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Crossing the Berm: The Disney Theme Park as Sacralized Space

Chris Newcomb



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
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CROSSING THE BERM:
THE DISNEY THEME PARK AS SACRALIZED SPACE

By
CHRIS NEWCOMB

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The members of the Committee approve the dissertation of Chris Newcomb defended on October 31, 2003.

John Kelsay
Professor Directing Dissertation

Robert Neuman
Outside Committee Member

Kathleen Erndl
Committee Member

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.

For my family . . .

Molly and Kylie – seeing the world through your eyes keeps me young
and Jamie – taking this journey together makes each day new.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes that the Disney theme park be approached as an agent of ritualization in the creation and experience of sacralized space: an ordered, organized space for the thoughtful, selective construction of social meaning and the mutual exercise of symbolic power, initiated in the creation of environment and experienced through ritualized activities and spatial movement, resulting in the recovery of the past and the possibility of a transformed future. This thesis will be pursued in four stages: first, an examination of the definitional parameters of sacralized space and ritualization, emphasizing the mutual construction of meaning and the interwoven power relationships inherent in the creation and experience of such a space; second, the application of these parameters and emphases to the Disney theme parks in terms of the creative process of park participants; third, the application of these parameters and emphases to the Disney theme parks in terms of the experiential process of park participants; and fourth, the resultant exercise of power and construction of meaning by park participants within sacralized space. Such an examination of Disney theme parks hopefully will provide a broad ground on which to place in dialogue the other interpretive proposals within contemporary Disney thought, a basis for the thoughtful discussion of these sites within Religious Studies, as well as a more flexible and coherent method of newly considering the complexity of the parks and their pervading influence, for good or for ill, on the global cultural stage.

INTRODUCTION

The Journey

Once upon a time there lived a small family—father, mother, boy, girl. They were a fairly typical, middle-class American family, living in northern California in late 1955. Although they often shared many activities and experiences, the space in front of the family television set increasingly became their preferred gathering place. Each had their favorite shows: The father watched the fights from Madison Square Garden; the mother never missed Ed Sullivan; the children discovered the Mickey Mouse Club and spent each weekday afternoon with Annette and Jimmie. On Wednesday nights, though, the family came together in front of their television and watched as one. This was the night of Walt Disney's show, *Disneyland*, presented by the American Broadcasting Company from 8:30-9:30 p.m. They began watching from the very first broadcast in October 1954. In just a year's time they defended the Alamo with Davy Crockett, traveled into orbit aboard a rocket ship, explored Seal Island, and journeyed to Wonderland with Alice. The variety and excitement of each week's offering captivated the family.

Their favorite episodes, though, were the ones dedicated to Disneyland the place. Walt himself introduced this new creation on the show's premiere: Disneyland would be a "magic kingdom" where dreams came true--a place of "fun and fancy" where visitors would enter worlds of the past, the future, and the imagination. Stories presented on the Disneyland show would soon come to life at the Disneyland park. Walt also promised periodic updates leading to the grand opening. The family watched each of these "progress reports" with increasing interest, witnessing the rapid emergence of a medieval castle, jungle rivers, and rocket ships. Finally, on July 17th, 1955, Disneyland was dedicated and opened to the public and the family joined with millions of others in watching the ceremonies live on television. *Dateline: Disneyland* was a 90 minute broadcast on ABC showing Walt's dedication speech, the opening of each individual "land" within the park, an inaugural parade down Main Street U.S.A., and a variety of musical tributes. It all seemed so wonderful that the family immediately decided to plan their own trip to this unbelievable place that coming Christmas during the school holidays.

In the weeks after the opening of Disneyland, the family heard many rumors of planned trips by neighbors and schoolmates. They each wondered who would be the first to visit and return, sharing first-hand experiences of the journey. Finally, in late August, their next door neighbors took a last minute drive south to Anaheim before the fall classes began. Returning four days later, these first-timers immediately became the most popular family in the neighborhood, fielding dinner invitations and curious

inquiries. They proudly shared photographs from their travels, carefully describing the strange sights of the park. They passed around an issue of the Disneyland Times newspaper, given away at the park as advertisement and containing tantalizing summaries of the various attractions and shows. Most importantly, they carefully displayed Disneyland souvenirs from their travel: an ashtray, a wall map, a china cup. Their look of pride and awe were quite noticeable, lending further encouragement for the family's own upcoming journey.

Soon the time for the trip drew near. The children found it difficult to sleep through the night. The mother packed and re-packed clothes and picnic items for the drive. The father changed the car's oil and checked tires. The most important travel accessory became the camera with plenty of film, for the family planned an extensive presentation after their return. Friends called incessantly the day before the departure, hoping to secure the promise of at least one postcard sent from Disneyland itself. Finally the day came and the family left the familiarity of home for the promise of their destination. The travel time consisted of long recountings of the television glimpses seen so far and the enumeration of the specific adventures each looked forward to: Dumbo, the Flying Elephant; The Jungle Cruise; the Mark Twain Steamboat; the Hall of Chemistry; and especially Sleeping Beauty Castle, the iconic symbol seen every week on TV. The family also engaged in the music of Disney as the children taught their parents Jimmie's latest songs from the Mickey Mouse Club and the parents, in turn, taught the children the score from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, memorized by the mother as a child from her family's 78 rpm soundtrack set. The Los Angeles mileage signs measured the trip at regular intervals, interrupted only by the inevitable bathroom stop. Late that evening the family finally drove through Los Angeles itself and continued south on Interstate 5 toward Anaheim. The father found a motor-inn on the freeway just north of Disneyland and stopped for the remainder of the night.

The next morning was one of rushed preparation and almost palpable anticipation. The goal was in reach and each member of the family prepared in his or her own way. Freshly bathed, the children dressed up in their best Sunday clothes to which the mother added new additions: a scarf for the girl and a tie for the boy. The parents dressed up as well, each looking prepared for formal pictures. They finished the last of the picnic food for a quick breakfast and piled in the car for the final leg of the journey. Disneyland was just ahead on Harbor Boulevard. The family's car pulled through the parking entrance and was directed to a spot not far from the ticket booths and main gate. After a final check of their clothes the family began the last part of their trip on foot. Approaching the ticket booths, the father slipped in line to gladly pay the family's small entry fee; additional fees would be charged inside the park. The rest moved forward to glimpse the floral Mickey Mouse at the boundary of Disneyland. Meeting a few minutes later, the family took a picture to commemorate the moment, then went, one by one, through the turnstiles and toward the entryway. Ahead of them stood a turn-of-the-century train station and below that tunnels leading inside. They stopped to make note of the sign at the entrance to the tunnels: "Here you leave today and enter the worlds of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy". With a quick glance shared amongst themselves, they joined the dozens of others and crossed from their world into another.

Emerging on the other side they found themselves in the year 1900. A town square was in the midst of a celebration: a band played a Sousa march; peanut and popcorn sellers plied their trade; a group of firefighters polished their truck over at the Fire Station; City Hall displayed festive Fourth of July bunting; a horse-drawn street car slowly made its way around the square to travel up Main Street, U.S.A. The family took time to read the dedication plaque at the foot of the flagpole: "To all who come to this happy place: welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past ... and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America ... with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world." Walt himself read those words on the opening day broadcast and the family now found them applicable to their own journey as well.

As they headed up Main Street, U.S.A. they felt a sense of peace and connection with their surroundings. The buildings and shops invited a sense of community and manageability: a bakery, an emporium, a cinema. They felt a part of the past and in touch with something lost in their own world. Soon they noticed something ahead for which Main Street subtly prepared them: Sleeping Beauty Castle—straight from the romantic fairy tale illustrations of the past. They were familiar with its basic contours from the Disneyland program, but to see it in person was to appreciate its true significance. This was the goal of their journey, lying beyond the comfortable and familiar. The castle seemed to somehow represent that interior place of joy and imagination so familiar to the young yet distant with age. The image conjured up memories of mythic stories read by firelight, introducing one to the beauty and terror of the world, endlessly recounted by the storytellers of the past. Sleeping Beauty Castle somehow brought all that back. They had never seen anything like it, yet at the same time felt as if they had returned to someplace set aside and forgotten.

This was the center of Disneyland and from the castle steps sprung the other four lands of the park, each with its own set of mythic storylines: Adventureland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. The family traveled first to Adventureland to vicariously participate in the myth of the explorer: navigating down uncharted waterways, escaping native attacks, and trading in the bazaar. Next came Frontierland and the myth of the West: saloon shows, riverboat trips, stagecoach rides, Indian villages. Fantasyland let the family participate in mythic fairy tales as imagined by Walt Disney himself: flying with Dumbo, fleeing through the dark forest with Snow White, traveling to Never Land with Peter Pan. Finally, in Tomorrowland, the family left the mythic past behind and journeyed to the mythic future: trips to the moon, the wonders of science, the highways of tomorrow. The family couldn't wait for this new world to appear. After a long day, they made their way back to the castle and watched the nightly fireworks show, providing a visual coda to the day's journey. Main Street, U.S.A. then returned them to the train station and the exit tunnels. With a final look they crossed back over the threshold and reentered their world.

On the long trip back home the family reflected on their travels and what they learned. The children felt like active participants in stories previously limited to the page or screen, thereby giving them a chance to explore the difficult feelings and emotions of childhood in transition. Mom felt a sense of continuity with her remembered past, thereby giving her a new perspective on a society increasingly divorced from tradition.

Dad felt a sense of hopefulness in the open possibilities of the future, both familial and communal, thereby giving him confidence in a vision as yet unformed. The family would not soon forget their journey to Disneyland, for they had seen a new world—one which in many ways seemed more real to them than their own.

Initial Observations and Questions

This hypothetical narrative of a 1950s-era family outing to Disneyland may seem quaint or naïve now, almost half a century on, given the prominence of the theme park in contemporary culture and the disposable nature of the current visitors' experiences.¹ In its initial years of existence, however, Disneyland was unique and was treated with a sense of awe and wonderment by visitors. Nothing else like it existed anywhere in the world.² Even more than that, Disneyland functioned as a classroom of sorts, communicating and interpreting a mythic tradition. A trip to Disneyland became a cultural signpost for the families of that generation and represented a form of self-definition for post-war society.³ The tensions of assimilating into the modern world could be addressed at Disneyland and the aspirations for a transformed tomorrow realized. The pre-war generation had a similar self-defining destination available to it in the New York World's Fair of 1939-40, which can indeed be counted as one significant antecedent to Disneyland itself.⁴ Tantalizing glimpses of a future world filled with moving sidewalks, television sets, and robotic servants filled the newspapers of that day, creating a sense of necessity in the population. But Disneyland differed in that the desire to initiate the trip was not one born of marketing alone. Although Walt used television as an important vehicle for the communication of intent and the dissemination of information, visitors were further prepared by a prior familiarity with the stories and mythologies referenced within the park. Both adults and children had grown up with the Disney animated characters and films, inculcating a desire for a re-experiencing of

¹ Today, most Americans live within driving distance of and have visited some form of themed park. The Disney parks, though, still maintain their premier, iconic status within popular imagination. Indeed, Walt Disney hoped for as much: "When we were planning Disneyland, we hoped that we could build something that would command the respect of the community and after 10 years, I feel that we've accomplished that, not only the community but the country as a whole." *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, ed. Dave Smith, (The Walt Disney Company, 1994), 36.

² Of course, amusement parks like those on Coney Island, New York and the seaside piers that dotted the California coastline all predate Disney's park. Disneyland's claim on uniqueness came more from the type and quality of the "amusements" available than from their mere existence. For a concise review of Disney theme park antecedents, see Neil Harris, "Expository Expositions: Preparing for the Theme Parks," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, ed. Karal Ann Marling (New York: Flammarion, 1997), 19-27, and Raymond M. Weinstein, "Disneyland and Coney Island: Reflections on the Evolution of the Modern Amusement Park," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26 (Summer 1992): 131-164.

³ "The public liked Disneyland. On New Year's Eve, 1957, attendance reached the ten million mark. Statistics further indicated that a hefty 40 percent of the guests had come from outside California, often driving long distances to reach their destination." Karal Ann Marling, "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream," *American Art* 5:1-2 (1991).

⁴ "I think that there are moments where you can see the world turning from what it is into what it will be. For me, the New York World's Fair is such a moment. It is a compass rose pointing in all directions, toward imaginary future and real past, false future and immutable present, a world of tomorrow contained in the lost American yesterday," John Crowley, *The World of Tomorrow*, dirs. Lance Bird and Tom Johnson (New York: Media Study, 1986).

these images and storylines in a more tangible way.⁵ This lent immediacy to visitors' travels through the park and created an almost unconscious sense of comfort and openness. Transformational, mythic stories were referenced, visitors became willing participants in their development, and the hopeful possibilities inherent in their outcome actively provided a sense of resolution and confidence in both visitors and the society of the 1950s.

The increasing popularity of Disneyland soon prompted many regional competitors, dedicated to duplicating the form (if not the content) of the theme park.⁶ Disney himself was slow to replicate, waiting more than ten years before announcing the Florida Project, opened in 1971 as Walt Disney World following Walt's death in 1966.⁷ Here again was a project akin to the original Disneyland, albeit on a far grander scale, inspiring a similar response in visitors. The journey to Walt Disney World became the East Coast's answer to the West Coast's original paradigm, instilled again through television glimpses and print travel spreads. This time, though, a new layer was added as Walt Disney World was intended to be more than the theme park proper, known in Florida as the Magic Kingdom. Here was nothing less than a utopian vision of a future metropolis: architecture, infrastructure, housing, recreation, transportation, dining, all ecologically grounded and independently controlled. The promise of the future in the original Tomorrowland was, in Florida, writ large and advertised as a practical necessity to overcome the plight of urban centers in the 1960s.⁸ This development did not go unnoticed by the intellectual community, who recognized a distinct attempt at utopian realization in addition to the existing referents, making a trip to Florida one of even greater urgency in terms of self-definition. Indeed, journalist David Brinkley called Walt Disney World "the most imaginative and effective piece of urban planning in America."⁹

The idea of the Disney theme park as a distinct and challenging expression of a social ethos continued to grow as each new park reflected the changing values and perceived needs of a developing culture. EPCOT Center (now Epcot) at Walt Disney World opened in 1982, representing a contemporary vision of human beings in relation both to the natural world and to each other.¹⁰ Tokyo Disneyland opened in 1983, introducing the form and content of Disneyland into a new context: contemporary

⁵ This impetus can be seen in other ways as well: the popularity of Disney storybooks and comic books, the proliferation of Disney consumer products, and the early soundtrack releases of Disney scores.

⁶ These include Knott's Berry Farm and Magic Mountain in Southern California and even international sites like Europa-Park in Germany and Nara Dreamland in Japan.

⁷ The project had been conceptualized and the land purchased before Walt Disney's death but was designed, constructed and completed under the leadership of Roy Disney, Walt's brother.

⁸ Indeed this seems to have been the explicit intention behind the project in the first place. Walt Disney had intended the Florida Project to center around a new-town development, which he called EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), that would demonstrate the "cure" for the urban ills of the day. This fully functional, populated city was intended to be a showcase for industry and technology and a blueprint for the transformation of society at large. Although the city was never built much of the infrastructure was: mass-transit, health care, waste disposal, and modernist urban vistas.

⁹ Jeff Kurti, *Since the World Began: Walt Disney World The First 25 Years* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 83.

¹⁰ Epcot as built may have contained the name of the previously discussed city, but nevertheless was a theme park, not a place of residence. Some of the ideas broached in the original conception of Epcot survived, however. The Future World section of the theme park was a demonstration arena for new technologies and industrial imagination. So, too, the World Showcase section created a global community and a sharing of cultural identities.

Japan.¹¹ This interesting fusion of Western mythologies and Japanese culture resulted in a globalization of the Disney archetype and a recontextualizing of the transformational paradigm.¹² The Disney-MGM Studios, opened in Florida in 1989, incorporated the mythology of the movie industry, allowing visitors both self-realization through instant “stardom” within the mythic storyline of Hollywood in the 1930s and a deconstructive view “behind the scenes” to illustrate the creation of such a storyline.¹³ Euro Disneyland (now Disneyland Paris) opened in 1992, again importing the original set of mythologies into a new context, although this time attempting an intentionally cross-cultural, pan-European synthesis.¹⁴ 1998 brought a fourth park to Florida, Disney’s Animal Kingdom. An extensive program of ecological mythologies were introduced to visitors, inviting a systematic contemplation of harmonious creation, increasing antagonism between humanity and the natural world, and the hoped for redemption and re-creation of the lost symbiosis.¹⁵ Disney’s California Adventure, Anaheim’s second park and the cornerstone of the expanded Disneyland Resort, opened in early 2001 and deals with the contemporary mythologies of California itself: the entrepreneurial spirit tied to the geography of the state, the modern-day mythmaking of Hollywood, and the fantasy vision of a seaside amusement pier.¹⁶ Tokyo DisneySea opened in 2001 as well, becoming a natural complement to the existing Tokyo

¹¹ Tokyo Disneyland is owned and operated by the Oriental Land Company under a licensing agreement with the Walt Disney Company. The creative conception and design of the park, however, was still generated by the Imagineering division of The Walt Disney Company, allowing it to fall within the parameters of this discussion.

¹² The initial Japanese intention seems to have been a more-or-less direct import of the Magic Kingdom in Florida. Gradually, indigenous Japanese elements did make their way into the park; for example, the Restaurant Hokaido, serving traditional Japanese cuisine but located on Main Street, U.S.A., and “Meet the World”, an audio-animatronic history of Japan found in Tomorrowland. For incisive analyses of this interaction, see Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, “Images of Empire: Tokyo Disneyland and Japanese Cultural Imperialism,” in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Smoodin (New York: Routledge, 1994), 181-199, and Mary Yoko Brennan, “‘Bwana Mickey’: Constructing Cultural Consumption at Tokyo Disneyland,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹³ Although this park originated as a new pavilion within the Future World section of Epcot, Michael Eisner, Chairman and CEO of the Walt Disney Company, “saw no reason to limit this basic concept to a single pavilion in an already-existing park. The idea lent itself to expansions and elaborations on so many levels that the concept exploded into a movie studio design.” Kurtti, 123-124.

¹⁴ In contrast to the situation in Japan, French officials insisted on unique elements demonstrating their cultural heritage: Le Chateau de la Belle au Bois Dormant (Sleeping Beauty Castle) is influenced by both Mont St. Michel and the Gothic illustrations in *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, while Discoveryland (Euro Disneyland’s Tomorrowland) uses the work of French visionary Jules Verne to inform its Machine Age “future as seen from the perspective of the past”. This sensitivity extended to pan-European cultures as well, especially British and Italian, creating a park with a significantly different look and feel. For an excellent survey of the design of this park, see Didier Ghez, *Disneyland Paris: From Sketch to Reality* (Paris: Nouveau Millénaire Editions, 2002).

¹⁵ These mythologies are intended to create a specific reaction in visitors. “The Animal Kingdom park, by doing away with traditional barriers, dramatizing human-animal conflicts, and instilling a sense of fun, has the opportunity to convert guests into committed conservationists.” Melody Malmberg, *The Making of Disney’s Animal Kingdom Theme Park* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 170.

¹⁶ Although the Anaheim property had anticipated a second park for much of the late 1980s and early 1990s, initial plans for a West coast version of Epcot fell through given the escalating costs of urban development and various economic downturns. The second park as ultimately built drew on the abandoned Disney’s America project, albeit in a scaled-down and re-themed form.

Disneyland and implementing a unique and specifically applicable theme for Japan: the allure and mythology of the world's oceans. Walt Disney Studios, the most recent park, opened in Paris in April 2002 and again utilizes Hollywood mythology as its basis, although the broader intention seems to be the Europeanization of this mythology. The progression will not stop with these, however. One more park is currently proceeding towards completion: Hong Kong Disneyland, set to open on Penny Bay in early 2006. Beyond that, Anaheim and Tokyo have both suggested intentions of constructing a third park at each location, while Florida is hinting at a fifth. Even further international locations are rumored, with South America and mainland China strong possibilities.¹⁷

Despite the variety of mythological referents and contextual settings, the ten existing parks each preserve the basic experiential elements inherent in the original Disneyland as built in 1955: the journey towards; the crossing over of a threshold; the circular geometry of bounded space; the journey to the center; the progression of lands; the interaction of architecture, story, and visitor; the didactic intention; the hopeful transformation of the personal and communal. All of the current parks have successfully achieved an iconic status within society, their images alone communicating content and stimulating in many viewers the desire for the journey. This holds true even for the foreign parks—prior familiarity with the mythologies leads to a desire to travel, irrespective of the change in locality. Today the travel to, through, and from a Disney theme park is ubiquitous and frequently repeated by so many that it becomes increasingly difficult to find first-time visitors. Park visits are badges of societal involvement—a unifying, shared experience that, to a degree, cuts across social division.

The Disney theme park, although not yet fifty years old, has created a commonly-held, cross-cultural, communal pattern of activity involving immersion into and interaction with content-filled, created spaces which recover thoughts and memories of the past while actively proposing various transformational paradigms for the future. This dissertation, then, begins with some initial questions: How can one begin to understand these constructions and the activity connected to them? What is happening in the interaction of visitors and site? What are these parks and what do they mean?

Literature Review

As a first step in exploring these questions, a brief review of Disney related literature seems in order. Although the Disney theme park has been around for almost fifty years, the literature was surprisingly underdeveloped in the first couple of decades, consisting primarily of internal Walt Disney Productions (now The Walt Disney Company) advertisements and press materials announcing the presence and identity of the various parks, and travel pieces in national magazines hailing this new breed of family amusement. Only gradually did an academic commentary begin with attempts at explicating the theme park (and the general Disney) influence on contemporary society. Close descriptions of the parks themselves, including their specific antecedents and cultural referents, followed later and are still under development. For the purposes of this dissertation the body of literature can be grouped as follows: primary sources

¹⁷ Current news releases and insider rumors about future Disney theme parks are thoroughly compiled at *LaughingPlace.com*, <<http://www.laughingplace.com>> (21 September 2003).

consisting of comments from the creative designers of the parks, descriptive material published by the Walt Disney Company, and newspaper reports, magazine articles, and books accompanying each park's opening and subsequent development; secondary academic resources from a variety of disciplines addressing the general values and implications of the Disney theme park; and, finally, secondary academic resources addressing specific interpretations within individual Disney parks.

Primary Sources

With questions of intent, reception and meaning at the forefront of this dissertation, primary sources are of great importance. The words of Walt Disney himself provide an initial primary source. Although few direct texts from Disney exist, many interviews and discussions have been preserved, forming a kind of "oral tradition" dealing with the conception of the earliest theme parks and Disney's underlying intentions for them.¹⁸

Another primary source is found in the memories of the early designers or "Imagineers" who conceptualized and implemented Disney's ideas in the formation of Disneyland in the 1950's. These men and women, charged with the shaping of constantly developing ideas into workable forms, provide a window on the creative energy of that day. Then, with the passing of Disney, the creative impetus for additional parks became focused in the Imagineering division of the Walt Disney Company, of which much first-hand conceptual and design information is preserved.¹⁹

A final primary source is the promotional material produced by the Company in support of a park opening or expansion. Often this material interprets the parks for the public in advance of an actual visit, suggesting meaning and guiding response. It also reveals the self-perception of the Company towards its finished product, which may or may not be in line with the stated intentions of the creators. Included in this category are the park dedications preserved on plaques at the entrance to each park.²⁰ These primary source materials will be referenced throughout this dissertation, suggesting interpretive parameters for the explication of visitors' journeys.

General Secondary Sources

Secondary literature was slow to develop and came as a result of the almost immediate success of Disneyland in the mid-1950's. This popularity not only influenced national and, increasingly, international visitors but prompted the proliferation of

¹⁸ The most useful collection of Disney quotes is preserved in *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*. Edited by Disney Archivist Dave Smith, this volume divides quotes thematically and covers many important topics.

¹⁹ Much of this information is found in Randy Bright, *Disneyland: Inside Story* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987) and Bruce Gordon and David Mumford, *Disneyland: The Nickel Tour* (Santa Clarita: Camphor Tree, 2000), along with an important volume compiled by the Imagineers themselves: *The Imagineers, Walt Disney Imagineering: A Behind the Dreams Look at Making the Magic Real* (New York: Hyperion, 1996).

²⁰ Such material is preserved in a variety of places: internally-produced magazines like *Disney News* (now *Disney Magazine*); in-park promotional brochures and souvenir guidebooks like Marty Sklar, *Disneyland* (Walt Disney Productions, 1969), and "making of" books written from the insider's perspective like Jeff Kurtti's *Since the World Began* and Melody Malmberg's *The Making of Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park*.

indigenous, non-Disney theme parks around the world. This “Disneyfication” (to use a word coined by this secondary literature) of national and global culture inspired academic discussion. Scholars and observers from a myriad of disciplines began to consider the role of the theme parks in general within their fields, prompting some to praise and others to sound cautionary notes. Cultural critic Julian Halevy, writing in 1958, laments that everything in Disneyland is “reduced to a sickening blend of cheap formulas packaged to sell” in which “the invitation and challenge of real living is abandoned.”²¹ Film critic Richard Schickel remarks that when seen clearly, Disneyland “becomes a dark land, the innocent dream becomes a nightmare, and the amusement park itself becomes a demonstration not of the wondrous possibilities of technological progress, as its founders hoped, but of its possibilities for horror.”²² Urban planning critic Peter Blake calls Walt Disney World “the most interesting New Town in the U.S.”²³ and playfully suggests that “Walt Disney did not know that such things as vast urban infrastructures . . . were unattainable, and so he just went ahead and built them.”²⁴ Architect and master planner James Rouse, delivering the keynote speech at the 1963 Urban Design Conference at Harvard, states “that the greatest piece of urban design in the United States today is Disneyland” because it “fulfills all the functions it set(s) out to accomplish”, thereby becoming “a brand-new thing.”²⁵ Economic critic Carl Hiaasen sees Walt Disney World as a root metaphor of unbridled corporate greed.²⁶ Historian Marcia G. Synnott, responding to the perceived misuses of the historical record by the Disney theme park, insists that “the company must decide whether it wants to use its resources to educate and engage visitors . . . or to entertain them with nostalgia and fantasy-like playlands.”²⁷ Semiotician M. Gottdiener claims that Disneyland is popular “because many of its visitors, especially those from California, subscribe to the very same values as Disney and come from similar backgrounds.”²⁸ For social scientist Jean Baudrillard “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real.”²⁹ Such secondary literature suggests normative attitudes and paradigms applicable to all Disney theme park environments, either generally affirming or negating the phenomena of the parks from the standpoint of each particular discipline. These sources seem less interested in an interpretation of the parks as individual expressions of a community of designers and in the referents and analogies voiced within these environments.

²¹ Julian Halevy, “Disneyland and Las Vegas,” *The Nation* (7 June 1958): 511.

²² Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 337.

²³ Peter Blake, “Walt Disney World,” *The Architectural Forum* (June 1972): 24.

²⁴ Robert Hughes, “Disney: From Mousebrow to Highbrow,” *Time*, 15 October 1973: 88.

²⁵ Bright, 29.

²⁶ Carl Hiaasen, *Team Rodent: How Disney Devours the World* (New York: Random House, 1998).

²⁷ Marcia G. Synnott, “Disney’s America: Whose Patrimony, Whose Profits, Whose Past?” *The Public Historian* 17:4 (1995), 57.

²⁸ M. Gottdiener, “Disneyland: A Utopian Urban Space,” *Urban Life* 11:2 (1982), 160.

²⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 25.

Specific Secondary Sources

The next stage of the literature arrived fairly recently and is still developing. Rather than begin with a given discipline applied to a general Disney theme park experience, some critics reverse the trend and begin with the specific received environment, explicating the sources of imagery and design and reading individual parks as interactive, instructional narratives. Stephen M. Fjellman begins his study with an analysis of each attraction and show at Walt Disney World circa 1992 in an effort to draw connections with history, economy and culture theory.³⁰ Karal Ann Marling focuses great attention on the design of the parks, developing a theory of social reassurance communicated through structure.³¹ Beth Dunlop employs an architectural survey of the parks to note the development of artistic narrative.³² Alan Bryman develops a link between the triumph of fantasy over economics within the parks and the biography of Walt Disney himself.³³ Steve Nelson chooses to focus on single parks, Epcot and the Disney-MGM Studios, tracing antecedents to the World's Fair tradition and Hollywood cinema respectively.³⁴ Richard Francaviglia, sharpening the focus even further, discusses Frontierland as an allegory of western expansion.³⁵ Although their interpretive endpoints are quite varied, these critics take seriously the parks as specific, individual, and content-filled and are open to infusing their readings with primary-source intentionality and cultural referents.

Interpretive Proposals

These various types of literature have produced a wide range of interpretive proposals for explicating the phenomenon of the Disney theme park, both as repository for cultural understandings and as proactive blueprint for social reform.

Primary Interpretations

The primary literature limits much of its end-point discussion to the themes of community-building and education. The parks are places “where the parents and the children could have fun together.”³⁶ The boundaries between the aged and the young are intentionally blurred, each being mutually invited to interact with familiar, deeply-rooted, but possibly forgotten mythologies and environments. Indeed, visitors are encouraged to “recapture the nostalgia of days gone by”³⁷: the candy store and nickelodeon on Main Street, U.S.A.; the explorer launches and mysterious jungles of

³⁰ Stephen M. Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

³¹ Karal Ann Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks,” in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, ed. Karal Ann Marling (New York: Flammarion, 1997).

³² Beth Dunlop, *Building a Dream: The Art of Disney Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996).

³³ Alan Bryman, *Disney and His Worlds* (London: Routledge, 1995).

³⁴ Steve Nelson, “Walt Disney's EPCOT and the World's Fair Performance Tradition,” *Drama Review* 30 (1986) and Steve Nelson, “Reel Life Performance: The Disney-MGM Studios,” *Drama Review* 34 (1990).

³⁵ Richard Francaviglia, “Walt Disney's Frontierland as an Allegorical Map of the American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 30 (1999).

³⁶ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 32.

³⁷ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 34.

Adventureland; the stagecoaches and Indian villages of Frontierland; the knights and castles of Fantasyland. The age of these memories seems relatively unimportant. Disneyland assumes a common background for both old and young, offering a shared environment and dissolving (at least temporarily) generational distance.

Community-building also seems intended at a broader level. Social and cultural ideals are introduced and reexamined communally by virtue of their application within the theme park visit: the yearning for a general return to the small-town lifestyle; the reestablishment of civic duty and neighborliness; the rediscovery of pride in the national heritage. These stand in direct opposition to the “real world” outside the theme park boundaries. “I don’t want the public to see the world they live in while they’re in the Park. I want them to feel they’re in another world.”³⁸ This attitude of the communal recovery of lost common ground implies the creation of a neutral space, or “blank page”, upon which other perceived communal yearnings can be entertained. At the Disney-MGM Studios, for example, the mythology of fame and “stardom” becomes manifest within the created space, as visitors are encouraged to “become the star” for a day and place themselves “within the movies.”³⁹ These are potent symbols of self-realization and wish-fulfillment, here shared and available to all.

Education characterizes the other stated end-point of the theme park experience within the primary literature. Disneyland, especially in its first few decades, was intended to function as a didactic tool for the dissemination of new technologies and innovations, a function seen most clearly in Tomorrowland. The Hall of Chemistry, the Bathroom of Tomorrow, and the House of the Future all exhibited the domestic wonders of the year 1986, displaying a coming lifestyle of ease and comfort. The Autopia and the demonstration of jet backpacks displayed future modes of transportation. Space Station X-1, The World Beneath Us, and, especially, the Rocket to the Moon portrayed space-age travel far beyond earthly boundaries.⁴⁰

This future world was not on display as a necessary reality, however. The didactic intention seemed to be directed towards a presentation of a potential future, available if newly educated visitors (and, thereby, society itself) worked for its realization. The ideal of “visionary education”—a presentation of a potential future necessitating its realization—seems intended from the earliest stages of the theme park’s design. Indeed, Walt himself talked about the past as memory but about the future as challenge and promise.⁴¹ Tomorrowland functions as a vehicle for the expected transformation of society, crafted in the image of long-remembered visits to Disneyland.

The manifestation of the ideal of education can also be seen on a larger scale in the 1982 construction of Epcot. Although initially conceived as a functioning community, Epcot was designed and built as a type of permanent World’s Fair, showcasing (specifically American) technological, ecological and cultural achievements deemed

³⁸ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 36.

³⁹ As park promotional materials state, “Days and nights at the 135-acre park are filled with lights, cameras, action, romance, and fun!” *Walt Disney World Resort* (Disney’s Kingdom Editions), 136.

⁴⁰ According to the dedication of the land in 1955, Tomorrowland is “a vista into a world of wondrous ideas, signifying man’s achievements ... a step into the future, with predictions of constructive things to come.” *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 42.

⁴¹ At Disneyland “the younger generation can savor the challenge of the future” and will “show us how to make these wonders a part of our own lives.” *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 34.

necessary for the continued development and ultimate transformation of global society.⁴² Education once again forms the vital experiential and interpretive component of the theme park. Referring to the original conception of an actual city, Walt commented that “it will never cease to be a living blueprint of the future, where people actually live a life they can’t find anywhere else in the world.”⁴³ Visitors to the Future World section of the theme park are taught their role in the preservation of the oceans, the cultivation of sustainable agriculture, the enhancement of the global village through communications, the development of renewable energy sources, and the creation of new habitats and ecosystems.⁴⁴ World Showcase educates as well, bringing together young representatives from twelve different countries in a spirit of cultural fellowship and a celebration of diversity.⁴⁵

Community-building and education, then, stand as clearly declared intentions from the designers themselves, applicable not only to the three parks already mentioned but to all in at least some form. Amorphous intentions like “entertainment”, “fun”, and “escape” are liberally sprinkled through the primary literature as well, but these are undefined and can be applied to innumerable types of communal activities, from seaside amusement parks of the early twentieth century to the circus. The Disney theme park experience is carefully separated from these other activities within the primary literature, though, lending a unique air of grandeur, importance, and social significance to the creation and realization of these spaces.⁴⁶

General Secondary Interpretations

Within the general secondary literature the interpretive proposals begin to form a critique of the stated primary intentions. A class critique has been broached by rejecting the idea of the theme parks as environments of substantive community-building. This approach argues that such intention is hopelessly naïve and thoroughly mitigated by an actual perpetuation and magnification of existing social strata. The parks are seen as blind agents of white, middle-class, heterosexual, suburban America, represented by both the designers and the target audience. A theme park visit, rather than celebrating diversity by identifying commonly held values and experiences, makes normative the contemporary identity of one particular segment of society, incorporating its racial,

⁴² Walt stated that “if we can bring together the technical know-how of American industry and the creative imagination of the Disney organization – I’m confident we can create right here in Disney World a showcase to the world of the American free enterprise system.” *EPCOT Center: A Pictorial Souvenir*, (Walt Disney Productions, 1982), 2.

⁴³ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 53.

⁴⁴ This section of the park is “a celebration of ingenuity and innovation” through which visitors “become ‘Epcot travelers,’ bound on journeys as fantastic as Gulliver’s and as futuristic as our dreams for better tomorrows.” *EPCOT Center: A Pictorial Souvenir*, 5.

⁴⁵ As the literature indicates, “It would take a lifetime of vacations to explore the diverse countries of the world For travelers to Epcot Center’s World Showcase, however, it is a dream come true” and serves as “an inspiration for all the world and a heartfelt message for unison.” *EPCOT Center: A Pictorial Souvenir*, 48.

⁴⁶ For example, Walt Disney World is referred to as “a completely new kind of vacation experience”, despite the pattern provided by Disneyland. By virtue of the fact that it is “a place to *play* and a place to *stay*”, it is quickly dubbed “The Vacation Kingdom of the World” in the primary literature. *The Story of Walt Disney World* (Walt Disney Productions, 1976), 11.

economic, and geographic particularities. The rediscovered past represented by Main Street, U.S.A. is actually a false past as imagined by this particular class and used for the perpetuation of its own corporate identity. The fairy tales referenced in Fantasyland are ones remembered by those privileged enough to have had access to these stories in their youth. The Future World represented at Epcot is a future imagined in the image of this class and fueled by interests represented by its individual members. "In order, then, for Disney World . . . to be successful – that is, for a trip there to be fun – the park's visitors must perform complex ideological maneuvers which allow them to see themselves in the representations of American life offered there and, from that, to find them entertaining or, in Disney's words, instructive."⁴⁷ A class critique sees Disney theme parks as socially irresponsible, perpetuating the ideology of a triumphant middle-class and marginalizing all others to the point of negation.

Another interpretation analyzes the parks on the basis of economics, forming a subset of the previous critique. Again mitigating the idea of community-building, this approach sees in theme park construction and expansion a focus on those able to afford the considerable costs of visitation. By setting an entrance fee, limiting food and beverage choices, and creating multiple environments within a single resort locale, the parks function as economic filters, attracting those with the resources to fund not only entry, lodging, and meals but also clothing and souvenirs, while eliminating those "undesirables" without the means to fuel the economy. "The success of Disney World as an amusement park has largely to do with the way its use of programming meshes with the economics of consumption as a value system As an economic factor, the individual exists to maximize consumption – and therefore profits – across the broad mass of consumers."⁴⁸ Within this viewpoint all other claims of community or education are mere rationalizations of a corporate profit-making machine, effectively masking the benefits to officers and shareholders behind the facade of "joy", "magic" and "discovery". Indeed, this masking works so well and the fleecing of the consumer so invisible that the majority are repeat visitors, paying increasingly more to revisit a site that will have only slightly changed.

Another avenue of interpretation forms a critique to the stated primary intention of education. Michael Wallace, among others, has analyzed and questioned the parks on the basis of their presentation of American history. Commenting on Disney's appropriation of certain personages and events, he notes that "the unleashed historical imagination is a powerful, potentially corrosive force, not always compatible with the myth-making dimensions of their project(s) to date" although there is no "inherent contradiction between entertainment and education, between 'serious' and 'fun'."⁴⁹

Indeed the Disney theme parks have always contained a veneer of historical presentation to aid its effort at education and social awareness. Walt Disney was "a passionate historian" through whom "the past is powerfully evoked for visitors One might fairly say that Walt Disney has taught more people history, in a more memorable

⁴⁷ Jane Kuenz, "It's a Small World After All: Disney and the Pleasures of Identification," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92:1 (1993): 66.

⁴⁸ Susan Willis, "Public Use/Private Space," in *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*, ed. The Project on Disney (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 188.

⁴⁹ Michael Wallace, "Serious Fun," *The Public Historian* 17:4 (1995): 87-88.

way, than they ever learned in school.”⁵⁰ The type of historical presentation found in the theme parks frequently opts for the impressionistic rather than the verifiable. For example, Frontierland is more a depiction of the American frontier as filtered through imperialist memory than an attempt at accurate recreation.⁵¹ Walt Disney did not shy away from specific historic referents, however. Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln, developed for the Illinois State Pavilion at the 1964-65 New York World’s Fair and later moved to Main Street, U.S.A. at Disneyland, utilizes speech material and biographical data coupled with an Audio-Animatronic Lincoln figure in an effort to “animate” and make relevant information previously consigned to the pages of American history books.⁵² The planned expansions of Liberty Street and Edison Square would have also contained elements of historical recreation, offering up the Revolutionary War era and the Industrial age respectively.⁵³

This interest in historical themes came to the fore with the announcement in Fall 1992 of a new theme park, Disney’s America, to be built in Haymarket, Virginia outside Washington, D.C. This park was to bring Walt’s idea of historical education to the fore and offer specific recreations of a variety of eras throughout American history: the Civil War, Lewis and Clark’s exploratory trips west, the Native American experience, a World War II airfield, turn of the century county fairs.⁵⁴ Abandoned after conflicts with local landowners, the Walt Disney Company nevertheless signaled its intent to pursue historical representations and recreations as a means of furthering the stated intentions of education and community-building. The historical critique, then, of this long-ranging, multi-venue intention seems to focus on the appropriation of historical figures and events which are decontextualized and shorn of perspective. Rather than coming out of Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln better equipped for the understanding of his importance within the broader sweep of mid-19th century American politics and social progress, visitors leave with the distorted view of Lincoln as a lone individual who had some unique ideas about the abolition of slavery. Indeed, for this critique, one would probably leave with a greater appreciation for robotics and voice impersonation than responsible historical context. Disney’s America, if built, would have writ large this particular understanding of iconic American events, separated from significance and brought under a corporate banner of merchandising and profit.⁵⁵ For historical critics the name

⁵⁰ Michael Wallace, “Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 158.

⁵¹ “In its spatial organization, Frontierland represents the cartography of expansion: It is a locale in which the process of imperial colonization is *constantly* depicted and celebrated.” Francaviglia, 182.

⁵² The same holds true for the Hall of Presidents at the Magic Kingdom and the American Adventure at Epcot, a “multimedia pageant of striking grandeur (which) celebrates the dream of freedom.” *Walt Disney World Resort*, 120.

⁵³ These areas would have expanded Disneyland’s Main Street U.S.A., forming counterpoints to the existing 1900-era time frame. The reasons behind their abandonment are unclear, although indicate a lack of confidence in merging historical eras. For a complete description, see Gordon and Mumford, 44-45, 236-237.

⁵⁴ For a survey of the planned park, see Synnott, 54-55.

⁵⁵ One key question asked by historians opposing the project: “Do popular history teachers (including Disney and Colonial Williamsburg) have an obligation to tell audiences *unpopular* stories about our past that informed citizens nevertheless need to know if we’re all going to make this country a better place in the future? Or is ‘popular history’ just a euphemism for a purely market-driven, consumer-knows-best,

of the proposed park was enough to signify the illegitimacy of Disney's relationship to historical realities, suggesting the waggish name "Dis-tory" to describe their efforts.

Yet another interpretation sees the construction of Disney theme parks as an attempt to realize the Utopian ideology of the perfect society. In a positive vein, observers like city planner Robert Hart and author (and part-time Imagineer) Ray Bradbury suggest that the parks represent architectural and environmental excellence and go farther than any other projects in creating the "city of the future".⁵⁶

Transportation is environmentally conscious and efficient. Waste management is accomplished through the construction of underground vacuum tubes leading to specially-designed treatment plants. Sustainable agriculture is utilized for the feeding of the temporary inhabitants of this city. Architecture maintains a human scale and stands in partnership with the natural environment, fostering a symbiotic relationship. Preserved green spaces and wetlands provide for the perpetuation of animal habitats as well. The environmental pollution and damage inherent to growth and development are kept to a minimum while providing a new space of shared resources and mutual respect between partners. This interpretation again finds a certain voice within the primary sources. Walt Disney's initial conception of the Epcot Project was just such a demonstrative showplace for future development—a functioning city intended to model attitudes and processes essential for the recovery of society and to provide an antidote for the plight and blight of the city circa-1960.⁵⁷ Although this city was never built, the resultant parks have been interpreted as a partial fulfillment of the utopian model, indicating the potential for the transformation of society that lies within the responsible reimagining of the environment.

A contrary opinion also exists within the utopian critique, however. Some have viewed the physical championing of the environment by the theme parks as a misguided and doomed attempt at utopian realization. Louis Marin represents this view and refers to Disneyland as a degenerate utopia, abandoning the core ideals of utopian vision by neglecting the creative participation and empowerment of the inhabitants. "The basic tenets of the utopian mode of thinking . . . are at work in Disneyland, no longer as a form of knowledge but as a disguised apparatus which can be taken for its contrary: natural life."⁵⁸ Rather than encourage environments for the fulfillment of personal and communal goals, the parks institute and exhibit a corporate hierarchy of manipulation and limits. The inhabitants have their views determined and their potential circumscribed, all for the fueling of the corporate entity lying behind the utopian facade. The perfect society, then, turns out to be a corrupt reflection of greed and

celebratory version of the past?" Cary Carson, "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, Whose History Is the Fairest of Them All?" *The Public Historian* 17:4 (1995): 64.

⁵⁶ According to Hart, Disneyland is "(p)robably the best example of an urban environment where people are treated in a humane way." Paul Goldberger, "Mickey Mouse Teaches the Architects," *New York Times Magazine*, 22 October 1972, 94. Ray Bradbury, addressing the Imagineers during the creation of Epcot, noted "if we build all this correctly, if we build it beautifully, if we set an example for the world, we can change the whole damn country." Richard R. Beard, *Walt Disney's EPCOT Center: Creating the New World of Tomorrow* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 29.

⁵⁷ "It's like the city of tomorrow ought to be. A city that caters to the people as a service function. It will be a planned, controlled community, a showcase for American industry and research, schools, cultural and educational opportunities." *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 52.

⁵⁸ Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 13-14.

fragmentation. “In this, the park is the ultimate mass democratic capitalist blend of entertainment, education, and business.”⁵⁹

Finally, the Disney theme parks have also been critiqued from the standpoint of “faux reality” and simulacra. Rather than providing a place of discovery for the purpose of community-building and education, this interpretation would view the construction of castles, the Chinese Theater, African savannahs, and Sierra-Nevada mountain peaks as providing a perfected substitute for the actual locale or construction. Indeed, for Jean Baudrillard, “the Disney enterprise goes beyond the imaginary. Disney, the precursor, the grand initiator of the imaginary as virtual reality, is now in the process of capturing all the real world to integrate it into its synthetic universe . . . where the real becomes the theme park.”⁶⁰ Decontextualized, manipulated to fit a construction footprint, kept clean from decay and abuse, brought in close proximity to one another, these constructions offer little if any genuine educational content because the visitors’ frame of reference extends only to the simulacrum itself, not beyond to the ultimate referent. Indeed, the “real” becomes unimportant and the simulacrum takes precedent, appropriated for consumption by visitors content with the experience of the image alone. The result of this “is not merely the blunting of visitors’ powers of discrimination and the blurring of boundaries between reality and artifice: It is, more important, a transformation of the real fake into the fake real.”⁶¹ Rather than building a sense of openness to a new-found community of ideas and cultures, the simulacra of the theme parks divorces images from meaning, destroying the very things it references and creating an imperialism of perfection.

Specific Secondary Interpretations

These various interpretive critiques of the Disney theme parks voiced in the general secondary literature still receive much interest and comment. Some have even entered into the realm of conventional wisdom and are accepted as generally true for all the various parks. A counter argument began to arise in the last decade, however, and is now beginning to influence the academic conversation in significant ways. This set of interpretations rejects the eisegesis of the previous discussions, viewing the application of predetermined categories to the parks as a whole (and then critiquing the parks on that basis) as prejudicial and illegitimate. From this perspective a more appropriate starting point would be an exegetical approach to the parks, viewing and analyzing each as a related but unique construction with its own referential context and multi-vocal intention.

One interpretive analysis derived from this body of specific secondary literature proposes viewing Disneyland as a developed form of performance theater. Visitors are ushered into a theater as they enter the park, complete with stage sets, performance spaces and actors assuming a variety of roles. Indeed, the visitors themselves are invited to take part as well by physically traveling into and through the sets rather than assuming traditional, passive roles on one side of a fixed proscenium. Familiar storylines are then acted out within the spaces by both humans and animatronics. Even

⁵⁹ Michael R. Real, *Mass-Mediated Culture* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 86.

⁶⁰ Jean Baudrillard, “Disneyworld Company,” *Liberation*, 4 March 1996.

⁶¹ Fjellman, 256.

act changes are built into the space through the transitions from land to land. Performance theater models an attitude of vicarious involvement with engaging stories and themes and assumes both the authorial shaping of content and the contribution of the performers.⁶² An application of this model to Disneyland allows the park to function as a creative text expressed through space, architecture, narrative, and a community of actors.

Another related analysis again looks at Disneyland and sees within its design an attempt at exporting the language of film into metaphoric, three-dimensional reality.⁶³ As visitors enter the park there is a “red-carpet” of colored brick leading into Town Square, a prefatory “lobby” of sorts which prepares one for the “film”. As visitors travel down Main Street, U.S.A. the “credits” of the film are displayed on the windows of the upper floors via the creative listing of the names of many of the park’s designers. These credits end with Walt Disney’s name, found in the traditional director’s location on the last building before one reaches the Central Plaza and Sleeping Beauty Castle. The film then begins and contains as many scenes as there are lands and attractions. “Like a movie, this place was a fiction, subject to artistic control. And like a movie, it worked over time, to tell a story that unfolded in three-dimensional space, from train to street to castle.”⁶⁴ Visitors are relatively passive in this analytical model, content with riding pirate galleons and “doom” buggies through various environments while attempting to follow the storylines presented. As visitors complete a day at Disneyland and head for the exit, the film “ends” by presenting the closing credits on Main Street, U.S.A., leading the visitors back through the lobby to their cars.

This film metaphor proved so useful that the Walt Disney Company expanded this idea with the creation of the Disney-MGM Studios at Walt Disney World. Rather than simply presenting itself as film, this park allowed visitors to be on both sides of the “camera”. Visitors enter onto a film set recreating an idealized, romanticized version of Hollywood in the 1940’s, complete with starlets, autograph hounds, Germanic directors, and period billboards. This is a world of film and about film, presented with a nod to the iconic and mythic stature of the “dream factory”. But as visitors venture beyond Hollywood and Sunset the film set is exposed as such and visitors are let in on the illusion. Painted plywood flats, empty facades, flood lights, actor’s trailers, and the movie studio itself lie on the other side of the set and visitors are encouraged to become creative participants in the illusion-making process.⁶⁵ This de-mystifying of the

⁶² Speaking of Epcot, Steve Nelson argues that “the presentation of any subject or product is more appealing if handled in an active, performative fashion” which Disney uses to “create elaborate theatrical environments within the already highly performative fantasy environment of EPCOT itself.” Nelson, “Walt Disney’s EPCOT and the World’s Fair Performance Tradition,” 130.

⁶³ Drawing on the studio’s film output, Disneyland works to “create a three-dimensional wonderland . . . that totally enveloped the consumer. . . . The park (does) not tell a story in traditional cinematic fashion but instead make(s) the visitor an active participant in a kind of three-dimensional movie.” Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 390.

⁶⁴ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Park,” 82-83.

⁶⁵ “Movies and theme parks are certainly among the most prominent and effective purveyors of simulated experience. Their ability to present elaborate, tangible fantasy to a mass audience has made them the popular theatre of our age. . . . The mixture . . . allows Disney the maximum flexibility in changing the spectator’s experience . . . by letting them take the roles of actor, technician, director or whatever.” Nelson, “Reel Life Performance: The Disney-MGM Studios,” 61.

Hollywood mystique pulls visitors out of the film per se but is intended as a stimulus for personal creative imagination.

Yet another exegetical analysis views Disneyland as an exercise in reassurance and nostalgia. Drawing inspiration and incorporating elements from other public venues (the Chicago Railroad Fair, Tivoli Gardens, the New York World's Fair of 1939-40), Disneyland creates a landscape of memory and dreams as an antidote for the perceived deficiencies of modernity. Leaving Los Angeles behind, visitors to the park in the late 1950's would physically remove themselves from a potent symbol of modern life and travel to Disneyland, located in the midst of the orange groves and farms of Anaheim. This retreat would not have been simply geographic, though. A temporal shift would have also occurred, taking visitors back in time as it were to a place that only still existed in their memories, either personal or cultural.⁶⁶ Stepping into Disneyland, then, would not be seen as an attempt at recreating specific personal or cultural histories (which would obviously vary wildly) or replacing the real with an alternative state, but rather as a place to engage memories in danger of being lost.⁶⁷

Much of this ideological intent can be attributed to Walt Disney's own autobiography and his struggle with the preservation of personal memory. Indeed, from his short cartoons to the feature length animated films to television and publishing, much of his professional career focused on the revitalization of memory.⁶⁸ Disneyland becomes a place for that revitalization to find permanent ground and build on the previous Disney output. Indeed, the idea of memory and dreams is built into the park itself. The architecture of Main Street, U.S.A., the first element of the memoryscape experienced by visitors, uses forced perspective and reduced scale to create a personalized intimacy reflective of memory. Incongruous, dream-like juxtapositions occur frequently within the park, the most obvious example being a small-scale, storybook castle framing the vanishing point of 1900-era Main Street, U.S.A. The attractions available to visitors such as the Mark Twain steamship and the Jungle River also function as memory-pieces, recalling the stories and images of youth as experienced within storybooks and films. Finally, encircling this landscape and standing in direct opposition to the automobiles that brought visitors to Anaheim is another potent icon from a vanished time: the steam-powered locomotive.

This analysis of Disneyland as preservation of memory is no mere exercise in nostalgia, though. The end result, as potently stated in the writings of Karal Ann Marling, is the reassurance memory brings to a culture and society struggling with the accelerated demands of modernity. Disney, Marling suggests, believed that his art "ought to provide comfort and refuge from that world of woes he knew at first hand." Disneyland, then, was "built behind a berm to protect it from the evils that daily beset humankind on all sides. It aimed to soothe and reassure. It aimed to give pleasure. Joy.

⁶⁶ Indeed, Paul Goldberger calls Disneyland the "Town Square of Los Angeles", signaling a perceived dissatisfaction with modern urban life and a yearning for identity. Goldberger, "Mickey Mouse Teaches the Architects".

⁶⁷ Such memories would include the elimination of conflict, though. "The Disney theme parks provide a version of the past which is distorted by omissions and by a very upbeat message . . ." Bryman, 134.

⁶⁸ "Disney drew on his own predispositions and middle-class, Midwestern personality" in creating Disneyland, whose historical settings are "what cultural geographers call a 'field of care': a place . . . loaded with associations of familiarity and affection." Margaret J. King, "Disneyland and Walt Disney World: Traditional Values in Futuristic Form," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (Summer 1981): 129.

A flash of sunny happiness.”⁶⁹ This “architecture of reassurance”, from the perspective of the Disney theme park, addresses the rush of modern life and the subsequent content vacuum. Suburbanized society in the 1950’s, fueled by technological advances and a booming post-war economy, hurtled forward without preserving a grounded appreciation of identity and purpose.

For Disney, the machinery of modernity created a loss of awareness accompanied by dissolution of memory. The future would be a terrifying place without the preservation of the past. Indeed, this is demonstrated boldly with the placement of the lands within the park. Main Street, U.S.A. initiates the visitors’ journey and leads them to the Central Plaza, or Hub, from which they choose entry into the other lands: from left to right, Adventureland, Frontierland, or Fantasyland. After traveling through these specialized memoryscapes, visitors are prepared for the final stop, Tomorrowland. Significantly, a content-rich, humanized, dreamlike future awaits visitors only with the preservation of memory as secured through the other lands. Tomorrowland, then, became a place “where Walt could try to articulate a future so compelling that his guests and their children would want to go home and make it all come true, down to the moving sidewalks and the dancing fountains.”⁷⁰ The reassurance Disneyland offers is one of a grounded, personalized future through the retention and validation of one’s memories, hopes and dreams.

These specific secondary interpretations, especially the latter, make much progress in responsibly explicating and clarifying some of the unique compositional properties and cultural referents contained within the phenomenon of the Disney theme park. Missing, though, is an exegetical approach that can function on two levels: identification of a formal identity for the parks, i.e. what they are, and explication of their functional messages, i.e. what they are saying.

Such an approach should begin with the received elements of the individual spaces but should then be capable of expanding to encompass the formal elements held in common by all Disney theme parks, including the routinized sequence of the visitors’ journey into and within the space. It should also be capable of providing a functional parameter broad enough to engage a variety of content proposals, both general and specific to individual parks. With such a ground the various analytical approaches offered in the past half century would have a starting place for engagement and development, offering responsible interpretation, dialogue and critique.

Thesis Statement

This dissertation will propose one such approach applicable both in terms of form and function. The genesis of this proposal can be traced to an article by Alexander Moore, published in *Anthropological Quarterly* 53 in 1980. In his “Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and Playful Pilgrimage Center”, Moore suggests that Walt Disney World in Florida borrows its form from traditional pilgrimage centers like Mecca.⁷¹ He further suggests that the park itself is a bounded, liminal space, engaging

⁶⁹ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Park,” 83.

⁷⁰ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Park,” 143.

⁷¹ It should be noted that Moore uses the term “Walt Disney World” to denote both the Magic Kingdom park proper and the resort as a whole.

its visitors in rites of passage involving a separation from the world, a transitional journey through a ritual space, and an eventual reincorporation into the world. This sequence is writ both large and small, encompassing the journey to Walt Disney World and home again as well as the passages that take place while visiting the park. Moore, however, clearly states that Walt Disney World (as well as other Disney parks by virtue of association) merely borrows the ritual space form without importing any specifically religious content. "...Walt Disney World is an amusement park whose form is borrowed – quite unconsciously – from the archaic pilgrimage center. The argument is *not* that the behavior within Walt Disney World is therefore religious or necessarily even explicitly ritual. That behavior is organized, routinized play."⁷² Speaking as an anthropologist, Moore fails to apply his ritual space proposal beyond the formal elements. Function and content are reduced to notions of communal play as essential, but undefined, components in social health and productivity.

Developing this idea a bit further are Debra Riley and Christopher Parr of Boston University, who presented "Disneyland: 'Religious Revelling in Real America'" at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in 1989. In this presentation they describe Disneyland as a "symbolic landscape" which "promises to reveal the purpose of our past and the possibilities of our future." Referencing both Jean Baudrillard (Disneyland is a "religious revelling in real America") and Mircea Eliade (Disneyland as an example of the phenomenology of sacred space), Riley and Parr concede that Disneyland has "barely any religious symbols at all" but is a "modern pilgrimage site...evok(ing) a sense of paradise and purity" by virtue of its separation from the "profane". The park also has a "distinctly religious message" in the assurance to visitors that "the future will bring happiness" and in the triumph of good over evil represented in the mythologies and storylines of the Disneyland attractions. Riley and Parr support Moore in identifying Disney theme parks as bounded, liminal ritual sites in terms of form and proceed to suggest certain elements and content that can be thought of as religious in terms of function. Yet they fall short of claiming an actual religious identity for Disneyland, content to merely point out aspects of the experience that have a religious "flavor".⁷³

One further step in this line of thinking is raised by Eric Michael Mazur and Tara K. Koda. In "The Happiest Place on Earth: Disney's America and the Commodification of Religion" the authors examine Walt Disney World and, referencing Eliade, claim it as "a well-manicured piece of sacred space...an oasis in the vastness of profane space"⁷⁴ which creates an intentional religious experience and response in visitors. The authors fail to develop that claim, however, and instead identify a corporate motivation for the creation of such an experience. "Disney's parks...exploit the desire to live in a world of peace and beauty, to hope for a better time, and to leave troubles behind" in order to

⁷² Alexander Moore, "Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and the Playful Pilgrimage Center," *Anthropological Quarterly* 53 (1980), 207.

⁷³ Debra Riley and Christopher Parr, "Disneyland: 'Religious Revelling in Real America'," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, 1989, as quoted in *Abstracts: American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature 1989* (Scholars Press, 1989), 287.

⁷⁴ Eric Michael Mazur and Tara K. Koda, "The Happiest Place on Earth: Disney's America and the Commodification of Religion," in *God is in the Details*, eds. Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2001), 305.

“resanctif(y) the world of American consumer capitalism.”⁷⁵ The “trading in religious symbols and categories” acts as a substitute for traditional religion, deifying American consumerist culture. Reducing the claim of an inherent religious identity for the parks to a manipulation of categories in the sole service of economics seems a violation of the broad and complex streams of meaning generated by these sites.

This dissertation will attempt to further develop this approach by claiming for the Disney theme parks both formal and functional identities as religious sites. I suggest that the Disney parks cannot be reduced to locations content with the formal mimicking of an ill-defined, static conception of “sacred site” or as a substitutionary repository of quasi-religious meanings and symbols in the service of other cultural goals. The inherent complexity and multi-vocal nature of these constructions suggest otherwise. I will instead attempt to redirect the analysis by drawing on the ideas of sacralized space and ritualization. This dissertation proposes that the Disney theme park be approached as an agent of ritualization in the creation and experience of sacralized space: an ordered, organized space for the thoughtful, selective construction of social meaning and the mutual exercise of symbolic power, initiated in the creation of environment and experienced through ritualized activities and spatial movement, resulting in the recovery of the past and the possibility of a transformed future. This thesis will be pursued in four stages: first, an examination of the definitional parameters of sacralized space and ritualization, emphasizing the mutual construction of meaning and the interwoven power relationships inherent in the creation and experience of such a space; second, the application of these parameters and emphases to the Disney theme parks in terms of the creative process of park participants; third, the application of these parameters and emphases to the Disney theme parks in terms of the experiential process of park participants; and fourth, the resultant exercise of power and construction of meaning by park participants within sacralized space. Such an examination of Disney theme parks hopefully will provide a broad ground on which to place in dialogue the other interpretive proposals within contemporary Disney thought, a basis for the thoughtful discussion of these sites within Religious Studies, as well as a more flexible and coherent method of newly considering the complexity of the parks and their pervading influence, for good or for ill, on the global cultural stage.

⁷⁵ Mazur and Koda, 312.

CHAPTER 1

CATHERINE BELL AND SACRALIZED SPACE

In order to frame this dissertation's discussion of Disney theme parks as religious sites and to clarify the terms being employed, this chapter will attempt to suggest definitional aspects of ritualization and sacralized space applicable to the unique nature of these constructions. As a word of caution, though, it should be noted that any suggestions made in this regard need to be seen as tentative and provisional, always subject to further clarification in the light of the space being analyzed. The conscious selection and de-selection of potential aspects, and the fluidity of the interaction of aspects, seems almost endemic to this type of discussion, irrespective of the specific object of study.

Ritualization

To begin with I have chosen the term "ritualization" as descriptive of the core process of the parks; i.e., their identification as agents of ritualization. In this terminological selection I mean to suggest something other than is commonly associated with the notoriously diffuse term "ritual". Ritual has been variously defined as formalized symbolic behavior,⁷⁶ as reenactment of a cosmogonic event or story recounted in myth,⁷⁷ as expression of latent social cohesion and ordered relations,⁷⁸ and as thoughtful communication of cultural meaning, fusing the world as experienced with the world as imagined.⁷⁹ Coming from a variety of academic spheres (psychology, religious studies, anthropology, linguistics), these definitions tend to objectify a given event. This objectification separates the event into two: a priori thought and ideology, which communicate specific understandings of social being; and action, by which participants receive and implicitly accept that which has been communicated.

As influential as these and many other formulations of ritual have been, Catherine Bell's critique of such ritual discourse forms the foundation for this dissertation's approach. Her critique focuses on a pair of important issues. First, Bell highlights the aforementioned tendency of ritual discussions to separate thought and

⁷⁶ Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law, and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965).

⁷⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: New American Library, 1963).

⁷⁸ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965). See also Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

⁷⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

action. This division “unwittingly structures the whole discussion of ritual around a series of oppositions, including an opposition between the theorist and the ritual actors.”⁸⁰ This opposition may seem to converge and ultimately disappear in the phenomenon of ritual,⁸¹ rendering the critique moot. Yet the end result of such separation is distortion of the contributions of both thought and action, especially through a “subordination of act to thought, or actors to thinkers.”⁸² Ritual activities thus become byproducts of predetermined, intentional thought. They serve merely as conduits of symbolic code, embedded with meaning, but ultimately subordinate to thought and, therefore, expendable. Bell, however, suggests that meaning is not merely a function of the theorists, formed through thought processes and subsequently communicated in ritual activity. Rather, meaning is also actively created and constructed by the actors. Furthermore, ritual (and thus, the construction of meaning) is a process in which both thinkers and actors are coequal participants. As a means of resisting the bifurcation and hierarchical ordering of thought and action, the simultaneity of the two needs to be safeguarded. Thought and action are mutual, interconnected and in constant dialogue.⁸³

Second, Bell suggests that traditional determinations of ritual often approach the phenomenon either as a unique activity clearly and sharply separated from other social activities, or as the ground of behavior underlying and uniting all others. This delineation does damage to the multivocal and textured nature of ritual, suggesting arbitrary separations that “have little to do with the categories relevant to ritual actors, and (which) tend to invoke . . . methods of analysis that analyze action as the execution of a conceptual program.”⁸⁴ In Bell’s reframing of ritual, the analytical categories of separation and synthesis must be viewed as mutual in order to preserve the complexity of ritual phenomena.

For the purposes of this discussion, the use of the term “ritual” implies the a priori objectification of the thing being studied, the separation of thought and action, a loss of the interconnectedness of observer and observed, and a dilution of the influence ritual phenomena has within the broad framework of life. Common usage of this term seems to “impose . . . a powerful limit on our theoretical flexibility, our divisions of human experience, and our ability to perceive the logical relations inscribed within these divisions.”⁸⁵

As an alternative I will utilize Bell’s term “ritualization”, not in an effort to describe particular things but rather to highlight an active process. As Bell defines it, ritualization is “a way of acting that distinguishes itself from other ways of acting in the very way it does what it does; moreover, it makes this distinction for specific purposes”.⁸⁶ Bell resists an inclusive definition and does not deny the “otherness” of ritualized activity. Rather, ritualization is a way of acting (amidst all possible ways of acting) that constructs social meaning and provides an avenue for the exercise of social power.

⁸⁰ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80.

⁸¹ “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world” Geertz, 112.

⁸² Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 49.

⁸³ To what extent this is possible, though, is broached by Kieran Flanagan, “Review of *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, by Catherine Bell,” *Sociology* 26:4 (1992): 744-745.

⁸⁴ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 81.

⁸⁵ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 17.

⁸⁶ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 81.

Ritualization sees the traditional categories of thought and action as dual aspects of a process by which certain activity is purposefully utilized by a participating group both for the construction of meaning and empowerment.

This process manifests itself in innumerable ways but, in Bell's formulation, includes several defining characteristics. First, ritualization implies that the activity under question "should be analyzed and understood in its real context, which is the full spectrum of ways of acting within any given culture".⁸⁷ From this perspective, all activities are interconnected. The ritualization process, then, distinguishes some activities from others, thereby imbuing, or ritualizing, them for the purposes suggested. Resisting earlier formulations, such ritualized activities are not the ground of other activities, nor are they specifically composed as separate and inherently purposeful. Rather, the converse seems to be true: in the process of ritualization preexisting, complex webs of activities known to the society are thoughtfully ordered by participants and separated from other activities as meaningful and empowering.

Second, ritualization implies "the primacy of the body moving about within a specifically constructed space, simultaneously defining (imposing) and experiencing (receiving) the values ordering the environment".⁸⁸ Ritualized activity, then, emphasizes a unity of thought and action. As the social group engages in ritualized activity a simultaneous process of both creation and experience occurs. The participants actively define the activity as ritualized by creating a space for meaning and empowerment while simultaneously experiencing the benefits of the space. For the purpose of the current discussion this also minimizes a theoretical separation between creators of ritualized activity and the group experiencing the activity. Indeed, within the process of ritualization, the two categories are dissolved in the agency of the social group engaged in both creation and experience.

Third, ritualization "tends to promote the authority of forces deemed to derive from beyond the immediate situation."⁸⁹ Although these forces may, in some contexts, be described in transcendent terms, the ritualization process can validate the authority of the participants themselves, exercising power by purposefully distinguishing activity from activity. This intentionality allows the participants a measure of control and authority within the process itself, further dissolving the perceived hierarchy of established thought and responsive action. Given these definitional parameters and their relevance to the type of activity studied within this dissertation, I suggest the employment of the term ritualization in thinking about the Disney theme parks and the activity taking place within their boundaries. Indeed, these parks can be studied as agents of ritualization, given that the interconnected activities of creation and experience engaged by park participants are activities distinguished from others for the purpose of a mutual construction of meaning and exercise of power. Furthermore, I also suggest that the spaces containing these activities and acting as vehicles for creation and experience can be thought of in terms of sacralized space.

⁸⁷ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 81.

⁸⁸ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 82.

⁸⁹ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 82.

Sacralized Space

Again, the term “sacralized space” implies something other than the more common “sacred space”. The immediate difference seems to be one of degree; however, I suggest that with the rephrasing comes a shift in ontology as well. “The sacred” is often defined in ways that suggest substance and being. It is that which is holy,⁹⁰ powerful,⁹¹ or real.⁹² A sacred space, then, would be one in which the sacred “irrupted, manifested, or appeared in certain places, causing them to become powerful centers of meaningful worlds.”⁹³ From this perspective, sacred space possesses a substantial ontology, operating as space chosen by the sacred for separation from the profane and for the investment of meaning.

As an alternative to this formulation, the sacred has also been defined as a term of situation and context. Durkheim suggests that the sacred is located in the social group,⁹⁴ while Levi-Strauss suggests that “nothing is inherently sacred”, the term being “an empty signifier” capable of receiving “any meaning whatsoever”.⁹⁵ In this formulation an ontology of substance is replaced with one of relation, allowing application to any given context. These definitions are static, though, in that they both reduce the idea of the sacred to a singularity, either exclusively as something of particular substance or inclusively as something without.

The use of the term sacralization by contrast allows a focus on process. Things are sacralized in as much as they are intentionally set apart and invested with meaning by people. Sacralized things do not possess a particular substance, necessarily separating them from other, “profane” things. Likewise, sacralized things are not indistinguishable from the things surrounding them. Sacralization lies in the perception and authority of the social group rather than in the thing itself. Sacralized space, therefore, would be one manifestation of the process of sacralization: a certain space intentionally set apart from other spaces and invested with meaning. Such a term is useful when combined with the process of ritualization, for within the creation and experience of sacralized space ritualized activity has a focused environment for the construction of meaning and the exercise of power. Indeed, the two processes function as one, enabling the social group to distinguish both place and content in pursuit of the stated purpose.

⁹⁰ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harley (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

⁹¹ Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁹² Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961). A short survey of the definitional possibilities related to the terms sacred and sacred space can be found in David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, “Introduction”, in *American Sacred Space*, eds. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.

⁹³ Chidester and Linenthal, 6.

⁹⁴ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

⁹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Introduction à l’oeuvre de Marcel Mauss,” in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie: précédé d’une introduction à l’oeuvre de Marcel Mauss* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), xlix.

Intentionality

The use of the term sacralized space further necessitates a discussion of representative compositional elements. As previously noted, any such discussion can only obtain to the particular space under analysis, given the highly contextualized nature of the term. Despite this, by keeping in mind the processes of ritualization and sacralization, certain aspects of sacralized space can be highlighted as contributing to the susceptibility of a given space for possible sacralization by a given social group. Chief among these elements is the idea of intentionality. This term is used in other formulations of sacralized space to indicate the *a priori* reification of a given space's interpretive meaning, preconceived by an author and supportive of a bifurcation between thought and action.⁹⁶ Within the parameters of this discussion, though, intentionality refers to the conscious act of treating a space as sacralized—set apart from other spaces for a meaningful purpose. Intentionality is not a result of unconscious or subconscious processes. Indeed, if defined in that way, sacralized space would revert to the alternative rejected earlier: “sacred” space, ontologically declared (or revealed) as such by outside forces without the possibility either of assent or dissent from those thoughtfully interacting with the space.

Rather, intentionality implies consciousness of interaction. The space in question is approached, entered, experienced, and reflected upon. If found uniquely meaningful and if given conscious assent, the space is creatively appropriated and sacralized by the participating group in an intentional process. Thus sacralization highlights the agency of participants in relation to a space. From this point of view, the designation of space as “sacralized” is a creative act. A caveat to this, though, is raised by Bell: “Ritual practices are produced with an intent to order, rectify, or transform a particular situation. Ritualized agents would see these purposes. They would not see what they actually do in ritually ordering, rectifying, or transforming the situation.”⁹⁷ To put it another way, this suggests that all participants do not possess equal consciousness of their creative role (at least, not at all times). For some, sacralized space is more experienced than created. For others, the processes implied in the functioning of sacralized space may lie at the level of the subconscious, only revealed through examination and reflection.⁹⁸ Despite these variations, intent does play a significant function in actualizing the process itself. Indeed, intentionality provides the basis upon which an environment will begin to operate as sacralized space within the consciousness of participants.

This characterization of sacralized space initiates reflection on the specific processes involved in the functional manifestation and operation of the space. Ritualization can be considered the core process but can be appreciated functionally as descriptive of a set of ongoing processes: creation of space and experience of space. This duality should not be construed as a bifurcation between thought and action in which creation assumes the primary position and experience the second. Rather, the terms creation and experience can be utilized as descriptive of simultaneous processes

⁹⁶ William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1969).

⁹⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 108.

⁹⁸ Philip Smith criticizes her at this point, suggesting that the blindness of the actor cannot coexist with the primacy of intent. Philip Smith, review of *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, by Catherine Bell, *American Journal of Sociology* 98:2 (1992): 420-422.

involved in the manifestation of sacralized space. Also, they are descriptive not of isolated contributions by a certain type of participant, but of dual processes operational for the group as a whole. Creation is not relegated only to those who initially construct the space, and experience is not relegated only to those who visit and travel through. Rather, creation and experience are characteristic of all who intentionally identify a space as sacralized and participate in the ritualization process.

Creation as Process

Creation as process implies the formation and shaping of a sacralized, meaningful space as part of the intentional declaration by participants. This creative process may function at a variety of temporal stages by a variety of participant groups: prior to spatial realization by those involved in physical construction, during an actual visit by those exposed to the space, and post-visitation by those only subsequently identifying the space as meaningful. The process may also realize itself in a variety of arenas, ranging from an essentially intellectual reflection on things seen to a demonstrative proactivity towards spaces yet to be physically realized. As such, the creative process manifests itself in numerous ways.

Formalization

One important characteristic of the process is formalization through the imposition of order, for sacralized space implies an ordered environment. Rather than seeing space as random or incoherent, participants impose a sense of design and purpose, creating an environment able to sustain prolonged investigation and analysis. Order may be imposed on a “natural”, unordered space through the demarcation of physical boundaries—a conscious “setting apart” of one space from another. Order may also come within the perception of participants, choosing to view a certain space as separate and sacralized without any real change in the physical environs. Either way, under the creative aegis of participants, “formalization effectively determines content, transforming the specific into the general in terms of a natural and preexisting order.”⁹⁹ Formalization of the space is realized, then, through the ordering process—a “setting of the stage” upon which the construction of meaning and exercise of power is played out. Context remains important, though, throughout this process. An ordered space, though separated, is not isolated from its surroundings, nor does it possess hierarchical superiority by virtue of substance. Indeed the juxtaposition of spaces (sacralized and not, ordered and not) creates a dialogue that informs the ordering process itself, determining the effectiveness and constructive possibilities of the sacralized space while maintaining the latent possibility of sacralization within all environments. Order, then, proceeds intentionally through separation and formalization, bringing both physical and mental shape to the space in question.

⁹⁹ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 120.

Selection of Content

Ordered space is in need of content, though, in order for meaningful interaction to occur. This suggests another characteristic of the creative process: the selection and appropriation of meaningful content by participants. Contained within the boundaries of a given space are a variety of compositional elements: objects, bodies, architectural forms, vegetation, open space, even negative space implying the absence of an element. As a part of the process of creation, each element is potentially useful as a part of sacralized space, appropriated by the participants. Selective appropriation of elements implies an intentional appreciation for some and a consequent depreciation of others, based on utility and relevance. Selection further implies either a conscious, physical placement of certain elements within the space (along with the physical exclusion of others), or a mental appropriation of elements as meaningful from among the present, undifferentiated whole. This is described by Bell as “a minimalist logic that generates a ‘sense’ of logical systematicity while simultaneously facilitating subtle shifts in the ability of some symbols to dominate others.”¹⁰⁰ The various elements under consideration may or may not be permanent portions of the site, as sacralization implies the shifting nature of spaces, functional as such for a period of time by intentional participants but always subject to change and rearrangement. Despite this, the space as experienced by the participants provides material for the process of sacralization. So, the creative shaping of sacralized space creates opposition between the elements present and identifies selected elements as content-rich, making them available for use and imbuing them with purpose.

Organization

Yet another characteristic of the creative process is organization, for sacralized space is not only creatively delineated from other spaces and populated with selective, content-rich elements, but is further formalized and organized within its own boundaries. Organization implies a conscious appreciation for the interaction between the elements selected as meaningful parts of the space. Dependent on the number of objects selected the possibilities for the arrangement and re-arrangement of elements is vast and intimately affects the construction of meaning. If transportable, participants may choose to organize the space physically, creating new content possibilities through the initiation of dialogue between elements. If fixed, the elements of the space are still subject to intellectual organization and interplay. Either way, the organization of elements contributes to the creative process of participants by establishing context as integral to the sacralized functioning of the space. Elements, though consciously imbued with meaning by participating groups, are not isolated but rather form a community of interactive components, representing further content in partnership with all other elements present. For Bell “their sacrality is the way in which the object is more than the mere sum of its parts and points to something beyond itself, thereby evoking and expressing values and attitudes associated with larger, more abstract, and relatively transcendent ideas.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, the juxtaposition and balancing of

¹⁰⁰ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 157.

components, both physical and spatial, forms an important step in the creative process of the space, organizing the possible disparity of individual elements into meaningful groupings and deepening the communicative vocality of the whole.

Traditionalization

The final characteristic that is useful to highlight is traditionalization. This aspect is placed as an endpoint to the previous three creative movements and functions as a form of legitimization for the creative process as a whole. Traditionalization speaks to the process of appropriating the intentionally selected and organized elements of the sacralized space as manifestations of the linkage between the present event and the perceived past. Although the space is, by its very nature, *sui generis* for participants involved in the act of ritualization, the components of the space delineated through the creative process are traditionalized, or provided a history of meaning and interpretation. “Thus, traditionalism is an important dimension of what we tend to mean and identify as ritual, while activities that are not explicitly called ‘rituals’ may seem ritual-like if they invoke forms of traditionalism.”¹⁰²

Traditionalization suggests a conscious linking of elements within the space to previous cultural manifestations. This may be explicit: architectural forms might trigger thoughts of particular historical referents in participants, creating a sense of rootedness and longevity to the current manifestation. This process also may be suggestive: open space may force participants to create meaningful cultural referents to past actions or environments. Either way, traditionalization speaks to the sense of legitimizing the sacralized space and the activity associated with it by creating and preserving meaningful links to the past. In effect, legitimization through traditionalization preserves the sense of context and continuity important in this formulation. Indeed, “a ritual that evokes no connection with any tradition is apt to be found anomalous, inauthentic, or unsatisfying by most people.”¹⁰³ The activity of the sacralized space is not new, even if the elements and subsequent meanings are, for these elements carry the echoes of other times and places. Such is the nature of traditionalization that the creative reference need not be one associated with the participants’ own cultural environment. Appropriation of “foreign” cultural history seems increasingly an option within the globalization of contemporary society. Obviously, then, this changes the nature of the tradition in the process. “Ritual *can* be a strategic way to ‘traditionalize,’ that is, to construct a type of tradition, but in doing so it can also challenge and renegotiate the very basis of tradition to the point of upending much of what had been seen as fixed previously or by other groups.”¹⁰⁴ Through the creative aegis of participants, each element, indeed the organized space as a whole, is allowed voice and interpretation by virtue of perceived referents. Traditionalization validates the process for participants while preserving a creative autonomy, allowing the construction of meaning and exercise of power to move forward within a web of communal associations.

¹⁰² Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 145.

¹⁰³ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 145.

¹⁰⁴ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 124.

Experience as Process

With these characteristics in mind, creation as process can be seen as one aspect of the intentional realization of sacralized space. A dual aspect, though, is equally important in this realization and is necessary for a discussion of ritualization to avoid the hierarchical pitfalls mentioned earlier. Experience as process implies the sense of exterior movement by participants in and through a space intentionally declared as sacralized and meaningful. Indeed, “the body acts within an environment that appears to require it to respond in certain ways, but this environment is actually created and organized precisely by means of how people move around it.”¹⁰⁵ By necessity this process requires a physical environment within which to travel. This seemingly negates the declared opposition to a hierarchy of processes, given the standard progression from creation to physical realization. The sacralized participants who enter do not experience the site passively, though. Rather, they create by actively appropriating and interpreting the environment, fusing the two processes. Indeed, much of the creative process relies on the experiential for content and form. Also, the process of experience does imply a physical environment but does not necessarily rely on the full-scale realization of spatial elements. A simulacrum of the space would also allow the experiential process to proceed. So, the process of experience contributes equally in the identification of the space as sacralized.

Spatial Movement

As was the case with creation as process, experience as process manifests itself in many ways but includes several representative characteristics active within the participants’ involvement with the space. Primary among these is the idea of spatial movement, for sacralized space implies the movement of bodies in and through a specific environment. “Through a series of physical movements ritual practices spatially and temporally construct an environment organized according to schemes of privileged opposition.”¹⁰⁶ Motion establishes participants as active elements within the space, interacting with the objects, architecture, and open spaces. This allows examination and contact, influencing the quality of appropriation. Motion also works to eliminate artificial separations between observers and observed, perpetuated through the maintenance of distance. Entering the space declared sacralized by participants and seeking to embody the labor of constructive interpretation works to subjectively actualize that which otherwise might remain objective and static. Finally, motion calls into play the interaction of body and environment as well. Physical exertion of any kind has at least a minimal effect on the perception of the senses. This in turn is compounded by the effects of the environment within and surrounding the space. Difficult terrain or atmospheric conditions impacts the participating group’s interaction with the space, incorporating a multitude of sensory information and further shaping the constructive parameters appropriated through ritualization. Motion, then, greatly impacts the experience of sacralized space, providing a means of interaction with spatial content unavailable to detached observers.

¹⁰⁵ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 139.

¹⁰⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 98.

Visual Interaction

Another characteristic of the experiential process is visual interaction. Physically entering and journeying through space implies vision as a primary means of gathering information. This vision personalizes the contents of the space but also creates fluidity within the spatial organization, for as participants travel, elements shift contexts and reapply correspondences. For Bell, “it is by means of these operations that ordinary physical movements generate homologies and hierarchies among diverse levels and areas of experience, setting up relations among symbols, values, and social categories.”¹⁰⁷ Reification of the accepted dialectic within the environment is challenged through the visual interaction of participants. As movement initiates, previously unknown juxtapositions occur, suggesting endless constructive possibilities within and between the spatial elements. Fresh associations also bring an ever increasing depth to the ritualizing process. Initial reception itself proves tentative and incomplete as additional content imposes itself along the participants’ path, unknown without the experiential journey. Sequence also becomes important in the visual interaction with the space. This experiential journey within the sacralized environment implies a freedom of movement, allowing participants to anticipate and approach freshly contextualized elements from a variety of directions. This further multiplies the possible connections and constructions, contributing a layering effect to the ritualization process. Visual interaction, then, further enhances the process of experience, developing an even richer amalgam of interpretive possibilities for participants.

Performance

Further developing the possibilities inherent in spatial movement and visual interaction, performance is another characteristic of experience available to participants. Implying the embodiment of new roles or responsibilities, performance allows participants the freedom to appropriate the content of sacralized space and “perform” activities as a response to the contextualized elements. Participants engaging in performance temporarily but consensually assume a series of seemingly artificial personas with implied, attendant behavior. For Bell “the power of performance lies in great part in the effect of the heightened multisensory experience it affords: one is not being told or shown something so much as one is led to experience something.”¹⁰⁸ Enactment of such a performance serves to further break down lines of demarcation between objects and observers, making the interaction intimate and personal. Importantly, the elements within the space shape the nature of this performance but do not mandate—the acceptance (and eventual efficacy) of performance lies in the autonomy of the participating group. Performance, when chosen, serves to move interaction beyond observation or dutiful mimicry and into mimetic embodiment, “confer(ring) on the performance the ability to signify or denote larger truths under the guise of make-believe situations.”¹⁰⁹ Participants entering the sacralized space find opportunities for personal assumption through the ritualization process, lending

¹⁰⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 104.

¹⁰⁸ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 160.

¹⁰⁹ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 160.

performance an essential role in the subsequent construction of meaning and exercise of power.

Routinization

Finally, serving as an endpoint characteristic for the experiential process is the routinization of activity. This aspect mirrors the earlier discussion of the formalization of the spatial environment in which the elements within the sacralized space are ordered through the perception and involvement of participants. Within the experiential process, though, the formalization and ordering of physical activity occurs. Throughout this process bodies involve themselves within sacralized space through spatial movement, visual contextualizing, and mimetic performance. Consequently, a multitude of patterns is created through this physical engagement. These patterns of interaction coalesce within this final aspect through a routinization of the modes of engagement. Methods of spatial movement are measured and compared by participants, ultimately selecting those that contribute to the process of ritualization. Dynamic, meaningful visual groupings are appropriated, creating fresh layers of content. A selection of alternative personas and specific performances are recognized as constituent elements of sacralized space. These particular elements, within the experiential process, become routinized: established as valid, effective and worthy of repetition. “The emphasis may be on the careful choreography of actions, the self-control of the actor, or the rhythm of repetition in which the orchestrated activity is the most recent in an exact series that unites past and present.”¹¹⁰ Routinization creates a logistical parameter within which participants can re-experience the content of the sacralized space, continuing the development of the ritualization process. Indeed, the ongoing, routinized layering of movement, context and performance within a space effectively discourages stasis. Simultaneously, though, routinization also suggests an attitude of invariance toward certain categories of activity. Meaningful combinations remain as such and embed their patterns within the experiential activity of participants. Established and validated, routinization creates within the sacralized space a series of particular activities and, in doing so, brings form and order to the process of experience.

So, these dual processes, creation and experience, function simultaneously within the intentionally defined sacralized space to shape, clarify, contextualize, and routinize the elements and behaviors which participants appropriate as constitutive and meaningful. A hierarchy of the kind associated with the terms “thought” and “action” is at least partly minimized in this formulation. Rather than direct activity viewed as validation for *a priori* conceptualizations, “subjective” experience finds itself engaged in the creative endeavor, just as “objective” creativity is untenable without the contribution of experience. Both processes serve to further define sacralized space for the intentional participants as well as to set the interpretive ground for the purposeful result of ritualization: the construction of meaning and exercise of power.

¹¹⁰ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 150.

Exercise of Power

These compositional elements and processes, along with the intention of the observers turned participants, contribute to the designation and continued functioning of a given environment as sacralized space. With this ground in place attention turns to the result of such an endeavor: the establishment of a space in which meaning can be purposefully and consciously constructed by participants while simultaneously exercising the power of appropriation and control. Stress should once again be placed on the inclusive nature of such results. No preference is made between those involved in the initializing and physical realization of a space and those interacting within an existing environment. The processes of creation and experience remain functional necessities for all parties. So, too, the possibility that the components available for use in pursuing these results may shift over time, providing additional or diminished possibilities for interaction and interpretation, should in no way privilege or marginalize a particular interpretive framework. The appreciation for and appropriation of sacralized space remains the task of participants, irrespective of other factors.

Symbolic Power

The exercise of power is one functional endpoint to the process of ritualization through creation and experience. Development and accumulation are important elements of this exercise, for power has been demonstrated and actualized throughout the processes already examined. In as much as participants engage in the intentional declaration of a space as sacralized, power has been exercised. Creatively, the selection of elements and organization of spatial relationships, both intellectually and physically, is an exercise of power. The same is true within the experiential process: the choice of movement and contextualization of elements, as well as the engagement in mimetic performance, all proceed from a sense of empowerment. So, then, within this initial context, power can be defined as the accumulated demonstration of freedom to coherently declare and appropriate a sacralized space. Such symbolic power is “the power to constitute the given by stating it, to create appearances and belief, to conform or transform the vision of the world and thereby action in the world, and therefore the world itself.”¹¹¹ Participants within a sacred space are manifesting the ritualization process through the exercising such symbolic power.

Social Power

A sacralized space, though, does not operate in a vacuum of independent isolation. The act of identification and appropriation is the purview of a participating group, but this act lives within a network of other social bodies potentially engaged in a similar process of ritualization. Therefore, the exercise of power under discussion also has a broader social dimension. As participants determine the identity and meaningful content of sacralized space, the formulation is communicated within the act of participation within the space. This “sharing” of constructive ideologies in turn influences

¹¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Symbolic Power”, trans. Colin Wringe, in *Identity and Structure: Issues in the Sociology of Education*, ed. Denis Gleeson (Driffield, England: Nafferton Books, 1977), 117.

other participating groups and their own actions and engagement. The exercise of power, then, is also “contingent, local, imprecise, relational, and organizational”¹¹² and can be defined as the direction of the activities of others through “guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome.”¹¹³ Such exercise suggests the creation of a body of accepted or normative interpretive schemes relating to the sacralized space, further shaping and circumscribing the autonomy of participants. This should not be seen as an exercise in coercion, however. Other definitions of power intimate the ontological necessity for coercion, especially as it functions in the negation of the power of others.¹¹⁴ Social power, however, preserves the autonomy of participants while projecting specific patterns of activity for possible assent. For Bell this type of power “works below the level of discourse. It produces and objectifies constructions of power..., which the social agent then reembodies.”¹¹⁵ Particular creations and activities projected among the social body as a whole suggests that this exercise of power, even given its autonomous origin, might be appropriated as an ontological element of the space under consideration. “The process of objectification is one in which participants themselves physically effect the construction of a set of relationships, in the guise of participating in organizational schemes that appear to be mandated by the environment itself.”¹¹⁶ Thus, the social dimension of the exercise of power serves to create patterns of activity and interpretation for the sacralized space and works in tandem with the symbolic power of participants.

Negotiated Power

A final aspect of the power exercise within the process of ritualization lies in defining power as conscious empowerment through negotiation. In as much as symbolic power reflects the relative autonomy of the participants’ understandings within the ritualization process and social power reflects the projection of the participants’ understandings onto other social bodies, there still lays within this interconnected web a root ability to claim and exercise the freedom of negotiation. This may result in the appropriation of only some of the activities and meanings suggested by other participants within the space. Contrarily, the result may be an opposition to certain activities and meanings, especially as they threaten to dilute or transform currently held appropriations. Active are “concomitant processes of consent, resistance, and negotiated appropriation” which bring “to such activities a self-constituting history that is a patchwork of compliance, resistance, misunderstanding, and a redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order.”¹¹⁷ Negotiation occurs as freedom is exercised, thereby empowering one to “construct a version of the hegemonic order that promises a path of personal redemption, that gives one some sense of relative dominance in the

¹¹² Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 199.

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed., ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 220-221.

¹¹⁴ Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (London: Sage Publications, 1989), 4.

¹¹⁵ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 206.

¹¹⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 207.

¹¹⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 207-208.

order of things, and thereby some ability to engage and affect that order.”¹¹⁸

Empowerment suggests a dual appreciation both for localized understandings and for the latent possibilities within the appropriation of aspects of the social whole. Conscious acknowledgment of the constraints involved in both autonomy and projection, as well as the complex cross-pollination between both, results in a negotiated interpretation of sacralized space, actualized within the ongoing creative and experiential process. Neither interpretive frame need be privileged, for both offer options and circumscription to participants within the process of ritualization.

So, in the exercise of power the intentional processes of creation and experience, active in the identification and interpretation of space as sacralized, are validated for the participating group and projected onto the processes of others. Negotiation between the two empowers participants in the mediation of content and further shapes the interpretive end result. Each type of power provides the ritualization process meaningful validation and an existential ground for participants. Power serves to further minimize *a priori* conceptual frameworks transmitted for mute acceptance and appropriation. The exercise of power creates within participants the feeling of relative autonomy and personalized meaning, even in the midst of social constrictions and circumscribed interpretive boundaries.

Construction of Meaning

With the exercise of power standing as one result of the process of ritualization within sacralized space, attention turns to the other simultaneous result: the purposeful and conscious construction of meaning by participants.¹¹⁹ Incorporating the totality of information gleaned from the creative and experiential processes, the construction of meaning functions in a number of ways.

Validation

Firstly, meaningful construction formalizes and validates the initial, intentional declaration of the space by demonstrating to participants (and thus to others) the sacralized nature of the environment. The essence of sacralized space lies in the attribution of meaning to the elements, context, and activity occurring within the space. Creative and experiential processes suggest the diversity and interactivity amidst the elements, but the eventual declaration that these elements carry a constructive meaning, even when subsequently projected within society, is a necessary formal step. Only when meaning is expressly attached to the space can sacralization be considered valid. The construction of meaning, then, legitimizes the physical and intellectual separation of a specific space from others, as well as the claim to a population of content-rich, purpose-filled spatial elements.

Circularity

¹¹⁸ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 208.

¹¹⁹ The consciousness of construction may function as a subconscious process, though, when conducted without thought or reflection. “In ritualization, people tend to see themselves as responding or transmitting—not creating.” Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 208.

Secondly, construction of meaning also functions in highlighting the circular movement of interpretive patterns and compositional elements. Indeed, the term “result” applied to the process of construction might be misleading, for meaning is not a simple by-product of the other processes previously discussed. Indeed, purposeful construction operates within a circularity of enmeshed, dialogic procedures: meaning uses the information from the creative and experiential processes but also informs their necessary continuance with fresh patterns of significance. Meaning, in turn, is influenced and shaped by the empowerment present in the appropriation and negotiation of a variety of interpretive frameworks but also contributes and projects unique patterns into the social body for possible negotiation and appropriation. This circularity presupposes a pervasive, long-lasting quality to sacralized space in that the processes and meanings gleaned are under constant reexamination and negotiation. Indeed, for a space to remain valid for the purposes of sacralization, circularity and interconnectedness between streams of thought is of vital necessity. In essence, then, meaning stems from the multitude of processional streams but functions self-reflexively in the continual reapplication and reassessment of spatial parameters and definitions.

Reification

Thirdly, the circularity involved in the construction of meaning, along with the empowered freedom of interpretation, argue against the reification of specific meaning as a necessary and direct outgrowth of the space. Reification presupposes what is called a “textualized” understanding of ritual in which “meaning (is) something that can be deciphered, decoded, or interpreted.”¹²⁰ This pursuit assumes that the space operates as a text which “is autonomous and unified on one hand and that its latent meaning is fully accessible to a close reading of its manifest form on the other.”¹²¹ However, the processes of creation and experience within sacralized space imply the multi-vocality of the constitutive elements and the uniqueness of contextualized movement and performance. Rather than reading these elements as texts and seeking the discovery of latent meaning, sacralized space suggests a certain openness of interpretation and meaning, taking into consideration all variables and interactivity brought to the space through the processes outlined. This openness is delimited by the visual elements and narrative mythologies available within the sacralized space. Yet even with the exercise of social power and the interpretive parameters surrounding the construction of meaning, participants remain free to exercise selective appropriation, thereby opening all available elements to a multitude of relevant possibilities. Reification, then, is challenged and, to some degree, marginalized through the processes involved in sacralized space. The construction of meaning is open to unique shaping by participants within the larger framework of the societal body, creatively configuring all processional information while remaining aware of the strictures placed upon it by other participants and the spatial elements themselves.

So, with the construction of meaning by participants, sacralized space is validated and proven worthy of the initial, intentional declaration. Rather than presenting itself as ontologically sacred by prior creative forces and communicating latent meaning

¹²⁰ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 45.

¹²¹ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 45.

upon secondary, passive receivers, sacralized space takes seriously the interconnected web of significance created by participants through the ritualization process. Meaning is an outgrowth of the circularity of interpretive responses to multi-vocal elements and contexts, delimited by the materials available and set within the mutual exercise of power, legitimizing the nature of the sacralized space and participants.

In summary, a physical environment can act as an agent of ritualization and can therefore be declared sacralized through the intentional separation of the space from other spaces and through the creative and experiential interaction with the space by participants, enabling an exercise of symbolic and social power and the construction of meaning. These characteristics form a beginning point in the discussion of sacralized space, providing parameters within which a space may be examined while introducing the complex web of significances active in its interpretation. As example of this, and in further elaboration of the thesis statement, the Disney theme park has the potential to be intentionally interpreted by participants as an agent of ritualization and can be defined as sacralized space in that it manifests the characteristics outlined in this chapter to a significant degree. So, then, the discussion turns now to the parks themselves and to the processes at work within them.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROCESS OF CREATION IN THE DISNEY THEME PARK

Building on the theoretical framework proposed in the previous chapter, I now turn to application in an effort to suggest the process of ritualization and the manifestation of the concept of sacralized space within the Disney theme parks themselves. This discussion will focus on the Disney theme park in general, advocating a ritualized identity shared by each construction. In initiating this application, though, it should be noted that the development of such an identity does not constitute a claim for ontological necessity. The Disney theme park should not be seen as inherently or exclusively ritualized and sacralized; indeed, given the fluid, processional nature of these terms, such an attribution is not possible. Rather, the proposition of ritualized identity should be seen as one potential descriptor of the creative and experiential processes at work within these spaces, dependant on the thoughtful construction of such meaning by participants.

Ritualization

An initial step in applying the proposed conceptual model to the Disney theme park lies in the general identification of the parks as agents of ritualization. As presented, ritualization describes a process by which an activity or space is distinguished from other activities or spaces and imbued with purpose or meaning by participants. Such an activity or space is not set apart ontologically, but rather is distinguished through conscious action. Such an activity or space does not impose purpose or meaning, but rather provides a ground upon which purpose and meaning are consciously constructed through the mutual exercise of power. Furthermore, such an activity or space does not bifurcate participation between creators and visitors, but rather sees creation and experience as processes in which all participate.

This formulation of the process of ritualization seems quite descriptive of the Disney theme park. Rather than possessing some intrinsic uniqueness, these spaces and the activities occurring within their boundaries can be seen as an amalgam of a rich array of cultural entertainments and diversions. The structural framework of the Disney parks draws on such antecedents as the Coney Island style amusement park, the World's Fair tradition, historical pageants such as the Chicago Railroad Fair of 1952, and the Wild West shows of the 19th century, many of which were familiar to the earliest Disneyland visitors.¹²² The content of the Disney parks is also embedded in a cultural

¹²² See Karal Ann Marling, "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream".

tradition, from the images of an idealized turn-of-the-century small town Main Street and 19th century storybook illustrations to the characters and situations from the cinematic Old West and Sci-Fi future, as well as the direct referencing of the filmmaking output of the Walt Disney Studios.¹²³ Although Disney spaces are physically separated from their surroundings through architecture and geography, they are not isolated or independent, but rather a conscious development of the past, intentionally drawing from cultural tradition. The space is thus embedded within the social fabric and promotes a sense of familiarity and comfort for participants. Given this context, as well as an increasingly ubiquitous cultural presence, the parks are now generally accepted as a standard component of American, and indeed global, society.

Any claim of uniqueness, then, arises as a response generated through the agency of participants traveling within and experiencing the space, not as a necessary result of identity. Indeed, many will undertake such a journey and find nothing unique, while others claim the space as different and, in some way, important. Uniqueness is an exercise of creative and experiential power by participants, as activated in the process of ritualization.

Likewise, any claim that purpose or meaning occur within the boundaries of this differentiated space arises not from any intrinsic cultural demarcation or even from specific, intentional declarations by the designers. Although the content of the spaces includes stories and environments that have an independent interpretive tradition, the spaces themselves operate primarily through visual categories, thereby resisting the assignment of specific meanings. Furthermore, although the designers and even Walt himself spoke in general terms about the “meaning” of the spaces¹²⁴, these comments (with the exception of the dedication plaques at the entrance to each park) are not a necessary part of any particular participants’ journey. Rather, a declaration of purpose, if chosen, must arise as a reflective response of participants, who, having already claimed differentiation for the space, are now apprehending the space as meaningful. Previous interpretive traditions may inform the experiences of participating groups, but sacralized meaning is declared and constructed as a creative exercise of power.

The activity by participants is thus one of simultaneous creation and experience—no bifurcation exists between the designation of the space and the apprehension. Lacking intrinsic differentiation or meaning, the Disney theme park offers participants the possibility of creating and experiencing the space as differentiated and meaningful; in other words, as ritualized. This possibility makes manifest the process of ritualization and provides participants with new possibilities of meaning and perception. The possibilities existing within the space for such participation closely align with the proposal to analyze the Disney theme park in terms of ritualization.

¹²³ Again, Marling’s work is quite fine in this regard, especially “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks.”

¹²⁴ “Disneyland would be a world of Americans, past and present, seen through the eyes of imagination – a place of warmth and nostalgia, of illusion and color and delight ... it would encompass the essence of the things that were good and true to American life. It would reflect the faith and challenge of the future, the entertainment, the interest in intelligently presented facts, the stimulation of the imagination, the standards of health and achievement, and above all, a sense of strength, contentment and well-being.” *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 29-30.

Sacralized Space

Another step in application of the proposal lies in the identification of the Disney theme park as sacralized space. According to the previous chapter, sacralized space implies a spatial environment within which the process of ritualization is active. Such a space is intentionally declared sacralized as part of the ongoing process of ritualization and preserves within the designation the possibility of a continual reinvestment of meaning. The Disney theme park, by virtue of their physical, environmental reality and their manifestation of the process of ritualization, can also be defined as sacralized space. Rather than seen as ontologically sacred or authoritatively declared such by transcendent sources, the parks are sacralized and meaningful in as much as they are declared such by participants. The parks are also able to be continually reinterpreted as sacralized as conditions, context and participation change. Given that the specifics of each application of sacralized identity lies in the agency of participants, this is true even with the establishment of parks in Europe and Asia. Sacralized space, then, seems an apt descriptor for the Disney theme park, further grounding the propositional claims of ritualization.

Intentionality

A further step, one that leads to a more specific discussion of the creative and experiential processes, is the application of the idea of intentionality. As previously noted intentionality implies the consciousness of participants' interaction with the space in question. For the activation and perpetuation of ritualization a space must be intentionally treated as differentiated and meaningful. The Disney theme park requires such intentionality, building a ritualized identity from the consciousness of participants. This intentional declaration may be a function of the experiential journey itself or a reflective movement after its conclusion. Either way, intentionality requires a conscious identification of sacralized identity. The park does not function as sacralized space by virtue of general consensus or rooted tradition. Many visitors may return from a park visit with fond memories and a strong sense of the "perfect place". Yet many visitors remain within the category of casual observer, unable or unwilling to recognize or declare the space sacralized. For the process to activate the participants need to make the intentional, creative leap of sacralized identification, responding to the elements and narratives of the experiential journey. Sacralized intentionality arises from a deeply felt connection to the space itself, implying an assent and an appropriation of the process of ritualization.

The Process of Creation

With the terms ritualization, sacralized space and intentionality applied within the framework of the Disney theme park, the discussion now moves into a more specific series of functional, compositional elements contributing to the proposal of religious identity; specifically, the processes of creation and experience. As previously developed, a sacralized space consists of dual processes simultaneously at work in the interaction between the space and the participants. These processes shape and

actualize sacralized space, forming the ground for the construction of meaning and exercise of power. The process of creation is concerned with the demarcation and organization of the space, while the process of experience is concerned with the traveling through and contextualization of the space. These processes function concurrently and are of equal necessity for the process of ritualization. I begin, then, with the process of creation as applied to the Disney theme park.

As previously noted, the process of creation entails the active shaping of space intentionally declared as sacralized. Participants are not merely receptors of a previously defined, conceptualized, and realized space, though. Participation is the defining characteristic of anyone intentionally appropriating a space as sacralized and is possible from a variety of temporal and physical standpoints, including both designers and visitors. The process of creation is a constituent part of broad engagement within the sacralized space, incorporating all participating groups in a shaping of environment and perception.

Imposition of Order

The creation of sacralized space implies a change in perception for participants. This perceptual change may develop in any number of temporal and conceptual ways but implies a series of constituent elements available for consideration and appropriation.

The first element of the creative process to consider is the imposition of order. Enabling a space to carry the weight of sacralization, ordering suggests a conscious structuring of environment by participants. Rather than the acceptance of a given space as random or amorphous, ordering implies design, composition, and thoughtful engagement. One way this occurs is through the demarcation of boundaries. Sacralized space is clearly defined space, set apart from the surrounding environment. Therefore, the establishment of boundaries as a means of separation and circumscription is endemic to the ordering process. The Disney theme park as sacralized space clearly demonstrates this attribute in a number of functional ways. From the perspective of design, each park has a threshold over which one must cross, physically and experientially leaving one space and entering another. This “crossing over” often occurs at the entrance turnstiles as participants have their ticket media examined, thereby granting personal access to separated space and reinforcing the bounded nature of the park.

Another boundary exists at the four Magic Kingdom parks, though. After this formal barrier, participants must progress even farther before passing *through* (not just over) a visual barrier. Access is granted via tunnels cut through an earthenwork berm surrounding the entire park and, at the entrance, supporting one of the park’s railroad stations overhead. More explicit than the turnstile barrier, the tunnels function as deliberate boundary demarcation, as verbalized at Disneyland by the entrance plaque overhead: “Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy.” Although one is given an intriguing glimpse, especially if a steam engine is at the station, this barrier effectively prevents participants from seeing inside the space prematurely. The random space left behind does not overlap the sacralized space ahead. As participants move forward the present world ends at the tunnel entry.

Especially true on a bright sunny day, the tunnel surrounds and swallows participants in shadow, effectively isolating one between worlds for a moment. There is light ahead, though, and as one moves forward the space begins to be revealed.

Referencing traditional imagery connected with birth (or, in this instance, rebirth), one finally emerges from shadow into light once again, completing the boundary crossing. Looking back, the reverse is now true as the world left behind is visually blocked within the sacralized space. “The act of entry was a rite of passage telling the stranger to shake off the customs of that other place—the formless sprawl of Los Angeles out beyond the parking lot, the town two or three stops back along the railroad tracks.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, as participants travel through this space the boundary established at entry is maintained. From the perspective of construction, the berm functions as filter for ground-level aural impositions from the outside world, while the careful balancing of construction elevations both inside and out effectively prevent the visual distraction of participants. As stated earlier Walt actively prevented visitors from seeing “the real world they live in while they’re in the park. I want them to feel they are in another world.”¹²⁶ With few exceptions the outside world does not intrude upon the sacralized environment. From the perspective of visitation, physical separation from one world and emergence into another has been signaled through visual design. More dramatic and sensory than the formal barrier at the turnstiles, crossing the berm through the Magic Kingdom’s tunnels specifies the implication of bounded space while offering a reinforcing host of metaphoric, interpretive symbols for participants who choose to appropriate them.

A further aspect to the imposition of order is the formalization of space. Once boundaries are established for the sacralized space participants impose a formal structure on the world “discovered” within. This structuring challenges the perceived randomness of the natural world outside by declaring a balanced and harmonious environment shaped through the creative aegis of participants. Formality overlays the space with thoughtful design, contributing to the sacralized nature of the space. Indeed, through formalization the sacralized space signals purposeful intent, anticipating the construction of meaning and exercise of power by participants. Thus, when seen as sacralized space, the Disney theme park formalizes the interior environment in very specific terms.

With the exception of Epcot, each park utilizes a wheel-like “hub and spoke” format to order the space. This formalization begins with the circle drawn by the boundary demarcation. The earthen berm and/or architecture around the perimeter of the space seals off the interior while resisting random, angular resolution, looping back on itself. The circular form created then implies a center, provided by each park with a different central icon. Within the Magic Kingdoms, castles are constructed, while rising at Disney’s Animal Kingdom and Tokyo DisneySea are a massive tree and volcano respectively. Each centralizes the circular form with a hub-like center point, providing the formal opposition inherent in the design. Furthermore, radiating out from this center hub are spoke-like pathways leading to the various “lands” of the park. The intentional design of this circle implies the necessity for travel in a proscribed manner: entry into the park at the lower-most point of the circle, procession up the central pathway toward

¹²⁵ Karal Ann Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks,” 86.

¹²⁶ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 36.

the icon at the circle's center point, followed by a choice of pathways into the various lands.

The return travel, given the circular nature, forms the mirror opposite, leading back to the center point and down to the bottom of the circle. As Marvin Davis, an original Disneyland designer, noted about the hub and spoke overlay, "Walt's main interest was to have absolute control, and by pleasant and disguised means force people to travel over every square inch of the property."¹²⁷ Such formalization provides a functional but highly conscripted passage for visitors into and through the content-rich environs of the sacralized space. With such a circular formal identity, the Disney theme park again points out the difference between the composed interior space and the random nature of the exterior world, enabling participants within sacralized space to establish a coherent ground for the establishment of content.

The exception to this traditional circular form, Epcot, does not abandon curvature altogether, though. In fact, this park employs a doubling: two circles placed side-by-side to form a figure-eight pattern. Rather than provide a center point icon from which the pathways radiate, Epcot fills the interior of each circle with water in the form of a fountain for the first and a large lake for the second. The "lands", then, of this park do not fill the interior of the circles but are placed around the circumference of each. The icon of the park, the geodesic sphere Spaceship Earth, is located at the lower-most point of the first circle, doubling as the de facto entrance to the park. From there the design of the park gives visitors a choice of movement around the lower circle: complete rotation, ending back at Spaceship Earth; a crisscross motion back and forth; or a progression forward into the second circle. Whichever path is chosen, the formal layout of the park eventually progresses to the lower-most point of the second circle, although once there the possibility for movement is more proscribed. Indeed, with water filling the majority of this circle, visitors can only choose progression to the left or right, both necessitating sequential travel around the perimeter before an eventual return. So, although claiming a quite different formal identity, Epcot, too, realizes a specific ordering of space and, as such, also creates a ground for participants within sacralized space.

A final aspect concerning the ordering of sacralized space is not a physical imposition created by participants but rather a mental imposition, actualized in an intentional viewing of the space in question. Despite the physical boundary demarcation and formalization of interior space, ordering necessitates the mental assent and proactivity of participants in the process of sacralization. The creation of ordered space, then, lies in the perception of the given space, whether or not this perception is fully realized by the physical environment itself. For the Disney theme park the creative imposition of order by participants is a part of the design and construction of each environment but also lies in the perception of participants. This is especially important given the ongoing modifications and functional necessities that occur at each park over time. For example, the demarcation of boundaries at Epcot, Disney's California Adventure, and Tokyo DisneySea is compromised by the visual intrusion of the outside world into the interior space.¹²⁸ Although these instances are fairly minor they would

¹²⁷ Bruce Gordon and David Mumford, 19.

¹²⁸ These clearly seen intrusions include the massive Dolphin and Swan resorts from within World Showcase at Epcot, Tokyo Bay and a massive, non-Disney ferris wheel from within American waterfront

threaten to compromise the ordering process of sacralized space if such ordering was solely dependant on the physical construction itself. So, too, the addition of pathways between lands at the Magic Kingdoms (thus reducing the need for travel back and forth to the center) and the addition of a second entrance at Epcot (located at the rear of the second circle) threatens to jeopardize the formalized layout of these parks. Ordering of space, though, despite these intrusions and modifications, lies with, and indeed is dependant on, the intentional perception of participants choosing to recognize such ordering and, hence, the sacralized nature of the space.

Selection of Elements

With ordering in place the space has been defined as separate from other space, a boundary between the two has been solidly established, and the interior has been formalized. Furthermore, these movements have occurred as the creative act of participants from all temporal perspectives, from design to visitation, and have been actualized in manifestations both physical and mental. For the process of creation, and, therefore, the legitimate identification of space as sacralized, to continue, though, the ordered space must be filled with content. The next aspect of the creation process, then, is the selection of elements.

Sacralized space as created space implies the presence of elements useful in the construction of meaning and exercise of power. Under the creative aegis of participants, the identity and number of these elements varies greatly. So, too, the singularity of the elements is also fluid, ranging from a physical selection leading to actual placement to a mental selection of a few elements amongst the many present. Selection, though, implies the necessary use of the chosen elements by participants as content in the sacralization of the space.

For the Disney theme park this process of selection happens in a variety of arenas. From the perspective of the design process, the choice of elements to populate the formal outline of each park begins at the earliest stages of conception with the choice of general theme. For example, at the Disney-MGM Studios the world of film and television production, along with a fascination for iconic Hollywood, provides the thematic material, while at Disney's California Adventure it is the state itself as microcosm for the entrepreneurial American Dream. For most parks, then, the selection of theme stems from a single, though broad, idea, allowing the subsequent selection of a variety of supporting elements. In the case of Disneyland, however, the thematic selection seems less a result of one prevailing idea and more reflective of Walt Disney himself.¹²⁹ His early life in small town America thematically results in Main Street, U.S.A., while his animated film output, itself motivated by his interest in mythology and fairy tales, results in Fantasyland. Indeed, themed by "his roseate memory of the good old days when he was young and found the store windows as dazzling as the bazaars of the Arabian Nights...all of Disneyland is Walt Disney."¹³⁰

at Tokyo DisneySea, and power lines and the Anaheim Convention Center from with Paradise Pier at Disney's California Adventure.

¹²⁹ This despite Walt's quote, "There's an American theme behind the whole park" as told to Hedda Hopper in 1957. See Watts, 393.

¹³⁰ Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks", 89.

Once a park's overall theme has been chosen, designers populate the space with specific elements in support. For Tokyo DisneySea, whose theme revolves around the exploration of and stories about the world's oceans, designers selected supporting elements as diverse as the Mediterranean coast of the 18th century, a New York City harbor of the early 20th century, King Triton's undersea kingdom from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, and an ocean monitoring station in an unspecified, neo-Victorian future. Disney's Animal Kingdom builds on the theme of interaction between modernity and the natural world by selecting elements dealing with the recovery of the Earth's fossil record through a dinosaur dig, the establishment of animal preserves in Eastern Africa, the over-grown remnants of Imperial palaces within the contemporary Indian sub-continent, and a mythical community of artists living in symbiotic harmony around the central icon of the park, the Tree of Life.

Each of these elements provides a thematic framework for the subsequent presentation of content-rich narratives and the potential appropriation of such by visitors. Importantly, the selection of these particular elements, all functioning in support of the overall theme, stands within an almost limitless body of possible elements, emphasizing the conscious nature of the process of creation. Indeed, the overall theme of each park is kept quite broad, allowing a diversity of specifics to be sketched and added, both during initial design and as additional construction post-opening. Specific element selection by the designers implies the conscious choice of purposeful, content-rich scenarios uniquely communicative within the bounded space of the park.

Although this process is most clearly demonstrable from the standpoint of design, selection also functions from the standpoint of visitation. Despite their conception and subsequent construction, the elements of each park in some ways remain merely suggestive for participants involved in the process of creation. A certain element may be appropriate and highly suggestive from the perspective of design, but visitors may choose either to accept and appropriate said element or to reject and disregard, based on perceived utility and communicative essence. Selective appropriation of specific elements of the received environment allows visitors full participation in the ongoing process of creation. Each element, then, whether chosen by designers or visitors, contributes to the functioning of the park as a whole and, through the consciousness of participants within sacralized space, supplies groundwork necessary for the construction of meaning and exercise of power.

Infusion of Content

The selection of overall theme and specific manifestations of the theme only provide the frame within the boundaries of the park, though. A further development of the process of creation is necessary within sacralized space: the infusion of the selected elemental frames with intentional content. Without yet implying meaning, content involves the appropriation or creation of specific themes and narratives for presentation within each selected element. The infusion of content is often suggested by the framework in question, and, indeed, forms an almost simultaneous response to the

chosen elemental structure.¹³¹ Content serves to enrich the framework and provide creative purpose, supplying each individual manifestation, and, by implication, the park as a whole, with perspective and attitude.

One way this occurs is through the infusion of specific themes. “A theme, as Disney conceives it, is a milieu or ambiance...so distinctive and entrancing that when immersed in it one forgets time.”¹³² A visual and temporal framework may be in place (an outpost in the Old West, an 18th Spanish fort), but the creation of theme suggests the immersion into intent and purpose. For example, at Tokyo DisneySea, the futuristic ocean monitoring station Port Discovery is not an empty frame of aesthetically compelling Victorian brass and rivets, but rather carries a thematic intent: the presentation of a facility dedicated to an ongoing appreciation for both the beauty and terror of the ocean, resulting in technologically advanced watercraft capable of safe ocean transport (the Aquatopia) and in research probes constantly watchful of imminent ocean storms (StormRider).

The infusion of thematic material works well in many locations around the various Disney theme parks: the Jules Verne-era future of Discoveryland at Disneyland Paris, themed to the motto “What one can conceive, one can achieve”; the contemporary seaside amusement pier (Paradise Pier) at Disney’s California Adventure, themed as sturdy survivor and proof of the perception of California as the state of dreams; and, most especially, the whole of Epcot, where each element thematicizes the exploration of humanity’s relationship with both the entire globe (the science and technology of Future World) and each other (the nations and cultures of World Showcase).¹³³ Thematic infusion of this sort may be either an appropriation of existing thematic material presupposed within the given framework or a fresh creation of the designers. Both, however, provide further development for the various elements chosen, creatively shaping each space for purposeful results.

Another way content is infused, though, is through the appropriation or creation of a specific narrative. Rather than remain at the level of theme, narrative suggests a specific plot line complete with protagonist, antagonist, setting and conflict. “Everything we do at Imagineering is driven by story. When an idea for a show, attraction or entire theme park is in development, an Imagineering team creates a story behind the story ... which plays a big role in further defining the details of the project”¹³⁴ The elemental framework provides a type of stage within which the narrative is presented to, and frequently performed by, participants interacting with the space. A heightened level of specificity accompanies narrative infusion, as well, providing further opportunity for creative proactivity by design participants.

One example of this creative movement occurs in a quite expansive way at the Disney-MGM Studios. Visitors to this park cross the boundary demarcation to find

¹³¹ For the Disney Imagineers story is everything—in other words, there is no selection of an elemental framework without a theme or narrative creatively applied. For much useful information on attraction “back stories”, see *The Imagineers*, 43.

¹³² Yi-Fu Tuan with Steven D. Hoelscher, “Disneyland—Its Place in World Culture,” in *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, ed. Karal Ann Marling (New York: Flammarion, 1997), 195.

¹³³ The thematic intentions of Epcot are discussed by the Disney Imagineers in Beard, *Walt Disney’s EPCOT Center: Creating the New World of Tomorrow*.

¹³⁴ *The Imagineers*, 42.

themselves in a narrative of Hollywood circa 1940. In front of them lies Hollywood Boulevard itself, complete with vintage automobiles, patrolling policemen, a movie shoot, and gawking tourists. As visitors move into the space they are treated as stars themselves, fielding autograph requests and being chided for their tardiness, while ahead lays the Chinese Theatre, site of the premiere of their latest picture. Moving off the Boulevard, visitors find the traditional Studio gate, leading them into the working studios of Walt Disney Pictures.

At this point in the narrative an interesting shift appears: passing through the gate visitors discover that they are no longer stars in a storyline about old Hollywood. Rather they realize that the journey so far has been a movie set and they have been playing a role in a film being shot at the studios.¹³⁵ Therefore, the narrative now becomes one of participation in the production of film and television and, as such, visitors discover the animation facilities, the live-action sound stages, the post-production bays, and the back lot. As one designer elaborates, “we let people see both sides of the façade and how it all works by letting them take the roles of actor, technician, director or whatever. This is definitely theatre, but it’s as much hands-on as it is sit-and-watch.”¹³⁶ Rather than the frame-like creation of a production facility walking tour, narrative infusion suggests a quite different use and purpose for the space in question, engaging the process of creation within sacralized space.

Narrative infusion also functions in more localized arenas within the Disney theme park. A park may not incorporate a broad narrative applicable for the space as a whole, yet a particular land within a park may incorporate a specific narrative. For example, Frontierland at Disneyland Paris creates a framework similar to the other Magic Kingdoms: America’s expansion west, complete with Army outpost, Native American camp, sternwheelers, gold mines, saloons, and a lumber board village. Infused within this frame, though, is a specific narrative structure: the town is Thunder Mesa, circa 1880; Fort Comstock, a U.S. Army fort, stands at the edge of town, protecting the citizens from possible Native American attack; the town has sprung up over the discovery of an active gold mine deep underneath Big Thunder Mountain, standing on an island in the river; within the town are the residences and establishments of a cross-section of society: the land barons, the entertainers, the mercantiles, the restaurateurs; on the edge of town, standing on the highest point, stands the mansion of Thunder Mesa’s wealthiest family, now deserted following the jilting of the eldest daughter on her wedding day; within the gold mine guests can board ore cars and explore the caves themselves, even discovering a new vein of gold in the process. Without implying necessity of interpretation, this form of narrative supplies a conceptual framework with a created world, ready for appropriation and utilization within sacralized space.

Finally, narrative infusion is also manifest within individual attractions at the theme parks. This utilization of narrative was, in Walt’s mind, “the next logical step in the art of story-telling – the chance to recreate his characters in three-dimensional worlds where the audience could step right through the screen and live the adventures

¹³⁵ This is signaled by allowing visitors to see the rear of certain locations already traversed. They are very clearly sets—unpainted and (seemingly) temporary.

¹³⁶ Nelson, “Reel Life Performance: The Disney-MGM Studios,” 61.

firsthand.”¹³⁷ While this infusion is often tailored to fit within the thematic structure of the land and park as a whole, attractions are spaces unto themselves, presenting a specific, unique narrative to visitors and implicating them in the storyline. One good example of this is an attraction called Kilimanjaro Safaris at Disney’s Animal Kingdom. Located within the village of Harambe, West Africa, visitors to the Safaris find themselves within the Harambe Wildlife Preserve, a several thousand acre site dedicated to the preservation of the African ecosystem. Progressing towards the safari booking office, visitors find the employees at lunch, although they have left the radio active, pronouncing a strict condemnation of recent poaching activity on the outskirts of the preserve. Further on are video introductions for the visitors hosted by the game warden, Wilson Matua. Finally there is a boarding platform where several open-air transports wait for clearance to begin the safari. Visitors eventually board one of these and head out into the preserve. Traveling through various geographic locales, the visitor is educated on the plant and wildlife species in view by both the driver of the vehicle and a specialist radioing in from a small monitoring aircraft overhead. Eventually a report comes in from the game warden that two of the elephants, Big Red and Little Red, are missing from the preserve and poaching is suspected.

After passing the elephant bathing grounds, visitors discover that poachers are within the reserve, have killed Big Red for her tusks, and are attempting to escape with Little Red in tow. Matua asks for the help of the safari vehicle: he will fly past the fleeing poachers and cut them off while the safari team chases them toward capture. The plan works, the poachers are captured, and Little Red is recovered unharmed. Visitors leave the safari vehicles with a hearty word of thanks for helping preserve the natural world from the evils of poaching. The narrative of Kilimanjaro Safaris, then, is quite specific in terms of character, setting and plot. Thematic infusion occurs within the Africa section of Disney’s Animal Kingdom as a whole, but for the attraction proper narrative specificity creates even richer creative purposes. Indeed, a moral component to the narrative is present even at this stage of interpretation, lending fertile material for participants to utilize in meaning construction. Narrative, then, is a very important step in establishing and creating elemental spaces within the boundaries of the Disney theme park which lend themselves to appropriation as sacralized.¹³⁸

The infusion of theme and narrative as discussed is primarily the province of park designers. Participants within sacralized space remain active agents in the creative process, though. Just as visitors creatively appropriate certain elements as important, so, too, they creatively manipulate the thematic and narrative character of these elements. For example, where there is no specific narrative, one may be creatively produced and entered into by sacralized participants. Within Fantasyland at Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, for example, the central courtyard is encompassed within the radiating walls of Cinderella Castle (whose towers form the southern boundary), while It’s a Small World demarks the space to the west and Dumbo, the Flying Elephant to the east. This courtyard is filled with tournament tents, suggesting a festival temporarily constructed for the enjoyment of the local citizenry. These tents form the entry facades

¹³⁷ Gordon and Mumford, 21.

¹³⁸ For an important analysis of this single attraction, see Ken Sanes, “The Elements of Story-Based Simulations: Kilimanjaro Safaris as a Journey Into the Self,” in *Disney’s Distorted Mirror*, <<http://www.transparencynow.com/Disney>> (21 September 2003).

for a series of attractions based on classic fairy tales and children's literature: Snow White's Scary Adventures, Peter Pan's Flight, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, Cinderella's Golden Carousel.¹³⁹

This courtyard area of Fantasyland falls within the boundaries of thematic infusion from the perspective of design, yet from the perspective of visitation, narrative specificity could be added as a function of the creative process. Visitors might fancy themselves loyal subjects of this "magic" kingdom, invited to visit the castle on tournament day. Passing through the castle into the courtyard, these citizens find a series of pleasant diversions in the form of storytelling tents and street entertainment. Traveling through each attraction and watching the Sword in the Stone competition, visitors join other "citizens" in a celebration of civic unity and mutual admiration for their beneficent royal family. Such a narrative, if created and appropriated, allows participants to actively supply content for their own sense of sacralized space.

Organization of Space

Within the process of creation space has been demarked and formalized, while elements have been chosen and infused with thematic and narrative purpose. Another step in the process is the organization of the various elements into a purposeful, contextual whole. Elements may be chosen and imbued with content but they do not exist as isolated, independent entities within the sacralized space. Their arrangement, spatial orientation, and sequencing all contribute to the establishment of context. By juxtaposing and balancing all selected elements, participants suggest new content possibilities for use by the sacralized agents.

The organization of space within the Disney theme park is carefully considered by the designers, especially within the creation of each park's overall layout. The previously discussed formalization of space places the center point icon and radiating pathways and lands, in some ways circumscribing the placement of the selected elements, yet still allowing freedom of contextualization. The various lands are then placed within this formal environment, presupposing the visitors' journey and order of apprehension. In this way, content contained within individual elements finds an additional layer of vocality when placed in contextual relationship.

A good example of this type of organization is evident at Disneyland in California. Sleeping Beauty Castle forms the park's center point with spokes radiating into the circular space. The lands selected for the radial endpoints include Main Street, U.S.A., Tomorrowland, Adventureland, Fantasyland and Frontierland. The arrangement of these lands is necessary, though, for the process of creation of sacralized space; random distribution will not work. Choosing the southernmost section of the park for the entrance and exit, designers placed Main Street, U.S.A. within this section, suggesting this environment the most important for the arriving and departing visitor. Indeed, Main

¹³⁹ According to Disney literature, "entering Fantasyland, guests arrive at the heart of Disney magic. Here, you relive the timeless stories brought to life in classic Disney films. Whether you fly with Peter Pan, ride Cinderella's Golden Carrousel, or meet a favorite fairy-tale character, you'll experience something very special in Fantasyland." *Walt Disney World Resort*, 50.

Street provides contextual preparation for the lands within the rest of the park, as well as commentary upon the visit after a long day within the space.¹⁴⁰

The section located north of Sleeping Beauty Castle lies along the axis of Main Street, U.S.A., suggesting a contextual throughline. Fantasyland is placed within this space, visitors being drawn from Main Street toward the castle and through the gates, highlighting the juxtaposition of the familiar and the fantastic. The western sections of the park are then filled with Adventureland at the southern end and Frontierland at the northern, both creative reflections of the imagined past. Although the former is themed to 19th century explorations of exotic places and the latter presents a mythologized Old West, both traffic in the romanticized childhood dreams of visitors “where nature and civilization are competing for hegemony, with the outcome still in doubt.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, given their spatial orientation, both lands function in contextual harmony side by side, commenting on each other and suggesting further interpretive layers for participants. Indeed, at other Magic Kingdoms these two lands remain on the western side of the park, yet switch places north and south, suggesting their symbiotic, fluid relationship.

Finally, incorporating symbolic images of the dawn, Tomorrowland is located in the remaining park section, east of the center point. This area’s content involves a hopeful creation of a transformed future in which technology has produced a utopia. In terms of spatial arrangement, Tomorrowland, then, lies at the end of a sequence: Main Street, U.S.A. brings participants into a forgotten past; Adventureland, Frontierland, and Fantasyland remind visitors of the dreams of their youth; and Tomorrowland suggests the hopes for the future. With this spatial arrangement in place the present is functionally marginalized once visitors enter the sacralized space. The communicative contents of the chosen elements suggest the appropriation of past and future, while the arrangement of elements suggests a particular journey, bringing theme and narrative into a cohesive whole. From the standpoint of design, the organization and arrangement of elements within the space of the Disney theme park plays an integral part in the process of creation of sacralized space.

Yet despite the placement of elements in contextual conversation, visitors to sacralized space also participate in the organization of space. Again using the Disneyland spatial example, visitors must enter into and through Main Street, U.S.A., but then are presented with a series of choices. The visual, mythic pull of Sleeping Beauty Castle often proves too strong, leading visitors to travel through Fantasyland as a secondary step. Movement then might proceed to Tomorrowland, not visiting the western sections until late in the day. This pattern of movement would still encounter each element within a day’s journey, appropriating those elements found to be of vocal import. Yet the spatial dialogue between elements would suggest fresh creative possibilities unseen by other participants within sacralized space. Design might suggest communicative intention in the arrangement of elements, yet visitors create unique

¹⁴⁰ In further support of the ordered nature of the environment, “the Hub concept is also important in that it allows the concept of Main Street to extend throughout the Park. As each land opens out from the Hub, the land itself becomes the Main Street of its own particular era. . . . This way, each land feels at once comfortable and familiar the moment you enter.” Gordon and Mumford, 19.

¹⁴¹ Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks”, 103.

contexts and correspondences through creative choices, even when these seem in opposition to the flow of formalized space.¹⁴²

Traditionalization of Space

The final element within the process of creation is the traditionalization of space. Extending to both the park as a whole and the individual elements within, traditionalization refers to the conscious linking of space to previous cultural manifestations and referents. By suggesting a viable history, both real and imagined, this process legitimizes the spaces in question, providing a sense of authenticity while promoting a linkage between present and past. The identification of space as sacralized and meaningful, then, is validated through the creation of traditionalized spatial elements.

This process functions in a variety of ways at the Disney theme parks. One example is the traditionalization of an appropriated past, suggested at Tokyo DisneySea. Making no attempt to provide a linkage with historical Japanese cultural tradition, this park selects elements familiar by virtue of world literature and film. Mysterious Island traditionalizes the science fiction literature of Jules Verne's *Captain Nemo*, suggesting cultural permanence to the fanciful scientific explorations on view. Arabian Coast traditionalizes tales from the *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* literary tradition, focusing on Sindbad's voyages of discovery. The potent filmic mythology of trans-oceanic travel is referenced and traditionalized within American Waterfront, recreating 1920s New York City on the sailing day of the S.S. Roosevelt, a four-stack ocean liner in process of steaming up for a trip across the Atlantic. Lost River Delta also references filmic history, this time appropriating the Saturday afternoon serial tradition captured in the *Indiana Jones* series. A South American jungle is constructed, leading visitors to discover a hidden Mayan temple and to journey inside on a dangerous search for hidden treasure. Each of these "ports of call" within the park employ a form of traditionalization, grounding the creation within the cultural memories of visitors, thereby allowing a sense of connectivity for legitimization and the communication of content.¹⁴³

Another type of traditionalization is present in an area like Liberty Square at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom. Constructed within this land is a recreation of Colonial America during the Revolutionary War era. Visitors can visit Independence Hall in Philadelphia, meeting the Presidents of the United States in the process, as well as touch the Liberty Bell on display in the central square. One can eat at the Liberty Tree Tavern in Boston while gazing out at the tree itself, festooned with lanterns representing the thirteen original colonies. Visitors can also travel through a Tudor residence on the outskirts of the Square and learn the sad history within the Haunted Mansion. As

¹⁴² Imagineer John Hench, commenting on the spatial progression through the park, emphasizes that "you don't throw people into the fifth scene, where they cannot make sense of what is happening. . . . You begin with the first scene and move through." Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," 83. Reorganization of space, then sits within the parameters established by the designers, establishing a mandatory entrance sequence followed by a series of choices by participants.

¹⁴³ Given the youth of this park, little interpretive material has been produced. A good overview of the thematic material is found on the official website: *Tokyo Disney Resort*, <<http://www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp>> (21 September 2003).

opposed to the Tokyo DisneySea example, traditionalization within this location references the cultural and social history of the majority of the visitors. Architecture, landscaping, traditional music, and period attractions work together to create an impressionistic gloss on the country's origins, gleaned from a variety of cultural referents. Interestingly, though, legitimacy of place is established without necessarily prioritizing the historical record. Rather than a Floridian Williamsburg, Liberty Square traditionalizes through referencing visitors' impressions of the era, gleaned through television, film, and folk tales. The Square establishes a recognizable impression of the environment of the colonial era, providing a sense of familiarity and, therefore, creating potential openness to the appropriation of content.¹⁴⁴

Finally, traditionalization can also be seen in an area like Main Street, U.S.A. at each of the Magic Kingdoms. This creative interpretation of small town America circa 1900 stems from Walt Disney's own perceptions of his boyhood in Marceline, Missouri between 1908 and 1912. Idealized through the use of forced perspective, Main Street, U.S.A. functions as a memory piece, encouraging visitors just entering the park to leave modernity behind and remember the days of their youth. Strikingly, though, this is not the remembered past of the visitors to the park. Stepping into Town Square at the foot of Main Street Station, visitors are not transported back into their own memories, but rather are presented with someone else's personal interpretation of the past. Here traditionalization plays a key role, for despite the logical disconnect, visitors often experience a sense of familiarity and belonging as they travel down the street, which is, in Walt's words, "everyone's hometown."¹⁴⁵ Initially this sense was partially due to, or at least fueled by, the perpetuation of an idealized, shared past within the older generation of the 20th century. More significantly, though, legitimacy stems from the construction itself, drawing visitors into an era far removed from the present and creating the perception of a shared past. Entering the space, visitors are thrust into a radically different environment, both visually and philosophically. Everything seems changed—fashions, vehicles, architecture—yet the era portrayed seems a logical antecedent of the present.

Furthermore, the visuals are stylized and creatively manipulated—buildings are smaller, colors are brighter, streets are cleaner—a "nearly perfect visual/architectural homogeneity."¹⁴⁶ Despite the "unreality" of it all, from a design standpoint the very presence of such a construction creates a sense of historical validity and importance, in effect indicting modernity as a fall from an earlier grace. "The miniaturization of the buildings identifies the locus of memory and reverie: the visitor has strayed unwittingly into somebody else's life story. Memory shrinks the past and sweetens it, too, until history becomes something small and precious and private. Main Street feels so intimate because it is a corner of Walt Disney's psyche, shared with his guests."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ The Disney literature emphasizes this aspect of traditionalization by stressing visitors' responsibility in recognizing the historical referents: Recreating life in America's original Thirteen Colonies, Liberty Square pays stirring tribute to the Spirit of '76 with an inspiring look at a heritage worth celebrating!" *Walt Disney World Resort*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 41.

¹⁴⁶ Richard V. Francaviglia, "Main Street U.S.A.: A Comparison/Contrast of Streetscapes In Disneyland and Walt Disney World," *Journal of Popular Culture* (Summer 1981): 148.

¹⁴⁷ Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks", 90.

The historical reality of the earlier century, rife with social ills and strife, is unimportant, then. This is the past as hoped for, content-filled and traditionalized within sacralized space. For sacralized participants, Main Street, U.S.A., therefore, is available for creative appropriation as a culturally significant past, remembered not by virtue of actual past experience but rather as a function of a perceived past, experienced with immediacy and granted legitimacy. This type of appropriation functions within Main Street, U.S.A. in Paris and Tokyo as well, for although historical memory is impossible given the geographical location, the space (as noted about the Paris construction) “bring(s) a naïve, simple view of America, reflecting the idea of America that Europeans have.”¹⁴⁸ Despite the lack of personal connection, the traditionalized space legitimizes the past as perceptually memorable and worthy of immersion, prompting openness to the content contained therein. Traditionalization, then, is a key component in the creation of sacralized space, legitimizing the elements within the space and grounding their content in real or perceived ties to past cultural manifestations.

So, then, as this chapter has explicated, the Disney theme park seems quite capable of being identified and declared as sacralized space by participants intentionally involved in the process of creation. Whether this process occurs at design, construction, visitation, or even as post-visitation reflection, the space carries the creative weight of sacralization quite comfortably: demarked boundaries, formalized space, the selection and arrangement of content-filled elements, the traditionalization of the past. Sacralized space, though, is not simply the sum of these elements. Indeed, space implies not simply creation, but proactive experience as well. Therefore, in order to further apply the model of sacralized space to the Disney theme park the creative process must be coupled with a simultaneous counterpart—the process of experience—to which this dissertation now moves.

¹⁴⁸ Dave Kehr, “It’s Not All Ooh-La-La Over French Disney Park,” *Chicago Tribune*, 8 June 1991, sec. 1, p. 1.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROCESS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE DISNEY THEME PARK

The Process of Experience

The process of experience is the second of the dual processes operating within participants' intentional perception of sacralized space. Functioning simultaneously with the process of creation, experience implies the essential component of physical interaction within the site. While creation as process maps the space, experience as process places participants inside, interacting with the composed environment. As previously developed, though, this process is not secondary in a hierarchy of perceptual stages, dependant on the prior completion of the creative act. Rather, experience functions alongside creation within the perception of participants, actualizing the intentional identification and appropriation of the space as sacralized while providing content necessary for the construction of meaning and exercise of power. Creation of space and experience of space are necessarily ongoing within the sacralization process, each informing the other and influencing the perception of participants.

Spatial Movement

One aspect of the process of experience is spatial movement. Implying the motion of bodies through space, spatial movement takes seriously the nature of sacralized space as environment, for participants physically enter the space in question and travel within its boundaries. Rather than an intellectual exercise in mapping, spatial movement creates broad physical interaction between participants and the entirety of the bounded environment. Participants embark on a journey through the intentional space, traveling to each elemental point and experiencing the content through motion.

Within the Disney theme park, spatial movement is a necessity for visitors, for experience of environment implies movement, both to and through. Motion itself functions as a key component of the experiential frame, enabling participants a sense of intimacy and involvement within the created space. Initially, spatial movement establishes participants as active elements of the environment, penetrating the space layer by layer. This is especially true at the Magic Kingdom within Walt Disney World. Not content with movement beginning at the entrance of the park, visitors are first directed to large parking lots more than a mile away from the turnstiles. They then board trams, which move them to the Transportation and Ticket Center, a sort of hub for spatial movement. At this point visitors are presented with an option for the next leg of

the journey: monorail or passenger ferry. Both travel around and through Seven Seas Lagoon, gradually approaching the Magic Kingdom.¹⁴⁹ A short walk finally brings visitors to the entrance of the park. In a short period of time one has traveled by auto, tram, monorail, ferry, and by foot, all in approach to the space. After entry, movement options continue. One can remain on foot or travel up Main Street, U.S.A. in a striking variety of period transports: a fire engine, a horseless carriage, a horse-drawn streetcar, a limousine.¹⁵⁰ Whichever is chosen, the various modes eventually deposit the guest at the Plaza, the hub-like center of the park directly in front of the central icon, Cinderella Castle. Motion itself is necessary for visitors to achieve the center, from which the movement then continues into the various lands.

For participants within sacralized space this functional quality of the park implies an appreciation for interaction with the content-filled elements of the space. Indeed, participants in motion become elements within the boundaries of the park, allowing contact through the examination and contemplation of the space's physical nature. For example, participants may intellectually consider the boundary delineation and hub-and-spoke physical mapping of the Disney theme park, but the process of stepping over and through the boundary itself, traveling toward the center, and then proceeding to see and even touch the various compositional elements contributes to their appropriation and definition within sacralized space. The active nature of participants within the space, then, is established, enabling dynamic contact and enhancing content appropriation.

Spatial movement within the environment also allows the collapse of distance between observer and observed. Distance is not available for participants, for the appropriation of sacralized space implies interaction. At the Disney theme parks this collapse is fully available. As visitors enter one of the parks they are immediately surrounded by the formal elements of the space. Ahead lays the individual park's emblematic symbol: castle, tree, volcano. Peripheral vision is also filled with smaller architectural forms, costumed characters, and distinctive landscaping. Other senses are engaged as well: music from nearby attractions and performances, the sounds of transportation vehicles, the smells from restaurants and vending carts. Visually and aurally confined within the environment by the encircling berm, participants are disallowed the opportunity to study and map from an objective or neutral position.¹⁵¹ Visitors are absorbed into the space itself, creating intimacy and a blurring of traditional observational distance.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ The spatial separation of the theme park from the parking areas and the anticipatory buildup to the entrance via transportation is intentional. "The plan was in keeping with Walt Disney's desire to remove visual intrusions and enact the lessons learned at Disneyland, creating a true sense of place for the new park." Kurtti, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Although these options exist as viable modes of transportation, the implication and visual demonstration of motion in support of theme seems of overriding importance. "Main Street, U.S.A. is America at the turn of the century – the crossroads of an era. The gas lamps and the electric lamp – the horse-drawn car and the auto car. Main Street is everyone's hometown – the heartline of America." *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 41.

¹⁵¹ This is one of the key substantive differences between the Disney theme park and other similar environments. "Disneyland is not just another amusement park. It's unique, and I want it kept that way ... Disneyland is a show." *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 34, 36.

¹⁵² "In a theme park ... the viewer is not just an observer, but a participant. The imagery is not confined to the parameters of a movie screen, and the participant is bombarded with visual overload." The Imagineers, 90.

By way of example, upon entering Disney's California Adventure, visitors pass underneath the Golden Gate Bridge and are immediately confronted with the Sun icon, standing at the focal point of Sunshine Plaza. Standing 30 feet high and perpetually shining thanks to computerized mirrors which track the actual Sun and reflect its light onto the icon, the Sun captures the initial visual perception of participants. Surrounding visitors, though, is an arrival terminal for the California Zephyr, a trans-Continental passenger train from the early 20th century. Also within sight might be Three Bags Full, a performance art trio completely covered in brightly colored fabric, busy miming interactions with passing guests. Behind them, within the train terminal itself, is Baker's Field Bakery, busy producing the smell of cinnamon rolls and freshly brewed coffee.¹⁵³ Personal interaction is often present as well, for cast members frequently greet visitors standing within Sunshine Plaza, offering assistance in planning the day and indicating the wait times for certain popular attractions. Distance between observer and observed fades as sacralized participants enter the environment.¹⁵⁴

This sense of collapse increases with the initiation of participant movement into and through the space itself. Despite the complexity of sensory information present within the initial stage of the environment, visitors do not stay rooted for long, choosing instead to proceed, often towards the center. Again, the formal elements play a key role in this. The central icon of each park is visually imposing, pulling visitors' attentions and encouraging movement. At the same time, however, the supporting, peripheral architecture begins to function as a visual frame for the central icon. Unnoticed by many, this frame utilizes a certain degree of architectural foreshortening, visually compressing the structures and shrinking their presence in the eyes of visitors.¹⁵⁵ The perceptual gaze is firmly set on the central icon, therefore, and forward movement initiates. In this fashion, visitors are effectively funneled from the entrance plaza into the heart of the experiential space.

Functionally, this visual manipulation elevates the central icon, and the center itself, as the initial experiential goal of sacralized participants. In turn, though, after this initial goal is achieved, the process begins to repeat itself and multiply. From the center visitors are confronted with a greater number of choices. A certain visual plateau is reached and other lands are suddenly open options. Each radiating pathway leads visitors' perceptions from the center toward another visual icon. Although these are less imposing and more numerous than the central icon, the same visual strategy is employed to encourage spatial movement: a large iconic structure framed by smaller supporting structures. Again, once the directional decision is made, participants are pulled forward into further spaces ripe for exploration.

¹⁵³ This careful attention to sensory immersion ensures that everything is "of a piece, a complement to the rest, part of a harmonious picture that admitted no jarring elements." Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks", 81.

¹⁵⁴ An objective overview of this controversial park is available at "California Adventure Guide," *MouseInfo.com*, <<http://www.mouseinfo.com/california-adventure>> (21 September, 2003).

¹⁵⁵ Imagineering uses the term "forced perspective" to indicate "the art of making something taller than it actually is" and "is accomplished architecturally by starting with normal scale elements at the base of the building and progressively making them smaller as they continue towards the top." The Imagineers, 84. The effect of this technique is an "aura of well-being, fantasy, and delight." Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks", 79.

For visitors at Disney's California Adventure this forward movement is initiated by the opening of a landscape horizon within Sunshine Plaza itself. Although surrounded by the arms of the train station, the visitors' focus returns to the Sun icon. Taking an initial step towards this center, the support architecture rapidly recedes, leaving a broad, circular, landscaped plaza inlaid with mosaic tile work. The Sun icon stands at the far point of the circle, effectively heightened by the visual plateau. A few more steps forward and support architecture disappears all together. As added encouragement, the Sun icon rests on a water work featuring a constantly pounding California surf. Aural stimulation, coupled with the image of a perpetually rising or setting sun, pushes visitors toward this centerpiece, undistracted from competing visual stimuli.

Once at the center (and the requisite photographic proof of the journey is secured), visitors are visually offered at least two distinct travel possibilities. To the east of the Sun lie the gates of the Hollywood Pictures Backlot and the façade of the Hyperion Theater, while to the southwest lies Grizzly Peak and the California Rockies of the Golden State. Further that direction (although somewhat obscured) is Paradise Pier and the Sun Wheel. Each of these "districts" contains a central, secondary icon and each competes for the attention of visitors.¹⁵⁶ Once a decision is made and movement re-initiated, the supporting frame work of each icon works to sweep visitors toward the goal and into an area of further content-rich elements.

Spatial movement is necessary, then, to penetrate the environment and reach both the center and the other radiating lands, again disallowing objective observation divorced from experience. Indeed so persuasive is the visual language of the space that movement comes as an almost unconscious act. In some way, visitors are drawn forward and swept up in the (often teeming) throng of fellow guests. The collapse of observer and observed, so important to the process of experience within sacralized space, is greatly enhanced through spatial movement and allows creative appropriation and interpretation of the space by sacralized participants.

Finally, spatial movement precipitates an interaction between body and environment, further enhancing the process of experience. Not content with remaining at the level of the aural and the visual, experiential interaction with the Disney theme park extends to the physical as well. At the most basic level, movement throughout the sacralized environments entails a certain amount of exertion and stamina. Despite numerous transportation options within the parks, most visitors experience the environments on foot. Although this requires a certain energy level the effect is lessened through hub and spoke mapping, first utilized at Disneyland.¹⁵⁷ Linear progression is minimized, and tired feet comforted, by traveling to various attractions via the center. As existing parks have expanded, however, and as new parks are created

¹⁵⁶ According to Imagineers Jesse Schell and Joe Shochet, such icons are referred to as "weenies". "Weenie is phrase coined by Walt Disney himself. It refers to the technique used on movie sets of guiding stage dogs by holding up part of a sausage. The classic weenie is the castle at Disneyland. It draws the eye, and the eye draws the feet, and people walk to the castle at the center of the park." Jesse Schell and Joe Shochet, "Designing Interactive Theme Park Rides: Lessons Learned Creating Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean – Battle for the Buccaneer Gold," *GamaNetwork*, <<http://www.gdconf.com/archives/2001/schell.doc>> (21 September 2003).

¹⁵⁷ Marvin Davis recalled that "Walt's main interest was to have absolute control ... and by pleasant and disguised means force people to travel over every square inch of the property." Gordon and Mumford, 19.

on increasingly larger scales, the exertion level has also been elevated. Indeed, one familiar comment declares Epcot an anagram for “every person comes out tired”.

More acutely, movement also introduces environment as an element of visitor interaction. As can be vouchsafed by many a theme park guest, the quality of appropriation and openness to transformational content is often in close relation to the time of year, atmospheric conditions, crowd level and traveling companions. The leisurely freedom of motion and the crisp air of a Spring day at Disneyland Paris might create a certain sacralized moment for a young French couple, while a July 4th weekend at the Magic Kingdom in Florida, complete with crowds in excess of 60,000, temperatures of 100 degrees or more, and fussy toddlers in strollers, might create an aversion to the mere idea of the theme park.¹⁵⁸ Such factors influence the process of experience and, in turn, affect participants within sacralized space. This is not to say, however, that extreme situations are necessarily antithetical to the sacralization process. For intentional participants within sacralized space, these challenges are additional components within the network of content and interpretation, providing ready examples of harried visitors closed to transformation, if nothing else.

Lastly, the physical terrain of the park also affects visitors in motion. Epcot at Walt Disney World is, for the most part, quite accommodating in terms of movement. Expansive, circular plazas form the spine of Future World, while broad walkways interlace the outlying pavilions, providing numerous possibilities for travel and effectively thinning crowd jams.¹⁵⁹ World Showcase also incorporates open spaces while subtly guiding visitors around World Showcase Lagoon through the use of the Promenade, a broad walking area connecting each international pavilion.¹⁶⁰ In distinct contrast, Disney’s Animal Kingdom intentionally overturns this mapping: walkways are little more than paths, meandering through dense vegetation; access to attractions is purposely fragmented and indirect, forcing frequent reappraisals of direction; even “off-road” trails are present, taking adventurous guests up steep inclines and across small streams.¹⁶¹ Movement over the various physical terrains present in the Disney theme park creates a variety of experiential categories, further enhancing the interaction of participants and space.

¹⁵⁸ Walt himself addressed the environmental impact on visitors during the planning stages for Walt Disney World. “A major consideration presented at the meeting was the weather. Walt made note that the rain would need to be planned for. He suggested that numerous areas should be enclosed so people could still enjoy themselves even if it was raining. Recalling the Houston Astrodome, he commented on how big an area could be enclosed.” Paul F. Anderson, “The Final Vision,” *Walt Disney: An Intimate History of the Man and His Magic* CD-ROM (Santa Monica: Pantheon Productions, 1998).

¹⁵⁹ Future World’s “eight (originally six) corporate pavilions are arranged around the outer rim of a vast plaza, articulated on its outer edge by two paired arcades laid out ... in a manner reminiscent of Bernini’s colonnade at Saint Peter’s in Rome.” Marling, “Imagineering Disney’s Theme Parks,” 163.

¹⁶⁰ The transformation of space is quite distinct, though. “It is a visual treat to approach World Showcase Lagoon and get one’s first glimpse of the international pavilions of World Showcase. Here the view opens up, for the point is to be able to see all the pavilions spread out around the lake.” Fjellman, 213.

¹⁶¹ This mapping is clearly demonstrated by the design of the entrance area of the park. “Oasis is a radical idea – an entry not through a traditional retail corridor like Main Street at Disneyland Park, but a cool, green decompression zone, a rockwork idyll of waterfalls and landscaping that allows guests an immediate contact with exotic, beautiful animals ... It’s a meandering path of discovery that keeps guests’ views controlled and contained.” Malmberg, 60.

Visual Interaction

Spatial movement, then, as part of the experiential process, further serves to characterize and identify the Disney theme park as sacralized for intentional participants. Unable to remain detached observers, visitors in motion are surrounded by the space itself, actively encountering compositional elements and physical challenges. The experiential process continues, though, through an attention to visual interaction. The sacralized space may be personalized and subjectified through motion, but vision is privileged in terms of content gathering for future meaning construction. As motion proceeds through the environment, the participants' vision serves both to apprehend the individual elements of the space and to relate those elements to others by way of a constantly shifting context. Initial correspondences, created through the visual interaction of spatial elements as evident upon arrival within the space, are available to participants for utilization in constructive appropriation. This dialectic, however, is preliminary within the process of experience, for as participants move, the spatial elements shift context, creating alternative correspondences and uncovering further constructive possibilities.

The process of visual interaction begins as participants enter the sacralized space. Using Disneyland Paris as example, after passing through the liminal berm visitors are visually confronted with Town Square, the beginning point for Main Street, U.S.A. Visual interaction begins at the moment of initial experience: beginning on the right and working counter-clockwise, one makes note of the transportation company, the dentist's office, the millinery, the photography studio, the emporium, the book shop, City Hall, and standing above, the train station. In the center of the square is a manicured park complete with an ornate bandstand, often hosting a performance with band members in dress uniforms. Encircling the park, a small street accommodates a horse-drawn streetcar, a double-decker omnibus, a police paddy wagon, and a fire truck. These elements work together to communicate an impression of a small town main square circa 1900, given the architecture and appearance of the various elements.¹⁶² Hidden from initial view by the band stand, however, are Main Street itself and the other elements lying beyond. For observers, Town Square functions as an isolated spatial environment, communicating much potentially meaningful information.

Once in motion, though, the context of initial impressions shifts as the interaction of additional elements comes into play. Movement toward the bandstand brings Main Street U.S.A. proper into lateral view, creating a visual context for Town Square. The interaction of the former and the latter within the perception of visitors expands the axial depth of the environment and places the experience of the initial, relatively static space at the beginning of an experiential journey. The new visual information provided by Main Street unsurprisingly extends the communication of Town Square: ahead lies an auto shop, a bakery, and a corner restaurant, all situated under advertisements for coffee

¹⁶² Paris' Main Street, U.S.A. was initially designed as a 1920's "flapper" era environment, complete with elevated El train. The design reverted to the traditional 1900's theme to preserve a sense of American innocence, although maintaining a rich sense of depth and detail. See Nate Naverson, "Interview with Imagineer Eddie Sotto," *Imagination Portal*, <<http://www.themedattraction.com/sotto.htm>> (21 September 2003).

and ballet lessons.¹⁶³ The initial impression of a turn-of-the-century small town is reinforced and developed. Still hidden from sight, though, is the destination towards which the streetscape points. In an interesting compositional decision, one must journey around the bandstand to dynamically reveal the next visual feature located at the end of Main Street: Sleeping Beauty Castle.

With this piece of visual information, the revealed space introduces the central iconic image to participants and places the castle in visual interaction with the square and street. Here, though, the interaction is unexpected and incongruous, for the newly perceived contextual space now includes elements associated with both early 20th century America and a vaguely defined medieval Europe. This experiential development, created through visual interaction, necessitates a thoughtful response from participants and signals the communicative complexity of sacralized space.¹⁶⁴ As one travels to other areas of the park this visual incongruity persists, for the castle remains in view even within the Old West of Frontierland or the desert oases of Adventureland. The subjective standpoint of participants as experiential travelers is necessary for this interaction to occur and for meaningful interpretations to be constructed.

Visual interaction is not simply the expected and unexpected juxtaposition of images, though, for sequence also plays an important part in the experience of the sacralized environment. Contextual associations perceived and potentially appropriated through initial visual encounters are challenged in the sequential progression of elements. Moving through sacralized space, participants take the image groups already in conversation and place them in contextual interaction with the next. Furthermore, this sequencing is open to a multitude of possibilities, characterized by a certain freedom of axial movement allowed by the design of the parks themselves.

Given the hub-and-spoke mapping of the majority of Disney theme parks, sequential progression through the space is open to visitors once the center is reached. Several lands radiate off the hub itself, making possible a variety of linkages between the central visual image and the outlying elements. At early Disneyland, once Main Street U.S.A. and Sleeping Beauty Castle are sequentially placed in contextual conversation as dictated by the park mapping, participants are able to choose the next sequential linkage. Turning west toward and into Frontierland brings the castle as storybook dream image into conversation with images of the opening of the West, possibly connecting dual imagined dreamscapes from childhood. Turning east, however, toward Tomorrowland sequences a link between the castle as imagined past with the image of the TWA Moonliner and the hoped-for reality of the near future.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ "We focused on Americana and its richness and beauty. We made everything about something. We took the American personality and ramped up the colors made things less pretentious and more theatrical." Naverson, "Interview with Imagineer Eddie Sotto".

¹⁶⁴ "The castle dominates the view from Main Street ... Without the castle, this is just another Greenfield Village. With the addition of the castle, it becomes magical ... (the castle) plugs the vista that funnels down Main Street into the illustrated pages of a storybook." Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," 68.

¹⁶⁵ According to Walt, Tomorrowland "offers new frontiers in science, adventure and ideals: the Atomic Age...the challenges of outer space...and the hope for a peaceful and unified world." *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 42.

Likewise, within Disney's Animal Kingdom visitors are presented with choice once crossing over Discovery River onto Discovery Island (formerly Safari Village), the artist's colony living in the shadow of the iconic Tree of Life. From this functional hub one can turn east, entering DinoLand, U.S.A. and a humorous representation of environmental commodification, or west, entering Camp Minnie-Mickey and a child's-eye view of the anthropomorphic natural world. Both of these choices are equally available to visitors, yet the former links the impressionistic playfulness of artistic expression with an eventual (and possibly inevitable) commercialization, while the latter implies the genesis of such artistic expression within the child's search for community.¹⁶⁶ Given the geographic openness toward individualized sequential linkage as represented in the hub-and-spoke mapping, the experience of participants within sacralized space and the contextual conversation created differs greatly dependent on these initial sequencing choices.

Once within a land, visitors are also able to progress in a number of directions, further linking the available compositional elements in dynamic visual interaction. Rather than offering a handful of specifically delineated choices, though, the individual park areas present an almost unlimited variety of sequential possibilities. Within Fantasyland at Disneyland Paris participants can choose a circular route that travels the periphery of the land, contextually linking a number of interconnected attractions and shops representing European fairy tale mythology and employing indigenous architectural styles (Blanche-Neige et les Sept Nains, Les Voyages des Pinocchio, the Old Mill, Le Brave Petit Tailleur). They can also opt for the center route, dynamically linking attractions that mimic the circular geography of the land (Le Carrousel de Lancelot, Dumbo the Flying Elephant, Mad Hatter's Tea Cups, Alice's Curious Labyrinth), or for a route connecting a Fantasyland attraction with its counterpart in another, as Peter Pan's Flight links, both visually and thematically, with both Pirates of the Caribbean and Captain Hook's Galleon next door in Adventureland.¹⁶⁷ Again, freedom of movement and visual sequencing provides further contextual possibilities and interpretive suggestions within the process of experience.

Even when spatial movement is severely constricted the potential for creative sequencing still exists with the sacralized space. The hub-and-spoke mapping of many Disney parks is substituted for a formal "figure-eight" pattern within Epcot and a looser, stylized geography within Disney's California Adventure and Walt Disney Studios in Paris, effectively delimiting the freedom of spatial progression. This is especially acute within the World Showcase area of Epcot. Eleven countries are represented around World Showcase Lagoon by water-front pavilions and a connective walkway. Once choosing an entrance direction, travel around the lagoon and between pavilions is

¹⁶⁶ In terms of conceptual mapping, Animal Kingdom is quite rich thematically. The park revolves around the interaction between humanity and the created world, but segments this theme with reference to the life-cycle. Creation and birth are represented by the *axis mundi*, the Tree of Life, in the center of the park and is echoed in the surrounding artist's colony. Radiating out from this point are the responses of childhood (Camp Minnie-Mickey), adolescence (DinoLand, U.S.A.), adulthood (Africa and Asia), and the wisdom of the old (Conservation Station).

¹⁶⁷ The design philosophy of the Paris park is well covered in *Euro Disney* (Paris: Connaissance des Arts, 1992).

ordered by the architectural sequence itself, not the visiting group.¹⁶⁸ For example, Italy and Germany are intimately tied to one another; visitors cannot opt out of the Italian connection by proceeding directly from Germany to the American Adventure. Visitors can choose to bypass Italy experientially, though, by proceeding past the pavilion and failing to engage the space as constructed. Conscious choice is active in such a linkage, yet is facilitated by the design decision to place the iconic architecture, and therefore the immersive space, for each pavilion as a setback from the walkway. Visitors seeking a certain elemental sequence within the sacralized space, therefore, would find the possibilities still numerous and available despite the restrictions inherent in the space itself.

The sequencing of visual elements by participants within sacralized space effectively multiplies their contextual identities, providing a layering of visual associations and a sense of experiential discovery for participants, thereby greatly expanding the interpretive possibilities inherent through visual interaction. Within the process of experience, such interaction helps create webs of correspondence between the compositional elements of the space, conscious participants and the sacralized space itself, intimately tying each part to a continually developing whole while preserving the individual possibilities of connection and appropriation. Together with spatial movement, visual interaction helps actualize the claim of the Disney theme park as potentially meaningful and, therefore, as sacralized space.

Performance

A further element of the experiential process available to participants within the parks is the manifestation and availability of performance. Essential to the process of sacralization, performance implies the conscious mimetic embodiment of narrative lines by participants, either as a general response to elements within the space or as the result of a specific prompt by others. Performance, though consensual by necessity, provides even deeper intimacy between participants and the sacralized space, allowing increased associations with the spatial elements and the development of meaningful constructions.

Within the Disney theme parks performance manifests itself in a number of ways. At the most basic level visitors to the park find themselves referred to as “guests”, implying a role simply by virtue of presence. “The visitors are our guests. It’s like running a fine restaurant. Once you get the policy going, it grows.”¹⁶⁹ Guests accordingly are treated as valued members of an ad hoc society, worthy of special attention and the most gracious behavior by those who are “residents” of the park. The role of guest implies the meeting of specific and specialized needs, the careful maintenance of park property, the provenance of quality food, and the attention to comfort and well-being. This elevation of consumer service to the level of role-playing implies an appreciation for performance lying at the root of the experiential nature of the park. Given that this level of performance obtains to all who cross the park berm,

¹⁶⁸ This restriction of spatial movement in World Showcase has been further exacerbated by the recent closing of the dual Friendship launches that carried guests across Friendship Lagoon.

¹⁶⁹ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 38.

participation is seen as an ontological function of entry. The opting out of the role of guest seems disallowed by the very structure of the theme park visit.

At a slightly more complex level of performance lies the participants' identity as "audience" for the acting of a play. The specific language of the stage is utilized at this level, indicating a conscious attempt at a theatrical metaphor. The guest areas of the parks are referred to as "on stage", while the service and employee areas are "backstage". The employees themselves are "cast members" who are playing specific roles whenever they come on stage and interact with guests. Visitors, then, are, by virtue of attendance, the "audience" for the drama, comedy or musical being performed. Following this metaphor through, the park itself functions as the stage, encouraging a theatrical performance by both actor and audience.¹⁷⁰

Although the mere usage of such theatrical nomenclature indicates a level of performance, a more specific example actually physicalizes individual identity. Streetmosphere is the Disney name for experiential theater within the park environs, consisting of one or more cast members playing specific, thematically appropriate roles within a specific space and encouraging an impromptu gathering of audience members, often with humorous intent. The actors are not restricted by script or stage space, but rather utilize improvisational techniques and the existing park architecture to create a performance narrative. This narrative is interactive, though, dependent on the personified role of audience member for realization. In tandem, performer and audience assume a temporary persona within the sacralized space of the Disney theme park, experientially enacting storylines that serve to further break down the boundaries between observers and observed.

Several examples of streetmosphere are found on Hollywood Boulevard at the Disney-MGM Studios. Visitors become audience members when they encounter a vaguely Eastern European Hollywood director shooting second-unit location work on a film circa 1930. Surrounding him are the requisite actor, actress, cameraman, grip, and makeup girl, attempting to do their jobs while navigating the director's monstrous ego. Audience members are encouraged to participate as extras in the shoot, witnessing a variety of comic mishaps while attempting to follow (invariably misunderstood) direction. Within Boulevard shops visitors also encounter a married couple improvising the obnoxious tourist/shopper, complete with marital spats and overbearing voices. Furtive glances from the newly created audience members results in a harangue and increased indignation. Rosie also inhabits the street, offering maps to the stars' homes and the latest celebrity gossip. Unable to control her enthusiasm, this star-struck character encourages her audience to lose their inhibitions and embrace the cult of celebrity. Streetmosphere director Craig Wilson explains that "it's all about street theatre and atmosphere, and it's highly audience interactive."¹⁷¹

Employing information gathered from their audience participants, these performers use their caricatured personae to shape unique narratives which encourage

¹⁷⁰ The Disney University, the employee training arm of the Company, establishes the following rules: "Disneyland doesn't have customers – it *play host to guests*; the park doesn't cater to crowds – it *entertains an audience*; There are no employees...instead there are Disneyland *cast members* whose role it is to create happiness for park guests; cast members at Disneyland wear *costumes from wardrobe* instead of uniforms . . . cast members work *onstage* or *backstage*." Tim O'Day, *Disneyland: Celebrating 45 Years of Magic* (Disney Editions, 2000), 124.

¹⁷¹ Nelson, "Reel Life Performance: The Disney-MGM Studios," 61-62.

a deeper level of involvement from visitors. Accepting the role of audience member disallows objective observation within this context; either the group presses toward the street event and accepts the possibility of direct communication, or they pass quickly, hopefully unnoticed. Performance, therefore, extends to the content of the theatrical event itself, allowing intentional participants a chance to wish-fulfill the fantasized dream of movie participation, celebrity encounter or nosy neighbor. Even further, this level of performance suggests the emergence of personality and individualized identity. One finds themselves as a part of the performance event, co-creators in a personalized, interactive, and engaging storyline. Taking its cue from the thematic specificity of the park, streetmosphere at the Disney-MGM Studios extends the experience of sacralized participants by specifying direct engagement with the content-filled objects and activities encountered. Without being told or shown, performance offers a further experiential blurring of object and observer, providing additional levels of attachment for participants and aiding the appropriation of meaningful content.

A final level of performance is also evident within the Disney theme park, though. Not content to present the broadly appropriated “guest” moniker nor the more individualized “audience” persona, the parks also offer performance at the level of featured “actor”. Within this level, visitors temporarily become the performer within the theatrical event, focusing the attention of the “audience” upon themselves. Moving beyond observation or personal engagement, assuming the role of “actor” supposes mimetic embodiment of a specific narrative and the reversal of observer objectivity. If chosen, the performance becomes the subjective appropriation of content, experienced through the act of role-play.

Performance of this type is found in at least two different forms at the Disney parks. The first involves the acceptance of an unspecified role within a park event. For example, in many of the parades conducted daily, an individual or family is chosen as the “Star of the Day” and is given a focal placing on a prominent parade float. Clothed in mouse ears or other readily identifiable attire, the Star of the Day rides the parade route, waving and gesturing to the audience members that line the street. Although not playing a specific character within a specified narrative, the guest as actor assumes a role of high honor, demarked by their elevated position above the other guests and actualized by their physical contact with and assimilation by the elements of the space itself. For a brief time the guest has crossed over the boundary, inhabiting a corner of the sacralized environment through performance.

The second example of this type of performance comes within the midst of selected park attractions. Here, by virtue of participation, visitors assume a specified role and are treated as such for the duration of the experience. This role, then, is predetermined by the elements of the attraction itself. One classic example is the “Snow White’s Scary Adventures” dark ride from early Disneyland. Within the Imagineering design scheme, attraction participants ride in a mine car, encountering various environments and scenes from the film. Rather than observe from beyond the proscenium, though, visitors enter the plot and become Snow White herself, traveling through the storyline as the character. The old hag, then, offers the poison apple directly to the actor; the actor flees the Huntsman and is lost in the forest; the dwarfs find the actor and take “her” to their cottage. Consequently, Snow White is unseen throughout the length of the attraction, confusing not a few small children (and adults) along the

way.¹⁷² Narrative and appropriated content is entered by the assumption of the role and the fulfillment of performance.

A more contemporary example is Superstar Limo, located within the Hollywood Pictures Backlot at Disney's California Adventure. With little subtlety, Superstar Limo advertises a trip through Hollywood "starring YOU!" and begins at a stylized LAX luggage carousel. Arriving back in town from a publicity junket, you find yourself late for your latest film's premiere across town. With the freeways jammed a limousine is called and you set out, beginning a witty jaunt through the neighborhoods of Los Angeles, both posh and seamy. As the limousine travels, you encounter crazed fans, persistent paparazzi, and down-on-their-luck celebrities, all vying for your attention. Finally the limo reaches the premiere, confirming your star status for one more day (further validated by your own product placements along the red carpet). In keeping with the tenor of the park, Superstar Limo brazenly celebrates the contemporary cult of celebrity while simultaneously exposing the arbitrary, economically-driven machinery underneath.¹⁷³ As performance, though, the attraction deftly places the visitors in a position they are accustomed to viewing from afar. Celebrity is assumed for the duration of the ride, embodied by the actor as a function of participation. Again, content is experienced, not communicated, allowing perceived meaning the possibility of intentional appropriation. Performance of this most intimate type carries sacralized participants deep within the narrative content of the space, presenting the possibility of mimetic embodiment and intimate connection.

Performance, then, is an integral component within the experiential nature of sacralized space. Enacting the roles of guest, audience, and actor, participants engage the conceptual content of the space, experiencing the object-filled environment intimately. Lines of demarcation are blurred within these levels of performance, facilitating movement from a position of observation to personal embodiment. Importantly, though, performance also suggests in microcosm the dual interpretive nature of the space. As befits the sacralized environment, park performance suggests conceptual parameters and content while preserving personal autonomy and individualized acceptance. Within mimetic involvement participants find the option for engagement, for role acceptance, for implied behavior and action, and for content shaping and appropriation. While preserving autonomy (in that each role is able to be refused) performance options within the Disney theme park supply yet another important characteristic for the declaration of sacralized space. As Walt said, "Disneyland is a show."¹⁷⁴

Routinization

Finally, the experiential process of sacralized participants encompasses the routinization of physical activity. As discussed, routinization suggests the recognition of the efficacy of the experiential process itself as embodied through spatial movement,

¹⁷² This eventually prompted a change in narrative structure. Today, although visitors still assume the role themselves, Snow White does show up at several points along the journey, causing confusion of a different sort.

¹⁷³ Unfortunately, this very interesting attraction is currently shuttered due to poor guest response and is awaiting a change of theme.

¹⁷⁴ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 34.

visual interaction and performance. Finding such experience satisfying and relevant, sacralized participants seek to formalize the activity through intentional repetition. Over time certain directional progressions are again followed, certain visual connections are repeated, and certain roles are again accepted and embodied. This repetition, in turn, creates emerging patterns of layered, content-filled experience for use in the exercise of power and the construction of meaning.

The process of routinization at the Disney theme park, then, initially stems from the individual physical experiences of sacralized participants. In terms of spatial movement visitors might find the act of entering a given park by crossing over the liminal threshold somehow meaningful and suggestive. At Disneyland this happens with the crossing of the berm through the entry tunnels, bringing visitors into Town Square. The everyday is left behind for a space imbued with possibility, initiating the sacralized declaration. Many visitors, then, seek to repeat this activity of crossing over, visiting the park multiple times in an effort to re-experience the event and re-connect with the meaningful constructions already in place.

Visitors might also find the discovery of and movement towards certain iconic vistas personally relevant and worthy of routinized repetition. The “reveal” of the Tree of Life at Disney’s Animal Kingdom is a particularly potent example: as one exits the overgrown, densely contained foliage within the Oasis at the front of the park a stone-work bridge appears ahead, differing significantly from the rough trails traveled since entry. Movement toward this bridge is therefore encouraged, leading visitors out of a tightly contained, low visibility environment into an open-air vista. Proceeding onto the bridge, then, brings into view the Tree of Life, shocking in visual impact and effective at pulling visitors forward still.¹⁷⁵ This moment of spatial progression, environmental replacement and slow reveal potentially carries significant experiential content for sacralized participants, leading to repetition and re-experience.

Another possibility for spatial routinization lies in the manner of approach to the physical environment itself. Rather than an initiating contact with an act of penetration sacralized participants might find the circumscription of a park prior to inward progression meaningful and communicative. Disneyland Paris effectively demonstrates this possibility in the layout of the Disneyland Railroad.¹⁷⁶ Boarding at Main Street Station visitors embark on a circular tour of the park on one of four steam locomotives. The seating benches are placed perpendicular to the forward movement of the train, focusing one’s view into the environment. As laid out in Paris, this tour carefully prepares visitors for the physical mapping of the park and the spatial linkage of each land. Importantly, though, the Railroad also introduces the thematic content of the space in advance of direct contact. Leaving the station, visitors first encounter the Grand Canyon diorama in preparation for the striking reveal of Frontierland as seen from afar. The town of Thunder Mesa sits beyond the Rivers of the Far West with Phantom Manor dominating the southern horizon. Big Thunder Mountain, complete with small mine trains and prospecting camps, is directly in view but seen from an unusual lateral perspective, tying town and commerce together. Adventureland as well is provided linkage between various elements (Mayan temple, pirate ship, South Seas tree house),

¹⁷⁵ The intention is quite deliberate as this park’s weenie stands nearly 140-feet tall. See Malmberg, 38.

¹⁷⁶ An exhaustive analysis on Disney railroads is found in Michael Broggie, *Walt Disney’s Railroad Story* (Pasadena: Pentrex, 1997).

highlighting experiential travel to far-away places and the encounter with the “other”. Fantasyland and Discoveryland reveal interesting vistas in turn, presenting narrative material and visual iconography for eventual consideration by sacralized participants. Returning to Main Street Station visitors then turn inward and progress to the center, conscious of the makeup of the environment and prepared for its reception. If such circumscription proves relevant and consistent with the day’s other experiences, conscious repetition of the railroad excursion may occur at the initiation of each visit, furthering the routinization of the experiential process.

Routinization might also occur within the experiential development of visual interaction. Certain objects encountered within the environment by sacralized participants might pair up with other objects in interesting and communicative ways, prompting the repetition of the visual linkage. A pointed example of this routinization occurs within the dynamics of live park events such as parades and fireworks displays. Although elementally unchanged during the forward progression through a given park, parades can be experienced in different fashions with different experiential results dependent on the visitors’ viewing location.

The Disney Cinema Parade at Walt Disney Studios in Paris presents moveable tableaux from various Disney film productions, traveling through the park and directed at visitors lining the pathways. The content for this parade is fixed and carries a mild theme: a remembrance of the creativity and influence the filmic creations of the Disney Studios have had around the world. This international thematic intent is communicated both through the choice of scenes (the Italian Pinocchio, the German Snow White, and the French Cinderella as conceived by Disney artists) and the assumption of visitor diversity (including many representatives from the United Kingdom and continental Europe).¹⁷⁷ Experientially, though, the parade might be apprehended and interpreted in a multiplicity of ways dependent on the visitors’ location along the parade route. When seen amidst the Backlot production area the parade elements visually interact with the rough mechanics of contemporary filmmaking, possibly creating a focus on the lost art of hand craftsmanship and artistic intent. When viewed amidst the retro 1940’s studio architecture of the Frontlot, however, the parade might be seen as a celebration of the “dream factory” illusion inherent in the filmmaking process. Sacralized participants, then, might find the Disney Cinema Parade personally involving and communicative within a certain framework of environmental visual interactivity. If meaningful the parade experience might be repeated and the visual linkage with a specific point along the parade route routinized.

Similarly a performance of Disneyland’s fireworks show “Believe...There’s Magic in the Stars” is a significantly different experience dependent on the choice of viewing location. Seen from a balcony at the Disneyland Hotel the show visually interacts with the whole of the park, possibly communicating a rather simple message of celebration and communal event. Although music, shell progression and aerial choreography remain unchanged, “Believe” as seen from the park’s hub suggests something much more persuasive. Here the pyrotechnics, ignited by Tinker Bell, visually interact with Sleeping Beauty Castle, exploding just over the top spires and casting multi-colored light over the structure. This (by design) suggests a connection between the experience

¹⁷⁷ For a detailed description see “Disney Cinema Parade at the Walt Disney Studios Paris,” *LaughingPlace.com*, <<http://laughingplace.com/News-ID506040.asp>> (21 September 2003).

of “Believe” and the viewer’s memory of the opening of the Disney anthology television program. The visual interaction of castle and fireworks is repeated iconographically, linking childhood memory (itself richly meaningful) with present realization. The fireworks show itself uses this interaction to communicate its self-proclaimed theme: believe again as a child and anything is possible.¹⁷⁸ Content is effectively communicated when meaningful visual interaction occurs, spurring sacralized participants to seek the routinization of the specific experience (and causing severe congestion in the castle courtyard as a result). “Believe”, if meaningful, creates the desire for repeat viewings from meaningful locations, thereby preserving visual interaction and again suggesting the importance of routinization in the process of experience.

Beyond a static routinization of visual interaction, though, lies the dynamic repetition of park movement and sequencing. Progression through the environment by repeat visitors suggests a constructed understanding of previously experienced objects within the space, leading to their conscious linkage and re-experience. Meaningful connections remain as such within the experience of sacralized participants, leading to sequential routinization. At a basic level such sequential movement is manifest in the choice of directional flow within the Disney theme park. Although movement up Main Street, U.S.A. toward Sleeping Beauty Castle is compelled at Disneyland, once arriving at the iconic center visitors must choose a direction to continue movement through the space. A clockwise progression points visitors towards Adventureland and suggests a sequential progression of environments ending in Tomorrowland, while a counter-clockwise choice reverses this pattern. Visitors also may choose a sequence of environments not physically linked: an entry into Fantasyland through the castle may come first, followed by a return to the hub and the subsequent entry into one of the other lands. Such decisions may be based on crowd movement during an initial visit¹⁷⁹, yet repeat journeys by sacralized participants suggest the attachment of meaning to the environments and sequential movement based on meaningful personal constructions. In as much as conscious sequential progressions through the parks allow participants the re-experience of meaningful environments, such sequencing becomes routinized, presenting thoughtful, relevant information each time the pattern is engaged.

The same conscious sequencing holds true for the linking of individual objects within the space. Sacralized participants might find a particular attraction significant as an introductory experience, leading to its continual selection upon entry to the park and a routinization of the choice. The Great Movie Ride within the Chinese Theater at the Disney-MGM Studios might serve such a function. A journey through the proscenium arch into a variety of famous movie scenes, the attraction serves as an introduction to the thematic journey available throughout the entire park. Riders are allowed the wish fulfillment of meeting favorite stars of the silver screen and of participating in their filmic experiences. Bogart and Hepburn are encountered on the tarmac at the end of “Casablanca”, Gene Kelly is met on the lamppost in “Singin’ In The Rain”, and Jimmy Cagney is seen making a deal in “The Public Enemy”. Visitors and iconic movie stars

¹⁷⁸ This is emphasized by the narrator’s words: “Do you believe in the magic of dreams? That if you wish upon a shooting star with all your heart, dreams really do come true? Then join us on a journey where shimmering stardust will tug at your dreams and encourage you to look at the sky and make a wish.”

¹⁷⁹ Based on personal observation, the typical crowd movement appears to be clockwise.

share the same space, then, merging their respective experiences and granting a vicarious celebrity to the riders.¹⁸⁰ Such experience of wish fulfillment might create a desire for repetition, then, routinizing participants' park journeys by including The Great Movie Ride as the first attraction of the day. A single attraction might also serve as a summary and endpoint to a day's journey, thereby consciously left until the evening exit from the park. Dumbo, the Flying Elephant at the Magic Kingdom might serve such a function. Physicalizing the desire for flight, the attraction codifies the overall experience of the park in that the remembrance and embrace of the experiences of the past allow forward progression into the future. A ride on Dumbo might serve to remind and metaphorically fulfill the participants' childhood desires, precipitating a repetitive routine just before exiting the park. Indeed, such discovery of root meaning and subsequent routinization occurs throughout visitors' time in the sacralized environment as whole lands and individual attractions, along with restaurants, stage shows, parades, and architecture, are brought into sequential linkage in an effort to perpetuate the individual transformational experience.

Finally, routinization also functions within the experience of performance. Eager for the treatment attendant the role of guest, visitors might consciously accept and repeatedly participant in such a performance, frequently interacting with the cast members. Certain street performers might be sought out each time visitors enter a park. One popcorn vendor at the Disney-MGM Studios initiated a solo performance piece in which he recreated the entire opening musical sequence from the Disney animated film "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". The popularity of this impromptu, and reportedly moving, recital generated a high number of return visitors, eager to repeat the experience. The repetition of performance based attractions might also become routinized within the participants' park experiences, again fulfilling an existential desire for metaphoric embodiment of relevant narrative. Repeatedly traveling as an expedition member on Kilimanjaro Safaris at Disney's Animal Kingdom allows one the continual experience of the group capture of animal poachers, simultaneously satisfying a sense of adventure and moral outrage. Performance, then, as for other experiential processes, becomes routinized in the engagement of participants with sacralized space in as much as the repeated roles perpetuate meaningful content.

Rather than a reified pattern, though, the parks suggest an ongoing conversation between the multitude of objects and spaces. This sense of a continual reexamination of the routinized sequencing within the parks is assisted through the introduction of new attractions, stage shows and special events on a regular basis. Older elements are often reconceived as well, bringing new possibilities for content appropriation. Such experiences might impact routinized activities and precipitate the reshaping of certain patterns. Recently discovered elements might replace ones that have lost significance or might link with the existing patterns to form new correspondences. Dynamic, ongoing reconceptualization of the routinized patterns suggests an experience of sacralized space that retains relevant, transformational content, thereby self-actualizing the sacralized declaration of participants.

¹⁸⁰ As park materials state, "fabulous sets, special effects, and both live and Audio-Animatronics stars make your journey into The Great Movie Ride seem as real as if you'd stepped into the films themselves." *Walt Disney World Resort*, 140.

So, then, as this chapter has explicated, the Disney theme park seems able to carry the weight of a sacralized identification and declaration through the process of experience as well. As intentional participants engage in spatial movement, visual interaction, performance, and patterns of routinization, engagement with the sacralized space intensifies, providing a wealth of content-filled narratives and transformational ideologies. Coupled with the process of creation, the process of experience intimately involves intentional participants within the sacralized space, using the elements present to shape personal understanding and relevance in dynamic and ever-changing ways. The dual processes, then, serve to define the sacralized space and to offer content-rich material for appropriation and use in the exercise of power and construction of meaning, to which this dissertation now turns.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXERCISE OF POWER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN THE DISNEY THEME PARK

The weight of the creative and experiential processes coupled with the intentionality of participants supports a definition of the Disney theme park as sacralized space. As participants interact with the environment, both creatively and experientially, the park in turn provides potentially meaningful content. Whether intimately involved in the design and construction of the various environments or temporarily visiting an unfamiliar, preexisting landscape, the possibility of sacralization exists, awaiting a conscious, intentional declaration and the apprehension and appropriation of available content through creation and experience.

This interaction with sacralized space, then, produces dual results, mirroring the dual definitional processes. As previously outlined, sacralized space allows the useful appropriation of meaningful, available content through both the exercise of power and the construction of meaning. These dual results function simultaneously and in dynamic conversation both with each other and with the ongoing processes of creation and experience. Indeed, the exercise of power and construction of meaning are an aggregate of the ongoing and multifaceted ritualization process itself, initiated by sacralized participants. Definition of a space as sacralized implies empowerment and thoughtful construction. In return, these results further inform the perception and appropriation of the space, creating a circularity of influence.

The Exercise of Power

The Disney theme park as sacralized space allows participants the conscious appropriation of content through these dual resultant processes. With their simultaneity in mind, the discussion will begin with the exercise of power. Given the multitude of experiences and content-filled elements available to participants through the definitional processes, the exercise of power serves as one functional, necessary endpoint for the appropriation and utilization of the Disney theme park. Yet this exercise lies in symbiotic relationship with the definitional processes, for to the extent that participants have creatively imposed order on the space and experientially engaged the physical environment during a journey, active power has been exercised. Indeed, such a result is an accumulation of all conscious choices and perceptions made by participants during spatial interaction. In this way, the exercise of power is rooted in the intentionality of the sacralized declaration itself.

Localized Power

Visitors to Disney theme parks exercise primary, localized power (meaning power exercised within specific social grouping) in the choice between the attribution of meaning to the available content and the disregard of such content as meaningless. Power then extends to the constantly developing activities related to the creation and experience of content within the space. A conscious mapping of the park, an openness to resonant mythologies conveyed through architecture and attractions, and a formalization of the elemental components all presuppose an exercise of deliberate (if possibly subconscious) power. So, too, the engagement in spatial movement, the linkage of visual material, and the choices of sequential progression all manifest the relative autonomy of participants. The exercise of power, then, as one endpoint of engagement with sacralized space is partially an accumulation of previously made choices regarding the appropriation of available content within the space itself. This aspect of the exercise of power should not be thought of as static, however, for each entry into a Disney theme park by sacralized participants implies the constant reimagining of such choices. Despite the formalization of space and the routinization of active engagement taking place within the definitional processes, the exercise of power implies openness to development and change dependent on the dynamic progression of content perception and constructed meaning. For sacralized space to function as such, participants must be open to certain compositional elements shifting or diluting their meaning and consequent appropriation, even to the point of conscious elimination. The factors affecting such an exercise of selection and deletion depend on any number of subjective factors, yet the availability of dynamic choice within the perception of sacralized space provides further solidification of the space's efficaciousness.

So, then, the exercise of power in making ongoing choices about the engagement with and appropriation of available content within the Disney theme park is one result of the ritualization process being proposed. Sacralized space as formulated implies an exercise of power in all areas of engagement: the attribution of meaning and sacrality, the ordering of content for appropriation, the spatial movement and performance during the journey. This result struggles against a reification of content and environment, thereby preserving the possibility of an ongoing and self-actualizing sacral declaration. Rather than perceiving the parks as didactic communicators of static and predetermined content, the Disney theme park as sacralized space implies the protection of the exercise of power. Indeed, such exercise is a direct result of the definitional processes, preserving the multi-vocal composition of the environment and the long lasting potential for meaningful appropriation.

Communal Power

From this perspective, then, resultant focus is given to the element of the localized exercise of power, both autonomous and dynamic. Participants exercise such power as their social groups interact with the spatial environment. Yet power also carries quite a different element as well: the communal. Occurring simultaneously to and intimately informing the local, the communal exercise of power implies the concurrency of multiple expressions of conscious choice and autonomous appropriation

by many active social groups. Indeed, as local groupings of bodies exercise their power in personally relevant ways, they stand next to others exercising the same autonomy. Implicit, then, is the existence of a network of social bodies engaged in the exercise of power. This implies a broadly social dimension to such exercise, for as localized groups make choices and appropriate meaning within the boundaries of public space, they inevitably interact with others similarly engaged. The nature of this interaction as previously formulated implies the sharing of constructive ideologies and appropriations within the sacralized space itself through the simultaneous embodiment and enacting of conceptual understandings.

Within the Disney theme park, this sharing of choices through social enactment can manifest itself in a variety of ways. One example is the choice of the first attraction of the day. Traditionally, each park activates their entrance turnstiles as much as thirty minutes earlier than the posted opening time, allowing the initial visitors a chance to progress a certain distance into the park and preventing overcrowding outside the entrance.¹⁸¹ At the point of farthest progression a rope is placed across the pathway, creating a lateral line perpendicular to the street. Such a configuration allows the guests (who are already performing their roles) the chance to enter the remainder of the park without further hindrance. At the set opening time the rope is dropped and a great number of those gathered sprint forward, heading to a favorite attraction. This daily event implies a repeated pattern born from multiple park visits. An attraction or show has proven memorable in some way, prompting within visitors the desire for a repeat experience. Choosing the first attraction, then, implies a localized exercise of power directed toward a further appropriation of meaning. Interestingly, though, the choice of direction is often the same in these early visitors, giving rise to a seemingly mass migration at the rope drop. The Magic Kingdom in Florida often sees such visitors veer right at the hub, heading for the rocket ships of Space Mountain. Disneyland in California sees many visitors veer left, heading for the Indiana Jones Adventure in Adventureland.

Tokyo Disneyland arguably sees the greatest such migration, although the crowds are not heading to one of the more obvious famous thrill ride attractions. Rather, Tokyo visitors sprint to Pooh's Hunny Hunt in Fantasyland. This park's newest attraction, Pooh's Hunny Hunt is a technologically innovative marvel of creative design, often attracting lines of several hours throughout the day. Over time, as visitors have begun to discover a meaningful experience worth repeating, the attraction has increasingly drawn the attention of each day's initial visitors. Not dissuaded by its out of the way location or the compelling qualities of other park offerings, many guests now consciously choose to make Pooh's Hunny Hunt the first element in their sequential progression through the park environment.¹⁸²

This seeming demonstration of localized autonomy, though, is impacted by the other bodies within the space making a similar decision. Indeed, as the attraction gains popularity and assumes an accepted, meaningful import, localized choice is increasingly

¹⁸¹ Due to budgetary concerns, this practice has begun to diminish of late.

¹⁸² Six months after opening the attraction was still drawing large numbers of visitors. "Hunny Hunt's popularity hasn't diminished. Today (March 26th, 2001), the stand-by line was three hours and twenty minutes long and the line to get FastPass tickets (before they sold out) was ALSO over three hours long... all in a driving rain!" Marc Borrelli, "Land of the Rising Mickey," *LaughingPlace.com*, 2 April 2001, <<http://laughingplace.com/News-PID110045-110045.asp>> (21 September 2003).

enacted in a broadly communal fashion, creating a sense of shared purpose and experience. This multiplication of choice further serves to validate and solidify the initial decision itself, spurring visitors toward their goal. Important in the explication of a communal exercise of power, then, is the impact such multiple, shared choices have on the autonomy of the localized group. As the choice of first attraction manifests itself repeatedly in public demonstration, growing stronger as a result, other social bodies stand as witness, observing the crush of bodies pushing forward. Despite other previously made plans, such an observation creates the possibility for adoption of the communal choice. In this scenario, localized autonomy is challenged by the activities of the communal body, allowing, and perhaps even coercing, an alternate choice to be made. Visitors to the park, observing the throng proceeding to Pooh's Hunny Hunt, might decide to join in, setting aside localized choice for one shared by the ad hoc community. This adoption of broad group activity further serves to create certain patterns of accepted behavior, normalizing park dynamics. Indeed, the run to Pooh's Hunny Hunt has increasingly become the accepted morning event of the park. The development of new modes of spatial interaction, springing from mutually agreed upon, meaningful corporate choices, substantially changes the experiential landscape of the space, incorporating both the autonomy of the localized group and the compelling energy of the crowd. The exercise of power within such a sacralized environment, then, is also manifest in a shared, communal form.

Such exercise of communal power speaks to the considerable weight of broadly observable activity coupled with the open possibility for conscious acceptance by the group. Such power assumes a corollary as well: the autonomy of refusal and the engagement with more isolated, alternate pursuits. Despite the rush towards Fantasyland, communal power of this sort still preserves the more lonely decision to head for Adventureland or Westernland instead. This suggests that coercion comes into play only as a possible element of the localized group's reaction to the observable activities of the corporate body. Yet communal power may also be exercised within sacralized space in a fashion that necessarily limits the activity of the localized group. Such power resists exporting specific, ontological limits on the autonomy of other social bodies, yet creates a situation in which the localized exercise of power is constricted. The popularity of the nighttime fireworks show at Florida's Magic Kingdom has continued to grow throughout the park's thirty year history. The current iteration, Fantasy in the Sky, takes place evenings when the park is open late, forming an experiential endpoint to the day's journey. Although launched from offstage areas north of the Magic Kingdom, allowing potential viewing from multiple locations around the property, the show is designed for optimal viewing from within the park itself. Even more specifically, the various elements that comprise the twelve minute event (pyrotechnics, musical score, Tinker Bell flying overhead) are designed to converge most perfectly when viewed from the hub in front of Cinderella Castle.¹⁸³ Here the castle structure itself forms an environmental proscenium of sorts, framing the display for viewers. Not surprisingly, then, the hub fills with visitors many minutes before the commencement of the show, containing those hopeful of the perfect experience promised by the prime location. As the show time draws nearer such crowds begin to limit the freedom of access between various points within the landscape. Indeed, when viewed from the

¹⁸³ This is a good example of "sensory overload" as a constitutive part of the Disney experience.

perspective of the adjacent lands, the hub appears completely impassable. Other visitors within the space, therefore, are increasingly faced with a dilemma: stay within the land they are currently exploring and forego a desire to experience spatial elements located across the park, or fight through the bodies in the hub, irrespective of difficulty.

The same holds true just after the conclusion of Fantasy in the Sky, which officially signals the closing of the park. Despite visitors' desire to exit and make their way to their car or hotel room, the thousands of others attempting to leave the park at the same time overload the available exits and subsequent resort transportation (including bus, monorail and passenger ferry), forcing a group either to linger on Main Street, U.S.A. (which strategically remains open for food and merchandise purchases thirty minutes after park closing) or to endure the significant lines found upon exiting. Fantasy in the Sky, then, though a significant and potentially meaningful experiential element in the participants' journey through sacralized space, creates a situation in which the corporate exercise of power effectively constricts the local. Despite the personal desire to travel across the park to experience Pirates of the Caribbean or the Jungle Cruise, sacralized participants fresh off an evening's adventure through Space Mountain find it difficult to exercise power due to the corporate decision occurring within the hub. Likewise, participants prepared to cross back over the liminal threshold and return to the world outside find difficulty during the closing minutes of the park day. In such situations the corporate body and attendant decisions create an atmosphere of normalized behavior, welcoming, even enjoining, the assent of the localized group, while simultaneously constricting contrary decisions. This should not be seen as an exercise in restriction or coercion, however. There exists no necessity of assent or literal barrier to continued travel for the localized group during Fantasy in the Sky. Rather, the collision of dual power constricts the group, allowing continued autonomy, both in assent and dissent, only in conversation with the strongly declared corporate will, evident both in perceived physical barriers and normative experiential behavior. In the exercise of communal power the mutually agreed upon decisions create strongly suggestive patterns of behavior, encouraging localized appropriation and participation.

Negotiated Power

Yet another exercise of power is evident within the sacralized space of the Disney theme park, however, for between the poles of local and communal exercise lies the autonomy of negotiated appropriation. Within this manifestation, power moves beyond a rather naïve reading of the categories of acceptance and rejection. Indeed, the practical functioning of the power formulations already suggested opens a potential reading of the park as a place of oppression. Such a reading might see the exercise of communal power as a result of exterior, unconscious controls limiting the behavior of the visitors in an effort to shape acceptable behavior. Furthermore, the exercise of personal autonomy might be seen as a reaction against the suspicious, corporate nature of the park experience, attempting to counteract group control through local resistance.

The third form of the exercise of power, then, that of negotiated appropriation, would address this interpretation by marginalizing any suspicion over the ontological origins of behavioral choices by prioritizing what Bell calls "redemptive personal

appropriation". In other words, the exercising of power, local and corporate, would not be about the struggle between either capitulation or resistance to hegemonic forces within the constructed environment. Rather, choices both made and observed would enter into conscious negotiation within the experience of park participation, producing a synthetic response in which possible behaviors are either accepted or discarded on the basis of benefit. As discussed, one important aspect of the identification of space as sacralized is the attachment of meaning and transformational utility to the objects and environments encountered by participants. Such identification and attachment, although open to sacralized participants in terms of content, is grasped through the making of choices and the exercise of power.

Within this formulation, if an autonomous, localized choice creates a sense of transformational power and contributes to the concurrent construction of meaningful content, then the appropriation of said choice is validated within the sacralized space. Likewise, communal choices corporately accepted self-validate in as much as they contribute transformational content and meaning. Such choice does not occur in a vacuum, though, but rather implies negotiation and measurement. Local choices at odds with the communal are subject to modification, redirection and at least partial appropriation if helpful in the pursuit of meaning. So, too, communal decisions are subject to reshaping based on the dialogic encounter with the local. The identification of power as negotiated appropriation privileges transformational content over the collision of private and public thought, allowing all choices, despite origin, the possibility of acceptance and employment. By its very nature, such negotiation forms itself as an ongoing, dynamic event within sacralized space, preserving the identification of power as ongoing process rather than reified tradition. As choices are made, modified, evaluated, and reappropriated by both local and communal groupings, and as the identification of relevance further creates a necessity for new choices, power is exercised by participants within sacralized space and meaningful content is made available for transformational use.

Within the Disney theme park this type of negotiated power manifests itself in the consciousness of participants, intentional of the park's sacral definition and in pursuit of transformation through constructed meaning. A good example of the exercise of such power lies in the participants' engagement with the theme park parade. Parades have been a part of the Disney experience since Disneyland's opening day in 1955, often including costumed performers, elaborate floats and specially composed musical scores. Each parade carries a specific theme, referencing familiar narratives and visual iconography from the Disney oeuvre as a means of communicating content.¹⁸⁴

The response to such content has grown in appreciation throughout the past half century, resulting in ever increasing attendance at parade performances. Even more significant, though, is the progressively codified behavioral patterns of visitors before, during and after these performances. Indeed, the increasing popularity of Disney parades has created a sense of "event", prompting many to schedule the day's itinerary around posted performance times. This "setting apart" is partially due to the isolated

¹⁸⁴ As park literature indicates, "Disneyland has . . . led the way in creating some of the most impressive parade pageants presented anywhere in the world. Whether celebrating special occasions, holidays, or one of the beloved Disney animated films, Disneyland parades have delighted millions of park guests from virtually every part of the globe." O'Day, 140.

nature of the Disney parade, performed only once or twice each day and necessitating more careful planning. Yet the repeated pattern of parade scheduling by many visitors also indicates an appreciation for the experience itself.

Also significant is that the “setting apart” is not directed at the twenty-minute performance time alone; visitor investment extends to a potentially lengthy wait time in advance of the actual performance. Other attractions may be postponed, meals may be shortened, and shopping may be curtailed as parade time approaches. All other activities are secondary to obtaining a perfect viewing location for the performance. The definition of such perfection is subjective, yet careful observation of visitor behavior indicates that shade and an effective, communicative setting are indicators of prime locations. At Disneyland, such locations are often identified along Main Street, U.S.A., allowing the parade to be framed by Sleeping Beauty Castle as the elements travel south, while at Disney’s California Adventure the so-called “Performance Corridor” for the parade extends past Grizzly Peak, prompting many visitors to face west for the “perfect” experience.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, some spots are in such demand that visitors occupy them hours in advance, often saving blocks of space with personal items.

This idealization of the parade experience through the staking of spatial claims causes much competition and territoriality among visitors. Despite the jealous guarding of real estate for lengthy periods, as parade time draws near the inevitable interlopers will appear, encroaching on the chosen location. Safety is found only in communicating with your neighbors and confirming the mutual claims, thereby preventing intruders and preserving an obstructed view. The alternate, localized exercise of power is unwelcome in such a setting if standing in violation of the communal understanding. Such group dynamics and behavioral understandings, then, are mutually accepted by the corporate body, readily identifying and policing both proper and improper conduct. Once the parade comes into view, group behavior insists on only one thing: staying in the agreed upon space, straying neither horizontally nor vertically, and thereby preserving the experience of the collective. Upon conclusion, etiquette dictates an orderly, swift dispersal, clearing the streets and pathways for the cleanup crews as visitors rush to popular attractions in hopes of a less crowded experience. Disney parades, then, are indicative of developed, communal patterns of group behavior, agreed upon by the participating visitors and violated at severe social peril.

Within this situation, communal power is exercised in self-perpetuation of established norms, while localized power stands in distinct opposition. A third option, though, that of a negotiated exercise of power, exists as a viable choice. As discussed, this type of exercise negotiates a form of compromise by accepting the behavioral norms of the collective while preserving autonomous choice in pursuit of meaningful benefit. Within the context of parade performances, localized power might view normative corporate behavior as coercive and inflexible, precipitating either capitulation or resistance. Yet negotiated power focuses instead on the meaningful possibilities inherent in the performance event, creating the possibility of the modification of corporate norms. If sacralized participants expect to find the parade beneficial in terms of meaning yet remain suspicious of the efficacy of such expectations within the pursuit of the perfect viewing position and the policing of corporate behavioral ethics, an

¹⁸⁵ California Adventure is evidence that the more recent theme parks create iconic spatial arrangements in advance of their “discovery” by visitors.

exercise of negotiated power might lead such participants to abandon the idealization, instead searching for a personally relevant, less crowded viewing experience somewhere else in the park. Abandoning Main Street, U.S.A. for Fantasyland, participants would prioritize engagement with the narrative and visual elements of the parade over the relentless competition for viewing spots further down the route. Here, where the parade begins, the pathways are broader, thinning the visitors and allowing a more careful engagement with the elements. Hence, the expected communal behavior would be maintained yet minimized in importance, while the communal goals would be ignored, participants instead focusing on a viewing location best suited for the exercise of individual, negotiated power.

So, then, one identifiable result of the identification, creation and experience of sacralized space is the multiple exercise of power: local, communal, and negotiated. Such exercise suggests a space in which autonomy is vouchsafed, communal decisions are freely engaged, and all activities are open for negotiation and possible appropriation. The subsequent empowerment of participants allows a relevant, existential engagement with sacralized space, validating the sacral definition in the manipulation of order and meaning. The Disney theme park as sacralized space manifests these characteristics in significant ways, allowing the exercise of power by intentional participants and providing avenues for the interpretation and appropriation of the various lands' narrative and visual content. Rather than reducing the identity of the parks to landscapes of corporate coercion and capitulation, a sacralized formulation discovers the empowerment and autonomy of appropriation lying within the berm.

The Construction of Meaning

The exercise of power, though, is only one result of the declaration of the Disney theme park as sacralized space, for simultaneously active is the conscious and purposeful construction of meaning. Such construction stands as a summary activity by sacralized participants, incorporating the totality of content observed and absorbed from the creative and experiential processes. Given the characteristics of the sacralized definition, such content does not possess ontological meaning didactically presented for acceptance. Delimitation is present in the choice of elements and storylines found within the park. Yet the narrative mythologies and visual iconography of the sacralized space are multi-vocal and multi-referential, thereby resisting strictly reified interpretive parameters. The wealth of available information created and experienced by park participants is made relevant only through a process of appropriation and self-construction, revealing transformational and existential purpose.

Validation of Meaning

Such construction of meaning functions in a number of ways for sacralized participants. Initially, the conscious shaping of created and experienced content into meaningful patterns serves as validation for the sacralized definition itself. Throughout the processes of creation and experience, the sacral claim applied to the space by participants is in a state of becoming, circulating between perception and the received physical and narrative elements. A developing dialogue exists between the intentionality

of sacralization and the mapping and interaction with the space. Legitimization of the participants' sacralized claim, though, lies in the express attachment of meaning to the space in question, thereby substantiating the perceptual separation of the space from other spaces. This construction of meaning from the variety of available content within the space demonstrates to participants the efficacy of the perception itself, further substantiating the sacralized identity.

Within the parks themselves, meaning construction arises as the interconnectedness of perception, creation, and experience accrues throughout the journey of participants through the bounded space. Visitors might find something personally relevant or touching about an encounter within one of the parks, leading them to a perceptual change: the park is no longer solely a place of amusement or recreation, but takes on the aura of something worthwhile and important. This newly discovered perception grows if reinforced and nurtured through the ongoing creative and experiential processes: the parks are mapped and separated from other space as they are simultaneously entered and engaged by participants, thereby developing an increasingly specific sacralized character. Indeed, the parks themselves contribute to this perceptual shift by specifying a broad, conceptual framework of interpretive possibilities through visible text. Placed at the front entrance of each Disney theme park is a small bronze plaque containing the words of dedication spoken at that park's opening ceremony. Though easily overlooked by park visitors, these dedications indicate a range of meaning inherent in the park's design scheme and compositional narratives, further informing the sacralized participants' perceptual change by specifically allowing for the possibility of meaning construction while providing the necessary interpretive boundary.¹⁸⁶ The accretion and internal self-reinforcement of sacral identity fails, though, without a growing sense of appropriated meaning, constructed from the available elements and brought into increasingly significant dialogue with the other active processes: unless the narratives encountered and visual icons perceived are utilized by participants and made meaningful, the sacralized perception fails and dialogic structure collapses.

So then, the dialogic nature embedded in the sacralization of the Disney theme park depends on the resultant construction of meaning by participants for formalization and validation. Without a meaningful endpoint such sacralized language remains unfulfilled and subject to abandonment. The construction of meaning serves to validate and perpetuate the dialogue between perception, process and result, realizing for sacralized participants the conceptual goal of the initial attachment.

Extension of Meaning

A second function of meaning construction stems from this dialogic nature of the sacralization process, for such interconnectivity forms a hermeneutic circularity in which each element of the process informs the others, creating a constantly developing, internal substantiation and extension of the sacralized space. Validation of the sacralized definition may proceed from the attachment of meaning, but the continued

¹⁸⁶ The text of these dedication plaques, as well as the interpretive parameters they create, will be discussed later in the chapter.

efficacy of the spatial declaration for participants depends on meaning construction that continues to engage and challenge, thereby perpetuating the transformative encounter.

Such extension of sacralized spatial meaning implies several attributes within the Disney theme park: firstly, the theme parks, as discussed, present a landscape open for a continuing hermeneutic circularity. Rather than remaining at the level of dialogue in an effort to substantiate prior claims, the sacralized processes at work within the space create an interpretive circle that continues to function inter-referentially, incorporating not only the perceived content of the park and the prior experiences of participants, but also the ongoing engagement with each element. As discussed, many narratives encountered within the environment resist strictly didactic presentation, instead allowing a more fluid embodiment of mythic material. Visual, iconographic architecture encountered by participants is multi-vocal, allowing participants to bring their perceptual consciousness to bear in developing spatial relationships and existing meanings. Indeed, the theme park as sacralized space depends on participants' active engagement with the spatial elements, implying a consistent and long-lasting circular network of influence.

This type of interaction and personal engagement opens the interpretive framework, creating the possibility for meaning construction that grows and develops in the face of interactivity. Within such a hermeneutic circle, engagement is ongoing, and through such investment openness is created, implying the potential inexhaustibility of meaning constructions within the boundaries of content. The interpretation of spatial elements and the construction of specific meaning, then, require the multiple processes of sacralization to work together, each offering the potential for increasingly potent relevancy.

Secondly, meaning construction that arises from such circularity implies a process of assessment and reevaluation by engaged participants. While remaining within the interpretive delimitation established by the park boundaries, participants engaged in ritualization continue to be informed by each element of the circular process (declaration, creation, experience, and construction of meaning). As these elements impact each other, though, certain challenges inevitably arise. Needs shift and develop over time and the relevancy of certain elements may be called into question. Just as group engagement with the elements of the park necessitates specific appropriation, so must the perceived existential needs of participants be met within the hermeneutic circle. Sacralized space, to be meaningful and worthy of separation, needs the openness of addressing participants and providing a space for the reapplication of meaning.

So, then, just as the perception of existential need by participants changes and develops throughout time, the measurement of the efficacy of meaning construction within declared sacralized space must develop as well, constantly assessing the spatial environment and the availability of relevant elements. Although this may occur at a sub-conscious level, the measurement of meaning construction implies the necessity for change and development within the hermeneutic circle. Meaning construction, if effective, develops and extends to meet the needs of participants and serves to again legitimize the initial sacral declaration.

Thirdly, though, the extension of meaning construction implies the possibility of the discovery of irrelevancy by participants and a subsequent disregard for spatial

engagement. As reassessment occurs within the hermeneutic circle and meaningful constructions of spatial elements are developed by the sacralized individual, certain existential questions may arise for which the space offers little transformative information, at least in the perception of participants. Further accretion of interpretive parameters and revelatory constructions may be stymied by a perceived lack of elasticity in the circular dialogue.

Within the Disney theme park as sacralized space, participants may feel that the spatial elements are personally exhausted of meaning, preventing further circular development. One may also feel a lack of fresh elements entering the dialogic mix, reifying the environment through lack of physical development or upkeep. Any number of such perceptual changes may create distance between participants and the increasingly silent space, resulting in either a radical abandonment of the sacral definition (implying that the sacralized search continues elsewhere) or a stepping back from the hermeneutic circle, allowing no further growth of interpretive relevancy (implying the compartmentalization of the sacralized space into the participants' "past"). The progression of meaning construction is a key function of this resultant process, then, only in as much as a hermeneutic circle is formed and fed, allowing the address of developing existential needs within participants, thus further legitimizing the sacralized declaration itself. Without processional growth of interpretive categories and relevant content, though, meaningful construction cannot move forward and the sacralization process stops or disappears entirely. Participants who continue to find within the Disney theme park a circular, self-reflexive corollary between perception, creation, experience, and meaning will be able to perpetuate the transformative relevancy of the constructive project, while those unable to construct such a network will find sacralization ultimately counterfeit.

Diversity of Meaning

This brings into focus a third function of meaning construction, for as sacralized definitions are validated and relevancy extended to meet changing questions and needs, so, too, is the diversity of interpretation established and vouchsafed within the activity of sacralized participants, preserving the possibility of relevancy against the oppositional forces of stasis and reification.

As discussed, meaning within sacralized space is not a hierarchical end product of the creative and experiential processes. Spatial objects and environments are not didactic, mono-vocalic representatives of an authorial voice, demanding acceptance or rejection. If sacralization is a valid possibility for visitors, there exists, then, neither a necessary, ontologic finality within the separated space nor a reified, interpretive singularity, leading inexorably to a conclusion of oppression and coercion. Rather, meaning construction by sacralized participants implies a certain autonomy over against a state of static reification, allowing open spatial engagement.

The preservation of a diversity of interpretation for sacralized participants is manifest within the Disney theme park in a number of ways. Reification presupposes the existence of a text in need of decoding, penned by an authorial voice in a unified act of creation. Firstly, then, within the Disney theme park, such objectification is marginalized in the participants' perception of the multi-vocality of compositional

elements. Within the bounded space, narrative, architecture, landscape, performance, and music present opportunities for relevant engagement by participants without dictating strict interpretive parameters. As the dual processes of creation and experience shape participants' perception of the space, and as participants exercise power in the negotiation of the space, elements collide and form relationships conducive to meaningful, personal discovery. In this web of signification, texts are not being decoded as much as elements are being absorbed into the circle of interpretation, allowing highly diverse, constructive themes. Objects within the space carry vocal weight but are entered into dialogue only under the perceptual aegis of sacralized participants, not as an ontologic necessity. This, in many ways, is part of the legitimacy of the Disney theme park as sacralized space: the openness of the environment for a diversity of meaning.

This is not to say, though, that interpretive parameters are not present within the space as a whole or within the objects populating the space. Geographic placement and thematic intentions influence the perception of each park by the participants as they enter and begin their travel. Mythic narratives and architectural forms present within the individual attractions and visual icons act as referents to familiar, communicative ideologies, and as such are picked up by participants as they move through the space. Intentional content and meaningful communication are evident in the careful design and construction of each park. Yet such information remains at the level of suggestion and possibility in terms of appropriation; participants may be presented with a menu of available content and challenged by the available signifiers, yet still preserve the autonomy of drawing and appropriating relevancy within the delimited space. Indeed, such is the nature of sacralized space as declared by participants: spatial elements and compositions are meaningful, and therefore open for sacralization, only in as much as they are appropriated as meaningful construction, not simply accepted as propositional truth. Furthermore, each element present, as part of a dialogic circle, has many potential voices within the sacralized environment. Each spatial element references the context in which it lays as well as impacting participants actively involved in creating the sacralized space through which they move. Multi-vocality highlights the embedded diversity of interpretation that lies at the heart of the Disney theme park when seen as sacralized space. Meaningful construction relies both on the openness of available spatial elements for appropriation by the participating group and on the resistance of specific, reified intent.

Secondly, diversity is preserved within meaning construction through the participants' reaction to and incorporation of development within the sacralized environment. Disney theme parks have traditionally been places of constant growth and expansion, as Walt himself intimated: "Disneyland will always be building and growing and adding new things ... new ways of having fun, of learning things and sharing the many exciting adventures which may be experienced here in the company of family and friends."¹⁸⁷ Unpopular, overly trouble-prone, and expensive attractions are routinely closed and replaced in the hope of improving guest experiences. Parades are changed, often to coincide with the opening of the latest animated film. Architecture is modified in commemoration of special events and anniversaries. Landscape, especially, is reimaged to accommodate the changing seasons or to refine visual perspectives. This

¹⁸⁷ *Walt Disney: Famous Quotes*, 36.

attitude of malleability implies an environment in constant flux, recreating itself over time. Each of these developments, though, also enters the hermeneutic circle and is available for appropriation by sacralized participants, impacting the processes of creation and experience through the multiplication of possible encounters.

Meaning construction, then, is impacted as well, for the shifts in spatial content necessitate the measurement and reevaluation of prior constructions. The replacement of or fundamental change in an attraction may cause a meaningful narrative to drop from experiential view, forcing the attached meaning either to stay as a remembered yet still valid element of the past, or to fade completely from the interrelational dialogue. A minor cosmetic change or upgrade of an attraction might actually reintroduce a discarded visual icon into the elemental mix, recovering its voice in the process of rehabilitation. New elements introduced into the park boundaries might also strike meaningful chords with participants, further energizing the sacralized definition as new transformational paradigms are discovered. Each of these spatial developments introduced into the park environment serve to challenge the idea of reified meaning by arguing for an openness of interpretation and a continually emerging interreferential dialogue between constituent park elements. Singularity of thought disappears in such a sacralized understanding, instead promulgating a construction of meaning which resists stricture and encourages diversity commensurate with the growth of the park itself.

Finally, strict objectification of the Disney theme park is also opposed by the preservation of autonomy within the negotiated struggle between the localized and communal exercise of power. As discussed, this dynamic tension has at its heart an emphasis on purpose, demonstrated in the appropriation of certain spatial elements and the disregarding of others. Although this process is informed by both communal and local behavior within the park, the construction of meaning is not a byproduct of a perceived objectification of acceptable categories of interpretation; indeed, meaningful construction is able to utilize such tension to open up possibilities unseen from the limitations of either polar viewpoint. If large groups of visitors find a certain attraction or performance determinative, and their behavioral exercise of power creates a sense of authenticity, participants may consider an appropriation of the experience as well. Rather than assimilate the perceived meaning of the communal activity, though, participants may seek to negotiate the appropriation by linking the attraction or performance with other actively vocal elements, resisting the objectification of the object by resisting communal identification. Again, a commonly accepted interpretive schema is marginalized through negotiation in an effort to preserve the element of autonomy within meaningful construction. Negotiated power, then, works as a resultant twin to the construction of meaning, resisting the strict reification of the spatial environment. In this way, meaningful construction again supports the diversity of interpretation necessary within sacralized space.

Interpretive Paradigms

With these functions in mind, sacralized participants construct meaning by choosing relevant content from amongst the various mythic narratives and spatial elements available within the bounded environment. Such construction, as suggested, maintains a certain level of autonomy for the participating group. Yet meaning

construction does not presuppose a radical freedom of interpretation. The circularity of appropriation suggests a parameter of meaning available to the participants within which autonomy of construction is allowed. This suggests that the intention standing behind the design and construction of each Disney theme park delimits the interpretive boundaries of sacralized participants. Such intention in no way exhausts the meaningful possibilities inherent to sacralized space. Rather, the interpretive boundaries are presupposed, providing participants with a ground of meaning upon which to manipulate spatial elements in relevant ways.

With this in mind, two such interpretive boundaries or paradigms can be suggested within which both empowerment and meaningful construction occur at the Disney theme park. Without exhausting constructive possibilities, they suggest the broad parameter of available meaning, within which specific, content-filled elements present themselves for appropriation.

Disney Dedication Plaques

As noted already, located within each Disney theme park is a dedication plaque stating the intentions of the creators concerning the bounded environments. Although the parameters of available meaning within the parks are suggested in a variety of sources, the dedication plaques are determinative given their specific and permanent position within the experiential journey of sacralized participants. These plaques are suggestive of the broad intention lying behind the design and construction of each park, providing a framework for the geography and narratives experienced by visitors. In order to suggest paradigmatic intention, the text for each plaque follows.

To all who come to this happy place: welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past ... and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America, with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.

Disneyland, July 17, 1955

Walt Disney World is a tribute to the philosophy and life of Walter Elias Disney ... and to the talents, the dedication, and the loyalty of the entire Disney organization that made Walt Disney's dream come true. May Walt Disney World bring Joy and Inspiration and New Knowledge to all who come to this happy place ... a Magic Kingdom where the young at heart of all ages can laugh and play and learn together.

The Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, October 25, 1971

To all who come to this place of joy, hope and friendship, welcome. EPCOT Center is inspired by Walt Disney's creative genius. Here, human achievements are celebrated through imagination, the wonders of enterprise, and concepts of a future that promises new and exciting benefits for all. May EPCOT Center entertain, inform and inspire. And, above all, may it instill a new sense of belief and pride in man's ability to shape a world that offers hope to people everywhere.

EPCOT Center, October 1, 1982

To all who come to this happy place, welcome. Here you will discover enchanted lands of Fantasy and Adventure, Yesterday and Tomorrow. May Tokyo Disneyland be an eternal source of joy, laughter, inspiration and imagination to the peoples of the world. And may this magical kingdom be an enduring symbol of the spirit of cooperation and friendship between the great nations of Japan and the United States of America.

Tokyo Disneyland, April 15, 1983

The world you have entered was created by the Walt Disney Company and is dedicated to Hollywood – not a place on a map, but a state of mind that exists wherever people dream and wonder and imagine – a place where illusion and reality are fused by technological magic. We welcome you to a Hollywood that never was – and always will be.

The Disney-MGM Studios, May 1, 1989

"To all who come to this happy place, welcome." Once upon a time...a master storyteller, Walt Disney, inspired by Europe's best-loved tales, used his own special gifts to share them with the world. He envisioned a Magic Kingdom where these stories would come to life and called it Disneyland. Now his dream returns to the lands that inspired it. Euro Disneyland is dedicated to the young and the young at heart...with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration for all the world.

Euro Disneyland (Disneyland Paris), April 12, 1992

Welcome to a kingdom of animals ... real, ancient and imagined: A kingdom ruled by lions, dinosaurs and dragons; A kingdom of balance, harmony and survival; A kingdom we enter to share in the wonder, gaze at the beauty, thrill at the drama ... and learn.

Disney's Animal Kingdom, April 22, 1998

To all who believe in the power of dreams...Welcome! Disney's California Adventure opens its golden gates to you. Here we pay tribute to the dreamers of the past...the native people, explorers, immigrants, aviators, entrepreneurs and entertainers who built the Golden State. And here we salute a new generation of dreamers who are creating the wonders of tomorrow...from the silver screen to the computer screen...from the fertile farmlands to the far reaches of space. Disney's California Adventure celebrates the richness and diversity of California...its land, its people, its spirit and above all, the dreams that it continues to inspire.

Disney's California Adventure, February 8, 2001

Welcome one and all to a world where Imagination and Adventure set sail. Tokyo DisneySea is dedicated to the spirit of exploration that lives in each of us. Here we charter a course for Adventure, Romance, Discovery and Fun and journey to exotic and fanciful Ports of Call. May Tokyo DisneySea inspire the hearts and mind of all of us who share the water planet, Earth.

Tokyo DisneySea, September 4, 2001

To all who enter this studio of dreams...welcome. Walt Disney Studios is dedicated to our timeless fascination and affection for cinema and television. Here we celebrate the art and the artistry of storytellers from Europe and around the world who create magic. May this special place stir our own memories of the past, and our dreams of the future.

Walt Disney Studios, March 16, 2002

These plaques present a broadly inclusive intentionality lying at the center of design and construction. By referencing communal aspirations, and by using symbolic phrases, the dedication plaques solidify an approach to the creation and experience of the Disney theme park that signals meaningful paradigms while preserving a generality of content. Such intention, communicated and appropriated by sacralized participants, establishes a ground for the processes of ritualization.

The Recovery of the Past

Utilizing general, symbolic phrases as containers for specific appropriation, the various Disney theme park dedications make reference to many shared ideas: magic, happiness, imagination, hope, dreams. Also evident is a focus on education and inspiration, helping initiate a process of sacralization. Upon reflection, though, two repeated themes are evident in these dedications, providing compelling evidence for specific, interpretive paradigms. The first is a focus on the recovery of the past. The

parks consciously suggest a link between the bounded journey within the spaces and a meaningful engagement with the past. Various dedications refer to reliving “fond memories of the past” while inside the park, to America’s ideals, dreams, and hard facts, and to the dreamers of the past involved in building a “Golden State”, symbolic of society in general. The life and philosophy of Walt Disney is remembered in several dedications, as well as his status as “master storyteller”, perpetuating communal tales in physical form. The past is also linked to the notion of “Hollywood” as a symbolic repository for memories, communicated through cinema and television. The concept of remembering the past, then, is voiced by the creators of the parks.

This does not entail the recreation of the past, however.¹⁸⁸ Rather, the Disney theme park intentionally signals an entrance into a dreamscape in which past memories are preserved but generalized and filtered through the perception of the participants within the space. The memories are “fond”, they focus on ideals and dreams, they celebrate the idealization of past personages, and they preserve a notion of the past as meaningful and eternally relevant: a place and time that “never was and always will be.” A recovery of the past, then, signals the intention to create a meaningful engagement with the idea of the past. As visitors enter the parks they discover a past that is neither specific and historically plausible, nor attached to personal experience. Rather, the space is intended to perpetuate a memory of how everyone’s past should have been; indeed, must have been.

Such a past is recovered in that it is opened as a meaningful pursuit and generalized to accommodate all participants. This past is not specific in any real way, yet suggests an approach to memory that preserves and accentuates meaning. The past is a vehicle for meaningful construction and relevancy, allowing visitors a ground within which to explore their own perceptions and to seek a transformative vision. This conception of the past, then, also stands in stark contrast to notions of the present. The parks seem to share with Walt a deep suspicion of the present in as much as the contemporary world lives divorced from memory. The park dedications marginalize mention of the present and avoid any celebration of the world from which visitors come, choosing instead to view the past as remedy to the ills of modernity. The memory of the past, as presented within the Disney theme park, is recovered and idealized by constructing landscapes and choosing narratives that communicate meaning, allowing participants to find connection and validation. The past as experiential category intentionally suggests that memory and perception are useful, meaningful and transformative. Crossing the berm brings the hope of memory, for in the world of the Disney theme park there is no progression without the recovery of the past.

The Transformation of the Future

The second paradigm suggested by the Disney dedication plaques is a focus on the transformation of the future. Visitors to the parks “may savor the challenge and promise of the future” which will bring “New Knowledge”. The envisioned future “promises new and exciting benefits for all”. The future is a place of joy, inspiration, belief, and pride, reached through hopeful dreams and the ability to shape a new world.

¹⁸⁸ “A vision is presented which mythologizes and steepens in nostalgia a past that never really existed.” Bryman, 127.

Along with the recovery of the past, the creators of the Disney theme parks view the future as the result of the validation of meaningful memory. The future is presented as a place of open-ended possibilities, limited only by the ability to dream. Visitors to the parks, then, are presented with certain dreams of the future world. Tomorrowland at the four Magic Kingdom-style parks presents a future as imagined through the eyes of past visionaries like Jules Verne and Leonardo da Vinci. Epcot focuses on the future as a place of harmony between humanity and the natural world. Other parks focus on the future as a place for dreams to come true, in terms of both entrepreneurial possibilities and personal creativity. The transformation of the future as paradigm suggests that park visitors have opportunity to discover the future as a place of limitless choice and potential. Rather than remain skeptical about the development of society and disillusioned by the meaninglessness of the contemporary world, the parks present a future within which participants have voice and creative potential. The specific futures, then, presented within the park environments are merely suggestive of constructive possibilities.¹⁸⁹ The real transformation comes after the visitors return to the real world. The feelings of suspicion and alienation engendered by modernity are not answered in replicating the Tomorrowlands of the theme parks, but by creatively constructing futures which resolve the search for meaning. By entering the sacralized environment, then, participants enter into a paradigm of future possibilities, able to appropriate the content of the space for the construction of relevant futures. Coupled with the validation of the imagined past, the future is a place of dreams and real promise, making manifest the idealized past as a transformed reality.

These two paradigms suggest the interpretive parameters established by the creators and designers of the Disney theme parks as formalized through the tradition of dedication plaques. For sacralized participants entering the spatial environment, the imagined past that surrounds them is declared as meaningful and the future world that lies around the corner is declared as open and full of potential. With the establishment of these paradigms the spaces set the groundwork for meaning construction by the sacralized participants.

So, the exercise of power and construction of meaning within the Disney theme park take their cue from the wealth of creative and experiential content appropriated by participants in the engagement with bounded space. Through the exercise of power, sacralized participants purposefully choose to utilize the spatial environment of the Disney theme park and the content therein to address substantive existential questions, answering them through the processes of creation and experience. Meaning, then, is constructed both in response to and in dialogue with the elements of the space, serving to validate the sacralized definition and to stimulate the transformational paradigms linked to the past and the future. As defined, the exercise of power and the construction of meaning directly relate to the active processes of creation and experience, allowing the Disney theme park a self-reflexive, active legitimization as a place of ritualization.

¹⁸⁹ "In fact, to many commentators, the future envisioned . . . is remarkably mundane and uninspiring." Bryman, 135.

CONCLUSION

The Disney theme park as cultural phenomena continues to puzzle and frustrate interpreters looking for specific keys to unlock its popularity and relevance. Many would no doubt prefer a timely disappearance of the theme park from the global scene, taking with it the distortions of history and the imperialistic, corporate greed. Indeed, the parks have, in recent times, been highly prone to economic downturn and creative restriction. As profit margins shrink and discretionary spending and travel dissipate, the Disney Company often responds with budget cuts at the parks, resulting in decreased maintenance and few new creative elements. Coupled with this is a certain malaise in the general populace toward repeated visits, due in no small part to a decade of over-expansion. Yet the ten parks still operate each day of the year around the world, indicating a continued desire for the experiences offered and a peculiar, long-lasting quality to the meanings carried away by visitors. As demonstrated in this dissertation, many cogent critiques are leveled at these environments on any number of levels, some well founded and deserving of careful consideration. The homogenization of collective memory and insensitivity to social diversity are surely aspects of Disney culture in need of further elaboration. Yet when seeking a common ground from which to launch more finely-pointed discussions, no consensus is in sight, although Marling's work on the politics of reassurance shows real promise. It is my hope, then, that this dissertation's proposal might stimulate some progression towards a conceptual platform able to launch Disney research and dialogue in new directions.

In summary, and despite the protestations of Moore, Riley and Parr, and Masur and Koda, the Disney theme park is quite able to be defined as religious site. Seen as agents of ritualization in both form and function, these sacralized environments are available for use by participants as a means of resolving deep-seated feelings of alienation within the contemporary world. Crossing the berm and entering the park brings participants into contact with rich mythologies available for appropriation in pursuing a sense of empowerment and meaning. The present, therefore, is discarded in favor of reassuring memories of the past. Once recovered, these memories, and the meanings constructed from them, are available for powerful use in transforming the future lying just outside the park boundaries. So, within the sacralized environment of the Disney theme park, participants find connection and are provided with resources for the shaping of alternative destinies. The religious nature of such sites, then, lies in the empowered pursuit of meaningful answers; answers which, to paraphrase Bradbury, just might change the whole damn world.

The Journey Revisited

Once upon a time, later...there lived a small family: single mother, young daughter. They were a fairly typical, lower-income family, living in central Florida and struggling through the economic downturn of the summer of 2003. They shared few adventures together anymore – money was tight now that they were on their own and any notion of free time had quietly evaporated. Yet they hoped to spend a day at Walt Disney World before school resumed. They had been many times before, of course. Who hadn't? But they heard about a couple of new attractions on the news and thought it might be a fun waste of a day. At least they could spend some time together. It didn't really matter where they went.

The mother indeed was able to take a day off in mid-August and the two planned to head the 10 miles or so south to the parks. Luckily a neighbor had a couple of one-day passports left over from an out-of-town visit and gladly gave them to the mother and daughter. They threw on some shorts and oversized Disney tee-shirts from their last visit and jumped in the car. As they headed out of town on Interstate 5 they ran into some traffic and almost decided to pull off at the exit for the Universal theme parks, but the road soon cleared and they decided not to pass up free tickets. As the daughter chatted about a recent, boring weekend with her father, the mother was glad for the time away from the bustle of their normal day. Even though Walt Disney World was as familiar to her as any other place in Orlando, moments with her daughter counted very much, and she was glad for that.

As they neared the Disney exits, they discussed which park to visit: not Animal Kingdom – too educational; not Epcot – too boring. The Disney-MGM Studios had a new roller coaster that they hadn't been on yet, but they decided to visit the old stand-by – the Magic Kingdom. This was the park the mother visited constantly when she was a child growing up in Kissimmee. In fact, she went so often that she swore never to drag her child there. But she had and the Magic Kingdom it was. They would have fun together no matter where they went. As they joined the hundreds of other cars and pulled up to one of the parking attendants, the mother shook her head at the fee of seven dollars. She saw this would be an expensive outing, even with free tickets. Did Disney really need to charge that much on top of everything else? Leaving the car in the Dopey lot, they boarded a tram to the Transportation and Ticket Center. From here they had to decide which transport to take to the park: monorail or ferry. The daughter just wanted to get there and eat, so they opted for a passenger ferry just preparing to leave. In the distance they saw Cinderella Castle beautifully lit by the morning sun. They had seen this many times, but why did it still send a little shiver down their backs, they wondered? They were just sentimental dopes, they decided, hoping to remember where they parked as a result.

The ferry dropped them at the entrance to the Magic Kingdom where a mass of visitors waited at freshly constructed checkpoints to have their backpacks and purses searched. This was new, the mother thought, reflecting on the surprising places the post-9/11 world manifested itself. She also noted that these precautions hadn't thinned the crowds much. In fact there seemed to be more people arriving than ever. The search procedure was streamlined and soon they were at the turnstiles, pushing their way through and arriving in front of the train station. The daughter began to follow the

crowd under the train tracks and through the tunnels, but the mother paused for a moment. The floral Mickey Mouse facing her brought to mind a tradition her mother and father insisted upon each time the family visited. Despite protestation, the daughter dutifully placed herself in front of Mickey, hoping to get this over quickly. Unfortunately for her, the mother then began looking for a willing passerby to snap a picture of them both. Dredging a half-smile, the daughter put her arms around her mother and posed. At that moment the daughter swore that she would never drag her children here and subject them to similar humiliation.

Finally they moved through the tunnel, grabbed a guide map from inside, and emerged into Town Square. Although she did not fully realize, let alone vocalize, her reaction, the mother sensed something strange within her. It wasn't a reaction to Town Square itself. Despite the fact that this area was supposed to represent America one hundred years ago, the mother found she cared very little about a fake recreation of the "good old days". She'd seen this before and wasn't buying it for a second. Instead, she saw something else surrounding her that morning: her own childhood. Not that she grew up in anything resembling Main Street, U.S.A. But this space was a deeply rooted part of her childhood and somehow represented, in physical terms, the memories of innocence and joy she once experienced here. Her young life had been difficult – divorce was never something easily maneuvered for an eight-year old. But coming here were moments of togetherness and peace, shared between her mother, her father, and herself. The Magic Kingdom, at least in her own memory, was just that, helping drown the words of bitterness and animosity so often a part of their family life. She thought it funny how she had forgotten that. Children cope with pain in so many varied ways. But stepping into Town Square today triggered that memory. Why this time, she wondered? After all, she had made many visits with her own child, now a product of divorce herself. Nevertheless, she connected with her own past for a moment, and for that she was very thankful.

The two of them made their way up Main Street, U.S.A. and stopped to stare at Cinderella Castle, the center of the park. Looking over, the mother noticed her daughter and the strange look on her face. What was she thinking about? The daughter said nothing, but inside remembered how the castle thrilled her when she was little. Many times she had stood there with her mother and father, dreaming of her family happily living in a dream world. Fairy tales were stupid, she knew now, but she sure liked the way they made her feel. She felt her father beside her and if she closed her eyes, she saw herself, wide-eyed and still innocent. Maybe the day would be worthwhile after all, she thought.

They paused for a moment in the Hub, wondering which way to proceed. Many people headed west, probably for Splash Mountain before the lines reached the two hour mark. They decided to continue heading north, however, and crossed the drawbridge into Fantasyland, heading for "It's a Small World", their old, traditional choice for the first attraction of the day. Despite the corniness of these little dolls and that annoying song, they liked having a tradition to share each time they visited. Again, there were good memories attached to this silly place.

The rest of their day was enjoyable as well, despite the heat and crowds. Those things usually frayed nerves and attitudes, but the mother and daughter took things slowly and avoided the rush. They ate a couple of nice meals with the money saved

from admissions, chatting about nothing and everything. They spent time browsing in the shops and picking up small souvenirs. Most of all, they enjoyed each other's company, away from the press of their real worlds. Perhaps this was the most memorable event of the day – being together. That evening, as they held hands and made their way back down Main Street, they both secretly wished something. We should work harder at making time for each other, and we should have more days like this. And they knew, as they passed under the railroad tracks and out of the park, that they would be back.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chris Newcomb has been a participant within the Disney Theme Park his entire life. Born in 1964, his earliest memory is a family trip to Disneyland at age two. He graduated the University of Washington in 1987 with a B.A. in Drama, followed by a B.D. in 1994 from the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rueschlikon, Switzerland. His Ph.D. in Religion was awarded by the Florida State University in December, 2003. With his wife Jamie and two children, Molly and Kylie, Chris continues to make frequent trips to Disney parks around the world, discovering new delights each time.