Representations of Classical Greece in Theme Parks

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in Theme Parks

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Filippo Carlà-Uhink

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Representing History in the Theme Park: The Case of Ancient Greece

'It's a Small World' after all – and it includes Greece

'It's a Small World', located in the 'Fantasyland' area of all Disney *Magic Kingdoms* (with the sole exception of *Shanghai Disneyland*), is one of the most popular theme park rides worldwide.[1] Originally developed for the New York World's Fair of 1964 and then relocated to *Disneyland* in Anaheim, California in 1966, it quickly became one of the most recognizable trademarks and a true staple of the *Magic Kingdoms*, opening in 1971 in Orlando, in 1983 in Tokyo, in 1992 in Paris and in 2008 in Hong Kong. The riders, accompanied by a highly recognizable song which might be the most-played song in musical history,[2] sail on boats on a ride through the world ('the happiest cruise that ever sailed'), in which the different countries and peoples are embodied by dolls representing children in traditional costumes.[3] As can be expected, each country is represented in a highly stereotyped way, with the costumes, monuments, and at times the traditions which are considered most typical and recognizable.[4] This means that countries and peoples are generally represented in a historical way, in reference to the most famous phases of their histories, those which left the most recognizable monuments. By being represented in this way – each country as a small diorama – anachronisms may ensue, which bring together different recognizable phases of the country's history: Italy, for instance, is represented in *Disneyland Paris* by a Roman chariot race, next to a representation of Venice, an opera singer, and many other details.[5] This does not apply to Greece, which is perceived only through its ancient phase, immediately recognizable by the international public.[6]

In Anaheim, the original ride caters to the worldview of the public that was expected when the ride was developed – mostly US Americans.[7] The façade of the attraction is a collage of representations of several famous monuments – the choice is definitely Western-centric, and the Parthenon, included next to the Eiffel Tower,

Big Ben and others, is thus raised to the level of icon for one of the crucial phases of world history.[8] The representation of Greece within the ride, though, is so small that it is extremely easy to overlook. Interestingly, it is not located in the European section, but after the clearly marked passage to Asia, between Russia and the Middle East. A lone doll represents Greece: a shepherd, wearing furs and a red cap, evoking the red scarf which is a component of female traditional dress in many regions of Greece or a fez, who plays the Pan flute (referencing Greek mythology in its very name) to a lamb. The shepherd sits on the capital of an Ionic column, placed on an architrave held by two further white columns. It is rather easy to identify the components of this representation: the ruins of classical antiquity leave space to the 'naturalistic' idea of Greece as a wild landscape (never again touched by civilization), in which shepherds play music while tending to sheep or goats. The costume evokes the Ottoman and modern clothing, with a clear reference to the fustanella (known in the United States through the Greek communities),[9] while the geographical positioning reveals an Orientalizing gaze which locates Greece among the post-Ottoman countries, thus attributing it to Asia.

Moving on to Orlando, Greece is still located in Asia, but it is the first country the riders meet in this section, in direct contiguity to Europe. The scene is much bigger, and while the main element remains the same Pan flute-playing shepherd with lambs, he is located in a broader landscape of ruins. The idea of Greece as pristine and uncontaminated landscape has disappeared in favour of a more 'symbolic' representation, dominated by the colours of the Greek flag: the white of the ancient buildings and the blue of the hills, mountains, and even of the sunflowers. The columns are more stylized and abstract but still recognizable as Ionic; the number of columns and pediments is greater, and in the background a mountain with a temple on the top is likely a visual reference to the Parthenon, here meant to signify Mount Olympus. Classical culture is thus highlighted over 'natural' Greece, even if the latter does not disappear (life in Greece after the classical period is still represented as playing music to lambs), and Greece in general seems to attract more attention.

The ride in Tokyo reproduces that of Orlando;[10] indeed, Greece seems to be understood in Japan as the 'starting point' of Western trips to the Orient: in this way, 'Oriental Trip' in *New Reoma World*, Marugame, Japan, moves, exactly as 'It's a Small World', from Greece, represented by 'a Greek church, a few houses and a white-washed terrace', to then display the Middle and Far East (all seen from a projected Western perspective).[11] Yet this was impossible in Paris: not only as Greece is nearer and better known in France, but also because Greece had joined the European Economic Community in 1981. Catering to the knowledge and

expectations of this different public implies a crucial difference: shifting Greece into the European section.[12] The main – and only – human character remains the shepherd, who is still playing his Pan flute to the lambs. Away from the 'abstract' representation in Orlando, the hills are again green, and the landscape is naturalized through the insertion of tall trees, making the representation similar to that in Anaheim: ruins evoking a far-away past and a pastoral (or bucolic) present. Yet this is presented here in a more positive way, as a sign of closeness to 'Nature', within an Arcadian landscape that is different from that in California. The ruins are represented in much more detail; a group of three columns with an architrave is round in shape, something which breaks the most usual and conventional representations of ancient Greek architecture but has a clear direct referent: the tholos of the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia in Delphi. In Europe, the number of available 'images' of Greek antiquity is larger, also because the country is a much closer and cheaper tourist destination. Finally, there is a further reference to classical mythology: above the shepherd flies a winged horse, Pegasus, revealing that this idyllic, Arcadian vision of Greece is actually the stuff that myths (and dreams) are made of. The attribution of Greece to Europe could not be undone in Hong Kong, where the Greek scene is positioned between Italy and Switzerland. Yet the scene is the same as in Anaheim, with only a slightly more modern, more 'abstract' design. From Hong Kong, Greece is again very far away, almost lost between better-known countries.

Why was Greece represented in these slightly, yet significantly different ways in the different Disney parks? Starting from this question, and moving beyond the world of Disney parks, this book will investigate and explain the ways in which classical Greece is represented and reproduced in theme parks throughout the world. In order to proceed to such analysis, though, it is necessary to provide first a theoretical framework about theme parks and representations of history and historical cultures within them. This first chapter aims to elaborate and present such framework, which will be deployed in the following sections of the book for the analysis of the single theme parks taken into consideration.

Historical theme parks and their uses of the past

Theme parks and their antecedents

Conventionally, the inauguration of *Disneyland* in Anaheim, California in 1955 is considered the 'birth' of theme parks. Indeed, it was through *Disneyland* that the form 'theme park' came to mean a specific kind of themed environment, or themed

space,[13] within which a set of defined characteristics emerged:[14] theme parks are artificially created (generally in their entirety); they are closed, unmovable; and they consist of a 'collection' of different forms of attractions, games and entertainment offers. Above all, they are characterized by a thematic consistency, meaning that either the entire park or individual parts of it (clearly identified and themselves closed off from the rest) are inspired by a specific theme:[15] 'theme parks are cultural mind maps – symbolic landscapes of psychological narratives. They are the multidimensional descendant of the book, film, and epic rather than the offshoot of the roller coaster and tilt-o-whirl.'[16]

However, scholarship is ever more certain of the genealogy of antecedents that brought us to the 'postmodern' theme park;[17] this genealogy also explains why cultural and historical themes are so important within theme parks. Most – and the most popular – antecedent forms of the theme parks were conceived, often also with a didactic component, as instruments to bring the visitors to landscapes, animals, traditions from cultures far away in space or time. World's fairs, zoos and human zoos are perfect examples: in the nineteenth century, zoological gardens had already begun to develop immersive strategies, for instance through architectural forms which imitated the animals' region of origin,[18] thus enhancing the visitors' sense of seeing something 'exotic'; ethnological exhibitions, with a colonial gaze, displayed the cultures of exotic populations perceived as 'primitive'.[19] The aim was to reinforce the sense of identity (and superiority) of the visitors, displaying an alterity which was represented as exotic, 'inferior' and 'archaic'.[20] As a consequence, the exotic other is almost always represented as 'stuck in the past', implying a connection between the idea of a geographical distance (of the exotic culture) and a temporal one.[21]

Open-air museums moved in the same direction, starting with *Skansen* in Stockholm, which opened in 1891 and collected and reproduced the traditional architecture and lifestyle of various parts of Sweden (and the animals representing Swedish wildlife) at a moment when they were perceived as endangered by industrialization and ever-stronger migration to the cities.[22] Such structures, distinct from the 'exotic shows', represent one's own (historical) culture, both for insiders (in the sense of continuity and identification) and outsiders (to highlight the national pride for visitors from other countries).[23] By 'freezing' this culture in time, be it in the form of a reproduction of one specific moment or the fusion of different time periods (represented by different buildings, in one imagined paradigmatic moment of the traditional lifestyle), such representations also always end up reifying an idealized version of the culture represented as being anchored in a previous time – as past.

This occurs in *Disneyland*, too: the complete separation from the outside world, which *Disneyland* made much clearer and more radical,[24] as well as the act of paying for a ticket and moving through the gates of the parks (a ritual-dynamic action that highlights the separation between Inside and Outside),[25] are both central instruments in creating an immersion that is not only functional to entertainment, but also to the development of a 'patriotic' historical consciousness.[26] The pedagogical aspect was in this sense very clear to Walt Disney, who proposed to his visitors (originally mostly US Americans) the reified utopia of the small American town at the beginning of the twentieth century, materialized in the entrance area of the park, 'Main Street U.S.A.', the only one that each visitor cannot avoid crossing.[27]

It so happens that most themes represented in theme parks are 'historical' or 'cultural' – what Scott Lukas calls theming based on 'place and culture'.[28] As formulated by King and O'Boyle, the theme park is more correctly a 'time park'.[29] We see this beginning with the classification of possible theme park themes developed by Fichtner and Michna in 1987.[30] Excluding their category number 5, 'Play worlds, as water parks, circus' (these are not theme parks in the narrower sense, as they are not characterized by a consistent theme applied either to the entire park or to single sections of it), the other four categories are defined as follows:

1. 'Foreign worlds in the dimension of time'
   a) Past and nostalgia
   b) Future
2. 'Foreign worlds in the dimension of space'
   a) Foreign people, regions
   b) Wild nature
3. 'Foreign worlds in the social dimension': foreign cultures, folklore
4. Unreal worlds, such as miniatures, ghosts, fairy tales.

As with all classifications, the limits are clearly visible: the difference between 2a and 3 is disputable to say the least, as well as the definition of miniatures as being unreal. Miniature parks, representing the main monuments of a country in a miniaturized form and thus displaying the unity of the nation and its 'spirit' in a clear and easily transmissible form, are relevant instruments of nation building for the creation of a feeling of belonging to the national identity, as deployed in countries such as Israel, Indonesia, Italy, etc.[31] Their 'reality' – their perception as real – is demonstrated by acts of dissidence, resistance, and even destruction practised by visitors upon them as a symbol and a form of ersatz for the civic body.[32]

However, independent of this, one can see how all the categories identified are deeply historical: there is no need to discuss this for section 1, as it is sufficient to note that imaginations and visualizations of the future are also historical and dependent on the specific culture of the moment in which they have been developed (and thus they can also be represented as 'past visualisations of the future', as in the case of steampunk).[33] But nor can foreign cultures, folklore, wild nature, or other regions be represented in the form of an evolution or of change. What is represented is always 'frozen in time', in a way reifying this frozen moment as the paradigmatic and archetypical representation of that specific culture, region, or ecosystem. As summarized by Schlehe and Hochbruck, this either represents 'the creation of a history of a nation, region, or ethnic group, as an offer to the visitor for imaginative identification, or it is the creation of a seemingly timeless exotic Other, juxtaposed to the Self and serving to stabilize and position it in the global world'.[34] 'Time' is thus proposed by Bryman as one of the 'ingredients' of theming, which generally do not come alone, but in association, alongside space, literature, cinema, music, sport, architecture, fashion, etc.[35]

Finally, unreal worlds need to be visualized, too, and this happens in ways which are necessarily inspired by historical phases and their symbolic association with values in the culture of reference. In the Western imagination, for instance, the world of magic (and associated images of witches and fairies) is deeply entrenched in the imaginary of the Middle Ages. This is strengthened by the fact that fairy tales, as extremely old and traditional components of folk culture, are often also associated with this historical phase and with the images of realms, kings, princes and princesses, etc. As put by Marcus Folch, 'a false medievalism' is 'the normative ecology for fantastic literature', even if 'classical structures often subtend fantasy's medievalizing edifice'.[36] As a consequence, themed environments dedicated to these worlds take inspiration from medieval architecture, or from what is imagined to be a visualization of the Middle Ages. The world of Harry Potter, as represented in the movies and then in the corresponding themed areas in the *Universal Orlando Resort*, is thus characterized by architectural forms associated with the Middle Ages.

'Historical' and 'cultural' theme parks, stereotypes and authenticity

How can one thus define what is a 'historical' or a 'cultural' theme park? Beyond the apparently simple statement that 'cultural theme parks are parks that use cultures as their themes',[37] there is much less clarity than one might think. Not only is the concept of 'culture' an extremely problematic one, widely discussed in

literature; such a definition also does not help us to see how specific cultures (such as the European Middle Ages) influence the representation of themes which cannot be considered 'cultural', nor how the representation of specific cultures is re-mediatized from other popular media (we will see a clear example of this later in *Parc Astérix*). This is crucial, because previous and popular visualizations have a strong influence on determining how later decisions in the representation of a world, a character, or a culture are taken. In this sense, any representation of the world of fairy tales, or of Harry Potter, for instance, that shifted away from a stereotypical 'medieval' setting would be unexpected and disturbing. This complication is further demonstrated by the case of a 'cultural theme park' entirely based on popular knowledge and revolving around a painting which might not actually be authentic, as analysed by Ong and Jin.[38] It is thus better to replace the concept of 'cultural' with that of 'historical', which allows the inclusion of all forms of re-mediatization, the chains of reception, and the influence of historical phases on the representation of fantastic worlds, leaving us 'only' with the problem of defining what is history – or better, from what moment the past can be considered 'history'.[39] I have suggested elsewhere a conventional, and rather drastic, answer, proposing to identify as 'historical' every theme representing a culture, a society, an event, a character, for which there are no living witnesses left.[40] I will leave this problem aside for now, however, as the focus of this book, on the representation of the ancient world and more specifically of classical Greece, means this question is of secondary importance here.

The representation of the chosen themes must therefore make use of existing stereotypes: the public has foreknowledge about a theme (it does not matter whether right or wrong) and has pre-built visualizations of it, deriving from movies, paintings, postcards, comics, video games etc.: 'the historical theme park will content itself with rearranging those things the visitors knew before into forms that appear simultaneously new and familiar',[41] generating what Chapman has called 'historical resonance'.[42] The condition for a successful immersion in the theme is, in this sense, its recognizability:[43] the individuation and recognition of images and concepts which are already known about a foreign culture or a historical period gives a sense of satisfaction and the feeling of 'having learnt' through seeing and touching,[44] while being confronted with representations that are perhaps more historically correct, yet unrecognizable, risks causing a sense of alienation which can lead, in the end, to a lack of amusement and therefore a commercial failure.[45] It is therefore no surprise if these forms of reception continue and perpetuate ideas which, from a scientific perspective, should be

classified as 'mistakes'.[46] This is why representations in theme parks are inherently conservative,[47] and follow an approach to history that basically essentializes and naturalizes contemporary expectations and social structures: 'this nostalgic approach to history assumes the nuclear family unit as the central social organising system, that the individual is a transhistorical construct, and most importantly, that encounters with the physical reality and material culture of a given period will sufficiently stimulate the total experience of that period'.[48]

In this sense, while a scholarly correct representation may be considered 'authentic' in the sense that authenticity is perceived as a property of the object ('museological authenticity'),[49] it risks failing to create any feeling of 'authenticity', here meaning an attribute of the experience of the public confronted with the object ('existential authenticity').[50] Li Yang has called this 'a tourist's perception of authenticity' and defined it as being composed of two parts: 'tourists' preconceptions of the visited culture' and 'tourists' perceptions of the actual manifestation of the culture in the attraction',[51] the latter clearly linking to MacCannell's concept of 'staged authenticity' in tourism which began, during the 1970s, the scholarly debate on the very concept at stake,[52] and led to a reversal of the focus from the 'offer' to the 'demand'. Both aspects, the 'museological' and the 'existential', have been partially integrated through the concept of 'performative authenticity', which insists on how the bodily practices of the visitors contribute to the authentication of the places.[53] This terminological tension is clearly visible in scholarship from the 1980s, as in Orvell, who came to define the nineteenth century as a 'culture of imitation', the twentieth as a 'culture of authenticity' and our world, after the Second World War and the development of mass popular culture since the 1960s, as the 'culture of the factitious', in which 'we have a hunger for something like authenticity but we are easily satisfied by an ersatz facsimile'.[54]

Umberto Eco (wrongly) considered this cultural movement to be exclusively American, and tried to sociologically explain it as deriving from wealth without history: 'the past must be preserved and celebrated in full-scale authentic copy', up to the point that the entirely real becomes identified with the entirely fake, and the sign 'aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement'.[55] This is what he defined as 'hyperreality', while Lash and Urry tried to define the postmodern economy as an 'economy of sign and space', in which 'what is increasingly produced are not material objects, but signs'.[56] All this is particularly important when dealing with the past, as a lived experience cannot, of course, be 'authentic' in any museological sense, and thus must be a 'staged authenticity', albeit one that is experienced as deeply authentic.[57]

An episode from the era of human zoos is particularly meaningful. Carl Hagenbeck, the 'inventor' of these ethnological exhibitions, organized the presentation of a group of Native Americans called Bella Coola. Their costumes and large traditional masks attracted much praise from the scholarly community, as the presentation was considered to be ethnologically well-conceived and precise; it ended in a financial catastrophe, as the public could not connect this appearance with the image of the Native Americans from the prairies which they knew from novels, drawings, paintings, and shows in the style of Buffalo Bill. Journal articles defined the Bella Coola as 'not Indian enough' or 'false Indians'; their 'museological authenticity' was, for the visitors, simply 'not authentic':[58] 'heritage fabricated by the media often seems more real because it is more familiar than the original'.[59] This issue has been explored in connection with *Colonial Williamsburg*: when the living history museum decided to integrate dirt, garbage and dung to transmit a less sanitized idea of the past – which would appear more authentic[60] – it attracted criticism from some visitors, who complained about the choice.[61] What's more, considering dirt as a quantifiable sign of authenticity, the management made the site even 'dirtier' than it was, thus falling into another stereotype, that of the past as being simply a more primitive version of the present.[62]

In theme park studies it is almost compulsory to quote Jean Baudrillard in reference to such questions of representation and authenticity, who in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) dealt with the evolution of systems of sign. According to Baudrillard, there are three kinds of simulacrum, associated with different historical stages: in the premodern world, the first order is that in which the originals are impossible to replace, and copies are just placeholders (natural simulacra). With the Industrial Revolution, the second order brought, through mechanical reproduction, the impossibility of distinguishing original from copy, transforming all of them into commodities (productive simulacra). Finally, in postmodernism, the third order inverts the traditional concepts: the simulacrum precedes the original and originality loses any significance (simulacra of simulation).[63] While this resembles Eco's argument, I would argue that this actually has only a limited significance for immersive environments with a historical and/or cultural theme, which break the traditional, museological, concept of authenticity but have an external referent without which they would completely lose their meaning.[64]

Indeed, Baudrillard's idea of the simulation of third order, specifically used to explain *Disneyland* and connected to the assumption that 'we need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end',[65]

should instead be framed in terms of a radical change in the perception of time and temporality characteristic of the last quarter of the twentieth century, which we will argue in more detail later. What Baudrillard considers to be a simulation of third order, arguing for instance that a perfect copy of the caves of Lascaux makes the original artificial,[66] is rather a process of presentification, which 'flattens' various time layers onto a broad present.[67] The hyperreal is, for Baudrillard, surely 'more true than the true, more real than the real', but this is connected to a strong conviction that 'there is not even the possibility of simultaneity in the order of time';[68] on the contrary, as we will see, it is precisely the possibility of simultaneity and of 'time travel' that allows immersive historical environments to function.[69] This also allows us to overcome a major difficulty in Baudrillard's theory: the fact that 'it is not evident that simulation and representation are mutually exclusive'.[70]

Far more important is Baudrillard's classification, in the same work, of the four different stages of the sign-order: the faithful copy; the perversion of reality (the assumption that the copy is not faithful); the pretence of reality, in which the sign pretends to be a copy, but has no original; and finally, the simulacrum, which has absolutely no contact with reality.[71] The forms of representation encountered in historical theme parks do not thus move within the sign-order of the simulacrum, but within that of the pretence of reality, in which images assemble to hint at and reference a reality that is not hidden behind them. As formulated by Adey, 'simulations and models can be comprehended not merely as copies or referents, but as mediators'.[72]

With few exceptions, theme parks are first and foremost commercial enterprises, as were most of their antecedents.[73] In this sense, their political and ideological aspects should not be underestimated, but they also are presented to the public in a way that makes them 'enjoyable' and guarantees the economic success of the park. They do not represent the main aim of the park, nor the condition for its survival. In this sense, 'visitors to amusement parks seek to maximise their enjoyment by preferring rides and attractions linked to historic themes that are easy to recognise, simple to grasp, and fun to join'.[74] Even parks with a didactic or political aim, such as the miniature park *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* that is dedicated to creating a sense of Indonesian national identity (and to which admission is free),[75] cannot afford to unsettle visitors nor confront them with unknown and unrecognizable images; they also work with the stereotypes available, combining them to their specific aims. Even religious theme parks, which have a substantially different aim and should not necessarily be connected with sanitized versions of history, end up deploying the same representation

mechanisms: 'one visitor to the *Holy Land Experience* [a religious theme park in Orlando] suggested that it was better that the real thing, not as "smelly" as butcher's alley (suq el-lahham) in Jerusalem's Old City – and much less crowded'[76] (and representing, again, a historical past: Judaea in the time of Roman rule).

Theme parks, representations of the past and historical culture

Externality, Disneyfication and Disneyization

To investigate the forms through which 'history' is represented in theme parks, it is necessary to discuss two concepts recurrently used in scholarship: externality and Disneyfication/Disneyization. The former, 'externality', has been introduced to highlight that a themed environment, and therefore a theme park, must represent something different from what is already available there, where the representation is created.[77] Theme parks are not bound by rules of place or availability: 'they generally stand in an arbitrary relation to the sites where they are built, since fantasy has no fixed geographic relation'.[78] The passage is marked by the closed boundary of the theme park, which could not exist if it represented what is available outside the gates. As Lowenthal puts it: 'our theme parks, no less than the themed gardens of the Middle Ages, are Other: They come into being and thrive only by *opposing* the chaos or ruin of the untamed and untidy mess beyond'.[79] The central point is a form of deterritorialization, which leads the visitor not just to look upon an exterior zone as an observer, but to occupy it and experience it directly, to internalize it and make it domestic. This was very clear to Walt Disney already when *Disneyland* was established, in 1955, as a sign at the entrance of the park famously claims that 'Here you leave today and enter the world of Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Fantasy'.[80]

But as this plaque makes clear, externality cannot be taken only in a cultural and geographical sense, it can also be understood in a temporal sense; it does not exclude representations of genealogy and continuity to imply only representations of otherness and exoticism. Indeed, while theme parks can represent cultures and historical phases which are extraneous to the location of the park, they can also represent the past of that very same region. Theme parks can 'assert their localness by celebrating their local nationalistic identity either in the actual attractions offered, in the mascots they use, or in the programme of activities they run (e.g. festivities)'.[81] This can be primarily aimed at visitors from abroad,

for whom the discovery of the 'traditional cultures' of a place that is already 'exotic' merely reinforces the feeling of exoticism (as in the *Polynesian Cultural Center* in Hawaii);[82] yet many parks are directly aimed at local visitors, and in general both the 'local' and the 'exotic' gaze are active and productive in the construction of identity at the same time.[83]

Temporal externality – the opportunity, through immersion, to 'visit' the past of that same region – is enough to mark the boundary of the themed environment. At the same time, it constructs identity, not through the forms of opposition described by Lowenthal, but through the identification of a continuity, the construction of a historical narrative which allows us to identify 'our ancestors':[84] one example (a 'real' theme park with roller coasters) is *Six Flags over Texas*, which celebrates Texan history and its different phases.[85] While representations of ancient Greece in China, for instance, are surely very exotic, ancient Greece can be activated in Western Europe, and not only in Greece, as the 'cradle' of Western civilization, and thus represented as temporally other, but deeply 'ours',[86] as this in particular is how ancient Greece is presented within schools and school books throughout Europe.[87] In spite of the fact that few Western (and even European) countries have a direct connection with Greek antiquity and Greek ruins on their territory, most would still represent ancient Greece as being a part of their own history and identity. The choice of themes within the theme park thus depends strongly on the structures of identity available where the park is built; at the same time, the forms of representation deployed in the theme park produce, or rather confirm and reinforce, these identity structures through the forms of historical narrations deployed there. This implies that the same historical culture can be represented in different contexts and assume different meanings in these contexts: this will be a red thread that runs throughout the entire book.

Theme parks are thus deeply ideological: using the different approaches to history as defined by Cornelius Holtorf, they can (1) be 'evolutionary', stressing the continuity and sequencing of historical periods and 'facts'; they can (2) be 'political', stressing the construction and representation of different pasts in different presents; or they can (3) adopt the mechanisms of 'time travel'.[88] It is important to stress the concept of travel, as the rite of passage at the entrance of the park allows visitors to experience a 'departure', 'a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one's senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane'.[89] Importantly, indeed, the 'traveller' is all the time aware of the fact that he is actually not moving to the past at all.[90] Theme parks and themed spaces are not

'frauds' and do not aim to truly convince their visitors that they are entering a new time or a new dimension;[91] they work through the constant awareness that the immersion they provide is a temporary separation from the reality outside, which is not forgotten at any moment. Indeed, 'if we were totally to become Mississippi steamboat passengers or Star Wars characters, immersed in their concerns and goals and fears and anxieties, we would not have the concomitant awareness that the experience was "fun" and "different" … A theme park is an attraction, not a conversion to a new identity.'[92] The visitors thus look at what surrounds them with a 'tourist gaze', 'directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them from everyday experience' (the principle of externality) and based on anticipation, 'constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist technologies' which create structures of expectation.[93] In this sense, the process of immersion cannot work if the visitors are not 'willing' to enjoy it and bring to the theme park the 'correct' predisposition.[94]

Nonetheless, when they have a historical theme, theme parks provide information about the past, even if 'time travel' generates an experience of the past that is not intellectual-argumentative in nature: to use Graburn's adaption to museum studies of Lévi-Strauss's vocabulary, the knowledge derived is 'mythic' and not 'scientific'.[95] The results are extremely powerful historical images: powerful because they are interiorized by the visitors through their sensorial experience (in the same way tableaux vivants are 'offered as a form of shared experience', to follow Samuel),[96] and not 'learnt' argumentatively, as occurs with a reading of historiography; they are also powerful due to the sheer number of people reached.[97] Even rather unsuccessful theme parks have visitor numbers on a scale entirely different from those who read history books, and sometimes even from the audience of historical documentaries on TV, which are considered the main channel through which people come into contact with history in our society.[98] The only reasonable comparison would be the number of people reached by historical video games.[99]

These aspects have been perceived by some as worrying, and one consequence has been the development of the concepts of 'Disneyization' and 'Disneyfication'. The first concept, introduced by Bryman, defines 'the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world'.[100] According to Bryman, while Disney cannot be considered solely responsible for this evolution, but rather as emblematic of these dynamics ('structural Disneyization'), its success has also made it influential in accelerating and perpetuating such a trend ('transferred Disneyization'). This consists of the ever more widespread use of

theming as a way of attracting customers, but also hybrid consumption, the development of merchandising and the use of performative labour, and entails a strong control over and thus surveillance within the themed area:[101] 'without a specific social and material context' – writes Zukin, who describes this phenomenon and locates it within the complicated relationship between market and place, even if he does not use the concept of Disneyization – 'the organising principle in these landscapes is simply a visual theme'.[102]

Disneyfication, on the other hand, is used to indicate in an exclusively pejorative way the adoption of a 'Disney approach' to different areas and fields of action, mostly literature and history.[103] It was originally used to signify how literary and cultural products from different origins, when 're-elaborated' by Disney, became distorted, undoubtedly Disneyan products, obscuring the previous life of these works. However, the concept was later applied to urban planning and eventually to representations of history, to define a process through which contents and objects are rendered in a superficial, simplistic and whitewashed way. In this sense, the concept of Disneyfication has been adopted in many situations to refer to representations of heritage and of history perceived to be produced 'as in the theme park', in a too simple, undifferentiated, commercial, untroubling way.[104] Beyond that, the concept is also pejorative in a second sense (a criticism often raised against reconstructions and immersive historical environments): that they place the spectators in a purely passive role, taking away from them the possibility of reconstructing and rebuilding the past in individual forms and giving them 'no role other than the consumption of kitsch'.[105] And yet, if we define kitsch as 'the attempt to repossess the experience of intensity and immediacy through an object',[106] it becomes clear that 'historical theme parks' are indeed kitsch, but in a more positive fashion, as they allow people to experience with intensity and immediacy a different time and culture through the objects which compose their theming.

Disney's America

The discussion about the appropriateness of theme park representations of history, their opportunity and dangers reached a peak when in 1993 Disney announced the project of a theme park, *Disney's America*, to be built near Haymarket, Virginia, in an area dense with historical memories, not far from *Colonial Williamsburg*.[107] The park would have opened in 1998, consisting of nine themed areas representing American history, from a Native American village to a Civil War fort and the two World Wars. There were two main criticisms

of the project: the impact on the area, as well as on the 'real' historical sites surrounding the park; and the ways in which Disney would have represented American history and its contested issues, from the massacre of Native Americans to slavery. In a context marked by the Culture wars,[108] a general fear was that the park would have provided a sanitized, whitewashed vision of history which would have ultimately, due to the popularity of Disney and the immersive, sensorial approach to history provided, been impossible to correct. The concept of 'Disneyfication of history' thus evolved into the concept of 'Distory', intentionally playing with both the name Disney and the prefix 'dis-' ('opposite or absence of'). Introduced by Fjellman, this concept defines a postmodern form of presentation of the past which is based on spectacle, decontextualizes stories from the past and constructs authoritative narratives.[109] This was not the stance of all scholars and historians: some argued that the project could be positive, provided Disney were ready to involve professional historians, and David Lowenthal even claimed that the park could have helped to generate a stronger interest in the past: 'so might Disney's Historyland generate interest in actual historic places and themes'.[110] Nonetheless, the project was abandoned, after having revealed the strength of the tensions surrounding the past and history and its interpretation, and the clash of interests between professional historians and a commercial enterprise such as Disney. Yet it is important to highlight that theme parks have also developed, over the past few decades, special didactic programmes and offers that are generally reserved for schools: *Terra Mítica* in Benidorm, Spain, for instance, offers materials to visit the park while learning about the ancient world.[111] As formulated by Huyssen,

> we cannot simply pit the serious Holocaust museum against some Disneyfied theme parks. For this would only reproduce the old high/low dichotomy of modernist culture in a new guise ... For once we acknowledge the constitutive gap between reality and its representation in language or image, we must in principle be open to many different possibilities of representing the real and its memories.[112]

Theme parks and historical culture

Theme parks are, in the end, an important means of visualization, of transmission, of popularization of history and historical knowledge, as their images and narratives are incorporated 'into the discursive body of mutualized knowledge'.[113] In this sense, they are a crucial part of what German scholarship calls the *Geschichtskultur*, the 'historical culture' of the communities where they exist, and

those of their visitors. The concept includes all the forms and ways in which a chosen society or community deals with its history, including academic research, school teaching, popular culture, and so on;[114] theme parks must therefore be analysed in terms of their connections and relations to the other components of the relevant 'historical cultures', in order to explain how their figurations of history work within the specific contexts in which they have been created. Rüsen recognized three main dimensions of the 'historical culture': an aesthetic, a political, and a cognitive, which he later broadened to five, adding a moral and a religious dimension.[115] While admitting that all are present in any representation of history, Rüsen considers them to be separate from each other; in his opinion, a strongly aesthetic approach reduces both the argumentative side of the cognitive dimension and the political dimension.[116] Yet, if it is true that theme parks, acting mostly on the aesthetic side, do transmit images of history in a non-argumentative way, this in no way makes such images less political.[117] In the theme park, the past is a 'present past', which is activated and functionalized to make sense of one own's experience, to create and reinforce identities and orient action.[118] It is not only narratives that perform this function: images, recognizable as symbols, can also assume a semaphoric value, activating the memory processes, historical knowledge, and values connected to them.[119]

According to Rüsen, there are four approaches through which meaning and sense are given to history:[120] the first is the traditional approach, which constructs a sense of identity between the past and the present, in the sense of 'we were always the same'; the second, the critical approach, instead highlights the superiority of the present by arguing that the past was characterized by mistakes, cruelty, a lack of democracy, etc. Through the third approach, the genetic, a continuity is constructed between past and present, while also stressing the evolutionary process which makes the present a better, improved version of the past. Finally, the exemplary approach sees in the past a repository of positive and negative examples, which can be considered helpful to orient our actions. These approaches must be considered as ideal types, as they do not necessarily exclude each other, but can coexist within one and the same representation of history.

Still, they are also useful for understanding how history 'works' in the theme park: the representation of the small American town of the early twentieth century in 'Main Street U.S.A.' in *Disneyland*, for instance, is traditional as it appeals to what, in the ideology underlying the representation, lies at the 'core' of American values. It is genetic, as it stresses the evolutionary continuity from that world to the America of today, and it is exemplary, as it expresses the model of the ideal Americanness as conceived by Walt Disney.[121] The critical approach

is harder to find in the theme park, as it would require the representation of negative aspects which are generally filtered out, and can thus appear only in the form of 'dark theming', that is, the intentional choice of a scary, uncanny, unsettling, troubling theme.[122] The other three approaches are easily visible and conform to very widespread mechanisms of the popularization of history: moralization, as the easiest way to 'give sense' to historical narration,[123] intrinsic in the exemplary approach; and the 'teleologisation' that constructs a continuative narration, which is reassuring in its inevitability, providing an easy frame for us to 'understand' history and to found and reinforce identity. As the 'revelation of mortality is of no use for group identity – it is precisely what has to be suspended',[124] such teleological plots are particularly successful in the construction of collective identities and are not by chance the background for most nationalistic interpretations of history. Transmitted within society and through schoolbooks, these also provide the bulk of stereotypes with which the theme parks operate, thus constantly reinforcing such teleological narratives further. Archaeological reconstructions – an antecedent of these immersive environments – were already being used in the first half of the twentieth century 'to give people a dramatised sense of being part of the state, "with a share in its future"'.[125]

The 'domestication' of history in the theme park

In this way, theme parks are, when they represent history, a form of modern 'heritage', according to Lowenthal's definition, for whom 'heritage' is the past activated and functionalized for group identity, a 'possessive' or 'partisan' past: 'History is for all, heritage for us alone.'[126] According to the geographer, heritage 'domesticates' history in three ways, by updating (making actual), upgrading (making better) and by excluding.[127] These three dynamics are put into practice through a series of representational strategies; in particular, theme parks operate, as Florian Freitag and I argued a few years ago, through four specific strategies to represent history.[128] These should not be understood as sequential, but rather as a theoretical model which defines different aspects of the mechanisms of the 'translation' and 'transformation' of history within theme parks, which operationally occurs through a creative process not so neatly ordered in distinct phases. The first strategy is that of 'selection'. As in any form of historical narration, it is impossible to reproduce the entirety of the past. A selection is, in this sense, necessary, and the selection that occurs in the theme park is specific to the characteristics and needs of this medium. As most theme parks attempt not to

have only one specific target age, but generally try to include and attract families as a consistent part of their public (the Disney parks are in this sense, once again, paradigmatic examples), there is a tendency to avoid any family-hostile themes.[129] War, death, poverty, sickness, executions and slavery are all themes that are generally avoided, if one excludes the already mentioned specific cases of 'dark theming', which follow specific rules and are addressed to specific groups of the public. This is not exclusive to theme parks, and is generally an important criterion in the development of touristic offerings: as highlighted by Duke, archaeological sites that are open to visitors (in the case of his study, the Minoan sites on Crete) have no reference to the lives of poor people, nor traces of 'squalor and disease', nor do they mention human sacrifice or cannibalism, instead presenting an image of Minoan Crete as a rich and opulent society, dedicated to technological progress and prosperity, untouched by war.[130] If death and destruction are evoked, it is only in the sense of explaining how this society came to an end – just as they are present (and would be impossible to omit), for instance, in Pompeii.

The second strategy is abstraction: the selected, stereotypical 'themes' are translated into typical visualizations, which can be recognized by the greatest number of observers possible. This implies not only, as Lowenthal highlights, vagueness and generalization, as well as mixing places,[131] but also the creation of pictograms which can directly evoke a period, a culture, a place.[132] This means (as so often happens in the reconstruction of ancient environments) that architectural elements can be completely de-functionalized: a bunch of white columns can signify antiquity, even if they just stand there, not holding any roof.[133] By creating such pictograms, the process of abstraction also corresponds to what Winnerling has called, in a study of historicizing video games, 'reduction':[134] the forms thus transformed maintain their shape but are emptied of content. The Greek temple in the theme park is not necessarily a temple; it can be a restaurant, a shop, the loading station of a roller coaster, a prop, etc. A Greek temple, to continue with this example, can be a reconstruction of a real ancient temple (as in *Terra Mítica*, see Fig. 1) or an imaginary one (as in *Europa-Park*, see Fig. 5), but as long as we see a white structure with six or eight columns on the front, generally Doric or Ionic, and a pediment with sculptures, we have evoked through abstraction the Greek temple; it can be 'antique Greekness'.[135] Such abstractions can be in contradiction to what is known by scholars: the polychromy of Greek temples is not only certain (since the first half of the nineteenth century), but also widely known at a popular level;[136] still, with very few exceptions (we will see one in *Parc Astérix*: Fig. 23), this has in no way modified