A STORY IN THREE DIMENSIONS: THEME PARKS AS INHABITABLE STORY SPACES

and

SELECTED ARTWORK AND TEXT FROM “VERNE’S JOURNEY”

by

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in **Children's Literature**

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Abstract

This hybrid thesis is a companion to the Pitch Bible for my creative project, 'dark ride', a narrative theme park attraction titled *Verne's Journey*. Here I discuss the history and theories on themed narrative attractions, specifically with a focus on the role of narrative themes. I review audience engagement with these spaces, especially their participation in playful behaviours and interactions, and their acceptance of the imaginative nature of these rides as brief realities where they may go as far as to dress up and inhabit story spaces they have previously consumed in literature and/or other media.

Lay Summary

The goal of this work is to design a dark ride based on a body of literature, three books by French author, Jules Verne. The idea of this hybrid piece is to provide context on the field of themed entertainment by situating it in a larger history and describing the elements constituting a ride in order to support the concept plans provided in the creative portion.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Luiza da Costa Laborne Salazar.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to every person who has worked or is currently working to create entertainment in all its forms, but more specifically the kind of entertainment which allows people to live out fantasies, to inhabit a place beyond reality and to learn how to walk in another's shoes. To every dreamer and doer who dedicates their lives to creating joy for others by allowing them to be whoever they want.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Motivation

1.1 Motivation for Research

Ever since I first set foot at Disney's Magic Kingdom Park when I was four years old, theme parks and their rides have captivated me. Once every three years my family took the trip to the Florida Magic Kingdom. As the dates fast approached, I vibrated with excitement and busied myself with rituals in anticipation, such as my father's game of "walking through" the souvenir maps from the previous trips to simulate our upcoming visit.

I was twenty-three years old when I first visited the Disneyland Park in Anaheim. Riding on the *Indiana Jones Adventure: Temple of the Forbidden Eye* attraction for the first time, I remember feeling a rush of excitement as the truck twisted and turned, the famous John Williams score in the background. Since the ride is not in any of the Florida Disney parks I grew up visiting and eventually working in, this experience was brand new to me. I wore shorts and a tank top as I stood in line waiting to climb into a "fake" truck, feeling for that moment *like* Indiana Jones. I became a part of that story, doing the same daring feats one of my favorite characters did in his movies. It was not a rational response. It was emotional.

In this thesis, I discuss notions of how emotional responses to theme park rides are generated by story and design, and how it is vital that participants make connections to their previous knowledge of the narratives. These ideas are discussed in literature by theme park designers – John Hench, Jeff Kurti (2008), Jason Surrell (2015), Don Carson (2000), David Younger (2016) and The Imagineers (2006); as well as academics – Edgar Cabanas (2019), Scott Bukatman (1991), Abby Waysdorf & Stijn Reinjders (2016), S.A. Clavé (2007), Susan Davis (1996), Janet

Murray (2005) and M. Gottdnier (1982). In order to support these perspectives, I look at existing rides in theme parks and spaces around the world. I provide my observations, and consider how the background and history of these rides inform the process of designing an inhabitable story space, a space in which a guest may walk through to take an active role in a story that was previously only consumed in "two dimensions”.

I chose to base my conception of a ride on the novels of Jules Verne. The choice seems like a perfect fit, since Jules Verne has been capturing the imaginations of generations of readers through his books, which are translated into multiple languages and adapted into multiple formats (Bould & Vint, 2011; Derbyshire, 2006; Gunn et. al., 2005). The sense of adventure and discovery coupled with the impossibility of most of the plots proves an ideal opportunity to offer the guests[1] something unique, an appealing role to play and an invitation to actively participate in a narrative attraction, not only by experiencing the physical aspects of it, but also by recognizing sights from known stories and feeling like characters in them. As a former cast member[2] at the Disney's Hollywood Studios park, I witnessed the power of immersion in a themed environment, where adults buy into the illusion as much as the children. I have noticed how emotionally dramatic the experience is when a narrative connection is made, when a guest may recognize a specific piece of music, scenery, character or prop from a story they know and their attitude toward the experience changes, either by pointing out how they are now in that story, as children often do, or by being able to embody the spirit of the ride or space physically - like an excitement

[1] Guests is the general term used to describe customers and visitors to the parks
[2] Cast Member is the title given to park workers in the Disney Parks

or adrenaline rush that comes from participating in a pirate raid or temple run, to name a couple. Guests may leave a specific ride that is not themed to known stories talking about how beautiful it was, how scary or exciting. However, in a themed ride, they will talk about the characters and sets they have seen and recognized from stories: "Did you see Elsa? We flew over Hogwarts! I almost touched Peter Pan!".

1.2 Purpose of Study

This hybrid thesis looks at the elements of stories necessary to create an emotionally engaging themed story space (Hench, 2007; Lukas, 2013; The Imagineers, 2010; Younger, 2016). It explores how rides have been rendered in the past (Cabanas, 2019; Clavé, 2019), and how today they are developed with new technology and designed to meet the increasing challenge of keeping guests' attention (Carson, 2000; Sehell & Shochet, 2001). I am especially interested in the relationship between audiences and adapted materials (Gould & Mitchell, 2010; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). The literature review looks at the execution of themed spaces from the perspectives of select scholars, and includes ideas and concepts from creators who explain how their experiences and insights determine design choices, engineering, and how they use those to solve problems, such as working around monetary constraints (Bigné & Gnoth, 2005; Cabanas, 2019; Murray, 2005).

My approach to this thesis is a hybrid one because it includes both historical and theoretical background on the process of adapting a narrative into the three dimensions of rides, and because it includes a 'Pitch Bible', i.e., the detailed plans for a specific ride. This piece discusses why and how people connect with themed spaces, information which is vital knowledge for a

designer to possess in order to create rides that feel alive and authentic to the original narrative (Cabanas, 2019; Hench, 2008).

Rides offer opportunities to tell stories in three dimensions, in ways not afforded by television, film or games. While all the aforementioned can result in emotional experiences, and some even allow a modicum of participation by the audience (in the case of interactive games), none allow the audience to physically inhabit the spaces where these stories take place. Themed spaces are entertainments in which audiences utilize all five senses as they interact with story (Lukas, 2013). The ability to see, touch, smell, taste, and move about the space beyond the focus provided by, for example, the lens of a camera, has the potential to make it more personal, more engaging, and facilitates a way to suspend disbelief and truly become actively engaged with the narrative.

1.3 Rationale and Criteria for Choosing Verne

I chose to centre my work in the public domain. This removes certain logistical obstacles when it comes to executing the project. Furthermore, Jules Verne is considered a pioneer in science fiction and fantasy with many of his – at the time outrageous – ideas for the future having been realized fully or partially. His stories, which have been available for over a century, captured the attention of generations with bold characters and imaginative settings and generated a body of literature on its form and content. Verne's books have gone through a number of adaptations - such as movies, television shows and radio series to name a few - and have greatly influenced contemporary narratives, genres and characters.

My first consideration was to work with classic fairy tales from creators such as The Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen. However, these stories have become in the modern age so synonymous with the Disney company that it would be complicated to approach them without running into the issue of how often they have been adapted. As I was growing up I consumed the stories of Jules Verne, imagining myself as one of his many characters. Remembering my love of those interactions, I decided Verne's stories are perfect for contemporary audiences, new but containing familiar narratives.

The works of Jules Verne include dynamic episodes of exploration, science and technology. I wanted to use elements of exploration to give guests a vivid taste of adventure. Thus, I looked for the most emotionally resonating stories in the more than 60 pieces Verne wrote over his lifetime with particular attention to the ones audiences worldwide would be familiar. Over the course of looking at prints, children's editions and adaptations, it became clear that his most popular stories are *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (Verne, 1870)*, Around the World in 80 Days* (Verne 1873) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (Verne, 1864) (Bould, 2011; Gunn, 2005; Pike, 2019). These novels had been modified, translated, and so extensively adapted that parts of them have become unrecognizable. Some visual pieces originally not central to the narrative, have turned into iconic elements of the story, such as the Nautilus ship now more closely associated with its design in the 1954 Disney film or the image of a hot air balloon, so evocative of *Around the World in 80 Days,* despite the fact the main character does not use it as a means of transportation (Telotte, 2010).

Exploring what people remember most about these three particular stories provides excellent clues as to which important anecdotes to highlight and to how I might use audience responses to create experiences that feel both fantastic and grounded, much as his books do many years after his passing. In this work I attempt to answer the following questions:

- How can existing themed spaces and rides provide insights into design decisions and how are those decisions based on audience expectations?
- How can I use that insight to create my own dark ride, based on a known intellectual property?

1.4 Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I look at the historical background for themed experiences and spaces, exploring how the concept of "theme park" came to be and how these spaces are built around audience behavior and patterns of movement. In Chapter 3 I explore the notion of these themed environments as spaces in which the guest is invited to role play and review literature pertaining to emotional engagement and familiarity with existing themes through the interactionist lens and through case studies of existing spaces. In Chapter 4 I delve deeper into the relationship between audience and space and explore how their expectations are vital to the creation of an effective experience. I look at existing spaces based on intellectual property such as "Harry Potter" to clarify the necessary elements that need to exist when developing a ride that contains elements an audience may recognize and expect things from, as well as the multisensory nature of those interactions. In Chapter 5 I analyze the physical elements that compose a dark ride individually and study the necessary coherence each piece must have in order to create an authentic experience as well as the role they play within the physical structure. In Chapter 6 I discuss my

conclusions about the nature of these experiences and how they can be used to further the study of interactive themed spaces as well as the lessons learned to use in my own design of a dark ride.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Theme Parks

"Here you leave today and enter the world of

yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy."

Sign at the entrance to the Magic Kingdom, Orlando

2.1 Historical Context

On a hot Sunday afternoon in 1955, Walter Elias Disney welcomed a crowd of guests to the grand opening of his new "kingdom," a park in California that required a total investment of seventeen million dollars and was met with no small amount of skepticism (Finch, 2011; Sklar, 2013). At the event, broadcast by ABC to over ninety million viewers, Disney delivered the speech that is now engraved in a sign just inside the park which reads "Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past…and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future". These words encompass the philosophy that led Disney to renounce the naysayers of his "Magic Kingdom" project, by showing that a place could be more than just a physical structure, that bricks and mortar could construct a story, that a special reality existed past the turnstiles and, more than that, people are willing and eager to buy this illusion (Hench, 2007). His gamble paid off. Over one hundred and fifty million visitors crossed the gates of its eleven theme parks in California, Florida, Paris, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo in 2018, with projections for more growth once the highly anticipated *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* fully opens in Anaheim and Orlando (Smith, 2020). Several amusement and theme parks have closed in this same span of time, and while it is difficult to determine the exact reasons for Disney's

success, the focus on presenting characters and environments from known stories could be a major draw.

2.2 Themed Rides and Spaces

Themed environments have been used by humans in different capacities since our earliest tribal living. Theme park scholar Scott Lukas writes that "over 32,000 years ago, the cave painters at Lascaux used effects from illustration animated by flickering firelight, focused attention, natural acoustics, music, manipulation of space, and narration to create a virtual reality environment" (Lukas, 2013, p. 43). The idea of parks as places of recreation can be traced back to the Pleasure Gardens of the Medieval Age, in which admission fees were charged to gain entrance to spaces where a variety of entertainments such as "gardens, walks, mazes, statuary, artworks, pavilions, animal menageries, and hosted concerts, fireworks, balls and parties" (Younger, 2016, p. 9). The majority of these spaces closed to make way for the new entertainments, but a few, like the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, continue to evolve to address growing interests in narrative-themed spaces (Davis, 1996).

World's Fairs are examples of themed entertainment and are pioneers in creating innovative entertainment spaces, often proving to be perfect "testing grounds" for what become permanent fixtures in other places (Davis, 1996; Younger, 2016). Attractions like *Carousel of Progress, It's a Small World* and *The Disneyland Skyway* all had their debut at a World's Fair before finding a home in Disney parks. Years after the opening and success of Disneyland Park, many of Disney *Imagineers* were employed at the New York World's Fair of 1964-1965, both to bring knowledge of their own operations to the New York Fair attractions and to learn lessons to apply to future

Disney endeavors. (Hench, 2016; Sklar, 2013). World's Fairs "pioneered the division of the fair into themed lands" (Younger, 2016, p. 9), an innovation at the core of the theme parks.

Perhaps the closest predecessor to theme parks were amusement parks, specifically Coney Island's Sea Lion Park, which opened in 1895. The staggering success of Coney Island led to a proliferation in the industry (Davis, 1996) in the USA. By 1919, "the USA had between 1500 and 2000 amusement parks." (Davis, 1996, p. 399). Despite this remarkable success after the Great Depression and the Second World War the amusement park industry declined, perhaps unsuccessfully competing with newer, "shinier" forms of entertainment such as television. While some parks worldwide survived the decline - such as Tivoli Gardens and the Vienna Prater, which opened in the 19th century and are still in operation today - in North America, amusement parks became associated with urban decay, crime, and with disreputable industries and people (Brody, 1976; Davis, 1996; Sklar, 2013).

While there is some debate about what was in fact the first theme park in history with Knott's Berry Farm and Santa Claus Land vying for the title (Younger, 2016), "the term 'theme park' was coined in 1958 in order to specifically describe Disneyland (1955) with the new type of themed entertainment it offered." (Younger, 2016, p. 10). There is a famous story about the genesis for Disneyland evolving from Walt Disney's taking his then young daughters to an amusement park which he found squalid. A company brochure from the 90's stated:

> When his daughters were very young, Walt would take them on what he later called 'very unsatisfying visits' to local amusement parks. He felt there should be something built where parents and children could have fun together. He

> wanted Disneyland to be a place where ‘people can experience some of the wonders of life, of adventure, and feel better because of it.’ (Gottdiener 1982: 157)

Walt Disney’s idea met with great resistance, from investors, friends, and even his wife, who inquired why he would want to build an amusement park, stating that “amusement parks are dirty, unsafe, and the people who work there are nasty”, to which Disney responded: “My park won’t be anything like those” (Imagineers, 2010, p. 11). Not only was the intention to make it a clean, family-friendly environment free of alcohol, “barkers” who competed for the customer’s attention, midway games, and free of several entrances to name a few; he wanted the park to be a place where people could interact with and inhabit the stories and characters made popular by his animation studio and the Disney brand (Kurti, 2008; Younger, 2016).

In his book, *Designing Disney: Imagineering and the Art of the Show*, Disney legend and former Imagineer John Hench writes about Walt Disney’s intentions for the park, where he explained that "while travelling through their stories, guests would encounter, and even interact with, their favorite Disney *characters*, who would be transformed, as if by magic, from their two-dimensional film existence into this special three-dimensional story world.” (Hench, 2008, p. 2)

Employing people from the fields of film and animation who shared his passion, Walt Disney insisted on having his park built *for* the guests, but also *by* the guests. This meant that in the early days of Disneyland, he followed them around to see their patterns of movement and behaviors and to listen to their comments, a practice he instilled in his *Imagineers,* insisting they spend time in the park to come up with solutions (Davis, 1996; Hench, 2016; The Imagineers, 2006).

When the park first opened, guests were given wrapped candies so the designers who followed them around could where they would discard the wrappers so it could be determined where to place trash cans (Hench, 2016). When it was brought to Disney's attention that guests trampled a flower bed that might need to be fenced, he refused. Disney purportedly responded, "No, we must pave this pathway. When guests make their own path, they probably have a damn good reason for doing it." (Hench, 2008, p. 30)

This kind of organic park development based on the needs and wants of guests is arguably what made Disneyland thrive when most amusement parks around the country were closing or facing serious financial trouble. The opening of Disneyland initiated a rebirth in the industry and a further expansion of the use of thematic entertainment in amusement spaces (Davis, 1996; Younger, 2016) and "[...]having combined the Coney-Island style amusement park with a World's Fair style cultural experience, Disney further solidified the 'theme' in 'theme park'." (Gold & Mitchell, 2010, p. 149).

2.3 Conclusion

While parks have been around since early in the history of civilization, the notion of theme parks - spaces where the attractions and rides are associated with known stories and characters - is relatively new, dating roughly from the 1950's. These spaces, vastly exemplified by the success of the Disney brand parks around the world, represent an opportunity for guests to walk through spaces familiar to them from films, television and books. The construction of these narrative

spaces is planned not only in terms of what the engineers and designers want, but in consideration of what developers anticipate guests will want.

This organic build, one that pays attention to the wants and needs of the guest, responds to their emotions and behavior, and is interactive in nature, giving guests choices as they make their own paths through the space. What are the benefits of this type of approach when considering these spaces as extensions of stories? How are the guest's choices informed by their expectations from the story world? These are the questions I discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Themed Narrative Attractions: An Invitation to Play

3.1 Adaptation in Themed Spaces

John Hench defines the Disney Parks as “places where guests can reaffirm the emotional connections they feel with characters they have known and loved from the animated films and television series.” (Hench, 2008, p. 95). This connection with existing narrative properties proved invaluable in the early days of Disneyland as well as in the parks that followed because it became clear that the nature of theming and three-dimensional story spaces facilitates guest connections by drawing on their knowledge of popular narratives and their characters (Bigné, 2005; Hench, 2016; Waysdorf & Reindjers, 2016).

The Disney Parks worldwide contain over four hundred attractions, with a little over fifty percent being adapted from, based on, or containing elements of their existing Intellectual Properties, or IPs. At Universal Studios, their main competitor and a giant in the themed entertainment world, the numbers are even higher. Founded on the tradition of the studio backlot tours (Davis, 1996; Younger, 2016) and Hollywood set walkthroughs, Universal's parks in Japan, California and Florida contain over ninety percent of their rides based on existing IPs – by my own count. Furthermore, the Universal designers and engineers are constantly adapting these attractions and spaces to reflect the most recent trends in entertainment (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016).

Adaptations can take the form of several different kinds of experiences, such as meet and greets with popular characters, roller coasters with themed queues, or dark rides, in which guests move through a series of specially lit scenes in an enclosed building, while aboard a vehicle. Dark rides

can tell the original story beat-by-beat - like in *Journey of the Little Mermaid* or *Snow White's Scary Adventures,* or simply be something based on a single element of the film, book or series like *Buzz Lightyear's Astro Blasters* or *Dinosaur*. They can also be passive - where a guest is simply driven in a vehicle through scenes; or active - where they can participate by shooting weapons, controlling certain parts of the vehicle or playing minigames. This thesis provides more detail on the specific elements of dark rides in Chapter 5. Disney's Imagineers often start the process of designing a ride by making a series of decisions (The Imagineers, 2010).

> Should it be a show or a ride? Use cutting-edge technology or time-honored techniques? (How about both?) Will it be fast-paced or leisurely, an individualized exploration or a large-group experience? Will the attraction be like a novel or a short story, with a beginning, a middle and an end[...]? (The Imagineers 2010: 27-28).

These decisions may be conditioned by a number of constraints such as budget or the physical space allocated in the park for its construction and may also change according to emerging technologies or guests' needs and preferences.

In his article "Experiencing Designs and Designing experiences: emotions and theme parks from a symbolic interactionist perspective," Edgar Cabanas delves deeper into the immersive nature of these experiences, emphasizing the emotional connections, the notion of placing oneself within the stories to go beyond quantitative measurable results, and the "situated relationships between visitors' emotional experiences and spatial design at theme parks" (p. 1). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that emphasizes sign systems (language and communication) to analyze participants' subjective understanding of an experience. Underlying this interactionist approach Cabanas analyzes theme parks not as passive, guided experiences, but in terms of the role emotions play in engaging and involving the audience in them, that is in

how “the relationship between emotions and space is conceptualized and interactive” (Cabanas, 2019, p. 2).

The interactionist approach looks at the specifics of how the theme park industry exerts emotional control over the audience. Cabanas' focus is participation, not just observation, meaning the construction of the ride is as much about how much the audience infers from their own particular cultural experiences and context as it is about the brick and mortar, colors and sounds (Cabanas, 2019) and he states that “it is not possible to design an experience, only to design for an experience. Designers can shape but they cannot determine” (Cabanas, 2019, p. 4). This audience experience that is personal to each individual guest is key when talking about spaces based on existing media. As each person has their own connection with these privately-owned symbols and motifs, “themes allow parks to establish powerful synergies with the popular imagination, the world of mass media and their branded commodities, and to turn the consumption of merchandising and food into an integral part of the theme-park experience” (Cabanas, 2019, p. 3).

According to Cabanas, theme parks are spaces in which the visitors get assigned "symbolic roles within certain stories", they are given the opportunity to "mimic" or "become another" by accepting these roles and engaging in this act of role play, an acceptance that comes from a desire for active participation. This desire is an emotional response to a physical environment, an aspect central to the symbolic interactionist approach as "for interactionists, individuals interact with spaces in a manner similar to how they interact with other individuals, that is, with presumed mutuality and by assigning certain roles to each other." (Cabanas, 2019, p. 2)

Emotional interaction with spaces will be dictated by the audience's relationship with their imagination or memory of these spaces. While a simulacrum of a generalized Main Street of America may bring up feelings of nostalgia, the three-dimensional realization of a book environment such as Harry Potter's dorm room also may spark a feeling of familiarity and belonging. This could mean that when constructing a themed space that is based on a familiar narrative, the adaptation will rely far more on emotional connection than on physical accuracy.

In contrast to Cabanas' work, which leverages sociological theory, Marty Gould and Rebecca N. Mitchell employ a media analytic frame in their article "Understanding the Literary Theme Park: Dickens World as Adaptation." Gould and Mitchell analyze the case of a specific park, the now permanently closed *Dickens World,* an "indoor visitor attraction" which promised the guest a trip to Dickensian England, through sets, characters and events from his novels. In the article, the authors use the failure in engagement of *Dickens World* to discuss the notion of accuracy in the construction of themed spaces. The emotional connection described by Cabanas as necessary does not occur, because the audience encounters a confusing theme park that is "neither a historical structure dating to the nineteenth century, nor a location associated directly with Dickens, nor a site invoked by any of Dickens' novels" (Gould & Mitchell, 2010, p. 146). Therefore, it fails to give the audience the grounds on which to anchor their emotions of recognition, nostalgia or anticipation. Promising a trip to the "worlds of Dickens" is ambiguous as it could mean the world in which the author lived or the worlds from his books. In support of Gould and Mitchell's supposition that authentic connection to story drive emotional resonance, Janet Murray's article, "Did It Make You Cry? Creating Dramatic Agency in Immersive

Environments", states that themed environments “provide not a reproduction of the real world but a carefully abstracted representation of a story world in which everything that is seen creates a consistent physical reality and creates expectations of story events.” (p. 93). Immersion in these places only works insofar as the setting corresponds to our expectations of what specific narrative spaces should be (Murray, 2005; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). The sensory data the audience receives while moving through a themed space needs to be connected to their memories of the story or story world, or the immersion fails (Cabanas, 2019; Hench, 2008).

In Gould and Mitchell's article, the authors describe Francesco Casetti’s claims that adaptation is “the reappearance in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, theme or character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere.” (Gould & Mitchell, 2010, p. 148), but this broad view of the construction of a themed environment does not seem to satisfy the audience's need for emotional connection. In order for a theme park to be truly immersive and emotionally engaging, it needs to provide what the authors call an "in situ" display with their attractions and spaces, meaning the audience situates themselves within those environments, not as observers but as participants who, as mentioned by Cabanas, assign roles to themselves and each other. The case study of Dickens World, albeit critical at times, proves that there are several ways to insert story elements into a space or ride and that some will work better than others (Gould & Mitchell, 2010).

Cabanas' insight on the necessity of emotional engagement coupled with the analysis of the most unsuccessful pieces of Dickens World reinforces my belief that audience participation is not only desirable but crucial to a positive interactive themed experience (Cabanas, 2019). When arguing the pieces of *Dickens World* that were successful, the authors emphasize this role of active

participant, movement through themed spaces and agency, "[...] with its focus on the mobility and independent decision making of the visitor, suggests a world of bountiful possibility." (Gould & Mitchell, 2010, p. 151).

This ability to roam freely, engage in play and immerse oneself in known environments is something the Disney Parks have been focusing on since their opening day in 1955, when Disney suggested that characters from his animated movies would move and interact with guests as they traversed the walkways of the parks. (Hench, 2008). Where *Dickens World* failed to provide guests something to recognize, Disney excelled. Disney Parks' contributions to the different types of themed experiences based on known symbols from narratives of well-known books in passive dark rides and in the exploration areas still resonate with designers today and have been studied by academics of the form (Davis, 1996; Lukas, 2013). Disney Parks seamlessly integrates souvenir shops, restaurants and rest areas into the themes of the environments, allowing guests to fully immerse themselves in the story. A shop in a land themed after Star Wars could be modeled after one from the films and/or novels where the characters buy their own weapons and clothing rather than one of the Disney shops available in shopping malls. A bench disguised as a tree in *Winnie the Pooh*'s Hundred Acre Wood land helps the guest feel integral to the environment even when pausing for a sip of water or a bit of rest. The immersion work is continuous and all encompassing.

Imagineer John Hench writes about Walt Disney's vision for his first park.

> Walt realized that a visit to an amusement park could be like a theatrical experience – in a word, *show.* Walt saw that the guests' sense of progressing through a narrative, of living out a *story* told visually, could link together the great variety of attractions he envisioned for his new kind of park. (Hench 2008: 2).

The idea behind the creation of this environment is exactly the type of “traveling through the stories” that is the main draw of these attractions. Clavé (2007) writes that there is a foundation for emotional design in the research on guest engagement, specifically that Disney parks are successful because they make use of the emotional connection guests have with existing intellectual property. This is the same conclusion reached by Cabanas (2018) and Gould and Mitchell (2010).

Walt Disney made it a point to ask his engineers and designers to “live” with the guests, to have lunch with them, stand in line with them, and to see how they responded to music, sounds, and smells (Hench, 2008).

> Going out into the park taught us how guests were being treated and how they responded to sensory information, what worked and what didn’t, what their needs were and how we could meet them in entertaining ways. We paid attention to guests’ patterns of movement and the ways in which they expressed their emotions. (Hench, 2008, p. 21)

Following the guests and observing their behavior provides insights on what they do, consciously or unconsciously and can help solve design problems by responding to what audiences want and how they tend to interact with their environment.

3.2 Emotional Engagement and the Act of Play

As Gould and Mitchell note, simply creating experiences is not enough. The design needs to create something that resonates with audiences and creates emotional responses (Bigné et al., 2005; Gould & Mitchell, 2010). So how does this relate to translating stories from one medium to another? As with all adaptations, designers make changes in order to accommodate whichever format they choose for adaptation while maintaining the emotional connection that first inspired

the inclusion of intellectual properties. At Disneyland Park, the old “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea” ride lost much of its resonance with modern audiences who craved more excitement and more advanced technology. This inspired designers to do a complete reworking of the ride to make it a journey into the colorful Australian seas, not as a new adventure but as a three-dimensional retelling of the plot of the Pixar film *Finding Nemo* (Hench, 2008). This is an excellent example of how film narratives can be translated to different media using different elements from the original and of how Disney is experienced and successful in using a popular film as a theme that audiences will actively emotionally engage with.

Finding Nemo's presence in the park did not end with its inclusion in the old space for "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea". The Imagineers were charged with adapting the adventures of Marlin and Nemo to a musical at Animal Kingdom Park in Florida (Wright, 2007). There were many challenges, such as converting a two-hour story into a thirty-minute length, transforming prose into a musical format, rendering fish no bigger than ten centimeters that would be visible to an auditorium of people while ensuring that the characters are recognizable (Hench, 2008). The solution was a series of giant puppets manipulated by actors who speak for the characters and who wear costumes in colors that visually disappear into the ocean background of anemones and algae. This visual camouflage helps the audience focus on the familiar characters. The strategy draws on familiar conventions of puppetry that help audiences focus on Marlin’s search for his lost son. Making use of two of their existing attractions, one long ago abandoned and one dwindling in popularity, Imagineers expanded the presence of the clown fish to two other parks, Epcot and Disneyland (Wright, 2006). At the former, the ride found a home inside the “Living Seas” pavilion, a space containing aquariums and walkways in which guests could observe

marine life and that had not been changed for many years. A dark ride featuring the characters from the film was added that uses state of the art special effects, computer generated fish to give the illusion of the narrative's fish swimming alongside the live ones in the massive aquarium. Guests board a clam-mobile for a journey to find Nemo, who is always peripherally visible, as he mischievously hides from his father (Hench, 2008; Wright 2007).

So why adapt stories at all? Why do audiences wait in a long line to see a story they have already seen, possibly many times? What justifies the price of admission and the physical effort it takes to bring oneself to that experience? The answer to that could be related to the phenomenon of immersion, which Janet Murray defines as "a related phenomenon which has been difficult to achieve in Virtual Reality and Mixed Reality research projects, but reliably achieved in theme park rides by integrating interactivity with strong narrative elements." (Murray, 2005, p. 83). To Murray, there is a specificity to the nature of theme park rides and certain gaming experiences because they allow the guest or interactor to physically enter the play space, either by walking through a threshold, or by putting on a certain piece of equipment such as a VR headset or tactile devices, such as a seat which simulates vibrations of a car in a race game (Murray, 2005). The author claims this is an important step in the immersion experience, as the wall or equipment functions as a "transitional object" and "boundary-maker" which helps the viewer move from one space into another and triggers a receptive state of mind as these physical objects also "anchor the action of the interactor" (Murray, 2005, p. 87). This clear separation and use of a passageway signal the audience that they have entered a space that encourages and allows the act of play.

An example of entering an immersive play space can be found in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter complex at the Universal Studios Parks in Florida, where the two play spaces - Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade - are separated from the “outside” by a physical barrier: the "magic" brick wall of Diagon Alley and the archway entrance to Hogsmeade (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). These barriers or portals often used in literature and cinema are now common in theme park design as a way to reveal a whole space, like curtains being lifted. They also work in an emotional sense, as a symbolic passageway. They “provide the interactor with clear boundaries and with virtual or real objects that take them across the boundary between the real and imaginary worlds.” (Murray, 2005, p. 86). As Murray argues, by physically separating these worlds, the audience gets to step through a barrier that separates the fantasy world from the real one effectively giving the audience “permission” to play the role they have always wanted, to live in the story they love, and to make it their own. They suspend their disbelief by accepting the magical world of wizards and witches as true for as long as they inhabit the space within the barriers.

Further exploring the notion of entering a play space, Cabanas explains that by entering narratives, guests are assigned roles “that encourage specific behavior while discouraging other kinds, so to make the experience feel authentic, visitors ‘agree’ to perform according to those roles.” (Cabanas, 2019, p. 5). The three-dimensional nature of theme parks and themed spaces allows for a feeling of participation different from the passive observation of watching a movie or reading a book. In reading and viewing, the audience is physically separated from the world by pages or screens. They are, in some ways, a spectator, outside looking in. They can see, but they cannot touch (Cabanas, 2019; Lukas, 2013). There seems to be something essential about

the physical, tactile experience, the touch. While outside the scope of this discussion the power of physical immersion and role playing may likely draw on audiences' early fantasy play dressing up and acting out both their real-life experiences and the narratives in their lives with what is physically at hand - a box, a hat, a cut-out piece of paper.

The desire to participate in the stories, by visiting the locations, speaking to the characters, maybe tasting the food, or hearing the music, is a major driving force behind themed spaces (Carson, 2000; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). "No longer are rides simply a short-lived thrill, now guests are fully immersed in stories, where they play the main character." (Carson, 2000, p. 2). The opportunities to play roles, inhabit spaces, walk streets, and interact with fictional people constitute the foci of the themed experience (Murray, 2005).

3.3 Conclusion

When entering a themed space, both guests and designers co-create narrative experiences and the ride itself represents an invitation to play by stepping through a physical barrier that separates the mundane, "real" world from the story one which they intend to inhabit. As Cabanas states, these spaces provide visitors with opportunities to assign roles to themselves and each other as part of the inhabiting of the space and this grander exercise of role playing. As the designer of my dark ride, it is necessary for me to pay close attention to what feels familiar and populate it with authentic physical details which will inspire guest's playful engagement.

The audience's relationship with the surrounding physical environment is of the same importance as their relationship with other guests in the themed play space. Once guests are invited to

engage, the experience becomes one of agency and involvement, as opposed to a passive, guided one. It is here that the physical portal - be it a piece of equipment, a wall or the boarding of a vehicle - acts as an invitation in much the same way the term "once upon a time" signals entry into a fairy tale, acting as a "useful immersive boundary" (Murray, 2005) that preludes what lies ahead. Entering this play space, built with a view to guests' expectations, the transition into interaction is aided by the presence of physical barriers, walls, screens or devices that separate the "real" world from the imaginary one. This clear line gives permission to leave reality behind and facilitates in the role playing that is necessary to emotionally engage successfully with responses beyond just physical or sensations. The continued operation, experience and construction of these places is an alliance between the audience and the creators, with each guiding the other in terms of expectations and possibilities.

Once guests cross over the physical barrier and willingly enter the play space, they have expectations that need to be met and an idea of what the immersion into the world they have entered will entail and the environment they are in must reflect and promise what is ahead. Within that space, the construction must physically include the pieces that the audience is expecting or hoping to see and offer them choices that make them feel as if they are active participants, like players in a game.

Chapter 4: Creating Engaging Immersive Narratives

4.1 Designing Artificial Worlds

Once the guest has accepted their invitation to play and has entered the themed space physically, the challenge becomes how to make sure that the space corresponds to what they are expecting in this relationship of role play, which includes ensuring that the roles they assign to the environment, park workers and other people, is coherent with the story being told by designers. This means that if the guest assigns the function of a real wizarding school to the fake Hogwarts castle, for example, the environment needs to aid them in believing that illusion by providing objects and spaces that feel like a real school, and the same goes for workers and other guests, who reflect the behavior in that environment. Accepting the invitation and willingly entering the space is the first step, but now the design and construction needs to function to keep the guest inside, not just physically but psychologically, convincing the audience not to abandon their chosen role and encouraging them to act as a character in the space. The choices made in the adaptation of the story to a themed interactive space will determine the power and success of the emotional engagement.

In adapting a story, designers transform the spaces once confined to the screen or the pages of a book into physical ones in which guests can move about. Furthermore, guests can make their own decisions about where to go as they gain access to and agency in a world they had no previous opportunity to inhabit. For example, as a guest rode through the (now defunct) Great Movie Ride at Disney's Hollywood Studios, they could recognize and occupy the same spaces as characters like Mary Poppins or Dorothy, enjoy a three-dimensional view of the set, hear sounds

coming from directions in response to their motion, as well as smell smoke from London chimneys or the flowers from Oz (Wright, 2010).

Criticism abounds, even in the entertainment community, on the “fakeness” of these spaces, on the sanitized versions of reality, and on the past and the future with its carefully curated restaurants, rides and shops (Bukatman 1991; Gottdiener 1982; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). These critics oftn see them “as generic, lowest-common-denominator entertainments that fail to fully represent what they are creating in order to have mass appeal.” (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016, p. 175). However, in my research and in creating my own dark ride, I argue that in order to sell the illusion, especially to adults who are able to distinguish it from the reality outside the walls, there must be an emotional component behind the engagement, a willingness to buy into this separate reality that must be tapped into (Cabanas, 2019; Hench, 2008) so “rather than examples of society’s preference for sanitized versions of reality, [theme parks] are specific places in which fantasies, mythologies and cultural icons can be enacted and played with.” (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016, p. 175). This emotional component necessary for the willing participation of audiences more resistant to the idea of play, comes from the utilization of senses that would otherwise not be engaged in the consumption of two-dimensional media, such as touch, smell, and even taste. This multisensory approach allows the participant to be physically present, to be surrounded by the elements that compose the story being told in the themed space, aiding in the suspension of disbelief (Lukas, 2013). The multisensory approach physically surrounds the guests inviting them to physically participate. While the suspension of disbelief is an important dynamic in all fantasy, in a theme park environment it is the physicality and authenticity of the resources for participation that audiences must accept and use that seems to

determine their engagement and thus the success of the ride. The effective use of those senses will determine if a guest can forget – if only for a moment – that they are standing in a simulacrum of the story world rather than the real thing.

Themed entertainment scholar Scott A. Lukas argues that rather than being inauthentic, theme parks have their own form of authenticity and measure of believability, one that is based on how effectively these multisensory aspects are accepted and perceived as correct (Lukas, 2013). This effectiveness is particularly important when discussing the nature of these places as extended story spaces, in which the imagination plays a role in the acceptance, immersion, and success of the experience. If readers and viewers expect Hogsmeade, the fictional village from the Harry Potter books, to smell sweet or feel cold because that is how it is described in the books, for example, they might feel cheated and have difficulty suspending belief if they don't encounter those attributes (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016).

My own observation of guests' behaviors at rides and other themed spaces supports the effect that suspension of disbelief has, even involuntarily. In the ride "Soarin'", present in both the California and Florida Disney parks, guests take a simulated flying tour of the state of California and/or, more recently, the world. The way in which "Soarin'" differs from other 360 filmic experiences is by coupling it with a physical element, the guests board chairs that simulate a hang glider that lifts them high in the air and respond to the movement of the "flight" as the screen moves from scene to scene while releasing aromas that match the view. While the smell of oranges, the mist of the sea and the enormous, half-moon screen all contribute to the feeling of being physically present in these spaces, the most remarkable fact is the reaction of adults on the

ride. As the “hang glider” soars over the projected image of rushing rivers, several of the guests scream and raise their feet, as if to prevent them from getting wet. This type of believability, that lasts even a second or so and disappears once the interactor is out of the physical boundaries of the attraction, is one of the major draws of themed experiences (Murray, 2005). When paired with the fulfilled expectations of a known imaginary world they become powerful experiences that can elicit emotional response from guests, regardless of age or cultural background (Cabanas, 2019; The Imagineers, 2010; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016).

No longer are theme parks just isolated spaces in which to ride rides, but opportunities to engage in themed roleplay and a park like the “WWOHP (Wizarding World of Harry Potter) exemplifies a push in the industry towards more immersive theming around known narrative worlds, in going beyond rides and souvenirs into full, complete environments promising immersion into [sic] a favorite text.” (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016, p. 174). Scholars have noted that immersive theming is becoming more prevalent in recent decades (Lukas, 2013; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). Rides and spaces, unchanged for years, have been reworked to fit newer stories, more popular narratives or just condensed to fit an overall theme of properties. At Disney’s Epcot, the attraction “Maelstrom”, once about the folklore of Norway was closed and reworked to reference the hit movie "Frozen″. This decision initially met great resistance from fans who considered the ride, which opened in 1988, a "classic" that should be preserved. These fans claimed in forums and interviews that an attraction set in a fictional kingdom went against Epcot's identity as a park about real countries and cultures. (Wright, 2007). While it is impossible to compare the popularity of the old and new rides without hard data from Disney and a longer period of time in which to study them, it is possible to observe the change in focus. While "Maelstrom″ took

guests through diorama-like scenes that illustrated isolated aspects of the folklore and history of Norway, the "Frozen" overhaul takes guests on a linear journey through the film's story in which guests get to relive favorite moments and see characters they recognize from the blockbuster film.

“Maelstrom” is not alone in the approach to attach known intellectual properties recognized by today's public into older rides (Wright, 2006). The wildly popular “Tower of Terror” at Disney’s California Adventure was reworked to become a themed attraction based on the multimillion-dollar film *Guardians of the Galaxy*, associated with the enormously popular Marvel Universe. The attraction - which previously had its own standalone story - is now a space guests will have seen in the Marvel movie, and where characters from it can be seen throughout the attraction. The same happened to "Paradise Pier", once loosely based on the Boardwalk-era carnivals and which has become “Pixar Pier”, with each attraction and piece of décor placing guests inside scenes from films such as *Toy Story* (Wright, 2010). The “kiddie coaster” at Universal’s Islands of Adventure once known as “Flight of the Unicorn” was rethemed to be “Flight of the Hyppogriff” in order to cash in on the *Harry Potter* fandom and better suit it to the surrounding land that changed from a general kingdom of mythology to the Hogsmeade village from the Rowling books (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). Even “Pirates of the Caribbean”, easily one of the quintessential rides in most Disney parks and long given almost “historical landmark” status wasn’t safe from revision. After having visited the ride many times in the Orlando park, after the release of the Pirates of the Caribbean films, in my next visit the main character Jack Sparrow could be seen in several places in the ride. In this case, the ride inspired the series of movies, which in turn inspired the addition of the film’s character to the ride.

The ride systems in these spaces - be they a boat ride in which guests travel slowly down a river, a traditional roller coaster or a walkthrough in which guests travel the space at their own leisure - have not changed (The Imagineers, 2010). The mechanics remain the same, which means there is no addition or removal of anything strictly physical that would alter a guest's experience (The Imagineers, 2016; Younger, 2016). Often spaces merely receive a new *theme,* a new narrative focus. The fact that the companies who build and operate these rides decided to make specific changes to theming and none to the ride system is a good indicator that experiences can, in fact, be greatly altered by the presence of known story elements.

4.2 Immersion Through Participation

The interactionist approach Cabanas proposes addresses the issues of engagement and participation as essential to the consumer experience because narrative "theming turns rides, attractions, and commodities into stories that immerse visitors in memorable experiences of high emotional value" (Cabanas, 2019, p. 5). No longer is a ride a space, it becomes a three-dimensional version of a story, one in which the guest plays an active role and is encouraged to *play*, to follow the rules of the narrative world as an inhabitant of it, all activities which play directly into Don Carson's (2000) golden rules of being taken somewhere you could never go and being someone you could never be. This particular element of play is essential when looking at themed spaces as inhabitable story spaces. The illusion only works if everything and everyone participates, "to complete the sense of immersion, the space must be occupied" (Murray, 2005). When Walt Disney built his park in California, he was upset to see people dressed in space-

themed outfits making their way to Tomorrowland through the Western-themed Frontierland (Hench, 2008; Sklar, 2013). To him, this clash of theme broke the illusion and immersion and made it harder for the guest to engage in the possibility of inhabiting Frontier times in that moment. In order to fix this problem, when building the "Florida Project", today known as the Walt Disney World Resort, Disney requested the building of an underground tunnel beneath Magic Kingdom Park, the first replica of Disneyland, in which all the parks operations could be done without invading on the guests' spaces and possibly breaking their immersion (Wright, 2005; The Imagineers, 2010). This meant no cast member dressed in attire not belonging to a specific land would ever have reason to be seen on that land. It also meant guests would not have to see daily operations like trash transportation, so the park could fulfil its function as a "magical" land in which things "just work".

A study conducted by Abby Waysdorf and Stijn Reinjders (2016) on the "Wizarding World of Harry Potter" at the Universal Parks pays special attention to the function of play, make believe, and story spaces, and the opportunity to "experience the story-world in an embodied manner" (p. 180). Tastes, smells, sounds and physical movements that are part of the narrative world are experienced through the park. This gives them an embodied sense of a story-world that, while familiar, is only cerebral or audiovisual. Once the park's simulation is accepted as authentic, the visitor feels as if they are having a genuine encounter with the narrative world.

Being present physically gives the guest a sense of agency (Cabanas, 2019; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). They are not watching the stories of Ron, Hermione and Harry, but creating their own stories, walking their own path but in a place those characters once inhabited, at least

in their imagination. Touching the bricks, walking into the stores, and wearing the clothes provide guests with a sense of realism that is impossible to achieve without that multi-sensory experience. Several of the interviewees in the study mention this sense of the book coming to life, of being able to inhabit the space they have watched from a distance for so long (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). There is a sense of *belonging* with it, as if they were always meant to be there.

The Wizarding World is particularly interesting since it opened in stages. On my first visit, only the village of Hogsmeade, based on the quaint village just outside of Hogwarts castle in the *Harry Potter* novels, was open. A few years later, Diagon Alley was reproduced in a different park in Orlando. While impressive, Hogsmeade suffers from an error in scale, because many of the stores are too small or only fake fronts, and do not give audiences an accurate facsimile they could recognize directly from the films and fully inhabit to engage in play (Murray, 2005). Nonetheless, the area was still enormously popular, and Universal decided to expand it (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). When Universal opened Diagon Alley in 2014, an area based on the shopping district exclusive to witches and wizards in the books, they employed the help of the film's designers to make the experience as authentic and accurate to the books and films as they could, building shops and walkways to scale, and creating several opportunities for guests to explore on their own. The designers even provided a physical train, the Hogwarts Express, as a portal between the two "lands" (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). The result is a much more accurate representation in scale and scope. The gasps as the guests, adults and children alike, cross the threshold into a simulated version of the brick wall at Platform 9 ¾, are audible. By

entering that space, the “visitors are encouraged to think of themselves as leaving their mundane existence behind them, just as Harry did.” (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016, p. 181).

The design team for Wizarding World saw challenges as opportunities (Younger, 2016). Those challenges come from the lack of clear detail in the films. Throughout the eight movies, the camera rarely enters every nook and cranny of Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade. Instead, sweeping views are used, and the filmmakers have full control over what the audience sees. This approach can work well in film and even in a book but in an immersive narrative space far more detail is required because once guests are “released” into these spaces, they take charge of the story, free to roam, explore, and handle things that they would never even see in the films (Lukas, 2013; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). In a sense, they are granted a VIP pass into this universe and engage in the opportunity by dressing up in uniforms of the Hogwarts school, buying, using wands (the area has several spots that respond to smart wand movements in order to “cast spells”), or eating a favorite treat from the books and films. This means that "being ‘able’ to shop in WWOHP therefore also contributes to the illusion of ‘actually being there’” (Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016, p. 183). The fans of stories like Harry Potter have already inhabited these spaces many times through their imaginations and other games (there is no shortage of tests and websites to find out your “Hogwarts House” or your “Patronus”) but themed spaces allow them to be engaged in every single sense (Lukas, 2013).

4.3 Conclusion

An effective inhabitable story space greatly relies on the multisensory aspect of the experience. Senses like taste, touch and smell are unique to three dimensional spaces and create a greater

atmosphere of belonging through the act of walking, touching and physically being present in a story space as well as making choices on how to move about in the space. When guests situate themselves within the role chosen for that world using every sense, the experience feels more "real", more grounded and with an easier path toward suspension of disbelief.

However, this multisensory aspect is only effective if coupled successfully with the expectations the audience has for the known story world. Designers need to make sure the spaces they design correspond to a plausible range of expectations from audiences of different backgrounds and who may possess distinct and different emotional connections with the stories. The audience will only agree to take place in the act of play if they believe that the space does justice to what they want and expect it to be. In turn, the environment will only be effective if the audience, as crucial players agrees to enact their role in it and populate the space. The audience's own personal exposure and previous emotional connections with rides' familiar narratives play vital roles in the onsite experiences. The guests' collective imagination and expectation adds or subtracts from these experiences.

The power in this relationship when done correctly is what could motivate the reworking of older attractions to involve familiar intellectual properties, allowing for the emotional engagement that comes from long before the audience comes in contact with the themed space. Entering that space by deciding to play a role, having that role enhanced by fulfilled expectations that come from multiple senses and inhabiting that world as an agent, not an observer; these are deeper experiences than riding a ride for the physical thrill and exiting into a completely different context. This is why it is also crucial that the theme be carried through not just in the ride but in

the surrounding areas and that the professional inhabitants of the space – the workers and operators – also match the circumstance that the environment is meant to emulate.

As I move forward I look at what constitutes a particular experience – in this case a dark ride – and how each unique element can be used to aid in the emotional engagement and sustained relationship with the guest as they participate in the space.

Chapter 5: Components of a Dark Ride

5.1 A Closer Look at Dark Rides

Theme parks contain a variety of experiences that can engage the guest in the play space: walkthroughs, meet-and-greets, interactive games, roller coasters, simulators, water rides, live performances and "4D" movies, to name a few. While each ride presents its own challenges, advantages, and disadvantages, for the purposes of this thesis project, the plan for a 'dark ride,' - in which guests travel through specially lit scenes aboard a vehicle - apply key insights and dynamics gleaned from my historical and theoretical discussions of themed immersive narrative experiences. In this portion of my hybrid thesis I describe the components of a dark ride. In analyzing the extremely specialized aspects of engineering and design that comprise a dark ride, I am especially grateful to be able to consult David Younger's book *Theme Park Design and the Art of Themed Entertainment*, which was written in partnership with experienced themed designers and engineers and provides thorough insight on the more technical aspects.

Dark rides began in the early nineteenth century as brands of single-rail electric rides, most famously called "Tunnels of Love" that remained in operation long after their first iterations. In 1901, Coney Island's Luna Park's "A Trip to the Moon" was a dark ride and its main attraction and namesake. Later in 1928 the first single-rail electric dark ride was patented by Leon Cassidy (Davis, 1996; Lukas, 2013). Twenty years later a themed narrative dark ride in a theme park setting debuted in the form of Disneyland's *Snow White's Scary Adventures* (Younger, 2016). In the words of designer Claude Coats:

> At that time, most of the little scare rides (at other parks) had very little mood or storytelling qualities. Ken Anderson's storyboards had shown that *Peter Pan* or *Snow White* could be told in not quite a story, but at least a mood that gave you the feeling of that story and more than you had if you just went through and saw little scary things. (Younger 2016: 402)

Of course, dark rides need not be scary. The word "dark" comes from the way these rides are built, using lights strategically placed to highlight what the designer wants to showcase and "the dark ride is often considered the archetypal theme park attraction, being to the theme park what the roller coaster is to the amusement park." (Younger, 2016, p. 401). Dark rides are completely or predominantly set indoors, sometimes as boat rides – like "Jurassic Park: The Ride", "It's a Small World" or "Pirates of the Caribbean" – as high thrill simulators – like "The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man", "Indiana Jones Adventure: Temple of the Forbidden Eye" or "Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey" – or as the tamer, more storybook quality rides, such as "Peter Pan's Flight", "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride" or "Pooh's Hunny Hunt", known commonly as Storybook dark rides. Dark rides are a *type* of ride, not to be confused with a *system,* of which they can use several, from simple Busbars, to *Omnimovers* (vehicles that move off of a physical track), and Roller Coasters. Joe Rohde, designer and former Imagineer, explains that in dark rides it is the function of the design team to use darkness to their advantage, directing the audience's attention to the set pieces necessary to tell a compelling story (Younger, 2016).

In a way, dark rides are similar in setup to a picturebook, comic book or film, with the designers making decisions on how much of the scene the guests will see, similar to the way the cinematographer selects the field of view for a film (The Imagineers, 2010). In a ride like *Pirates of the Caribbean,* the audience experiences more agency, more control over where they

look and to what they want to focus on from the many scenes, displayed like dioramas (Hench, 2016; The Imagineers, 2010). However, in some rides like *The Haunted Mansion,* the half-egg shaped *omnimover* provides a fairly narrow field in order to increase the impact of “horror” scenes as they are revealed (Surrell, 2015).

5.2 Physical Components of a Dark Ride

5.2.1 Ride Vehicle

The ride vehicle takes guests on their narrative journey through carefully constructed storylands. It can be a replica of an existing vehicle such as a car, truck, airplane, train, or something fantastical that does not exist in the real world. It “may [be a] compromise of a single car such as the mine carts of *Snow White’s Scary Adventures* [...] or a train made up of multiple carts.” (Younger, 2016, p. 494). It is imaginary, existing in the context of the ride’s fantasy world such as a dragon, spaceship, unicorn, or honeypot, created with the sole purpose of moving people through the set. However, it need not be integral to any part of the set as it is meant to transport without drawing attention to itself once it has been boarded and “in some cases, the ride vehicle a guest boards may be entirely different to the ride vehicle they think they are boarding [...] guests think they are boarding a large plane in *StormRider* (Tokyo DisneySea 2001) when they are in actuality simply boarding a simulator motion platform.” (Younger, 2016, p. 497). There are essentially two major categories of ride vehicles: the invisible ones, in which the guest is meant to ignore the existence of the vehicle and simply use it as a means of transportation; and the visible one, in which that vehicle plays a part in the story (Younger, 2016). The Doom Buggies in *The Haunted Mansion* are a good example of an invisible vehicle, while the adventure jeep in

the *Indiana Jones Adventure* ride is very much a part of the narrative and meant to enhance the experience. Ride vehicles offer hundreds of different combinations of effects, interactivity, type of seating, decoration, capacity, design, restraints, sightlines and movement patterns taking into consideration that "the very nature of theme park as a medium relying on the movement through space encourages a wide range of transportation types." (Younger, 2011, p. 495).

5.2.2 The Building/Venue

The exterior façade sets the stage, sells the story or theme as well as the interior settings which make it whole whether a haunted house with creepy corridors and living rooms, a cursed temple filled with treasure, the remains of past discoveries or an important castle long abandoned, inside filled with the remains of ancient battles. The attraction entrance should "communicate the type of experience that awaits the guest, both in terms of the physical experience such that guests can decide whether the attraction is right for them, and experientially: presenting the attraction to the guest, and intriguing them as to the content within." (Younger, 2016, p. 467). The attraction entrance needs to harmoniously fit the aesthetic of the land surrounding it and contribute to the story and setting of that land, while remaining distinct enough to draw in visitors. Oftentimes the designers will make use of the "façade to disguise the look of the show building." (Younger, 2016, p. 467). A large or well-placed attraction building will also sometimes work as a "wienie", a beckoning hand to draw guests to a certain area of the park (Hench, 2016). "A beckoning hand promises something worthwhile; its friendly beckoning fingers say, 'Come this way. You'll have a good time.' It stimulates curiosity." (Hench, 2008, p. 50).

5.2.3 Interior Sets

Sets inside the building convey the narrative as guests ride through them. These are also referred to as “scenes” intended to simulate stories that play out designers’ plans (Younger, 2016). For example, a simple walk in the woods turns sour after a curse, reflected by the change in the shapes of trees, or made visible in dioramas displaying iconic features of a time. Attraction sets "should be designed with the viewing angle of the guest in the ride vehicle in mind. Often this means raising up the show scenes off the floor to eye level, or using a tilted plane for the set (constructing it on an angled floor, higher up at the extremities of the set, with Forced Perspective in mind)” (Younger, 2016, p. 509). When creating a set, designers need to consider a multitude of elements, from the necessity to have guests walk/ride through them safely, to their efficiency as a storytelling tool, and to the costs, security, and longevity of the design as “attractions often attempt to portray worlds far larger than the limited space they are constructed on. [...] Various Spatial Design Techniques, including Stratification, False Portals, and Forced Perspective, can be used to make a space feel much larger than its actual dimensions” (Younger, 2016, p. 510). The efficient and deliberate use of these design techniques can provide guests with convincing illusions that contribute to their sense of immersion and their participation in the story world.

5.2.4 Lighting

Lighting in themed spaces is divided mainly between functional, what is necessary for safe operation, and diegetic, the themed sources of lighting, such as simulated gas lamps on a turn-of-the-century street or neon in a futuristic setting (Younger, 2016) and "show lighting [...] describes any lighting use to enhance the diegetic lighting for dramatic and experiential

purposes.” (Younger, 2011, p. 203). Lighting, particularly in a dark ride, can serve as the main tool for creating salience and highlighting features designers wish audiences to see. Since participants can look in any direction, unlike in a feature film, lighting particular aspects of a scene not only evokes mood, but importantly directs the eye to ensure a story is told clearly. Lighting resources include the use of dark or black light to illuminate neon painted objects that appear to float against a black backdrop (Younger, 2016) and “black light enables elements to pop without the use of conventional light [...] and will typically convey an otherworldly quality to the set as guests are not used to fluorescence.” (Younger, 2011, p. 509). Show lighting must serve these main functions: focus the guests’ view; conceal areas not meant to be seen; shape the landscape with highlights and shadows; establish the mood of a story or environment; establish the setting such as time of day or season; and communicate story elements like the fires engulfing a city raided by pirates (Younger, 2016).

5.2.5 Props

Props consist of all elements within a scene which are not set or characters and can be moved within the scene, including by the actors or animatronic figures. Props populate a set, making it feel lived in and real, while also contributing to telling the story. For example, scattered toys in a room could indicate a child’s recent playing presence. In another place pieces of ancient ruins allude to secondary mysteries unfolding along with the attraction’s primary narrative and “applying all of the techniques of set decoration, attractions additionally have the benefit of utilizing animated props far more than lands, tied into wider show action infrastructure and free of the issues of weather protection.” (Younger, 2016, p. 524). Props afford high interactivity and enhance participant immersion, and they give life and a used feeling to a space, “driven by the

notions of the setting, in both time and space, who inhabits the space, and what they do." (Younger, 2016, p. 212).

5.2.6 Animatronic Figures or Actors

Sometimes a ride requires real people to play roles and guide guests further into the narrative experience through *spiels* and scripts. Other times, these roles are played by animatronic figures, automated, programmable characters that could be placed anywhere from the queue to the boarding area to the middle of the ride (Hench, 2008; Younger, 2016). The characters may be realistic pirates, famous historical or literary figures or popular cartoon and live action film characters. The use of an animatronic figure in place of a real actor presents a series of benefits, best described by Imagineer John Hench: "You would be cheated if an actor put on a performance with a terrible hangover, with a fight with his wife the night before [...] The idea was to develop this technique which is still in research to such a point that you can take a great actor and program his very best performance and it will be repeated forever, with no change at all" (Younger, 2016, p. 517). Animatronics, however, provide their own set of challenges from creative ones, such as the artificial nature of their movements. Nonetheless, technology is catching up fast (Younger, 2016). There are practical differences in cost and maintenance between real actors and animatronics. For example, an audio animatronic figure cannot have the same costume construction as a human worker, since they are moving in a repetitive fashion every single hour the park is operated. Joints on costumes for animatronics often need to be reinforced to handle this wear and tear (Hench, 2008).

5.2.7 Costumes

Costumes, like props and settings, enhance guests' immersion by actively giving them the sense of being in a real place in a specific world and/or time and "costumes have to make a convincing contribution as a story element; they validate the story environment." (Hench, 2008, p. 29). As Disney early in the life of Disneyland noted staff dressed in garb from other parts of the park disturb the possible guest immersion (Hench, 2008). A cast member in jeans and a t-shirt inside a space shuttle, or in a Victorian dress in a submarine will break immersion and remind the guests that what they are living through is fake. The costumes also need to reflect the mood of a land or attraction, sometimes in lieu of absolute historical accuracy. Hench writes that "when designing Disneyland, we knew that the shopkeepers, ride operators, tour guides and service staff would be fulfilling important guest needs. We wanted them to be costumed as though they were actors in a film" (Hench, 2008, p. 29).

5.2.8 Music

As in film and television, music plays a vital role in evoking and stimulating emotions in rides (Cabanas, 2019). Unlike film and television, however, attractions do not have a space of quiet in which the music can diminish or disappear altogether, needing to maintain an intensity throughout. In dealing with Intellectual Properties, designers will more often than not utilize familiar pieces of music from the films in the attraction, such as the Imperial March from *Star Wars,* or *When You Wish Upon a Star* from Pinocchio. Well known musical pieces from pop culture, a crescendo during a particularly exciting drop in a dinosaur ride or an offkey song inside a haunted house, envelop audience senses and foreshadow events soon to unfold before them (Younger, 2016). Music in rides can be diegetic - meaning it is taken directly from the

source material like a movie or TV show theme; or extra-diegetic, where the music is inspired by the theming of the universe, like electronic music for a futuristic ride. In themed settings, in "the majority of the time, the music will typically adopt a musical style appropriate to the setting, regardless of whether it is diegetic or not. [...] However, in rare cases, a musical style may be chosen that breaks the expected style for dramatic effect." (Younger, 2016, p. 524). The importance of music in dictating tempo and mood for an attraction can be well exemplified by the instance in which designers added a soundtrack to *Space Mountain* at Disneyland. They received compliments from guests about the increase in speed even though no changes were made in the actual ride system (Younger, 2016).

5.2.9 Dialogue/Script

Some rides require spoken scripts which serve as an invitation to participate in the narrative world and to explain situations at hand in the ride's imaginary world. These scripts may be for the audio-animatronics figures as well as for workers and hosts. They may be on video or in person in the guise of an MC or figure related to the ride. This Show Script "or simply Script, is the complete document of all narration, dialogue, and spiels in the attraction (from entrance to exit, including the queue and post show), along with music, sound, and special effects cues. It is formatted like a movie screenplay, with additional annotations for rolling dialogue." (Younger, 2016, p. 119). The script may explain the stakes, set up a story, or simply explain the rules of the game. Dialogue can be divided into pointer dialogue, in which the plot is explained through conversation, flavor dialogue, which exists to liven up an environment and help ground it in the story setting, cued dialogue, which happens as a guest walks by a certain point in the attraction

and rolling dialogue, which is a type of dialogue that is constantly on loop regardless of where the guest and the ride vehicle is (Younger, 2016). In the spirit of keeping every component cohesive with the other components it is crucial that the dialogue and script feel integral to the story with the exception of safety announcements.

5.2.10 Sound Effects

Sound, like music, is important sensory information for theme parks and theme park rides. Sound that responds to the position of the vehicle or guest, reminds them they are in a three-dimensional environment that can be attended to "at will" as opposed to the unidirectional nature of film and television sound (Younger, 2016). There are several applications for sound as "Sound Effects can then be used to emphasize action within a scene, such as cannon fire, rainfall, dogs barking or laser shots. Sound Effects may be cued, as with the TNT explosions in *Big Thunder Mountain Railroad*, or looping as with the radio in Jaws." (Younger, 2016, p. 529). Sound in an attraction also needs to be thought of in terms of location: some of it will come from speakers within the ride vehicle creating a sense of proximity; audio like dialogue coming from an animatronic figure needs to be placed near the audience, but hidden from sight, and ambient sounds are often hidden in speakers disguised like the landscape to appear natural and surrounding. Creaking floorboards or breaking glass need not be seen to be understood, to provide sound clues to action out of sight, and to ground the visual in a multi sensual reality all of which are some of the benefits of good sound design and "sound effects can also be made to change: along the Rivers of America in Disneyland, chirping bird sound effects are played during the day, switching to chirping crickets and croaking frogs after sundown." (Younger, 2016, p. 211).

5.2.11 Visual and Special Effects

Visual and special effects help tell a story by making a place feel more real or by simulating an event or condition vital to the narrative (The Imagineers, 2010). Special effects can be defined as "the use of various mechanical and visual effects to create pyrotechnics, smells, smoke and fog effects, water effects, advanced lighting effects, wind effects and so on that cannot be created through standing set design and propping." (Younger, 2016, p. 213). The number of techniques varies, from digital ones like projection mapping, virtual reality, 3D screens, and interactive lighting to physical ones such as fog, mist, smoke, haptic effects, water, pyrotechnics, and aromas. One of the main effects used in several attractions working within a constricted space is Augmented Dynamics (Younger, 2016) which "describes the use of theatrical effects to alter the guest's perception of how they are really moving. Often this aims to make them feel as though they are going faster than they really are, while other effects work to create the sensation of moving backwards, up or down, or still when they are actually moving." (Younger, 2016, p. 502). Effects need to work for the story, complementing the notion of belonging in a story space by assisting in the engagement of all senses which means the physical and digital work together to tell a story, like a floor cracking as the result of an earthquake, lighting splitting the sky with heavy rain seen through a vehicle window, or a town on fire because of a pirate raid. Unlike in film and television in which an effect is used once for a single shot, the effects also need to work repeated times in one day, with the same quality and intensity (Hench, 2008).

5.2.12 Queues and Holding Areas

The holding area for queues is the essential introduction to the dark ride and many other themed attractions (Hench, 2008). Hench writes that "we found that we could use a line to build guests' anticipation while offering them an orderly way to enter an attraction." (Hench, 2008, p. 32). It is the first place that guests encounter the mood and features of the narrative ahead of them. This prologue to the ride presents an opportunity to engage guests in the story world, giving them some space to navigate before boarding a vehicle or entering the intended story space. A queue littered with human skeletons indicates danger ahead while a playful set of oversized everyday items makes the guest feel as if they have been shrunk and entered an impossible world. Queue design is also about providing a comfortable experience for the guest (Hench, 2008). Early in the design of Disneyland, John Hench and other Imagineers added signs that told the guests how long the line might be and learned that guests appreciated "having a choice about waiting." Adding switchbacks –in which the line folds back and forth – resulted in a more social experience, while a drinking fountain at the end of a switchback increased comfort. A good queue "introduces story elements with a clear sense of progression, reinforcing the ride itself [...] and makes guests feel that they are already part of the experience as they approach the boarding area" (Hench, 2008, p. 32).

5.3 Conclusion

Dark rides, which historically date back to the early 20th century, offer designers an opportunity to take the audience through a linear story line or diorama-like scenes from diverse worlds. They are built in an enclosed or primarily enclosed space, where the scenes are specially lit and guests are guided through them in vehicles that can range from boats to electric cars to *omnimovers* that

are not shaped like anything in particular. The display of these scenes, how much the audience sees, how fast the vehicle turns or spins and how far are all tools that aid in the building of atmosphere within these rides, with some having more leeway for the audience to play around in as well as occasional interactive elements.

A dark ride is made of several different elements that combine to make the experience as immersive as possible. The careful orchestration of lights, sound and visual effects, music, sets and even the angle of view for the audience must evoke the atmosphere intended by the designers. When based on existing intellectual properties they must factor in the expectations and previous knowledge of the audience. These elements must be coherent, and communicate a clear and uniform message about the world the guest inhabits while riding it. The choice for each design element must be informed by what best serves that particular story and what will better emulate the known story world.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Summary

Theme parks, which date roughly from the 1950s, differ vastly from amusement parks in their model which unifies areas and rides around a same theme or story. This association of known story elements and recognizable traits with multisensory engagement creates a more convincing and alluring play space (Lukas, 2013; Murray, 2005; Younger, 2016).

Guests enter these spaces through physical barriers that can be represented by walls, a piece of equipment or the boarding of a vehicle, which separates the "real" world from the story world. This story world is an invitation to engage in the act of play, where the guest is offered the opportunity to assign roles to themselves, other audience members and the physical space itself. Themed spaces, rides, parks or lands, depend on emotional engagement which is inspired by the multisensory nature of play (Cabanas, 2019). "Play is of particular significance to understanding visitor's active engagement and involvement with theme-park narratives, as well as visitor's active desire for active participation." (Cabanas, 2019, p. 5). This notion of participation, of acting as if you are in the story, visiting places only possible through imagination or two-dimensional adaptations is a driving force in the design of my ride with its plans for immersive environments based on the works of Jules Verne. This role playing creates a relationship and develops expectations on what this relationship and experience should look and feel like.

When dealing with known intellectual properties, that engagement is dependent upon the previous emotional connections guests have with characters and settings. "This three-

dimensional representation of key scenes in the story replicates the action and atmosphere of the film, stimulating the memory of guests who have seen it; their interior visualization reinforces the experience of the attraction.” (Hench, 2008, p. 39). The correspondence of expectations when it comes to known story worlds is essential to success: guests have their own notions of what a world should look, feel and smell like, and once their expectations are met – or exceeded – the guest feels validated and more willing to engage in play (Murray 2006; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). “Feel” is a crucial word when addressing interactive immersive spaces, as the core of an emotionally engaging experience comes from the multisensory aspect of it. Choice in movement coupled with smells, tastes and sounds are traits unique to the three-dimensional interactive space and, when done right, can evoke an emotional response that comes from memory, connection and association with known stories. In these spaces, aided by effective and emotionally-led design, guests can suspend disbelief and have agency over the story in the play space.

In a dark ride, this engagement is achieved through the use of several elements that can make something instantly recognizable and aid in the immersion, such as music, characters or props. Efficient design takes into consideration the good use of color, sound, effects and technology, but also of how these elements can work to engage, grab the attention and immerse an audience into a fictional world. By providing the guest with a believable experience that they take part in designers give them a sense of ownership over the property and over the results (Hench, 2008; Waysdorf & Reinjders, 2016). The unique setting of the theme park allows each guest to decide where to go and how to experience each ride and space, influenced by all kinds of personal and collectively shared memories, which creates a sense of agency that helps ground this fictional

world into real emotions. All of the physical components which make up a ride in a themed environment must work together to sell an experience, to help the guest step into an imaginary reality and inhabit a piece of a story, not as a spectator but as part of the narrative (Hench, 2008; Murray, 2005). These pieces must be rendered with a multisensory approach, one that sets it apart from two-dimensional forms of entertainment and promotes emotional engagement, by allowing the audience to inhabit the story space (Bukatman, 1991; Cabanas, 2019; Lukas, 2013).

Theme parks, specifically rides, provide audiences with unique opportunities to live out their imaginations and to participate in stories beyond the limits of most people's experiences. A collaboration is necessary between the audience through belief and the creator through execution; it is this most crucial element of collaboration that determines whether or not a themed narrative space fulfills its intended purpose. David Younger states:

> Themed Design's core product, then, is an impression in the mind rather than any individual component that contributes to it[...]. The product is not the Sleeping Beauty castle structure, for example, but rather our experience of it: the sum total of the architecture, music and detailing, the friendliness of the employees that directed us to it, our pre-existing aspirations to explore a fairy-tale palace, our fondness for the fairy tale's story and characters, and the shared enjoyment we take in experiencing the castle with our family and friends (Younger, 2016, p. 1).

A well designed and built theme park or ride can fail as a piece of interactive entertainment if the audience refuses to or is confused by how to engage with it. Believing in the world, not thinking about the architecture, setting or tools, that is the ultimate goal of an immersive themed experience. Once the audience agrees to participate, once they step through the portal and into their role as a member of the story and respond to the cues, that is when the effort of design will

have succeeded in an emotional level and therefore, will be much more likely to stand the test of time.

6.2 Insight and Concluding Thoughts

I set out on this thesis to discover: *how can existing themed spaces and rides provide insights into design decisions and how are those decisions based on audience expectations? How can I use that insight to create my own dark ride, based on a known intellectual property?* Throughout the review and analysis of existing rides as well as the literature, I have learned that audience participation is a central element to the effectiveness and quality of these experiences. This goes beyond interactivity as elements one can control such as minigames, weapons or tools and into a deeper relationship that involves an organic build with the guest. The experience cannot exist without the guest taking charge of his role and agreeing to play the part, which means when designing an experience, I need to think of how the guest will participate as a character in the story and not as passive observer and give them cues and physical elements that reinforce that belief. I also need to consider what an audience member expects to see in the environment I design, observe their behavior and, if necessary, adapt to that behavior to create a more seamless transition from the real world to the imaginary one.

When designing "Verne's Jouney" I decided to place the audience in a role of active participation by literally inviting them to an adventure. They are assigned the role of latest recruits of The Explorer's Society, off on an important mission by the characters in the ride and the intention is to make them feel like necessary workers in the endeavor to recover Verne's journals throughout the locations of his books. This comes from the notion learned of delivering

on expectations that the audience has for familiarity and recognition. Although the story is set years after the adventures in Verne's books, guests will still be able to recognize environments, props and events from those books and feel validated that they are living the stories they read.

Using the lessons learned on physicality and transitional objects, I have also decided to give the audience vehicles they can board and recognize, and a prop to interact with where they can scan the sets and recover the pages of the journal themselves. This gives them agency as well as a fun element that comes from playing a game and opens the possibility of multiple visits to see different parts of the ride and perhaps recover more pages in one visit than the previous. The ride also aims to provide a physical barrier the guests can cross into by means of the ride venue, located inside a building shaped like a turn of the century mansion that houses the Explorer's Society, with hints starting at the queue of how many adventures were had by members of the society, which creates a sense of anticipation.

This analysis and concept build is significant to scholars of interactive media as it showcases an approach that is collaborative, in which it is necessary for the audience to act as a co- creator. By developing principles about ride design and applying them in this study, I aim to create a model for other ride designers, and provide insight into my personal process of adaptation which may answer questions in future themed interactive endeavors. The research gathered here as well as my personal experience as a creator demonstrate the complexity of designing meaningful and effective themed rides by encouraging roleplay and not creating a passive space. I hope to have provided sufficient evidence that designing these experiences goes beyond choosing colors, size

and shape for the sake of aesthetics or technology, but that each decision, from the smallest detail to the largest building needs to be in service of what a guest *wants* to see, feel and experience.

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