

An American in Paris

The Hyperreality of America as presented
in Disneyland Paris

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Abstract

The research topic for this bachelor thesis will be hyperreality in the case of Disneyland Paris. It will be particularly focused on the aspect of how American hyperreality can be translated to a French context. This will be explained using the case study of Disneyland Paris. Several iconic landmarks that can be found in the American parks have been omitted or changed for the French adaptation of the theme park. This BA thesis will show how American elements of hyperreality need to be changed and adapted in order to work for French society. This will be investigated with the help of academic journals, and concepts by Gottdiener, Pells, and Baudrillard, which will help to explain the answer to the research question that this thesis will be focusing on.

Keywords: hyperreality – cultural transfer – themed environments – America – Disneyland Paris – Walt Disney – theme parks

Introduction

Upon entering Disneyland visitors are greeted by a sign telling them "to all who come to this happy place: welcome" (qtd. in Gottdiener 139). Walt Disney, not only a cultural icon of the twentieth century—but also an innovator on theme parks, personally spoke these words to the visitors of his theme park (Mansour). In 1992, the CEO of The Walt Disney Company, Michael Eisner, repeated these words when he officially opened Disneyland Paris. Guests were welcomed to the “happiest place on earth”. All the Disney Parks around the world share a similar notion; they care about transferring that spirit of fantasy that Walt Disney captured many decades ago when he opened his first theme park in 1955 in Anaheim, California. His vision was to design a place where guests could feel like children again (Cross 173).

Over the years more Disney Parks opened their gates around the world. This provides for an interesting discussion regarding the cultural transfer of an American ‘product’ to other continents in the world. In this Bachelor Thesis I will first explain the history of the original Disneyland in Anaheim, California and the cultural transfer of Disneyland to Japan and France. Next I will apply this to specific concepts. These include ‘themed environments’ by Mark Gottdiener, ‘America’ by Richard Pells, and ‘hyperreality’ by Jean Baudrillard.

Disneyland is considered to be one of the first theme parks in the world. Preceded by fun fairs and pleasure places, Walt Disney set the standard for other theme parks to come. The layout that is featured in the original Disneyland is duplicated and replicated many times in many different forms in both Disney and other non-Disney theme parks. It took almost forty years for the first European Disney Park to be opened in France. The realization of the theme park came with some complications, such as the protest of the French as they felt the park would ruin their culture, but also the ailing economy. These problems show that there are many challenges in transferring and translating parts of American culture to the cultural environment of another continent (Pells 311). This is interesting to note, especially since Disney classics originate in Europe. To investigate how this problem of cultural transfer was solved, I will be focusing on the following research question: How does hyperreality influence the way the French perceive Disneyland Paris?

The case study of Disneyland Paris will narrow down my research to one specific park to investigate the results of cultural transfer. Cultural transfer can be

explained as “the migration from one cultural situation to another” (Yakushenko). While the Disney theme parks are an American invention, over time they have been copied and pasted into different societies over the world. By focusing on the European version of the popular theme park, I will investigate in which ways American culture is adapted for European audiences as a simple reconstruction of the original park could not work as easily as might be expected. I argue that cultural differences have to be taken into account since there are various differences between American and French culture, history, and society.

Theories of themed environments, America, and hyperreality

In order to understand the problem of the perception of American culture in Europe, in this case, Disneyland Paris in France, it is important to first explain three concepts. These concepts include themed environments, America, and hyperreality. I will use concepts by scholars such as Mark Gottdiener, Richard Pells, and Jean Baudrillard in my research. With these concepts I will elaborate exactly on in what ways Disneyland Paris failed to inspire the French guests.

Theming can be found everywhere in everyday life, from restaurants, to malls, and even natural landmarks. Theming adds an extra dimension to a certain experience. According to Mark Gottdiener, a themed environment is a product of two social processes. He explains this, firstly, as a socially constructed built environment that serves as a space for human interaction, like malls and restaurants, where, secondly, "themed material forms that are products of a cultural process aimed at investing constructed spaces with symbolic meaning and at conveying that meaning to inhabitants through symbolic motifs" (5). The response to these themed environments decides whether or not the message has been conveyed to success or, when there is no response at all, failure. A negative response can, however, also be a result of irritation towards a particular themed environment. This is when the message is conveyed to success, but it is accepted negatively. An example of this is McDonalds franchises in Europe, which is often met with annoyance.

Two concepts that are tied to themed environments are ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ in which the former "refers to a social process of creation that often involves a group of individuals brought together within an organized, institutional context" (Gottdiener 5). Consumption is seen as the process individuals apply when interpreting a themed environment. It refers to the experience one has with the

constructed space, whether positive or negative.

Theme parks can be considered a vast themed environment. They often have an overarching theme or the park is divided into sub-themed environments, all presenting the visitors with a version of a constructed reality. These parks "attempt to create an ambience of another place and time by focusing on a dominant motif, around which architecture, costumed personnel, rides, shows, food services and merchandizing are coordinated" (Trigg 13). This can be seen in Disneyland Paris, where, for example, Frontierland imitates the Wild West of America, complete with similarly themed rides, restaurants where they serve Texan cuisine, and boutiques where cowboy hats are sold. Everything complies with a theme that allows guests to transport to a certain place without truly going there. Disneyland offers guests several themed environments in one place while operating under a main theme of 'childhood wonder'.

The concept of America has garnered several different descriptions over time. Many of those involve notions of novelty, new beginnings, and utopian promise (Silva Gruesz 19). In 1958 Edmundo O'Gorman stated that America was 'invented' before it was 'discovered'. He explained that Europeans for a very long time have had the tendency to project their own needs, wishes, and illusions on America, which was then unfamiliar terrain.

America is seen as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, and a chance to start over in a new unrestricted country, unbound by the rules of society — this in contrast with Europe. America is a new beginning; it "presents itself as a void. It is devoid of the burden of Europe" (Kroes 9). This can be seen as the cause for an Anti-American feeling towards American culture; the "compelling European standard of cultural success has maintained its discouraging sway in America until the present day" (Kroes 11). Since the country is based on a blank slate, it has no rich history that European countries have plenty of. It seems to be lacking in many aspects, and Europeans condemn America for it, not seeing its culture as legitimate culture since it is not based on a long heritage of cultural rules, regulations, and icons.

In line with Anti-Americanization, "many European observers have been struck [...] by the American tendency to disassemble cultural forms into the component parts and to rearrange them reply into new patterns" (Kroes). Over the centuries, Americans have appropriated not only European culture, but also other cultures to create their own. In doing this, they disregard any rules dictated by the original

culture. In short, "Americans have tended to dissect patterns of traditional and organic cohesion while feeling free to rearrange the component parts into new wholes" (Kroes).

Fluck states that Americanization is more than American culture replacing a native culture. He finds that Americanization is a result of modernization, and not a form of cultural imperialism (263). As time progresses, Americanization is inevitable, but while this is often regarded as a negative implication, according to Fluck it is not. Due to the dehierarchization and growing individualization there is a certain need for innovation concerning culture (Fluck 263). People are no longer satisfied with only their own culture and want something more. Culture goes through a series of modernization in which it adopts culture from other parts of the world.

While American culture is still not held to the same regard as European culture in Europe, Kroes concludes that "America" is ever present in our lives. Over time, we have learned to not only accept, but also understand it, partially due to the help of the younger generation who was able to explain the appeal of certain American cultural elements to the older generation. Americanization is a natural process of modernization that does not necessarily mean the eradication of the original culture. It can be viewed as an update of culture, rather than a cultural take-over.

The final concept is that of hyperreality, a term coined by Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. What he means by the concept is viewing a place like Disneyland as something more real than reality: a hyperreality (1). He also makes the distinction between representation, and simulation, stating that "representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, [whereas] simulation develops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum" (6). Hyperreality thus presents something as true, and real, rather than acknowledging that it is merely a representation; Disneyland is not a representation of America, it is a simulation.

Since an American created Disneyland, Baudrillard's next description of America as a hyperreality itself can be of use:

"America is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyperreality. It is a hyperreality because it is a utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved. Everything here is real and pragmatic, and yet it is all the stuff of dreams too. It may be that the truth of America can only be seen by a European, since he alone will discover here the perfect simulacrum—that of

the immense and material transcription of all values. The Americans, for their part, have no sense of simulation. They are themselves simulation in its most developed state, but they have no language in which to describe it, since they themselves are the model" (America 26)

Baudrillard sees America as a hyperreality. This is clear to Europeans, who can look at the country from a non-hyperreal country that gives them an unbiased view. For Americans this is less evident, since they continuously live in its hyperreal setting day in and day out.

He then continues by expanding on this gap between America and Europe. According to Baudrillard, there is "an unbridgeable rift" between the two continents (73). What he tries to say is that America is considered as modern and this can never be achieved by Europe. This becomes noticeable when going from Los Angeles to Paris. The American city is strikingly contemporary compared to the French city, which consists mostly of 19th century architecture (Baudrillard 73).

Both Baudrillard's hyperreality, but also his explanation of the difference between American and Europe will be of great help when investigating how the French responded to Disneyland Paris back when it first opened in 1992, and how that has contributed to the failure of the success of the park.

Methodology

Before I can answer my research question it is important to look at the general history of theme parks and Walt Disney's vision of the original Disneyland that opened in 1955. This first chapter will focus on the following questions: In what way was Walt Disney inspired by 'pleasure places'? What was Walt Disney's vision of Disneyland? How is his vision of Disneyland received outside of America?

Theme parks originated from fun fairs and pleasure places such as Coney Island in New York and Blackpool in England. Walt Disney was not the first visionary who introduced the concept of a theme park, however, he was the one who created the concept of theme parks as we know it today: a stationary themed experience that not only entertains visitors by means of attractions, but also enchants them with an overarching theme of a certain space (Cross 36).

Next, I will explore in depth the similarities and differences of Disney Parks outside of the United States, namely in Japan and France. Both parks generate a

completely different response, which will make it interesting to look at the differences between both countries, and also America.

The second chapter will explain the concepts used to elaborate on the phenomenon of the responses to Disneyland Paris. These will include themed environments by Gottdiener, America by Pells, and the hyperreality by Baudrillard. In this chapter I will put these concepts into perspective. This results in the following subquestion: How can the concepts of themed environments, America, and hyperreality be applied to the case of Disneyland?

This chapter will go into depth about how Walt Disney saw his park as a place where anyone could return to their childhood (Gottdiener 121). He used specific themed areas to evoke a feeling of innocence. He wanted his park to be a place of childhood wonders above anything else. It will also illustrate how the French felt about a Disney theme park coming to their country, and why they felt that way. Finally, the concept of hyperreality will show how Disneyland Paris is down at its core a hyperreality of America. This influenced the perception of the park in Europe, which would influence the success or failure of the park.

In the third and final chapter I will elaborate on what exactly had to be changed to make sure Disneyland Paris would work for the French audience. While Disney executives' strategy in Japan had been to copy-and-paste the park almost in its entirety, it turned out that this would not work in France. The French were initially not happy about the announcement of a Disney Park near Paris, even though government officials worked hard to ensure their bid (Lansbury 23). They predicted that the park would bring job opportunities to Paris which would give an economic boost to the region it was placed in. (Pells 308). However, the French people were afraid it would eradicate their own culture and make it more American: "The park was considered an incongruous element in the French landscape" (D'Hautessere 302). The fear of Americanization of the French culture was present, and in return they asked the Imagineers (a term used for engineers in charge of theming) to make some significant changes to appease the negative responses to the park. In this chapter I will focus on the following questions: What aspects of Disneyland did Imagineers change to satisfy the French? Were these changes enough to ensure the success of the park?

In the final chapter, I will trace the modifications of the theme park in France in order to satisfy French needs and expectations. These changes include the addition of French and European historical references in traditional Disney attractions,

ensuring the French would be able to relate to the American themes, making the park much richer in detail in contrast to its American counterparts. Examples of this include the way Imagineers created a richer detailed park than ever before, the inclusion of distinct French aspects, and the homage it paid to European fairytales.

For the sake of this BA thesis it is important to note that when referring to the French or Americans in general, I am often generalizing. This is an unfortunate problem that is almost impossible to avoid. A thing to remember is that not all the French felt that Disney would be a threat to their culture, but to make matters easier I will still refer to them as the French in general.

At the end of this BA thesis I hope to conclude that, indeed, several notable changes had to be made to the concept of Disneyland for it to suit the French guests. I expect to be able to find connections between the concepts of themed environments, America, and hyperreality used in the final chapter and the case of Disneyland Paris. This will help me to understand the changes in the design of theme parks in different cultural environments and the critical responses by French visitors.

Chapter 1: From Pleasure Place to Theme Park: the Origin of Disneyland and the Development of Foreign Parks

1.1 The History of Pleasure Places and Walt Disney's Vision

Disneyland in Anaheim and Walt Disney World in Orlando are regarded as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. In fact, in terms of yearly tourist traffic, the parks are preceded only by Mecca, the Vatican, and Kyoto (Van Maanen 5). It can thus be concluded that Disneyland is loved and visited by many. This results in more Disney Parks being built around the world, such as Tokyo Disneyland and Disneyland Paris. Disneyland is regarded as the first theme park, but it is most definitely not the first 'pleasure place' (Cross). Fun fairs, circuses, and sites such as Coney Island all came before Disneyland. All of these 'pleasure places' influenced Walt Disney, positively and negatively, to dream up his own park during the 1950s. His vision led to the game-changing park of Disneyland, a park that set the standards for many theme parks to follow.

Fun fairs can be seen as the beginning of 'pleasure places', a term coined by Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton to describe a park that would eventually develop into amusement and themed parks. Two of the most well known permanent fun fairs were Coney Island in the United States, and Blackpool in England. Located right along the beaches, these places offered visitors a day of escape from their day-to-day lives. Here, they could ride attractions for a small fee or play games to win prizes in various kinds of booths. These fairs "integrate the thrill, ride, spectacle, and animal and free show into their seaside pleasure" (Cross 36). Attractions such as the rollercoaster and Ferris Wheel are closely associated with these fairs. The fun fair itself generally had an overall ramshackle-look, which appealed to mostly lower-class visitors. While Coney Island and Blackpool put down the foundation for Disneyland, they had, and still have, a very different image than the Disney Parks. In contrast to fun fairs, Walt Disney wanted his park to appeal to middle-class visitors.

Amusement parks can be seen as the link between the fun fairs on Coney Island, and Disneyland. Where fun fairs inspired the amusement parks, amusement parks again inspired Walt Disney to build his own and very first theme park. The idea of the amusement park was that it would be an enclosed area owned by a single company, which charged visitors to enter, rather than charging them for admission to particular rides only. Amusement parks added new experiences to traditional seaside pleasure

and kept searching for new innovations to add to the permanent structure. These new parks emerged on the pleasure beaches, and Coney Island and Blackpool slowly began to transfer into what would later be recognized as the first amusement parks in the world.

While parks such as Tivoli Gardens in Denmark and Coney Island had been around much longer than Disneyland, Walt Disney specifically chose to draw inspiration from one park in particular. He wanted to reproduce "Tivoli's Danish sense of decorum and safety, its cleanliness and meticulously planned use of space" (Pells 307). Disney felt that Coney Island was too loud, and too disorderly, which would not appeal to the sensibilities of the middle-class. He steered away from the Coney Island tradition of freaks, fortunetellers, and controversial themes. He even refused to add any thrill rides, such as rollercoasters, which were found in pleasure places, as he associated that with the vulgarness of Coney Island (Cross 171). Besides Tivoli Gardens, Disney was particularly inspired by his own travels, as one biographer noted:

"The vision of an amusement park grew in Walt Disney's mind. On each trip to Europe and during his travels through the United States, he attended outdoor attractions of all kinds [...] He visited country fairs, state fairs, circuses, carnivals, national parks. He studied the attractions and what made them appealing [...] His most depressing experience was seeing Coney Island. It was so battered and tawdry and the ride operators were so hostile that Walt felt a momentary urge to abandon the idea for an amusement park." (qtd. in Weinstein 131)

Disney wanted something different from what he had seen. His park was going to be the exact opposite of Coney Island. His theme park would be able to present guests a happy vision of pleasure achieved by eradicating the less appealing aspects of regular urban life (Trigg 13). It would show the facets that Coney Island did not show. It would be clean, uplifting, and nostalgic. It would be "a positive alternative to the kind of amusement park typified by Coney Island" (Weinstein 132).

There was one thing that neither Tivoli Gardens nor Coney Island had, and that was an overarching theme. This was where Disney would innovate, and create a park that stood apart from other parks in the world. This was also why the original Disneyland Park that opened in Anaheim in 1955 was often seen as the first theme park due to its use of several themed environments. It also had a very distinct park

layout, which has been imitated many times even up until today. What was striking about the way Disneyland had arranged his park was that it was divided into separate themed areas. These areas were connected by the fairytale castle that stood in the middle, featuring as the central focus point of the park. Themed areas included Main Street, U.S.A., Adventureland, New Orleans Square, Frontierland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. Due to the use of this park layout, many different themes could be gathered in one park, taking the visitors through several themed environments in one visit. Mark Gottdiener even stated that "the classic form of the park is arguably the most successful themed environment in history" (121) as the park had been designed in such a way that even though there were many themes covered in such a relatively small area everything flows together perfectly. This created an overarching theme regardless of all the themes used in the same place.

If anything, Disney intended his park to be a place of wonder more than anything else. Where pleasure places served the purpose of amusement, his park would do so much more. The imagination of a child was the most important aspect of his themed areas. Every single land had a different message that would be evoked through interaction with the guests. Cross gave a few examples, which illustrated this nicely:

"Tom Sawyer's Island promised to be "a play land out of a youngster's dream" where "everything an adventurous boy could want" was to be found [...] Frontierland was to be a storybook version of history [...] Adventureland taught the boyish pleasures of "traveling to mysterious far-off places," offering a romantic travelogue which evoked memories of reading Hardy Boys and Tom Swift adventures" (173)

Drawing on the notion of the "child-within", Disney actively sought to include the parents in the theme park experience, creating a family friendly area where the fun could be shared. His park would not be specifically aimed at one age group, it would be for everyone; families, parents, children, and the elderly. Everyone would be able to enjoy his or her time in Disneyland. This was opposed to pleasure places such as Coney Island, where attraction experiences were mostly aimed at children and teenagers.

Walt Disney wanted Disneyland to be equal to happiness. The park codified the notion of "happiness" around three essential ideas. He wanted to place the guests into a cinematic fantasy, reinforced by the themed areas in which they could escape the

daily struggles of life. He wanted people to reach for their "inner-child" and capture guests with the spirit of what it was like to be possessed by childish wonder. Finally, he wanted the appeal of nostalgia to be present in every aspect of the park. The idea behind this was for the visitors to tap into the "child-within" (Cross 175).

Gottdiener argued that Disneyland was "the fantasy of a Walt Disney who yearned [...] for an idealized youth" (159). The park could thus be seen as Disney's creation to be able to revisit a childhood, but not necessarily his own. Rather, Disneyland allowed both him and guests to visit the perfect childhood he dreamed of, whether true or not. Disneyland has always been a land of fantasy, and the fantasy of childhood is nothing different.

After the success of both Disney Parks in the United States, Disney executives like president Michel Eisner expressed their wishes to move their theme parks abroad. They saw both Japan and Europe as a great marketing opportunity (Trigg 19). Their first experience would be with Tokyo Disneyland, followed by Disneyland Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland, and finally Shanghai Disneyland. Walt Disney created his very own theme park, which would later serve as one of The Walt Disney Company's biggest franchises.

1.2 Tokyo Disneyland

Tokyo Disneyland was the first Disney Park to open on foreign grounds. It opened in 1983 and would become The Walt Disney's Company first experience in developing and operating a Disney Park outside of the United States. The park was undeniably a huge success. According to Trigg, in the first ten years of operation it welcomed more than 10 million visitors, and grossed \$100 million over budget. In fact, "based on per capita expenditure, Tokyo Disneyland was performing some 50 percent better than its US counterparts" (Trigg 18).

The Japanese loved the American theme of Disney, and the way the Japanese embraced the 'Americanness' of the theme park proved to be the downfall for Disneyland Paris. As stated by Mary Joko Brannen, "Disney drew the wrong conclusions from the apparently problem-free "copy-exactly" strategy it used in its initial experience" (594). As stated before, there were many cultural differences to be found between America and Europe, but nowhere was this gap bigger than between America and Japan. Brannen argued that this was the cause for Tokyo Disneyland's success, as the greater cultural distance between the United States and Japan allowed the Japanese guests to view the theme park experience as something entirely

'foreign'. The American theme park had no ties beyond park grounds in Japan. It was a cultural phenomenon with no reference to an original source (Gibson 17). Tokyo Disneyland was where they could experience a hyperreality of America and escape the realities of Japan. Since the cultural gap between Europe and the United States was much smaller European guests will not share that notion of visiting America (Toyoda 209). They viewed America as something less than their own culture rather than something 'exotic' and 'new'. In fact, the developers of Tokyo Disneyland felt that the Japanese guests would want the park to be as close to the original as possible, "or else they would consider that they were being shortchanged" (Trigg 18).

Scott Schaffer continued on this matter, arguing that the American reconstruction of Japan's political, economic, and social systems after World War Two influenced Japanese society and made Tokyo Disneyland a success. In fact "the reconstruction of Japanese society by the American military, coupled with the highly commodified cultural that both Japanese and American societies share, prove to be rich ground for the propagation of Disney's messages regarding the place of the United States in the world" (Schaffer).

However, it can also be argued that the Japanese have affection for theme parks with a foreign theme. The same year Tokyo Disneyland opened, a similarly 'foreign' theme park opened in Nagasaki, namely, Huis Ten Bosch. The theme park was to be a replica of Dutch villages and many Dutch landmarks, such as the palace of Huis Ten Bosch itself, the Dom Tower of Utrecht, Amsterdam Central Station, a VOC-ship, and many more.

But the Japanese did not stop there. In the years after, more than a dozen 'foreign country theme parks' were constructed. These included Gluck Kingreich (medieval Germany-themed), Parque España (Spain-themed), Kurashiki Chibori Park (Denmark-themed), and a smaller-scale German Village in Chiba and Niigata Russian Village. These parks were built to purposely mimic, or represent, an authentic foreign culture, but especially, they hoped to achieve the same success Tokyo Disneyland had achieved (Toyoda 211). It could thus be said that the success of Tokyo Disneyland was not down to it being accepted as a representation of American reality, but rather as a non-ordinary world. To the Japanese, America was a fantasy; it was exceptional to them, since Japanese culture differed so much from American culture (Toyoda 209). While Disneyland could be seen as a hyperreality of fantasy, the American aspect of the parks would be as much a fairytale to the Japanese as Sleeping Beauty

would be.

It can be concluded that Tokyo Disneyland was a tremendous success. The executives almost rebuilt the exact same park as in Walt Disney World in Florida, a park that even today is still a hit among the Japanese.

1.3 Disneyland Paris

Disneyland Paris, then Euro Disney Resort, opened its gates on April 12, 1992. The successful opening of Tokyo Disneyland reinforced Walt Disney's successors belief that they could export his visions and ideas to other parts of the world. The park was immensely popular in Japan, which seemed to embrace every aspect of the park with open arms. Especially since Walt Disney imported his theme park ideas from Europe, on paper the park seemed to be a guaranteed success in Europe as well (Pells 308).

It was announced on August 12, 1985 by Walt Disney Productions that it was to build a European theme park. Its current location of Marne-La-Vallée (about thirty kilometers from Paris) was not the only location in the running; another possibility was Spain, where the weather was much better than it was in Paris. In contrast, Paris was much better located in terms of tourist traffic and its close proximity to the capital. Surrounded by many countries and in driving and flying distance from others, Paris proved to be better suited — location wise. French officials were especially eager to win the bid as they thought it would create jobs, and strengthen France's position in the world as a leader in high technology and mass entertainment (Pells 308).

But despite all these positive changes that could come with the development of a Disney Park, not everyone was happy with the announcement of a theme park complex in the rural French country side, where families had been living for several generations. It went so far that "to some French, Mickey Mouse had become a rodent in need of extermination" (Lainsbury 23). They feared the park would destroy the quaint rural farming grounds; it would Americanize the countryside beyond recognition. Their concern was easily understood, and looking at the area years later it has truly been transformed. The countryside has been eradicated and in its place is now a vast theme park complex with many hotels. Others were displeased because the park was built right on the doorstep of a local French park: Parc Astérix, posing a constant threat to their 'own' theme park. It was as if America was invading them by means of a themed environment, and who could win against the Mouse? (Gross 949).

Disney changed the area in various aspects, but it could be argued that it changed Marne-La-Vallée for the better. Several new towns in the region were developed, including a large shopping-mall area with a SeaLife-aquarium. According to the twenty-year review of the Disneyland Paris center, the 7 billion dollar initial investment resulted that the park generated "an annual average of 55,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs in France, while generating nearly 20,000 jobs in the Seine-et-Marne area" (Inter Ministerial Delegation). While Disneyland Paris may have cut down the farmer's grounds, it instead created a mini economy of its own, bringing wealth and tourism to a region that before might have gone unnoticed to both local and foreign visitors.

Disneyland put down the foundation for many other theme parks, including their own. The Magic Kingdom Park in Walt Disney World and Tokyo Disneyland are almost exact replicas of the original park in Anaheim. Many attractions can be found in all the parks around the world, including Autopia, Space Mountain, "It's A Small World", Big Thunder Mountain, Pirates of the Caribbean, and many more. Michael Eisner, then CEO of The Walt Disney Company, hoped he could transfer the same formulas that worked in America so well to Europe (Pells 308).

While Disneyland Park, the name of the Magic Kingdom park in Disneyland Paris, could be seen as a replica, many changes have been made to accommodate the French audience. This was in response to French officials, who made it clear from the beginning that the theme park could not be as blatantly American as the other Disney Parks (Lainsbury 50). Since the announcement of the park was met with much criticism from the French people, Tony Baxter, senior vice president of creative development at Walt Disney Imagineering, had no other choice but to give into the demands. According to Léon Mercadet, a French magazine editor,

"the French [felt] threatened because the cultural landscapes in France are changing too fast. They sense France is becoming part of the American Empire. After decades of cultural penetration, we know culture is ruled by economies, and we in France have learned to be suspicious of whatever comes from America" (qtd. in Lainsbury 5).

Baxter thus had an important task. He had to create a park unique and detailed enough to persuade the French audience, yet still ensure the park would be Disney-like.

The French demands were a blessing in disguise for the Imagineers. According to the Walt Disney Imagineering website, they "combine our rich storytelling legacy

with the latest technology to breathe life into beloved Disney stories and characters in our theme parks, resorts, cruise ships and other Walt Disney Parks and Resorts experiences around the world". The Imagineers had the chance to design the park from scratch, improving older rides and themed areas to create a new Magic Kingdom, suited not only for an American audience, but also a French. However, the Imagineers could not eradicate all the American touches completely. Disney was an American brand, and "exorcising 'America' from the new theme park would be like cutting the 'Disney' out of Euro Disney" (Lainsbury 52). Although Euro Disney was in France, it had to contain the same themed areas the American counterparts. It would not be a Magic Kingdom without Main Street, U.S.A., Frontierland, or the traditional American fast food that was sold at restaurants. America was part of Disney, so while the Imagineers worked hard to rework "America" in Euro Disney, one thing would be certain, they could never get rid of it entirely. As D'Hautessere stated, "the theme park had to be modified so that it would not be so blatantly Americanizing... just American" (303).

It is particularly interesting to trace back the country of origin of these Imagineers. Was Disneyland Paris a truly American creation, or where some French Imagineers involved in the development of the park? When it came to designing the hotels, Senior Vice President of Creative Development, Tony Baxter assembled a team of architects that would help him realize the dream that was Disneyland Paris. Born and raised in Anaheim, California, Baxter had always been close to the original Disneyland. As the leading Imagineer in charge of designing the French resort, Baxter took great care in accommodating the French needs. For the design of the themed hotels (which all featured a distinctly American theme), he hired perhaps the most leading architects. Michael Graves, Robert Stern, Antoine Grumbach, and Anton Predock were in charge of designing the hotels, while Frank Gehry was given the task of designing the shopping district, Festival Disney, which was later renamed to Disney Village (Webb 365). The Imagineers were all North Americans, except for Antoine Grumbach, who was French. The Frenchman was the architect for the Sequoia Lodge Hotel, a hotel featured around America's national parks. He was the sole architect to design a structure he was not as familiar with as the North American architects. It could thus be concluded that the design of the park was largely in the hands of North Americans, making Disneyland Paris a truly American creation.

Luckily, the French government was obliging and seemed to be satisfied with the suggestions made by the Imagineers. As long as the park would be a healthy mix between American and French culture, the park had a chance of survival. And this 'mix' was exactly what the Imagineers were striving for.

Chapter 2. Disneyland: A Themed Hyperreality of America

In this chapter I will apply the concepts I explained in the introduction to the case of the original Disneyland and Disneyland Paris. This will help me to explain the changes made to the park, which will be investigated in the final chapter.

2.1 Themed Environments

Walt Disney envisioned his park to be a place where adults could return to childhood while it would present children with an idealized version of community at the same time (Gottdiener 121). He wanted to design a space that captured childhood fantasies. It could thus be argued that the overarching theme of Disneyland in general is the reproduction of childhood wonders. While all the separate lands were vastly different in theme, they all captured that notion of innocence and wonder. Disneyland was a place where guests live out their childhood memories, fantasies, and perhaps wishes.

But still, it has to be mentioned that Disney's vision of childhood may not be the vision of all the visitors. It is possible for guests to be disillusioned by the hyperreality of childhood that Walt Disney created. It can be viewed as "commercialization of nostalgia" (Olick 125). In the end a theme park is a business out to make money, and Disneyland is not any different. Disney's park might be a place of childhood wonders, but it could also be that of childhood disillusion.

Gottdiener argues that Disneyland in Anaheim, California is different because of its use of themed environments. He takes the example of the Hard Rock Café-franchise and an American diner. He states that there is little difference between the two except for the themed environment they are in. While both restaurants serve the same food, the "themed environment makes the difference. Difference is produced not through products but contrasts in the themed environment alone" (Gottdiener 273). What would differentiate Disneyland from other pleasure places is the fact that it is themed. This would add to the experience as it could take visitors through several fantasy environments at the time.

Disneyland was themed in such a way it would represent different places in time and space. But it could also be argued it was likewise themed to have a look that could be described as a "constructed "fun space" that is a sanitized, idealized, "unreal" representation of America" (Arnold Costa). Disneyland purposely ignored issues such as ethnic diversity, and the discrimination of Native Indians. These

problems were partly solved in Disneyland Paris, where the park did acknowledge France's colonial history. What the original Disneyland does was create a space that was not only themed to fit certain specific environments, but was also themed to represent a 'perfect' society where none of the problems that we face today were present.

When Disneyland opened in 1955, it opened true to Walt Disney's vision. His park was not to be simply an amusement park, he envisioned so much more. Disneyland was supposed to be a fantasy environment: a hyperreality. This aspect that was criticized much in the beginning turned out to be the source of Disneyland's success. For the first time in history, an amusement park had transcended into a themed environment and had become a combination of the two.

2.2 America

The notion of 'America' coming to the French culture was one of Disneyland Paris's biggest setbacks. In 1990, 40% of the French felt that the development of a Disney theme park in France was a sign of Americanization of the French cultural identity (D'Hautesserre 302) and theater director Arianna Mnouchkine called the park "a cultural Chernobyl" (Zuber 69). The French did not necessarily fear the introduction of another culture; they feared the introduction of America. The arrival of Disneyland Paris would confirm the arrival of 'America'. The United States would become physically present in France.

Walt Disney wanted his park to be "a celebration of America – its past, its present, its culture, its achievement and its future" (Smart 102). While the Imagineers did their best to accommodate Disneyland Paris for the French, they could never eradicate the American theme all together. Disneyland was not only an American product – it would have an overarching American theme as well. Imagineers tried to work around this by including French elements wherever they could. This meant they left out American themes where they could as well.

This ties into an argument made by King, who agrees that Disneyland is at its core truly American. She argues "within various "lands" and the myriad paths that lead among and between them, it is a clearly coded text, set in icons and images, easily read by any age and across cultures" (King 10). She states that the themed environments, albeit American, speak for themselves and are thus easily translatable to another culture. This is the reason why Imagineers took a gamble with lands such

as Main Street, U.S.A., Frontierland or the American-themed hotel district, as can be seen in the next chapter.

Richard Pells states that it is ironic that Disneyland had trouble establishing itself in Europe, considering amusement parks were as much European as they were American (307). Europeans have the tendency to compare their Old World culture to the New World culture of America. American culture is regarded as low and vulgar, but what is often forgotten is that American culture stems from European culture (Kroes). It is the outcome of European creolization. European culture is difficult to compare to American culture, and it should be compared with caution. European culture can be seen as 'original'. It is not based on something else, while American culture is just that.

Since the cultures cannot be compared, necessary changes had to be made to certain aspects of the park, which are explained more thoroughly in chapter 3. To provide an example now, Parisian dancer and choreographer Myriam Hervé-Gil recollected her experiences of adapting a country-western-style stage show to be performed in The Lucky Nugget Saloon from American audiences, to French audiences:

"With the U.S. Lucky Nugget Show as a basis, they decided to rewrite a text that would include the saloon décor, the Far West [and] the character of Charlie. They added a French lover because the French lover permitted French to be spoken among the characters, and [...] there was the theme of the French lover in the U.S., the Maurice Chevalier angle. If you like, it's a link between the two cultures that is very simple and very efficient [...] They really rewrote everything around it: it's the same décor, the same context as in Florida, but not at all the same story" (Kaplan 157)

Hervé-Gil confirmed in her interview with scholar Alice Y. Kaplan that something that could be seen as easily transferable, in this case a stage show, had to be altered and adapted. The French culture cannot be compared to American culture, which was why aspects of the Disney Parks were difficult to translate for another audience who might not be as open to influences of other cultures than others (such as the Japanese) would be.

The French felt that their culture was in danger of Americanization, yet Disney publicists asserted that Disney's movies and theme parks originated from European novels and folklore (Pells 310). As much as 25 films developed by Walt Disney

Animation Studies were of European descent or take place in Europe. Early classics include *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Germany), *Alice in Wonderland* (England), and *Pinocchio* (Italy). This is still followed through until today, with Disney's latest fairytale *Frozen* being inspired by *The Snow Queen* by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen.

With the parks primarily being based on Walt Disney's films, I want to argue that the parks are a reflection of his appropriation of European culture. Euro Disney can thus be seen as a theme park that may seem American at first glance, but is very much rooted in the European experience (Pells 310). The French feared for Americanization of culture, while in fact the Americans are simply bringing European culture back to Europe, albeit in a different form.

2.3 Hyperreality

Disneyland can be seen as the embodiment of the fantasy state of America. Kroes states that when Europeans think of America, there is an element of nostalgia present. America is the place of "adolescent dreams when the world was still one of endless potential. America as a realm of dreams has preserved that quality" (Kroes). In a way, America can be seen as the country that refuses to grow old into a fixed form or shape, like European countries. America represents the innocence, the many possibilities, but also childhood dreams. Disneyland embraces this like no other, welcoming adults into their land of dreams and fantasies. Disneyland is an escape to the mythical West.

Disneyland offers a perfect simulation of fantasy and nostalgia, both in the form of classic fairytales and childhood wonders, but also America. According to Baudrillard, the park is "a perfect model of simulacra" (12). All the themed environments are presented as even better managed and more real than reality. This notion of a full immersion into a hyperreality can be seen as the reason for Disneyland's success, and is also noted by Toyoda:

"Disneyland and Disney World are frequently analyzed as successful tourist destinations because they navigate around issues of authenticity and inauthenticity through immersion in pure fantasy, and thus create an encompassing atmosphere of non-ordinariness that is essential to attract tourists." (219)

It can thus be argued that Disneyland's success is creditable to the way Disney used

hyperreality as a way to transport visitors to a themed area of fantasy and nostalgia. Baudrillard confirms this, noting, "Disneyland is play of illusions and phantasms" (12). The guests enter a world that can be considered a miniaturized pleasure of the real America. This attraction to the "social microcosm" that the park presents ensures the success of Disneyland (12). "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1). Baudrillard's hyperreality is not to be seen as the opposite of reality, but rather as a "chain of signs which endlessly refer to each other" (Kooijman 71).

All themed environments in Disneyland are a hyperreality of something, whether it is small town America in Main Street, U.S.A., or the frontier in the West, yet these places have not necessarily existed in the 'real' world. As is stated before, a hyperreality can be something that is based on nothing. In the case of Disneyland, it is supposedly based on aspects of America, and as Van Maanen states "there is certainly nothing subtle to Americans about Disneyland. The stories told in and by the park are exaggerated, inflated versions of familiar tales and events, aggrandized to the point of parody" (12). Van Maanen thus agrees with the notion that Disneyland is a hyperreality based on nothing. The stories, which are represented in the park, are changed beyond recognition. According to Baudrillard this is because these myths and legends that Disneyland builds upon have never really existed in the first place. In Kooijman's chapter on hyperreality he states, "American pop culture is instrumental in the shaping of hyperreality through fictionalization" (Kooijman 71). Disneyland is based on a dream of nostalgia and childhood wonders, as to Walt Disney's vision, and not reality.

Another important aspect of Baudrillard's definition of hyperreality is how, according to him, Disneyland exists "in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that *is* Disneyland". The themed environments in the park do not only transport the guests to a different time and place, it also tries to fool them into believing that what lays beyond the gates is no longer real. It is what is inside that counts:

"Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of false representation of reality (ideology), but of

concealing the fact that the rest is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle." (Baudrillard 13)

Gottdiener argues that people respond to hyperreality by adjusting and organizing their consumption styles (19). This is "regardless of need, regardless of practical concerns, and regardless of reality" (Gottdiener 19). It can be said that the French do not feel like Disneyland Paris could be considered necessary to their lives. They adjust their consumption styles by staying away from the parks or spending a very limited amount of money on souvenirs and food. It can be argued that the French respond to hyperreality by resisting it.

Hyperreality can have a negative impact. While it should be noted that hyperreality is in fact based on nothing, it could be that some will believe it to be reality. This can lead to problems, as "the effect of a visit to Disney World may be to render the experience of actual main streets in small towns quite disappointing, if not lacking" (Gottdiner 259). In this case, the fake is more real than the original.

Disneyland's Main Street, U.S.A. is not based on anything and should be considered an imaginary street dreamed up by Walt Disney. However, as Gottdiener argues, it could be that hyperreality is interpreted not as hyperreality, but as the truth.

It can be concluded that Baudrillard's hyperreality is the perfect way to describe the way Disneyland uses its themed environments to its advantage. It emerges visitors in a hyperreality of American history and similar themed areas such as Adventureland. The places and events that are portrayed in Disneyland may have never existed or happened, but the message is conveyed in such a way that it does feel real.

Chapter 3. Designing Disneyland Paris: America Packaged for France

Disneyland Paris underwent many changes to accommodate the French audience. As I will illustrate in this chapter, Imagineers went out of their way to create an entirely unique Disneyland Park, while still retaining the original spirit and vision that Walt Disney had many decades ago. All these changes were made to accommodate the French audience, but as the end of this chapter will show, changing the appearance of the park was not enough to convince visitors.

3.1 Main Street, U.S.A.

When entering a Disney park, guests are greeted by the traditional American turn-of-the-century town that is Main Street, U.S.A.. As the name suggests, the entrance to Disneyland Park is to be seen as quintessential American. Walt Disney specifically had chosen this as an entrance for the park as it would provide a "mood setting" (Francaviglia 70). Guests are immediately transported back in time and enter a world of nostalgia.

The Imagineers struggled with this particular themed area, fearing the French would be put off by an entrance so typically American-looking. However, they concluded that it would work nevertheless. Firstly, they noted that since "the region had nothing similar to a Gilded Age American-style townscape, such a place promised to be unique and charming against the backdrop of Paris" (Lainsbury 53). Main Street, U.S.A. was the visitor's first experience with an American form of hyperreality.

Secondly, the Imagineers surmised that, even though the French guests might dislike America, anyone was persuaded by the optimism and energy of the small town character of Main Street, U.S.A.. In the end, they felt that the upbeat look of the entrance would not be threatening (Lainsbury 53). While it might be American, it did not look like contemporary America at all. Instead, visitors were presented with an American town that was steeped in history. The Imagineers found that this would result in French audiences being able to relate easily.

Walt Disney's vision of the original Main Street, U.S.A. was to capture a sense of nostalgia where he offered the guests an idealized hyperreal past of the small town life which he portrayed with the theme of 1900s town. Main Street, U.S.A. was supposed to be "a protest against the contemporary city [...] and the suburb where

many sought sociability, but often found status seeking and a car culture that impeded the neighborliness that presumably prevailed in the small towns of the past" (Cross 181). Once again, Disney countered the image of the city presented in pleasure places like Coney Island, which had that distinct city look.

Various scholars such as Francaviglia have noted that Main Street, U.S.A. has specifically been based on Walt Disney's own memories of his hometown of Marceline. However, Deborah Phillips argues that the imagery of nostalgia and wonder that is conveyed through that themed area goes much further than Disney's own boyhood memories. She stated, "its *mise-en-scène* is a mediation of a version of community that was already well established in the popular American memory, and which also extended beyond Walt's personal history" (31). That same sense of nostalgia that Disney wanted to find in Main Street, U.S.A. could be found by anyone entering. This was also due to the fact that the street does not represent a street from one town in particular, as is the case with hyperreality. While it might be based on Disney's hometown, Main Street, U.S.A. had a very ambiguous look. It was essentially "and idealized construction of a small-town America that never was" (Phillips 32). Main Street, U.S.A. was not just the entrance to Disneyland; it was supposed to be a place that would immediately capture a sense of longing to something visitors would have dreamed of when they were children. Main Street, U.S.A. managed to capture that child-like wonder Disney aimed for right from the very beginning in a hyperreal setting.

Imagineers captured that sense of history by steeping the street into a prolific moment of American time when the country was in transition. Main Street, U.S.A. in Paris would capture that time America was about to be introduced to electricity. New inventions were arising everyday, which allowed the street to be full of little details referring back to that. The Imagineers worked hard to "heighten the entertainment value of this themed region for Europeans seeking a taste of turn-of-the-century American dynamism" (Lainsbury 54).

To combat the French perception that America was highly shallow in comparison to the rich French culture, Imagineers made a Main Street, U.S.A. as detailed as never before. Billboards were placed on top of building (which cannot be found on any other Main Street, U.S.A.'s) that advertised typical American products of that time.

In Fig. 1 you will see the boutique of Main Street Motors, a store that sells

Disney-themed clothing but has a backstory of being a garage-type of building. The exterior is covered with billboards, advertising world famous American brands such as Coca Cola, but also other restaurants situated in the same themed area. Main Street, U.S.A. is thus very detailed. Behind every single window a story is being told, whether that of a dentist pulling a tooth of a client, or that of someone being taught the piano (with audio included). Main Street, U.S.A. would feel alive. It is not supposed to be an empty shell or a facade. The street is supposed to feel like a real street, with real people living behind every window. The plan was that it would not matter where a guest would look, they would see something different, new, and unique every single time, on every single visit.

What is perhaps the most exclusive element of Euro Disney's Main Street, U.S.A. is the development of covered arcades at either side of the street. Intended to shelter the guests from the possibly harsh French weather, the two arcades are richly detailed with original props and even working gas lanterns that would provide the guests with some warmth. The arcades are given the name 'Liberty' and 'Discovery' Arcade, the first focusing on the Statue of Liberty, the French gift to the United States. This is seen in Fig. 2, a photograph that featured the middle section of the arcade. The decorative walls inform the visitors of the history of the Statue of Liberty. The arcade is decorated to American taste, with red-white-and-blue banners hanging from the ceiling and a general 1900s architecture style. The second arcade harbors an exhibition on inventions. Many showcase windows feature models and sketches made during the 19th century that were in possession of the U.S. Patent Office. Once again, this arcade has a very American theme, with large posters covering the walls, which depict American cities of the future.

In the end, the Imagineers created a Main Street, U.S.A. that was able to retain its American image, while accommodating to the French audience at the same time.

3.2 Frontierland

Depicting the history and grandeur of the Wild West, Frontierland could face a similar problem as Main Street, U.S.A. in regard to the theme being very 'American'. The second themed area of the park was to create a sense of coherence in regards to theme. It was another 'land' dedicated to American history, and in the development stages of the park Imagineers decided to refer to it as 'Westernland'. They reverted back to the original name after learning through market research that not only the

French, but also Europeans in general were very much interested in the 'Frontier' (Lainsbury 57).

Several changes were still made to ensure the themed area would meet French expectations of the Wild West. While general attractions, restaurants, and shops stayed the same in regard to the original idea, the names were often changed to suit the French park. Examples include The River of America, which was now called Rivers of the Far West, and the Diamond Horseshoe restaurant was renamed to the Lucky Nugget Saloon. This ensured that "the fun nomenclature [would] evoke movie images of the Wild West and invited people of all linguistic backgrounds to participate in Euro Disneyland's fantasy of the American frontier life through the simple act of pronunciation" (Lainsbury 58). Frontierland was adapted so the French view of the Wild West would coincide with what they would find in the Disney Parks.

In order for the guests to feel American exoticism, the traditional Mississippi valley background landscape of Frontierland was replaced with the desert colors of the Great Southwest, putting a link to the great western movies such as *Duel in the Sun*, *Bonanza*, and *High Noon* that the French seemed to love and identify with (Lainsbury 58). To enhance that feeling even further, the background music played in the area consisted of the great western themes scored by, for example, Dmitri Tiomkin. The area emerged visitors in their own hyperreal western fantasy, complete with a picture perfect backdrop and cinematic score. This is illustrated in Fig. 3, which features the focal point of the themed area; Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, an island right in the middle of the Rivers of the Far West. For decades people had been watching John Wayne westerns, which evoked a certain image people had with the Wild West, and this red desert mountainous backdrop coincides with that image.

The Imagineers adapted Frontierland to the point of what the French imagined it to be like, which meant they also included a specific area dedicated to Native American and Mexican-American cultures, something France always had been interested in (Lainsbury 59). The Frontier Trading Post was changed to the Pueblo Trading Post, and a new restaurant unique to Euro Disneyland's Frontierland, Fuente del Oro Restaurante, which had a distinct Mexican architectural style, was added, serving popular Tex-Mex dishes.

One of the main attractions in Frontierland besides Big Thunder Mountain is Phantom Manor. This attraction could be considered one of the most extensively redesigned attraction in Euro Disney, changing the complete theme, name, and feel of

its original predecessor in Disneyland, Walt Disney World, and Tokyo Disneyland, where it is located in New Orleans Square, Liberty Square, and Fantasyland respectively. The first two themed areas do not exist in the French variant, and during the development the Imagineers decided that the attraction would fit better in Frontierland where it would continue the theme of a mine town.

Phantom Manor is considerably spookier than its American and Japanese forerunners. This is done with the intention to create a link between French culture and Disneyland. Where the Haunted Mansion looks like a well-kept house, which happened to be possessed by ghosts, Phantom Manor looks like a dilapidated grand Victorian house. On Fig. 4 the Haunted Mansion is showcased, which can be described as a southern plantation style mansion surrounded by landscaped gardens that results in a crisp look. From the outside, the Haunted Mansion does not look daunting or spooky at all. So for Phantom Manor (see Fig. 5) Imagineers took inspiration from "a pastiche of powerful movie images, namely *Psycho* (1960), to create a frightening landmark that would communicate its contents to diverse populations without so much as a word" (Lainsbury 61). From the outside it would immediately become apparent what would wait inside of Phantom Manor, in contrast to the Haunted Mansion where its intentions could be confusing. The manor is dark and gloomy, and while the garden surrounding it can be described as lush, they are somewhat overgrown and unkempt. The manor is simply downright creepy, a theme that the Imagineers have used right down to the exit, where guests return back to Frontierland through a cemetery.

Altogether, Frontierland turned out to be an American hyperreal themed area through and through. From the mine town setting, which depicted life in America on the Frontier, to special areas reserved for the story of Native Americans, the Imagineers did not shy away from using "America" in this themed area. The mysticism of the American West appealed to all audiences, French or not.

3.3 Adventureland

Located next to Frontierland, Adventureland changed in various ways, the first being the size. It was a lot smaller than its American counterparts due to the fact that Frontierland already took up a lot of space. Instead of copying the "the lush, ready jungles of other Adventurelands, which recalled a blend of placed [...] they designed a place that would reflect a new geographical mix" (Lainsbury 63). To make the

themed area more French, the Imagineers added elements which the French would recognize and have a certain affection for. While the lush jungle would still be there, a separate area was designed that represented a Moroccan bazaar as a reflection of French Imperialism. The entrance was styled to imitate a bazaar found in the Middle East, complete with imagery, music, and overarching theme. They added several restaurants which were themed with a specific North African theme as was the classic Disney attraction *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The ride underwent significant changes to make it fit in with the overall theme that the French Adventureland was going for, as well as upgrade the special effects used in the U.S. parks to give the attraction greater realism than its American counterparts (Zuber 73).

However, there were still many landmarks from the U.S. parks present. The Skull Rock, Adventure Isle, the Explorer Club restaurant (which was later renamed to Colonel Hathi's Pizza Outpost; a nod to *The Jungle Book*). Everything considered, Adventureland still had that distinct adventure-theme, but the Imagineers managed to capture the French sense of the orient easily by designing specialized new walkthroughs and themed areas.

2.4 Fantasyland

At first glance it might look like Fantasyland underwent any changes. This is, however, not true. The Imagineers realized that most classic Disney films were based on European fairytales. While the geographical heritage of those stories did not matter much in the U.S. parks, they noted that it would in Europe. As then Euro Disney president Robert Fitzpatrick explained: "Europe isn't North America. It seemed appropriate and politically astute to understand that Pinocchio was an Italian boy, Peter Pan used to fly out of London, and Cinderella was a French girl" (qtd. in Lainsbury 67). By acknowledging this, Fantasyland changed into a European showcase of traditional fairytales. Unlike the American guests, the European guests were knowledgeable on the history of the original narrative sources (Brannen 612). Children grew up with stories of Hans Christian Andersen, to them, Disney appropriated their own stories, and the logical response would thus be recognizing this appropriation.

This resulted in Fantasyland being divided into several separate sections, which recognized the separate countries of which the original fairytales came from. The attractions itself were not changed much, but the themed environment they were

placed in was altered. The shop you entered after leaving the Pinocchio ride was called La Bottega di Gepetto. The restaurant near Peter Pan's Flight served the English-favorite fish and chips. Cinderella's own restaurant was called L'Auberge de Cendrillon, and the carousel ride revolved around the legend of Lancelot. Another section was dedicated to the Dutch, where the Old Mill served not only as an attraction based on a windmill, but also a small tea shop.

The hardest task that came with designing Fantasyland was the castle, the statement piece of each and every Magic Kingdom park. While they had duplicated Walt Disney World's castle for Tokyo Disneyland, the Imagineers were against such a thing, especially since the American castles were based on traditional European castles. The same strategy could not work in France; a country where castles were a regular occurrence. While Americans would be enchanted by a European-style castle, the French would not be. The Imagineers had to design something so out of the ordinary, even the French visitors who were so used to seeing these structures had to be impressed.

In the end they settled on a castle based on the Sleeping Beauty film. While the film features a castle in one of the shots, they decided to design something even more radical, and "it brought to life the artistic style of the animated classic, capturing its tone of abstract beauty and mystery with warm colors, drastically razored trees, and a [...] dragon hidden in the darkened dungeon below" (Lainsbury 71). The French would not settle for a copy of one of their own castles. They needed more than that, which resulted in a one-of-a-kind castle full of details that the American castles did not have.

All in all, Fantasyland was designed as a celebration of fairytales that lauded European heritage and paid homage to the history of them.

3.5 Discoveryland

The final themed area, which underwent the most radical changes, was Discoveryland. In the American parks, the area even had a different name, namely Tomorrowland, which presented the Space-Age look of 'tomorrow'. The problem with this was that times were changing fast, and what might look modern and futuristic one day, could look old and dated the other year (Lainsbury 72). To solve this problem, the Imagineers gave the area an entirely different theme, which also presented them with the opportunity to add more European historical heritage to

Disneyland Paris.

Instead of focusing on the notion of ‘tomorrow’, Imagineers decided to focus on the past representation of ‘tomorrow’ by theming the area to the visions of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Leonardo da Vinci, thus adding a very distinct European concept to Discoveryland.

Several new attractions were added to ensure the vision the Imagineers had, and a few years later the completely redesigned Space Mountain would serve as the main eye-catcher of the area. Where the rollercoaster had a very stark white look in the American parks, the French version continued with the Jules Verne theme, giving the rollercoaster a very distinct and detailed look.

The two rollercoasters can be seen in Fig. 6 and Fig. 7. The main difference that is immediately striking is the amount of details. The whiteness of the American version is contrasted by the immensely detailed version of the French. The U.S. Space Mountain looks ambiguous in time period and place, while the French Space Mountain is a clear reference to Jules Verne’s *From The Earth to the Moon*. The Imagineers especially went out of their way to create a more detailed version of the ride, completing its new theme by adding a backstory, which coincides with the Jules Verne theme of space travel. It is also the only Space Mountain-version in the world where guests are shot straight into space with a cannon (Columbiad Cannon), incorporating the story even more in its design.

A new attraction created especially for Disneyland Paris was Le Visionarium, a 360-degree theater where one was taken on a sky tour of Europe throughout history. The guests were flying past scenes such as the depiction of Leonardo Da Vinci’s workshop; a performance by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; and the construction of the Eiffel Tower. The United States had a similar version to this attraction, however, there, guests were taken on a voyage of the United States, rather than a journey that showed several of Europe’s key historical figures and places. Actors Michel Piccoli and Jeremy Irons played Jules Verne and H.G. Wells respectively. Gérard Depardieu also had a role, and notably most of the characters spoke in their native language, thus not erasing their heritage (Zuber 74). The attraction closed on September 1, 2002, creating space for a new Toy Story-themed ride.

Discoveryland represents the philosophy of the Imagineers. It adds European and French heritage to a distinct American park in a way that everything still works and the original message is still retained.

3.6 Hotels

If there was one particular place that embraced America like Main Street, U.S.A. and Frontierland, it was the hotel district. To accommodate the visitors during their vacations, the Imagineers developed a hotel district with 5,200 rooms. It was complete with brand new hotels found in no other Disney parks.

By theming the hotels to the same standard as the park itself, the Imagineers made sure the fantasy of being in a Disney park would not be lost once returned to the hotel. The Disneyland Hotel, the most expensive one of the seven hotels that were constructed, served as the main entrance to Disneyland Park. It was the only hotel that did not receive an American theme as the Victorian architecture fitted better as an entrance to Main Street, U.S.A.

The other hotels were themed to distinct areas in the United States, spanning a range from East to West. The beauty of the Big Apple inspired Hotel New York. Hotel Sequoia Lodge portrayed the adventure of Yellowstone and Yosemite national parks. The Newport Bay Club had the clear-cut look of New England, and Hotel Cheyenne and Hotel Santa Fe celebrated the American West. Finally, the Davy Crockett Ranch situated just outside of the resort glorified the frontier (Lainsbury 72).

While the French were infamous for disliking anything American, the Imagineers took a gamble and themed the hotels to American architectural styles. They concluded that once a guest was interested in visiting Disneyland, they would be interested in American culture as well.

3.7 Failure, Still

Even after all these changes, the Disney executives made mistakes that ended up to be costly. Pells argued that merely cosmetic alterations alone were not enough to save a park that made a loss of \$1.5 billion in its first three years (312). What they failed to understand was French culture, and this went a lot deeper than merely visually. As Curwen argued, why would the French visit a park with a 'fake' castle when they could visit an authentic one around the corner? Another question that developers should have asked was why guests would go to Disneyland Paris at all, if the "real thing" was in Florida? Not only would there be guaranteed better weather in the sunny state, but the trip down to the States would provide visitors with a long, out of the country holiday, rather than a two day theme park visit that eventually would end up

costing as much as a week down the sea.

European guests did not behave like American guests, and this surprised the executives. As Trigg stated, "Americans are noted for their individualistic traits which eschew regimentation with constricting rules and regulations [while] French society is characterized by a greater dependence of the average citizen on hierarchy and rules (15). This difference became clear in several different ways, the first being that the response to the climate was different than in America. The weather in Europe, and especially France, was a lot harsher than in California or Florida. The French did not visit theme parks during the wintertime, where they often did not go on holiday at all, and if they did they went south to find better weather. Other European theme parks closed down their parks for a couple of months during the winter, something that Disneyland was not used to.

The second difference was cultural. The French preferred to spend their summer holiday away from home at a relatively inexpensive inn where they could be for a couple of weeks. They did not prefer to splurge out to spend a mere four days hobbling through a theme park when they could relax by the sea somewhere in Southern France instead (Pells 311). Another cultural difference was the French's lack of flexibility. Michael Eisner was particularly surprised by the "refusal to be whimsical about schedules or to snack during the day as Americans did" (Pells 311). This led to long queues for attractions and restaurants could barely cope with the amount of guests getting their lunch or dinner at the same time. The fact that alcohol was prohibited in the parks came as a shock to the French. The ban on alcohol is regarded as normal in America, but for the French a glass of wine was an essential part of their meal (Trigg 21). D'Hautesserre stated in her article "when asked whether Europeans would stand in line in the cold, Disney executives replied with, 'The Japanese do'" (302). The French (and Europeans) did not behave like the Americans or the Japanese. The Disney executives did not take this into account and just assumed their park would safely work in another continent like it had done for Japan (D'Hautesserre 302). Their disregard to French culture proved to be one of their biggest mistakes.

Finally, the economy did not work in their favor either. Europe was just going through one of its worst recessions and due to all the different currencies in Europe, the park was disproportionately expensive for some countries such as Italy (Curwen). The guests also spent less on souvenirs and food as they had expected. To save the

park from its downfall, they lowered prices and eventually, put French executives in charge, and more guests seemed to flow in (Pells 312). Besides the decrease in prices, Europeans were skeptical of the park in the beginning, and they needed persuasion before they would believe the park is not as plastic and fake as they thought it to be.

The Imagineers worked hard to rework many traditional elements of Disneyland, creating almost a new park specifically for Paris. They had hoped these changes would be enough to convince the French and ensure the success of the park. Through theming they presented the guests with a hyperreality they had never seen before. Imagineers paid special attention to French and European heritage, making sure the guests would recognize their own history in the park. However, many still continued to view Disneyland Paris as an American creation, even though many of the elements of the park were based on French and European history.

Discussion

Almost 25 years later, Disneyland Paris still cannot be considered a success. In 2014, the parent company Euro Disney had to ask The Walt Disney Company for a €1 billion emergency rescue to not go under (Neate). To make a profit, the park has to welcome about 15 million visitors annually, a number which they struggle to attract (Pozzebon). They also had some setbacks as the park was forced to close for four days following the terrorist attacks in Paris, losing revenue since the park is open 365 days a year. Even though the park made many changes to secure its success, the park continues to make a loss. Especially in comparison to its American and Asian counterparts, Disneyland Paris could be seen as a failure.

One of the mistakes that were made was the disregard to European culture. While the 'copy and paste' technique worked out tremendously in Japan, Disney executives were completely wrong to assume that this would ensure success in France as well, which was why the parks needed to change so much in appearance. They did not take into account the apparent French indifference to American culture and failed to see that even though American and French cultures seem alike, there are major differences between them. The French did not behave like the Japanese or the Americans, and the fact that this came as a surprise showed the lack of research that went in the development of the park.

In an early attempt to perhaps save Disneyland Paris, the Imagineers started to develop plans to create what would be the most detailed and unique Disney Park among them all. The thoroughly American park was toned down to incorporate French and European elements, such as the classic fairytales Europeans grew up with and the incorporation of French colonial heritage. The park had to appeal to a skeptical audience. It needed to offer something the French guests had never seen before. Disneyland had to work harder to convince the French of its hyperreal setting than any other Disney Park. Fairytale castles are not unique to the park like they are in the United States. These castles could be found all over France, which meant the Imagineers had to take special caution in creating a castle that even the French had never seen before.

That is where the concept of hyperreality tied in. The French had to believe in this alternate reality presented by the Imagineers in the form of a Disney Park. They constructed a themed environment based on something entirely new, and this was

where Disneyland Paris fell short. The hyperreality of America as presented by Disney would be taken as a 'real' reality by the French. What they failed to see was a hyperreal park, which was at its root based on nothing. What they were truly seeing was a park based on America.

The French did not think highly of American culture, and the Disney brand was closely associated with that notion. American culture could never equate to their own culture, which was steeped in years of history. The French did exactly that which Pells argued against. America and Europe, or France in this case, cannot be compared. French culture is original, rooted in years of tradition. American culture can be seen as an adaptation, perhaps even a creolization, of many cultures, and thus cannot be compared to French culture. Still, the French compared and dismissed Disneyland Paris, which ultimately was its downfall.

Limitations

There were some limitations to my research that had to be mentioned. The first had to be the fact that the true opinion of the French, back then and today, was very hard to measure. I had gathered some general opinions from 1992 when the park opened its gates, but it was very hard to compile concrete information about the general response towards the park today. I had used statistics of the amount of annual visitors to draw conclusions about what the reaction towards Disneyland Paris could be today. What was lacking on this part is empirical research that would measure the opinions of the French.

Another limitation was that most of the articles that can be found in peer-reviewed journals were mainly about the parks in the United States. Disneyland Paris is a relatively 'new' park, so it has not garnered as much attention as its American counterparts. This can lead to some confusion, as both the American and French parks have many similar themed environments of which it could be assumed that theory on the American parks could easily be applied to the French parks. This resulted in the same problem about which this thesis is about; the Disney Parks on the different continents cannot simply be transferred and exchanged without taking into regard the culture it resides in.

Future projects

There are many future projects that could be linked to this thesis. As I mentioned

before, it would be very interesting to concretely measure the French sentiments towards Disneyland Paris using empirical research. Another very interesting development is the newest Disney Park: Shanghai Disneyland. Where Disneyland Paris took some steps back from the original design, Shanghai goes even further. The Chinese variant is almost unrecognizable as a traditional Disney Park. This can be related to the fact that the Chinese people did not grow up with Walt Disney films like America and Europe did. How does Disney transfer their park to a culture that is not familiar with their films or brand?

Another possible option would be to tie the Dutch theme park of the Efteling to the original Disneyland in Anaheim. The Efteling opened in 1952, three years before Disneyland opened in the United States. Did Walt Disney take inspiration from the Efteling, or perhaps the other way around? In what ways did the two parks influence each other over the years? Both theme parks have a distinct fairytale aspects and it would be very interesting to see how they compare.

Final conclusion

This thesis presents the way culture cannot simply be transferred from one country to another. It might work in some special cases, such as Tokyo Disneyland, but ultimately success seems to be culturally dependent. Disneyland Paris seemed to be doomed from the start. It was met with criticism and even today it cannot be compared to the other Disney Parks in terms of success. What I would like to argue is that Disneyland, as a form of hyperreality, can be interpreted in many ways, including an incorrect way, which is what the French did. They do not love the park for its inflated sense of America. Hyperreality is a difficult case to transfer to another culture. The French interpret it differently than the Americans do in their own parks. They seem to fail to let go of the sense that all of it comes from America. In my opinion, aside from economical reasons, this is Disneyland Paris's downfall. The Imagineers did everything they could to present the French with their best version of Disney hyperreality they could offer, and sadly, the French failed to understand it.

Appendix



Fig. 1. Main Street Motors om Main Street, U.S.A. Digital image. *Disney-pal.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 June 2016.



Fig. 2. Liberty Arcade on Main Street, U.S.A. Digital image. *Paradise Found Around*. N.p., 5 Jan. 2015. Web. 14 June 2016.



Fig. 3. Big Thunder Mountain in Disneyland Paris. Digital Image. *Disney Parks Wiki*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 June 2016.



Fig. 4. The Haunted Mansion in Disneyland Anaheim. Digital image. *The Enchanted Manor*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 June 2016.



Fig. 5. Lopez, Sergi. Phantom Manor in Disneyland Paris. Digital image. *Panoramio*. N.p., 6 May 2008. Web. 14 June 2016.



Fig. 6. Space Mountain in Disneyland Paris. Digital image. *Pinterest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 June 2016.



Fig. 7. Space Mountain in Disneyland, Anaheim. *Tourist Plans*. N.p., 7 May 2013. Web. 14 June 2016.

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