

THE IMMERSIVE THEME PARK

Analyzing the Immersive World of the Magic Kingdom Theme Park



JOOST TER BEEK (S4155491)
MASTERTHESIS CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
Radboud University Nijmegen
Supervisor: C.C.J. van Eecke
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Summary

The aim of this graduation thesis *The Immersive Theme Park: Analyzing the Immersive World of the Magic Kingdom Theme Park* is to try and understand how the Magic Kingdom theme park works in an immersive sense, using theories and concepts by Lukas (2013) on the immersive world and Ndalianis (2004) on neo-baroque aesthetics as its theoretical framework. While theme parks are a growing sector in the creative industries landscape (as attendance numbers seem to be growing and growing (TEA, 2016)), research on these parks seems to stay underdeveloped in contrast to the somewhat more accepted forms of art, and almost no attention was given to them during the writer's Master's courses, making it seem an interesting choice to delve deeper into this subject. Trying to reveal some of the core reasons of why the Disney theme parks are the most visited theme parks in the world, and especially, what makes them so immersive, a profound analysis of the structure, strategies, and design of the Magic Kingdom theme park using concepts associated with the neo-baroque, the immersive world and the theme park is presented through this thesis, written from the perspective of a creative master student who has visited these theme parks frequently over the past few years, using further literature, research, and critical thinking on the subject by others to underly his arguments. The Magic Kingdom theme park is analysed through four chapters, each chapter focusing on a different neo-baroque aesthetic that comes back in the theme park's structures, strategies, and design that could be regarded as an immersive quality of the parks: the theme park's labyrinthine structure, the illusion and the machine's evoking these illusions present at the theme park, intertextuality in the souvenir, and the theme park as a series and as part of a series being the main foci of this analysis. Each of these different aesthetics seems to come back in many different forms in the theme park, both literally as metaphorically, depending on how these aesthetics are interpreted, revealing the complex ways in which the theme park could be interpreted as an immersive space. The author recommends further research towards the interpretation of the Magic Kingdom as an immersive space through qualitative and quantitative research towards the guests' perception of the park, as this subject stays underdeveloped in this thesis; the park itself is the main case study of this research, how guests interpret it stays a subject that is further researchable.

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Introduction

Amusement and theme parks all around the world attract an immense amount of visitors these days. The results of a research into amusement parks, theme parks and museums attendance undertaken in 2016 by the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) show that the top 25 amusement and theme parks alone were visited by approximately 235.6 million visitors. For a relatively mature industry, it is remarkable to see that the worldwide attendance numbers for amusement and theme parks are still growing each year (attendance numbers of the top 25 amusement/theme parks around the world have risen with 26.3% between 2006 and 2015, and these attendance numbers have risen with 5.4% between 2014 and 2015 alone), while for instance the worldwide attendance numbers of museums are currently stagnating (attendance numbers of the top 20 museums worldwide have dropped with 0.7% between 2014 and 2015) (TEA, 2016). While this does not necessarily mean that one of the two sectors is more important than the other one, it does show that the theme park industry is a creative industry that is not subordinated to other creative industries, and should therefore be further analyzed and improved by scholarly attention on technical, economical, as well as cultural levels.

With all four of the Walt Disney World resort theme parks in the top 10 of the list of the 25 most visited amusement and theme parks in the world of 2015 (and two of the Disney group's other theme parks also featured in this top 10), the Disney theme parks seem to be the leaders of the theme park landscape worldwide (TEA, 2016). Disney theme parks themselves and the stories they tell through all sorts of different aspects of the parks have a lot to do with fantasy and the unreal, with both a nostalgic attitude towards the past as well as a longing for the future (or a nostalgic attitude to what ideas about the future used to be in the past), and with all sorts of different cultures from far-away and exotic countries. The so-called Disney Imagineers, which are the designers and creators of all the different experiences in the Disney theme park, such as rides, shows, restaurants and the theming of the lands, try to create an atmosphere in the Disney theme parks that should feel as real as possible to the visitors, by using all sorts of visual elements, different techniques, and special effects.

While there has been written a lot about them, most of the research done on theme parks focuses largely on a critique of their form, on the role of simulation in an image-focused society (Baudrillard, 1988; Bryman, 2004; Eco, 1986; Gottdiener, 2001; Rodaway, 1994; Sorkin, 1992). This means that at this moment, we know a lot of ways to be critical about theme parks (and of our society), while we only have limited understanding of why these parks are so popular and beloved by many. For instance, some cultural critics (Baudrillard, 1988; Eco, 1986) regard theme parks as inauthentic places, either because they are seen as replacements of real experiences or places, or because they cannot be linked to the actual place where a movie or series was filmed, and therefore have a purpose and design that is almost exclusively commercial. There are also many culture critics who are critical on certain aspects of the Disney theme parks on their own, as Karel Ann Marling argues in her book *Designing Disney's Theme Parks* (1999). She believes that many critics are overstating and criticizing the parks in a way that does not go further than the 'ordinary conversation', focusing too much on minor elements of the parks (such as decoding its dedication plaque at the entrance of the park) and therefore missing out on what the parks really are about.

Not all critics consider the parks as being exclusively inauthentic places. According to Lukas (2007), themed environments should not be regarded as inauthentic – their authenticity is based on their multi-sensory aspects. The visitors of a theme park know that what they are visiting is fake, but the environment they are a part of can actually feel authentic to them when the environment feels correct on all sensory levels. Some thinkers, such as Clavé (2007), see theme parks as an equivalent to other cultural expressions, such as a painting, a photograph or a film, and should therefore be evaluated as creative productions.

While research has been done on the aesthetics of theme parks and their meaning (Waysdorf and Reijnders, 2016; Milman, 2013), most of this research never reaches the point of how these aesthetics can create an immersive experience. There has been done research that actually takes the subject of immersion at a theme park as the main subject of analysis, but this research is not about immersive experiences at the Disney theme parks, but about immersive experiences at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter area at Universal Studios Orlando (Waysdorf and Reijnders, 2016). This research analyzes the visitors' experience of an immersive space through interviews with the visitors of the park, but does not truly analyze in detail the ways in which the park is designed to create such an experience. A similar research looks at the staged authenticity perceived by the guests of the EPCOT theme park, a theme park that is actually part of the Walt Disney World Resort (Milman, 2013). Here again, the visitors' experience is taken as the starting point, with the research trying to distill the way in which they experience the park through a questionnaire. But as I believe there are inherent qualities to theme parks that I believe are important to create such an immersive experience, I want to find out in what ways it is tried to create such an experience through certain choices made in the design of a theme park and their possible outcome.

The theme parks, waterparks, restaurants, and hotels at Walt Disney parks aim to provide a visitor experience that could be regarded as an immersive experience (Lukas, 2013). If holidays are seen as a form of escape out of the normal daily life, a trip to Disney World can be seen as a form of escapism out of reality, into what Baudrillard (1988) would call the simulacrum of the 'Disney Experience'; a form of escapism that cannot be found at many other 'real' holiday destinations (although it could be argued that many holiday destinations nowadays have followed the Disney theme parks model and create more or less a simulacrum of what certain tourists would like to see at a certain tourist destination). As Umberto Eco (1986) and Jean Baudrillard (1988) have argued before, the Disneyland Park can be regarded as an example of hyperreality, which means that in the Disneyland Park, the audience does not perceive the fake anymore as an imitation, even if the audience knows that everything they see is fake. In this sense, the fake becomes a reality. The Disney theme parks attain this hyperreality in various ways, including the theming and architectural style of its 'lands' and rides, the food they serve in their restaurants, the merchandise they sell in their stores and the music they play throughout the park. Through visiting the theme park, guests can get the feeling as if they are in another world, which can be a purely fictional fantasy world, a representation of an exotic far-away country, or a representation of the world in a certain different time-frame, of how the world looked in the past.

There are many ways in which this kind of other-worldly experience can be created, and there are many different aspects of a theme park that play a role in the creation of an immersive experience, and it is through this thesis that I want to analyze in what ways this is done at the Disney theme parks, as I believe that every theme park does this in their own, different way. Therefore, my research question will be the following:

What different aspects related to the structure, strategies and design of the Disney theme parks help in the creation of what could be considered an immersive world at these theme parks, and how do these different aspects work?

Method

Because it is not possible to analyze all the different Disney theme parks that exist all over the world throughout this thesis, I have made the decision to choose one of the many Disney theme parks as my main case study for this analysis, applying an intensive approach to the research of this phenomenon of immersion (Swanborn, 2010, p. 2). The case study will focus on the strategies which are being used at that theme park to try and create an immersive experience at that theme park

(Swanborn, 2010, p. 7), which I will try to distill by analyzing the park as a visual text, focusing on the space, theming, decoration, and structure of the park, which are all aspects of the park that I believe to play an important role in the evocation of an immersive experience felt at the theme park.

As the main subject of this thesis, I have chosen the Magic Kingdom park at the Walt Disney World resort, because this is the most visited theme park in the world (TEA, 2016). This aspect on its own already makes this theme park an interesting case study, as this theme park has been a part of more people's holidays, and therefore more people's lives, than other theme parks around the world, and should therefore be regarded as one of the most important parks in the theme park landscape. But next to that, I also believe that the attention to detail that is present at this theme park and the ways in which they try to create a certain overall immersive experience at this theme park are important to understand why it is exactly this theme park that is so popular, and I find it therefore interesting to analyze in what ways this certain immersive experience is created at this theme park. I have visited this theme park four times over the last twelve years of my life, and my interest and feelings of immersion when visiting this theme park have made this into the subject of this thesis, as I was interested in finding out the complexity behind the immersive experience created in this theme park.

This thesis brings together elements of autoethnographic research of my own experiences at the Magic Kingdom theme park, literature studies and case studies on the Magic Kingdom theme park in itself, as well as on the representation of this theme park through the internet and other media, in order to try and understand how such an immersive world is created at the Disney theme parks. In order for me to analyze the Magic Kingdom theme park, I will make use of theories by Lukas (2013) on immersive worlds, theories by Ndalians (2004) on neo-baroque aesthetics, and theories by other thinkers that further explain Lukas' and Ndalians' theories and concepts, which I believe can be helpful in explaining in what ways an immersive experience is being created at this (and other) theme park(s). I will explain these concepts further in my analysis of several aspects of the Magic Kingdom theme park. In my analysis, I will use these concepts as a tool to try and understand the different experiences that can participate in while at the Magic Kingdom, such as for example the different rides or live shows, which will be my case studies. The subjects of the chapters will be used to analyse the theme parks, and in thinking through these subjects, the important and interesting cases in which these subjects come back in aspects of the Magic Kingdom theme park will be explained and discussed.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will focus on the labyrinthine structure of the Magic Kingdom theme park and its rides. Because I believe that the overall experience felt at the theme park, for instance while walking around the park and exploring it, plays a major part in the overall immersive experience that could be felt at the theme park, this chapter will focus on the theme park from both a bird's eye-view as from a guests eye-view, on the way in which park is structured and mapped, using both Lukas' (2013) components of an immersive space, as Doob's (1992) and Ndalians' (2004) ideas about the labyrinth, as I will explain that both the multi-cursal labyrinthine structure of the park as well as the uni-cursal labyrinthine structure of many of the rides, such as the Pirates of the Caribbean dark ride or the Haunted Mansion dark ride, can ensure for an immersive experience. In the second chapter, I will focus on the ways in which illusions and machines (Ndalians, 2004; Lukas, 2008) can ensure for an immersive environment, focusing on the many ways in which certain sensory experiences are created at the park, and the ways in which the Imagineers at the Magic Kingdom try to create an experience that seems real, while actually being totally fake. This chapter will focus more or less on the different techniques that are being used to create a certain experience, such as those used in dark rides, roller coasters and 3D rides and shows. In the third chapter, I will focus on the ways in which the souvenir could be understood as an extension of the experience had at the park into the domestic sphere, through such concepts as intertextuality

(Claes, 2011) and intimacy (Cardell, 2016). In my last chapter, I will focus on the Magic Kingdom theme park as part of the bigger picture, as I believe the park is part of a series, as well as a series on its own. I will explain why a serial tendency, one of the neo-baroque aesthetics (Ndalianis, 2004), could be regarded as an immersive quality, and how the Magic Kingdom park being part of a series as well as being a series on its own can ensure for a more immersive experience at the park.

Theoretical framework

Immersion

While the *immersion* of an individual into something could be understood in many different ways, all have to do with a certain plunging or dipping of the individual into a certain other subject or thing (Lukas, 2016, p. 115). This plunging or dipping into what could be understood as a cultural object in the case of cultural studies, could also translate more precisely into the etymologic meaning of the word, of it being the 'absorption in some interest' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2018). In contemporary culture, the word *immersive* (which is derived from the word *immersion*) has got a new meaning, as a certain quality of certain spaces that involve a participatory element (Rose, 2011) that plays a role in their structure and design, but also in their reception, and involve taking a guest and 'placing that person directly within the given (and typically symbolically marked) context of those spaces' (Lukas, 2016, p. 115). How a certain immersive quality of the space is created is up to the designer of that space, and has to do with an attention to such aspects of the space as its narrative, focus of storytelling, technology, social media, and many other manners of material, media, and performative culture.

How the immersion of a guest in an immersive space should actually be understood, is open to debate, and is also the reason why different meanings of this term can become criticized quite easily (Lukas, 2016, p. 119). Because a guest can never be immersed totally in a place in an existential sense, because there will always be a divide between the individual and the surroundings in which the individual is situated in, total immersion in its literal meaning could and should be a concern not worth striving for. The fact that an immersive space is emblematic of simulation in itself and therefore could be considered inauthentic, also makes total immersion of the guest in its surrounding a debatable and problematic subject. The economic, political, and other hegemonic intentions that may lie behind almost every immersive space, also may implicate that a total immersion of the guest in its surroundings is not quite desirable, instead almost a negative thing. Therefore, immersion should be understood in a different sense, in order to see the subject of *immersion* in a less critical sense that does not place the many visitors of these places on a pedestal that would make them seem like unmindful beings. For the guest to be immersed in its surroundings, does not mean that the guest should necessarily forget that he or she is in a commercial immersive environment. The guest therefore can fluctuate between different states of mind: the guests can participate in its immersive surroundings, and so to say, believe in the illusions that this space invokes, but can also take a step back while experiencing an immersive space, and realize that the environment is a construction. The guest could be understood as being in the midst of things (Tyler, 1995), and not only the creator of the environment is therefore the reason behind one's immersion in a certain immersive environment: the individual (the guest) itself is complicit in the immersion of the individual as well. This does not mean that certain environments can give tools to the individual that can help to put this individual in a certain mindstate through the already mentioned used narrative, focus of storytelling, technology, social media etc., even when the individual knows that all these aspects are constructed. These different tools of the immersive environment that is the Magic Kingdom theme park, which could be able to put guests of the park in a certain mindstate, of them having the feeling that they are in a different world, will be further analyzed in the different chapters of this thesis.

Immersive worlds

In order for me to explain, and for you as a reader to understand, what I will mean when speaking of an immersive experience that is created at theme parks, an experience that I have felt personally when visiting the Disney theme parks myself, such as the Magic Kingdom theme park at Disney World, I will use definitions and concepts that are brought up by Lukas (2013) in his book *the immersive worlds handbook: designing theme parks and consumer spaces*. Lukas has designed this immersive worlds handbook 'for anyone who wants to know more about immersive worlds and all that they entail and who wants to study some ways to make these worlds more meaningful for the guests who visit them' (Lukas, 2013, p. xi).

Lukas (2013, p. 5) first defines what he sees as a 'world' in itself, to make it possible to explain what he sees as the qualities of an immersive world, and how such an immersive world could be created. He comes with the following definition of a world:

'A world... is a place inhabited by beings. It is complete, diverse, consistent; it has a background or history, and a culture. It is ever-changing or evolving and is characterized by relationships and forms of interconnection.' (Lukas, 2013, p. 5).

This definition of an (immersive) world incorporates aspects of immersive worlds that come back often in practice, while still describing the term in a sense that certain words can be interpreted in a wider sense, not letting certain versions of immersive worlds out of the picture (as there are many kinds of spaces that could be considered immersive, as well as that an immersive space can be either thought of as being in the real world or being a virtual world).

For instance, Lukas (2013, p. 5) uses the word 'beings' when describing that a world is made up of entities, because it can include everybody and everything in a world. In that sense, fictional beings, which for instance can be represented by animatronics that are used in a certain theme park ride, can be interpreted as 'beings', just as actors and guests that play a part in an attraction can be also interpreted as such, making it possible to see very different versions of immersive worlds still as being immersive worlds.

The usage of the words 'complete, diverse, and consistent' shows that Lukas (2013, p. 5) sees an immersive world as something that should not be bland or uninteresting, in a sense that an immersive world should not be designed in such a way that it is too empty and does not speak to the imagination, but that an immersive world should be complex and consistent in that complexity throughout its spaces, just as the 'real' world is.

Lukas (2013, p. 5) adds a similar notion of complexity to his definition of the immersive world by adding the quality of a 'background or history, and a culture' to his definition of the immersive world, making an immersive world not a shallow place, but a place that has a well thought out story attached to it, making it easier for the guests to believe what they are experiencing.

The last quality that Lukas (2013, p. 5) gives to what he defines as an immersive world, is that of it being an ever-changing or evolving entity, making an immersive world a place that is never static, and giving us the possibility to think about change (over time), which is an important aspect of the immersive worlds that are created in theme parks.

In his handbook on the immersive world, Lukas tries to understand how an immersive world is created, and tries to explain ways in which this can be put into practice, which can be useful brainstorming tools for people that are part of the creative process of creating an immersive space. I will explain and use further concepts originating from Lukas' handbook throughout my analysis, such as the concepts of the macro world as opposed to the micro world (and vice versa), the concepts of the theme park as opposed to the amusement park, the components of a space in general, and the elements that an immersive space consists of according to Lukas, to analyze whether the Magic

Kingdom theme park should be considered an immersive space, and in what ways the creators of the park have tried to create immersive experiences at the park.

Linking neo-baroque aesthetics to the concept of the immersive world

In her book *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, Angela Ndalani (2004) analyzes today's media forms by using baroque and neo-baroque aesthetics as a framework. She argues that, as a result of recent technological and economic transformation, neo-baroque aesthetics have emerged again, combining sight, sound and text in ways that parallel seventeenth century baroque forms of art, with the difference that new technology forms are being used. As Ndalani mentions in her introduction to her book, when describing the dramatic changes that entertainment media has underwent in the last two decades at that time: 'Media merge with media, genres unite to produce new hybrid forms, narratives open up and extend into new spatial and serial configurations, and special effects construct illusions that seek to collapse the frame that separates spectator from spectacle' (Ndalianis, 2004, pp. 2-3). I see a strong parallel between the different aesthetics Ndalani uses to describe what she sees as (neo-)baroque expressions and the different aspects that can be distilled from Lukas' (2013, p.5) definition of an (immersive) world (the latter aspects already explained earlier when defining what should be understood as an immersive world). For example, as Ndalani mentions in her book, neo-baroque aesthetics 'refus[e] to respect the limit of the frame that contains the illusion' (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 25). 'Instead [they] "tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it, to become as one with all its possibilities"' (Focillon 1992, 58; in Ndalani 2004, 25). These sentences could as well be understood as an explanation for 'immersivity' as they are an explanation of the underlying goals and ideologies of neo-baroque aesthetics.

Throughout this thesis, the many different concepts used in Ndalani's book, such as the concepts of the **labyrinth**, the **machine**, the **illusion**, **intertextuality** and the **series**, which are concepts that could be interpreted as tools to create (more) immersive world, are used as tools to try to explain how the different elements of Lukas' immersive world have been realized in the Magic Kingdom theme park. The way in which these concepts can be linked to what Lukas' calls an immersive world, is one of the new findings of this thesis, and is argued below, as every concept that Ndalani (2004) considers one of the neo-baroque aesthetics can be linked to one certain aspect of what Lukas (2013) considers an immersive world. Throughout the analysis of the immersive qualities of the Magic Kingdom theme park, and will be explained further in the different chapters of this thesis, with each chapter focusing on one of the concepts as a tool for the analysis of the Magic Kingdom theme park.

As a concept, the **labyrinth** could be considered one of the different aesthetics that come back often in baroque (and neo-baroque) art (Ndalianis, 2004). This kind of structure could be used by the artist or interpreted by the audience in many different ways, to create a sense of what Ndalani would call 'extravaganze, impetuosity, and virtuosity' (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 7), which are all terms that have been associated with the concept of the baroque since its early beginning; since the times in which concept of the baroque had been conceived, had been elaborated, and had been applied to certain forms of art. One of the ways in which the labyrinth comes back in baroque (and neo-baroque) art is as an aesthetic form, in the way in which an artwork is planned by the artist and/or interpreted by the beholder of the artwork. The aesthetic of the labyrinth structure comes back in artworks originating from the seventeenth century, such as in the mosaic pavement in the Palazzo del Té in Mantua, Italy, of which the planning could be considered an example of a unicursal labyrinth; in the garden of the Château de Versailles, which in its entirety is planned as a multicursal labyrinth; and in the way in which the gaze of the beholder could be considered as being steered by the artist in baroque ceiling paintings, because of the fact that the beholder can take different routes while observing these kind of artworks, due to their complex structure and the multiple narratives

present in its contents (Ndalianis, 2004, pp. 82-85). The concept of the labyrinthine structure as an aesthetic form that can be used to create feelings of the already mentioned extravagance, impetuousness, and virtuosity, due to its complexity in the way in which such a labyrinth is planned, is also very much linkable to one of the aspects of Lukas' (2013, p. 5) immersive world, of it having to be a complex and consistent structure, making the labyrinth the first helpful tool that I will use in my search towards an understanding on how an immersive world is tried to be created at the Magic Kingdom theme park. This concept will be used to analyze the ways in which the park in itself is structured, and the way in which the many rides present in the park are structured, as well as a starting point for searching further academic and/or relevant literature on this concept that is helpful in understanding how the structure of the park can ensure for an immersive experience.

One of the other major aspects of (neo-)baroque aesthetics, according to Ndalianis (2004), is a fascination with **spectacle**, **illusionism**, and the principle of **virtuosity**. She sees an alliance between artist and scientist, leading to a (neo-)baroque aesthetics, as new technologies and ideas on optics on both sides push the boundaries of how human perception works, and how the human perception can be tricked, consciously producing technologies, machines, and other inventions that try to let the boundaries between illusion and reality collapse. A baroque fascination with for example automata (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 248), which are automatic little dolls that can move by themselves after for example winding them up, and a fascination with how these objects work and the illusion that is induced by observing them and seeing them actually move, is something that comes back in contemporary culture through the use of special effects in many forms of art and media, and other techniques that have much to do with the concepts of the spectacle, the illusion and the principle of virtuosity. Similar to the concept of the labyrinth, these three different concepts together could be linked again to a concept that one of the aspects of Lukas' (2013, p.5) immersive world, of it having to contain 'beings' that should feel alive, with these 'beings' not necessarily having to be real human beings, but also for instance robots, or the audience having the feeling as being alive/present in a certain setting, making this also a helpful tool that I will use in my search towards an understanding on how an immersive world is tried to be created at the Magic Kingdom theme park. These concepts will be used to analyze the different ways in which the rides present at the park are designed, as well as a starting point for searching further academic and/or relevant literature on these concepts (in the light of the theme park and the theme park ride) that is helpful in understanding how a different kind of rides can ensure for a different kind of immersive experiences.

As Ndalianis (2004, pp. 71-81) mentions **intertextuality** as one of the aesthetics of the neo-baroque, she sees the concept of intertextuality resembling the already mentioned concept of the labyrinth, as intertextuality can also make a work of art more complex, similar to the complex kind of riddle that a labyrinth actually is (note: while Ndalianis mentions intertextuality as an aesthetic, it could actually be considered a concept which has to do more with the content of a work of art than with its aesthetics). The intertextual element of the neo-baroque is only elaborated on by Ndalianis through contemporary culture: there are no examples given by Ndalianis in her book of seventeenth century works of art in which intertextuality plays a role. This means that Ndalianis actually uses the concept of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the concept of intertextuality, while in my opinion these two concepts are both in their own way important to understand what happens at a theme park (and outside of it). Therefore these two concepts are both set apart in this thesis, as two different aspects of what could be considered neo-baroque aesthetics, especially because the theme park could not only be seen as an architectural, aesthetical work of art with elements of the labyrinth, but also because it could be read as a text that contains meaning in its content (and makes references to other text through intertextuality). It is exactly the concept of intertextuality, that can be tied to a similar notion that Lukas (2013, p. 5) uses when defining what he sees as an immersive world: through intertextuality, a world can be created that has a background or history, and a culture, a

world that can actually be larger than the actual space it takes in. Next to that, intertextuality can make an immersive world less shallow, as by using intertextuality in an immersive space, there is a story attached to the things that can be seen at the immersive space. The concept of intertextuality will be used to analyze the different ways in which souvenirs of the park can be memory inducers of experiences had at the park, and in that sense could be considered inducers of certain immersive experiences in the domestic sphere. Again, similar to the already mentioned neo-baroque aesthetics, the concept of intertextuality will also be used as a starting point for searching further academic and/or relevant literature on this concepts (in the light of the souvenir) that is helpful in understanding how a souvenir could be considered an immersive memory inducer.

The last (neo-)baroque aesthetic that will be used in the analysis of the theme park, is the concept of the **series**. Many baroque artworks reveal a sense of serial logic in the way in which they are planned and/or produced, such as is the case in baroque literature, through for instance the different books written by Cervantes and Tordesillan in the *Don Quixote* series, and through the fact that new technologies, such as printed media, made the production and consumption of texts easier; but this also comes back in baroque art through the more visual arts, such as is the case with artists such as Swanenburgh, who started to produce mass-produced popular images in serial variations, due to altered market conditions in the seventeenth century in which courtly patronage shifted away towards a rise of mercantilism. The serial (or polycentric) aesthetic, an aesthetic that ensures for both a certain sense of repetition as for transformation, is important to understand how (neo-)baroque arts work, and again can be linked to one of Lukas' (2013, p. 5) aspects of the immersive world, of it being an ever-changing and/or evolving entity. This means that immersive worlds should never be static, similar to the fact that the concept of the series stands for a comprehensive story that is ever-changing and/or evolving over time, due to adding new installments to that series over and over again.

An introduction to the Magic Kingdom theme park

The Magic Kingdom theme park was the first theme park that opened at the Walt Disney World Resort, in 1971. Nowadays, this resort is one of the most visited holiday resorts around the world, features three other theme parks, two water parks, a large shopping area, many hotels, and much more to do and explore. The Magic Kingdom theme park is influenced by the original Disneyland park in Anaheim, California, but bigger. While times may have changed, this park is still the park that draws the most yearly visitors of all theme parks around the world. This means that the original vision that Walt Disney saw in his parks, the somewhat utopian, magical, safe, and clean place where families could gather to spend time together, has not lost its charm and appeal to many, and has been well maintained over the years. The park has also gone through many changes, to keep up with the latest trends, technologies, and referencing to the newer creative output of the Walt Disney Company.

The park can be divided into six distinct areas, which are all themed to their appropriate title: Main Street U.S.A., Adventureland, Liberty Square, Frontierland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. One of the parks strengths is the fact that each distinct area maintains its theme throughout the whole area, to its last detail. The park is situated at a large lake, where also four hotels are situated, and its entrance can be reached from its parking lot either by a ferry or a monorail. After entering the park through its entrance, and before leaving the park, guests always have to pass through Main Street U.S.A., with its many souvenir shops and snacks resembling small American town streets. Just like the other areas in the park, this area is themed into the last detail, from its architecture, to the way the people that work in this part of the park are dressed, to the interiors of the buildings, to the snacks that are sold, to its old ragtime music, to its smells of popcorn and hot dogs. In the back of the street, a large castle can be seen, that invites its guests towards it, to take pictures with it. This castle, resembling *Cinderella's* castle from the animated Disney movie with the same name, is a realization of Disney's idea of the "weenie" (Marling, 1997, p. 66), and because of its sheer size, could feel as if it is a real castle, even though it is just décor, scenery for the guest's experience of the park. This is the first instance where fantasy and reality seem to come together at the park, as the designers of the theme park have tried to replicate something out of a fantasy world, a fairytale princesses castle, into reality in a way that it almost seems reality. From the hub-area, people can go to whatever themed area they would like to go first, where all sorts of rides, restaurants, and souvenir shops are situated that stick to the overall theme of the land they are situated in. Many famous attractions are situated at the park, such as the Splash Mountain ride, a log flume ride, in which guests pass through caves, swamps and meadows on a journey along Br'er Rabbit to find his 'Happy place', the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, in which guests board a small barge and pass through many scenes showing the golden age of piracy, or the Peter Pan's Flight ride, in which guests step aboard a magical flying pirate ship to Never Land. Guests of the park might experience all sorts of things during a day at the park, and afterwards might feel as if they have entered another world, due to the fact that the experiences are so immersive and detailed.

Chapter 1: The structure of the Magic Kingdom park

1.1 The labyrinth

The (neo-)baroque concept of the labyrinth is used as a metaphor by some to explain their thoughts on the concept of intertextuality (Doob, 1992; Ndalianis, 2004). This is in Doob's sense because she sees features of the labyrinth back in texts with intertextual qualities and the reading of such texts, features such as enforced circuitousness, disorientation, the idea of planned chaos, the critical choice between two paths, or complexity, and in Ndalianis' sense because she sees a connection between the labyrinth and the concept of the hypertext, a format of texts that consists of hyperlinks, clickable references in computer programs or web based texts, and that originates from more recent times, since the coming of the computer and the internet. But the concept of the labyrinth is not only relatable to theme parks in an abstract, metaphorical, and textual sense (as more on that will be explained in the chapter on intertextuality in the Magic Kingdom): many theme parks can be thought of as labyrinths in themselves because of their structure, and the way in which many rides are created and realized also has to do a lot with a labyrinthine structure present in the design of such rides. As Doob (1992, p. 22) describes in her explanation on what labyrinths actually are, and in which ways they can be related to texts, one of the qualities of the labyrinth is that it can make people feel lost when inside of them, which sounds like a perfect way to create immersivity.

Some of the qualities that Doob (1992, p. 1) assumes in her explanation of the labyrinth, and some of the ways in which she uses the concept of the labyrinth, can be interesting when analyzing the structure of theme parks. First of all, there are two points of view when it comes to labyrinths: there is the maze-walker point of view, which is dynamic in the sense that the maze-walker sees something new every time he or she goes around a corner and explores the maze, and there is the privileged onlooker's point of view, which has a static point of view and has the privilege to know where to go. These two points of view are important when taking into account the Magic Kingdom theme park, as they both come back in the experience of exploring this theme park: the visitors of the park actually take both roles during a day at the park, especially if they visit the park for the first time. Another aspect of the labyrinth, that has close ties to these two different points of view, has to do with the fact that the maze-walker gaze is constructed by what is around him, while the onlooker can see the clear pattern, an overview of the labyrinthine structure. The maze-walker perceives the labyrinth as a path that leads to a goal, and cannot see the parks structure yet, the different paths leading through the park, and the places where the rides are situated (especially when it is a first time visitor), while the onlooker can see the maze as a pattern. In some sense, the onlookers perspective and the creators perspective (the creator of the maze) are very similar to each other, as the creator is actually an onlooker as well.

Another quality of the labyrinth, has to do with a certain complexity and ambiguity between order and chaos: the designer can get fame for designing such a miraculous work of art, leading to a certain worshipping of the virtuoso behind it all (Doob, 1992, p. 24). Especially when the visitor of a maze is tricked by its creator, and therefore feels lost, the creator can be seen as a masterful architect: a similar aspect can be felt at theme parks, as one of the reasons why theme parks are enjoyed and visited so much by many, is because of their quality to make people feel as if they are lost in another world, and therefore have a lot to do with their virtuosity, with how well they are made in the eye of the beholder.

There are two forms of labyrinths, the unicursal and the multicursal labyrinth (Ndalianis, 2004, pp. 81-84). In a unicursal (or monodirectional) labyrinth, the visitor does not have to choose between paths, but these labyrinths let the wanderer take the longest possible linear path through the surface that the labyrinth takes up. This is very similar to the ways in which many theme park rides, such as dark rides, and the many themed waiting line areas that are present at a theme park,

are actually structured: taking in as much of the available space, leading guests on a single path through different rooms and areas, as if they are on a long journey, while the actual area the ride or waiting line takes in might be smaller than how big the guest might feel the area is. In a multicursal (or multidirectional) labyrinth, the visitor needs to make choices between different paths, in order to reach the end of the labyrinth. This comes closer to the experience of walking through a theme park, going from experience to experience. The difference with a stereotypical maze, is that in a theme park, everything is themed, and taking a different path might give the guest different vistas, viewing points, or little details that are present throughout the park, and therefore can give the visitor of the theme park a different experience.

There are not only characteristic differences between a unicursal and a multicursal labyrinth, otherwise they would not both be regarded as labyrinths. There lies an essence in all sorts of labyrinths, as both sorts of labyrinths are designs of planned chaos, which is achieved through the virtuoso of the architect to create an artistic expression that can baffle or dazzle the beholder of the labyrinth (Doob, 1992, p. 52). Next to that, it is important to note, that most labyrinths have a center; a center that contains something that is either valuable or shameful. Labyrinths are sometimes seen as prisons, as something that the maze walker wants to escape when inside, something I want to elaborate on during my analysis, because I believe the opposite happens at Disney theme parks: here, they are prisons of something that the guests might like, something that the guests have chosen to participate in, prisons of a certain 'happy' mindset.

The actual mapping of an area such as a theme park can be examined in several different ways, and can be compared to how the mapping of areas was done in different historical periods. There lies a difference behind what is meant by the mapping of an area, as both the planning of everything that is present in an area, such as for example the roads and paths, buildings, attractions, restaurants, and other experiences at the theme park, could be meant by the mapping of an area, just as the creation of the map of an area and the way in which the creation and elaboration of this map is done, such as its art style and perspective could be meant by the mapping of an area. For instance, Yandell (2012) compares the maps of the Disney theme parks to the maps that were made in medieval times. He explains that, while it is difficult to get actually lost in the parks (lost as in being unable to find one's way), due to the fact that there are maps given at the entrance that tell you which way to go, there have been instances where people in the park felt lost (especially when the parks had just opened in 1955). Next to that, he mentions the fact that some of the rides are intentionally made in such a way that it feels as if you are lost, such as is the case at the Jungle Cruise ride, a ride in which you board a boat that is steered by a skipper/guide that plays as if you are lost in the jungle. He sees this simultaneously being lost and found as having an analog in the Middle Ages. He sees this in the design of two genres of maps: the poster-sized maps that are sold as souvenirs in the Disney theme parks from 1958 onwards, and the medieval *mappae mundi* (medieval maps of the world). Both of these genres of maps pose a world in its entirety, offering a view that is more complete than anything available at ground level. He sees a resemblance in the way that both of these maps are 'drawn', in the style of the maps, with the souvenir maps sold at the Disney theme parks harkening back to the style in which the *mappae mundi* of medieval times were drawn: 'colorful illustrations of small vignettes, employing a bird's-eye, aerial perspective (that is both realistic and fantastic at the same time) and holding everything together in a clear, ordered boundary' (Yandell, 2012, p. 31).

It is through using both the form as well as the metaphor of the labyrinth in designing theme parks, that a more complex, diverse, complete, and therefore a more immersive space can be created, as complexity in form (as in complexity in how spaces are situated) as well as in stories are things that also come back often in the 'real' world. This is also one of the aspects that Lukas (2013, p. 5) sees in his interpretation of an immersive space, as they should not be bland, uninteresting, or

empty, but complex and consistent, which can ensure for a more immersive experience at a certain place.

1.2 The Magic Kingdom park as a multicursal labyrinth

1.2.1 The Magic Kingdom park as an immersive space

One of the ways in which the Magic Kingdom tricks its guests into believing they are in a different world, in which the park shows a certain virtuosity throughout its design, is by having a certain continuity in its theming; by not only theming the larger things present at the park, such as its rides and shows, but theming as much as possible. Lukas' (2013) ideas of the different areas that should be considered as important parts of an immersive space, can be a helpful tool to show how intricate the theming at the Magic Kingdom actually is. In one of the chapters of his handbook on immersive space, Lukas (2013, pp. 144-149) describes certain elements of an immersive space that according to him could make such a space more inviting for guests, and that are therefore typically found at many themed, immersive spaces. He does so by dividing the typical immersive space into certain smaller, meaningful areas that have a certain function, on top of which the creative team should have tried to create a certain overall experience, the atmosphere of the park, that should be communicated to the guests of the park through the park itself. These concepts could be helpful tools for a creative team to think about when creating such an immersive space, especially for how the space should be structured and what kind of elements should be part of the space, as well as for not forgetting to think about certain important areas of the space that can make the space more inviting for its guests. This subchapter will focus on how and in what way these areas come back in the Magic Kingdom theme park, as the fact that all these different areas come back in the structure of the parks, the fact that all these different areas are themed in a certain way, could be regarded as a sign that shows that the Magic Kingdom park is an immersive space.

Lukas (2013, pp. 144-149) sees key features in the following elements of an immersive space:

-The entrance area(s): the area where the entrance is situated, for example in the form of a gate that guests need to pass through in order to enter the theme park. This gate should not only be a functional gate, which shows where the outside world ends and the magical world inside the theme park begins: the gate itself and the experience that is created around it should be magical, as a starting point that sets the story and the tone for what is going to be told in the rest of the park. The experience that guests will have at the entrance is important, as it will have an influence at how they will see the rest of the park.

At the Magic Kingdom theme park, reaching the entrance gate can already be considered an immersive experience on its own: reaching the gate at the Magic Kingdom park could be considered a journey. How this journey goes, depends on how you travel to the park. If you take the shuttle bus from one of the Disney hotels to the park, you will be simply dropped off near the entrance of the park; but if you travel by car to the park, you will actually find out in what ways the creators have tried to create an experience that is different from other theme parks, and that could be considered a journey from the outside world, from the parking area of the park, towards the magical world inside the theme park. After parking their cars, guests will find out that they are not yet at the entrance of the park: they will first have to make a little journey towards the Magic Kingdom park, in order for them to reach their destination. This can be done either by choosing a monorail, which in itself is a means of transportation that is not found at that many places around the world. Its tracks are situated around a large man-made lake, the Seven Seas Lagoon, around which the Magic Kingdom, the parking area, three of the Disney hotels and one Disney time-sharing are situated; guests of the monorail pass by and through these locations as they travel around the lake, from one destination to the other, its guests possibly taking in some of the immersive qualities of the hotels

the monorail passes by through their detailed manner of theming, which could work as an inducer for certain feelings of the guest in its environment, feelings of being in a different place than they actually are, due to the fact that every kind of theming can be considered a referent to a certain kind of (back)story or certain place, either fictional or non-fictional. A different, more immersive option to reach the park, is to take a ferry across the Seven Seas Lagoon, as this lake has its own ferry system of three ferry boats that can bring theme park guests from the parking lot to the Magic Kingdom park and the other way around (see Figure 1.1). This could be considered more immersive, due to the fact that this element of the experience is well-thought of in the sense of the overall story and experience of the park: it is not only functional, it is also original, making the trip to the entrance of the park not a shallow experience, and therefore making it easier for the guest to participate in its environments (Lukas, 2013, p. 5). After boarding the ferry, you will slowly pass by all the themed hotels and little beaches that lie around the lake, maybe see some recreational boaters (as the lake is also used for recreational boating), while floating closer and closer towards the entrance gate, seeing Cinderella's castle looming into view the closer you get. These means of transportation actually have been created as a sort of buffer between the parking lot and the park, to create less long waiting lines in front of the gate, and therefore are without a doubt created with a functional reason in mind, but are also perfect examples of being creative with the entrance area, in a way that feels as if you are journeying towards a truly magical place. The fact that a boat trip across water takes a longer traveling time than for instance taking the monorail to the park also plays in with the illusion of making a long(er) journey towards the park.



Figure 1.1. This image shows one of the ferries which guests can take to get across the Seven Seas Lagoon in order to reach the entrance of the Magic Kingdom theme park, creating an experience that is different from simply walking from the parking area to the entrance of the theme park. (Photograph taken by Echeverría, 2017).

After leaving the bus, monorail, or ferry, you as a guest will find yourself at the entrance of the theme park. The first thing you will notice, is Main Street, U.S.A.'s train station, as it towers over the entrance gates; the small hill on which the train station is situated, is decorated by a planned garden that features a big, low hedge in the shape of Mickey Mouse's head, creating no doubt about whether this is a Disney theme park or not (see Figure 1.2). Again, this train station has a function beside of it being just a train station: it blocks out the guest's view of the theme park that lies behind it when standing in front of it. After the guests have their personal belongings checked by the security that stand in front of the entrance to the park, the guests will pass either way beneath the train station, where small passages are situated, above which hangs the entrance plaque to the park ("Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy"), and will get their first glimpse on the park, starting at Main Street, U.S.A (see Figure 1.3).



Figure 1.2. This image shows the Main Street U.S.A. train station, towering over the entrance to the park. When guests are situated in the area in front of this train station, this building blocks out their view of the entire theme park that lies behind it. (Photograph taken by Lee, 2014a).



Figure 1.3. This image shows the Main Street U.S.A. themed land of the Magic Kingdom theme park, and the iconic Cinderella's Castle in the background. This is the first area that the guests of the theme park experience after having crossed the Seven Seas Lagoon, having passed the entrance to the park and having passed the train station that blocks out their view of the rest of the park, making it the first time they actually get in touch with the Magic Kingdom theme park. (Photograph taken by Leithinger, 2010).

-Lead areas: the lead areas are the areas where the story, the atmosphere, and therefore the actual identity of a park really shines through. These are the areas that actually make or break the park, and therefore play a big role in the overall experience that is created at a theme park. Examples of lead areas at a theme park, could be the many rides, attractions, or live venues that are situated in such a park. Through the lead areas, the theme park can show off what they are investing in, as the ever-changing theme park has to keep up with the changes and stay up to date with the newest technologies and trends. Next to that, the lead areas are a good reflection of what powerful brands are (as it is often these popular, powerful brands that are used as a starting point for a new experience in a theme park), and are also a good reflection of what is thought of as a possible resonant experience by the designers of such a lead area, an experience that the designers think will be valued (or even cherished) by its guests. If done right, it is through these lead areas, the rides, attractions, or live venues, that guests can get the feeling that they are entering different worlds or exotic places, making them seem as the new layers in the overall theme park (with the overall theme park already being a sort of magical immersive world in itself, with different lead areas as portals to different, smaller immersive worlds).



Figure 1.5a. The exterior of the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride. (Photograph taken by Lynn, 2015).



Figure 1.5b. The exterior of the Swiss Family Treehouse. (Photograph taken by Theme Park Tourist, 2015).



Figure 1.5c. The exterior of the Under the Sea ~ Journey of The Little Mermaid ride. (Photograph taken by Smith, 2012).

Figures 1.5: These images show the exteriors of different lead areas from around the park. While these rides and experiences can be experienced in themselves by entering their interiors and structures, their exteriors also play a key role in the experience of the entire theme park, in a way that the park can also be experienced just by walking around the park, just by taking in the many themed environments that the park has to offer.

At the Magic Kingdom park, the different themed lands could already be regarded as lead areas on their own, because of the fact that they are themed in such an amount of detail, that they could therefore be linked with a certain story, atmosphere, and identity (Figures 1.5). For example, Frontierland appears as the Wild West, Adventureland appears to resemble the remote jungles of Asia and Africa, and Fantasyland (especially the newer version) appears as a place where the fairytales told in the many Disney animated movies, such as *Snow White* and *The Little Mermaid* come to life. The way in which this detailed theming of the themed lands is valued by its guests, depends on how willing the guest of the park is in letting him- or herself immerse in its environments: there might be a difference between people that are willing to let themselves immerse in their environment, and people that are non- or less willing to let themselves immerse in their surroundings. While reasons behind this could be meaningful for further research, what could be said from the theme park's perspective, is that there are certain theme parks (and their rides) that seem to focus more on an immersive aspect, and there are certain theme parks (and their rides) that seem to focus less on an immersive aspect, but instead on such things as thrills rides (in which the thrill might be as important as or even more important than its theming), or for instance the serving of good food/snacks, or just a fun day out with the family (but less interest in the kind of worlds these parks can create) (Lukas, 2008). The way that guests experience the theme park, can be based on earlier experiences with other theme parks, which have created prejudices or expectations of

other theme parks. If guests are experiencing the theme park to have an immersive experience, in order to have an experience of being in a different world or environment, the themed lands could be considered lead areas on their own, because they can already give you an immersive experience by walking through them. If guests are used to theme parks which feature many thrill rides, guests might have certain expectations that might have to do with the rides present at the parks, such as the thrills which they might bring. These guests might think of the theming of the themed lands of being of lesser importance to them, but the theming of the park might still play an important role in their overall experience.

For this last kind of people, it are the many attractions that are situated at the park that should be regarded as the real lead areas of the park, the places where the story is really told, as they are also the places where a story is actually told in a linear manner, from its waiting line (that sometimes crosses different themed rooms), to the ride itself, to the souvenir shop at the end. Here, the story does not only stay inside the guests mind through imagination, as is the case with the themed lands around the park, creating a certain atmosphere, but is told more explicitly, through the construction of 'moving' scenes that guests pass through while riding the ride; examples of those lead areas are for instance the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, the Splash Mountain ride, the It's a Small World ride etc. The rides are just the things at a theme park that attract the visitors while they are at the park, which can be noticed already by looking at the many lines that are always present at these rides: it seems as if most of its visitors visit a theme park to participate in those experiences, to ride the attractions, and watch the shows. Each lead area is distinct from the others, in terms of the overall atmosphere and theming of the place it is situated in, but also through such elements as music, the way the people that work there are dressed, and even in the art style that is used around the place: for instance, the Pirates of the Caribbean ride is themed in a more realistic way, while the Splash Mountain ride is themed in a way that stays true to its animated source, and a ride such as It's a Small World is themed in a totally different way, using animatronics that look like dolls, to show a trip around the world. While this theming in a certain style might do away with a certain possibility of some of the rides to be truly immersive, it could also create feelings as if the audience has stepped inside the world of a certain (animated) Disney movie, as it is only possible to create such a feeling that stays true to the (animated) source through using 'art' itself; in this sense, using theme park design as a form of art that can resemble what is shown on screen while watching an animated movie, with the difference that now, the audience can pass through it, in a three dimensional space. More on this subject can be read at the next chapter, which is about the technology behind certain theme park rides at the Magic Kingdom and the illusions they might bring.

-Functional areas: these are the places such as restrooms; the areas that are purely functional. Those areas are sometimes left without theming by theme park designers, and stay therefore out of touch with the narrative or story of the larger space they are situated in and a part of, but through theming these functional areas as well, a certain consistency can be created that stays strong throughout the entire world that is created in a theme park.

There are several ways in which the Imagineers have tried to theme the functional areas present in the park in a way that they seem to stay in touch with their surroundings. The first way through which this is noticeable, is through the signage of the many restrooms around the park. Two examples of these are the signs of the restrooms situated behind the Splash Mountain ride, and the restrooms situated at the Tomorrowland area of the park.

In the new Fantasyland area of the park, Imagineers have created a different way of styling and theming their restrooms (and also other aspects featured at this part of the park): here, the Imagineers have tried to create a functional area, of which its full theming is dedicated to the Walt Disney picture *Tangled*, an animated movie that tells the old German fairytale story of Rapunzel.

There is no ride here, no show, no lead area so to speak: it is purely a functional area, but fully themed (see Figures 1.4). While this area of the park could be regarded as only a functional area of the park, there is much attention to detail, as there are many recognizable props from the animated movie shown inside and outside of the restrooms: a replica of the tower from which Rapunzel lets down her hair in the movie is featured outside, as well as the lantern garlands that hang around the area, which are themed after a scene from the movie in which there are many lanterns released into the air, and the many most wanted posters of villains that are also featured in the movie decorate the outer walls and the men's bathroom. The building that contains the restrooms is themed in a style that resembles a romanticized German style farm or stable, taking into account that the original fairytale originates from Germany. Other functional additions to this area are featured outside of the restrooms, on the other side of the walkway that leads through this area of the park, as there are tables and stools in the form of barrels for guests to rest on, recharging stations to charge your electronics hidden in tree stumps and water fountains that are also themed in a style that fits to the overall theme. These additions make this area even more functional than the typical restrooms found throughout the park, while staying true to a certain style all around.



Figure 1.4a. The exterior of the Tangled restroom area. (Photograph taken by Rain0975, 2013).



Figure 1.4b. Still frame from the Disney animated feature film Tangled. (Image owned by Walt Disney Pictures, 2010a).



Figure 1.4c. The exterior of the Tangled restroom area (Photograph taken by CL Photographs, 2013).



Figure 1.4d. . Still frame from the Disney animated feature film Tangled. (Image owned by Walt Disney Pictures, 2010b).

Figures 1.4: These images show the little details that are taken from the Disney movie Tangled into the design of this functional area. Figure 1.4a shows Rapunzel's tower that is featured in this functional area, of which the architecture and design are taken directly from the movie, as this is the building in which Rapunzel lives during the beginning of this movie (see Figure 1.4b). Figure 1.4c shows the German architecture of the entire area, as the fairytale story on which the movie on which the area is based originates from Germany, and shows the little lanterns which hang across the garlands that are featured throughout this area, which also play an important role during one of the iconic scenes in the movie (see Figure 1.4d).

-Merchandise areas: almost every theme park also comes with merchandise areas, especially near the exit of the park or the exit of a themed ride. For a good immersive experience, the story that is told through the theming of a gift shop, is a continuation of the story that is told through the space it is situated in, being for example the story of a themed land it is situated in, or the story that was told throughout the themed ride it is situated after. This is also the case for the goods that are sold through the gift shops: ideally, these souvenirs or gifts should be small bits of the story that guests can take home with them or give as a present to others.

There are several of these merchandise areas around the Magic Kingdom park, and just as Lukas notices from typical merchandise areas, most of these are either at the exit of the park or at the exit of a themed ride. By positioning the merchandise areas at these places, you can make guests enthusiastic about the park or ride first (as they will just have experienced the park or ride before exiting either one of them), and after they might be willing to buy souvenirs of either one of those, to take a part of the story they were a part of back home with them.

The biggest merchandise area at the Magic Kingdom park, Main Street U.S.A., is positioned right behind its entrance/before its exit, and is the large street that leads towards the hub of the park, from which guests can go to either one of the themed lands of the park. Either side of the street is filled with many souvenir shops, and there are also a coffee shop, a barber, and a hot dog joint in this area of the park, making it look like a typical small American town from the past. The souvenir shops are made in such a manner, that from the outside, they look like separate shops, and from the inside they differ in their interior and in their sorts of merchandise they sell. But actually,

they could be seen as one large shop, as they are passable from one shop to the other from the inside, all the way through from the first shop to the last shop in the street, making it possible for guests to stay longer inside the stores, to not be distracted of the shopping experience by having to leave the store.

Another good example of themed merchandise areas at the park, is the Memento Mori shop, which is situated at the exit/entrance to the Haunted Mansion ride. This souvenir shop continues the story that is told throughout the Haunted Mansion ride, as there are many references in the shop to Madame Leota, which is one of the character that plays an important role in the ride. Cast members that work at this souvenir shop wear buttons of the tombstone of Madame Leota, which is also featured in the cemetery outside of the Haunted Mansion, which guests pass by when passing through the waiting line for this ride. By using certain technology and tricks in its interior design, paranormal occurrences seem to happen inside the store, as a portrait of Madame Leota changes after an ultraviolet light shines upon it, and Madame Leota's ghost materializes in a large mirror on one of its wall, accompanied by music. The cast members in this store try to stay in their roles, as they will disregard those paranormal occurrences happening inside the store when being asked about them by the park's guests, as if nothing has happened.

-Service areas: it is in the service areas, that guests come in contact with members of the service team. These areas play an important role in an immersive world, as they are one of the primary interactive means through which a guest experiences a place. A distinction can be made between service workers that provide a more functional role in the space, such as for example those that work in a restaurant, a quick service stand, a gift shop, do public relations, or do crowd control, and those who are directly involved in delivering the brand, product, or spatial characters, such as those that are dressed up as characters for the guests to meet, or for instance delivering small live entertainment shows throughout the park.

At the Magic Kingdom, the theming not only stays on the surface level of the area itself, in the design of the space, but also comes back in the ways in which its employees are dressed. Each area (ride, restaurant, show, parade, hotel, souvenir shop etc.) actually uses different garments in which the employees are dressed. This means that someone who works at a certain ride, will have different dress than someone who works at another ride, or at a certain restaurant, or at a certain souvenir shop.

Some of the typical service areas that are situated at the Magic Kingdom park, are its restaurants. It seems to depend on the height of the price that needs to be paid for a meal at a certain restaurant, and therefore how exclusive a certain restaurant is, how themed a restaurant will be, as quick service restaurants are themed less than for instance the more expensive restaurants, such as the Be Our Guest Restaurant, a restaurant that looks like the Beast's castle from the animated Disney movie Beauty and the Beast (see Figure 1.6). In this restaurant, pictures can be taken with the Beast character (which, of course, is actually a Magic Kingdom employee wearing a large Beast's suit), and the whole area is themed into detail after certain locations, parts of the castle that are featured in scenes from the movies, resembling the Beast's castle, its hallways, his ballroom, his west wing study room, and the library. The only difference, is that at the Be Our Guest Restaurant, the whole place is actually arranged as a restaurant. When looking outside the windows of the ballroom, you will actually look at an illusion: you will see fake snow falling from the sky and a black blue night sky, just as the place is pictured in the movie. This also creates an element of immersivity in the design of this place that has to do with the weather, the certain time frames of the day, and the guests expectations if they know the movie: while inside this restaurant, it might seem as if it is winter, as if it is snowing outside, as if you are sitting there at night, as if you are being a part

of the movie, even if you might be sitting there while it is actually daytime and the hot Floridian summers are reigning outside.



Figure 1.6. The interior of the Be Our Guest Restaurant. (Photograph taken by Inside the Magic, 2012).

Another important aspect of the Magic Kingdom theme park, are those certain areas spread around the park where you can meet Disney characters, to take pictures with them. This can especially be a magical event for many kids that visit the theme park, as it will be their opportunity to meet their beloved characters they know so well through the various Disney media they have been exposed to. Many of the locations where you can meet the characters, are in themselves themed after a fictional location from the film in which the character you can meet is featured in. For instance, you can take a picture with Mickey Mouse inside the Town Square Theatre, and this whole area is themed as if you are backstage at a magician show, through its environment, through the way in which Mickey Mouse is dressed, and through the props that are present at the spot, with which Mickey Mouse does magic tricks (see Figure 1.7). This is not only interesting for the photograph you can take there, as the photograph might look like you walked into a certain movie Disney movie, but it also fits the overall experience of meeting a certain character in their own environment, especially for such kids that believe that the character they are meeting is real. The costumes of the different characters that can be met around the park are detailed, and actors are cast in a way that they fit the character they portray, both physically as in their play. They stay in their role when they are 'on-stage', such that they will interact with the guests that want to take pictures with them and meet them in a way that fits the character they portray.



Figure 1.7. Meet Mickey at Town Square Theater. (Photograph taken by JeffChristiansen, 2012).

-Quiet and secluded areas: next to all the busy areas that a theme park seems to offer, theme parks should also have spots for their guests to relax and unwind. It is a challenge for designers to keep these areas part of the bigger narrative of the park, as for a truly immersive experience, these should complement the theme or design of the overall space, while also being a sort of haven that stands apart of the rest of the park, as to keep them quiet and secluded.

While there are not many of those places in the park itself, the many hotels you can stay at while staying at the Walt Disney Resort could be seen as those quiet and secluded areas you can flee to when it all becomes a bit too much. They are reachable from each park by public transportation offered by the Disney Resort itself. As told before, these areas are also fully themed, as even the hotel rooms have a theming that fits the overall theme of the hotel, and fit the overall Disney experience of everything being totally immersive.

-Public areas: these are the exact opposite of the quiet and secluded areas that are mentioned above, as it is in these areas that guests blend in with the other guests that are present at the park. Examples of these can be venues that stage and/or show performances, spectacles, or movie. Another example of a public area can be a central hall, if the immersive space is indoor, that people need to pass through before they will explore smaller and more secluded spaces, or, taken into consideration that most theme parks are situated outdoors, a large square or hub that people need to pass through before they will explore the themelands. These public areas again need to be in themed and designed in harmony with its surroundings, so that the overall atmosphere of the park stays credible.

In the Magic Kingdom, there are not any indoor stages and shows at this moment, but there

are two parades (a daytime parade and a nighttime parade) and a night time spectacular, with fireworks and projections on Cinderella's castle. During the parades, guests gather around the road where the parade passes by, and during the night time spectacular show, guests gather around the square in front of Cinderella's castle to get a good view on what there will happen. While these public areas are still themed in a manner that stays credible to the overall atmosphere of the park, it are the parades and night time spectacular themselves that are fully themed in a Disney manner, maybe even more so than other experiences around the park. Here, there are many references to characters, songs, and scenes from Disney movies, that can create a feeling of bonding throughout the crowd, as many people might know what they are referencing to through the shows, and therefore can have a shared sense of enjoyment by remembering the movies they are taken from.

-Atmosphere: the overall atmosphere, or "climate", of an immersive space is important to take into account, as it is this concept that has to do with the combination of all the elements of an immersive space and how they will have an influence on what guests feel and thinks when they are in a park. It is the atmosphere that can be felt through everything that guests encounter when they enter a space, which is the overall atmosphere of an immersive space as well as the atmosphere felt in the smaller areas, and the concept of atmosphere in itself can for example be attached to such concepts as different forms of **moods** that the designers want to let the guests feel when they enter an immersive space, which can be thought of when designing an immersive space (examples of such moods that can set the atmosphere of an immersive space can be adventurous, otherworldly, romantic, or calm for instance) (Lukas, 2013, 65-67). A different concept that has to do a lot with atmosphere, is **theming**, and especially if this theming creates an association with the guests of an immersive space, the guest can be impacted by this theming (Lukas, 2013, 68-89). Ideas, ideals, and attitudes towards a certain theme are made up by what we have grown to know of this theme through media, trips, history, and visits to museums and theme parks for example. It is through these elements that the guests have certain associations with a certain theme, such as for instance a certain country or a fictional location from a fantasy movie, that can be used by using elements of such a theme that make guests feel as if they are in a different place or a different time, and are therefore important for the created atmosphere at a park. Other elements that have an influence on the atmosphere of an immersive space are formal concepts such as color, shape, texture, size, mass, scale, proportion and lines; concepts that should be acknowledged, thought about and used by designers of an immersive space when trying to create a certain atmosphere in that immersive space.

The atmosphere present at the Magic Kingdom theme park is similar to that of the atmosphere that could be felt in many Disney films, and could be described as 'happy, optimistic, and uncomplicated beyond belief' (Farber, 1946)). While this description of the atmosphere present in Disney media was actually written as a critique by Farber on Disney films, it actually seems to hit the nail on the head; for some critics, this sweet look on the world might be a negative thing, but this atmosphere actually seems to appeal many people, which can be seen back in the visitor numbers of the Disney theme parks, and the popularity of Disney in general, as there are many people that might want to escape their daily lives. The corporate taglines of Disney World ("The Most Magical Place On Earth") and Disneyland ("The Happiest Place On Earth") underline this ideology that seems to come back often in the many things that can be experienced throughout the park. It is this atmosphere that can be felt throughout the entire park, while the many different themed lands actually seem to be totally distinct from each other in their theming: it is the overall present atmosphere that holds everything in the park together.

By not only focusing on the lead areas, not only theming the lead areas in detail, but also focusing on other areas present at a theme park, you can let the guests stay in a certain atmosphere. While the lead areas could be seen as the most important for the theme park, both on the creators/designers

part of these areas (as in having an intentionally importance), as on the guests/audience receptive part of these areas (as being understood as the most important parts of the park), only focusing on the lead areas to be immersive and not on the other areas could snap guests out of their immersive experience. Therefore, the structure of the theme park is quite complex, with not only walking routes through the park that have a quite labyrinthine structure in themselves, it are also the destinations you choose to go next, which you are walking towards when walking through the park that can make the park seem as a labyrinth, in which you have to find your way towards a certain destination, and that are therefore quite complex, because there is much to do and see in the park.

1.2.2 Labyrinthine paths

The different areas present at a theme park, make the park into a complex, labyrinthine structure, in which areas with divergent functions have a certain place in a design that makes optimal use of the space that it all occupies (optimal in a sense that there is no space left unused). The roads in between the many areas, are also important for the overall experience of the theme park. The fact that, while walking from one area to the other, the guests stay in a themed environment, means that guests will stay inside a certain atmosphere, and therefore can stay in a certain mind set. At the Magic Kingdom park, this atmosphere is that of the dream, of the magical (as its name already implies), and this is done by using hyperreality in its representations of both fictional and factional things, and by giving guests the possibility to travel between totally different experiences in story and theming in one day. This does not only happen in the rides, shops and other experiences themselves, but also between them. The rides, shops and other experiences are situated quite close to each other, so that there are no spaces in between them that might feel unimportant, that might take guests out of that certain atmosphere, and so that there is something to see all around you when visiting the theme park, trying to keep the guest interested in their environments. The different themed lands have borders, that can be seen on the map, but can also be felt while walking through the park: these borders consist of the themed land's scenery and nature. This means that, everywhere around the park, guests are totally surrounded by the themed environment of a certain themed land. You cannot see through the themed lands borders, so when you are inside a certain themed land, you cannot look outside of this land (similar to many rides) (some of the higher 'buildings' around the park can be seen from further locations), just as the park itself has borders. This is also very similar to the concept of the labyrinth, as it is also in the labyrinth that you have a limited field of view; as the visitor of a labyrinth, you cannot look around you where you have to go to reach your destination, as there are borders all around you. This can create the feeling of being lost, not only because you cannot see which direction you need to go, but also which place you are actually in the park. The difference at the park in contrast to a labyrinth, is that you have a map that can lead you the way.

Most of the paths that lead through the themed lands are situated in a meandering way, most of the time only the road in front of you is visible (except on crossroads), and each land seems to work differently with the roads that lead through the area: in Adventureland, the path(s) lead meandering in a way that, as you walk around this area, your view is blocked out by buildings, jungle like nature etc., in Frontierland, the path is like a boulevard that sits next to a lake, and at Tomorrowland, the path(s) seems structured in a more linear way (Walt Disney World, 2018a). This creates a certain distinction between those themed lands, not only through theming itself, but also through such details as the planning of the roads leading through the themed lands. This not only has to do with a certain complexity of the way in which the paths are situated in the park, an ambiguity between order and chaos, but also could make it easier for the guests to create a feeling as if they are in a totally different environment when traversing from one themed land to the other, while those themed lands are actually situated next to each other, only separated by their surrounding scenery.

In an immersive space, such as the theme park, it is important that even the surroundings of the walking routes that go from ride to ride are fully themed, just as all the distinct areas that were already mentioned in the subchapter above, to keep a certain continuity or flow in the design, so that there are no empty spaces in the park, empty spaces that could pull guests out of a certain sentiment. This comes back in the themed lands, and this makes the park so immersive, even while the different themed lands might be so different from each other. Music is playing everywhere, having a certain connection to the themed land it is playing in, and this music often mirrors the way in which music is used in for instance film, which can make the guests feel as if they are protagonists that are walking through a carefully staged narrative (Camp, 2017). Because the themed lands stay separated from each other, going from one area of the park to another stays kind of special, or unexpected, as you might not expect a total change in theming, and because the other themed land can only be seen by crossing a border. This can only happen at fully planned spaces, such as the theme park, where everything in the environment can be tweaked to each other: everything can be made in such a way, that it either matches with its surroundings, or awes the visitor because of its total change of environments, because there is one team that works on this, one team which decides what to do with the park and how to do that (design wise). This is different than for instance in a city, where there are many players in the field, and everybody has their own opinion and vision on how the city might look, and these opinions might collide with each other. Also, the design does not feel like a mess in this way, or as a collage, when going from one area to another, as the areas stay separated from each other through the way they are planned, structured, and designed. Therefore, visiting the park/a day at the park/walking around the park is more like a series of themed lands that the guests visit, than one mish-mash of different themed lands that you can watch from a-far (except when looking at its map). The structure might look like that, but the experience is not.

There are many crossroads in the park, where you have to choose which direction you want to go, similar to for instance experiencing walking around a labyrinth. This is only possible if you know where you want to go, if you know which direction you need to go in order to reach a certain destination you have chosen to experience next; but there might be people that do not know where some of the rides are situated, or even do not know what kind of experiences the park has to offer; visitors that do not have a map, who just go with the flow. For them, the experience of being at the park might be even more like wandering around inside a labyrinth, as the experience of being in a labyrinth is also mostly a search without directions.

You actually walk a lot during a day at the theme park, go into a building, out of a building, experiencing certain rides that take on certain directions. Actually you might lose track of where you are, because of all these movements inside and outside the structures of the park.

1.3 The rides as unicursal labyrinths: the Haunted Mansion ride

Not only could the Magic Kingdom park be considered a labyrinth on a macro world level (as the park taken as a whole), but also dissecting the park in smaller micro worlds, the park has many instances of smaller labyrinthine structures present in its composition, as its many rides could also be considered examples of labyrinths, although in a different way, as these have more in common with the concept of the unicursal labyrinth. The Haunted Mansion ride is one of the examples of a ride that has a clear unicursal labyrinthine structure, a structure that is actually present in many of the designs of the attractions present at the Magic Kingdom. It is in the way in which this waiting line progresses and passes all sorts of different parts, rooms, and areas present in the outer and inner structure of this Haunted Mansion, the way in which it seamlessly passes from waiting line into the ride itself, and afterwards, the way in which the entire ride passes through more different parts, rooms, and areas of the Haunted Mansion (and even a part of the ride that is themed in a way that it seems as if you are traversing through a graveyard at night time, with all the ghosts showing

themselves) that make it labyrinthine, with its complex structure making it possible that guests can feel lost inside. The ride can be separated in two parts, which are both important for the overall experience: its waiting line with a pre-show, and the ride itself. Its waiting line starts outside, and goes in many directions: first, guests pass the Haunted Mansion building (see Figure 1.7a), towards the backyard, which features an interactive waiting line in which guests can interact with their environments while waiting. There are all sorts of tombstones here with certain features, such as for example musical ones, where as you press certain instruments on the side of the tombstone, you will hear that instrument play a melody from the "*Grim Grinning Ghosts*"-song associated with the ride. This part of the waiting line is designed in a way to keep guests amused, while they wait to enter the Haunted Mansion building. After passing the waiting line's graveyard section, the outside part of the waiting line is over: guests will enter the Haunted Mansion itself and will set foot inside a hallway with a fireplace. In this room, guests will have to wait until a staff member leads them to one of the rooms on either side of the hallway, which could be called the stretching rooms: in these rooms, guests will get a pre-show, as tricks in its design are being used in order to let the guests think they are standing in a room that stretches out, as its walls and the paintings that hang upon them get taller and taller. There are actually two of these stretching rooms, one situated on either side of the hallway, that are used alternately from each other, which could disorientate visitors of the Haunted Mansion that have been on the ride before, but at that time were standing in a different stretching room than the one they enter now. In the stretching rooms, guests will experience a pre-show, which could actually feel as if you are standing in an elevator because of what is shown to you, and in that sense can make you feel even more disorientated: the walls of this room seem stretching, but because of this illusion, it can also feel as if the plane the guests are standing on is actually lowering, while it is not; this illusion can create a feeling of disorientation, especially after exiting this room, because as a guest, you might not know if you have actually stood in an elevator, or not; after this pre-show, when the room is fully stretched, guests move on towards a large hallway, which serves as the boarding area for the ride.¹ Here they will enter the Doom Buggies, which is the name for the vehicles that are used in this ride, after which they will travel through a diverse set of rooms of the Haunted Mansion, such as the gallery, a piano room, a stairs room, a séance room, the grand ballroom and the attic, after which they pass through a graveyard, which through lighting effects always stays to seem as if being by night. During the ride, the Doom Buggies take their own directions through the structures of the Haunted Mansion, sometimes even going in the opposite direction of the direction the passengers are looking in. This can create a sense of disorientation, as guests do not know where they are going, what they will see, and which direction they will go into. One of the scenes of the ride that the guests pass along, is its endless hallway: by passing it, guests stare into a long hallway, but do not enter it. This scene evokes ideas of the multicursal labyrinth, with the Doom Buggy choosing which directions guests shall take during the ride, leaving some parts of the Haunted Mansion unexplored. Just as in a multicursal labyrinth, there have to be choices made in which direction you will go to get to the ending of the labyrinth. The difference is, that in this ride, these choices are made for you, instead of the guests making the choices themselves. Still, the hallway could bring up ideas, a sense of curiosity of what you might be missing out by not going towards this endless hallway, exploring the rooms that lie on each side of it. It also makes the Haunted Mansion seem bigger as it actually is (because the endless hallway is actually an illusion, it is actually leading nowhere in particular; at least not towards a scene of the ride that could be interesting for the guests to explore; there are no rooms on either side of the hallway, the doors on

¹ At the Disneyland park in Anaheim, California, the illusion of the stretching room is actually used as a disguise for an actual elevator, which the guests have to pass through in order to get to the room where they will boarding their Doom Buggies; while there is still a stretching room in the Magic Kingdom version of the ride, the decoration and illusion of this room are not used as a disguise for an actual elevator.

each side of it are just a decoration). The room after this might bring up similar ideas, as

During the ride, guests go in all sorts of directions, with their vehicles making all sorts turns (see Figure 1.7b), as they pass differently themed rooms (see Figure 1.7c), even going a level of the Haunted Mansion up (towards a balcony that looks over the large dinner room, and towards the attic), and after a while, going a level down again, towards the graveyard scene. The fact that guests even explore different levels of the same building during the ride, make the structure of the ride's track more complex. If you look at a blueprint of the ride (see Figure 1.7d), you can see that the ride is made in such a way, that all of the space that the ride actually takes in is used in an optimal way, with which is meant that the space the ride takes in is as compact as possible, while still showing a lot of different scenes and rooms. A less optimal way would be a linear ride, in which the guests would pass different rooms while their ride vehicle is traversing over a straight line, because of several reasons: guests would either end up in a totally different place than where they boarded the ride, or should traverse back again through all the same rooms they already saw. Another option would be to create a long stretched oval track, where guests pass through the different rooms, but it takes away one of the qualities that the Haunted Mansion has now: its labyrinthine structure, its many turns, that can create a feeling of being lost inside of the structures of the Haunted Mansion, and also make the guests eager which direction they will go next, instead of leaving out a curiosity of where the guests will go next in a sense of direction, only leaving the curiosity for which scene that will be shown next, which scene they will behold (see Figure 1.7b).

The structure of this ride comes back in many different rides present in the Magic Kingdom park, as most of them share this labyrinthine structure in which the rides vehicles pass through different rooms, each room showing a different scene. Examples of these are for instance the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, the Peter Pan Flight ride, or the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. These rides also feature waiting lines that pass through several areas, and a structure of the rides track with many turns, that can let the guests feel lost when inside of them.



Figure 1.7a. The exterior of the Haunted Mansion ride. (Photograph taken by Kiger, 2015a).

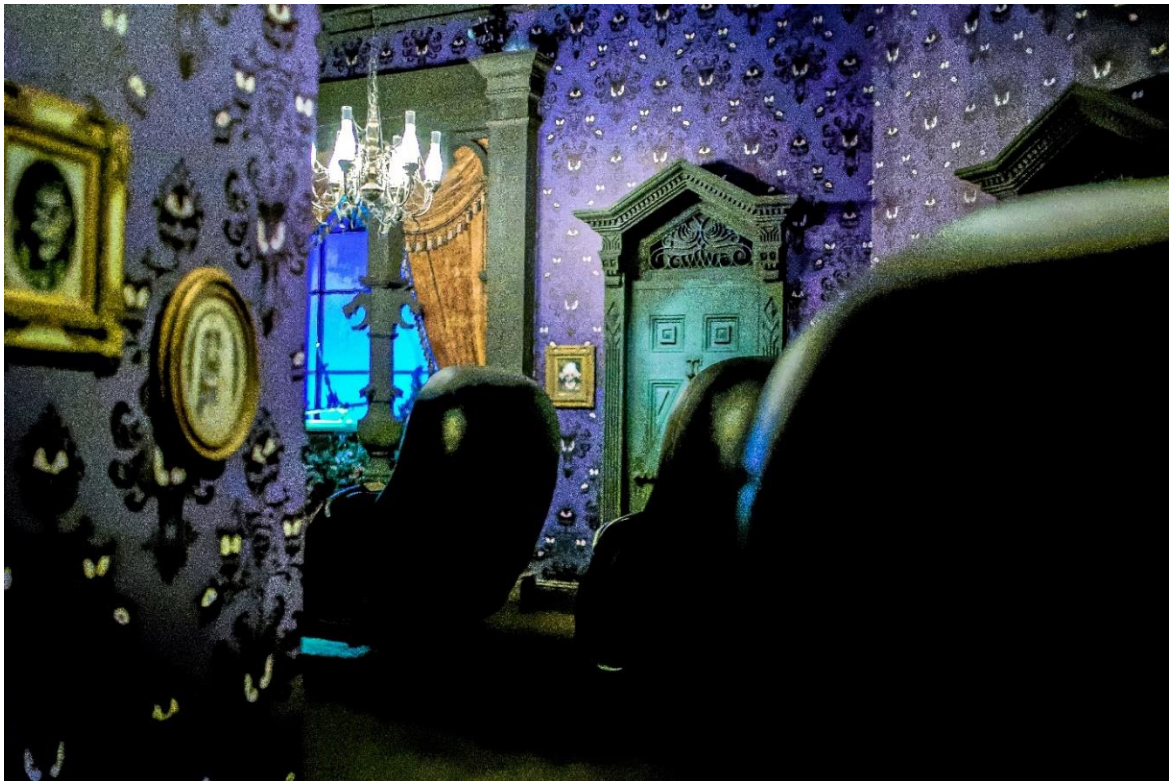


Figure 1.7b. One of the many turns in the Haunted Mansion ride; similar to what can be experienced inside a labyrinth, the walls block out the view of the participants. (Photograph taken by Murray, 2015).



Figure 1.7c. The attic, one of the many rooms of the Haunted Mansion that the guests pass by while experiencing this ride. (Photograph taken by Kiger, 2015b).

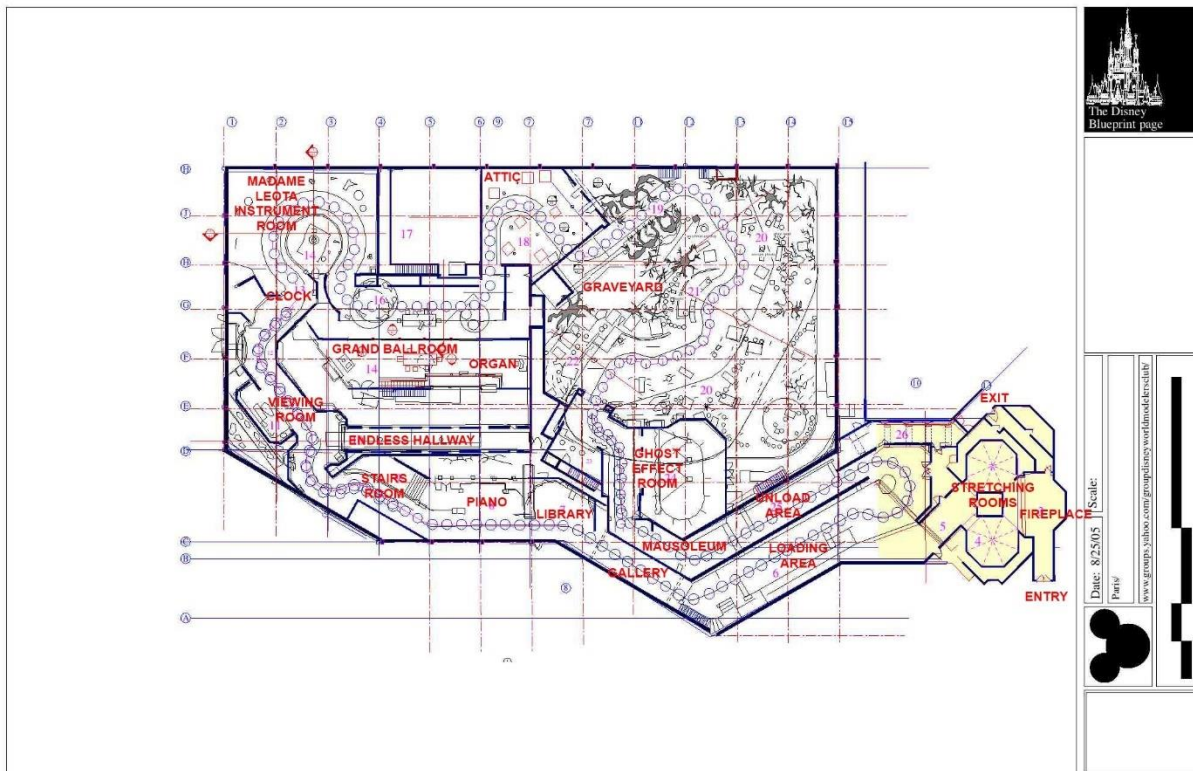


Figure 1.7d. An unofficial, fan-made, but on-scale blueprint of the Haunted Mansion ride, made for the creation of scale-models of this ride, shows the labyrinthine path that the ride takes throughout the Haunted Mansion, and the way in which the planning of the track makes optimal use of the space that the ride takes in. (Image by The Disney Blueprint Page, 2005).

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to make clear that the ways in which the Disney theme parks are structured are major reasons for the immersive experience that can be felt throughout these parks. By persistently theming not only the lead areas of the parks, but theming every kind of area into detail, the Imagineers (which are the creators and designers of the Disney theme parks) have tried to create an environment inside these theme parks that can make the guests stay in a certain atmospheric bubble. While the lead areas could be regarded as the most important of a theme park in general, both on the Imagineers' side of these areas (as in having an intentional importance), as on the audience's receptive side of these areas (as being understood as the most important parts of the park), only focusing on the lead areas to be immersive and not on the other areas could snap guests out of their immersive experience while experiencing the entire park.

Moreover, the structure of the Magic Kingdom theme park is quite complex and similar to a labyrinth, which is a way of structuring that I believe ensures for a more immersive environment, an environment in which audience can feel lost. Not only do the different walking routes leading through the park have a meandering, labyrinthine structure in themselves and do the many themed facades present throughout the park block out the view of what lies behind them: it are also the different destinations in the theme park, of which an individual chooses one to go next, that can make the park turn into a conceptual labyrinth, in which the individual has to find its way towards a certain destination, making these routes quite complex, as there is much to see and do in this theme park.

Through the creation of complex, labyrinthine structures throughout the Disney theme parks, the way in which these theme parks are structured does not only stand apart from the way in which

the world outside is structured: they also create a certain atmosphere in the park in which the virtuosity and the complexity of the space are key. Next to this, the audience can feel lost inside its structures, completely lost from the outside world, completely immersed in the themed world they are experiencing inside the parks. The labyrinthine structure does not only come back in the park's mapping, it also comes back in an unicursal way in the different rides which are featured throughout the park, creating enclosed environments in which the audience again can feel lost inside their structures.

Chapter 2: Illusions and the machine at the Magic Kingdom theme park

Not only is the Magic Kingdom theme park immersive through its structure, as in having a structure that can create a feeling of being lost (its labyrinthine structure), it also tries to create an immersive world through certain illusions, which are often created by machines. The experience at Magic Kingdom is that of entering a different world, and this experience can not only be felt by walking around the park: there are smaller parts of the parks that can take you on a certain journey, in the forms of rides and shows. Its many rides and shows could give the guests the feeling as if they are really there while experiencing them, as if what they are seeing is real, while at the same time the guests might also think about how this whole experience is created (how they have created these illusions and the machines). This is exactly how Davis (2001) explains his ideas about the connection between experience design (XD) and the consciousness, as he sees consciousness as a slider, present in every person, that runs from the totally linguistic to the pure intensities of sensation. Either guests are looking at the ride in a semantic way, trying to make sense of it all, creating meaning and thinking about them critically, or guests are partaking in the sensation of the ride, in that sense going with the flow, immersing themselves to the world that the ride tries to create. It is up to the guest where he or she will position this slider, and how he or she will interpret a certain ride, but there are also inherent factors to rides that will help the guests to partake more into the sensations of a certain ride. He gives the example of the rollercoaster, a sort of ride that can be looked at critically from the outside, but while riding it becomes quickly a sensation, something of which it is difficult to think of in a more or less sober sense, because of the experience it can induce to its riders, the experience of adrenaline and fear. But this can also happen in less thrilling ways, with more gentle movement through a dark ride environment that might seem real, as if guests are passing through fantasy environments, with maybe a small thrill-inducing part of the ride put somewhere in its track design.

Many of the rides present at the Magic Kingdom could be regarded as (neo-)baroque spectacles, due to the way in which these rides have been designed and their focus on the spectacularity of the experience. One of the important aspects of the baroque spectacle, is the phenomenon of border crossing, the disintegration of a work of art into a series of baroque folds that go beyond what we originally would regard as a work of art, into a limitless scope of vision (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 198-199). This phenomenon is explained by Deleuze (1993, 123) through his explanation of the “unity of the arts”, with which he means that in the Baroque, paintings not only stay within their borders, but exceed the frame in for instance the sculptures and architecture that surround the painting. Therefore, a certain continuity is strived for, by which an artwork not stays in its own frames of for instance the artwork itself, or its singular artform, but moves through different frames. It are the theme park attractions, that take this “unity of the arts” to the next level, and make use of many different arts in order to create a certain experience (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 199).

In this chapter I want to explain in what different ways there can be thought of creating an immersive world in the rides and shows present in the theme park, and what tactics are being used in the design of the rides that can create an immersive experience, as I believe there are three important, different ways in which immersive worlds are created through illusions in the many different rides present at the theme park, each of them attachable to one kind of ride:

- through Audio-Animatronics, lighting techniques and a certain attention to detail throughout the used scenery in the **dark ride** (or similar show experiences using Audio-Animatronics);
- through more thrilling kinetic experiences, special effects, and the architecture of and around the ride, whose exteriors in one instance could resemble landscapes such as

mountains, and whose interiors in another instance could resemble outer space itself, in the **rollercoaster**;

- through being able to use real human-beings, animals, and locations shot to film, and detailed computer animated special effects in **movie-based rides**, such as the simulator ride or the 3D show.

While these could be considered as three separate kinds of rides, all having a separate idea of what could be considered immersive, some rides present in the park make use of aspects of more than one category. Which one of those tactics is more immersive, stays a matter of debate. While many critical texts on theme parks focus on simulation rides, there are not so many that focus on the older category of dark ride attractions, of which there are many present at the Magic Kingdom park. When the park opened its new Fantasyland expansion in 2012, it showed to the world that its Imagineers still believe in this sort of immersive experience, an immersive experience created through the materialization of in this case Disney's animated fairy-tale movies: guests pass through materialized sets and environments that resemble the imaginary locations used in the animated films, pass by different scenes played out by characters from these movies, which in this sense are also materialized into the 'real' world, and which are brought to life through certain technologies (in the form of Audio-Animatronics and other special effects). This makes riding a dark ride a totally different experience than for instance watching a movie: instead of sitting passively and motionless in front of a screen (either in theatre or at home) on which the scenes of the movie are performed before your eyes, the audience moves physically past scenes that are fixed in place, and therefore seems to take on a more active role: in a dark ride, it is more the audience that moves, than the scenes that move, and is literally drawn into the story (Rahn, 2011).

2.1 The dark ride

While there are many types of rides and attractions present at the Magic Kingdom theme park (as there are also many types of rides and attractions present in the theme park landscape in general), there is one type of ride that comes back the most in the park, and might also be seen as this Disney theme park's trademark, which is the dark ride. Many of the rides that are present at the Magic Kingdom, follow a typical dark ride mechanic, in which guests step aboard a guided vehicle, such as a small cart or a small boat, which navigates through different scenes; these scenes are mostly dimly lit (hence the name 'dark ride'), and contain all sorts of elements to liven up these spaces, such as Audio-Animatronics, animation, sound, music and special effects. Examples of these rides present at the Magic Kingdom park, are the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, the It's a Small World ride, the Peter Pan's Flight ride, and the Haunted Mansion ride.

One of the important aspects of the dark ride that can make them so immersive, are its robotics, its automatons, or in Walt Disney's own trademarked terms, its Audio-Animatronics, that might seem as if there are real life-like people, animals, or even fictitious beings present at the scenes the audience passes through while experiencing the dark ride, while they are merely simulations of them. Lukas (2008, pp. 121-122) explains that it was Walt Disney himself who proved at the New York's World Fair of 1964-5 that robots mesmerized people. At the Disney parks, they found a way to incorporate these robots in all sorts of experiences, such as its dark rides, telling stories in the three-dimensional realm of the moving machine. These robots at the Disney parks are called Audio-Animatronics, and as Lukas describes, they reflected the desire of Disney to create characters that not only seemed as real as possible, but also would fulfil both mechanical as organic desires: they can fulfil efficient work without being paid, while they appear as friendly three-dimensional characters with a friendly personality that can tell a story.

Riding a dark ride is a liminal and psychological experience, which already begins shortly after boarding the rides vehicle, especially when riding the ride during daytime: as a guest of such a ride,

you are actually moving from the land of the living, which is symbolized by light, to some other world, which is symbolized by the darkness that is present throughout the ride (Lukas, 2008, p. 125). Because of the darkness, that takes hold of the riders of such a ride, and the way the vehicles are moving through the ride, the ride is playing with the expectation of the riders, creating surprises in either a form of awe (through showing aesthetically nice scenes, or a certain illusion) or in a form of terror (through showing something frightening, something threatening for the visitors, that in the end, when leaving the ride, can give the guests the experience as if they escaped something scary). Next to that, the sensory experience of the dark ride is important to let the guests immerse themselves in the world present in the dark ride. Sight, sound, smells, feeling of temperature, and kinetics all play an important role that sets the world inside the dark ride apart from the world outside the theme park, making it seem as a magical world on its own.

Some of the dark rides also have small portions of the ride that actually seem to tend to move into the realm of the thrill ride, such as the drops down the waterfalls in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride or the Splash Mountain ride (see Figures 2.1), which could be seen as examples of the mixing of immersive scenery and a sense of kinetic immersivity: the thrill can put the audience inside the experience, instead of for example when watching a movie, watching television, reading a book, listening to music, or viewing art in a museum, when the audience for example sits still in his or her seat or walks slowly past the work of art; here, the audience can feel that they are actually 'there', and the thrill can work almost like a wake-up call.



Figure 2.1a. Audio-Animatronics on the Zip-a-Dee Lady paddle steamer, featured in one of the scenes of the Splash Mountain ride. (Photograph taken by jpellgen (@1179_jp), 2017).



Figure 2.1b. Splash Mountain's steep drop down the waterfall into the briar patch. (Photograph taken by Freeman, 2009).

Figures 2.1. These images show how the Splash Mountain ride combines elements of both the dark ride and the thrill ride or rollercoaster. Scenes featuring audio-animatronics and other more aesthetically and visually focussed elements are alternated with more thrilling and kinetic elements, such as sharp turns, steep drops, or the fear of getting soaking wet.

The interesting thing about the Audio-Animatronics and other special effects used in dark rides, is the tense line between the machine and the illusion. In order to understand that something actually is an illusion, the audience has to know if something is fake, that the audience is tricked. It is only then, that the audience can see the virtuosity that lies behind the creation of the illusion. Therefore, rides can become artworks of the senses, in which the art lies in creating the illusion of actually being somewhere else, while the audience knows that everything they see is actually fabricated.

Because of the fact that many Disney related media is animated, with many of its famous feature films having been made through either hand drawn animation or computer animation, in many ways it is almost impossible to create an immersive world that seems realistic in terms of sticking to real life aesthetics, should the world present in the animated media be recreated faithfully in the park; should guests that experience a certain ride or show have the feeling as if they have entered the world of a certain film. But this actually can come in handy when creating Audio-Animatronics that do not fall into the uncanny valley; in many of the rides, especially those that have ties to Disney animated media, instead of trying to let the Audio-Animatronics look like real humans, or animals, they seem like three dimensional recreations of the caricatural cartoon characters that have stepped out of the movie, into the real world. What the designers of the rides at Disney theme parks try to do, is try to create an immersive experience in which the guests have the feeling as if they are inside the movie, where everything around them feels similar to as how it feels in the movie, but now made in a three dimensional space, which the guests traverse through.

There are many rides present in the park, in which guests pass through certain scenes from Disney animated movies, materialized and moving in a sense that they simulate that what is present in the original Disney animated movies, staying true to its source; while of course it is impossible for the guest to be truly situated inside a fairy tale cartoon, by simulating it all in a certain way that stays true to the guest's expectations when thinking of that fairy tale cartoon, it can feel as if guests are truly traversing through the locations from the Disney animated movies, and come eye to eye with characters that look and move in a way that stays true to the source, through design and Audio-Animatronic technologies (see Figures 2.2).



Figure 2.2a. Still frame of Wendy Darling from the Disney animated feature film Peter Pan. (Image owned by Walt Disney Studios, 1953a).



Figure 2.2b. Still frame of Mr. Smee from the Disney animated feature film *Peter Pan*. (Image owned by Walt Disney Studios, 1953b).



Figure 2.2c. Audio-Animatronics of Wendy Darling, Mr. Smee and some pirates featured in one of the scenes of the *Peter Pan's Flight* ride. (Photograph taken by Sullivan, 2013).



Figure 2.2d. Still frame of Doc (middle) and five of the other dwarves from the Disney animated feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. (Imaged owned by Walt Disney Studios, 1937).



Figure 2.2e. Audio-Animatronic of Doc featured in one of the scenes of the *Seven Dwarfs Mine Train* ride. (Photograph taken by *Inside the Magic*, 2014a).

Figures 2.2: These images show how the more or less simple art style used in Disney animated featured films can make sure that the Audio-Animatronics stay true to their source in their design; a task which might be more difficult when the Audio-Animatronics would be referring to real people, as either the uncanny valley or a matter of fake-ness might slip into their design. Because of their simple art style, the Audio-Animatronics do not need that much detail in their facial and body characteristics in order to resemble the character from the movie completely, while this makes it possible for the audience of these rides to come as close to these characters from the animated movies as possible, having been materialized into the real world.

Many critics, such as Rodaway (1995, p. 260) and Eco (1987, p. 46), have focused their critiques on the parks on the fact that they believe the parks to be like Platonic caves of illusions that actually spoil their guests with their many possibilities in what they actually show and act out: they believe that the parks destroy the guests' perception of reality outside the parks, as guests might find reality outside of the parks inferior to what can be seen in the parks. It almost seems as if these critics see the experiences that the parks offer as something that feels real through and through, as hyper-real, even more real than the real thing; when describing a ride such as the Jungle Cruise ride, they give the critique that in this ride it is very easy to see life-like animals (in the form of Audio-Animatronics), while in real life it is much more difficult to see those animals. This argument seems to regard Audio-Animatronics and real-life animals as equal, as if there cannot be made a distinction between what is fake and what is real by the guests of the theme park, while this is actually not how this ride should be interpreted. Allen (2014, p.34) describes what happens in this ride in a completely different way: he sees this ride as a reality game, and sees a duality between reality and fantasy present in this ride. This is actually a critique on Eco's view on what happens at the Disneyland park, as Eco believed that, in order for guests of the park to enjoy the total fake, the experiences that the park serves to its guests must seem totally real, the guest should be totally involved in its surroundings, and should not feel detached from the actually fake subject (1987, pp. 43-46). Allen sees this differently: it is not as if the guests of the Jungle Cruise do not know that everything in this ride is fake, that all the animals are fake, and that they are on a fake trip through a fake wilderness: the guests know that everything they see in the park is fake, but Imagineers have tried to add "a touch of fun and fantasy and the guests love it" (Hench, 1975 cited in Korkis, 2011). The Disney theme parks celebrate a certain art of simulation, and while doing so, these parks do not try to simulate reality, but try to simulate fantasy worlds as if they are 'real'. The parks depend on a certain duality, as guests might feel as if they are in a 'real' place and time, but at the same moment are aware that everything is a fantasy (see Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3. This image shows one of the scenes guests pass by during the Jungle Cruise ride. The design of the elephants might seem real, but the fact that the guests know that what they see is fake and the way in which they are staged in a sense that is interesting for the guests to behold (as if all the elephants are having the times of their lives during a washing session) makes it all become a sort of fantasy, showing the duality between reality and fantasy in the Magic Kingdom theme park. (Photograph taken by Lee, 2014b).

A different critique on the many Audio-Animatronics present in the park, by Baudrillard (2005, pp. 118-119), of the Audio-Animatronics embodying an autonomous world of machines, is also tackled by Allen (2014, p. 39), looking back on older descriptions of Baudrillard (1983, pp. 92-95) on the distinction between the robot and the automaton. Baudrillard (2005, pp. 118-119) gives a critique on the Carousel of Progress attraction, which is a show that is actually played out by Audio-Animatronics, and shows the progress of certain technologies present at home through different time-frames. The auditorium seating on which the audience sits, moves from one scene to the other as in a carousel, hence the name of the attraction. In each scene, there are the same similar Audio-Animatronics of the family present on stage, and it are the different technologies that are used at home in a certain time frame that change from scene to scene; these technologies change over time, to show a certain kind of progress of man's life at home. While Baudrillard is critical on this show, because it celebrates a certain form of automatism, a form of self-efficiency that actually puts humans in the background, Baudrillard misses something he actually has written earlier on in his life, and is of importance when taking into consideration what happens in this attraction. In his *Simulations*, Baudrillard (1983, pp. 92-95) makes a distinction between the robot and the automaton. While the robot is a model of a 'formally perfected' machine, the automaton is a 'theatrical counterfeit, a mechanical and clock-like man' (1983, p. 92). Therefore, automatons are only there for simulation purposes, not for functional purposes per se, and their actual purpose might actually be to keep guests in a state in which there is "always [a] detectable alternation between semblance and reality" possible in the guests' perceptions, as described before. It is only through using Audio-

Animatronics, that guests can actually marvel at the simulation of something humanlike, an experience which is lost when a real person plays the part that is now played by what could be regarded as an automaton. Something very similar happens in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, a boat ride with a much more serious tone than for instance the already mentioned Jungle Cruise ride: in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, many Audio-Animatronics play out the parts of the pirates present in the many scenes that the guests pass through (see Figure 2.4). Only in this way, guests can stay in a sense of wonder of the lifelikeness of all these characters, the quality of the simulation of something human, something which is actually totally lost, would everything be played out by real people.



Figure 2.4. This image shows the Audio-Animatronic resembling Captain Jack Sparrow featured in one of the scenes of the Pirates of the Caribbean ride. While the role that this Audio-Animatronic plays in this ride could actually have been played by a real human being (as this Audio-Animatronic represents a human pirate), the fact that the ride makes use of Audio-Animatronics that might seem close to reality for the audience might heighten a possible sense of wonder in this audience of the lifelikeness and the quality of simulation of these kind of Audio-Animatronics which resemble human beings. (Photograph taken by Lee, 2013).

It is through the dark-ride, that the Deleuzean “unity of the arts” reaches a high point: there are many things present in the dark ride, many different forms of arts, that altogether create a sense of continuity, and therefore a fluidity between illusion and reality. The total design of the waiting lines is already something to notice, as all of them are very distinct of each other, and try to create a certain atmosphere through their architecture, theming, lighting and music. In many of the waiting

areas, there are murals, paintings, or posters hanging on the wall, which in other settings (such as museums) could be regarded as works of art in themselves, but in this setting are actually part of the bigger picture, the overall experience, in which the décor makes the set as a work of art. And this is only the beginning, as it is in the actual dark ride itself that the real unity of the arts takes shape. The Audio-Animatronics present in the ride could be seen as moving sculptures, but they are not works of art on their own: they are part of their surroundings, and therefore the borders or frames of these works of art actually disintegrate into their environment. They are part of certain sets, which for instance are made up of certain architectural elements, or mimicking a certain natural environment, such as a cave or a garden. There are many detailed props present around this scenes, or in the hands of the Audio-Animatronics, and they wear detailed robes that could be considered a form of clothing design. Special effects create illusions, and lighting also takes a special role in the dark ride, as lighting is very important for the overall atmosphere of the ride. These are all very distinct forms of art, but they all come together in the theme park attraction, creating a unity in which even the participant is part of the entertainment spectacle itself, becoming both an “architecture of vision” as an “architecture of the senses” (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 199).

2.2 The rollercoaster

While the rollercoasters that are situated at the Magic Kingdom theme park might be less thrilling than the rollercoasters found at other theme or amusement parks, the audience might also differ: Magic Kingdom is more of a family friendly theme park, not so much a thrill-seekers theme park. This means, that for some, these thrill rides, such as the Big Thunder Mountain, the Space Mountain or the Splash Mountain, might still be regarded as truly thrill-inducing, even already by watching them, because these people might not be used to these kind of experiences, while for others, they might seem as rollercoasters more suited for families and kids.

While dark rides feed on a more aesthetically hungry audience, an audience that likes to see something aesthetically pleasing happening in front of their eyes, and want to be told a story, most rollercoasters actually offer a totally different immersive experience to their audience, and feed on more primeval, human fears, such as the loss of control (Minton, 1999 in Anderson and Burt, 2017, p. 47) and a feeling of impending death (Bourke, 2005 in Anderson and Burt, 2017, p. 47). Therefore, rollercoasters have another, different element of immersive experience present in their structures: they can offer guests thrilling experiences, as if they come eye to eye with their own fears itself, because of their heights, high speeds, sharp turns, and loopings, while the audience actually knows they are in a safe place. While the rollercoasters at Magic Kingdom should not be regarded as rollercoasters that want to let the guests have a near-death experience, as they do not go as fast, steep, or rough as rollercoasters in other theme parks, they still have all sorts of thrills present in their tracks, such as sharp turns, descends, ascends and passages through the dark, in which the audience does not know which way the tracks will go, but offers them in a more fun and jolly way.

As Lukas (2008, p. 14) writes in his explanation on what rollercoasters mean in themselves and for the theme park in general, and in what ways they could be understood, the rollercoasters situated in Disneyland, such as the Space Mountain and the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (which are both rollercoasters that could be regarded as the blue prints that were used as the basis for the similarly named ones situated in Magic Kingdom) are actually not the ‘true white knuckle rides’ one would associate with the word rollercoaster. They are rather thematic delivery devices, which offer the audience not solely a thrilling experience, but also something for the eyes to behold through their themed scenery they are situated in (which is similar to the dark ride), and that therefore can give their audience the immersive experience of believing to be riding through a certain landscape, such as is the case with the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad rollercoaster, which passes through a fake representation of the rockwork buttes of Monument Valley (see Figure 2.5). The rollercoasters

at the Magic Kingdom therefore break with their original function of only being kinetic instruments, shaping them into narrativized experiences (Bukatman, 1991, p. 61; Bryman, 1999, pp. 31-32). Therefore, the earlier mentioned unity in the arts is also important when taking into consideration the rollercoasters present in the Magic Kingdom, more-so than in other theme parks, in which the experience of the rollercoasters is totally made up by the experience of the rollercoaster itself, and not by the experience of the surroundings the rollercoasters passes through and its narrative.



Figure 2.5. This image shows a part of the scenery of the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride. Instead of this rollercoaster merely being the track itself, the designers of the Magic Kingdom park have tried to create an immersive environment around its tracks for the guests to experience while riding this rollercoaster. (Photograph taken by Edblom, 2006).

Rollercoasters play with the feeling of time, and could be regarded as instruments that let guests experience time in a different sense than is possible to explain in measured, scientific terms. When riding a rollercoaster, you experience something actually quite distanced from reason itself. There are different ways in which time plays a role in the rollercoaster experience. This already starts in the waiting line, before actually experiencing the rollercoaster itself: before entering the waiting line, most rides show outside how long guests will have to wait in line before they can actually experience the ride, measured in minutes and/or hours. But while experiencing these waiting lines, experiencing the feeling of impending doom of what will come, these waiting lines can actually feel as if they might take on forever (Anderson and Burt, 2017, p. 50). This shows that there is a difference between measured and felt time while experiencing certain things, as measured time cannot tell accurately how long a waiting will actually feel for its audience. A different situation in which time plays an important role in the rollercoaster experience, actually takes place while riding it: the lift hill, which is an important part of most rollercoaster, takes the guests on a long ascend to the top of the

rollercoaster, after which the 'actual' ride with its many thrills will finally happen. Ascending this lift hill can actually feel as a moment that takes on forever, and not only because it again delays actually experiencing the thrills of the rollercoaster. The 'click-clack'-ing sound of these lift hills, which is actually the sound that comes from the safety device that is situated in these lift hills and prevents the rollercoaster from moving backwards, might evoke the feeling of listening to a clock ticking, towards the inevitable descend the rollercoaster will make after reaching the top, and the many thrills that will come afterwards (Anderson and Burt, 2017, p. 50). During the rollercoaster itself, all feelings of time and space might be different than what guests might typically feel of those instances, as guests might be too busy experiencing the ride itself, losing all sense of time and space while doing so. But this might actually be the case with other forms of art, such as a movie, a book, or, to stay closer to the subject that is elaborated on throughout this thesis, other experiences in the theme park, such as the dark rides, the shows, or just simply walking around the theme park: when these experiences have the ability to let the audience totally immerse in them, they might lose track of the time, as they won't look at their mobile phones or watches all the time anymore throughout the experience.

In most of the rollercoasters present in the Magic Kingdom theme park, the ascend towards the top actually offers something for the guests to look at, making use of the time that it takes for the rollercoaster to get to the top, to give a sort of immersive experience similar to that of the dark ride. For instance, in the Space Mountain rollercoaster, which is situated entirely interiorly, there are two lift hills, and both of them give a different experience that fits the overall theming of the rollercoaster: one of them is situated in a tunnel with a futuristic light effect present inside of it, with the lights moving from the end of the tunnel towards the beginning of the tunnel, fitting the overall futuristic theme of the Space Mountain rollercoaster, while the other lift hill is situated in a large hall, which shows Audio-Animatronics of rocket scientists and astronauts in their suits working on their space-related work. In the Splash Mountain ride, there are many smaller lift hills, and many smaller drops, but the largest lift hill of them all is actually situated almost at the ending of the ride, leading towards the climax of the entire ride: its signature climatic steep drop down the waterfall into the briar patch, after which many of its riders might get soaked. This last lift hill is situated inside of the structures of the Splash Mountains, and all sorts of things happen around you while ascending towards this thrilling moment: the audience passes under two Audio-Animatronics vultures, that taunt them before they move up the lift hill, and just before the climatic moment, there is a small scene on the left, where Br'er Rabbit is held by Br'er Fox, and Br'er Rabbit pleads not to be thrown into the briar patch. This all adds a more dramatic element of the roller coaster, making it all more into a thrilling immersive story, than that the ride would only be the tracks itself and such elements as gravity and G-powers that would induce its thrills on the audience, with no more immersive qualities besides of the rollercoaster giving you an experience where you forget space and time, the rollercoaster in itself only being the structure of its tracks and the coaster that dashes over it.

Another important aspect of experiencing a rollercoaster ride lies in the fact that experiencing them is both an individual act, as it can offer an 'out-of-body experience of an ecstatic nature', as it is an act for the social body, as people are thrown together by the ride, neglecting such things as the normal social order (Lukas, 2008, p. 115). In this sense, while the rollercoasters at the Magic Kingdom park are less frightening as those at other theme parks around the world, and therefore might be less 'ecstatic', because of their gentler tracks they actually have the ability to let more people experience them, as they are meant to be experienced by all members of the family, from young to old (as long as those family members conform to the ride's restrictions), not only by the real thrill-seekers. In this sense, the rollercoasters at the Magic Kingdom have even a greater ability to 'discard the social and psychological orders of the day', as they also give youngsters (or a little-thrill-seeking elderly people) the ability to experience rides that put them in a liminal state of all

sorts of extreme human emotions.

Many of the more thrilling rides present at the Magic Kingdom park, still have elements similar to those of the dark ride: just as the dark rides, they could be seen as examples of the “unity of arts”, as the rollercoaster tracks itself could even be seen as a scientific artwork, but also its surroundings are very much detailed in these park: for instance through Audio-Animatronics, architectural design, mimicking nature in its surrounding, but also in such aspects as the design of the rollercoaster carts for instance. The newer Seven Dwarves ride even could be regarded as the combination of a dark ride and a gentle roller coaster, as the ride starts out as a dark ride inside the mines, moving past all the different dwarves working in these mines (similar to scenes from such dark rides as the Peter Pan ride, the Pinocchio ride etc.) and after that, become a gentle roller coaster, which even has an interactive element: guests can tilt their cars by shifting their weight towards either side of the car.

2.3 The movie-based ride: 3D-/4D-shows and simulator rides

A different way to create a certain sense of immersivity in theme park rides than for instance using ‘real’, materialized environments, is by using such ideas and concepts in the design of a ride as the virtual world, 3D or stereoscopic visuals, and motion simulation. An example of a simulator ride that Ndalianis (2004, pp. 194-195) gives, a form of theme park rides that could be regarded as a certain distinctive form of dark rides, is the original *Star Tours* ride at Disneyland (Anaheim, California). In this ride, guests board a fake spaceship, which is the simulation vehicle, and are shown a 70 mm film projection of an adventurous voyage through the world of Star Wars, with this film showing certain things that happened also during the movies, such as the scene in which Luke Skywalker flies an X-Wing and destroys the Death Star. The difference with watching the Star Wars movies in cinema or at home, is that in this ride all the scenes are experienced in first person, as the audience have boarded a simulation vehicle, making it seem for the audience as if they have boarded a real ship from the Star Wars universe and are travelling through locations that are present in the Star Wars universe. The simulator ride mimics what the audience sees on the screen, and because of the combination of visual and kinetic elements, the audience feels as if they have invaded the imaginative world of Star Wars. She also writes about the Amazing Adventures of Spiderman ride and the Terminator 2: 3D Battle across Time 3D movie experience, which are both situated in Universal Studios Resort theme parks, as both having certain neo-baroque aesthetics that seem to cross borders. It is actually interesting to see that Ndalianis mostly seems to mention these sort of rides involving screens as truly neo-baroque, but not mentions the other kind of rides which I have just mentioned, rides in which you are truly moving through a fully realized immersive environment. There are many other texts that also seem to focus on these movie-based rides as truly immersive (King, 2000; Pair, et al., 2003; Lukas, 2009; Di Benedetto, 2012; Freitag, 2017), while I believe there is still a lot of progress to be made to create a movie that is truly immersive, as immersive that you truly believe you are in the space shown on screen. This is why I believe that movie-based rides are actually less immersive than for instance a dark ride or a rollercoaster.

In the Magic Kingdom theme park, there are no simulator rides involving screens, and while there is a 4D show present (the Mickey’s PhilharMagic), the park does not seem to focus on these sort of movie-based rides, while other theme parks seem to focus more and more on these. Take for instance the Universal Orlando Resort theme parks, Universal Studios Florida and Universal’s Island of Adventure, which are also located in near Orlando, but have many attractions which have an element present in themselves that focuses on 3D effects or simulation through screens (with eight rides at Universal Studios Florida and three rides at Universal’s Island of Adventure having such an element present in them). While the benefits of using 3D screens for simulations could be that the real actors, movie locations, sets, animals, props etc. from the movies that the attractions are based

on can be used in the attractions themselves (as they are filmed and shown in 3D), being closer to reality than for instance an audio-animatronic of a real person or a real animal, screens can also create a problem: they ensure that the guests know that what they see is shown from a screen, that it is therefore not materialized, and is therefore just a simulation that is not present in the real world. The border of the screen stays between the audience (the spectator) and what he or she sees (the spectated), and while this border seems to go away by making the image stereoscopic and providing the audience with 3D glasses, the idea that everything comes from off a screen may actually stay, especially because of the fact that the audience have to wear glasses to enjoy the experience.

The fact that in a 3D movie or a simulator nothing is materialized into something present in the audience's environment, but actually comes from off a screen, also leaves out a sense of virtuoso which is present in creating a similar experience in a more traditional dark ride setting, through the materialization of the things that were present in a movie throughout the attraction. Next to that, the idea that what the audience sees is actually presented to them from a screen can make the experience less immersive, as everything the audience sees is virtual (and the audience might have this mindset throughout the ride, especially when it might have seen similar rides before). What the audience sees in a 3D simulator ride might look closer to reality (as some older Audio-Animatronics may stay fake-looking), but as what the audience sees actually comes from off a screen, this stays virtual. The actual reception of these kind of rides can be seen back in the many critiques coming from the audience and critics on the new screen-based rides present in the Universal theme parks, such as the critiques on the new Fast and Furious Supercharged ride (Fast and Furious Supercharged, 2018; Kubersky, 2018; Levine, 2018; Niles, 2018; Young, 2018). These mostly negative reviews written about this screen-based ride, of which there were already a lot present in the Universal Orlando Resort theme parks, and its negative ratings show that the focus should not lie on these kind of rides solely when designing a theme park, but should lie more on a certain diversity in different ride experiences throughout the park. The fact that the audience has to put on 3D glasses every time they will experience a new ride, and have to look at a screen again, might take them away from the immersive experience they should have when experiencing a theme park.

2.4 Conclusion

By focusing more on rides that focus on the materialization of the imaginative Disney stories, through a materialized décor, materialized Audio-Animatronics, materialized props, and an actual, materialized track, such as dark rides and themed roller coaster rides, and less on rides that take place in a virtual world that is presented through a screen, such as 3D/4D-shows or simulation rides, the Imagineers of the Magic Kingdom theme park have created different kinds of immersive environments in the different rides featured at the Magic Kingdom theme park, which through their material quality, detail in execution and techniques used in order to induce their illusions have actually entered the real world, and vice versa, have become worlds that the guests of the theme park can actually enter, in which they can let themselves immerse in completely. This is what sets the environment that is created in the Magic Kingdom theme park apart from other more screen-based or virtual media forms, such as for example cinema, television, the internet, or virtual reality, and even sets it apart from other theme parks that seem to focus more and more on screen-based simulation and virtual reality in their rides' architecture and structure (such as is the case the theme parks owned by the Universal Studios). Because of the fact that virtual reality and 3D media seem to have begun a life outside of the theme park environment, and therefore seem to have become almost normalized, into the domestic and public sphere, I believe that in order to offer the guests of a theme park an immersive experience that cannot be felt at other places, an immersive experience should be offered in which materiality, such as in the building of detailed sets, Audio-Animatronics, props, and an actual track, plays an important role in order to stay interesting for its audience.

Chapter 3: Immersive souvenirs of the Magic Kingdom theme park

While Ndalianis (2004, pp. 71-81) mentions intertextuality as one of the aesthetics of the (neo-) baroque, and while her explanation of the concept can still be tied closely to the concept of the immersive space, her explanation has less to do with the intention of the makers, as she sees intertextuality and the serial logic that ensures for intertextuality as aspects of the text that create a gap between the author and his or her work, creating an openness that leads to a distinction between intention and interpretation, and creating a possibility to interpret works in totally different ways. This way of looking at intertextuality can create a sense of infinite possibilities in interpretation, as people can create different intertextual links through their individual interpretations. Because this thesis looks at ways in which the creators of a theme park try to create an immersive experience at that theme park, intention and interpretation are both important: it is only when an intentionally made immersive experience is interpreted as such by the audience, that it will actually work as the creators intended the experience to be. Therefore, the explanation of Ndalianis of the term intertextuality, which she sees as creating multiple possibilities to interpretation (in relation to the concepts of the fold and the labyrinth), is interesting when thinking about theme parks, but I see a more useful interpretation of the term in Claes' (2011) book *Echo's Echo's*, which explains the concept of intertextuality more theoretically. It is through the actual fact that intertextual references are used in a text, that the stories that are told in a text and world that is created within the text becomes bigger than the text itself.

In his book *Echo's Echo's*, Claes (2011) tries to explain the underlying theories that he finds important for understanding such concepts as intertextuality, citation, and allusion. While Claes writes strictly about the relation between lingual texts in his book, we know through Eco's (1976) theories and philosophies on semiotics, the study of meaning-making and the process of signs, that not only texts could be read as texts, but that all sorts of cultural expressions can contain signs that can have a certain meaning, and can therefore be read as texts. Not only linguistic signs can contain meaning, which can be found back in language and literature, but for instance visual signs can have a meaning as well, which makes it possible to 'read' such diverse cultural expressions as the visual arts, cinema, architecture, or even cultural habits. Therefore, intertextuality is a useable concept when describing relationships between the Disney theme park and other cultural expressions, even when the theme park and those cultural expressions are not archetypical texts.

It is exactly the concept of intertextuality, that can be tied to a similar notion that Lukas (2013, p. 5) uses when defining what he sees as an immersive world: through intertextuality, a world can be created that has a background or history, and a culture, a world that can actually be larger than the actual space it takes in. Next to that, intertextuality can make an immersive world less shallow, as by using intertextuality in an immersive space, there is a story attached to the things that can be seen at the immersive space. This can make the immersive space less shallow, and can make it easier for the guests to believe what they are experiencing, as the guests might already know of the stories that are referenced to throughout the immersive space.

In this chapter I will focus on the different kinds of souvenirs which tourists can consume at the Magic Kingdom theme park and which can be brought home with them after their visit to the theme park, and the different ways in which these souvenirs can have meaning for the tourist as a consumer. Based on existing literature on souvenirs, souvenirs could be interpreted as talismans, extensions or parts of the immersive experience felt at a holiday destination, that can extend the feelings that the tourists had at their holiday destination into their homes (Anderson, 2009; Haldrup, 2016), and could therefore be considered objects that can induce memories of the immersive experiences had at the theme park. In this chapter I want to investigate if this is also the case for the souvenirs of the Magic Kingdom theme park, whether the souvenirs are devised with such uses in

mind, how the souvenirs of this theme park could be interpreted as immersive objects, and what kind of different immersive souvenirs there are sold and/or taken home by the tourists visiting the theme park. I will emphasize on both all the Disney souvenirs in a more general sense, as 'magical things' and intertextual souvenirs, as on certain categories of Disney souvenirs, such as Disney collectibles, immersive photographs, soft toys and media featuring the Magic Kingdom park.

3.1 The souvenir as a magical thing

Haldrup (2016, p. 58-59) has argued that souvenirs could be considered magical things, which can step in and out of various roles which he believes souvenirs can play. While he suggests that these various roles of the souvenir are not fixed, acknowledging that they are overlapping and fluid, he sees the souvenir act as an utility item, a mediator, a fetish, a tuner, and/or an artwork (Haldrup, 2016, p. 56). Thinking through these various roles given to the souvenir, the roles of the souvenir as mediator, the souvenir as fetish and the souvenir as tuner seem most important when taking into consideration the concept of immersivity in souvenirs, as immersivity has to do with the feeling of actually being somewhere else, just as the ideas behind these three roles seem to encompass. Souvenirs can work as mediators, as connecting entities existing between the home where it is situated and the extraordinary place it was bought. They can bring up ideas about a certain time, a space, or a specific event, just by looking at them; in the case of the souvenirs of the Magic Kingdom theme park, this could be the memories of the visit to the theme park, memories of the theme park in itself, or memories of a certain event that happened during your visit to the theme park. The souvenir can also work as a tuner, tuning the consumers body to particular affective atmospheres 'from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge' (Anderson, 2009, p. 78). It is important to note, that the Disney theme parks could be considered tuners in themselves, as huge importance is given to affective qualities of the park, a certain sense of 'happiness' around which everything in the park is actually themed, also coming back in advertising and the various Disney media. Souvenirs taken home from trips to the Magic Kingdom theme park could also be considered fetish objects, that present the totality of the experience by substituting it with a fragment, in this sense, the souvenir standing for the entire park and the experiences had at this park. This shows that the Magic Kingdom souvenirs (and Disney theme park souvenirs in general) can be valued for the many different roles which are given by Haldrup (2016), with many of these roles showing the ability of the souvenir to serve as a doorway to a certain time, space or event from personal history, making these objects considerably immersive in their own sense.

While it should be noted that every souvenir might serve different purposes for different tourists, and might be valued in a different sense by different tourists, many of the souvenirs sold at the Magic Kingdom theme park can step in and out of the various roles that Haldrup comes up with, and could therefore be considered magical things in themselves. Take for instance the 'Main St. U.S.A. "My Main Attraction" Figure by Precious Moments' figure, which is a hand-painted porcelain figure that could be used in the home decoration of the tourist (see Figure 3.1). While this souvenir could be considered somewhat sentimental, the sentimental values it shows in its depiction of the theme park visit are actually similar to those which can be felt at the Disney theme parks themselves: those of happiness, love, and feeling as a child again. Therefore it could easily be used as a tuner, to make the owner feel happy again just by looking at the souvenir, for instance during times of sadness or doubt. But it can also play other roles, such as that of the mediator (as a doorway in the mind of its owner to the park, its space and its structures; in the case of this souvenir, especially as a doorway to the Main Street U.S.A. part of the park, due to the name-checking of this part of the park in the name of the souvenir itself and on the little flag that the girl is holding, and because of the fact that the clock and the pavement featured in this porcelain figure resemble the clock and the pavement featured in the Main Street U.S.A. area of the park) or of that as the fetish object (putting the whole

trip into one object, into a materialized memory). Next to that, this souvenir can also play the roles of both the utility item and the artwork, as the owner might use it in his or her home interior as a decoration in order to show his or her identity to others, and might be aesthetically attracted to this object, due to its style and detailed production. This shows the complexity of the souvenir, the many roles it can play and the ways in which the souvenir could be thought of as something that influences its environment and its owner through those various roles it can play, making it into an object that could be thought of as something magical.



Figure 3.1. Main St. U.S.A. “My Main Attraction” Figure by Precious Moments. (Image taken from the shopDisney website, 2018a).

3.2 Intertextual souvenirs

All souvenirs sold at the Disney theme parks could be considered intertextual souvenirs: the souvenirs semantically refer back to the trip to the park as a part of the tourist's personal history, as the souvenirs could be considered a personal reference to a place and time that were experienced by the tourist, a reference back to the overall experience of the theme parks by the tourist or to a certain special moment experienced by the tourist, when the souvenir is taken back home. Next to referencing the parks or smaller aspects of these parks, most of the souvenirs that can be bought at the Disney theme parks also reference a certain other form of Disney media, for instance to characters which are featured in the Disney animated movies and/or cartoons. This means that these souvenirs can have backstories, which are told throughout various media, and in this way individuals can have a certain affection for a certain character, due to their knowledge of a certain character and/or because they think the character comes close to the individual's personality.

Therefore, Disney souvenirs could be regarded as intertextual triangles (see Figures 3.2), referring to both real as virtual texts (referring to the real as in referring to the trip to the parks, which could be considered a part of the visitor's personal history, and to the parks in themselves, materialized in the 'real' world; referring to the virtual as in referring to the fairy tale stories and other fantasy stories told through the Disney media), with the Disney souvenirs showing off these two opposites contained within the structures of the Disney theme parks: that of a fantasy made reality in those parks, a fantasy that could be visited by tourists and guests. For children, the souvenirs referring to the newer Disney media franchises will more likely play a more important role, as they are the target audience seeing this newer Disney media through children's eyes, while for adult consumers, intertextual references to older Disney media could play with their memories and feelings of the past, as these could be considered inducers of childhood nostalgia. Collecting Disney souvenirs, which is often referred to as collecting 'Disneyana' (Cross, 2017, p. 105), has become an important aspect of experiencing the Disney theme parks for Disney tourists and fans, and in a sense has become something which could be considered an engaging hobby in itself, due to the vast amount of content (and the willingness of the Disney tourists and fans to collect these). Collecting pop culture memorabilia actually has a lot to do with the series, due to the fact that Disney keeps on releasing new memorabilia over and over, and is therefore a hobby that could be considered one in which the subject (in this sense the Disney tourist or Disney fan) could lose himself or herself completely in.



Figure 3.2a. Still frame of Stitch (second from the right) from the Disney animated feature film *Lilo & Stitch*. (Image owned by Walt Disney Studios, 2002).

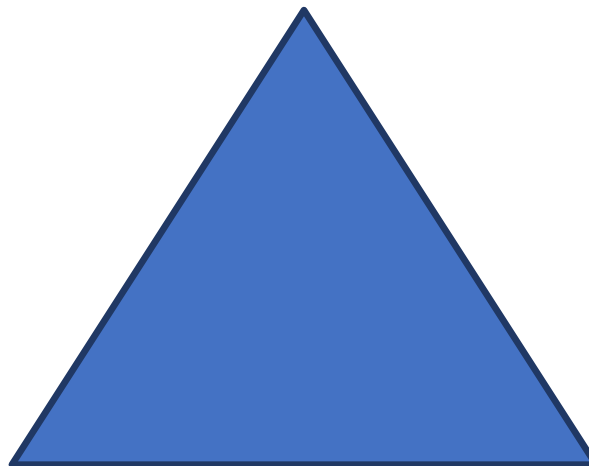


Figure 3.2b. Character performer in Stitch costume during the Move It! Shake It! Dance & Play It! Street Party at the Magic Kingdom theme park. (Photograph taken by Wong, 2016).



Figure 3.2c. Stitch Hawaiian Plush – Medium. (Image taken from the shopDisney website, 2018b).

The Disney theme park souvenir (Fig. 3.2c)



Real texts: The trip to the Disney theme park (part of the individual's personal history), and the Disney theme park in itself (Fig. 3.2b)

Virtual texts: fairy tale stories and fantasy stories told through the Disney media (Fig. 3.2a)

Figure 3.2d. This intertextual triangle shows the relations between the virtual Disney media, the 'real' Disney media and the souvenir, in which each of the three subjects refers to or can refer to each of the other two subjects, depending on the knowledge of the observer.

While the Disney collectible actually started out as a way for Walt Disney to subsidize his costly cartoons through means of selling licensed character toys and dolls in the 1930s, and in that sense actually started out in a time that the Disney theme parks did not even exist yet, it was when the Disney theme parks came into existence that the Disney collectible could actually turn into something of a miniature or souvenir of the pilgrimage to these parks (Cross, 2017, p. 105; Moore, 1980), and therefore could become an object which could also have ties to an actual place instead of only having ties with the virtual worlds, characters and events featured in the Disney (animated) media. Many of the Disney collectibles that could be bought as souvenirs at the park, are actually quite similar to the souvenirs that can be bought at the more traditional religious pilgrimage sites, such as those sold at Lourdes or Rome (see Figures 3.3), with the major difference that the Disney theme parks are not sacred or historical places in the traditional sense of this word, but in a more personal sense: these parks are like large toy environments, 'quasi-sacred places to go to in order to renew one's "faith" in the innocent delights of childhood' (Cross, 2017, p. 105). What is important about taking home these memorabilia from the Disney theme park pilgrimage as souvenirs, is that in a sense quite similar to for instance the souvenirs taken home from the more traditional pilgrimage sites, they are means to extend the memory of the event that is the visit to this sacred place, and are ways for the consumer of the souvenir to keep the memory of visiting these parks at home in the form of something material, as something which the consumer is able to possess, control, and confine for a longer time than the actual event took place. The Disney souvenirs could therefore be understood as means to let the experience felt at the Disney theme parks continue on in the domestic atmosphere.



Figure 3.3a. Typical religious souvenirs, shaped in the image of biblical figures. These figures might be known to the pilgrim or tourist through the many stories told about this figure throughout various religious texts. (Photograph taken by McL, 2009).



Figure 3.3b. Beast Couture de Force Figurine by Enesco – Beauty and the Beast. Similar to the typical religious souvenirs, the souvenir is shaped to a figure, in this case a Disney figure, that might be known to the tourist through the stories that are told about this character throughout the various Disney media and its theme parks. (Image taken from the shopDisney website, 2018c).

Nowadays, there are many different Disney souvenirs and memorabilia in existence; the online Disney Shop, which also sells many of the commodities sold in the theme parks themselves, sells 1087 distinct objects which are categorized as ‘Collectibles’ in 2018 (shopDisney, 2018d), and this could be considered only the top of the iceberg, as the stock sold throughout the Disney industries changes over time and actually anything related to Disney could be collected. Some of the items that are sold through the Disney Shop could be considered mystery items, such as the Vinylmation line of vinyl collectible figures (see Figure 3.4) or the Disney Animators’ Collection line of collectible figures (see Figure 3.5), sold in sealed-off, non-see-through containers, where the customer does not know beforehand which item he or she will get from the box or package they are contained in, adding a certain mysterious aspect (and gambling aspect) to these commodities. These kind of ‘mysterious’ items are actually sold under one individual store item in the online store, while they will only get you one ‘mysterious’ item out of these series of for instance twelve in the case of the Vinylmation figures, making the number of distinct objects sold throughout the online store even higher. Many of the items that are sold throughout the parks are in many different ways connectable to different sorts of series, and in that sense actually offer the possibility to be regarded as parts of a series in a more personal sense, as they could be seen as parts of a personal collection, which is the collection of Disney memorabilia the customer owns at home, or in a more general sense, as parts of the collection, line, season or category of souvenirs they are released in, or as parts of an intertextual series, a series that contains everything that could be connected to the form of media they are referring to. Cross (2017, p. 105) explains the popularity of the Disneyana memorabilia through their “additive” quality, as he believes these souvenirs gain value when they are combined with similar souvenirs, which are often packaged in series. The Disney merchandizing department smartly plays into the whole Disneyana hype by releasing new merchandize with every new media release,

creating seasons for certain kinds of Disney memorabilia (such as the Vinylmation line of vinyl collectibles or the many different Disney clothing lines for instance (shopDisney, 2018d)), and creating merchandize specifically for a certain event, such as the park's anniversaries (Miller, 2016), holidays (Miller, 2017) or other celebrations (Miller, 2018).



Figure 3.4. 3" Stormtrooper Executioner Vinylmation figure in front of its non-see-through, sealed-off container, part of the Vinylmation Star Wars: The Last Jedi Series. The customer cannot know before buying the item which Vinylmation figure will be in the box. (Image taken from the shopDisney website, 2018e).



Figure 3.5. Disney Animators' Collection Little's Mystery Micro Collectible Figures in front of their non-see-through, sealed-off containers. The customer cannot know before buying the item which figure will be in the box. (Image taken from the shopDisney website, 2018f).

With some of the collectible souvenirs which are sold throughout the Disney theme parks, the parks offer a kind of experience around these commodities that can actually go on further after having bought these items, and which has to do with the trading of these commodities, as well as the life of the commodity (Appadurai, 1986). This can especially be seen back in pin trading, an activity which can be practiced throughout the Disney theme parks. Disney pins are sold in many Disney shops throughout the theme parks, and many of the Disney employees who work at the parks have special key chains that contain Disney pins. It is possible for the visitors to buy pin trading starter sets, which come in the form of a lanyard with four cloisonné pins (see Figure 3.6), and start pin trading with the members of the staff of the Magic Kingdom theme park (see Figure 3.7), creating their own collection of Disney pins they like (Miller, 2013). It can give guests new experiences at the park, new ways to experience the parks, which makes every visit to the park different. In that sense, the theme parks organize ways to let the parks be entities that are alive, always changing, and where guests can be eagerly searching for a new pin they will like to have in their collection, somewhere being kept in one of the employees collections of pins.... the only problem with this is that the least liked pins happen to get lost in the pin trading traffic, as they are more likely to be caught up in the collections of the Disney employees, while the most liked or special pins will not be traded that easily by the Disney guests with the Disney employees, as the guests would more likely like to keep these in their own pin collections.



Figure 3.6. Pirates Pin Starter Set. (Image taken from the shopDisney website, 2018g).



Figure 3.7. A member of the staff of the Magic Kingdom theme park with a lanyard full of pins, with whom the guests of the theme park can trade their own pins with. (Photograph taken by Ziese, 2015).

Not only could the Disney souvenirs be simply considered intertextual references to the past experiences of their owners or to the Disney media, they are also parts of their owner's daily life, as they either fulfil decorative, practical or symbolic functions in their owner's life, long after the owner's first encounter with the object during his/her trip and the purchase of it. Just like other souvenirs, they are 'symbolic markers [that] can be used to theme and resource our narrative of identity and material terrains, both for ourselves and others' (Morgan and Pritchard, 2005, p. 45). The souvenirs from the Magic Kingdom theme park could be seen as a way for the Disney tourist or fan to be able to create his/her own little Magic Kingdom theme park at his/her home, and in that sense also a way to show to others who visit house how much you actually value these parks (and therefore, show your identity through them). But more importantly, while they are part of the owner's daily life, it is the souvenirs that give their owner the ability to 'detach [the owner's self] from the present through memory and metaphor' (Morgan and Pritchard, 2005, p. 46), to let the owner either revisit the Disney theme parks in his/her mind or remember the nostalgic memories of childhood watching the Disney media.

3.3 Immersive photographs

Another souvenir that could induce memories of immersive experiences at the park, which can either be taken yourself by phone or camera, or bought of a photographer or after a ride, is the photo moment, which takes the tourist as the subject of the souvenir itself, and in this sense the tourist is totally immersed in this kind of souvenir, part of their surroundings, and almost as the star of his/her own holiday trip. There are many ways in which the Disney parks try to create this overall atmosphere in which the guests have the feeling as if they are the stars in this magical environment (Loy, 2013). In fact it are the photo moments that might let the guests feel as if they are the stars of a movie, as if they are the 'real' heroes that stand next to their own 'fictional' heroes, which they might know from the many Disney media they are featured in (see Figure 3.8), or are the heroes participating in a certain thrilling experience in one of the many rides, in which the pictures are always taken during a thrilling section of these rides, which gives the guests the ability to show of the thrills they have conquered (see Figure 3.9). Little kids (and their parents, as they are the ones that decide where the trip's money will be spent on) might actually be tempted and encouraged to dress themselves up as princesses at the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique inside Cinderella's castle, as pirates in The Pirates League near the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, or might be tempted by the many toys that are sold in the many souvenir shops, such as swords, magic wands and different sorts of hats, dresses and other tools that might bring them closer to their heroes from the Disney movies they adore (Loy, 2013, p. 4). And not only can the guests themselves create the atmosphere as if they are the movie stars by making pictures of themselves or other people in their party during their trips: the parks themselves have also stationed photographers around the park at predetermined "photo-op" spots, that sell pictures and might create a feeling as if the guests are important, as if they are the stars in their own Disney theme park experience. It is exactly this kind of experience that can be felt at the Magic Kingdom theme park which Lancaster (1997, p. 79) regards as the most important experience that can be felt at the movie theme park in general, as he believes that tourists do not visit theme parks to passively watch a story unfold in front of their eyes, which is actually the case in many other forms of art, such as in watching cinema or passively listening to music from out of a domestic setting; he believes that tourists might visit theme parks in order to let themselves immerse in their surroundings, to play an active role in their surroundings and to not be seen as 'average' people, but to transform into someone who comes close to or even resembles their heroes. This active and immersed role of the tourist in the Disney theme parks surroundings can actually already be seen back in the consumerist role of the tourist when visiting these theme parks, as guests might go

souvenir shopping during their stay at the park, especially in the Main Street U.S.A. area of the park, whose sole purpose seems to be for shopping (Bryman, 1999, p. 33; Eco, 1986, p. 43).



Figure 3.8. A young Magic Kingdom guest, dressed up as Elsa from the Disney animated feature film Frozen, meets character performers of the Magic Kingdom staff dressed up as Anna and Elsa from the Disney animated feature film Frozen during a character meeting. A photograph like this can become a truly immersive souvenir for the individual that is featured on the photograph, as the individual has become totally immersed in her surroundings, standing next to her heroes, and therefore becoming similar to a movie star through the photograph taken at that moment. (Photograph taken by Inside the Magic, 2014).



Figure 3.9. A snap shot taken during the steep drop down the waterfall into the briar patch at the Splash Mountain ride. A photograph like this can become a truly immersive souvenir for the individuals that are featured on the photograph, as it shows off the facial expressions of the fears the individuals had at the moment of this thrilling portion of the ride, as well as the importance of the subject in its surroundings as an actor, as they have become like actors in a movie because of the way they have shaped the photograph taken of them. (Photograph taken by rebekah615, 2011).

One of the souvenirs of the parks that can encapsulate this idea of the immersion of the guest in their surroundings the most, but are not necessarily sold through the souvenir shops, are the photos taken at the park, as first of all they show the guests immersed in their surrounding in a visual sense, but also show the importance of the subject, of the tourist, as an actor with as much importance as its surroundings, both in the theme park as in the souvenir itself, and are therefore immersive souvenirs in a different sense than the Disney memorabilia souvenirs, which actually only show of the importance of the Disney media they reference to in themselves, for both the person him-/herself as for the community of Disney fans who collects them. In this sense, the Disney theme parks' success not only lies in its focus on the art and stories created by the Disney company, which are understood and adored by the masses, and the myths they actually stand for, it also lies in the democratizing of heroism, giving the guests the ability to be the heroes in their idealized myths, such as 'family happiness, fairy tale magic, adventure, the Golden Age of film, etc.' (Loy, 2013, p. 7), and capturing these moments on photographs, in order for the tourists to take them home with them as souvenirs.

3.4 Child's play

The buying and taking home of souvenirs relates to the concepts of materiality and material culture. There is quite a difference in how children and adults consume their souvenirs, as children tend to like toys such as plush toys, souvenirs that are not only bought to be a part of an interior display but can be played with or taken with them to bed. Whether a certain tendency towards materiality and a certain form of what could be considered as intimacy of the consumer towards material things (as soft toys become part of the more intimate sphere of the child when taken with them to bed), which is something to which materiality can apparently lead to, should be considered as something ethically good or something ethically bad, remains a matter of debate in critical writing on this subject. On the one hand, there are examples of studies on material things which are critical on the consumption of material objects such as toys, seeing materiality as a problem creator, toxifying childhood (Palmer, 2006; Schor, 2005) and as something that stands in the way of intimate human relationships (Illouz, 1997, 2007), as commodities are fetishized, distorting these human relations (Böhm and Batta, 2010; Böhme, 2014; Kapur, 2005). On the other hand, there are examples of studies that focus more on the positive aspects of the consumption of material things, especially in those studies focusing on the intentions of corporations to create a sort of intimate bond between brand characters, often in the form of cartoonish mascots, and children, which could be considered a profitable and meaningful relationship (de Droog et al., 2011; Fournier, 1998; Hémar-Nicolas and Gollety, 2012; Manning, 2010). Soft toys in the form of cartoonish mascots are not only used to create a sense of affection in the young customer towards the overall brand for which the mascot is used, as a sort of subconscious advertisement for young children; these soft toys also serve other purposes when the corporate layer of them should be left out of emphasis, regarding these toys as transitional objects which are important for children to become independent as individuals, as it is through playing with these toys that children could become autonomous beings (Russon, 2014).

The soft toys of branded cartoon characters which children (or actually mostly their parents) buy at the theme park, take along with them as souvenirs from the theme park and play with at home could be considered immersive souvenirs: it might be easier for young kids to be immersed in a fantasy setting such as the Magic Kingdom theme park during their stay at the parks than for instance adults, as children are easier to trick into believing that something they are experiencing is real instead of just fantasy. This sort of fantasy atmosphere felt at the park can also come back in the intimate relationships that children can have with the toys of the branded characters that are brought back home from their trips to the theme park, into the homely environment and the daily lives of these children as a material thing, as these souvenirs are both toys brought back from this magical place, in

that sense having a typical souvenir purpose as a materialized memory, as they are toys which are played with by children, beginning their own new life outside of the parks. In Cardell's (2016) ethnographic research to the children's reception of the Liseberg theme park, one of the foci of the research was on how the bunny mascot that is featured throughout the park comes back in the domestic sphere of children who have visited the theme parks. The actual research was done by visiting the homes of these children and interviewing the children about their reception of and reactions to the theme park and everything related to the park. One of the outcomes of the research showed how toys can be put in a collection by a child, as a display made to show someone's personality and individuality to others, but while being part of an exhibited collection they can still be touched and used in their sleeping arrangements, as something belonging more to the intimate sphere of the child, something they can hold on to while sleeping for instance (Cardell, 2016, pp. 97-104). Children can make a collection of souvenirs, which in their sense could be mostly consisting of toys, into something which is more than a display that should be observed from a distance; into something that could be touched, moved around with and get involved with, and also should be regarded in that matter. Therefore, the collections of toys assembled by children could be considered immersive in a manner that has to do with the playfulness of the child, making their collections into something alive (Nieuwenhuys, 2011), something to interact with, opposed to the more serious, grown-up adult who creates a collection of souvenirs in their home only there to be observed (Haldrup, 2016). Very similar to the bunny of the Liseberg park, soft toys sold at the Disney theme park resemble characters such as Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse or Pluto, that are not only featured in Disney media, such as movies or television series, but are also featured throughout the park, and could be met by the children to hug and create photo moments with. Therefore, these soft toys are ways to take something with them back home that extends the feelings had at the park, where they met a certain Disney character for 'real'. Taking them home as souvenirs from a trip to the Walt Disney World resort, they can be made part of a personal collection of souvenirs at their bedroom, but can also be played with by children, or taken with them to bed, making them parts of the children's biographies.

3.5 Disney media and vlogs

Something that can be used as a memory inducer after having visited the parks, but also to create excitement for the holiday trip to the Disney World Resort beforehand, next to giving tips about 'everything there is to experience when you embark on a Disney Resort [...] getaway' (Disney Parks, 2018), comes in the form of free Disney vacation-planning videos which are available through the website. These videos focus on many different aspects of the parks, such as each individual Disney theme park, the resort hotels, the water parks, other recreational options available at the Walt Disney World Resort, such as golf, boating and fishing, or the Disney Springs shopping district, but also on other more functional aspects of the stay at the resort, such as the MyMagic+ website and app, that can help the Disney tourist to plan their trip beforehand, the different options available for tickets and packages, or the dining options available throughout the Walt Disney Resort. On YouTube, there are also many vlogs available of people that visit the parks often, showing what changes have been made in the park, showing on-ride videos or giving their own opinions on the theme parks (such as the TheTimTracker (2017; 2018a; 2018b), MyThemeParkPOV (2013a; 2013b; 2017), or Jones Family Travels (2015a; 2015b; 2017) accounts on YouTube). People that have visited these parks beforehand, can watch back these videos in order to extend the feelings had at the theme parks to the living room. This extending of the theme park experience into the living room through media resembles another outcome of the already mentioned ethnographic research to the children's consumption of the Liseberg theme park, in which Cardell (2016) found out that two of the children he interviewed often watched a show that was filmed at the Liseberg theme park they had

recorded on VHS tape, containing shots of the park and the bunny character mascots that walk around there, as a sort of tuner to make them feel good, for instance when they were feeling sick (Cardell, 2016, p. 112). Because of the amount of video that is filmed at the Disney theme parks and shared on the internet, both by the Disney company themselves on their website as on YouTube and by other users and vloggers on YouTube, there are hours of content that could be used as a tuner for the past-Disney-tourists in order to relive their past experiences long after their stay, from out of the living room, making past memories enter the present.

3.6 Conclusion

These examples show how the Magic Kingdom theme park can actually be enacted outside of its geographical confines (Cardell, 2016, p. 116), through souvenirs that become part of the lives of families and their children, become a part of their daily routines and their everyday lives. But it is important to note that this does not mean that the taking home of souvenirs and being able to enact the theme park more or less in the domestic sphere replaces the experience had when visiting the theme park: the theme park and the home stay different, as theme park visits stay important for the creation of new memories, and the shaping of the domestic sphere. Souvenirs in the form of soft toys can become part of the fantasies enacted out by children while playing with them, and therefore become part of the children's biographies and are often spoken of in positive terms (Cardell, 2016, p. 117). As the souvenir becomes a part of an individual's daily life, of an individual's history, it has become totally immersed in its surroundings. In that sense, it is not only the visitor to the theme park that can be immersed in its surroundings while visiting the theme park, as if the visitor is a part of the world that is presented throughout the park, it is also the souvenirs, which in a sense could be considered parts of the theme park, that can become parts of the world of the past visitor, as they become part of their daily life, routines and environment.

Chapter 4: Serial logic at the Magic Kingdom theme park

Ndalianis regards serial logic as one of her neo-baroque aesthetics, as she notices that, due to changes in the world that can be related to the contexts of globalization, postmodernism, and advances in new technology, many contemporary entertainments have come to reveal an inherent serial logic again (Ndalianis, 2004, pp. 32-33), similar to what could be seen in creative expressions originating from a time period which we nowadays regard as the baroque. A parallel between the past (baroque) and the present (neo-baroque) lies in the fact that both are times in which consumerism on a mass scale has resulted in a market that produces entertainment and culture on a much larger scale than before, resulting in debates about the copy and the original, and the creation of such series: distinctive forms of arts or entertainment that have substantive connections to each other.

In addition to this serial logic, the relation between contemporary cinema and other media forms has changed completely. Nowadays, diverse entertainment forms such as computer games, comic books, theme parks, and television shows have become complexly interwoven. Media corporations have started to create transmedia story franchises, in which several derivative works from an original are created and spread across different media forms (Bourdaa, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, 2010; Scolari, 2009). These serial and polycentric tendencies that are present in many forms of contemporary entertainments can actually be traced back to similar tendencies that were present in the era of the baroque, as these tendencies can be seen as part of and therefore inherent to a (neo-)baroque style.

It is exactly the concept of seriality, that comes close with one of the qualities that already were mentioned earlier in this theoretical framework when explaining what Lukas (2013, p. 5) defines as an immersive world, making seriality an interesting concept when talking about immersive spaces such as theme parks. The quality I allude to here, is the quality that Lukas gives to an immersive world of it being an ever-changing and/or evolving entity, which means that immersive worlds are never static, similar to the fact that the concept of the series stands for a comprehensive story that is ever-changing and/or evolving over time, due to adding new installments to that series over and over again. Therefore, thinking through seriality can be a helpful tool in figuring out in what ways the Disney Imagineers try to create an immersive experience at their theme parks.

4.1 The Magic Kingdom park as a series in itself

“Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world.” – Walt Disney Company.

One of Walt Disney’s own thoughts on how he envisioned his first theme park, Disneyland, to evolve, of it being an ever-changing and always growing entity, has not only played an important role in that theme park over the years, but has grown to be an ideal that plays an important role in all of the now existing Disney theme parks around the world. In this sense, every Disney theme park can be seen as its own series, as new additions (in the form of new experiences) are being added to each park each year, while other experiences might vanish completely, and therefore, each park can be seen as its own, ever-changing little world on its own, just as the ‘outside’ world keeps ever-changing. A website made by Polsson (2017) has kept track of the history of the Walt Disney World Resort in the form of a timeline, and contains all the noteworthy changes made to the Magic Kingdom park over the years (just as the noteworthy changes made to the other theme parks, water parks, hotels, and shopping areas that altogether make up the Walt Disney World Resort), starting from 1958 (when Walt Disney commissioned a research to find a new location for his second theme park, which would later become the Walt Disney World Resort) to 2010. As can be seen on this website, almost every year,

new additions are being made to the Magic Kingdom theme park, as older rides and other experiences vanish completely.

The history of the Magic Kingdom park, and the many changes that were made at the park throughout its history, show that the park is an ever-changing entity, which can be seen as an important aspect of the Disney theme parks in general, especially for frequent visitors. The ever-changing nature of the park is also important to keep the wants and needs of new visitors and younger generations into consideration, as the park in this way can stay up to date with the latest trends and reference to the latest, newest well-known media releases of the Walt Disney company. These changes can be seen in all different aspects of the park: the rides (the realization of new rides as well as changes being made to existing rides, and the vanishing of older rides), the shows and parades, the character meetings, the restaurants, the themed lands, the technology used throughout the park, and the souvenirs.

For a committed visitor of the parks, the always changing environment present at the park can be seen as an important aspect of the overall experience, and also one of the reasons that make the parks so interesting for them; a reason for them to return, to see what has changed and what new and interesting additions have been made a part of the park; a reason to let themselves immerse into the Disney universe again. When there are major changes being made at the park, such as was the case when the park was expanding its Fantasyland area of the park in 2012, this news was not only being covered by local news instances, but also being covered by national news instances such as Fox News (Brigante, 2012) or news instances from big, far away cities such as the Los Angeles Times (MacDonald, 2012), which makes these changes to the park not only known to the real fans, but also to people that might have never visited the parks before. The fact that big changes made to the park are covered by news instances, could almost be seen as a form of advertising for the park, to let people either return to or to let them think about visiting the Walt Disney World resort for the first time.

The fact that the Magic Kingdom park is ever-changing can for example also be seen through an interactive timeline of the Fantasyland area of the park, which was shared by Jennifer Fickley-Baker (2012), Editorial Content Manager of the Walt Disney World Resort, at the Disney Parks Blog. This timeline shows the many changes that were made to this fantasy-themed area of the park throughout the years, with many of the rides and shows that are being presented throughout this timeline not being present anymore at the theme park nowadays. The timeline also shows the many changes that were made to the area during the major overhaul of the Fantasyland area of the park in 2012. During this overhaul of the area, which was told to be the largest expansion of the Magic Kingdom park in its at that time 41 years of existence (Dolan, 2014), new rides and dinner experiences were being added to the Fantasyland area of the park, and the park was given a more immersive environment (Brigante, 2012), that should feel as if guests are walking through a land where the many Disney princes and princesses have settled and live happily ever after.

Many of the creative works that are created by the Walt Disney Company, are so-called transmedia story franchises (Bourdaa, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, 2010; Scolari, 2009). This means that, while the creative works can be viewed/taken in separately and valued by the audience as independent works, creative works are cross-marketed across more than one medium. In this sense, a media franchise can be seen as a series on itself, consisting of stories that are told through various media forms, with differences between the fragments of this series on both a visual as on a content level. These differences might originate from the different conventions and possibilities of each different medium form, and/or might originate from a certain willingness to be original while staying familiar when coming up with a new release in a certain franchise, which could be seen as a convention on itself; something that might be the case when taking into account certain media franchises such as movie franchises, which may consist of many media forms of the same sort.

Take for instance the Pirates of the Caribbean media franchise: the story of this franchise started with the ride(s) of the same name at the Disney theme parks, of which the first one opened in 1967 at the Disneyland theme park, and of which many reincarnations followed in other Disney theme parks around the world. But since in 2003 the first Pirates of the Caribbean movie was released (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*), a lot has changed for how the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise is seen nowadays. This movie franchise/series now consists of five movies, the many rides in the different Disney theme parks, many video games, books, and a lot of different merchandise, such as toys, clothing and LEGO boxes, music albums featuring the film score which was used in the movies, the music from the ride featured in compilation albums that feature music from the Disney theme parks, etc. Everything that is made for this separate universe, adds story to the overall series, and is therefore interesting for those people that already like the world, characters and stories that are featured in the already existing media forms. When new things are added to this universe, it can be seen as a chance for the audience to see what has been added to this universe, a chance to go back and immerse him- or herself in this universe again. Since the movies were released, some of the Pirates of the Caribbean rides have had small changes being added to them over the years, such as adding animatronics of captain Jack Sparrow to the ride, a character who is played by Johnny Depp in the movies, and other rides, such as the Shanghai Disneyland Park version, being completely different than the rides in the other parks, with a completely different story being told during the ride, a difference in used mechanics and technologies in the rides design, and different scenes and references from the movies which are featured in the ride. By creating media-franchises instead of enclosed media forms, media can become more immersive, because more time can be spent in watching, listening to, playing with, or fantasizing about the media which is related to a bigger universe. Next to that, the story of a series can get more immersive qualities by adding more media forms to them, because the story can become more well thought out, more detailed, and with referring back to older stories within the fictional universe (or already referring forwards to media which is not released yet, but probably will be released in the future), stories can get connected to earlier or later instances in the fictional universe, which also can make such a fictional universe feel more believable, because it has a history, just as the real world does. But what is most interesting for the Disney theme parks as it comes to this ride being part of a franchise nowadays, is the fact that through releasing new media forms, new references can be made in the ride, which means that changes can be made in the rides. This can keep guests eager to return to the parks, because guests might be eager to see what changes have been made in the rides, giving the audience new experiences, by staying up with the latest technologies such as the ones used in new animatronics, and keeping the audience surprised.

After *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the first film that was loosely based on the Pirates of the Caribbean dark ride, became a large success, Disney decided to capitalize on its franchise by signing its original cast and director for two sequels to this movie. What Disney also decided, was to let Walt Disney Imagineering add refurbishments to the Pirates of the Caribbean dark ride that were inspired by what would become the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie franchise, to coincide with the release of the second movie in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie franchise, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, which was released in 2006. The Disney theme parks decided to add elements from these movies to the rides; elements that were not in the original rides, such as animatronics of one of the main protagonists of the movie franchise, Jack Sparrow, appearing at certain points in the ride, whereas this character was not featured in the original ride, an animatronic of Captain Barbossa replacing the original captain during the scene where guests pass a giant pirate ship, and a waterfall that the guests pass through during the boat ride, that featured a projection on it off Davy Jones.

When in 2011 *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* was released, the fourth

installment in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie franchise, again refurbishments were made in the ride, such as changing the character that is featured on the waterfall from Davy Jones to Blackbeard in 2011, and adding mermaids to the ride, in the form of a shape splashing in the water after passing the projection of Blackbeard, and a mermaid skeleton being added to the original skeletons that are featured in a certain scene of the ride.

Not only do the Disney theme parks have more or less lasting changes made to them by the Imagineers, such as is the case with the new Fantasyland or the changes made to the Pirates to the Caribbean ride, the parks also go through seasonal changes, with new merchandize being released throughout the year (Domenech, 2018a; 2018b; Fickley-Baker, 2018), the parks being themed differently throughout the Christmas and the Halloween seasons, and several special events being hosted at the Disney Parks throughout the year (Walt Disney World, 2018b). These aspects of the parks can also make guests want to return to the park in a different season, to see how different the parks look in that season, and make the park feel more alive and the experience more detailed, as you can get the idea that while walking throughout the park, everything has to be thought of to give the guest an interesting experience.

4.2 The Magic Kingdom park as part of a series

Disney theme parks can be seen as parts of different meaningful series. They can be seen as a part of a series that is meaningful for the way in which the different parks have been realized, a series that is meaningful for the way they are either valued or marginalized by either the larger public or by certain individuals, and especially as a part of a series that is meaningful for its visitors and the way in which they experience these theme parks. Under which series the Disney theme parks should be placed, depends on the way in which they are looked at, due to their ability to fit into many different frameworks and labels, and depends on the way in which the word 'series' is interpreted and used. When a form of culture or entertainment is part of a series (with series being a term that can be interpreted quite broadly and in different manners, in this cultural sense because forms of culture and entertainment can be interpreted as part of a series by tying them back to the people that are behind their creation; or by the intentions behind their existence, with them being explicitly made part of a series; or because through reception, labeling and naming, certain forms of culture and entertainment become part of a group with similar qualities, which could also be seen as a sort of series in its own sense) always gives the possibility for more immersive qualities for a form of culture or entertainment, due to the fact that there is more than what meets the eye at first hand. When something is part of a series, it is only one smaller piece of the bigger puzzle, and it is up to the individual whether he or she is interested in solving this puzzle and wants to find out more information either about the overall series or about its distinct pieces. While there is a certain popular, critical belief that the series ensures for repetition and boring output, with "repetition and serialism [...] regarded as the exact opposite of originality and the artistic" (Calabrese, 1992, 27; in Ndalianis, 2004, 61), the different variations on a theme actually ensures for a certain creativity and an intent on outperforming already existing works (Ndalianis, 2004, 61). This is what can make visiting different theme parks made by either the same or by different creative teams so interesting: because of their willingness to outperform other theme parks with their own (original) ideas on different ride mechanics, on the difference in theming of the parks and their rides, and the other experiences that can be experienced at different theme parks, theme parks do not only try to become better in giving immersive experiences in general, but they also become quite distinct from each other in the stories they tell, the atmosphere that is created in the parks and the rides and the experiences that can be felt there.

4.2.1 The Magic Kingdom park as part of the Walt Disney World Resort

The Magic Kingdom theme park is actually part of a bigger resort, the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida, which consists of four theme parks, two water parks, twenty-eight themed resort hotels, nine non-Disney hotels, several golf courses, a camping resort, and other entertainment venues, including the outdoor shopping center Disney Springs. All the theme parks, themed water parks and other themed places at this Disney Resort are very distinctly themed from each other, and therefore this could be seen as an example of the open (neo-)baroque form that Ndalianis (2004, p.33) mentions in her book, as additions are being made to the Disney theme parks series, with every addition being different than the ones before. Guests can have a multi-day stay at this resort, visit one or more parks each day, and in this way make visiting this resort like a series of experiences in themselves: a series in which they can make their own choices, such as at which hotel they stay, which park they will visit today, what rides they want to experience, and where they are going to eat.

Disney World has three more parks next to its *Magic Kingdom Park*, which all have a distinct kind of theming attached to them. For instance, the *EPCOT Park*, which actually in the beginning was supposed to be themed after Walt Disney's ideas about the city of the future, was opened on October 1, 1981, and eventually not themed after Disney's ideas about the city of the future, but split into two distinctly themed sections, the first of its sections called the *Future World*, the second the *World Showcase*, with each of the two parts themed after something completely else. The first part of the park has a futuristic theme to it, and this part of the park has had many changes over the years, with many rides and shows coming and going to keep up with ideas about the future of a given time. Rides that are featured in this part of the park nowadays are the *Mission: Space* ride, which puts guests in a cabin that resembles the cockpit of a space shuttle that simulates the actual G-forces that an astronaut has to cope with when a space shuttle shoots off into space or lands on a planet, the *Test Track* ride, which puts its guests in a car that has to pass certain tests, such as making sharp turns, hard braking or reaching its maximum speed limit on a speed ramp, and the popular *Soarin' Around the World*, which puts its guests in a simulator that gives you the experience of floating over famous landmarks from all over the world, such as the Gizah pyramids complex, the Taj Mahal or the Chinese Wall. These rides are themed more from the inside of the building they are situated in than from the outside, as the outsides of the buildings in which these rides are situated look like pavilion buildings with a certain architectural style that could be seen as futuristic in the past (when these buildings were originally designed and build). This already changes the whole experience when walking through the park, making it feel more like a museum or a 'permanent world's fair' than the other parks, and therefore less immersive.

The park makes up for that in its second part, which is called the *World Showcase*, which consist of eleven pavilions, each pavilion themed after a certain country. These pavilions are themed in a more richly detailed manner, in a manner that resembles the theming of for instance the different lands of the Disneyland influenced theme parks, while sticking to the architecture, landscape and streetscape of a certain country. This side of the parks features less rides, focusing more on the culture of these countries through the specific visual aspects of the pavilions, through the food that is served in the restaurants, the souvenirs that are sold in the shops, and the shows and live entertainment that is presented at the different pavilions, each of these different aspects tailored to the country that a certain pavilion represents. The illusion is made even more real by using staff for each pavilion that originates from the certain country that a pavilion represents.

Next to the four theme parks, the Walt Disney World Resort also features two water parks that are themed into detail, which are called *Typhoon Lagoon* and *Blizzard Beach*. *Typhoon Lagoon* looks like a storm-ravaged tropical bay, with a shrimp boat impaled on a mountain in the back of the park, because of the imaginary storm that has passed through this area of the Walt Disney World Resort. The park features one of the largest outdoor wave pools in the world, with waves so high that

they can even be used to surf on. Blizzard Beach is themed as if it is a melting ski resort, standing in the middle of the Floridian sun. The flagship of the park is its Summit Plummet slide, which is one of the fastest water slides on Earth. Disney Springs, a large outdoor shopping, dining, and entertainment complex, is also free for guests to explore, and just as the theme parks, water parks, and hotels, themed in a distinct style that sets it apart from outdoor shopping areas outside of the Walt Disney Resort.

A stay at Disney World can be more than a one day visit to the Magic Kingdom, the EPCOT park, or the other ones. It can become a holiday on its own. The Disney World Resort gives willing guests the opportunity to stay inside the Disney bubble for a longer time span, as guests can book one of the twenty-eight themed Disney hotels, which are located around the theme parks and other instances around the Disney World property. The fact that there are twenty-eight themed Disney hotels, gives the guests the opportunity to let them choose themselves which kind of themed environment they would like to sleep in (with themes ranging from Polynesian, to early 20th century Floridian, to simply modern), near which area they want to stay (as the hotels can be classified and ordered into five distinct areas of the Walt Disney World Resort, each area surrounding either a park or another important part of the resort, such as its shopping area Disney Springs or its sports complex Wide World of Sports), and what amount of money they are willing to spend on their stay, as there are more expensive, luxury options, and more affordable ones. Some of these hotels are more heavily themed than others, or are themed in a more immersive way, as I will explain further on. But more important, these hotels give the visitor the ability to be inside the Disney bubble for a longer time, of not having to leave the Walt Disney World's property, being able to even sleep in a Disney environment, and also leaving out distractive other things that could happen when guests would stay outside of the property, such as having to rent a car, dealing with parking, checking in at a hotel, or waiting in lines (due to the fact that Disney hotel guests can order FastPass+ earlier in advance) (Polland, 2017). The hotels are the links between each day at the parks or other activities that are being done by the guests at the property. And at the hotels themselves, there is also much to do and see. Most of them have swimming pools, spas, restaurants, souvenirs, sporting areas, etc., which are all designed in a way that resembles the overall theming of the resort.

4.2.2 The Magic Kingdom as part of a series of Disneyland-themed parks

The series of Disney theme parks actually started out with one theme park, the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California, which after its success resulted in the creation of similar theme parks all around the world. Walt Disney's idea to create a theme park actually started out with ideas to create a miniature village that he and his family could ride through on their own miniature trains, but this idea grew out to be what we now can consider to be the first Disney theme park, the Disneyland Park in Anaheim, California (Marling, 1997). When Walt Disney opened the park in 1955, the park consisted of five differently themed lands (Main Street, U.S.A., Adventureland, Frontierland, Adventureland, Tomorrowland and Fantasyland) (Just Disney, 2017), and some iconic rides that are still featured in the original park and (in alternate forms) in many of its reincarnations (Disneyland Paris, 2018a; Disneyland Resort, 2018a; Hong Kong Disneyland, 2018a; Walt Disney World, 2018c; Shanghai Disney Resort, 2018a; Tokyo Disney Resort, 2018a). Guests of the park entered the park through its main entrance, after which they passed through Main Street, U.S.A., where Walt Disney wanted to relive the typical turn of the century city Main Street (Just Disney, 2017). In the middle of the park was a square, often referred to as the hub, that had its own eye catcher in the castle of Sleeping Beauty. Walt Disney referred to this castle as a "weenie", a tall visual marker "that promised to reward the visitor who walked toward [it]" (Marling, 1997, p. 66). Around this hub were the many different lands situated, each with its own distinct theming and rides: as already mentioned, Main Street, U.S.A. was themed after the century city Main Street, Adventureland was themed after

dreams about "exotic tropical places" in a "far-off region of the world", Frontierland was themed after the pioneering days of the American frontier, Fantasyland was themed after the idea of a place where "dreams come true", and Tomorrowland was themed after the "marvels of the future" (Just Disney, 2017). Around the park, a railroad track was made that passed through all the different lands, with stops at the different lands so that people could travel across the Disneyland park with ease, which still kept some of Walt Disney's original ideas for the park in its plan (Marling, 1997).

Nowadays, with all the different Disney theme parks that were created over the years, and the original Disney Park not being the only Disney theme park anymore, a Disney theme park is a theme park that is owned by and that was created under supervision of Walt Disney himself or the Walt Disney Company. At the moment, there are six Walt Disney Resorts around the world, with each of them consisting of one theme park minimum and six theme parks maximum (the Walt Disney World Resort being the largest, consisting of six theme parks, if the large waterparks that are situated there are perceived as theme parks as well). What every Walt Disney Resort has in common, is that each Resort has at least one park that is or is heavily influenced by the original Disneyland Park (which is situated in Anaheim, California, and is nowadays part of the Disneyland Resort). Other similarities include that every park consists of themed lands that either fit the overall backstory that the park has or are themed after intellectual property owned by the Walt Disney Company (such as its movies, music or television shows), with each of its themed lands consisting of (often) heavily detailed, themed and illusionistic rides or other experiences such as shows or parades that fit the overall backstory of the land they are situated in or are themed after intellectual property owned by the Walt Disney Company. Next to that, each park has a sort of big mascot, in the form of a building or other large attribute that fits the park's theme, which is most often situated in the middle of the park, and is visible from almost all locations throughout the park. Next to that, themed food, snacks, and merchandize are sold at the park that fit the theme of the overall park, a certain land, a certain ride, or reference to certain characters that are owned by Disney, such as for instance Mickey Mouse, Lightning McQueen (the lead character from the popular Disney-Pixar movie *Cars*) or Elsa (one of the lead characters from the popular Disney movie *Frozen*) (Shop Disney, 2017b; Tang, 2012).

There are many rides that are featured in (almost) all of the different Walt Disney Resorts around the world, such as for instance the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, the Haunted Mansion ride or the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride (Disneyland Paris, 2018a; Disneyland Resort, 2018a; Hong Kong Disneyland, 2018a; Walt Disney World, 2018c; Shanghai Disney Resort, 2018a; Tokyo Disney Resort, 2018a). While these rides that come back in most of the resorts differ between each other in several aspects, the fact that they come back in a certain form at every park gives the parks a certain familiarity when they are visited by guests that have visited a different park of the Disney theme parks chain before. The same can be said about the different themed lands of the parks that are influenced by the original Disneyland Park: every of those parks has themed lands that are named after and influenced by for instance the Main Street U.S.A. land, the Frontierland or the Adventureland of the original Disneyland Park. Every park has its parades, nighttime spectacles (which often feature lightshows, firework and music with a certain show element attached to it, gathering a big amount of the parks guests at a certain spot to check out this nighttime spectacular), and shows, which come in musical shows, stunt shows or film showings (often in 3D or 4D) (Disneyland Paris, 2018b; Disneyland Resort, 2018b; Hong Kong Disneyland, 2018b; Walt Disney World, 2018d; Shanghai Disney Resort, 2018b; Tokyo Disney Resort, 2018b).

The different Disney resorts and theme parks around the world could be seen as parts of a series consisting of these Disney resort and theme parks in themselves, because of the fact that they all share similarities with each other, while still being different from each other, because they are easily classified as theme parks, and because they can be linked together as a series due to their used names, all in some way referring to the Disney brand, and the corporation that stands behind their

creation. Just as is the case with series in other medial forms or cross-medial series (Ndalianis, 2004, pp. 34-41), Disney uses 'marketing strategy that aims at squeezing from a product its fullest marketing potential', while visiting the different Disney theme parks around the world could be seen as something worthwhile for people that like the Disney parks or Disney in general, because of the little or major changes between each park that Disney Imagineers have put into the parks. These changes between the parks can create a different feel, a different experience, and are therefore interesting for people that would like to see something similar but different, while the different parks still maintain a certain familiarity due to the fact that certain aspects of the park stay the same. In this sense, the Disney theme parks could be seen as a series in which each park's underlying story is similar to each other's, but where there are also differences between them that are interesting for its audience. First of all, it should be noted that every Disney Resort has one park that is or is heavily influenced by the 'original' Disneyland Park (which was originally named 'Disneyland'), which is nowadays part of the Disneyland Resort, situated in Anaheim, California (Marling, 1997; Owen, 2011; Titus, n.d.). For instance, the Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World, which is situated in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, was built as a larger, improved version of the Disneyland Park and opened in 1971 (Langford, 1971), and the newest and largest version of the park opened in Shanghai on June 16, 2016 (Frater, 2016). It should be noted that all of these Disney Parks that are influenced by the original Disneyland Park still have major differences between each other, such as different rides, a completely different planning of the parks, different castles featured in each park (with each of those different castles perceivable as each park's mascot), different food that is served at the different parks, different restaurants, different souvenir shops, different lands, and the different cultures in which the parks exist (which are noticeable in the different languages spoken in parks, in its rides and at the shows, people from different ethnicities and with different cultures working at the park, a difference in food, and a difference in other cultural preferences between the different parks), which makes visiting each different version of this park a different experience on its own (Parker, 2016). While from an outsider point of view, the parks that are influenced by the original Disneyland Park could still be seen as part of a series that has more in common with copying a certain original (the Disneyland Park) than that they suggest the general movement of open (neo-)baroque form (Ndalianis, 2004, p. 33), I want to argue that they actually differ from each other completely, creating an open form series where things change over time and between parks, and where almost everything is possible.

If every new Disney Park that came after the original Disneyland Park would have been an exact copy of either the original Disneyland Park or a different park that came before it, it would not have been interesting for guests to visit more than one park. While it could be argued whether the differences between the parks that are influenced by the original Disneyland Park lie in the details or are actually major differences, the Walt Disney Company has put their effort in creating several differences between each park, that can alter the experience and could therefore be seen as interesting for the real Disney (Parks) devotee (Barnes, 2014).

First of all, many of the parks mappings are completely different: while the many themed lands seem similar, they are sometimes positioned on different places, are of a different scale, often feature different theming that still sticks to the overall theme of the land and they have completely different paths leading through them, which makes walking through a new park almost like walking through a labyrinth in which you do not know (yet) where you have to go to reach a certain destination. In this sense, the idea behind the themed lands of the parks that are influenced by the original Disneyland Park stay similar to each other, but the actual lands can become totally different. In that sense, visiting a new park can feel like visiting the park you already knew before, but has altered in such a way that visiting a new park can feel somewhat alienating at first and therefore it can become somewhat adventurous to find your way in a new and different park. This can already be

seen from the different maps of the different parks, which show that each park differs from the other parks in such things as for example its roads that lead through the park, differs from the others in the way in which its different buildings look in which the rides, the shops, and the restaurants are situated in and differs from the others in the different rides, restaurants and shops themselves that are situated in each park (Disneyland Paris, 2018c; Disneyland Resort, 2018c; Hong Kong Disneyland, 2018c; Walt Disney World, 2018a; Shanghai Disney Resort, 2018c; Tokyo Disney Resort, 2018c). There are also major differences in the theming between the different parks around the world, giving each park a different atmosphere. For instance, the Adventurelands of each different park are themed in a different way. This difference in theming can already be seen in a difference in theming of such details as the name signs for each different Adventureland area, the first thing that guests will encounter when they enter this area of the park. Every of those Adventurelands also has a different idea behind their theming, that makes them distinct with the others. The Adventureland at Disneyland has a certain 1930s Polynesian style, through a combination of Polynesian styled buildings and details such as masks, an animatronics show called the Enchanted Tiki Room, its Indiana Jones Adventures ride (a movie that takes place in the 1930s), the big band music used in this area, and the Jungle Cruise ride, a ride in which guests board a replica of a tramp steamer and journey across different rivers from around the world, encountering animatronics of different animals. The Adventureland at the Magic Kingdom park at Walt Disney World has more rides, and does not have a version of the Indiana Jones Adventures ride, and while there are parts of the area that also have a certain Polynesian style attached to them, the area has subareas themed differently, such as an Arabian Village and a Caribbean Plaza, creating a different atmosphere at this park. The Adventureland at Disneyland Paris again has a difference in theming and is also the biggest version of the Adventurelands around the world. Its main entrance and shops and restaurants behind it are inspired by the Middle eastern folk tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Next to this, the area contains scenery from the Disney animated movie Peter Pan, with its skull rock and the pirate ship of captain Hook to explore, differently themed restaurants, such as the colonel Hathi's Pizza Outpost, named after a character from the Disney animated movie Jungle Book and themed after colonial estates in the jungle, and the Indiana Jones et le Temple du Péril ride, an Indiana Jones themed rollercoaster that is totally different than the ride at the original Disneyland park, both in its theming as in the ride mechanics.

Every park has its own different tall visual marker that works as a mascot for its park, and almost all the parks that are influenced by the original Disneyland Park all have a different version of the castle that is situated in the middle of the park. While there are no major differences between the castle from the original Disneyland Park and its copy at Hong Kong Disneyland at this moment² (Barnes, 2016), which both have the smallest castles of all, themed after the castle from the Walt Disney movie *Sleeping Beauty*, there are major differences between the already mentioned castles and the castles from the Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World and the Tokyo Disneyland park, which are much larger and themed after a different Walt Disney movie, namely *Cinderella* (Marling, 1997, p. 90), and the castle at the recently opened Shanghai Disneyland Park, which has the largest castle of all, called the *Enchanted Storybook Castle*, representing all of the Disney princesses at once (Kaiman, 2016).

² An artist rendering of a planned "Frozen" themed area, part of a colossal growth plan of \$1.4 billion in enhancements at the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, shows a new Frozen themed castle, which might have a different size than the copy of Sleeping Beauty's castle that is at the moment situated in the park (Barnes, 2016).

4.3 Conclusion

While an immersive space can actually be quite small, an immersive world needs to be big: it needs content in order to feel complex and complete for the audience, similar to as how complex and complete our real world is. Transmedia storytelling, and the sort of content and amount of content that this can bring, can let one story unfold over different kinds of media forms, and is especially interesting for the concept of immersivity in the theme park when one story can be expanded in such a way that materiality can come into play: materialized media forms, such as theme parks, sculptures or souvenirs are of a different kind than virtual media forms, in which the content and its world, story and characters stay on the screen. The creation of and releasing of more and more transmedia content over time is one of the aspects of the park that makes the immersive world created by the Disney company in their theme parks feel almost like a real world, as the real world also has much content, places to visit, differences in culture, aesthetics and people, and changes over time. In other words: just as the normal world, the immersive world created in a theme park should not be boring, it should be complex, full of stories, all taking place in the same world or setting. This is the reason why an immersive world also needs stories to build upon and should not only consist of empty theming; those stories can be told throughout other media forms in more detail, which in the case of the Disney theme parks are their many feature films, television series, cartoons and other kinds of Disney media, which are all tied together by the Disney brand and the referencing to these stories throughout the park. These stories taken together are what could be considered the Disney series, and are one of the reasons why this park can be so immersive: it are the different backstories that make the park so complex for the fans of Disney media, as these backstories could be considered the backbone of the park and the reason that the immersive world created in the park can feel real, the reason why people can have more interest in this immersive world because they might feel familiar with the stories that are referenced to, the reason why the guests at the park can go with the flow and believe in what they see.

Conclusion

Through analyzing the Magic Kingdom theme park using concepts by Lukas, Ndalianis and others, I have tried to underline the immersive qualities of this theme park, taking into account the fact that Lukas' concepts can be linked to Ndalianis' neo-baroque aesthetics. This means that both the concepts of Lukas' (the different areas that make up an immersive space) as those of Ndalianis (the labyrinth, the illusion and the machine, the series and intertextuality) could be regarded as useful tools that could and should be thought of in order to understand how an immersive space, such as a theme park, works and should be understood. The actual problem is, is that the immersive quality of the Magic Kingdom theme park is taken from an autoethnographic perspective, as I believe these parks to be truly immersive experiences through and through, while this might differ from person to person. What is seen as a truly immersive experience for one individual could be seen as something truly un-immersive by someone else, or maybe too childish to begin with. This makes theme parks and the immersiveness of them such a difficult concept to analyse, as it might be something subjective, something which always stay a matter of debate (which came back in the chapter on the illusion and the machine). A qualitative or quantitative research towards the audiences perceptions and receptions on the parks immersiveness could be an interesting point of further research, as this research used the theme park itself as the starting point of the immersive experiences had at the theme park, trying to distill elements of its design or other aspects of the park in general that could be important when taking into account the parks immersive qualities. Secondly, this research has focused on one theme park (which is nowadays the most popular theme park around the world), but other theme parks, and their immersive qualities, could be interesting in order to compare theme parks, to see how different theme parks deal differently with the concept of immersivity, and what this actually means for the actual immersive experience felt at those theme parks.

Throughout the different chapters of this thesis, I have tried to analyse the park on different levels, from different perspectives, in order to find out how complex the park actually is, and to find out what different things immersiveness can be and mean. I have found out that immersiveness could even reach out to beyond the parks, as souvenirs begin their own lives outside the park, have influence on their owners and surroundings and could bring up memories of the stay at the parks. Memories could be thought of as immersive experiences in themselves, depending on how strong these memories are felt by the individual, and what these memories actually consist of.

In a time in which social media and virtual reality are two concerns to deal with, actual material immersive content, such as that what is created through the Disney theme parks, is actually something that might be interesting to take note of, and might be important for our future, in order for us as individuals to not become totally dependent on the screen. Instead of creating only media content that is made for screen, or which is only created for virtual media devices, it might be a breath of fresh air for many to experience real spaces, how fake they actually might be. This is what sets theme parks apart from different media forms which deal with the screen, such as cinema, television, videogames and social media, as an art form that might become even more important because of its difference in a more and more screen-based future.

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