235.

<sup>857</sup> Jackson, “Synergistic Disney,” 21.

aerial shots, the camera pans through, in Walt's words, a "quarter-inch-to-the-foot scale model of Disneyland" to guide audiences through the mock park. As Telotte notes, "[T]he most curious element of 'The Disneyland Story' episode is precisely this insistence on blurring boundaries" between television and park.<sup>858</sup> As Walt Disney himself says as he introduces the park by way of an aerial map, "Disneyland the place and *Disneyland* the TV show are all part of the same."<sup>859</sup> This is accomplished, in part, by using the televisual medium to fluctuate between the simultaneous movement inward, from the park into the home, and outward, from the home into the park. The concept of "flying" the viewer into the park space was later brought to life in a 1958 episode, "An Adventure in the Magic Kingdom," in which Walt quite literally asks an animated Tinker Bell to fly visitors down the freeway (after sprinkling the screen/audience with pixie dust) and into the park for a visit.<sup>860</sup> While destabilizing virtual and physical boundaries, the bird's-eye view, scale model, or map also orients the viewer to park space and primes them to navigate that space. Disneyland video games would later employ this televisual technique for similar purposes.

More than simply presenting the parks to viewers, *Disneyland*'s blurring of these spatial boundaries also functioned as a means by which Disney could compel viewers to become visitors. Through the television series, the park was made into a narrative setting that would become activated when viewers actually travel to the park to take their parts in the "inhabitable text" of the park. According to Anderson, "a trip to Disneyland—using the conceptual map provided by the program—offered the family viewer a chance to perform in the Disneyland

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<sup>858</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 76.

<sup>859</sup> Telotte, *Disney TV*, 10.

<sup>860</sup> Gillan, *Television Broadcasting*, 215.

narrative, to provide unity and closure through personal experience, to witness the ‘aura’ to which television’s reproductive apparatus could only allude.”<sup>861</sup> Discussing the “aura” of art, Walter Benjamin observed that, “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>862</sup> The lack of this aura in the televisual representation of the physical park, combined with a narrative to be inhabited by the viewer, created a compelling impetus for viewers to become visitors. Through the combination of park and television, Disney developed a template for using different media forms as a method by which to expand the reach of its brand and to disseminate a distinct physical location to a potentially limitless number of household television sets.

In addition to presenting the park conceptually as an “inhabitable” narrative to be activated by a park visit, the *Disneyland* television series also helped to condition viewers in desired park behavior. In show segments focused on the park space itself, viewers are presented with not only how to think about the park but what to do there. In the “An Adventure in the Magic Kingdom” episode, as the aerial camera flies over the freeway, the *Disneyland* narrator and “voice of Disneyland” Dick Wesson notes that “if it wasn’t for Tink, we’d be driving to the Disney studio party [in Disneyland] in those cars down there,” a remark that reinforces the idea of a magical Disney experience, while also showing the future visitor’s reality of using the freeway to access Disneyland, which also taps into the park’s reliance on a burgeoning mid-century car culture.<sup>863</sup> As the camera tours around the park, it shows—and Wesson tells—viewers what to do there and thus *how* to use park space; in Frontierland alone, viewers are

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<sup>861</sup> Anderson, “Disneyland,” 152–153.

<sup>862</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 220.

<sup>863</sup> For a discussion of Disneyland’s relationship to automobile culture, see Karal Ann Marling, “Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream,” *American Art* 5, no. 1/2 (Winter–Spring 1991): 174–177.

impelled to “warm up [their] six shooters,” “take an excursion on the Mark Twain riverboat,” and “explore caves” on Tom Sawyer’s island.

Television, however, is not the only medium the Walt Disney Company has turned to as a vehicle for disseminating the experiences of its theme parks and compelling viewers to become visitors. As technologies advanced in the second half of the twentieth century, video games offered a new opportunity to bring the parks into the home and to virtually transport players to the parks. In her discussion of Disney-affiliated sitcoms and Disney Channel shorts, Gillan notes how, like the *Disneyland* television series, shows such as ABC’s *Modern Family* (2009–present) or *The Middle* (2009–18) “became paratexts for an experiential relationship to the park, which would begin when television viewers became site visitors.”<sup>864</sup> Similarly, video games became another method by which Disney fostered an experiential relationship to the park in the domestic space via gaming consoles, computers, and mobile devices. Like these television shows, video games “provide narratives through which Walt Disney desired viewers to experience the park. They shape viewers’ perceptions of what they would see at the park when they did make a site visit.”<sup>865</sup> As Dorene Koehler notes, games like *Kinect Disneyland Adventure* and *Epic Mickey* “return the experience of the park to the living room, utilizing the merchandizing and mythic power of the park as a place to both sell games and, like the *Disneyland* and *Mickey Mouse Club* shows of the past, turn the television into a magic window into the park.”<sup>866</sup> In this way, video games represent a digital continuation of the project begun by the *Disneyland* television series of

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<sup>864</sup> Gillan, *Television Broadcasting*, 235.

<sup>865</sup> Gillan, *Television Broadcasting*, 235.

<sup>866</sup> Koehler, *The Mouse and the Myth*, 163.

the 1950s to bring the parks into the home and cultivate desired viewer/visitor relationships to them as media texts themselves.

Because video games are inherently more interactive than television, as they require players to make decisions and afford them a greater degree of agency, the effect of this perceptual training is heightened as players become invested, through the reward mechanisms of video games, in conforming not only to the targeted perceptions of the park but also to the desired active *behaviors* of park interaction. Video games *require* players to act, to participate kinetically with their hands and bodies rather than just watch a screen. With the presence of the disembodied yet digitally manifest player (typically communicated visually through the presence of an avatar), games can train the player in how to behave in the physical environment of the theme park through the virtual space of the digital park on the screen. In other words, these simulated behaviors can then be reenacted “in real life” when players visit the park. As Michael Z. Newman has observed, early video games were characterized as a form of interactive, participatory television. According to Newman, “this idea of manipulable television, of the audience as active agents making graphics move around the television set, implies a transformation not only in the address of media to audiences, but also in the orientation of audiences to media.”<sup>867</sup> A textual analysis of Disneyland video games demonstrates that, like the *Disneyland* television series, these games allow Disney to shape how its parks are experienced by educating potential future visitors in not only how to think of, but how to *embody* the space of the park.

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<sup>867</sup> Michael Z. Newman, *Atari Age: The Emergence of Video Games in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 66.



For players who have already visited the parks, Disneyland video games can reinforce desired park behaviors, but they can also refresh and enhance memories of actual park visits. These games have the potential to invoke the nostalgia of past park experiences, to reshape memories in ways that emphasize preferred park interactions, and to reward the player with the satisfaction of already being familiar with the layout and attractions, having enacted the behaviors typical of the park experience. In her analysis of the dystopian version of Disneyland in *Disney Epic Mickey*, Dusenberry argues that “selecting Disneyland as a model for the game world triggers existing nostalgia in players familiar with Disney *and* manufactures nostalgia in players who understand gameplay but are unfamiliar with the game’s transmedia links.”<sup>868</sup> This gratification is likely enhanced for frequent park visitors, particularly for annual passholders who typically take pride in their park knowledge and experience— for them, these games can reinforce specialized inside knowledge.<sup>869</sup> Disney’s preferred methods of reception (how to conceive of the parks) and of behavior (how to act in them) are communicated through these virtual spaces by training future visitors as they interact with the game interface. Simultaneously, the parks are brought into the home, disseminating the park space and enabling more frequent interaction with it.

### ***Disneyland Goes Digital: Early Disney Parks Video Games***

The replication of Disney parks in video game form dates to the 1990 release of *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom*, developed and published by Capcom for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). At the time *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* was released, the

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<sup>868</sup> Dusenberry, “Epic Nostalgia,” 185–186.

<sup>869</sup> Disney ended the former Annual Pass program in 2021 and reopened it as the Magic Key program, which includes increased restrictions on the frequency of visits as well as requiring advance reservations for all park visits.

NES dominated the North American home-video gaming market, having revitalized it after the industry crash of 1983. By 1991, more than thirty-three million homes had NES consoles.<sup>870</sup>

When *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* came out in 1990, the conditions were prime for using this new, widespread personal technology as a vehicle for bringing an interactive digital Disneyland into the home.

In *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom*, the player navigates a rudimentary eight-bit overworld map of the Magic Kingdom using an avatar personalized with his, her, or their name.<sup>871</sup> Similar to the way in which the model and park map situate the viewer in the *Disneyland* television series, the digital map clearly situates the gameplay within the park space by approximating the actual hub-and-spoke layout of a Disney Magic Kingdom Park. The title locates the player within a Disney Park but not necessarily a specific one—while “Magic Kingdom” is indeed the official name of the Walt Disney World, Florida version of Disneyland park, other “Disneyland” parks, and typically Disneyland in Anaheim park, are also colloquially referred to as the “Magic Kingdom.” The multiple franchised physical “Disneyland” parks (at the time of the game’s release only in Anaheim, Orlando, and Tokyo) are thus all potentially and simultaneously invoked by the recognizable but non-location-specific game map.<sup>872</sup>

The ostensible object of *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* is to collect the six silver keys that unlock the castle for Mickey’s big parade. In doing so, the gameplay involves three modes

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<sup>870</sup> Steven L. Kent, “Super Mario Nation,” in *The Medium of the Video Game*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 46.

<sup>871</sup> Although the title, *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom*, and the cover art, which features Cinderella’s Castle from the Magic Kingdom Park in Orlando, seem to indicate that the game takes place at Walt Disney World, the game’s map is more reminiscent of the Disneyland Park in Anaheim. The phrase “Magic Kingdom” is perhaps meant to refer to Disney theme parks more generally.

<sup>872</sup> The games cover art appears to depict the Cinderella Castle of Walt Disney World and Tokyo Disneyland, though the 8-bit castle in the game itself is arguably squatter in shape, like Disneyland’s Sleeping Beauty Castle.

of engagement with the Disney parks: navigating the park space, answering trivia questions, and “experiencing,” or playing, the attractions. These different behaviors correspond to desired modes of interaction with the “real” Disney parks. Players are virtually engaged in an approximation of what it is like physically to inhabit and interact with the park space. The attractions in *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* are themed minigames with gameplay mechanics akin to other NES games. For example, the Autopia level mimics top-down vehicle racers like *Road Fighter* (Konami, 1985), the Haunted Mansion and Pirates of the Caribbean level recalls scrolling platformers like *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985), and Space Mountain is akin to space simulator shooters like *Star Voyager* (Acclaim, 1986). An obvious obstacle to recreating the park experience, especially in 8-bit form, is how to convert the built ride experience into a two-dimensional video game. The solution here, as in later games, is to translate rides into established video game modalities, a process often resulting in the creation of game narratives distinct from the actual attractions in the physical park. As M.J. Clarke has explained in relation to television video-game tie-ins, “licensed games typically translate their licenses into preexisting genres and formats.”<sup>873</sup> As the technology progresses, we can see this borne out to a certain extent—later games bear an “ever-increasing fidelity” to their source material, but “are constructed and played in a manner common to video games.”<sup>874</sup>

While game progression requires passing these minigame levels, the player cannot complete the game without also correctly answering multiple trivia questions about Disney history, which speaks to another mode of interaction with the park space: the cultivation and

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<sup>873</sup> M.J. Clarke, *Transmedia Television: New Trends in Network Serial Production* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 108.

<sup>874</sup> Clarke, *Transmedia Television*, 109. Though Clarke is talking specifically about video games licensed from television series here, his argument is also borne out in these Disney parks games.

demonstration of franchise knowledge and fandom. Questions vary from basic facts about the parks (such as “Which is the largest Disney Magic Kingdom?”) to trivia on early Disney television series (such as “What was the name of the girls’ ranch in the ‘Spin and Marty’ serial on the ‘Mickey Mouse Club’?”) and Disney films (such as “What is the name of the King of Hearts from ‘Alice in Wonderland’?”).<sup>875</sup> In essence, the gameplay trains the player as a Disney fan; players are rewarded for possessing the kind of knowledge that only a Disney devotee might know off the top of the head (pre-Internet) and taught the correct answer if wrong. Trivia also easily translates into gameplay, particularly when technology limits the ability to translate the park experience in a more realistic fashion.

Through gameplay, the player is both exposed to and educated in several desired behaviors required for progression through the game and which also constitute engagement with the Disneyland parks. A focus on attractions as the most desired destinations in the theme parks is emphasized through their privileged position as the “exciting” part of the game, as the visual and gameplay mechanics of these are more dynamic than simple map navigation or trivia selection. This recalls how Disney Imagineers use attractions as “wienie,” or “visual magnets” that help circulate visitors through physical park space.<sup>876</sup> Because the object of the game is to track down and collect a set of keys, even the collection of items and protopurchasing behaviors are encouraged (or, rather, required). The creation of a narrative storyline in which players are the catalyst (“Maybe you can find the six keys for us!”), however simple, implicates players as generative of the narrative even though they may not have a great degree of agency in the game.

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<sup>875</sup> According to the game, the answers are “Tokyo Disneyland,” “Little King,” and “Circle H.”

<sup>876</sup> Marty Sklar, *One Little Spark!: Mickey’s Ten Commandments and the Road to Imagineering* (Glendale, CA: Disney Editions, 2015), 34.

At the parks, visitors are guided through the space but ultimately decide how the “play” progresses. Even in a relatively early video game, with a basic premise and simple gameplay, desired forms of thinking about *and* behaving in the park are both taught and reinforced as a means of bringing the park experience into the home while also encouraging the player to become a Disneyland visitor.

In 1996, Disney Interactive—the studio’s video-game division that was established in 1994—released *Walt Disney World Explorer*, a CD-ROM application that represented a continuing effort to use digital media to further the Disney Parks franchise through digital Disney parks. Though less a game than an interactive map of Orlando’s Walt Disney World, *Walt Disney World Explorer* nevertheless used digital video game technology to fulfill many of the same functions as *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* and even the *Disneyland* television series to bring the park into the home and teach the player how to inhabit park space. According to its tagline, *Walt Disney World Explorer* let users “[e]xperience the sights, sounds and magic of Walt Disney World!” “From Cinderella Castle to The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror,” the CD-ROM box announces, “you and your family are about to enjoy the fun and excitement of the most magical place on earth!” The game functioned as a virtual tour guide, advertising the park’s features to potential visitors interested in learning more about the park.

*Walt Disney World Explorer* also taught users preferred ways of experiencing the park. Like *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom*, it reinforced brand knowledge through “Quiz Challenge” trivia questions, behind-the-scenes photos and videos, and even a timeline of Walt Disney World history. Similar, too, was *Walt Disney World Explorer*’s incorporation of collection, perhaps the most traditionally game-like feature of the application. Instead of keys, the focus was on collecting “Hidden Mickeys,” which are images or symbols of Mickey,

typically in the form of the simplified three-circle head-and-mouse ears silhouette icon, that have a long tradition of being hidden by Imagineers in the Disney theme parks and even in the company's animated films as a kind of inside joke with the fans. Among Disney park fans, there is an established tradition of collecting and exchanging knowledge and sightings of the locations of Hidden Mickeys, such as with the fan-run website [hiddenmickeys.org](http://hiddenmickeys.org). The application thus not only trained users as park-goers but also initiated them into fan practices. This helps to establish and maintain a fanbase for the parks themselves that is distinct from, though deeply interconnected with, the company's other media franchises.

In 2005, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts launched *Virtual Magic Kingdom*, developed in conjunction with the Sulake Corporation, as part of its "Happiest Celebration on Earth" promotional campaign to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Disneyland. A massively multiplayer online game, *Virtual Magic Kingdom* brought fans together in a digital space to experience the park in a virtual representation of a Disney-style theme park. *Virtual Magic Kingdom* resonated enough with players that after Disney shut it down in 2008, a devoted community of fans on [myvmk.com](http://myvmk.com) recreated the game. While *Virtual Magic Kingdom* contains lands and attractions based on real park features, the game design still uses some artistic license. The park space is less a total mimetic simulation than an approximation of a Disney park. While its map remains relatively faithful to Disneyland's, its park layout lacks the kind of photographic and cartographic accuracy of later games. Instead, identifiably accurate elements, such as the Jungle Cruise tableau of safari guides treed by an angry rhino, or the isometric rendition of the flying-over-London room in Peter Pan's Flight, indicate that this is a "Disney park."

Like *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* and *Walt Disney World Explorer*, *Virtual Magic Kingdom* also recreates the Disney park experience by invoking typical park behaviors.

Minigames serve in place of attractions and collecting and purchasing are elicited through the inclusion of special virtual pins and badges acquired through gameplay and even the opportunity to “shop” in the game. The connection between virtual park and physical park was further solidified with the implementation of in-park quests that rewarded users for visiting the real Disneyland and Walt Disney World.<sup>877</sup> Visitors could print out quests at home, and log into the in-park VMK kiosk to answer questions and earn both virtual and physical prizes.<sup>878</sup> With the integration of in-park quests with the otherwise strictly at-home gaming experience, *Virtual Magic Kingdom* reinforced a core purpose: to motivate users to become visitors and to teach them how to interact with the parks once they do. The virtual game space and the physical park space are thus further blended, and the actions taken in one (answering questions on a park kiosk) affects the other (receiving virtual in-game prizes). In other words, the game quite literally translated virtual behaviors into actual physical behaviors in the Disney parks. Like the games discussed above, *Virtual Magic Kingdom* brought the Disney parks into the home via a home computer and Internet connection, but it also allowed the player to have a “home” in the virtual park. Players are given virtual private rooms, themed to different Disney park spaces, which can be decorated with items bought and collected in the virtual Magic Kingdom. The park is brought into the home, while the “home” is brought into the (virtual) park, completing the reciprocal cycle from one kind of park space to the other.

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<sup>877</sup> Disney would also bridge the virtual and physical using video game technology with its Disney Infinity series (Disney Interactive Studios, 2013–2015) where physical toy figures bring characters and playsets into the digital game world.

<sup>878</sup> Michael Knight and Trisa Knight, *Fodor's Disneyland and Southern California with Kids* (New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, 2006), 153.

## **(Kinect) Disneyland Adventures**

It wasn't until the development and release of *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* in 2011 that digital graphic and interface technology allowed Disneyland park space to be realistically recreated with a high degree of accuracy. This was combined with a play mechanism that attempted to bridge the divide between the actual parks, which are fundamentally dependent on physical experience, and the screen experience of video games. Until *KDA*, preceding games used the more traditional interfaces of a controller or a keyboard and mouse as the point of interaction. Coming soon after the introduction of Microsoft's Kinect Technology, *KDA* was the first Disney park game to utilize the new body-as-controller motion-capture technology of Microsoft's Kinect virtually to adapt the embodied experience of the physical park and bring it into the home.<sup>879</sup> While it shares many of the same impulses as earlier Disney Parks game texts, *KDA* harnesses the newly available technology to blur further the boundaries between the virtual and the physical by prompting players to move around in, interact with, play in, and consume park space using their bodies. The kinetic theme park became more accessible at home through this new technology, whose interface integrates the player's own body and voice.

Released in November 2010, Microsoft's Kinect was initially wildly successful, selling eight million units in just over a month (far surpassing the company's five million unit estimate), with utopian promises to revolutionize at-home console gaming.<sup>880</sup> The Kinect is a "depth camera," that creates an image through infrared light to detect where objects are in space, so that

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<sup>879</sup> *Kinect Rush: A Disney–Pixar Adventure* (Microsoft Studios, 2012) followed *KDA* and employed similar aesthetics and mechanics. Though not set in a Disneyland park, but rather a fictional "Pixar Park," *Kinect Rush* arguably served similar superfranchise functions as it brought together Disney and Pixar properties, some of which also appear in Disney parks.

<sup>880</sup> Chris Morris, "Microsoft Kinect Sales Blast Predictions," *Variety*, January 5, 2011, <http://variety.com/2011/digital/news/microsoft-kinect-sales-blast-past-predictions-1118029819/>.



the player's body and voice act as controller.<sup>881</sup> In terms of play experience, it is similar to Nintendo's popular Wii interface, with its motion-sensitive controllers, while going one step further to erase the interface by eliminating the use of handheld controllers during gameplay. The removal of a handheld input device is meant to heighten the immersive gaming experience into a new kind of embodied gaming, turning the static experience of sitting with a controller into the more kinetic gaming experience of interacting with one's whole body while standing.

The packaging for *KDA* impels players to “[u]se your body, voice—and a touch of pixie dust—to explore the timeless worlds of *Disneyland* park in *Kinect: Disneyland Adventures*,” and a pack-in insert announces that, with Kinect games, “you are the controller.” *KDA*'s body/sensor input interface privileges the whole body—not just the hands/eyes—as the site of interaction. To start, players must hold their hand out in front to navigate the game menu where they create an onscreen avatar to serve as their proxy in the virtual park space. Character interactions are instigated through bodily movements as well, as players must wave their hand to interact with characters onscreen. Other virtual character interactions are triggered by their “real-life” proxies: players can hold their hands out to ask for autograph, bow to dance, hold their arms out to the side for a hug, or high-five characters. These physical gestures result in mini in-game cutscenes, where the onscreen avatar will hug, dance, or high-five the digital character. This produces a mirroring effect, with the player's physical movements virtually duplicated as the onscreen avatar synchronously recreates the player's “real-life” gestures and postures.

Enhancing the immersive mechanics of the Kinect, where a player's physical full-body movements correspond more directly to the embodied park experience, *KDA* also capitalizes on

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<sup>881</sup> Greg Borenstein, *Making Things See: 3D Vision with Kinect, Processing, Arduino and MakerBot* (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media, 2012), 1.

the increasingly realistic graphics enabled by the seventh-generation Xbox 360 console. As Clarke has observed of television-based licensed games, “[W]on by the technological advances of sixth- and seventh-generation gaming consoles and compelled by the cultural virtue of photorealism, licensed game makers maximize connection with the on-air series through the strict digital translation of recognizable visual elements.”<sup>882</sup> Similarly, realistic fidelity to park space, including layout, scale, and overall appearance, reinforces the game’s connection with the “real-life” Disneyland.

The game’s use of photography in gameplay reflects this tendency toward photographic realism. Some quests prompt the player to collect photographs with characters using the virtual in-game camera—photographs are of the player’s avatar and the character, though the player is typically prompted to copy the character’s pose with their body, thus matching their avatar’s pose with the character’s. Designated photo spots also direct players to take virtual “photographs” of the virtual space. In addition, the Kinect camera automatically takes photographs of the real-life player playing the game at points in the minigame play, a feature that recalls the ride photos taken on Disneyland attractions like Space Mountain or Splash Mountain.

The new Kinect technology was promoted as a step toward greater immersion and more authentic embodiment, and this kind of discourse characterizes the language used in promotions of *KDA*. The game trailer on the DisneyGames website carries the tagline: “Experience Disneyland magic like never before,” and the girls in the trailer exclaim, “I wish there was a Disneyland in our house!”<sup>883</sup> The game promises, therefore, to bring a heightened Disneyland

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<sup>882</sup> Clarke, *Transmedia Television*, 108.

<sup>883</sup> “Kinect Disneyland Adventures,” Disney, The Walt Disney Company, accessed July 23, 2018, <http://games.disney.com/kinect-disneyland-adventures-video-game>.

experience “like never before” into “our house” and, according to some reviewers, the game succeeded. Reviewer Jack DeVries of *IGN*, a self-confessed “Disneyland nut,” remarked, “*Kinect Disneyland Adventures* recreates the Magic Kingdom so well that it sometimes surpasses Disneyland itself.”<sup>884</sup> In many ways, that is the role *KDA* fulfills—a faithful virtual recreation of Disneyland that players can navigate and virtually “inhabit.” Players can simulate being in the park itself by collecting photographs, autographs, and pins while shopping for virtual souvenirs in various stores around the park. Players can also “ride” simulated rides; certain attractions are included as non-playable cutscenes that simulate the first-person perspective of riding an attraction, such as Dumbo the Flying Elephant, the King Arthur Carrousel, or the Mad Tea Party.

Simulation is only part of the game, however. Beyond these simple ride simulations and following the form of other Disney park video games before it, *KDA* also includes playable minigame “attractions.” These attractions are frequently loosely based on real attractions, most often with new storylines and content.<sup>885</sup> For example, part of the narrative of the second “chapter” of the Matterhorn minigame is that yetis have kidnapped Goofy; players help rescue him with “real-life” throwing motions that cause their avatars to throw snowballs at the monsters.<sup>886</sup> While the physical Matterhorn attraction at Disneyland does include Audio-Animatronic Abominable Snowmen, it can hardly be said to have more than a rudimentary

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<sup>884</sup> Jack DeVries, “Kinect Disneyland Adventures Review: The Happiest Kinect Game on Earth,” *IGN*, November 18, 2011, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2011/11/18/kinect-disneyland-adventures-review>.

<sup>885</sup> Similarly, Walt Disney World attractions inspired the racetracks in Walt Disney World Quest: Magical Racing Tour (Eidos Interactive, 2000). The game’s intro recalls the Disneyland television series, with the player “flying” into the Magic Kingdom and down Main Street U.S.A. Players use a stylized map of the resort to select levels.

<sup>886</sup> Goofy and his son Max encounter “the legendary Bigfoot” in the 1995 animated film *A Goofy Movie*, though the yetis in *KDA*, with their long white fur, red eyes, sharp fangs, and snowy environment, recall the much more frightening Abominable Snowmen from Disneyland’s Matterhorn attraction.

narrative, much less one that somehow involves Goofy. Moreover, the physical spaces of these playable rides in *KDA* are generally not faithfully recreated, putting them in sharp contrast with the larger park space of *KDA*, which approaches the uncanny in its adherence to actual park topography. While the Matterhorn *KDA* minigame does feature a toboggan ride similar to the Matterhorn roller coaster, the virtual Matterhorn is much more fantastical, and game-like, than its physical counterpart. In the first “chapter” of the minigame, players actively steer the in-game bobsled by leaning from side to side while, in the third, players “ski” by leaning, pumping their arms to go faster, and jumping to jump in-game. Similarly, in the Pirates of the Caribbean minigame, scenes from the ride become “playable” by players, such as the famous “prison dog” scene: in the ride, this scene is a tableau that visitors drift by but, in the game, players can throw fruit (with their arms) at the starving pirate prisoners. In the pirate-ship fight scene in *KDA*, the player is the one actively ducking, jumping, and sword fighting, in contrast to the animatronic figures on the ride. In a sense, these minigames could arguably feel *as or more* embodied than the actual rides, with a somewhat greater degree of actual physical agency as players move their bodies instead of having their bodies moved for them.<sup>887</sup>

According to Clarke, minigames “flesh and fill out licensed games,” as they can function as “play sequences that briefly diverge from the dominant visual design and game mechanics, often in the form of a narratively contextual puzzle.”<sup>888</sup> In *KDA*, minigames diverge from the primary narrative of a visit to Disneyland—and its realism—in order to capitalize on the Kinect technology by foregrounding new mechanics and narratives for the rides. With its combination

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<sup>887</sup> Though some of the more interactive attractions like the Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters or Davy Crockett’s Explorer Canoes do elicit more interactive physical participation.

<sup>888</sup> Clarke, *Transmedia Television*, 110.

of simulations and games, *KDA* is more of a hybrid than some of its predecessors. It combines the questing game structure of *Adventures in the Magic Kingdom* and *Virtual Magic Kingdom* with the lifelike simulation of *Walt Disney World Explorer*.

The various elements of *KDA* help shape the potential future park experience for gamers and thus how they may experience Disneyland. *VentureBeat* critic Joe Sinicki cynically, but insightfully, calls *KDA*, “a game that basically serves as a commercial.”<sup>889</sup> While he is correct in one sense, that *KDA* serves a function similar to the *Disneyland* television series in that it is meant in part as a promotional tool on behalf of the parks, there is a deeper purpose to the game: to train the player in how *physically* to inhabit park space through the more embodied Kinect technology. Like the Disney park video games before it, *KDA* exploits player agency inherent in video gaming, and the increased sense of agency implied by the physical movement necessary to interact with the Kinect sensor, to reinforce the training of desired behaviors for using park space: what to do at and how to experience Disneyland.<sup>890</sup>

As in earlier games, *KDA* reinforces brand knowledge through virtual park guides who impart rare Disney facts when the player walks by them or engages them with a wave (again, virtually duplicated as the onscreen avatar mirrors the player’s real wave). Even the background chatter of the other virtual “guests” that populate the park train the player in typical Disneyland

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<sup>889</sup> Joe Sinicki, “Review: Kinect Disneyland Adventures Is the Most Unique and Most Disappointing Kinect Game Yet,” *VentureBeat*, November 15, 2011, <https://venturebeat.com/2011/11/15/kinect-disneyland-adventures-is-both-the-most-unique-and-most-disappointing-kinect-game-to-date/>.

<sup>890</sup> The “ghost physics” and “semi-embodied” nature of interfaces such as the Kinect have complicated implications for notions of agency and immersion. For further discussion of this, see Andreas Gregersen and Torben Grodal, “Embodiment and Interface,” in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*, eds. Bernard Perron and Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2009), 65–84.

discourse.<sup>891</sup> They prompt the player to marvel at the environment, as atmospheric NPCs marvel, “Can you believe the detail they put into this place?” This line in particular seems to be a winking reference to both the physical Disneyland and its laboriously mimetic virtual corollary. Another “guest” asks “Does anyone know what time it is?,” suggesting that Disneyland is a place of another time, an atemporal fantasy space where all relation to the “real” world becomes irrelevant in relation to the fun everyone is having there.<sup>892</sup> This dialogue, too, is an integral part of the experience of Disneyland, and even supplies future visitors with some standard lines—and thoughts—for when they actually visit the park.

Other activities prompted by *KDA* include seeking out characters for meet-and-greets. Waving while in proximity of a character (indicated by a sparkling ring) enables the player to interact with that character. Once engaged with a character, players use real-world physical movements to produce further interactions; for example, players can bow to trigger a dance sequence between the character and the player’s onscreen avatar, hold both hands out in front to ask for an autograph, hold both arms out to the side for a hug, or high five for a high five. When prompted to pose for a photo with a character, players are encouraged to match their bodies with the character’s onscreen pose. Most quests in *KDA* are given to the player by these characters. Character quests often revolve around collecting items, sometimes using in-game tools such as cameras, magic wands, and blasters that other characters give the player. Some of these more fanciful quests do not have literal analogs to park behavior (apart from Disneyland visitors’

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<sup>891</sup> As evidenced by Disney terms such as “guest,” “Imagineer,” and “weenie,” esoteric Disney language is an integral part of Disney park culture.

<sup>892</sup> The game’s fashion and technology are arguably also somewhat temporally nebulous. Human characters are dressed simply and generically in styles that look like they could range from the 1990s through the 2010s. In terms of technology, some atmospheric NPCs carry cameras, and Mickey gives the player a “magical camera” to complete photo quests, not a smartphone as one might expect.

affinity for buying and carrying lightsabers). Other quests, however, very clearly do have real counterparts typical of a visit to the physical theme park. For example, characters will ask the player to collect autographs from, or take specific photographs with, other characters or to buy specific items from the in-game store, which the player must purchase using coins collected primarily from playing the attraction minigames.

In addition to character-driven quests, *KDA* also prompts players to replicate in-park behavior by collecting pins from the attraction minigames. This ties into a common visitor behavior at the physical parks, a fan phenomenon officially referred to as “Disney Pin Trading.” Players unaware of pin trading, which tends to be practiced more seriously among park enthusiasts rather than casual tourists, are given a practical primer on the ins and outs of pin trading as they seek special-edition versions of pins in the game, which mirrors real-life pin traders’ quests for the rare and desirable. The game also includes another in-park behavior, souvenir shopping, with a proliferation of virtual shops in which players can purchase clothing, costumes, autograph books, and photo albums, versions of which are also available in those actual shops in the physical Disneyland. This ties back to similar shopping-oriented gameplay in *Virtual Magic Kingdom*.

Since purchasing these items requires in-game coins collected by walking around the park or by playing the minigames, the need for large amounts of coins to complete the character quests can result in minigame gameplay that becomes merely a means to collect coins and purchase items. In *IGN* reviewer Jack DeVries’s opinion, “Between the Hidden Mickeys, pins, costumes, autographs, and photos, there’s a ton of stuff to collect and discover within the park. Most of it comes very naturally through the game, eschewing the needless collectible quests in

favor of a more organic progression.”<sup>893</sup> In addition to being covertly disguised through game mechanics, however, consuming and purchasing are also openly promoted by the industrial discourse surrounding the game. Frontier’s own *KDA* website lists “[c]ollect Disney-themed items and purchase popular souvenirs” as being among the “Features” of the game.<sup>894</sup> Though gamers tend to bemoan “collect-a-thons,” the use of the game as a consumer-training device is less masked than touted as an essential, fun, and meaningful part of the Disneyland experience in *KDA*.

Like *Virtual Magic Kingdom*, *KDA* included a feature by which players could take actions in the “real” world that crossed over into the virtual game space. For *Virtual Magic Kingdom*, this was the completion of quests in the parks that award virtual prizes in the game. For *KDA*, the mechanism was inverted: players could purchase plush toys of Mickey, Minnie, Donald, and Goofy at Toys “R” Us that they would then scan into the game for additional character quests. Instead of focusing on the quest as the primary activity, as in *Virtual Magic Kingdom*, the purchase of consumer goods was the primary activity for *KDA*’s real-life quest component. Ultimately, *KDA* brings the park into the home while also educating the player/park visitor not only on how to think about the park, like the *Disneyland* television series before it, but also on how to experience park space, as both a part of the game and as a consumer.

It is significant, however, that this is done through the Kinect technology. Promotional texts, from Disney’s games website, Microsoft’s *KDA* page, the Frontier Developments *KDA* page, and even the packaging inserts for the physical Xbox game disc all contain a variation on

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<sup>893</sup> DeVries, “Kinect Disneyland Adventures.”

<sup>894</sup> “Kinect Disneyland Adventures,” Frontier Developments, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://disneyland.frontier.co.uk/>.



the same language—as the insert pamphlet reads, “Kinect™: Disneyland® Adventures is your ticket to the magical world of Disneyland park through Kinect.” The carefully crafted message here is that it is the new, more immersive and embodied Kinect technology that allows the player to experience Disneyland. Cutting-edge digital technology is thus touted as a means of access to authentic immersive experiences. With *KDA*, Disney, faced with a changing technological climate, used state-of-the-art consumer gaming technology to bring the most analog of phenomena (its physical park) into the digital age.

In the years since the original release of *KDA*, Microsoft has discontinued manufacture of, and support for, the Kinect sensor and games.<sup>895</sup> It was not game over for *KDA*, however, which was remastered and released for Xbox One and Windows 10 as *Disneyland Adventures* (sans Kinect) in 2017. This version substitutes physical controllers or keyboard and mouse for the Kinect mechanism. The elimination of the Kinect sensor strips *Disneyland Adventures* of the whole-body interaction that had made *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* a uniquely compelling attempt at imitating the park experience by bridging the virtual/physical screen divide through the player’s physical body. Some critics and gamers praised the non-Kinect port for its ease of use and 4K remaster, as Ian Morris’s review subtitle suggests: “All the fun of Disney, with none of the nonsense of Kinect.”<sup>896</sup> Others pointed to the awkwardness of converting a game founded

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<sup>895</sup> According to Alex Kipman, creator of the Kinect, and Matthew Lapsen, GM of Xbox Devices Marketing, the decision to discontinue manufacture and support for the Kinect primarily resulted from Microsoft’s efforts to compete with Sony’s PlayStation 4 console, both in terms of lowering the price and as a refocus on traditional gaming in an attempt to recapture the “hardcore gamers” who rallied around the PS4 and away from the experimental interface of the Kinect which had been bundled with the Xbox One since its launch in 2013. See Mark Wilson, “Exclusive: Microsoft Has Stopped Manufacturing the Kinect,” *Fast Company*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90147868/exclusive-microsoft-has-stopped-manufacturing-the-kinect>.

<sup>896</sup> Ian Morris, “Disneyland Adventures Xbox One Review: Back to the Magic Kingdom,” *Everybody Plays*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.everybodyplays.co.uk/review/Disneyland-Adventures-Xbox-One-Review-Back-to-the-Magic-Kingdom/2657>.

on Kinect controls to traditional handheld controllers; for example, John Elliott of *XboxAddict.com* observed that “as a former Kinect game it doesn’t translate well into controller based gameplay, as it feels like you are playing *Dance Dance Revolution* or *Rock Band* on a controller.”<sup>897</sup> In citing other kinetic games predicated on an embodied experience, Elliott underscores how a controller-based adaptation of *KDA* is fundamentally at odds with its purpose.

*Kinect Disneyland Adventures*, like the Disney Parks games before it, ultimately failed to capture much more than an instructive approximation of Disney park space but, because of the Kinect technology, it came much closer than previous games to capturing both the motion and the emotion of the lived park experience. The loss of that particularly haptic experiential quality negates what gave the game its impact and what could be thought of as a redeeming quality in a game that still pales in comparison to a “real” theme-park experience. The choice to remaster it despite the abandonment of the Kinect technology leaves a game where players go through the motions of a trip to Disneyland, with little motion at all.

### ***Disney Parks as Game Space***

More recently, Disney has begun pushing further into the mobile-game space as a means of extending their park franchise outside of its physical bounds, including outside of the home. Since 2009, Disney has released several official Disney Parks apps, including informational guide apps, shopping apps, and photo manipulation apps that have also increasingly brought mobile digital technology into park space.<sup>898</sup> These apps further smooth over the gap between

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<sup>897</sup> John Elliott, “Staff Review of Disneyland Adventures (Xbox One),” *XboxAddict*, December 8, 2017, <http://www.xboxaddict.com/Staff-Review/14026/Disneyland-Adventures.html>.

<sup>898</sup> These mobile apps include informational park guides such as *Mobile Magic* (2009), *Disneyland Explorer* (2012), *My Disney Experience* (2012), *MyMagic+* (2013), and *Disneyland* (2015) and interactive brochures like *Disneyland Explorer* (2012). Complementing these park information apps are a series of peripheral apps, including *Shop Disney Parks* (2015) for park merchandise and the photo-manipulation app *Show Your Disney Side* (2016) that further gamify the park experience.

physical and virtual space using a mobile—rather than home—experience. From home video games that trained players on how to engage virtually with park space, Disney has moved to mobile apps that blur these boundaries to provide a more synchronous engagement between the virtual and the physical space, and mobile games that actively gamify its physical parks.

In 2016, Disney partnered with developer Gameloft to release the mobile theme-park creator game app, *Disney Magic Kingdoms*. The game charges players with reconstructing the “Magic Kingdom” after its takeover by Disney villains. Players rebuild the parks bit by bit by collecting characters, building park components, and sending characters on quests to earn magic and create happiness. Just as the mobile game itself recreates the park in the hands of the player, the player also actively reconstructs the park through gameplay. Moreover, the player’s active creation of happiness and collection of Disney magic emphasizes the player’s interactive role as a constitutive component of the park experience. Like earlier Disney video games, *Disney Magic Kingdoms* is designed around the typical hub and spoke map, eliciting the experience of navigating Disney’s parks. As players build rides, earn parades, and interact with characters by tapping to give virtual “high fives,” they also enact typical park behaviors. In using mobile devices as a gaming platform, *Disney Magic Kingdoms* opens the possibility of playing the game while in the park itself, further collapsing the boundaries between these spaces. Beyond mobile gaming, this move to dissolve physical contexts also fits Disney’s larger move toward breaking down the boundaries between the physical and virtual with the increasing gamification of park space through digital technologies.

As has been discussed throughout this dissertation, there are several ways that park space has operated as game space. In broad terms, the parks themselves operate analogously to open-world (as opposed to linear) video games, where progression through space and order of

gameplay is determined by the player. More concretely, examples of smaller attempts at making the park spaces more game-like have abounded in recent years. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, some attractions resemble video games, such as Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters, an attraction that combines the dark ride with the “shooter” game genre via interactive ride vehicles equipped with laser guns. At the end of the ride, visitors may email souvenir photographs to themselves that digitally combine on-ride photos of themselves in action with a virtual cartoon game space. Other attempts have brought more overt elements of gameplay into the parks, such as in Walt Disney World’s “Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom” or “A Pirate’s Adventure—Treasures of the Seven Seas,” scavenger hunt-type games where visitors complete missions within the park, becoming the protagonist of their own game narrative within the park.

Scott Bukatman has discussed how the structure of Disneyland itself mimics the structural architecture of computers, which is a useful tool for understanding how theme parks work on a systematic scale and how the visitors, or “users,” function within that system. In his “terminal theme park,” users are integrated into a technologically informed park system of nodes organized by function and kind (rides are “files,” and lands are “folders”). At Disneyland, Bukatman argues, “the computer becomes a site of bodily habitation and experience in the theme parks—a technological interface so effective that most users are unaware of the interface at all.”<sup>899</sup> Disney has been digitizing park space through mobile apps since 2009, but the 2013 introduction of Magic Bands, RFID-enabled wristbands that serve a multitude of functions, including as a digital key, entry ticket, credit card, and FastPass, can perhaps be considered a manifestation of Bukatman’s theory.<sup>900</sup> Equipped so as to become a digital part of the park,

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<sup>899</sup> Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity*, 26.

<sup>900</sup> Magic Bands are used in conjunction with Disney’s MyMagic+ app.

visitors' natural "play" in the park space can be customized via interactive environments and props that read the bands (while data about their use of park space can be gathered, of course).<sup>901</sup>

At D23 in November 2021, Disney announced the expansion of Magic Bands from Walt Disney World to Disneyland.<sup>902</sup> Simultaneously, the company announced the discontinuation of the FastPass system to make way for its newest digital service, Disney Genie. Disney's website describes how "this cool new technology... guides you through our theme parks with tips that can help you reduce time in lines, discover magic around every corner and take the guesswork out of 'what's next.'"<sup>903</sup> Integrated into the Disneyland app, Disney describes how

Disney Genie service will maximize your park time, so you can have more fun. It includes a personalized itinerary feature that will quickly and seamlessly map out an entire day. From specific attractions, foodie experiences and entertainment, to general interests like Disney princesses, villains, Pixar, *Star Wars*, thrill rides and more—just tell Disney Genie what you want to do and it will do the planning for you.<sup>904</sup>

Where control over how their days were spent remained with the visitor in previous park apps, this new service encourages visitors to cede control over their park itineraries over to Disney.

Though there are several digital apps that serve as park guides, in 2018, Disney released the Play Disney Parks app, which represents the next step in the literal gamification of park space. Leading up to its release, Disney promised that "guests can play in the parks like never before using this soon-to-launch mobile app to access exclusive experiences at both [U.S.]

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<sup>901</sup> Brooks Barnes, "At Disney Parks, a Bracelet Meant to Build Loyalty (and Sales)," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/07/business/media/at-disney-parks-a-bracelet-meant-to-build-loyalty-and-sales.html>.

<sup>902</sup> Brady MacDonald, "Disneyland Imports Magic Band Wearable Tech from Disney World," *Orange County Register*, November 20, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/11/20/disneyland-imports-magic-band-wearable-tech-from-disney-world/>.

<sup>903</sup> See <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/genie/>.

<sup>904</sup> Disney Genie will also include Lightning Lane surcharges, which allow visitors access to special attraction entrances that reduce wait time for an additional fee. See <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/genie/>.

locations through activities that interact with the surrounding environment.”<sup>905</sup> This app demonstrates Disney’s continued focus on using digital video-game media to combine virtual and physical play spaces by dissolving the spatial boundaries of the theme park.<sup>906</sup> Players are now invited to literally play while inside the park. The GPS-enabled app includes ride-specific games that unlock only while in physical proximity to ride queues. At Space Mountain, visitors can play the “Rocket Race” game, where they engage in training missions as they “prepare [their] ship for the darkest reaches of space,” as described by the app. This includes simple interactive digital minigames that earn players ship upgrades. Players can also “[find] upgrade key codes hidden in the queue.”<sup>907</sup> The “Off To Neverland” experience asks visitors to “pick up to 4 other players and share your happy thoughts with a series of questions, stories, and jokes...and some fun with Tinker Bell too!” Upon entering the ride building, visitors playing “Off to Neverland” are asked to locate “Tinker Bell’s Trinkets,” which are symbols like a thimble, a pan pipe, and a pirate ship that appear to be carved into the structure itself.<sup>908</sup>

This “play” thus redirects down time in the park in ways that are controlled by Disney and that reabsorb visitors in the Disney experience.<sup>909</sup> Taking from video-game culture, in-app

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<sup>905</sup> Thomas Smith, “All-New Play Disney Parks App Coming to Disneyland Resort and Walt Disney Resort This Summer,” *Disney Parks Blog*, April 18, 2018, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2018/04/all-new-play-disney-parks-app-coming-to-disneyland-resort-and-walt-disney-world-resort-this-summer/>.

<sup>906</sup> This trend is also supported by Disney’s recent—and costly—park-wide WiFi upgrades. See Hugo Martin, “Why Theme Parks Are Spending Millions to Give Guests Free Wi-Fi,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-theme-park-wifi-20180720-story.html#>.

<sup>907</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcnK6zPJkcs>.

<sup>908</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ykCZzJRscM>.

<sup>909</sup> Play Disney Parks is in some ways an appropriation of existing visitor behavior, as it has become common to see line queues full of visitors playing mobile apps such as Ellen Degeneres’s Heads Up! to pass the time during long waits.

achievements may be unlocked by riding select attractions. Play Disney Parks also fosters environmental interactivity as it uses Bluetooth technology to activate special effects in the park itself.<sup>910</sup> Some functions within the app, including land-specific trivia quizzes and Apple Music-integrated playlists, work both inside and outside of the parks. Play Disney Parks thus allows players to begin their park experience before they enter the gates, to continue it after they leave—to seamlessly carry it everywhere. According to Dan Soto, Vice-President, Digital Experience, Disney Parks and Resort Digital, “This app allows our guests to feel a powerful and emotional connection to their favorite parks in a whole new way, which is always our goal.”<sup>911</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Two, this gamification of park space has been taken further in terms of dissolving boundaries and creating embodied game space in the Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge lands at Disneyland and Walt Disney World. These lands are centered around a more game-like interactive park experience, as visitors are encouraged to use the Star Wars Datapad portion of the Play Disney Parks app to interact with the physical spaces around them in a way that is intended to produce a more customized and physically engaging personal narrative experience. As previously discussed, Disney has also recreated the park space of Galaxy’s Edge in the *Sims 4 - Star Wars: Journey to Batuu* expansion pack. Like *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* and the other games discussed here, the *Journey to Batuu* expansion pack invites players to interact with park space in a way that encourages specific behaviors and modes of interaction and consumption. In a far more detailed way than its predecessors like *KDA*, players of *Journey to Batuu* can purchase specific digital merchandise or food for their Sims that is identical to that

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<sup>910</sup> Bridget Carey, “Turn Your Phone into a Magic Wand and Kill Time at Disney,” *CNET*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.cnet.com/news/play-disney-parks-app-games-while-waiting-in-line/>.

<sup>911</sup> Chris E. Hayner, “Play Disney Parks App Gamifies Your Disney Vacation,” *GameSpot*, July 1, 2018, <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/play-disney-parks-app-gamifies-your-disney-vacatio/1100-6460025/>.

found in the parks. Moreover, they can replicate actions like hacking that can be performed within the physical Galaxy's Edge via the Star Wars Datapad app through their Sim character, replicating the in-park role-play encouraged by the app through the digital role-play fostered by their Sim.<sup>912</sup>

Similarly, while the virtual reality game *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* (along with its expansion *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge—Last Call*) does not, for the most part, recreate physical park space as an accessible, playable environment, it nevertheless also uses its digital medium to expand park geography in a way that further encourages players to experience that space in particular ways. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, aside from Mubo's Droid Depot, *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge* leaves the visitable park environments of Black Spire Outpost, like the spaceport and town streets, as only viewable space, rather than playable locations. The game instead focuses on the player's navigation of imagined surrounding environments that are not present in the parks. Yet like the games discussed here, in *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*, players are expected to interact with the setting for Galaxy's Edge—Black Spire Outpost and its surroundings on Batuu—in particular, desired ways. Players are immersed in the fictional world as active participants, just as they are as users of the Star Wars Datapad app or the *Sims 4 Journey to Batuu* expansion. Moreover, some of the same actions, like interacting with technological mechanisms, are part of *Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*'s gameplay. Ultimately, these three Galaxy's Edge games—from the Datapad to the *Sims* add-on to the VR game—further gamify the physical park space and, in doing so, encourage more active, participatory immersion in it. Simultaneously, these games, like those before them, use digital game technology to bring physical park spaces virtually into the home.

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<sup>912</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of *Journey to Batuu*, see Chapter 2.



According to Soto, using the Play Disney Parks app in the Galaxy's Edge lands is a "next-level experience."<sup>913</sup> In an early testing of Project Natal (the first incarnation of what ultimately became Microsoft's Kinect), *Gizmodo*'s Mark Wilson and Matt Buchanan effusively praised the spectacular new potential of the technology:

Project Natal is the vision of gaming that's danced through people's heads for decades—gaming without the abstraction of controllers, using your body and natural movements... seeing it, *feeling* it in person, makes me want to believe that this what the future of gaming looks like—no buttons, no joysticks, no wands. The only thing left to get rid of is the screen, and even that'll happen soon enough.<sup>914</sup>

Microsoft's now-defunct Kinect notwithstanding, the Disney's Play Disney Parks app and Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge and its paratexts suggest further moves toward this disappearing interface, continuing the progression of bringing video games together with actual park space where even if the screen is still there, at least you can stow it in your pocket while you continue your game in the park itself.

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<sup>913</sup> Carey, "Turn Your Phone."

<sup>914</sup> Mark Wilson and Matt Buchanan, "Testing Project Natal: We Touched the Intangible," *Gizmodo*, June 3, 2009, <http://gizmodo.com/5277954/testing-project-natal-we-touched-the-intangible/>.

## Conclusion

Disneyland closed its gates on March 14, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, marking only the fourth time the park had undergone an unscheduled closure in its then-sixty-five-year history.<sup>915</sup> Previous shutdowns had only ever been for single days, following John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the Northridge earthquake in 1994, and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in 2001.<sup>916</sup> Though the park initially announced the closure was anticipated to be “through the end of the month,” the park remained shuttered for thirteen months, not reopening until April 30, 2021.<sup>917</sup> In a time where our embodied relationships to one another and the public spaces around us became newly fraught, Disneyland, as a site of mass public entertainment and physical experiences that necessitate physical presence in a public space, became a focal point for anxieties about how we physically relate to one another in social environments. Moreover, Disneyland's closure, and the changes made to the park after it, highlight many of the issues and trends discussed throughout this dissertation, including questions of interaction, participation, and embodiment as well as the increasing convergence of physical and virtual spaces that allow visitors to step into the tangible and narrative worlds of Disney media.

Disney approached the dilemma of how to keep its parks accessible during the closure in part by turning to digital media, including online platforms like YouTube and the company's

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<sup>915</sup> It should be noted that Disneyland's current policy of being open 365 days a year did not start until 1985. The park was typically closed Mondays and Tuesdays in its early years. See Sklar, *Dream It! Do It!*, 76.

<sup>916</sup> Kristen Lopez, “Disneyland Closes for Only Fourth Time in History Amid Coronavirus Pandemic,” *IndieWire*, Mar 12, 2020, <https://www.indiewire.com/2020/03/disneyland-closes-fourth-time-coronavirus-pandemic-1202217334/>.

<sup>917</sup> Frank Pallotta, “Disneyland Closes Because of the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *CNN*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/12/media/disneyland-close-coronavirus/index.html>; Hugo Martín and Todd Martens, “Disneyland Reopens: ‘This is a Homecoming for Us,’ A Tearful Parkgoer Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-04-30/disneyland-disney-california-adventure-reopening-day>.

own streaming service Disney+. Returning to Christopher Anderson's "inhabitable text," which describes how Disney used the *Disneyland* television series to extend the park into the home, Disney now used these services and platforms to reach people prohibited from entering the park's physical boundaries. While the use of media to expand the reach of the park has been happening for decades, as discussed in Chapter Three's analysis of park-based films and video games, the onset of the pandemic heightened the need for Disney to bring the parks out of their geographically bounded locations and into the home, which became the focal point of early quarantine life. Where Anderson describes how television compelled viewers to become visitors and "inhabit" the text, media during the pandemic instead served as a substitute for would-be visitors during a time when the parks were, in fact, literally uninhabitable.

Disney created the #DisneyMagicMoments campaign, promoted on its *Disney Parks Blog* and via a dedicated website, in early April 2020 in response to the extended closures of its parks. Intended to "[let] you experience the magic of Disney wherever you may be," the site includes a variety of videos, including animation tutorials and storytimes.<sup>918</sup> Other Disney Magic Moments were targeted at digitally approximating the experiences of the parks themselves, as Disney released "virtual viewings" of its parades and fireworks displays, such as Disneyland Paris's Disney Illuminations fireworks show, as well as ride-throughs of popular attractions like Disney California Adventure's Radiator Springs Racers.<sup>919</sup> While the parade and fireworks

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<sup>918</sup> "#DisneyMagicMoments," Disney, The Walt Disney Company, accessed January 31, 2022, <https://news.disney.com/magicmoments>.

<sup>919</sup> Thomas Smith, "#DisneyMagicMoments: Virtual Viewing of 'Disney Illuminations' at Disneyland Paris," *Disney Parks Blog*, May 1, 2020, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2020/05/disneymagicmoments-virtual-viewing-of-disney-illuminations-at-disneyland-paris/>; Michael Ramirez, "#DisneyMagicMoments: Speed Through Radiator Springs Racers at Disneyland Resort," *Disney Parks Blog*, September 9, 2020, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2020/09/disneymagicmoments-speed-through-radiator-springs-racers-at-disneyland-resort/?CMP=ILC-DPFY20Q4wo0903200036A>.

recordings are presented in a straightforward manner, the park attractions are often presented as “Ride & Learns,” where informational text about the chosen attraction is overlaid on a first-person point-of-view video aboard the ride vehicle. As with the park-based films and video games discussed in Chapter Three, this served as a means for Disney to expand the boundaries of the park while deepening viewer engagement with the space.

In announcement of #DisneyMagicMoments, Disney acknowledged that “we’ve loved seeing some of you recreate your favorite Disney Parks experiences in your very own living rooms.”<sup>920</sup> Indeed, the #DisneyMagicMoments campaign seized on a trend noted in popular news media of Disney fans using the early days of quarantine to replicate beloved park attractions that were now out of reach due to the park’s closure and to share these experiences over social media. In one viral example, a Utah family recreated the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction in their house, with scenes staged around their home and family members and pets standing in for the ride’s animatronics. The family went on to replicate The Haunted Mansion the following month.<sup>921</sup> Another fan humorously reenacted a ride on Soarin’ Over California using her desk chair, computer screen, and a spray bottle.<sup>922</sup>

During the park’s closure, media became practically the only way for fans to access the parks. In one online article that compiled ways for readers to “[recreate] the theme park

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<sup>920</sup> Michael Ramirez, “#DisneyMagicMoments: Virtual Viewing of ‘Magic Happens’ at Disneyland Park,” *Disney Parks Blog*, March 29, 2020, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2020/03/disney-magic-moments-virtual-viewing-of-magic-happens-at-disneyland-park/>.

<sup>921</sup> Michael Gavin, “‘A Quarantine Life for Me’: Fans Recreate Favorite Disneyland Attractions,” *Inside the Magic*, March 22, 2020, updated April 2, 2020, <https://insidethemagic.net/2020/03/fans-recreate-disneyland-attraction-pirates-mg1/>.

<sup>922</sup> Ryan Ogilvie, “#DisneyFromHome – Fan Recreates Soarin’ Over California at Home and It’s Incredible!,” *Inside the Magic*, March 19, 2020, <https://insidethemagic.net/2020/03/disney-fan-recreates-soarin-over-california-at-home-ro1/>.

experience at home,” which included watching fan-made ride-through videos, watching livestreams of the park, and cooking park recipes at home, theme park enthusiast and podcaster Scott Gairdner noted that “I think we’re extremely lucky that this unprecedented thing in theme park history is happening when there are so many ways to experience theme park media at home...Any taste of that is more special than ever because all those things are off-limits, or we don’t want to go to them right now.”<sup>923</sup> A New York family whose Walt Disney World vacation was scrapped due to COVID closures recreated a day at the parks in their backyard, including an outdoor projection of the Magic Kingdom’s Happily Ever After fireworks show to close out the night.<sup>924</sup> That same show was later streamed live on YouTube as part of the #DisneyMagicMoments campaign, as Disney told viewers to “Fill the skies above your home with some pixie dust. With some modern-day magic we are taking you to the best seat in the house, right in front of Cinderella Castle at Walt Disney World Resort.”<sup>925</sup>

The launch of Disney’s own streaming service Disney+ was well-timed to bridge the physical distance between would-be visitors and the parks. Disney+ first went live in November 2019, just months prior to the onset of pandemic closures, and it, too, became a vehicle for expanding the parks beyond their physical locations and into the home. Since the service’s launch, several series have been created that focus specifically on Disney Parks and their lands and attractions. The six-episode *Imagineering Story* (2019) documentary miniseries, for

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<sup>923</sup> Michael Darling, “A (Sometimes Goofy) Guide to Recreating the Theme Park Experience at Home,” *Los Angeleno*, November 3, 2020, <https://losangeleno.com/strange-days/theme-park-experience/>.

<sup>924</sup> Heather Braga, “A Family Re-Created an Entire Disney Parks Day at Home and It’s Just So Magical,” *BuzzFeed*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/hbraga/a-family-recreated-an-entire-disney-parks-day-at-h?fbclid=IwAR3eZk2RCn3Py6mjLW2PlqzLfV1J3e6Y8-RRwo1En57UlfVjpu7rJJfuSg>.

<sup>925</sup> Corinne Reichert, “Disney is streaming fireworks Friday night from the Magic Kingdom,” *CNET*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.cnet.com/news/disney-is-streaming-fireworks-tonight-from-the-magic-kingdom/>. For a recording of the show, see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bN5b11H4\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bN5b11H4_s).

example, looks at the genesis and development of Disney Parks, from the early days in the mid-1950s through the creation of parks all around the globe to the most recent headline lands and attractions like Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge. Another documentary series *Behind the Attraction* (2021– ) delves into attractions more specifically, with each episode centering on a single attraction like Star Tours or Space Mountain.<sup>926</sup>

Other less-traditional offerings on Disney+ also use the platform to bring the parks into the home. The 19-minute *Disney Illuminations* (2020) presents the fireworks show at Disneyland Paris, while the *Disney Parks Sunrise Series* (2020) consists of hour-long recordings of sunrises at different Disney Parks set to ambient instrumental music. This content is all organized in the Disney+ app/website as part of the “Disney Parks” category, which includes the documentary-style content described above as well as subsections like “Movies Inspired by Disney Parks,” which contains park-based films like those discussed in Chapter Three, and “Featured at Disney Parks,” where viewers can find films, series, and shorts that serve as the source material for media-based attractions like those discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Like #DisneyMagicMoments, Disney+ also recalls the “inhabitable text” ethos of the original *Disneyland* television series (and its descendants), but where Anderson saw the *Disneyland* television series's access to home as a means to draw viewers from their homes and into the park, the Disney+ streaming service also acts as a means of bringing the park into the home that compensated for its inaccessibility during the pandemic closure. Instead of encouraging viewers to watch ancillary media like TV and then complete the narrative by

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<sup>926</sup> The term “attraction” is used a bit loosely here, as there are episodes on the Disneyland Hotel and on Disney transportation. Regarding the latter episode, while the Railroad and Monorail are undoubtedly attractions, the trams that deliver visitors from the parking lots to the gates are arguably not, as they operate outside of the bounds of the parks proper.

coming to the park, these media texts asked viewers during the time of COVID to watch these media as a substitute for a park visit.

Park-based video games also allowed visitors virtual access to the park during this time. Content that was in development prior to the onset of the pandemic, like *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*, suddenly became a way to virtually bring the park to visitors (or visitors virtually to the park) when it was released during the pandemic in late-2020. As Scott Stein from *CNET* observed of its opportune release, “now, Tales from the Galaxy's Edge takes on a different meaning, because it represents a park most people can no longer easily visit.”<sup>927</sup> Bridget Carey, writing for *CNET* in May 2020, suggested turning to *Disneyland Adventures*, a remastered version of the 2011 *Kinect Disneyland Adventures* game, for the chance “to run around the park on your own terms” while at home.<sup>928</sup> Disney itself also added new content to its My Disney Experience and Disneyland mobile apps as a way to mitigate park closures.<sup>929</sup> Though both apps are designed to be used in the parks, Disney promoted new additions to the apps that “can all be enjoyed from home.”<sup>930</sup> Yet although some of the ways in which it was expressed were new, this

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<sup>927</sup> Scott Stein, “Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge is a VR Step Away from Virtually Visiting Disney,” *CNET*, Nov. 19, 2020, <https://www.cnet.com/tech/computing/star-wars-tales-from-the-galaxys-edge-is-a-vr-step-away-from-virtually-visiting-disney/>.

<sup>928</sup> Bridget Carey, “Get Your Disney Theme Park Fix at Home,” *CNET*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.cnet.com/news/get-your-disney-theme-park-fix-at-home-until-disney-opens/>.

<sup>929</sup> Ken Storey, “Disney's Orlando Theme Park Apps Get New Video Content, and Take on Quibi and BuzzFeed in the Process,” *Orlando Weekly*, September 22, 2020, <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/archives/2020/09/22/disneys-orlando-theme-park-apps-get-new-video-content-and-take-on-quibi-and-buzzfeed-in-the-process>.

<sup>930</sup> Thomas Smith, “Enjoy Disney Parks Recipes, Jungle Cruise Jokes and More with New Features in the Disneyland and My Disney Experience Mobile Apps,” *Disney Parks Blog*, April 8, 2020, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2020/04/enjoy-disney-parks-recipes-jungle-cruise-jokes-and-more-with-new-features-in-the-disneyland-and-my-disney-experience-mobile-apps/>.

impulse to use screen media as a means of accessing the physical spaces of the park has, as has been shown by Anderson and throughout this dissertation, existed for decades.

Once the parks reopened, several changes and new policies altered the park experience. Temperature screening, masking, and social distancing rules were enacted, in the ambient spaces of the park, in queues, and on rides themselves, where seats were left empty to ensure only those of the same household were near one another. Hand-washing stations and specifically designated eating areas were installed throughout the parks.<sup>931</sup> Food ordering was switched to the Disneyland App, to avoid lines and to enable touch-free ordering and payment.<sup>932</sup> Events like parades and firework shows that were likely to draw too much of a crowd, and thus threaten social distancing efforts, were canceled, and rides whose design prohibited social distancing, like the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage, were closed as well. Characters were still present, but distanced from visitors, who could now only wave or pose for a picture from afar, rather than reach for a hug or an autograph. In the early days of reopening, attendance was capped at 25% capacity and limited to California residents, leading to initially low wait times.<sup>933</sup>

Many of these safety measures and precautionary methods were altered, relaxed, or abandoned altogether over the following months, despite the continued threat of the pandemic and spread of new variants. However, Disney's strategies during the closure and the changes that took place immediately and in the months after its reopening reflect the some of the core aspects of theme parks that this dissertation has explored. Ultimately, the pandemic has only further

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<sup>931</sup> Martín and Martens, "Disneyland Reopens."

<sup>932</sup> This pivot raised concerns about data tracking and privacy. See Hugo Martín, "Apps Help Theme Parks Boost Their COVID Safety — and Collect Data on You," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/story/2021-04-17/disneyland-theme-parks-apps-covid-distancing-virtual-lines>.

<sup>933</sup> Martín and Martens, "Disneyland Reopens."



underscored and at times accelerated some of the trends I have traced throughout Disneyland's history.

While the earliest days after reopening from pandemic closures saw a more individualized park experience, where visitors were far more physically separated from one another than ever before, the parks were already headed toward an increased focus on personalization and individualized experience. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is perhaps best illustrated by Galaxy's Edge, whose design emphasizes the visitor's personal story and already incorporates virtual elements, like the Play Disney Parks app's Datapad, which foster deeper engagement with the space while in some ways minimizing interaction with other visitors.

In the wake of the pandemic, though not necessarily entirely because of it, Disney has announced that it will be bringing additional technologies to the parks to further digitize the park experience and the ways in which visitors interface with the parks. Walt Disney World has long used Magic Band technology, a wearable wristband mechanism for wireless connectivity with park services such as payments, FastPasses, and hotel keys. Though the technology was first introduced in the Florida parks in 2013, Disney announced in November 2021 that it was finally bringing Florida's Magic Band technology to Disneyland and Disney California Adventure parks in 2022.<sup>934</sup> Just prior to the onset of the pandemic, Disneyland had also implemented a new virtual queue system for its new Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance attraction. Initial demand for the ride was so high that reservations for the day were sold out mere minutes after the system opened each day.

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<sup>934</sup> Brady MacDonald, "Disneyland Imports Magic Band Wearable Tech from Disney World," *Orange County Register*, November 20, 2021, <https://www.ocregister.com/2021/11/20/disneyland-imports-magic-band-wearable-tech-from-disney-world/>.

Similarly, in December 2021, Disney announced the launch of its “Disney Genie” service, which the company promised would “reimagine[s] the guest experience” by creating a “personalized itinerary feature that will quickly and seamlessly map out an entire day.” According to Disney, “from specific attractions, foodie experiences and entertainment, to general interests like Disney princesses, villains, Pixar, Star Wars, thrill rides and more – just tell Disney Genie what you want to do and it will do the planning for you.”<sup>935</sup> The service also offers Disney Genie+, a paid option that gives visitors access to digital reservations for “Lightning Lanes,” or accelerated lines, for select attractions, as well as additional per-attraction reservations for the most popular attractions in the parks, such as Radiator Springs Racers. These services replaced the formerly free FastPass reservation system as well as the paid MaxPass, and was met with widespread criticism from park-goers, who often reported even longer wait times with the new system than during the interim between the closure of the FastPass/MaxPass service and the launch of Disney Genie+.<sup>936</sup> Space Mountain was reported to have its longest wait times in years.<sup>937</sup> While these programs demonstrate a continuation of COVID-era strategies of using digital technologies to maximize contact-less and socially distanced interaction in the parks, as with the promotion of app-based food ordering, they also signal Disney’s increasing push toward the integration of physical and virtual space, as discussed throughout this dissertation.

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<sup>935</sup> Avery Maehrer, “Disney Genie Service to Reimagine the Guest Experience at Walt Disney World Resort and Disneyland Resort,” *Disney Parks Blog*, August 18, 2021, <https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2021/08/introducing-disney-genie/>.

<sup>936</sup> Luke Dammann, “Guests ‘Hate’ Disney Genie, Prefer Universal’s Costly Express Pass,” *Inside the Magic*, January 30, 2022, <https://insidethemagic.net/2022/01/disney-guests-prefer-universal-pass-ld1/>.

<sup>937</sup> Julie Tremaine, “Another Effect of Genie Plus: Disneyland’s Space Mountain Has Its Longest Wait Times in Years,” *SFGATE*, January 19, 2022, <https://www.sfgate.com/disneyland/article/Another-effect-of-Genie-Plus-Space-Mountain-has-16785287.php>.

This impulse is epitomized by Disney’s recent patenting of technologies that it promises will allow it to create a so-called “metaverse” in its park spaces. These technologies include a “virtual-world simulator” that would “project 3D images and virtual effects onto physical spaces.”<sup>938</sup> According to the company’s patent, Disney’s “metaverse” technologies would create these interactive experiences without the use of a VR headset or other AR device, which would eliminate some cost, comfort, and sanitation concerns, the latter of particular relevance to a post-pandemic world.<sup>939</sup> As Hannah Towey of *Business Insider* describes, “instead of being designed for mass entertainment, the device would track individual park visitors to personalize the projections. For example, while one family may see Mickey Mouse greeting them by a hot-dog stand, another group could interact with Princess Belle and Cinderella.”<sup>940</sup> This extends the trends toward personalized interactive experiences traced in both the attractions discussed in Chapter One and the lands explored in Chapter Two.

Disney CEO Bob Chapek stated of the newly patented technology that, “our efforts to date are merely a prologue to a time when we’ll be able to connect the physical and digital worlds even more closely, allowing for storytelling without boundaries in our own Disney metaverse.”<sup>941</sup> Chapek acknowledges that this technology is simply the latest step in connecting “the physical and digital worlds,” though his reference to “storytelling without boundaries” understates just how fluid these boundaries have always been in Disney Parks throughout their

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<sup>938</sup> Hannah Towey, “Disney Patents Metaverse Technology for Theme Parks that Would Track Visitors While Projecting Personalized 3D Images for Them,” *Business Insider*, Jan 9, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/disney-patents-metaverse-technology-ar-virtual-world-projector-2022-1>.

<sup>939</sup> Towey, “Disney Patents Metaverse.”

<sup>940</sup> Towey, “Disney Patents Metaverse.”

<sup>941</sup> Towey, “Disney Patents Metaverse.”

history. As this dissertation has shown, the parks have always been characterized by permeable boundaries as they construct convergent environments where visitors could sojourn inside both virtual and physical narrative media space.

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