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Window of the World, Shenzhen, China. Photo by Nick Stanley.
Theme Park Landscapes: Antecedents and Variations

edited by Terence Young and Robert Riley

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Grounding the Myth—
Theme Park Landscapes in an Era
of Commerce and Nationalism

Terence Young

The subject of theme parks offers an abundance of materials on this increasingly international phenomenon. The popular enthusiast can choose from a range of laudatory, sentimental videos about early and current locations, and demand is so strong publishers cannot seem to produce enough glossy, coffeetable panegyrics and guides to favorite destinations. The sales of Walt Disney World books, for instance, vaulted Jennifer Watson and Dave Marx’s PassPorter Walt Disney World and Eve Zibart’s Inside Disney high on amazon.com’s booklist.¹ The theme park industry, large and swelling rapidly, publishes Amusement Business, Amusement Today, and Theme Park Adventure to keep track of developments, promote individuals, and identify key innovations. Scholars, just as curious and stimulated as the general public and the business community, have composed numerous explorations into individual parks and the phenomenon as a whole. The prevalence and influence of “theming” increased so dramatically during the 1990s that theme parks became a metaphor for postmodern urban life. In particular, critics apply the term “Disneyfication” to any landscape developed to communicate with several audiences, especially when that communication is an attempt to stimulate and direct consumption.² Nevertheless, few scholarly studies focus on the landscapes in theme parks. The origins, divergence, and significance of their spatial aspects are

¹ A search for “Disney World” on the Internet at www.amazon.com in January 2000 produced a list of 242 books. The 2 volumes cited here were ranked by sales at nos. 1,992 and 45,096, respectively, out of more than 2 million books.

only beginning to be understood. Under what conditions did theme park landscapes emerge? How did they enter into mass culture? Why are they so popular? How are they connected to the social order? What functions do they serve? This volume’s authors examine current and past, private and public, obviously and subtly themed landscapes in Asia, Europe, and North America in response to these and other questions. The essays were developed from the May 1996 Studies in Landscape Architecture Symposium organized by Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and Robert B. Riley.

Most scholars agree that sixteenth- to nineteenth-century European gardens were the major progenitors of theme parks. Landscape designers such as Andre Le Nôtre and William Kent tapped their aristocratic clients’ historic and contemporary sensibilities to transform villages, forests, and fields into spaces rich with visual references, innuendoes, hints, and winks. The grotto of Thetis at Versailles and the pantheon at Stourhead in England broke the representational ground for Minetown at Hershey Park, in Hershey, Pa., and Universal Studios Hollywood’s Terminator 2:3D. In each case, designers rejected explicit language and extracted symbols from their visitors’ cultural backgrounds to generate interest and promote responses. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, designers did not purposely attempt to instrumentalize culture but instead drew unsystematically from their social and environmental contexts. When John Evelyn or Dominique Girard created gardens in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they could tell their patrons what sort of style was best, but not how the specific elements in a design stimulated viewers. Their landscapes were arresting but not reflexively so. A critical step on the path to today’s theme parks was finally taken during the late eighteenth century when, according to Richard Quaintance’s thoughtful argument, William Chambers presented his psychological insights as “sinophilic” landscape theories and linked specific designs and features to particular states of mind. In the two hundred fifty years since Chambers, landscape developers have refined this mood-altering process and now calculatedly employ it in theme parks.

At least one theme—nostalgia—directly links European gardens to theme parks. The “Arcadian meadow,” for example, was created around 1770 as a part of Ermenonville and arose, as David Lowenthal phrases it, from a yearning “to evacuate the present,” which is opaque and turbulent, into a clarified, tranquil past. The meadow’s particular trope, the pastoral, has never lost favor and continues to inform the landscapes explored by Michel Conan (at Sweden’s cultural theme park, Skansen), Carla Corbin (in American agricultural fairs), and myself (at Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park that straddles Tennessee and North Carolina). Each landscape employs the past to proffer benign certitudes to visitors. These designs are more specific than the south landscape at Ermenonville, offering respective insights into Sweden and the United States rather than a generic Eu-

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rope, but they are equally rustic in character. Another set of the authors pulls away from the countryside, illustrating how nostalgic landscapes need not be rural. The lost village or town is another common trope, styling the landscapes probed by Edward Chappell (at Colonial Williamsburg, Va.), Nick Stanley (in Chinese and Taiwanese folk villages), and Marc Treib (at Japan’s Huis Ten Bosch). A civic but nonindustrial past is romanticized and presented as the open, attractive, supportive, honest, and reliable alternative to a modern city. This village trope is so close to the modern suburban ideal, Treib perceptively notes, that the developers of Huis Ten Bosch planned it as “a model for future Japanese dwelling” in spite of the fact the theme recalls a distant past and foreign land.

Performance also connects modern theme parks with European gardens of the sixteenth- to nineteenth-century. Occasionally an estate garden such as Chiswick, Claremont, or Rousham incorporated a theater or outdoor stage where family members, friends, or actors could entertain with a play, music, juggling, or some other amusement. These early theaters were small or designed to blend inconspicuously into the setting, but as the theme park emerged, the size and relationship between garden and theater reversed. We learn in Heath Schenker’s discerning essay that the latter progressively expanded in the nineteenth century’s commercial version of the estate garden: the public pleasure garden. Tree-lined walks, lawns, and flowers had dominated the earliest of these gathering spots, but aggressive proprietors built ever larger and more elaborate halls and stages over the natural features in order to meet public expectations. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, theaters often occupy more space in theme parks than do gardens.

Performances can also move off the stage onto the larger landscape. Marie-Antoinette and her court gathered to play at being shepherds and shepherdesses at the Hameau, her “model farm” near Versailles’ Petit Trianon. Today performers can be found similarly strolling, playing, or “working” in many theme parks. Cades Cove, as I note in my essay, employs actors to represent and interpret historic or cultural figures but are not necessarily related to them. Conversely, the performers at the Chinese folk culture villages discussed by Stanley and at Corbin’s agricultural fairs are neither actors nor individuals distantly related to the people they represent but the people themselves. Farmers attend fairs to learn about the latest developments, display products, and sell goods, but their utilitarian 4-H competitions and livestock auctions are also performances enjoyed by a large audience of suburbanites, who encounter the farmers as if they had stepped into a television documentary. Although the sensory experience of the fair is richer than television, it easily remains a one-way flow toward visitors unless they seek out a farmer for discussion. An agricultural fair’s landscape is not organized to prohibit interactions between farmers and visitors but neither is it set up to foster them. The Chinese folk culture villages park, a more deliberately themed exhibition, displays the “villages” of two dozen Chinese minorities and, unlike most cultural parks and agricultural fairs, allows the subjects to be active interpreters rather than passive objects. Its landscape is arranged to encourage personal contact between the villagers and visitors. This dialectical relationship allows the minorities greater control over how they are portrayed and interpreted because a villager can bring up discussion topics or specific practices in light of a dynamic context. At the same time, the visitors’ experiences are more personal
because their own questions, rather than the ones formulated by authorities, can be put to the villagers.

I do not want to overemphasize the European precursors to theme parks, since there are other regional sources as well. Traditional Chinese painting and landscape gardening focused on mountains, rivers, and other natural features common to Chinese theme parks. Many early gardens, such as Sui Yuan in Suzhou, included pavilions and belvederes. Chinese authors, like their European counterparts, were sometimes nostalgic escapists who, Stanley sensitively notes, praised the traditional village as “a life of rural simplicity.” Performances were known to occur in such places as the emperor’s garden in eighteenth-century Beijing (Pekin), which included a miniature capital city where actors recreated the daily life passing just beyond the garden walls.

Nor should anyone easily assume simple, direct links between past and present anywhere. In his erudite essay, Edward Harwood identifies several clear differences and warns that the form, history, and meaning of gardens and theme parks do not easily coincide. For one, the associations tapped in an eighteenth-century European garden grew out of the visitors’ formal education, whereas today’s associations spring from mass awareness. One is more likely to encounter Astérix than Odysseus at a theme park. For another, today’s parks generally exist to amass wealth through the manipulation of culture and leisure; where their garden forebears, by contrast, were displays of wealth and cultivation. Schenker picks up and develops these differences by using a hierarchical diffusion model. The nineteenth century’s pleasure gardens went from “fashionable” to “democratic” as the lower classes fused their own tastes with upper-class styles and landscapes. In the hands of entrepreneurs, who were less interested in a garden’s form than its potential to tap into a growing leisure market, Schenker suggests how an eighteenth-century vehicle for power and taste became a twenty-first-century cash machine, drawing vast crowds of visitors.

Theme parks attract so many people because they have become major pilgrimage sites within today’s mass cultures. Like other tourist attractions, they have grown into anodyne places where modern people can alleviate the anxieties in their lives and the crises in their societies. Such stresses develop whenever the prevailing sense of order is disturbed by intentional or accidental changes, which are common and normal in any complex society. To reassure “pilgrims” and create a haven away from the crisis, the causes of change are typically central to their experience of a pilgrimage site. In the past, pilgrims were more pious and often sought relief at the locus of a religious spirit who was believed to have power over a change, either sought or feared. Pilgrims might have been uncertain about the future in advance of a journey but gain confidence with a visit to Jerusalem or Mecca. Theme parks grew increasingly popular during the twentieth century as the world became more secular, the size and complexity of societies increased, and change became more prevalent and pervasive.4 In the modern world, people are more likely to attribute change to com-

merce and technology than to spirits, so the former are frequently highlighted in the theme park experience. According to Brenda Brown’s sensitive investigation, the rides at Disney’s Epcot Center brashly declare that commerce and technology are not to be feared; rather, they are servants that will carry everyone on voyages of profitable discovery. Although riders may have to relocate, reeducate themselves, or even lose their jobs to technological innovation, the change serves an important end—a better future. Conversely, an “authentic” historical park such as Colonial Williamsburg often bears witness to how much technological development has improved life. However, as Chappell wryly notes about such parks, the production of authenticity “can serve to limit [the authorities’] uncritical production of charm.” The re-creation of just a touch of the mud and muck that accompanied horse power goes a long way. Agricultural fairs paradoxically also reassure with technology. Despite the pastoral allusions of agricultural fairs, the economics of farming have been subject to dramatic, often volatile changes over the last hundred years. Harvests generally increased, but individual farm profits often declined because technologically supported competition steadily pushed commodity prices down. This brutal reality drove millions from farms around the world, yet, as Corbin poignantly notes, fairs continue to be based on “the positive benefits of progress.” Farmers, and likely the suburbanites as well, are drawn to the agricultural fair’s confident message about technology.5

The agricultural fair offers a clear example of how contradictory myths are often intertwined at a theme park. On the one hand, the fair is a nostalgic retreat for suburbanites seeking temporary escape into a purportedly benevolent past. On the other, the fair attracts farmers who, looking to the future, want to learn about the latest agricultural technologies. Theme parks, being postmodern, not only speak to many audiences but also bring opposite values together in one place and present them as a normal pairing. As Conan insightfully points out, the landscape in one of today’s theme parks often does more than simply recollect an existing myth; it creates popular culture’s new ones.

Theme parks do not necessarily focus on technology or commerce, but if not, they must draw on some other widely shared myth or myths to generate a sense of well-being. These internalized meanings are culturally and historically specific, vary between parks, and are generally the elements giving coherence—a theme—to the whole. There are an indefinite number of possible themes, and I have mentioned several, but at least one—nationalism—runs through this volume and helps explain the appearance of theme parks in noncommercial economies. Colonial Williamsburg and Cades Cove both recreate the local buildings and landscapes from foundational periods of the American national identity while Skansen assembles regional samples so that a composite whole—Sweden—is foregrounded. In these three instances, the essence of nationhood is found in the culture, especially the material culture, of the nation. Skansen and Colonial Williamsburg both profit from these

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displays, but since Cades Cove is in an American national park (and thus an officially endorsed view of the country’s origins), it is the most suggestive and nationalistic.

A similarly cultural approach to nationalism is taken at the five Chinese theme parks investigated by Stanley, but one in particular expands the definition and defines China in terms of its physical landscapes as well as its cultural ones. The nation, Splendid China asserts, is more than just its populace and their traditions; it includes such distinctive topographical features as the Stone Forest at Lunan and the Yangtze River gorges. Splendid China nationalizes nature by miniaturizing it and presenting it alongside artifacts made by the peoples within the state’s territory. The spatial associations and coherence of its landscape suggest a national whole. Splendid China helps us to see how nature can be politically appropriated by the state and therefore why natural landscape parks like America’s Yellowstone or Argentina’s Nahuel Huapi are not simply nature preserves but also nationalist theme parks. Although these nature parks are not spatially mixed with the nation’s cultural elements, they are nevertheless ex cathedra statements about how the nation arose from its scenic, recreational, and ecological landscapes.

A theme park’s landscape gives form and narrative to a myth, but it also gives it a place. Typically the myth’s disparate parts do not coalesce at any one location but are scattered across the larger territory or in many media. A theme park melds these elements so that, for example, the Japanese lore about Holland is made material in Nagasaki’s Huis Ten Bosch. Its landscape designers tapped the region’s Dutch past and all the material culture that this history suggests to a Japanese visitor to organize, adorn, and validate its hotels, shops, and houses. The landscape coordinates and situates the ideal and the real, providing a context that presents a useful version of the myth, enhanced visually and aurally. The spatiality of the landscape in particular gives myth weight and force. The tale becomes truer and the place, by implication, better as the former gains spatial extension. In contrast, a landscape can also take an incomprehensibly large area and its associations, reduce the whole and represent it in an intelligible, albeit biased fashion. Agricultural fairs, for example, capture the essence of farming, a practice spread across thousands of square miles, and affectionately tender it to visitors within a few acres. Fairs add instrumental value to the agrarian myth and whatever is associated, whether product, allegiance, or notion. But a theme park is much more than a simple location. It is a shrine to its message and to succeed must be bounded—isolated from the ordinary landscape—unlike most places, which blend indistinctly into other places. It is unclear exactly where one begins and another ends. Nonetheless, pilgrims have to know when they enter the pilgrimage site. In the language of Victor and Edith Turner, theme parks are liminoid—thresholds between the chaotic, often conflicting forces of the everyday and the orderly world tapped in the myth.6 If a distinction between special and ordinary does not exist, the former offers no control over the latter and fails to be a pilgrimage site. In simple cases, a fence with a gate may suffice to delineate inside from outside, but such devices are drably functional, lacking the drama and impact possible when

the partition involves the landscape. Disney designers understood landscape’s delimiting power when they required visitors to ride a monorail into Florida’s Magic Kingdom. Gazing out the window, one traverses land and water to arrive at the park’s flower-festooned entrance. The sense of spatial distinction is heightened by the several minutes of approach and anticipation in the car. The Cades Cove entrance also draws on the drama of landscape. Visitors, driving on a park road, pass an official sign and turnout and proceed toward a short hill that blocks any further views ahead. Making a left turn around the base of the hill before swinging sharply back to the right, they are suddenly treated to a scenic pastoral meadow stretching hundreds of feet into distant trees and even more distant foothills. The moment is a transfiguring one. At both Walt Disney World and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, visitors know they have left the realm of the everyday to enter a unique place.

In addition to being bounded, a theme park must be removed in space and time from everyday life. It needs to be “away”—not anyone’s place yet accessible, available to pilgrims if it is to serve as a social restorative. The pilgrimage is an inherently geographic phenomenon. A park must be distant so that the journey will take visitors out of their normal social hierarchy and into one where all are equal. Outside the park visitors may have high or low status, but after leaving the social relations of home and work behind and joining with other pilgrims at the site, everyone has the same opportunity to merge with the spatialized, materialized myth. In this vein, when visitors arrive at Skansen, they are encouraged to recognize one of two things: either they are Swedish along with all other state residents or that they are an “other,” who can only marvel at that which is Sweden. A consequence of this egalitarian separateness, one often sought by designers and owners, is that theme parks tie a diverse, diffuse society into one community. Visitors may have different status levels, incomes, ethnicities, religions, or genders on the outside but inside they all become citizens, subjects, consumers, descendants, or collaborators of some sort. Theme parks position an exotic variety of cultures, histories, artifacts, styles, texts, architectures, and performances onto a single landscape and hitch it to a familiar, uniform message such as, “it is good to consume,” or “it is good to be a member of the nation.”

To foster melding with the myth, theme parks typically control behavior within their borders. Since a park is the site for ritual reconnection to the mythic order, action often must be encouraged, directed, or restrained lest the order be lost. William Chambers understood the need for spatial control in his eighteenth-century gardens, observes Quaintance. The landscape designer laid Kew’s paths so that the visitor would have to view two sheep meadows and thus be reminded of Prince George’s famous interest in sheep breeding. The landscape designers at the U.S. National Park Service also have a sense of how spatial order can foster a theme park’s narrative. The one-way road at Cades Cove limits the ability to reinterpret the National Park Service’s message. Visitors can diminish the experience by driving through without stopping, but the thrust of the narrative will remain the same because the spatial order is linear. The ultimate constraint is exclusion, which must occur if a park is to draw pilgrims. Like heaven, theme parks are good places, and traditionally a good place is not open to all. According to Harwood, eighteenth-century estate gardens
were visited only by the handful who had the leisure and wherewithal necessary for the sojourn. The early pleasure gardens, remarks Schenker, were similarly situated out of town so that the only visitors were those “who could afford to come by carriage.” Transportation costs limited access to a wealthy, mobile elite. When the gardens became popular haunts for the working classes, the wealthy avoided them because they were in unfashionable, disorderly neighborhoods. In both cases the character of the surrounding space restrained the use of these early theme parks. The first group was excluded because it was poor and could not cross the emptiness, but the other group stayed away because it was rich and feared to cross what had become a densely inhabited and impoverished city.

Theme parks also seem to be “outside” the everyday world because their landscapes, in contrast to other locations, appear timeless. Since the myths enshrined are supposed to be natural truths, beyond the influence of history, landscapes frequently appear frozen in some vague period. Depending on the theme, an era may be in the past, present, future, or some obscure “elsewhen.” As Lowenthal trenchantly observes, conflation is common to theme parks, especially when set in the past. Splendid China is an excellent example of a timeless landscape, for it presents samples from all over China and out of its rich history at a single site. However, to avoid any hint of aging, nothing modern is represented. Conversely, the time, or timelessness, of a landscape is also a potential burden: visitors can become bored, especially in those parks that rely heavily on entertainment. If new features and designs are not introduced, the landscape threatens to become an historic artifact, revealing the age of some messages. In a progressive landscape, for example, new elements must appear to support the virtues of the latest technology. Disneyland’s Tomorrowland in particular has had several such revisions. Alternately, an exhibition in a nationalist park that praises the current regime must disappear or be revised when it ends. Nothing should clearly declare that history led anywhere but directly to the positive, reassuring present.

This landscape-bounding, overriding commitment to order, spatial distance from visitors, and apparent timelessness allows theme parks to be secular axes mundi, but their distinctiveness also sunders or revises a theme park’s cultural, historic, and geographic connections to the outside world. Since the landscape of a park is carefully monitored and maintained in its own fixed time, nearby outside influences frequently have little impact upon it. For example, should the way of life among the locals change from agriculture to industry (as they did around southern California’s Disneyland), the park will likely remain intact. Disneyland withstood the force of change by directing resources toward its deflection. At the same time, however, a theme park tends to undermine local and regional identities either by appropriating their mythic essences and relocating them within the park boundaries or by transforming the surrounding landscape in response to the park. Washington, D.C., area residents, for instance, fought Disney’s proposed history theme park in northern Virginia in part because they feared a shift of the sacred from the nearby Civil War battlefields maintained by the National Park Service and in part because they knew the countryside around the new site would rapidly commercialize. Pilgrimage sites have long been associated with vendors, guides, innkeepers, and others catering to pilgrims’ real and imagined needs. As these services grow in number around a theme park, the region typically loses its
old character and comes to be seen in terms of the park and its associated features. Orlando, Fla., which had previously been known for its citrus and ornamental horticulture, has been almost entirely transformed into a region of theme parks. Its earlier identity is increasingly nothing more than another icon to be manipulated by merchants peddling goods to the pilgrims.

Theme parks did not spring forth *ex nihilo* during the twentieth century. Elements developed in Europe, China, and elsewhere over the last four hundred years. A characteristic trope at all these places has been a nostalgia for the country and small towns. It gives form to a visitor's dissatisfaction with an urbanized and, more recently, industrialized world. In these tropes people see a recapitulation of their society's agrarian and mercantile history. However, nostalgia for a wild, prehistoric, hunting-gathering past is not widespread. Perhaps because rustic life was lost recently while the hunting-gathering one was abandoned long ago or because the transition from country to city was not as dramatic and wrenching as the shift from a mobile to a sedentary ecology, urbanized societies can look back on the landscapes of their less urban, but still settled, ancestors and see themselves. In contrast, national parks and forests preserve wilderness, an untamed place, but not its people. These nature-themed parks often grew out of a recent nationalist nostalgia for the landscapes from the period when the modern state's territory was established. The nature park puts the pilgrim in touch with the physical world his predecessors wrestled with to create the country he now occupies. Frequently, as was the case in the United States and Argentina, native peoples were an impediment rather than a resource for the new life. They are not the predecessors to be praised, so they have been separated from their landscape in the park.

Whenever the lives of earlier peoples, whether native or immigrant, are presented in theme parks, the landscape is usually organized using one of three different audience-performer approaches. First, as at Walt Disney World, they can be fully choreographed, objectified, and produced for the visitor. All the practices, questions, and material-cultural artifacts are preplanned by park authorities. The result is an object or product for the visitors to perceive at a distance. This distance may be physical or psychological but the flow of information is like a broadcast medium—toward the visitor. Second, as at an agricultural fair, the performance is partly choreographed but not objectified nor produced for visitors. The order of events and how they occur is controlled but not as a product to be necessarily purchased, enjoyed, or appreciated by the public present. It is more open-ended, allowing for spontaneous, dynamic interactions between performers and audience. Third, as at the Chinese folk culture villages, the performance is partly choreographed and not objectified yet produced for the visitors. The performers maintain a presence and a set of practices within a fixed space but are not there simply to be observed. The design brings visitors and performers together for the former's satisfaction.

Landscape can be arranged to control drama, movement, and behavior in order to foster a park's messages. It is not merely an isotropic surface on which the park rests but an active shaper of the experience. The space inside and around a park can be thrilling (as on a ride), act as a dramatic threshold, or function as a barrier, whether empty or occupied.
Space is actively manipulated like the materials in it so as to recall earlier uses and stimulate responses.

We must, however, be careful not to conclude that form, historical function, and meaning easily coincide, especially since wealth seems to allow—even encourage—theming. Affluent societies now and in the past have had more leisure than poor ones and often used their resources to create themed environments. Thus we find nature gardens in eighteenth-century France and China. Most theme parks today are commercial, nationalistic, or combination enterprises, so as their numbers increase along with the world’s wealth, we should expect an increasing portion of the world’s local and regional landscapes to become uniformly commercial and national. Despite their postmodern aspects, theme parks are part of modernity, agents in the homogenization of places. The new ones will be especially influential because they are increasingly likely to be historic rather than futuristic facilities. History parks and fantasy parks will presumably gain adherents over future-oriented settings because they are less affected by the tension between a dynamic external world of easily jaded visitors and a purportedly timeless, authentic, and essential landscape. Change is less likely to affect features in a history park because they can, like Huis Ten Bosch, draw on existing lore. National identity can be fostered more easily by emphasizing historic connections between groups than by projecting future affinities. In addition, the past’s technology is less likely to be questioned than the future’s innovations. However, unless the people in areas near theme parks are willing and able to commit resources to contain their influence and direct it toward widely beneficial ends, local and regional identities will be steadily eroded and lost to park operators pursuing profit and national allegiance.
Nowadays all nature is seen as a theme park, a realm of limitless possibilities to satisfy every desire. Thus California touts the whole of Orange County as a park whose theme is that “you can have anything you want.” And you can have it all at once: “Tomorrowland and Frontierland [are] merged and inseparable.”

Long ago, medieval gardens were themed as paradise; they walled out the surrounding wilderness. Instead of excluding it, modern Edenic designers aim to incorporate the whole environment—the hubris Marc Treib notes of Japan’s Huis Ten Bosch in this volume. But our yearning for total environment is a vain hope. Savages ever storm the stockade; against them, the beleaguered denizens of our parks deploy defensive arsenals. 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.

“Anything you want” is, moreover, an ominous promise. Theme parks strive continually to please, but to do so they also paralyze us, as William Cronon argues. Nothing untoward is allowed to disturb the even tenor of their layouts. There are no surprises, just postmodern ha-ha—Arcadian tricks that fool us only at the first photo opportunity. The illusion of order allows of no disarray. Royal hunting parks of yore banned intruders on pain of death; today’s theme parks ban anything unseemly, lest they be sued for “loss of innocence”—as when three children at Disneyland by mischance came on characters in the midst of changing costumes. Seeing Mickey Mouse undressed exposed the awful truth that Disney folk are fake, a shattering blow to young innocence.

The elderly nowadays retire to themed locales—“adult communities” in which the moribund can glide gently into some manipulated good night. Now flaunting Floridian features like sand or coral or palms, these pastel retreats may by and by mutate into Federation Space Beach or Deep Space Nine. But whatever their theme, such fabricated locales

share with Disney’s parks the aim of total control. In these landscapes we do as we are told—or else we get lost, in both senses of the phrase. Living by the rules is de rigueur at Poundbury in Dorset, the Prince of Wales’s theme park village where inhabitants are forbidden to put up a hanging flower basket, told what kind of trees to grow, required to keep doves, and “have to ask permission to do anything,” complains one tenant.5

Disorientation is the rule at the Irvine campus of the University of California, because of its contrived meanders from which Cronon learned he must not stray. Routes through Aldrich Park (the twenty-one acre botanical garden in the center of the Orange County campus) are crafted to prevent moving straight across it, making the walker follow “curvilinear walkways that frustrate every attempt” to take the most efficient route. Its designers are “encouraging us—nay, forcing us for our own good—to slow down, become more meditative, and enjoy a brief respite in nature’s greenery.” These genially deceptive pressures so irked Cronon that he “ignored the designated walkways and tramped straight across the lawn.”6

Thus the antecedents of theme parks are not to be found in mundane landscapes; rather, they lie in wishful and willful geographies of the mind. Back-to-the-land devotees in modern Britain hunt for hideaways with the help of maps, compiled by landscape architects, of ever-dwindling zones of tranquillity. But in the end we are cautioned: “[T]here can be tranquillity in one place alone, the personal landscape that lies between each individual’s ears.”7

“The Past as a Theme Park,” as I titled this essay, is intended to echo my book, The Past Is a Foreign Country.8 Nothing is more foreign than a theme park, whether it points toward Polynesia or some postmodern fantasia. Theme park Orange County boasts of being “no place like home.” Theme park Britain flourishes best not at home but in Ralph Lauren’s America or far-off Japan. Meanwhile, Japanese pilgrims to England itself follow the lure of Peter Rabbit to Beatrix Potter’s Hilltop Farm in the Lake District of England. So thick on the ground are such devotees that England, like the Swiss Alps, is said to dwindle “from ecstatic rapture to theme-park stature.”9

British landscapes redolent of “olden times” are common theme park foci, expressive of the same yearning to evacuate the present, as noted in this volume by Carla Corbin in a New World context. Jorvik, the fabulously successful invented tenth-century Viking village in the bowels of the city of York, has cloned a Canterbury Pilgrims Way, the Edinburgh Story, the Oxford Story, a Weymouth Time Walk, a Winchester Crusades Experience. The

The Past as a Theme Park

media tout all of Britain as a paradisiacal national theme park, epitomized in Julian Barnes’s satire, *England, England.* Like Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice,* we tour scenes whose true stars are “stately homes”: Castle Howard is Brideshead; visitors to Stamford retrace Dorothea’s footsteps in *Middlemarch;* Lyme Park, where the BBC filmed *Pride and Prejudice’s* Pemberley, has added a Darcy Walk for visitors, up tenfold since the film. Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Remains of the Day* have enriched Bath almost as much as its Roman waterworks; Saltram was filmically lifted from Sussex to Devon, where it became the haunt of the feckless Dashwoods of *Sense and Sensibility.* Themed experience follows an ordered routine: “[F]irst watch the film. Then read the book. Then visit the stately home.” Then dine in the themed restaurant and sleep in a four-poster bed in the themed inn. Knole and Sissinghurst were mobbed when the BBC’s *Portrait of a Marriage* conflated Virginia Woolf with another Vita Sackville-West lover, Violet Trefusis; thousands thronged these reputed lesbian love nests, whose guides were told to deny that anything like that ever happened in National Trust shrines.

English scenery need not even be in England to be archetypal: Ellis Peters’s medieval detective in the television version of *Cadfael* glorifies an English landscape filmed not in Shrewsbury but in Budapest. A guest at Queen Elizabeth’s birthday fête in Prague praised the British Embassy gardens as “so English”—even the grass smelled evocatively of home; no wonder, for the turf was actually imported from England. In fiction filmed at home, no effort is spared for verisimilitude, as with the plovers’ eggs painstakingly hand-speckled for *Brideshead Revisited,* the cast and crew of *Sense and Sensibility* plucking every single daisy from the lawn at Montacute House in June because they would be out of place in a filmic winter scene. “It took ages,” recalled a National Trust agent; “I have never seen so many bottoms in the air.”

Garbed in clogs and shawls, occupying thatched cottages, mouthing pseudo-Tudor dialect, redundant British coal miners and farm laborers find employment mimicking their forebears. The Welsh condemn putting locals in glass cases for tourists to gawp at as “cultural prostitution.” But a miner father tells his sulky son, “You’ll work down the Heritage Museum, just like your mother and me.” Besides, the Heritage Museum coal mine is a lot safer than the real thing. Global demands reshape theme park history thousands of miles away. Thus American preference for a “prettier England” led the BBC to replace Adam Bede’s harsh Derbyshire scenery with soft Cotswold contours. Such alterations soon become naturalized in native minds. “We ourselves have come to prefer the gussied-up ver-

tion of our past,” mourns an English observer, “allowing foreigners to buy it, tart it up and then sell it back to us.”

Like theme parks in the present, the landscape of the past as we see it is, by and large, an artifice, an invention, a construct, an illusion. It is less what actually was than what should have been, in the spirit of Michel Conan’s sketch in this volume of Arthur Hazélius, who more than a century ago at Skansen imitated Swedish nature as it ought to have been and so ensured that it would be henceforth remembered. Similarly, one of the great values of the English countryside, concludes sociologist Howard Newby, is that it “reassures us that not everything is superficial and transitory, that some things remain stable, permanent and enduring.” An illusion of continuity serves to sanction the status quo. Claiming rural roots, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin fancied himself “a man in a field-path, steeped in tradition and impervious to new ideas.” Few English people have had intimate rural links for one hundred fifty years. But the heritage of English landscape attracts farm subsidies as outré as in France. Only cultural heritage tourism can now save these scenes. “In 20 years’ time all Lakeland farmers will have given up farming,” forecasts a local. “They’ll be called field wardens. They’ll build up dry stone walls, then knock them down again to amuse the tourists. . . . Sheep will become pets, never sold or killed,” circled perpetually from field to field by collies, or perhaps by pigs, if “Babe” could be cloned.

This is no mere fantasy. One calamity threatened by mad cow disease, which has required the culling of millions of British cattle, is its impact on the landscape. Spokesmen for Britain’s major conservation bodies—the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust, the World Wildlife Fund-UK, the Council for the Protection of Rural England—joined in a plea to rescue scenes traditionally linked with bovine grazing: hay meadows, hedged fields, permanent pasture, heath, and moor. Rural stewardship sustains not merely cattle but tourism—some say even the nation’s soul. Former Prime Minister John Major extolled British roast beef as a priceless icon of national identity. The stench of carcasses culled in Britain’s hoof-and-mouth crisis of 2001 sharpens such concerns.

In America, battlefields of the Civil War embody themed experience par excellence. But to manufacture such sites is felt to debase the “true” history these scenes memorialize. Hence the widespread outrage at the Disney Corporation’s proposed Historyland in northern Virginia. For this was a sacred realm, in the words of historian C. Vann Woodward, where brave soldiers had perished and their heirs had created “a national heritage, not a theme park.”

15 These examples are drawn from David Lowenthal, The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (London: Viking, 1997), 101.
To avoid such imbroglios, theme parks usually deploy pasts as little known and generalized as possible. “Heroes and founding fathers . . . must be mythical characters like Romulus and Remus or King Arthur, obscured in the mists of the distant past,” argues historian Gordon Wood; “they cannot be, like Jefferson and the other ‘founding fathers,’ real human beings about whom an extraordinary amount . . . is known.”19 As Edward Chappell writes of landscape reconstruction in this volume, the less that is known, the more scope we have for imagination. This dictum is exemplified in the movie Pocahontas. So little known is her actual history that Pocahontas could be filmed as both utterly unreal and ecologically correct. Scholars who demurred at this hodgepodge were dismissed by Disney’s Native American consultants as “nitpicky anthropology-types.”20

Like Pocahontas, the past in general is often biddable because it is beyond retrieval. Since few from yesteryear can answer back, the past harbors scope for invention denied the present. Take E. L. Doctorow’s rejoinder to an elderly Texan who scoffed at his novel Welcome to Hard Times, set in nineteenth-century Dakota:

‘Young man,’ she wrote, ‘when you said that Jenks enjoyed for his dinner the roasted haunch of a prairie dog, I knew you’d never been west of the Hudson. Because the haunch of a prairie dog wouldn’t fill a teaspoon.’ She had me. I’d never seen a prairie dog. So I did the only thing I could. I wrote back and I said, ‘That’s true of prairie dogs today, Madam, but in the 1870s . . .’21

Vagueness is a prime virtue that theme parks share with the past. A modicum of knowledge is plenty, the less precise the better. “For theming to manipulate memory, it must lack specific referentiality,” writes Shelton Waldrep. Thus at Orlando, Fla., the themed site of “Canada” elicits more interest than “France” because it is far less recognizable; “one can imagine Disney’s ‘Canada’ as the ‘essence’ of the country without being reminded of an actual place . . . The aura of a country, a time, a place is best tapped by theming that doesn’t remind you of something that actually exists and [that] you may have seen in the original, but [is rather] a generalized myth.” Just as the musical South Pacific meant tropical seas and sex, so Orlando’s “Dixie” simply spells plantations and cane poles, and “France” means wine, women, and song.22

For celebrants of the past, as for visitors to theme parks, ignorance and distance keep beady historical scrutiny at bay. Few Finns know the Kalevala, the fount of Finnish identity, firsthand: “[S]imply the knowledge of its existence [is] enough to inspire general enthusi-

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asm.” The vaguest details of their Hebridean roots suffice Canada’s Prince Edward Island-ers; when their plight is likened to the Scottish Highlands after the Clearances, or Glencoe after the Massacre, few know what this means, but so much the better: “[T]he mere sound of the words arouses a homing instinct, a feeling of belonging to something tragic but durable.”23 The Islanders “belong” to the Hebrides in a way that explicit knowledge would not enhance but weaken.

The theme park past is a triumphal realm of faith, not of fact. “We have a history here, you know,” say Greek villagers content to leave its details to scholars and intellectuals. For the villagers what counts is the certitude that “here a history existed,” that Greece had a history when no one else did. In America, the past’s precise content is often otiose: “We don’t know what sort of history Adamsville has had,” a Rhode Island village’s roadside heritage display implies, “but we feel certain that it had a history.” Faith in having had a lot of history matters more than recalling any specific events.24

The more casual the history, the more engrossing it is. “Play with history—in the ancient hills of Judea . . . pursued by a Philistine who is trying to kill you!” runs a video game lure; “No Prior Knowledge of the Bible Is Required.” Featuring a “playful approach to history,” clothing and jewelry fashions stress “heritage” but shun particular roots. As with Disney World’s “Canada,” ancient concepts make for popular designs, so long as customers are “never sure exactly where they are from.”

Exotic enigmas enrich relics of the past; drab factual details are off-putting. Academics who seek to explain Easter Island statues or Alpine Stone Age ice men thereby “diminish the world’s mysteries and replace them by lifeless certainties,” charges a critic. “Why do we have to know everything? Where is reverence? belief? feeling?” A performer from India explains the exotic attraction of Indian dance and art for many English people: “[T]he fact they can’t understand it is part of the mystique.”25

Conflation, a habitual jumbling of various times, is another common feature of the theme park past. Both the architects and the audiences lump it all together, commingling epochs, disregarding calendars and contexts. Indifferent to linear chronology, they assign events to generalized “good old days” (or bad old days) or to the storyteller’s “once upon a time.” Living history locales favor period crafts over particular historical episodes, as if, in Christina Cameron’s phrase, one were at the Bread-Baking or Barrel-Making National Historic Site. Like theme parks, they tend to display not a sequence of events but a timeless fabric, a cavalier conjoining of places and periods. Thus in Israeli kibbutzim museums, specific kibbutz histories are storified into a generic tale. “Well, it may not have happened

25 Lowenthal, Heritage Crusade, 136.
Tourism and the media amalgamate medieval, Renaissance, and recent times into an indiscriminate prototype much like the Vauxhall Pleasure Garden scenes Heath Schenker describes in this volume. Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London, architecturally and historically utterly unlike, merge in the public mind as Tudorbethan bastions of tragic queens and bloody axes. Heritage centers and history museums guide visitors from B.C. to A.D., all the centuries ending up much the same to most viewers. Nostalgic fashion sometimes dwells on a particular period but often denotes anything fancied from any bygone time, a general aura of pastness, such as that felt to inhere in old photo reproductions. The American equivalent of Poundbury, Disney's new residential paradise at Orlando, "Celebration," commingles classical, Colonial Revival, French Country (steep roofs), Mediterranean (red tiles), Victorian, Low Country, and other stylistic themes, each evoking some past. In popular recall the Gauls come close to de Gaulle, Elizabeth I joins Elizabeth II, Salem witches and Watergate twisters tread the same American stage. Tradition conflates Greek classical culture to a single entity from Homer through Aristotle and beyond. For Americans, "[T]here's the present and then there's this dumpster of undifferentiated synchronic trivia called 'history.' Ask a kid which happened first, the Peloponnesian Wars or the Korean War—no clue."

Commemorative needs mandate theme park conflation. Long after the Mayflower Pilgrims landed, the city of Plymouth, Mass., installed a suitable rock on which they ought to have stepped ashore, and later still erected a bizarre classical canopy. Plymouth Rock's mythic function is manifest in tourist queries at the site: "Why doesn't the rock say '1492'?" some wonder; others ask, "Where is the sword?" The presence nearby of a Mayflower replica reinforces the spurious Columbus connection. "Where are the Niña and the Pinta?" ask visitors. And most awesomely: "How did he get all those animals on that little boat?" All the past is one; the planting of New England merged not merely with the discovery of America but with medieval lore and biblical legend. The rock and the Mayflower stand for all beginnings, all voyages to new worlds, all paths to new ways. Like theme parks, commemorative sites reshape the past to make it embraceable. Some revisions are overt, others unconscious; most are unashamedly crafted and eagerly greeted. Departures from historical accuracy distress only a handful of high brows; most viewers neither seek objective veracity nor mind its absence. Echoing Washington Irving's indul-

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28 Twister is defined in one entry in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, as liar or falsifier.

29 Mark Leyner, "Eat at Cosmo's," *New Yorker*, 7 March 1994, 100.

gence of spurious Shakespeare relics at Stratford in 1815, they are “ever willing to be deceived, where the deceit is pleasant, and costs nothing. What is it to us, whether these stories be true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into the belief of them?”

Irving himself was a practiced spinner of historical yarns; both he and his readers relished such deceptions.

Israel still deploys Masada as an icon of national identity, though literary and material evidence totally discredit the old tale of first-century mass suicide—that “rather than be taken as slaves, nine hundred sixty-seven zealots committed suicide; only one family survived to tell the tale.” Masada remains an Israeli ritual mecca; scouts gather around campfires, intoning Yitzhak Lamdan’s “Masada Shall Not Fall Again” while guides read aloud the speech that Josephus invented for the last Jewish survivor. Just as the Donation of Constantine lost little potency after being exposed as a forgery, so the Masada fable is no less gripping for being shown untrue to the facts. People visit Masada not for tangible evidence of the ancient legend but to experience a modern passion play of national rebirth. Masada is a theme park par excellence.

Knowing that a site has been themed (that is, invented or copied), far from provoking cynical scorn, makes visitors more appreciative; after all, it is for their sake that history has been recreated. Indeed, themed sites improve on those that are merely faithfully preserved. Learning that “authentic Old Tucson” is not the original, but the 1939 film set built for Arizona, increases rather than impairs viewers’ pleasure. A visitor to Beatrix Potter’s Hilltop Farm in the Lake District exclaims, “This is how I always imagined it!” That Scotland, not the Lake District, engendered Peter Rabbit is beside the point; the visitor’s fulfillment was not one of fact but of fancy. We crave imagined locales more than we do actual ones.

Two generations ago Evelyn Waugh told of a little girl at Cana peddling wine jars as “true relics” of the miracle enacted there; but if he preferred smaller jars, she assured him, these too were authentic. Waugh stressed the girl’s ignorance and cupiditu. Today, such tales spell local sophistication. The guide who tells tourists, “This is a piece of Noah’s Ark; or maybe it’s just a symbol,” and “Here is the spear that pierced Christ’s side. Though maybe


it’s a copy—who knows?” would once have been rebuked for libeling Scripture; now he is lauded for deconstructing it. A tour conductor leading a group of nuns in Christ’s footsteps says, “This isn’t the way He actually came. But it’s a more interesting route”; the guide is not mocking the sacred past but proffering a more accessible, postmodern Via Dolorosa.34

The modern guide echoes Henry James’s Bardic “birthplace” curator. A true Shakespeare devotee, the curator at first refuses to lard the fragmentary facts, thereby discouraging visitors—and reducing receipts. Warned to improve his pitch or lose his job, he veers to the opposite hyperbolic extreme:

Across that threshold He habitually passed; through those low windows, in childhood, He peered out into the world that He was to make so much happier by the gift to it of His genius; over the boards of this floor—that is over some of them, for we mustn’t be carried away!—His little feet often pattered. . . . In this old chimney corner—just there [is the very] angle, where His little stool was placed, and where, I dare say, if we could look close enough, we should find the hearthstone scraped with His little feet.35

Far from getting him sacked, visitors lap up this subversive stuff. “Don’t they want then any truth?—none even for the mere look of it?” asks an appalled crony. “The look of it,” says the curator, “is what I give!” The look of it equally suffices modern film audiences. “If historical accuracy were the thing people went to the movies for,” says producer John Sayles, “historians would be the vice presidents of studios.”36

Yet the public does insist on a semblance of accuracy. Historical films must be touted as “based on a true story.” As with much heritage, the problem is that many producers still share D. W. Griffith’s faith that what they contrive is true “history”—and are dismayed when customers who claim to care about verisimilitude in detail seem blasé about the broader messages of their chronicles.37 Unaware how radically they are reshaping history, heritage mongers themselves naively swear fidelity to truth. At historical theme parks such self-delusion is widespread.

Fifty years’ experience at Colonial Williamsburg illustrates the point. “Authenticity has been virtually [our] religion,” avowed its director in 1941, “sacrifices have been offered before its altar. Personal preferences, architectural design, time, expense, . . . even the demands of beauty have given way to the exacting requirements of authenticity.” Fifty years


on, Williamsburg staff can see that it was all wrong back then—and express confidence they are now getting it right. Even the toll-free telephone number, 1-800-HISTORY, implies fidelity to truth. Staff takes pride in purveying real history, as opposed to the fictions of Disneyland.

Worried about Disney’s prospective history theme park in their backyard in northern Virginia, Colonial Williamsburg staff were shocked to find that most people saw little difference and were not bothered if they did. Asked if they thought Williamsburg “authentic,” ten discussants drawn from the general public all agreed that it was:

“And Disneyland?” and without a pause, every one of them said, “Oh yes, yes, Disneyland is authentic too.” [The moderator] asked, “How can this be? We all know that Disney’s America . . . is going to be totally made up. It isn’t even a real historical site. Everything will be artificial. And you all know that Colonial Williamsburg is a real place, even if much restored.” “Sure,” they said, but . . . “Disney always does things first-class, and if they set out to do American history, they’ll hire the best historians money can buy . . . to create a completely plausible, completely believable appearance of American history.”

In the public view, plausibility is as good as truth, and historians are worthy of their theme park hire.

Similar salutary deceit is the raison d’être of Peter Shaffer’s play Lettice and Lovage. Hired for the summer open-days at a moth-eaten old manor house, the play’s eponymous tour guide thrills visitors with flights of fancy that bring “Fustian Hall” to life as the recital of bald facts signally failed to do. “Enlarge—enliven—enlighten” is her maxim; “fantasy floods in where fact leaves a vacuum.” (She is found out and fired but finally persuades her employer she was right.) Such tales not only delight in hyping history, they suggest our need for historical fantasy. Gluttons for false facts, we bring to the most improbable past an “immense assumption of veracities and sanctities, of the general soundness of the legend,” as Henry James concluded; like Washington Irving at Stratford, we swallow the reliquary shell’s “preposterous stuffing” almost whole. But not quite whole; for we know we are being fed this legacy by partisans. “Scepticism about one’s heritage,” says playwright Alan Bennett, is an “essential part of that heritage.” But as I suggested above, such skepticism is not mordant but happily enthralled; like theme park visitors, we enjoy being fed a bunch of codswallop.

Theme park pasts also generate agendas for imagined futures. On retiring as head of Britain’s Nature Conservancy Council in the year 2020, Timothy Hornsby envisages an

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39 Peter Shaffer, Lettice and Lovage (London: Deutsch, 1988), 25; James, “The Birthplace” (as above, note 34), 304, 307, 325; Alan Bennett, Writing Home (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 211.
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outing to

“Center Parc,” a wonderful, enormous dome, under which private enterprise conserves rare and representative re-created countrysides and stunning holographs of romantic landscapes now lost. On the way back, I visit the small thatched mock Tudor cottage . . . with blownup photographs of some striking buildings the National Trust used to run before they were either inundated or made way for the wonderful motorway. I sail over to a splendidly landscaped golf course for the senior Japanese businessmen whose microchip factories stretch to the horizon. Packed densely behind them lie corduroy stripes of Sitka spruce with an inviting notice to “Pick Your Own”; I garner some genetically manipulated bananas.40

A different if no less menacing millennial landscape, less theme park than gated rustic retreat, is foretold by the Breton folklorist Pierre-Jakez Hélias:

After the peasants abandoned the countryside, all fell into ruins. But the new masters began living there. The richest acquired entire farms and villages. But no one was around to keep up their estates or to serve them. They themselves were forced to cut their own lawns, prune their own trees, care for their animals, and fight against wild vegetation. And of course they began to love the land. They took pride in picking, harvesting, and eating what they themselves had grown. They rediscovered the taste of fruit and even bread. Their country homes became their only homes. Protected from the common people now locked up in the cities, they formed exclusive regional clubs where it was forbidden to speak anything but Provençal, Basque, and Breton. So the former bourgeoisie became professional peasants, while descendants of the former peasants consoled themselves with electronic toys.41

Themed museum landscape panoramas in Michael Lind’s fantasized American future extol successive national archetypes:

• Early nineteenth-century vision: An austere Ceramicus from ancient Athens’s garden of heroes exalts Anglo-American virtues; a Doric colonnade leads to a Palladian temple with statues of Moses, Christ, British Reformers, and icons of republican liberty; a mural limns Saxon glory from Hengist and Horsa through George Washington.

• Early-twentieth-century vision: In Euro-America’s Beaux Arts imperium, Columbus wades ashore at Hispaniola, Jefferson and Lincoln beckon to the Statue of Liberty and the promised land of the melting pot; murals feature pioneers (without Indians), the

Civil War (without blacks).

- Today’s Heritage Center advances from a Pre-Columbian arcadia (without Aztecs), to Paradise Lost (European genocide and slavery), to redemptive Paradise Regained, in a fringing diorama portraying separate and equal ethnic groups surrounding a hollow center; like Bill Clinton’s and Newt Gingrich’s Washington, Multicultural America is all Beltway with nothing but evil inside.

- Lind’s Trans-American future is largely cribbed from ecotechnic scale models of architectural wonders common in 1930s to 1950s world’s fairs. But with the solitary exception of an adobe Spanish mission with a Liberty Bell in its belfry, this is a Disney theme park of America’s natural wonders: miniatures of Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone geysers and the Painted Desert, all reflecting our preference for wild over cultivated scenes, for nature as vista but not as home. It reifies a sublime wilderness devoid of threat, without blizzards or black flies, ticks or tornadoes—the American garden “as untouched as the world on creation’s first day.”

In rebellion against the sordid reality of our environmental history, images of morally superior pristine nature ever replace degraded scenes of culture. At least since Henry David Thoreau, Americans repelled by the ruthless stains of Progress have erased traces of human occupancy to reify the wild. In his chapter in this volume on Cades Cove, Terence Young shows how early this bias was engrained in U. S. National Park Service policy.

The establishment of St. John’s National Park in the Virgin Islands, under Laurance Rockefeller’s aegis, reinforces Young’s point. Did the very name “Virgin” persuade Rockefeller to turf out local inhabitants, re-create a tropical wilderness, and restore a Pre-Columbian paradise by expunging traces of three centuries of shifting cultivation? No wonder St. Johnians were mystified by this appetite for wilderness. For what ensued was no primeval forest but a tangle of bush and thorn (imported to distance slaves from plantation mansions), jackasses, mongooses (imported against snakes), and mosquitoes.

Even at historical sites, the National Park Service long insisted on an initial tabula rasa. To display the story of the 1775 Revolutionary skirmish at the Minute Man National Historical Park in the 1960s, residents were evicted, post-Revolutionary houses demolished, and traditional farming brought to an end. The remaining houses were boarded up, fields and pastures reverted to brush, and within a few years the whole countryside ceased to bear any resemblance to the Revolutionary epoch’s usage. Instead of a living landscape with past and present visibly and functionally linked, elaborate notices along wood-chipped trails depict the historical views that could have been seen before the National Park Service obliterated them. To restore the original scene, the Park Service has spent millions on massive archival and archaeological research to determine the species of two centuries ago with

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the aim of the “eventual recreation of the landscape which once existed on that momentous day.” Only now is the lesson being learned that no amount of expertise can retrieve a state of nature—if such ever existed—from which history has sundered us.

Pastoral pleasures work better in our parks—sometimes too well. So good were Frederick Law Olmsted’s illusions of nature that he came, within a few years, to rail at those his creations had deceived, for failing to credit him with the artifice or even to let him continue it. “He planted trees to look like ‘natural scenery’ and then felt frustrated,” Ann Whiston Spirn wryly observes, when those who accepted “the scenery as ‘natural’, objected to cutting the trees he had planned to cull.” Modern theme park creators are more blatantly inventive than Olmsted. And maybe, too, they are prouder to be mistaken for God.

Toward Distinguishing among Theme Park Publics:
William Chambers’s Landscape Theory
vs. His Kew Practice

Richard Quaintance

What is so new about today’s theme parks? Material toward that inquiry awaits us in the prominently published theories and oddly divergent practical work of one budding architect, Sir William Chambers, during two bustling decades in mid-eighteenth-century England. To advance his theories’ sorting and dramatization of ways that a landscape designer might evoke and vary the responses of not just his landowner-client but a transient and indefinite public as well, Chambers studied a sophisticated affekt-agenda as closely as might the promoter of a commercial park. On the other hand, the twenty-three buildings, almost all from his own designs, with which Chambers ornamented Princess Augusta’s new Kew Park near London between 1757 and 1763 addressed clearly distinguishable landscaping agendas. Rather than stimulating private surrender to a generic gamut of sublime, or gutsy emotions essentially self-refined, this layout recruited public, focused, and “civic” engagement in contemporary British political and economic life. Observing Chambers’s work in these two readily contrasted arenas may help clarify some of the motives and means that our theme parks commingle.

A commercial theme park needs to sell memorable sensations—at least enough roller coasterish recollections to impress oneself and friends that one has “been somewhere.” But in order to attract and hold public attention across space and time, theme parks need their logos—focal imagery easily reduced to formula: a Mickey eager to put an arm around your child and smile for your camera, a Main Street or Epcot that architecturally embodies reassurance of past or future communities for the clientele to accept as its own. The rollercoaster-type of theme park “product” succeeds best when we forget that even Adventureland respects the forces of gravity and a bull market; but the park themed for history or prophecy wins the plausibility it requires through conspicuous regard for “commonsense.” At one extreme we are so engrossed in the present instant that any passing glimpse of a life before or beyond this one only stresses how isolated this joyride is. At the other extreme, we apprehend continuities: “This really connects me with my larger poten-
tial.” These diverse agendas or claims on their public are likely to blend together in the execution or experience of a theme park. But the contrast (oddly unappreciated) between Chambers’s theoretical writings and his simultaneous work at Kew sorts them out for us. Particularly apt in its anticipation of Disney’s “imagineers” is Chambers’s early but overt concern with susceptibilities among a consuming public for the landscaped terrain, closer in breadth to those of today’s day-trippers than to those of an eighteenth-century patron-family needing to think well of itself.1

“Chinese” Gardens as Exercise Circuits for the Emotions

In each of three essays published between 1757 and 1773, Chambers formulated as established “Chinese” practice certain initiatives that he keenly sought for English landscaping. (He knew enough of actual Chinese landscaping to know well, and privately admit, how fictional these descriptions were.) Any reader’s puzzlement as to how seriously to take this strategic polemical dodge is further complicated by Chambers’s passing, yet harshly snobbish mockery of the “insipid” dearth of circumstantial interest he found in Capability Brown’s work, then reaching the peak of its popularity. (The Brownian features that Chambers found artless or uneventful, a dispassionate landscape historian might today term abstract or musical, perhaps noting their match in features around Kew’s artificial lake!)2

Since he had visited China in the 1740s while serving in the Swedish East India Company and with his 1757 essay was publishing authoritatively on China’s arts and architecture, Chambers could pretend to fob off as sober truth his deliberately—sometimes luridly—overstated program of how Chinese designers made the earth move for their garden visitors. This sinophilic pretext, pseudodocumentary, if often ineptly fantastic, distracted English readers such as Horace Walpole from Chambers’s positive aims, although translations secured him favorable response in Germany and France. For our present purposes, what

1 My modeling of Chambers’s works assumes, of course, no consciousness of him on the part of current theme park planners. His Kew designs and his polemical feintings about “Chinese gardens,” although widely admired and followed on the Continent and by connoisseurs such as Lord Kames and Edmund Burke, were in England openly disparaged by anti-Tory poets William Mason and William Wordsworth. A dozen years after his Kew was completed, its merger with Richmond Park and new work there by Capability Brown would discompose the imperial logo I describe. See John and Eileen Harris, Sir William Chambers, Knight of the Polar Star (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 1970), and Ray Desmond, Kew: The History of the Royal Botanic Gardens (London: Harville Press, 1995), 30–84; admirably comprehensive as both works are, the readings here of Kew’s early hype are my own.

emerges from behind Chambers’s “screen” or “mask” of pretending to describe what he had never seen may be the first concerted effort to publish, mostly in practical terms, which designed phenomena produce what shifts of mood—thereupon challenging designers to organize landscape for its widest attainable range of responses.\(^3\)

An opening observation “Of the Gardens of the Chinese” fairly epitomizes Chambers’s analysis: “Nature is their pattern, and their aim is to imitate her in all her beautiful irregularities” (1757, virtually repeated in 1772). That master aim of variegation channels his discriminating among “three different species of scenes,” which “they” call “pleasing, horrid, and enchanted.” “Pleasing” is what most backyard gardens try to be; by “enchanted,” he soon clarifies, he means phenomena of odor, sound, or sight that a stroller finds surprising or inexplicable: exotic flora or fauna, complex echoes, mysterious windsong. Once such otherness has begun to seem violently life-threatening we have crossed “disenchanted” into the domain of the “horrid” or “terrible”: trees blasted by lightning, buildings “half-consumed by fire,” the “howl of ferocious animals,” dark rivers down which “you” are “furiously impelled.” Yet, in turn, this last category is refined by distinctions between, on the one hand, such traditional monitions as “cabalistical sentences, inscribed on tables of brass,” lit by “a constant flame,” and, on the other, startlingly up-to-date “repeated shocks of electrical impulse”—or accounts that bring the Industrial Revolution into focus as just another Sublime Trip: “to add both to the horror and sublimity of these scenes, they sometimes conceal in cavities, on the summits of the highest mountains, founderies, lime-kilns, and glass-works; which send forth large volumes of flame, and continued columns of thick smoke, that give to these mountains the appearance of volcanoes.” It may be clear by now that Chambers’s three categories of “scene” match quite neatly Joseph Addison’s “beautiful,” “uncommon,” and “great” from early in Chambers’s century, or Edmund Burke’s dichotomy of Beautiful and Sublime, between which others would wedge the Picturesque.\(^5\) What Chambers adds to their analyses is his persuasion that the landscaped park might be instrumented purposefully to treat the responsive stroller to a micro-chaos, evoking, perhaps, the very spectrum of emotions from which a traditional _hortus conclusus_ would shelter its refugees. This motif parallels a model then well known, with interesting theme park foreshadowings: the mile-square town, a miniature “Pekin” named “Yven-MingYven,” in the midst of China’s imperial

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\(^3\) Chambers’s words for it: _An Explanatory Discourse by Tan Chet-qua . . ._ (1773), ed. in facsimile Richard Quaintance (Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, 1978), 112–13; his letters confessing his hoax are quoted in Harris and Harris, _Chambers_, 158, 192. The ideal readership targeted by Chambers’s stylistic extravagances might be inferred from his letter conveying a copy of the 1772 _Dissertation_ to Voltaire: “[I]t contains besides a great deal of nonsence, two very pretty prints engraved by the Celebrated Bartolozzi; which prints, and the View with which the book was published are its only recommendation” (_Sir William Chambers’ Letter Books_, vol. 2, fol. 1, British Museum MS. ADD. 41134).

\(^4\) Chambers, _Designs_ (London, 1757), 15; _Dissertation_, 12, 35, 39, 69. Of course, _horrid_ here meant no more nor less than _horrifying._

palace grounds, “to procure the Emperor the Pleasure of seeing all the Bustle and Hurry of a
great City in little, whenever he might have a Mind for that sort of Diversion.” Otherwise
quite cut off from his people, the emperor then was understood to enjoy this boisterous
substitute, including the plying of crime, rewarded or punished, among the other trades of
his “Garden of Gardens.” Impurity likewise calculated stains the comprehensiveness of
Chambers’s inventory of Nature “in all her beautiful irregularities.”

Yet only the most sensational passages in Chambers’s theories (totaling one hundred
seventy pages published over a period of sixteen years) focus on the darkly suggestible
energies of human nature. Another passage fairly represents the balance he strikes between
these more socially charged stimuli and others more objectively concerned with optics—
always attending to how the landscaper’s opportunistic manipulations exercise the stroller’s
resources:

The Chinese artists, knowing how powerfully contrast operates on the mind, con-
stantly practise sudden transitions, and a striking opposition of forms, colours, and
shades. Thus they conduct you from limited prospects to extensive views; from
objects of horror to scenes of delight; from lakes and rivers to plains, hills, and
woods; to dark and gloomy colours they oppose such as are brilliant, and to com-
plicated forms simple ones; distributing, by a judicious arrangement, the different
masses of light and shade, in such a manner as to render the composition at once
distinct in its parts, and striking in the whole.7

For such challenging and sequential control over terrained contrast, Chambers easily
enough might have found both ideological and practical precedent. During the 1750s
Jonathan Tyers, the accomplished manager of Vauxhall, London’s leading pleasure-garden,
would often leave his house on those grounds to spend his sabbaths at another home
twenty miles south across Surrey. Here he might school his soul with journeying through
the labyrinthus eight-acre wood Penseroso (its walks “in some places easy, smooth, and
level, in others rugged and uneven: A proper emblem of human life!”) to his gothic Temple of
Death, where funerary monuments, graveyard poetry, and a clock chiming every minute
reminded him that his days were, like the leaves, subject to Time.8 The sophisticated profes-
sionals who helped Tyers with this estate were the same who painted lighthearted scenes
for his Vauxhall supper boxes and sculpted there his Handel and Milton. It is hardly unusual,
or even strikingly morbid, for a layout of these years in England to purport to chasten its
owner and visitors in so emblematic a fashion. Another widespread cultural movement of
the day, eloquent in the language of landscaping, was freemasonry, with its own “cabalistical
sentences” and imagery of journeying through fire, water, and air toward initiation and transcendence; several of Chambers’s friends and fellow architects belonged to its Parisian lodges. He was only the first, I believe, to publish a formula for programming into the landscaped terrain such inward exercises for its strollers.

So, centuries ago our thrill rides were anticipated by the notion (half-seriously maintained, at heart) that a “garden” is a place to go to have your equanimity checked—safely. In the context of general landscaping history this solicitude directly counters that “sweeping away” so routinely associated with Capability Brown’s work. Essentially conservative of on-site water and plant resources, Chambers’s concern for diversity prompts his subtle responses to the coloration and growth-habit of many trees and flowers. He argues that a wider witness to human work upon the land—turnip fields, cottages, abandoned quarries as well as fountains—can be “more picturesque than lawns the most curiously dotted with [Brown’s characteristic tree-] clumps.”\footnote{Dissertation, x, 75–91.} Just when country-house tourism was establishing itself as a growth leisure industry, an egalitarian condescension—noteworthy in our theme park context—informs Chambers’s frequent nudges toward that public to be addressed by his wealthier readers and clients: “[T]he owner is not the only person to be entertained [since] at a treat, there should be meats for every palate.” Indeed, a landscape may display so “many surprizing phoenomena, and extraordinary effects [that each layout] may be considered as a collection of philosophical [i.e., “scientific”] experiments, exhibited . . . upon a larger scale, and more forcibly than is common”—from which (gently implied) even the patron-proprietor may learn something.\footnote{Discourse, 128, 132.} Both exhaustive entertainment and what our current euphemism calls “discovery” are in store for Chambers’s ideal English-park public.

What did Chambers’s contemporaries make of his manifesto? Deconstructed as an apology for officious monarchical control far beyond the garden’s walls by William Mason’s satire of 1773, it was ridiculed famously. Yet within five years a mood-conscious guide-


\footnote{Dissertation, x, 75–91.}

\footnote{Discourse, 128, 132.}

\footnote{Discourse, 155–56, 157; further on the issues of public access, see 125, 142–43, and the hospitality to “Holy-day folks” in Chambers’s 1773 letter: Harris and Harris, Chambers, 192. Although quite the courtier in his professional life, Chambers may not have forgotten his humbler origins as the son of a sutler to the Swedish army, and the “philosophical” showcase does reach toward a function at Kew Park discussed below. For today’s “discovery” parks, consult not only zoos and aquariums but also Hong Kong’s SungVillage (1979) and Middle Kingdom (1990), Singapore’s Tang Dynasty City, and Hawaii’s Polynesian Cultural Center, for example, in Anthony Wylson and Patricia Wylson, Theme Parks, Leisure Centres, Zoos and Aquaria (London: Longman’s, 1994).}

book to the hilly West Midlands estate of Envil had (probably quite casually) compressed Chambers’s three desired emotional modes into one sentence transfiguring for its writer one moment, on “a single plank . . . thrown across the stream” where:

turning to the cascade behind you, and then to its troubled water below, you have other feelings [than “admiration of its beauty”]—it is true, nothing was ever better formed to create surprize, and pleasure; but at the same time one cannot help being affected with a sort of terror, standing in the very midst of an incessant roar of water, and seeing it break with such resistless fury—I declare I considered myself as a *victim devoted to* [emphasis mine] its rage, and expected every moment, upon some sudden burst, to be washed, without any kind of ceremony, down the torrent, into the dreary hollow below.14

That final personal declaration embodies just the associative subjectivism that Chambers’s “Chinese” theories desiderated.

*Prince Frederick’s Presence in the Original Kew Design*

Quite other styles of “devotion” are summoned up by the layout that Chambers executed at Kew during these very years. In 1757 the Princess of Wales commissioned him to convert a dull defile of three or four flood-plain meadows receding southward from her palace—all contiguous to her mother-in-law’s celebrated improvements at Richmond Park—into a demesne powerfully articulating the royal personhood of her late husband, her son the heir apparent, and herself. The results (as legible up to Augusta’s death in 1772) resemble much more closely the coordinated emblematic promptings of Lord Cobham’s Stowe a generation earlier than they do Richmond, Brown’s work, or Chambers’s prose rebuttals to Brown. Although completed in an efficient seven summers once begun, this layout had had a gestation period of some twenty-five years, a fact relevant to our study of theme parks inasmuch as it predicated that prior to other functions Kew Park would:

1. Enshrine the memory of Frederick, Prince of Wales, who died in 1751 before effectuating his botanical and architectural plans for this property, which he had been leasing since 1731.15

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15 Witness (a) the overt landscaping iconography of George Knapton’s portrait of Frederick’s family executed months after his death: Oliver Millar, *The Tudor, Stuart, and Early Georgian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (London: Phaidon, 1963), 1:189; (b) Chambers’s designs for his Theatre of Augusta and Gallery of Antiques, scaled to accommodate Frederick’s purchase of 13 lifesize or larger statues strikingly apt for garden siting: A. H. Scott-Elliot, “The Statues by Francavilla in the Royal Collection,” *Burlington Magazine* 98 (1956), 77–84; (c) Chambers’s drawings in the Yale Center for British Art, Sir John Soane’s Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Huntington Library, linking British literary figures and others to Frederick’s concept of a “Mount Parnassus” never executed. (Chambers had met Frederick and designed for him a
Chambers’s Landscape Theory vs. His Kew Practice

2. Reflect the current grief of his widow, Princess Augusta.16

3. Enact the sophisticated botanical interests of John Stuart, third earl of Bute, who had been Frederick’s friend, became Prince George’s surrogate father, and (by the time the lad was crowned George III, and Kew park nearing completion) had served him as prime minister.

4. Honor Frederick’s interest in chinoiserie by leaving prominent the House of Confucius he had seen installed there by 1749, designed either by Joseph Goupy or Chambers. In approaching this vitally political salute to Frederick as one potential “theme” for the original Kew Park, one must bear in mind that all such expressions occupied no more than a third of Kew’s then total area, the Temple of Solitude and the floral-botanic material commanding no generous vistas; this third was restricted moreover to the palace’s vicinity.

The “Chineseness” of the house of Confucius had discernible focus that we might not find today in a Disney replica. Removed in 1758 to stand on a strikingly “nonoriental” bridge that Chambers designed for it as a belvedere over Kew’s artificial lake (Fig. 1), it straddled a stream raised by John Smeaton’s pump (on which more presently). Most Chinese structures during this period of English landscaping were routinely sited over water: Stowe’s Chinese House, two at Shugborough, the one up the Thames by Twickenham’s Radnor House, Cumberland’s yacht Mandarin at Virginia Water. But it was not conventional to prepare for them a botanical “natural habitat” pretending to authenticity—and here significantly Chambers respected English custom. In Canton he had seen and accurately drawn the courtyard of a merchant’s home accoutred with its bamboo, prize rocks, and potted plants (Fig. 2), all of which might have been easily reassembled through the botanical resources at Kew. But that “Disneyfied” ambiance was not the goal, so the best engraved image of the environs of this House of Confucius (Fig. 3) shows us a shoreline bare except for English sheep, a Roman Temple of Aeolus on the hilltop; afloat on the lake is an English swanboat—a rare carnivalesque touch—seating ten passengers and outside my detail to the left, three fishermen in a rowboat flying the Union Jack! In view of recent exaggerations of Kew’s Chinese trappings (noting also five parks in Russia, Germany, and France that between 1754 and 1787 did assemble two or more oriental structures as “villages” and the cultural overload typical of theme parks now), it is worth stressing that none of Kew’s three Chinese buildings was visible from the others.17 What was the point then of this severely isolated House of Confucius? With its privileged vistas from the second-story balconies, it

mausoleum, also unexecuted.) The detail and energy of Frederick’s plans for Kew are summarized in Kimery Rorschach, “Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707–51), as Collector and Patron,” The Walpole Society 55 (1989/90), 27–31, or more fully in her Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, 1985), “Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707–1751), as a Patron of the Visual Arts: Principly Patriotism and Political Propaganda.”

16 Abreast of the palace, in this narrow, mile-long park, Chambers sited Augusta’s Temple of Solitude, and honoring generously Frederick’s botanical interests, the Orangery, Great Stove, Flower, Exotic, and Physic gardens, and Temple of the Sun. This concern for living plants seems to have taken the place of any more solid monument to Frederick, except for the resting of his House of Confucius.

17 In regard to “villages” like Tsarkoe Selo, Rheinsberg, Potsdam’s Sans-Souci, the Désert de Retz, and Steinfurt, see P. Conner, Oriental Architecture in the West (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).

embodies the elitist cult of the oriental sage, its interior walls and ceilings ornamented, as Chambers noted, with “little historical subjects relating to Confucius, with several transactions of the Christian Missions in China.” Even those French Jesuits had acknowledged the just and temperate morality they thought Confucianism brought to Chinese public affairs; in an age seeking secularization and universality for its value system, Leibniz, Voltaire, and the Deists had pointed Frederick’s tastes this way. Beyond its beckoning exoticism, this temple stood as a logo for the enlightened vision of the late Prince of Wales.

In order to appreciate the differing symbolic value of Kew’s pagoda in its original context it will be convenient to reckon next with the Pavilion—the Chinese structure Chambers worked on next (Fig. 4). Encircled by a pond of goldfish, then by runways and cages for Tartarean and Chinese pheasants, it is aptly delicate, barely affording shelter from

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34   Richard Quaintance

4. Thomas Sandby, A View of the Menagerie, and its Pavillion [sic], at Kew, Engr. Grignion, 1763

rain or sun. Approached from the palace by way of an English flower garden and neighbored by the Temple of Bellona shouldering its Doric way through the foliage to the engraving’s left, the exotic is again domesticated to the point where it seems mainly emblematic of the fragility of domestic arts contrasted to the sturdiness of the bellicose. Or, as Disney might set them chanting, “It’s a small world after all.”

The Original Kew Park as Patriotic “Discovery” Experience

Another theme no visitor could miss builds on several aspects of the vistas opening beyond those pheasant-cages and trees. The main view southward from the palace (or southwestward from Bellona, Confucius, or Aeolus) crossed a flat lawn, then an enisled lake, to survey two sheepsmeadows enclosed by ha-ha (Fig. 5). These flocks may have provided more than animation to the eye. Encircled by the only paths toward and away from the pagoda, their pastures had to form one side of each stroller’s forward vista; across them one or another of Chambers’s tiny temples pocketed in verdure would pop in and out of view as one walked along—a progressive visual ambuscade. Yet through the aesthetics of these changing stage-sets in narrative sequence, Chambers and whoever else designed the original Kew, honor a royal myth: Prince George’s interest in sheep-breeding is well known. This herd, enriched at Kew

19 Precise data seems to be lacking on Kew’s original design features, but Lord Bute and Robert Greening surely share credit with Chambers for them; see Desmond, Kew, 34, 57–8. On p. 48 of his Dissertation, Chambers scorned a circuit path “round the extremities of a piece of ground” which—as here—leaves “the
Chambers’s Landscape Theory vs. His Kew Practice

with merinos smuggled from Spain, would contribute after his coronation in 1760 to his affectionate sobriquet of “Farmer George.” The ingenuity driving Britain’s wool industry expressed itself in other ways: the water required for the greenhouses, gardens, livestock and that stream beneath the House of Confucius came from “the Water Engine” designed by England’s leading engineer, John Smeaton (Fig. 6). Its “Archimedes screw,” powered by two horses hitched to the horizontal bar, “raises three hundred hogsheads of Water in an hour,” as both the print and Chambers’s text brag, in his elegant elephant folio *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew in Surry*, subsidized by and dedicated to Princess Augusta when the job was finished.20 Amidst the *Plans*’ superbly evocative panoramic prints by Thomas (or Joseph) Sandby, William Marlow, and Joseph Kirby, the dry schematic idiom of this engraving certifies Chambers’s concern to validate Kew as a patriotic *ferme ornée* advertising Britain’s eminence in botanical and general-agricultural technology. The resemblance of this image (and Chambers’s section of his Great Stove, also in this celebratory volume) to the illustrations for Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, appearing during these same years, suggests hope that some readers will want to adapt these devices to their own needs.21 During a visit in 1786, Thomas Jefferson read this message, taking home a diagram of “Archimedes screw.”22 Acclimatizing tropical plants through English winters required Chambers’s large Orangery—and the heating-flues tunneling the walls of his Great Stove in that other illustration. The advanced technology that could turn winter to summer and make water flow upward through Smeaton’s pump radically yet favorably altered nature, as the British wool trade altered global economy. A still potent gust from the Book of Isaiah stirs the last words of Chambers’s homage to his patroness and the botanist-prime minister, Lord Bute, in this praise from his *Plans*:

The gardens of Kew are not very large. Nor is their situation by any means advantageous; as it is low, and commands no prospects. Originally the ground was one continued dead flat: the soil was in general barren, and without either wood or water. With so many disadvantages it was not easy to produce any thing even tolerable in gardening: but princely munificence, guided by a director, equally skilled in cultivating the earth, and in the politer arts, overcame all difficulties. What was once a Desart is now an Eden.23

21 The Great Stove is conveniently illustrated in Desmond, *Kew*, 146.
23 *Plans* (London, 1763), 2; see the Bible, Isaiah 51:3: “[H]e will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like a garden of the Lord.” Note, too, how the Francavilla statues (though still crated then) and 4 of Chambers’s temples mythologize an invocation that Nature bless British enterprise: overlooking the lake, temples to Arethusa and Pan would seem to invoke natural forces of water and fertility, while Aeolus’s Temple was mounted high, where its swiveling seat might catch the breezes; the Temple of the Sun fetched its archi-
5. Thomas Richardson, A drawn plan of the Royal Gardens of Richmond and Kew with the Hamlet of Kew and part of the Royal Manor of Richmond taken under the direction of Peter Burrell Esq., detail of manuscript on vellum, ca. 1771, keyed by the author (courtesy of the British Library, K.Top.41.16.k.2.Tab.)

Key to Figure 5

1. Temple of Solitude
2. Princess Augusta’s Palace
3. Orangery
4. Temple of the Sun
5. Great Stove
6. Temple of Bellona
7. Menagerie encircling Chinese Pavilion
8. Temple of Pan
9. Temple of Eolus
10. Smeaton’s Pump
11. House of Confucius
12. Artificial lake with island
13. Temple of Arethusa
14. Theatre of Augusta
15. Circuit path
16. Temple of Victory
17. Ha-ha surrounding sheepsmeadows
18. Roman Arch
19. Gothic Cathedral
20. Alhambra
21. Wilderness
22. Pagoda
23. Turkish Mosque
24. Kew Foot Lane, or Love Lane
25. Richmond Gardens
Before a nation already revolutionizing the planet’s industrial and agricultural technology, this middle or second-phase sector of Kew flourishes itself as an Eden self-consciously man-made, a prototypal Enlightenment artifact.

The accessibility of a park such as Kew to a broad middle-class public needs to be clear as we proceed. From Frederick’s montparnassian plans, through the improvements so far effectuated, a royal showcase for the nation was plainly foreseen. Engravings, often showing staffage with parasols at ease or staff at work in the park, would publicize it in London and Paris. Guidebooks would address a public visiting Kew and other private parks open at set times. During Kew’s first decades—those that most concern us—its one-day-a-week openings were announced in London newspapers; entrance was free, although presteam transportation up the Thames or by coach over a toll bridge was not cheap, so the most frequent visitors probably lived nearby. Those prompted by botanical curiosity would likely expect to tip an attendant, but available memoirs of these early years respond keenly to its other attractions.


[Diagram of the Water Engine]
Imperial Emblems in the Original Kew

What about the architectural signals that Chambers set out farthest—yet still barely visible—from the palace? Not the buildings alone, but their siting beyond the artificial lake and mounds, along the path circling the narrow one hundred ten acres of Kew Park? Can we find the commemorative and celebratory gestures noted so far “personally emblematic” in manners befitting a rising heir to the throne and his widowed mother, conscious of distinctive qualities in Prince Frederick’s legacy, Prince George’s agricultural hobbies, Lord Bute’s well-informed amateur botanizing, Chambers’s neoclassicism and travels—and beyond all that proffering Britain’s leadership in botanical research and general technology? The signals remaining to be interpreted are emblematic of an idea of a nation at once less focused on court or royal family, more proudly “outward-looking,” and even more topical and timely.

The years of Kew’s laying-out, 1757 to 1763, bracket precisely that first truly global conflict, the Seven Years’ War that American schoolbooks call “the French and Indian War” and British, sometimes, the elder William “Pitt’s Great War for Empire.” No available records of Kew’s planning stages explicitly relate landscaping decisions to events or goals in that war, but circumstantial evidence of such encodings should help demonstrate that, like Stowe’s, Kew’s ornamentation was not just “busy,” nor its vistas merely “inward-looking.”

Kew’s most obvious and self-conscious response to current military events was the erection in 1759, atop its artificial mound, of the Temple of Victory at Minden. Contemporary drawings support Chambers’s claim in 1763 that this round temple stood higher than Fig. 7 may suggest, yet readily accessible from the circuit path. Fig. 5 shows how it offered vistas toward other features: dead north back to Bellona’s Temple, for instance, wherein by 1760 garlands and medallions honored the names of regiments that had seen combat; or dead west across the Thames, squarely to the east front of Syon House. Rising about equidistant from the Temple of Bellona and the pagoda, this Temple of Victory served as hub-belvedere of Kew Park, the only vantage point from which visitors could see both the palace front and the entire pagoda until they had climbed to the latter’s third or fourth story.

Two other eye-catchers in the circle around this hub clarify how Kew enlisted and

26 Harris and Harris (as above, note 1), Chambers, 35.
27 Bute and George had almost immediate cause to regret this trumpeting of the Westphalian victory during that autumn of Hanoverians led by Augusta’s brother, since a close friend of theirs who they probably hoped thus to honor was condemned by court-martial for cowardice at the head of British troops there. See Piers Mackesy, The Coward of Minden: The Affair of Lord George Sackville (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979). Sometimes even a landscape feature can be a bit too topical, but more important victories that year at Quebec, Quiberon Bay, or Pondicherry had not been won by court favorites.
28 The drawings are conveniently assembled in Desmond’s superbly exhaustive Kew, 60, 62, 73, 74. Medallions within Victory for later naval heroes such as Nelson attest to the continuing iconic power of these structures (ibid., 361). For Müntz’s Alhambra design (1750) and Chambers’s as built, see ibid., 52 and pl. 4.
29 Regarding honoring those in combat, see Desmond, Kew, 361. On the location, it was not quite the vista drawn by George III (ibid., 68), but another compass accurately oriented: see Mavis Batey et al., Arcadian Thames: The River Landscape from Hampton to Kew (London: Barn Elms, 1994), 114–16.
trained the kind of responses that we associate with visits in theme parks. Beyond the sheep meadow to the southwest—probably also in 1759—rose to view the “Gothic Cathedral” designed by Johann Henry Müntz (Fig. 8). If approached from the circuit path behind it, the cathedral’s slimness and cardboard flimsiness might leave it resembling scenery for the stage, but from the angle and distance of the Victory-Temple belvedere, or from elsewhere across the meadow, it might presume architecturally to embody a style and spirit already a bit exotic yet once pan-European. Directly across from it, at the same range from the belvedere, rose the (pre-)ruined “Roman Arch” (Fig. 9) with its fragments of statuary (and the concealed overpass conducting sheep from the main London road into their pasturage beyond the ha-ha). Once we note how for the palace-bound stroller this arch frames like a gunsight the Temple of Victory built in the same year, we have to wonder what relationship the designer sought to imply among these three structures. The Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, and the power of the papacy no longer dominated England or Europe as they once had. Rising in their place even as this terrain is being laid out, and flourishing Enlightened policies of proselytizing, trade, and government, is another transcontinental hegemony—seated, it might fairly be claimed, in this very spot. “Gothic Cathedral” and “Roman Arch”—especially if we think of triumphal arches like those at Orange on the Rhone or Trier on the Mosel—must prompt both pride in the current imperial success and concern for its permanence.

Yet to the southwest from Victory’s hilltop—the highest ground in this original Kew

9. Joseph Kirby, A View of the South Side of the Ruins at Kew, with the Temple of Victory in perspective, Engr. Woollett, 1763
Park—cathedral and arch framed the view beyond them of three buildings at the end of Augusta’s property furthest from the palace (Fig. 10), foregrounded by the thoroughly English sheepsmeadow within its ha-ha, and backed by newly laid-out, thoroughly English “wilderness.” What their architectural idioms clearly “planted” in this English habitat were three cultures at the ends of the earth from Britain: on the left, a bright red, yellow, and blue Moorish Alhambra from designs that Chambers had had Müntz develop, then “changed to a more fanciful rococo Gothic design laced with eastern motifs”\(^{30}\); in the center, the pagoda straight from Chambers’s imagination, unmatched by anything he might have seen in China; and at far right a Turkish mosque with two minarets, based on designs Fischer von Erlach had published in 1725. Clearly the mosque and Alhambra signaled the Mediterranean trading arena’s eastern and western ends (Fig. 11), the latter under Gibraltar’s thumb in British control since 1704. At fifty meters this pagoda’s height rivaled the Porcelain Tower of Nanking, known in English translation and engraving since 1669. But it had a tall set of tasks to perform. Until about 1830, as a publicly accessible mother of all mounts (or Ferris wheels), on a clear day its tenth story surveyed, over the varicolored wingspread of those eighty dragons (Fig. 12), a radius of up to forty miles across the Thames plain, Chambers claimed. As a marker visible from the palace, it signaled back the ultimate verge of the estate. As emblem of a complex ancient civilization—the remotest from England’s yet accessible to its trade for tea, silk, and porcelain—the pagoda promised mercantile opportu-
nity and, among Western powers, Britain’s dominance in that far arena for most of the next two centuries. Hence the “inward” vistas across those meadows sighted emblems to prompt pride in current enterprise both peaceful and military; the actual “outward” vistas that you enjoyed once you had reached any balcony of the pagoda solidly validated the spreading imperial power signaled in this exotic quintet of buildings beyond the Temple of Victory. In a theme never set to Disney music, “It’s a big and variegated world after all; may the sun never set upon our grip on it.”

Chambers’s published Plans for Kew discuss and illustrate one other small building whose circumstances support this reading of an imperial theme for its nethermost third. A Temple of Peace, it was most carefully designed (at least four of his drawings, differing from the published engraving, survive) but was quite certainly never executed. The peace treaty negotiated under Bute’s ministry between 1762 and 1763 was too controversial a political achievement, perhaps, to warrant celebration at Kew: Pitt’s partisans thought that it surrendered hard-won gains of the war. Besides, at Stowe the opposition to Bute and the court had already used landscape-language to claim credit for the way the war was ending. To honor Pitt’s maintenance of the victorious alliance, his brother-in-law Earl Temple (lord privy seal in the wartime cabinet) had in 1762 renamed Stowe’s Grecian Temple the “Temple of Concord and Victory.” On its interior walls, sixteen plaster medallions modeled on commemorative medals of the war years heralded Pitt’s victories. Among other gestures to claim the war’s glories for
the Stowe faction, Peter Scheemakers’s sculpture of Britannia receiving the tribute of the world was removed from Stowe’s Palladian bridge to grace Concord’s pediment. With Stowe’s architectural co-option of the credit for everything worth celebrating, Kew’s overhasty preening for Minden, and the fall of Bute’s ministry—precipitated by the unpopularity of the Peace of Paris—just at temple-building time during that spring of 1763, it may well have seemed by that autumn that the proprietors of Kew need not invite further embarrassment with the completion of this Temple of Peace. In the teeth of Chambers’s heralding it that year as “now erecting,” this temple’s very absence attests to the pressures of pro-court propaganda in the actual layout of Kew’s southern extreme.32

No surviving writings of Augusta, Bute, or Chambers appear to offer a rationale for Kew’s layout that would support this formulation of three distinct themes it enunciates: commemorative of Frederick’s independent wit, sanguine in boosting British engineering, herding, and botanical enterprise, jubilantly prophetic regarding the new imperial dimensions of life. Yet since that third theme is rarer for a landscaped park to essay, the well-established imperial landscape model that Chambers had in mind all this while deserves notice. During his four-year residence in Rome and friendship with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, he must have visited the ruins of the emperor Hadrian’s villa in Tivoli. Hence, two years after his return and establishment in London under royal patronage, in his first published work, Designs of Chinese Buildings, appears this gentle pretext for placing “some” exemplars of Chinese architecture “in extensive parks and gardens, where a great variety of scenes are required”:

Variety is always delightful; and novelty, attended with nothing inconsistent or disagreeable, sometimes takes place of beauty. History informs us that Hadrian, who was himself an architect, at a time when the Grecian architecture was in the highest esteem among the Romans, erected at his Villa, at Tivoli, certain buildings after the manner of the Egyptians and of other nations.33

One such complex was Hadrian’s pool and dining pavilion, embellished with statues of crocodile and sphinx, which—named Canopus after a body of water in Egypt—has from Chambers’s time until recently been taken for emblem of an Orient dominated by Roman power. Whether “a great variety of scenes” landscaped from 1757 to 1763 might likewise betoken a later empire’s dominance is left to readers of the Designs that Chambers dedicated


32 Later guidebooks merely echo Chambers’s description of Kew’s Temple of Peace, but its location is conspicuously unnoted on even the finest of later plans of Kew, such as the royally commissioned work that is Fig. 5. For evidence of public perception of Kew’s landscape as politically wired, see the lengths that an ultra-Whig goes, observing its completion, to deplore this court’s “pedantry” and tastelessness: “Horace Walpole’s Journals of Visits to Country Seats, &c.” The Walpole Society 12 (1928), 23–24, 38–39.

33 Chambers, Designs, preface, ii. For arguments clearing the “Scenic Triclinium and Canal” of Egyptian associations, see William MacDonald and John Pinto, Hadrian’s Villa and Its Legacy (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 6–7, 108–11, 115–16.
to Prince George in May of the year he undertook his first work at Kew—including the resiting of the House of Confucius over moving water.

Let us glance at an adjacent cultural development that likewise reached a public excited about the boldness during these years of British arms in exotic places. The combination projected in this other medium—of stunning geographical features unmatched at home, dominated by current British warriors of heroic dimension, formatted for domestic display—might today have made the fortune of a theme park manager. On Guy Fawkes Day of 1760, within a year of the news of General James Wolfe’s victory and death at Quebec, and two months after Montreal capitulated to Lord Amherst, London saw the publication of the first six of some eighteen prints of the Canadian and Caribbean marine and land sites of imperial conquest. These are the work of England’s premier topographical engravers, after drawings on-the-spot by various military officers. A fair sample is Fig. 13 (its engraver had worked on some Kew vistas among others), after a drawing by General Wolfe’s aide-de-camp. It depicts an unsuccessful amphibious landing off the St. Lawrence River seven miles downstream from the capital city of Quebec (shrouded by its cannons’ smoke, beyond the right-hand gunboat), six weeks before the luckier predawn effort upstream from the city. Like others among these eighteen engravings, this one couples the numerically keyed details of the recent military operation—cueing us that “you are there!”—with images of a promising harbor and a sensational geographical “attraction”: the cataract almost three hundred feet high.  

This combination lets one take home experience topical and timeless, exotic and
familiar, comparable to what I have been suggesting the original Kew Park gave its visitors. English landscaping had honored conquest through sculptured architectural monuments to individual heroes such as the duke of Marlborough or Wolfe, or victories such as Culloden, and was long thought to have set plantings at Blenheim to suggest battle-lines. But beyond honoring the heroes, surely the timely appearance of such engravings, dedicated to familiarizations on a continental scale, addresses a public readiness to read the global expansion of imperial power in the precise spatial organization of Kew Park outlined here.

Once Kew’s features are heard in such dialogue with one another as I have suggested,


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34 Thus a caption would guide purchasers to recognize the ship firing at left as the Centurion, which had sailed around the globe under Admiral Anson, by this drawing’s date first lord of the admiralty. Cf. H.H. Miles, The History of Canada under the French Regime (Montreal: Dawson, 1881), 381. The 18 engravings and others I discuss are illustrated in Sigmund Samuel, The Seven Years War in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1934).


36 The 18 topographical views of Havana, Guadalupe, and Roseau harbor, together with those of formerly French Canada, were republished with another 10 of Boston Harbor, the Passaic Falls of New Jersey, Tappan Zee on the Hudson, and other peaceful vistas in the 13 colonies, in Scenographica Americana (London: Thomas Jefferys, 1768).
Chambers’s *Dissertation* proceeded in 1772 to claim for the stimulus of *ruins*, for instance, assumes a timbre that can help distinguish one kind of theme park responsiveness from another. Ruins belong to that category of landscape Chambers called “autumnal”:

[Among] the buildings with which these scenes are decorated, are generally such as indicate decay, being intended as mementos to the passenger. Some are . . . half buried triumphal arches and mausoleums, with mutilated inscriptions, that once commemorated the heroes of ancient times; [now they] serve to indicate the debility, the disappointments, and the dissolution of humanity; which by co-operating with the dreary aspect of autumnal nature . . . fill the mind with melancholy, and incline it to serious reflections.37

Chambers might here be quite accurately describing the effect of his Roman arch at Kew upon a visitor approaching it for the first time and from the north. But once such a “passenger” has noted the practicality of its overpass for Kew’s flocks, and how it twists the path to focus a northward gaze through its arch to the gleaming Temple of Victory beyond, crowning its hilltop, to walk on in a generalized “melancholy” seems irrelevant self-indulgence.

Over two and a quarter centuries ago, this architect and those he worked with appear to have understood the breadth of susceptibilities that might be addressed by a public park designed to embody a medley of themes. A visitor may be content with a largely visceral stock response to generic stimuli contrived to entertain. But the same person may also welcome emblematic signals awakening and informing responses more specifically memorable, to matters more rooted in the visitor’s “real world.”

In both his “Chinese” theory and his work at Kew, Chambers wanted to evoke, in a general public, interactive responses more specific than he thought Brown’s style could touch. The salient distinctions we have noted under “theory” and “Kew” lie in their publics’ relative degrees of self-referral and initiative. The ideal visitor in what Chambers calls a “Chinese” landscape is alert to every sense but that “common” one which most abidingly harnesses him to work, home, prosaic decisions. An essentially passive subject, he rejoices in sensations of strenuous if meaningless incongruity. By contrast a visitor to any of the three zones of the original Kew would encounter architectural, botanical, and topographical promptings to reconcile his private experience with cues clearly from beyond it: a prince to be mourned, practical national energies to challenge his own, a spatial transcription of empire to infuse his awe with pride.

Rhetoric, Authenticity, and Reception:
The Eighteenth-Century Landscape Garden,
the Modern Theme Park, and Their Audiences

Edward Harwood

In May 1995 I stood on the bank of the lake at Stourhead with a group of students (Fig. 1). We were going to see a number of landscape gardens during a three-week stay in England, but this was the first. None of them had seen anything quite like it before, and they tried to explain what was before them by connecting it with other places they knew. The first student to voice her reaction said, “It’s like Disneyland,” and there was general agreement with that parallel. This striking assertion of at least a visual similarity between Stourhead

1. Stourhead: View across the lake toward the Pantheon
and Disneyland can be reframed as the central concern of this essay. Are the cultural and formal worlds of the eighteenth-century landscape garden and the contemporary theme park linked? If so, are the links relevant to ways in which we might interpret theme parks, or do the differences between the two outweigh interpretatively useful parallels?

Upon further questioning, it emerged that not all of the students had been to one of the Disney complexes, although most had. Clearly, however, a conception of what is to be seen at Disneyland and of the Disney “experience” is so pervasive in late twentieth-century culture in the United States that the analogy was generally available and accessible. I am certain it is equally so to the readers of this essay. Nonetheless, it is worth pausing to ponder two characteristic examples of how the Disney Corporation has used advertising to direct the public’s perceptions of its theme parks in ways that subliminally link them with ideas associated with the grand tradition of landscape architecture. One of the most obvious instances of such efforts, and one that targets annually a unique, vast audience, is present in what has become the culminating advertisement at the end of each Super Bowl. The person who has just been named the game’s “most valuable player” is asked what his plans are, and, of course, he replies: “I’m going to Disney World!” This response is truly quite extraordinary if one pauses over it. After all, our “most valuable player” is a professional athlete. We are, therefore, already disposed to perceive him as leading an heroic, exciting, privileged, and well-remunerated life, a life in which we might assume he can have and do almost anything he wants. And yet, at the moment when he has reached the pinnacle of his professional goals and dreams, we are led to believe that there is only one possible road to the consummating apotheosis of desirable satisfaction and excitement. That road ends in Orlando, Fla. There and only there will he finally find the closure to the imaginative hedonism, i.e., our persistent creation of unfulfillable desires, that Colin Campbell has argued is the sustaining mechanism of modern consumption.¹

But that is not the only provocative aspect to this simple exchange. It is also appropriate to register here the presence of a central topos of garden history: the release from the public domain of work (negotium) into a private world of restorative relaxation (otium).² And further evidence would appear to confirm that this concept is a key ingredient in the Disney message. A second recent advertisement, this one on radio, makes this point in terms quite remarkably apropos my concerns in this essay. Here again we find an unmistakable effort to move our understanding of the Disney “experience” beyond the boundaries of a narrow conception of an amusement park. In this ad we hear two men. One is describing to the other a recent weekend “escape” he has had with his partner. The terms of his description are such that his listener (and, of course, we who are voyeuristic participants), assume that his escape has been out into nature. But when this assumption is voiced, the rather surprised response is that the “getaway” was to Disney World. The implication is

clear that something akin to a relaxing “back to nature” retreat is not only possible at Disney World but is an essential part of the experience.\footnote{I am grateful to Jessica Stewart for bringing both of these advertisements to my attention. As it turns out, Michael Sorkin also comments on the Super Bowl advertisement in “See You in Disneyland,” in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 205.}

These advertisements attest to the corporation’s efforts to mold its audience’s desires and to emphasize that audience’s ability to attain them. Their very brevity, however, reflects the assumption that the audience already possesses a conception of the Disneyland experience. The advertisements are modest interventions designed to highlight, and perhaps slightly reconfigure, existing realms of meaning.

My students at Stourhead, however, were not consciously pursuing such readings. What made the parallel work for them was the recognition that what they were seeing were theatrically contrived settings, the juxtaposition of which suggested an organized collection of opportunities for imaginative play.

Given the variety of issues raised even thus far, plotting the relationships between the eighteenth-century landscape garden and the modern theme park is clearly a complicated undertaking. It is certainly not possible to map its entire extent in a brief essay. Even a detailed chronological account of the transformation of the one into the other is surely outside its scope. I do believe, however, that such a narrative could be constructed, and I hope that critical moments within it will surface through the course of this essay. It is also possible to separate out a group of themes that may both be informative in and of itself and resonate profitably through the other chapters in this volume. That is my goal here.

What follows is divided into two large sections. The first focuses on issues, questions, and materials that will address and help to characterize certain similarities and differences between the respective audiences for landscape gardens and theme parks. I begin with a discussion of imaginative association as the source for the content of garden and theme park experience. I then turn to the subject of tourism and the changes in that arena over the past two hundred fifty years that must affect how we think about parallels between the eighteenth-century garden and the modern theme park. In the second section I briefly take up three intertwined topics that I believe are related to those similarities that struck my students: (1) the conceptual relationship between the objects and tableaux re-presented in the garden or theme park and their originals; (2) the types of meanings generated in these sites, and the expectations of how they will be received; and (3) scale and miniaturization. Taken together, I hope that they might illustrate not only the complexity of my particular subject but of our general concern in this symposium.

**Association and Tourism**

To move through Kew or Painshill, Belton or Badminton in the eighteenth century, and to see the rotundas and inscribed obelisks, the pagodas and Turkish tents, the ruins and hermitages that populated such sites was to be carried back and forth across space, time,
cultures, and ideas. To respond to them most effectively was to employ the dynamic mental mechanics of memory and association and to bring to bear upon them the learned, interpretative lineaments of taste. And it is certainly the case that memories and related ideas of association continue to lie at the core of our experiences in theme parks. And not only in them, for they also play an important role in our responses to those increasingly pervasive variants of theme parks: the historical recreation or time-capsuled experience. These latter constructions operate in many forms and on many scales today (from the region, to the town, to the street: New England, Sturbridge Village, South Street Seaport, respectively). What is more, they insinuate themselves into our lives with far greater regularity and more subliminal insistence than can the special outing to a theme park.

But although we may acknowledge the persistence of a role for memory and association, we must at the same time register a sharp division in at least one respect between the eighteenth-century associative experience in a landscape garden and our modern one in a theme park. The intellectual stimulation triggered by the garden scene was understood to be related to the breadth of one’s formal education and range of cultural experiences. These correlated directly with the potential complexity of the visitor’s response. Thus taste (which, following Susan Stewart, I take here to mean class-based patterns of consumption) and its reification through design and its appreciation, were clear markers of social position. Given those facts, it is not surprising that they were central to the concept and practice of eighteenth-century landscape gardening and garden “tourism.” By contrast, the world of the contemporary theme park would appear to be committed to a leveled experience in which visitor preparation beyond a general awareness of mass entertainment culture has little or no role to play. As a result, there is a determined effort either to erase, or at least render unimportant, our awareness of class distinctions in the park. This expectation is quite clearly articulated through the dichotomy between the equality of experience within the park and the unmistakable economic stratification of the hotel accommodations supplied by the corporation. This intention is manifest in an advertisement that appeared in USA Today:

The best way to capture all of the magic of a Walt Disney World vacation is to stay in one of the 15 themed resorts across the Vacation Kingdom. Whatever your budget or style, every resort offers Disney’s discerning standards. . . . In much the same way that Disney Theme Parks offer an escape, Disney Resort hotels offer a mix of adventures. . . . And the resorts match every pocketbook.

Association, in other words, is still very much with us, but its class-based expectations and discriminations have been largely set aside. Tourism and tourists, too, have been significantly transformed since the middle of the eighteenth century.

In The Tourist Gaze, John Urry has offered an illuminating account of the modern phenomenon of “de-differentiation” and its relationship to contemporary tourist experi-

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4 My definition of taste here is that found in Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 35.
5 This copy comes from a 6-page advertising supplement in USA Today, 8 November 1996.
ences. His discussion helps our understanding of how modern tourist destinations develop and exploit a conception of leisure entertainment in which history and imaginative play exist symbiotically with aggressive marketing.6

The Studley Royal–Fountains Abbey complex (Figs. 2, 3) is both a National Trust and a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is one of the most visited tourist attractions in England, and the recent opening there of a multimillion-dollar visitor center and shop is an explicit reflection of its commodification as part of the heritage industry in Britain.7 Indeed, the intrusion of theme park commerce and theme park effects into English landscape gardens, whether they be in the form of safari parks (Longleat), miniature railways (Blenheim), or ever-expanding shops (everywhere!) is surely “de-differentiating” (that is, collapsing) the distance between the two in ways that are impossible to ignore. We expect to find evidences of theme park tourism everywhere and we do. The extension of “theme park” ideas into shopping malls—indeed, the identification of shopping malls as tourist attractions—is a further example of such de-differentiation among sites.8 The interpretative problem here,

7 See David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen, 1987); Urry, *Tourist Gaze*, chap. 6. The encouragement that such designations bring to the popularity of sites such as the Studley Royal–Fountains Abbey complex has the ironic dual effect of both guaranteeing interest in its preservation and enhancing its fragility.
of course, is that in the inevitable conflation of experiences that arises from de-differentiation prior distinctions in form, audience, and use can be obscured unless we specifically highlight them.

I believe that one can track a clear line of formal descent from eighteenth-century (and earlier) landscaping practices to our present theme parks. We have already seen that one can identify some conceptual similarities across the centuries, but it is equally essential that we register critical moments of transformation. Three are of particular note:

1. The emergence in the mid-nineteenth century of the world’s fair tradition, which developed the particular configuration of the interplay among the social and natural sciences, technology, consumption, nationalism, and fantasy that was consciously and creatively retooled by Disney in the early 1950s. This mix still dominates the theme park concept.9

2. The almost exactly contemporary emergence, again in the mid-nineteenth century, of new transportation possibilities, especially the railroad, which enabled significantly increased numbers of people to bridge hitherto unbridgeable distances quickly, easily, and relatively inexpensively. It also could be used to direct identifiable groups of consumers to

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specific designated spots that could be developed to receive them.\footnote{Two very focused accounts of the effects of railway transportation on tourism and leisure are to be found respectively in T. J. Clark, \textit{The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers} (New York: Knopf, 1985), chap. 3, and Paul Tucker, \textit{Monet at Argenteuil} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), chaps. 1–3. See also Urry, \textit{Tourist Gaze}, chap. 2.}


Expanded opportunities in transportation and leisure utterly transformed tourism during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the arrival of the automobile enhanced the possibilities for tourism and touristic destinations still further. It was only through the utilization of new transportation possibilities, for example, that an entire region, New England, began to emerge as a vast “theme park” during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Here were “collected” for nostalgic consumption particular character types, a way of life that was seen as the embodiment of a set of national values, a landscape that was also read as symbolic of the nation, a distinctive architecture, and even a distinctive cuisine. In late nineteenth-century journals such as \textit{New England Magazine}, information and advice were offered to a readership composed of both potential tourists and those hoping to receive them. For example, one can read about not only what one might expect to find in a typical “Yankee” meal but also how to prepare it.\footnote{Dona Brown, \textit{Inventing New England}, esp. chap. 5, for the emergence of New England as a tourist destination/theme park, and pp. 157–58 for sources of cooking advice in contemporary magazines.}

The recognition to which these observations lead us is that in thinking about similarities and differences between landscape gardens and theme parks we must focus on the audience. How has its makeup changed over the years, and what impact might this have on questions of planned or programmed content and expectations of reception? In turn, how have expectations of reception affected design? The multinational and multicultural “it’s a small world after all” presentation of the Epcot Center might bear a superficial resemblance to the melange of architectural styles dotting Kew Gardens in the 1770s, but are the messages truly similar? Ironically, one might answer yes if one takes the position that both Epcot and Kew are subliminally presenting the idea of the world as a potential market for the Disney Corporation and Britain, respectively, but that is surely not the immediate text that visitors are, or were, supposed to read.

The great landscape gardens of the eighteenth century were, generally, developed on private estates. It is clear that the owner-creators of these gardens developed their estates with the intention and expectation that they would be visited by a “public.” An eighteenth-century landscape garden was cultural capital deployed in an elaborately nuanced game of social prestige.\footnote{I have written about this issue on 2 occasions. See “Personal Identity and the Eighteenth-Century English Landscape Garden,” \textit{Journal of Garden History} 13, no. 1–2 (1993): esp. 40–42, and “Humphry Repton and the Idea of Association,” \textit{Journal of Garden History} 16, no. 3 (July–September 1996): 192–214.} At Stowe and Stourhead, small inns were built to accommodate vi- sitors, and a guidebook for Stowe was available by 1744. But who these visitors were and how
Edward Harwood

many there were are telling illustrations of the differences between then and now.

So far as we know, no eighteenth-century estate owner undertook a survey of his visitors from which we might develop a profile of who these “tourists” were and the array of reasons as to why they were doing what they were doing. But we can be quite certain about a set of defining criteria. In the first place, to visit a garden required leisure time, and there were no paid vacations during the eighteenth century. Thus the possession of leisure time meant that one possessed the money to permit it. Garden visiting also required travel, which, in turn, requires either the ownership of the means of travel or the wherewithal to hire it. Additional costs could mount alarmingly if one was on a limited budget. One had to pay for lodging, of course, and for food for oneself and, more expensively, one’s horse. Moreover, it would have been wrong not to tip the servant who showed one around, and when, as was the case at Blenheim, a number of servants involved themselves, if only marginally, in this task, the de facto “fee” for admission could be quite a hefty one. John Byng’s marvelous travel diaries from the 1780s and 1790s provide fascinating examples of someone confronting these issues and problems. He did not have the financial well-being to justify keeping a horse, for as a Londoner he would rarely need one.14 As a result, he generally relied on hired horses for his journeys, and he always had to keep a close watch on his expenditures. But he did have funds sufficient to guarantee himself a life largely unencumbered by the need to work. Thus there were few time constraints on his travels. Economic factors alone, therefore, sharply delimited the pool of visitors to a small, monied elite.

This elite, in turn, was largely congruent with either the social elite or those who might for economic or intellectual reasons (or both) be attempting to claim a place within it. For example, William Gilpin’s Polypthon in his Dialogue upon the Gardens of Stow (1748) has attained a sufficient level of fiscal security that he can take time off to visit that most famous and widely visited of eighteenth-century gardens, and he recognizes that he must do so in order to develop his taste and its proper accoutrements. His companion and cicerone, Callophilus, recommends that people such as Polypthon should make this pilgrimage annually. We must always bear in mind that improving one’s taste in the eighteenth century was inextricably intertwined with moral education and was thus a means of cementing ties among the social,

14 John Byng, The Torrington Diaries, ed. C. Bruyn Andrews, 4 vols. (London, 1936). Because by his own account his purpose in keeping these records of his travels was for the interest they might have for his descendants, Byng often notes practical matters, such as expenses, that rarely figure in other travelers’ descriptions. That the cost of feeding a horse for a night was generally almost twice the cost of feeding himself may surprise us today, but, as he notes on several occasions, hay for tourists’ horses was expensive because there were more substantive uses to which that hay could and should be put. It was, in other words, a kind of local luxury tax imposed on those who had the money to travel for pleasure. A typical bill from a night’s stay at an inn at Bala in northern Wales in 1784 shows us that the total for 3 meals (dinner, supper, and breakfast including all drinks) was 8 shillings and 7 pence, whereas the hay for his horse cost him 5 shillings and 9. See vol. 3, p. 145, entitled On a Trip into the West in 1781, where he writes: “We dined at the Bear Inn at Woodstock, and were wise enough not to dissipate the small remains of our purse in the purchase of steel, and leathern wares, (which are to be had as cheap in London) because the expense of seeing Blenheim is very great; the servants of the poor D________ of M________ being very attentive in gleaning money from the rich travellers,” vol 3: 53.
economic, and educated elites. The ability to appreciate landscape design and, where relevant, deploy what one knew of the nuances of good design in one’s own landscaping was repeatedly used at this time as one of the determining signs of social acceptability and worth.\footnote{Observations to this effect—some extensive, others mere asides—are legion in the Byng diaries. There are a number of well-known literary examples of this connection between landscaping and character, but perhaps the 2 most often cited are Alexander Pope’s Timon in “Epistle to Lord Burlington” and Francis Coventry’s Squire Mushroom in his essay in The World in 1753. I have written at some length about Mushroom in “Personal Identity.”}

We have recently been led, through the work of David Solkin, T. J. Clark, and others, to recognize that the mixing of classes brought a frisson of pleasure to certain leisure experiences such as the public pleasure gardens of eighteenth-century London (Ranelagh and Vauxhall, for example) or the mid-nineteenth-century Parisian café-concerts.\footnote{See David Solkin, Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Center for British Art, 1992), chap. 4, for the London pleasure gardens, and Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, chap. 4, for the café-concert.} But such experiences were completely antithetical to what the elite, eighteenth-century audience expected and sought in a visit to a private estate. Nor does this expectation change as we move into the nineteenth century. The young John Ruskin and his parents, traveling in their elegant private coach in the early 1830s, are the quite self-conscious and aspiring Polyphonds of their immediately prerrailroad age.\footnote{John Ruskin, Praeterita: The Autobiography of John Ruskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 23–24. I am grateful to John Dixon Hunt for bringing the Ruskin example to my attention.}

It is, therefore, reasonably clear who made up the audience visiting gardens during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But that still begs the question of numbers: How many people should we visualize partaking of one of these landscape gardens during what was a visiting season largely confined to the summer months? Hard numbers for visitors are a rarity and have generally surfaced as a byproduct of other research concerns. In 1801, for example, Joseph Farington was informed by his guide at Hackfall that the site was visited by about two hundred parties a year.\footnote{Joseph Farington, The Diary of Joseph Farington, vol. 5: August 1801–March 1803, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (New Haven and London, 1979; original ed., 1612). For Hackfall, see my “William Aislabie’s Garden at Hackfall,” Journal of Garden History 7, no. 4 (1987): 307–411.} Though it is difficult to know how much absolute credence to bestow on such a figure, it is true that by that date a visit to Hackfall was a well-established stop on a much-praised day’s excursion from Ripon that also included Studley Royal. We can assume that the number of visitors by 1801 was probably greater than forty years earlier if only because of the burgeoning popularity of touring in the last decades of the eighteenth century. We can also deduce that owners of often-visited estates assumed a consistent pattern in numbers because the person designated to serve as a guide generally received scant remuneration from the owner; there was an expectation that a lower-than-normal wage would be augmented by tips. Given what we know, in other words, Farington’s figure appears reasonable.

A second possible source of information on this question of numbers is visual: paintings, drawings, and prints of gardens. We must acknowledge, however, that the evidence is slippery because we must assume that descriptions and depictions of gardens were them-
selves highly rhetorical communications designed to convey various messages, including, for instance, the idea that visiting Studley Royal was an exclusive experience that would not entail subjecting oneself to crowds of people.

Although not everyone could feel, as Joseph Parnell did at Painshill in 1763, that he was Adam in paradise, it is notable how rarely written accounts of garden visits mention the presence of others. And this is not inconsistent with what we can deduce from the visual evidence. As we see in a view of Studley Royal (Fig. 4), we are generally shown a space inhabited by small groups, couples, and individual wanderers. And indeed, these written and visual accounts do not contradict Farington’s two hundred parties a year if one assumes a “season” of a hundred days. The famous series of engravings of Stowe by Jacques Rigaud from 1739 (Fig. 5), which show a relatively crowded landscape, would appear to contradict the foregoing argument, but we must keep several thoughts in mind when pondering them. First, Stowe, like Painshill, was readily accessible from London and thus might quite logically draw persistently larger numbers of visitors than more distant sites. Second, it quickly achieved fame as a destination and was aggressively “marketed” thereafter, viz., the guidebook and perhaps Rigaud’s prints themselves. And, finally, we should ask what is it that these prints are depicting? Is this a normal day at Stowe, or are we witnessing a special


4. Anthony Walker, engraving, View of Fountains Abbey and Tent Hill from the Gardens of Studley Royal, Yorkshire, 1758 (courtesy of a private collection)
event such as the grand garden party in which Horace Walpole took part in 1762? The presence of Lord Cobham himself in several of these prints might lead us to assume the latter. Whatever may be the specifics of the case, the crowds in Rigaud’s prints are the exception rather than the rule in this world of garden imagery, and we are, I believe, justified in assuming that most garden visitors in the eighteenth century found themselves largely unencumbered by numbers of people.

I have dwelt upon the topic of estate visitors in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at some length because, in whatever way one reads the evidence available, it is clear that we are dealing with the small coterie of “polite society.” The contrast with the thirty million people who visit Disney World annually is little short of stupefying, but it is also very revealing. The target audience for the Disney complexes was quite explicitly defined from the outset as a middle class that possessed some expendable income and leisure time. The social elite was not expected to attend, and although entry to Disneyland itself was initially planned to be free of charge, entrance fees ultimately were imposed in order to create a social cordon sanitaire against the less well-to-do.20

Indeed, entrance fees alone are a vivid signifier of target audiences and remind us that money is a central element in comprehending both the theme park and the landscape.

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20 John Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture after 1940* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), chap. 2, and p. 81. One cannot help but register in this regard that the entrance fees required to have the complete Williamsburg experience are such that they too impose an inevitable glass ceiling on attendees.
garden. But the role it plays in each is strikingly different. One of the most impressive accomplishments of the Disney Worlds and Colonial Williamsburgs is the extent to which the fundamental goal of making money is successfully camouflaged by the corporation behind the articulated altruistic goal of catering to our imaginations, our need to escape, and our desire for knowledge. I am by no means questioning whether this altruistic goal is genuine, but it is nonetheless important to register that leisure consumption is the engine that drives these undertakings. An important component of this articulated goal (most obviously, perhaps, with the Disney Corporation) has been the careful presentation of an image of a wise, virtually parental corporation that functions as the guarantor of an enduring but threatened set of national values. These values relate not only to entertainment but also to social relationships and work ideals, and they serve as a last bastion against a threatening and chaotic world.

The Generation of Meanings

The landscape garden conspicuously mixed the representation of entertainment, education, and money, but the latter was a conspicuous presence rather than a discretely masked agenda. Because the garden in the eighteenth century was inevitably understood as the reflection of a private individual, the fact that it explicitly represented the ability and commitment to spending large sums of money was central to its meaning. That individuals must be seen in settings appropriate to their social position had been a fundamental rhetorical tenet since antiquity. It was a recurrent theme in British writings on architecture and gardens from at least the time of Henry Wotton in the 1620s. It remained the determining goal of landscape design for Humphry Repton into the nineteenth century. Because the estate visit offered perhaps the most focused opportunity in which a great landowner “appeared” to a “public,” however limited that “public” might be, it was deemed essential that an estate reveal the enduring and justifying qualities of its creator, including his possession of expendable wealth. Unquestionably, then, the makers of landscape gardens were as dedicated to the creation of a particular social representation as were those who created Disneyland. But the acknowledgment of the uses and meanings of capital differ in important ways.

From its earliest days, Disneyland quite pointedly presented its displays as the embodiments of sets of values, some universal and others quintessentially American, that is, the distillation of an authentic American character and way of life: “Disneyland will be based upon and dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America. And it will be uniquely equipped to dramatize these dreams and facts and send them forth as a source of courage and inspiration to all the world.” Quite strikingly, this distillation

22 There is no similar human face in Disney World or Colonial Williamsburg. Michael Eisner is not presented as the embodiment of “Disney.” It is interesting to ponder, however, the extent to which the embrace of Disneyland in its early days was linked to the avuncular presence of Walt Disney himself. He did give the corporation a personal character.
was conceived as existing only in Disneyland, as if it had been lost outside it. Thus the Disney Worlds were not merely separate universes, palisaded off from the outside; they were quite determinedly alternate universes.

A striking assertion of this is said to have come from Walt Disney himself in a conversation with the Reverend Billy Graham. Disappointed when, after a recent visit to Disneyland, Graham merely noted that he had had “a nice fantasy” there. Disney is reported to have responded: “You know the fantasy isn’t here. This is very real. . . . The park is reality. The people are natural here; they’re having a good time; they’re communicating. This is what people really are. The fantasy is—out there, outside the gates of Disneyland, where people have hatreds and people have prejudices. It’s not really real!”

This assertion that Disneyland has co-opted reality is found not only coming from the mouth of Disney himself; it was a conscious litany and justification during the theme park’s early days. As Sharon Zukin has written, “Disney’s fantasy both restored and invented collective memory. ‘This is what the real Main Street should have been like,’ one of Disneyland’s planners or ‘imagineers’ says. ‘What we create,’ according to another, ‘is a “Disney realism,” sort of Utopian in nature, where we carefully program out all of the negative, unwanted elements, and program in the positive elements.’

Although we do not tend to equate Disneyland with historical theme parks such as Plymouth Plantation and Williamsburg, one cannot help but register the extent to which the “imagineers” approach has been readily applied to them. At Williamsburg, as at Disneyland, moreover, there is an implicit and carefully nurtured assumption that we live in a postlapsarian America and are, as a result, consumed by a nostalgic longing to regain an authentic national culture from which we have grown increasingly distant. This lost but intensely desired culture was grounded in a life of simple patterns in which no labor was alienated and all social relationships were face-to-face: “In being transported to some not very well defined golden age—perhaps the period 1900–1910 as presented along Main Street U.S.A., or the pioneer era as suggested in Frontierland—and in touring ‘lands’ devoted to fantasy, adventure, and the future, visitors could escape their unnatural present-day cares, ‘drop their defenses,’ and become more like themselves.”

21 There is no similar human face in Disney World or Williamsburg. Michael Eisner is not presented as the embodiment of “Disney.” It is interesting to ponder, however, the extent to which the embrace of Disneyland in its early days was linked to the avuncular presence of Walt Disney himself. He did give the corporation a personal character.

22 Sorkin, “See You in Disneyland,” 206. This quotation comes from the early publicity produced by the Disney Corporation.

23 Findlay, Magic Lands, 70. Findlay does note that this remarkable conversation may be apocryphal. It is unquestionably congruent with other remarks made about “Disney Realism.” Umberto Eco has pursued this idea in Travels in Hyper-Reality (London, 1986). “Disneyland tells us that faked nature corresponds much more to our daydream demands . . . [and] tells us that technology can give us more reality than nature can,” 44.

24 Zukin, Landscapes of Power, 222.

25 Findlay, Magic Lands, 67.
gent, chaotic, and somehow inauthentic daily existence. The creators of our modern theme parks appear to be driven at least in part by the belief in the need to provide arenas in which our nostalgic desire for an irretrievably lost world can be palliated.

The claim that what one finds in Disneyland is more “real” than the world outside its walls and that a lost authentic culture persists there is certainly a provocative one. Is there a parallel experience within the garden? Were landscape gardens sites of atavistic escapism to a past that was somehow more “real” than the present?

To be sure, a commitment to creating convincing visual cues in one’s garden structures was the *sine qua non* of successful design. Owners who did not acquiesce in this were routinely blasted by contemporary critics. But this demand for a convincing representation arose out of the tradition of rhetorical example. For landscape design, like the other fine arts, was committed to an ideal of rhetorical communication. Just as an implausible or inappropriate example could shatter a verbal argument by disrupting the listener’s associative responses, so too would an unconvincing building undermine a viewer’s disposition to employ it as a springboard to imaginative flights. Thus effective illusion was necessary to achieve the associative activity that was a key rhetorical goal of the landscape garden. It was deployed not as a substitute and implicitly better reality, but rather as a tool analogous to Susan Stewart’s conception of the souvenir—as a metonymic trigger for narratives of authentic knowledge and experience.

If we cast our gaze back to the eighteenth century, however, we discover that a nostalgic belief in a past that was somehow better than the present was a notable topos then as well. But here again, we must not assign it too large a presence in landscaping practices because it co-exists in the eighteenth century with other intellectual tendencies that impose other readings on apparently escapist forms.

The British elite of the eighteenth century still operated vividly and certainly within a culture whose forms and meanings remained deeply rooted in the classical tradition. The garden, like the other major artistic media, was employed as a means for their rhetorical promulgation, and its audiences were prepared to receive them either as confirmations of an enduring set of values or as guideposts toward its attainment. The dispersal of classical and gothic forms and ideas through their landscapes was not fundamentally an effort to regain a world that was lost. The contrast with the theme parks’ originary but vanished values is a stark one. In other words, it is misleading to designate classical and gothic features

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28 Harwood, “Humphry Repton.”
29 On the souvenir, see esp. pp. 132–39. Nostalgia is one of the basic themes of Stewart’s *On Longing*, and her insights are infused through my discussion.
30 Raymond Williams has written about the virtual omnipresence of this past/present dichotomy in *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), esp. chaps. 2–4.
31 One might well note that the nostalgic escapism of the modern theme park is made possible only by persistent technological progress and that a belief in such progress remains a powerful tenet in late 20th-century Western industrialized countries, no matter how much we may appear to want to escape to a simpler, less technological past.
Rhetoric, Authenticity, and Reception

in landscape gardens as escapist because they are not there primarily to remove us from the present to a better past; they are there to assert connections and continuities across time. An elite party dining in the elegant Ionic temple on Rievaulx Terrace, with its fine interior classical detailing and “Carracci-esque” ceiling painting, was celebrating the perpetuation and replanting of a culture, not mourning one that no longer existed. And, indeed, as they looked down from its portico onto the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey and out over the moors (Fig. 6), it was the fact of the integration of the classical and national pasts and presents that framed their associative flights.

And here we are led inevitably to question whether there are similarities between meanings that are planted in theme parks and landscape gardens. Do they differ one from another? How are they to be read?

One of the immediately striking aspects of wandering through an eighteenth-century landscape garden (then or now) is how limited the textual information with regard to the major structures with which one is presented truly is. The visitor to Hackfall’s Mowbray Castle (Fig. 7) or Badminton’s Hermitage (Fig. 8) was not told what to think. The structures

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6. View toward Rievaulx Abbey from Rievaulx Terrace

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<ref>6. View toward Rievaulx Abbey from Rievaulx Terrace</ref>

<ref>32 Certain gardens were, of course, saturated with inscriptions (e.g., William Shenstone’s Leasowes), and most gardens had inscriptions on plaques, obelisks, and other dedicatory monuments that directed the viewer’s response. My distinction here is between such features and the larger structures, such as hermitages, ruins, temples, etc.</ref>
7. Hackfall: Mowbray Castle

8. Badminton: View of the Hermitage
themselves were merely cues—triggers to associative acts. The narrative generally had to come from the viewer, and the relative richness of the narrative was largely dependent upon the relative preparation of the viewer. Under such circumstances, it is clearly unlikely that any two viewers will share identical experiences and, in fact, rather more likely that experiences might differ considerably from one person to another.

This is, of course, not to say that there were not places where meanings were implanted by the owner with the expectation that they would be read. The hermitage built by William Kent for Queen Caroline’s garden at Richmond is an example of this (Fig. 9). But it is notable that we have clear evidence that even in the case of the Richmond hermitage, visitors had ample leeway and encouragement to add their own readings to the predetermined discourse on natural philosophy and took advantage of it. Visitors were always challenged to bring their individual interpretation and to remodel it into a personal experience that still dovetailed with the more generally held values of elite culture. Response was, in this way, both private and yet affirming of a public class unity.

The developers of Disneyland have always argued for the individuality of the Disney experience. “You are an active participant in the fun, the imagination, the adventure and entertainment of Disneyland” [italics in original]. But at the same time, they have always

33 The iconography of this structure was explicated by Judith Colton in “Kent’s Hermitage for Queen Caroline at Richmond,” *Architectura* 2 (1974): 181–91.
been equally committed to controlling the experience. The insistent repetition of the defining “the” in the preceding quotation is striking in this regard. Ultimately, however, the experience of Disneyland or Williamsburg is so saturated by “texts” (which, it should be noted, have often been manufactured solely for the product), that, as Michael Sorkin has written, visitors are dancing “to routines of someone else’s imagining.”

In *The Book of Daniel*, E. L. Doctorow offers a darker reading of Sorkin’s observation: “What Disneyland proposes is a technique of abbreviated shorthand culture for the masses, a mindless thrill. . . . In a forthcoming time of highly governed masses in an overpopulated world, this technique may be extremely useful both as a substitute for education, and, eventually, as a substitute for experience. Disney’s symbols, in other words, determine the limits of consumers’ imagination.”

The troubling conclusion is that the space for imaginative play in the modern theme park has become so preconceived, textually sated, and institutionally self-referential (many of the areas of Disney World are recapitulations of Disney movies), that the experience has become strangely passive despite the apparent imaginative exuberance that attends it. By contrast, Stourhead was a site where, to be sure, potential meanings were gathered, blended, and juxtaposed by the owner, Henry Hoare. To this extent, Hoare was in control. But since meaning was largely generated in the act of reception by each unique viewer, that meaning was dynamic, fluid, and personal. The owner or creator was largely marginalized in terms of the way in which his garden was read in every respect except for his assertion of social preeminence. Indeed, the recognition of the inability to control all content other than social signs had become so pervasive by the end of the eighteenth century that Humphry Repton and those who followed him largely abandoned the articulation of associative meaning except in the realm of social status.

Let me close with one last example of the ways in which an apparent similarity can mask quite different intentions. One of the most striking apparent parallels between the architectural worlds of the theme park and the landscape garden is the extent to which they are both characterized by miniaturization. But here, too, the apparent similarity camouflages basic differences. To be sure, miniaturization is to some degree a necessity in both cases. The Disney Corporation could no more make a full-sized Matterhorn than Lord Cobham could dig Lake Avernus. But miniaturization in the land of Disney was consciously pursued as a means of providing a comforting, nonthreatening environment. As we have seen, Disney’s

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35 Findlay, *Magic Lands*, chap. 2. The logical Disney argument, outlined by Findlay, is that control is necessary, as it is, for example, in a restaurant to ensure a standardized quality in peoples’ experiences. Others have taken the more cynical view that the goal of control has been to maximize efficiency and thus potential consumption.
38 See Harwood, “Humphry Repton.”
“imagineers” were determined to remove as much tension from their sites as they could, and miniaturization was explicitly identified as one of the tools for doing so.39

There is no evidence that this modern goal of creating a comfort zone played any role in the minds of eighteenth-century designers, nor was there only the matter of practical limits. The purpose lies in another realm entirely. As he turned to address the subject of grottoes in gardens, John Evelyn wrote, “Grotts are invented to represent Dens and Caves, and they are also either Naturall or Artificial.”40 It is a simple assertion, but implicit within it is the understanding that a garden is an artful re-presentation of the world outside the garden. Thus features within gardens, whether they be buildings or lakes or grottoes, are signs of “actual” features without. They are significant, therefore, precisely in the way in which they establish a dialogue between the world of human art within the garden and a “Nature” outside the garden that was believed to be itself inherently artful. Indeed, this dialogue has been one of the defining topoi in the history of the garden, and it speaks to an important connection with a long-established theoretical conception of art: that is, that true art cannot merely mimic. It must translate and transform. There must be a liminal disruption. In the seventeenth century, Caravaggio was bitterly criticized by hostile contemporaries who reported that he simply brought his models off the street and into his studio and then painted them as they were. If this was his practice, then to these critics Caravaggio had no claim to being an artist.

We can, I believe, see that miniaturization can perform this liminal art-defining role in the garden. As Stewart has acutely observed, “The problem of scale appears only in relation to the physical world. . . . There are no miniatures in nature; the miniature is a cultural product, the product of an eye performing certain operations, manipulating, and attending in certain ways to, the physical world.” As such, she further argues, all miniatures have a theatrical character.41 They are staged re-presentations that, by their pointed difference, force a dialogue with the original. Is this not precisely Evelyn’s “grot”? I have often wondered whether some of the hostility to William Aislabie’s incorporation of Fountains Abbey into his landscape at Studley Royal was not grounded at least in part in the abbey ruin’s obliteration of that liminal necessity. Fountains Abbey was (and is) unquestionably magnificent, but in what sense can it be thought of as garden art? By being unmistakably “real,” it disrupts the dialogue between within and without. Indeed, it discon-

39 Findlay, Magic Lands, 69–70.
41 Stewart, On Longing, 54–55. See also p. 60: “The amusement park and the historical reconstruction often promise to bring history to life, and it is here that we must pay particular attention once more to the relation between miniature and narrative. For the function here is to bring historical events ‘to life,’ to immediacy, and thereby erase their history, to lose us within their presentness. The transcendence presented by the miniature is a spatial transcendence, a transcendence which erases the productive possibilities of understanding through time. Its locus is thereby the nostalgic. The miniature here erases not only labor but causality and effect. Understanding is sacrificed to being in context. Hence the miniature is often a material allusion to a text that is no longer available to us, or which, because of its fictiveness, never was available to us except through a second-order fictive world.”
Edward Harwood

certingly destroys the boundary between the two. Aislabie, in fact, follows the dangerous
path ascribed to Caravaggio, abandoning the pursuit of artistic re-creation in favor of
simply importing a piece of the real world into his studio-garden. Or perhaps, even more
provocatively, Fountains Abbey becomes a kind of Duchampian ready-made, necessarily
but awkwardly transformed by its recontextualization, and strangely diminished in the
process despite its vast scale. This is because it cannot fill both roles at once. It cannot be, at
any given moment, both Fountains Abbey and a garden pavilion. It can only be one or the
other. By defying the demand for miniaturization and re-presentation, it undermines the
goal of the dialogue. In doing so, it underscores the latter’s rhetorical importance to the
question of how these gardens were to be received and read.

Conclusions

At the outset I acknowledged the complexity of the relationship between the land-
scape garden and the theme park, and I hope that this has clearly emerged. Each of the
topics introduced here, from tourism, to the generation of meanings, to miniaturization
could readily be the focus of far more extensive and probing consideration. Such consider-
ation would, I have no doubt, not only transform our appreciation of these topics but
reveal new configurations of the relationships among them.

My students’ response at Stourhead was perhaps more provocative than “correct.” And
yet there are parallels, real and apparent, between the landscape garden and the theme park,
and it is interpretatively useful to track them. I believe this is so even if the results are
ultimately of greater assistance to us in registering differences than similarities. Certainly
there is a line of descent that runs from the eighteenth-century landscape garden to our
modern theme parks. But since gardens and theme parks are so richly expressive of the
complexity of their cultural milieux, the line that we plot can be neither straight nor
narrow. Like the visitor to Stourhead, Studley Royal, or any of the great eighteenth-cen-
tury landscape designs, whatever path we might set out upon is constantly meeting up with
other paths that prevail upon our interest and cause us to move off in other directions. At
times we rejoin our original path farther along, but we do not always do so. At others, our
new course offers surprising glimpses of the old, just as we might see a garden pavilion
from a number of different viewpoints. Sometimes we find ourselves retracing our steps.
But each of these movements contributes to a ceaselessly evolving perspective on the
overall pattern. Interpretation is synthetic and inherently unstable. I hope, however, that the
subjects I have touched upon here will prove profitable for those pursuing their own
courses through the essays that follow.
On 27 June 1858, a notice in the *New York Herald* announced the opening of a new commercial pleasure garden in Manhattan: “[T]he most beautiful, the most attractive, and in all probability the last great garden that individual enterprise will be enacted to devote to the health, pleasure and recreation of the citizens of New York” (Fig. 1).¹ The advertisement described the pleasure garden landscape:

> Here may be enjoyed the luxury of pure fresh air, laden with the perfume of many flowers; here may be seen those brilliantly illuminated archways with transparent scenic pedestals . . . fountains . . . imparting a refreshing coolness to the air, while in the basins beautiful gold and silver fish may be seen sporting in their native element . . . Upon entering this splendidly decorated garden, the magnificent spectacle that bursts upon the beholder’s sight appears like a scene of enchantment, conjured up, as it were, by the power of another Aladdin.”²

Commercial pleasure gardens had provided popular settings for social life in New York since the early eighteenth century. The Palace Garden represented a late flowering of the genre. Opening in the same year that Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux won the Central Park Competition with their Greensward Plan, it offered a distinct alternative to the new public park.

The pleasure garden landscape was considered as a possible model for Central Park but ultimately rejected. During public debate over Central Park, some critics contemptuously rejected the clutter, excessive ornamentation, and artificiality of the pleasure garden landscape. One correspondent to the *New York Tribune* pleaded with New Yorkers not to be “led astray by the claptrap and gewgaw . . . the harrowing spectacle of Nature made mincemeat of—her fair proportions indiscriminately chopped up and served to suit only a vitiated taste.” This writer worried that some would-be designers of Central Park, “could not resist a Chinese pagoda—an Indian wigwam; they would surfeit us with nymphs and mer-

¹ Advertisement in the *New York Herald*, 27 June 1858.
² Ibid.
maids and dancing fauns—would seek to tickle the fancy at every step by curious grottoes and labyrinths, artificial ponds, innumerable cascades.”3 This critic preferred a more “natural” style for Central Park.

Taking the opposite position, editorials in periodicals such as the Irish American and Zeitung und Herold proposed the pleasure garden landscape as an excellent model for Central Park.4 Enthusiasts saw the eclecticism of pleasure gardens as a strength. Offering a medley of statues and busts, architectural monuments, trompe l’oeil panoramas, and changing entertainments, the pleasure garden landscape was varied, exciting, and cosmopolitan. It provided a stage for cultural events and for various festivals and social gatherings. Pleasure gardens were social settings—places to see and to be seen. Proponents of pleasure gardens argued that their proven popularity made them an excellent model for Central Park.

Social class differences underlie this debate about landscape style. Analyzing American society at the end of the nineteenth century in his Theory of the Leisure Class, Thorstein Veblen

1. The Palace Garden (lithograph with colors) by Sarony, Major, and Knapp, used as a cover illustration for “The Palace Garden Polka” by Horace Waters, 1858 (courtesy of the Eno Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations; Eno349 ME 2N)

theorized that “pecuniary canons of taste” played an important role in maintaining social class
distinctions in American culture. Lower echelons of society, Veblen thought, emulate the
styles and adopt the tastes of the higher classes to demonstrate social advancement. But in
order to maintain cultural hegemony, the upper classes constantly invent new styles and adopt
new tastes. Veblen’s theory suggests a way of analyzing the Central Park debate.

Veblen noted that during the second half of the nineteenth century, “[A] predilection
for the rustic and the ‘natural’ in parks and grounds [made] its appearance on the higher social
and intellectual levels.” This preference for naturalism in landscape design was imported
from Europe. It took hold among wealthy members of the American leisure class, successful
businessmen, and a growing professional class. This upper class adopted the newly fashionable
“natural” style for their private gardens in suburban areas around New York and other Ameri
can cities. Naturalism in landscape design signified power, wealth, and social position, like the
latest style in equipage or dresses brought back from a European tour. Participants in the public
debate over the landscape style of Central Park represented different social classes in New
York society, with competing interests in regard to the park. When naturalism won the
stylistic contest for Central Park, it signified the power and influence of New York’s elite. In
contrast to this “natural” landscape, the “artificial” landscape of commercial pleasure gardens
represented a working-class and lower-middle-class constituency.

New York’s pleasure gardens have largely faded from public memory, although in their
heyday they were well known and popular. The goal of this essay is to resurrect them. There
are similarities between pleasure gardens and contemporary theme parks. Both are commer-
cial landscapes designed to amuse the public in a competitive market for leisure entertain-
ment. Like theme parks today, pleasure gardens plundered history, popular culture, and the arts
for thematic inspiration. They offered fantasy and an escape from the workaday world. At the
height of their popularity, pleasure gardens were crowded, lively places. But, most important,
the cultural criticism leveled at pleasure gardens anticipates criticism of theme parks today.

Critics in the nineteenth century saw pleasure gardens as an impoverished expression
of American culture, faulting the artifice and disregard for “nature” in the pleasure garden
landscape. Cultural critics now focus on the fantasy and unreality of the theme park land-
scape. Ada Louise Huxtable, for example, charges that theme parks offer a “replacement of
reality with selective fantasy.” Michael Sorkin sees them as a “happy regulated vision of
pleasure—all those artfully hoodwinking forms—as a substitute for the democratic public
realm.” Umberto Eco worries that “Disneyland tells us that technology can give us more

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6 For the social history of Central Park and an analysis of competing interests at the park’s inception, see
Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*; Eric Homberger, *Scenes from the Life of a City* (New Haven,
Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University
7 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*.
reality than nature can” and that “imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it.”

This essay explores the pleasure garden landscape as historic background for contemporary cultural analysis of theme parks.

**New York’s Commercial Pleasure Gardens: Artifice, Entertainment, and “Democratic” Society**

Commercial pleasure gardens in New York once represented the newest fashion, imported from Europe, in leisure landscapes. They were patterned after famous establishments in London and Paris. The most widely emulated pleasure garden was Vauxhall Gardens in London. A description by Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* (1847) captures the magical quality of Vauxhall, located on the south bank of the Thames (Fig. 2).

[There were] lamps, which were always lighted; the fiddlers in cocked hats, who played ravishing melodies under the gilded cockle-shell in the midst of the gardens; the singers, both of comic and sentimental ballads, who charmed the ears there; the country dances, formed by bouncing cockneys and cockneyesses, and

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executed amidst jumping, thumping and laughter; the signal which announced that Madame Saqui was about to mount skyward on the slack-ropes ascending to the stars; the hermit that always sat in the illuminated hermitage; the dark walks, so favourable to the interviews of young lovers; the pots of stout handed about by the people in the shabby old liveries; and the twinkling boxes in which the happy feasters made-believe to eat slices of almost invisible ham.11

Thackeray’s description conveys a sense of Vauxhall’s exotic appeal at the end of the eighteenth century. Visitors were bombarded by stimulation in the form of fantastic entertainment, extravagant fireworks displays, panoramic special effects, exotic performers, a cacophony of noise and light. This lively foreground barely distracted Thackeray’s readers from the erotic background of dark and shady garden paths where Becky Sharp hoped to snare a vulgar but wealthy husband, thus improving her social and financial status.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, pleasure gardens in London vied for a fashionable clientele by offering a variety of entertainments, but their reputation as a setting for private trysts constituted a large part of their allure. The earliest pleasure gardens were often attached to country taverns. Some openly operated as country brothels. Samuel Pepys, a frequent visitor to Vauxhall Gardens (then known as Spring Garden), emphasized the lure of the ladies. Sir Roger de Coverly, leaving the garden after a visit in 1712, reportedly remarked to “the Mistress of the House, who sat at the Bar, That he should be a better Customer to her Garden, if there were more Nightingales, and fewer Strumpets.” 12

During the nineteenth century, London’s pleasure gardens became increasingly associated with low life and debauchery, losing their fashionable clientele. Early in the century Vauxhall’s reputation had been enhanced by the frequent attendance of the Prince of Wales, whose dissolute lifestyle was legendary. Upon assuming the throne as King George IV, he approved the renaming of the garden as the “Royal Gardens, Vauxhall.” However, pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall increasingly catered to an emerging urban working class. As industrial London grew, formerly rural surroundings vanished. The gardens’ illusions, like worn stage sets, became less and less compelling. Visitors remarked that the grounds appeared tawdry by daylight. Incidents of drunkenness and violence were reported (Fig. 3). Proprietors tried to counter public fears by including assurances of safety and gentility in their advertisements, but, such tactics failed to halt the steady decline of pleasure gardens over the course of the nineteenth century. Vauxhall Gardens, London, closed for good in 1858.13

Commercial pleasure gardens began to appear in New York early in the eighteenth century. The first examples were small, privately owned gardens, usually an acre or two in size, most often used for outdoor dining associated with a tavern or inn. Some had originally been private homesteads or estates and were turned into commercial venues by enter-

12 Quoted in T. J. Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Center for British Art, 1983), 11–12.
prising new owners. With shaded walks, lawns, and arbors, they offered relaxed, informal settings for light meals, private meetings, or special events. They were open for business during the summer only. Admission was usually free; proprietors made their profits by selling drinks and light refreshments or by catering meals for large groups. Sometimes traveling performers stayed for a week or two, charging an admission fee.

By the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, commercial pleasure gardens proliferated in New York and began to offer an increasing variety of entertainment, including musical programs, balloon ascensions, and circus acts. During the antebellum period, competition spurred proprietors to greater flights of fancy in search of novelty and a competitive edge. Many establishments stayed open for only a year or two with rapid turnover in ownership. In some cases gardens stayed in business in the same location for several decades, but with a parade of different proprietors and frequent name changes. Some New York gardens borrowed names from famous London predecessors. There were at least five “Vauxhall Gardens” in different locations in New York over the course of two centuries. Many gardens lasted for only brief periods, and scant documentation remains of their existence. This essay does not attempt a complete history of New York’s commercial pleasure gardens. 14 Three establishments will serve as representative examples of the genre: Vauxhall

Garden (on the Bowery), Elysian Fields (in Hoboken, N.J.) and the Palace Garden (between Fourteenth and Fifteenth Streets near Sixth Avenue).

Although varying in decor and size, these three establishments evince important characteristics of the genre. They had many tree-lined gravel walks traversing areas of lawn and flowers. Their decor changed regularly but usually included various statues, busts, fountains, grottoes, and architectural monuments. They featured illusions and special effects in the form of transparent paintings, pyrotechnic exhibitions, and mechanical devices. Their proprietors arranged for a variety of changing entertainment: plays, concerts, balloon ascensions, equestrian exhibitions, and various exotic performers from tightrope walkers to necromancers. Illuminated at night, they were transformed into fantasy settings for balls, concerts, or plays. As the century progressed, garden proprietors focused increasingly on performances, building bigger and more elaborate theater buildings and other structures to house various forms of entertainment.15

Vauxhall Garden, located on the Bowery at the intersection that later became Astor Place, was typical of New York’s commercial pleasure gardens in the nineteenth century. This three-acre property was originally designed and operated as a seed garden by a Dutch physician, Jacob Sperry, in the 1770s. Sperry’s garden was a working nursery, with orchards, flower plots, and a greenhouse (Fig. 4). The property was bought by John Jacob Astor in 1804 and leased by him to a French confectioner and distiller, Jacques Delacroix, in 1805.16

After obtaining a twenty-one–year lease on the Sperry property, Delacroix redecorated the garden for public use. He erected a fence around the garden, moved and converted the greenhouse into a dining saloon, laid out gravel walks and broad, tree-lined avenues, parterres, shrubbery, refreshment boxes, pavilions, temples, and assorted monuments, following the basic model of London’s Vauxhall but on a reduced scale. A rectilinear layout of gravel walks formed the skeleton of the garden. Two thousand colored lamps, strung up in the trees and fixed in ornamental archways over the gravel walks, provided illumination at night. A large elevated stage occupied the center of the garden, and scaffolding for fireworks stood in one corner.

Busts and statues from antiquity, interspersed with patriotic statues of American heroes, were scattered throughout the landscape at Vauxhall. Advertising the newly renovated garden, Delacroix announced “a choice selection of Statues and Busts, mostly from the first models of Antiquity, and worthy the attention of Amateurs.”17 The collection included figures of Washington, Cicero, Ajax, Antonius [sic] (in two poses), Hannibal, the Apollo Belvedere (in four sizes), Venus, Hebe (in two poses), Hamilton, Demosthenes, Plenty, Hercules, Time, Ceres, Security, Modesty, Addison, Cleopatra (in two poses), Niobe, Pompey

15 The word garden was frequently retained in the names of New York theaters (e.g., Madison Square Garden, Atlantic Garden, Niblos Garden).
16 Delacroix had previously opened 2 other New York pleasure gardens, located further downtown, each one in its turn called Vauxhall Garden. The Vauxhall Garden at the Sperry site on the Bowery proved the most successful of Delacroix’s commercial gardens.
17 New York Daily Advertiser, 24 June 1805.
Heath Schenker

This eclectic assemblage anticipates twentieth-century theme parks, an early example of “obsessive determination not to leave a single space that doesn’t suggest something . . . [a] masterpiece of bricolage.”

Illusions figured prominently in the landscape of commercial pleasure gardens. Transparent painting was a popular form of illusion. Erected at the terminus of walkways, incorporated into the pedestals of statuary or set into walls of pavilions or theaters, transparent paintings produced a trompe l’oeil effect, making a painted scene appear extremely realistic, at least at first glance. The technique involved painting on several layers of fabric or glass, and shining a light through the layers, which created a three-dimensional effect and an appearance of inner illumination, especially effective at night. Transparent paintings were changed frequently in an effort to keep the decor fresh and provide new interest in the pleasure garden landscape. Artists were often commissioned to create transparent copies of masterworks of European art.

Fireworks exhibitions, another form of illusion, drew great crowds to pleasure gardens, especially at annual Fourth of July shows, when proprietors competed with each other to produce special shows on patriotic themes. The art of pyrotechnics reached great heights in the nineteenth century. Technicians mounted fireworks on scaffolding, telling elaborate stories in sequential images. Sometimes stage sets, dioramas, fireworks, and mod-

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Pleasure Gardens, Theme Parks, and the Picturesque

els were combined to produce multimedia effects. Although such spectacles were particularly elaborate on the Fourth of July, fireworks exhibitions, announced in advance to attract large crowds, also took place on other days throughout the year. For example, a show mounted in August of the opening season (1805) at Vauxhall Garden on the Bowery combined fireworks, panoramas, and mechanical models in a depiction of a naval skirmish in the Bay of Tripoli. The following description gives a scene-by-scene account of the elaborate spectacle:

The Intrepid, bomb ketch, accompanied by the Syren Schooner, are seen entering the port of Tripoli—The Syren takes her allotted station near the entrance. The Intrepid advances to the frigate, on which flies the Tripolitan Flag. They board; the Tripolitan flag is struck, and the frigate is discovered on fire. The Batteries commence a brisk fire upon the ketch, who returns the fire, and displaying the American flag, departs successful amidst the fire of the enemy. The Frigate still burning, the masts and rigging give way as she is consumed; the cannon on board are discharged by the heat. Grand Explosion of the Magazine; Spars, rigging, etc. discharging in the air. The hull drifts from her burnt cables and strikes upon a rock at the foot of the Bashaw's Castle. A number of bomb ketches advance in order to attack, and commence the bombardment; the enemy open their fire from the castle and battery. Shells are thrown into the city from the ketches, several of which fall on the houses and set them on fire; the spires and part of the buildings are consumed; the Americans depart with the tide, having accomplished their design, in setting fire to the city; the city still burning, the Timbers, etc. appear in the flames, and fall to pieces as they are consumed.

Such pyrotechnic spectacles attracted crowds of spectators, amazed by the technology and the artifice of the illusion. These spectacles prefigure popular entertainments today, such as the pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland, where visitors witness a mock pirate battle, or the marine battle enacted every hour or so in front of the Treasure Island Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

Even when no fireworks lit up the landscape, pleasure gardens were transformed at night by lights that illuminated the paths and pavilions, lanterns strung up in trees, and transparent paintings. The Palace Garden advertised “a thousand lights, rendered still more radiant by their reflection through colored shades of every conceivable hue, interspersed among the arbors, paths and archways.” Night lighting transformed the pleasure garden

21 The variety of entertainments and special effects offered in commercial pleasure gardens deserves a lengthy study of its own. Moving dioramas were also a popular attraction, such as the one on view at Vauxhall on the 4 July 1806. Nearly 1,000 ft. long, it depicted a procession held in New York in 1788 in honor of the U.S. Constitution. See Garrett, “History of Pleasure Gardens,” 289.


23 New York Herald, 27 June 1858. The Palace Garden was closely patterned after Vauxhall Garden on the Bowery, which had closed 2 years earlier. It had a similar network of pathways, pavilions, night lighting, and “statues of the heroes and heroines of mythology, and those of modern times . . . placed in tasteful order.”
landscape into a magical realm, heightening illusions and casting elongated shadows along the garden paths as visitors strolled from amusement to amusement.

Promenading was a major pleasure offered by commercial gardens. Before the opening of Central Park, the most popular promenade among New Yorkers was at Elysian Fields, which afforded a much admired view of New York across the water (Fig. 5). Colonel John Stevens owned Elysian Fields and operated a ferry service to Hoboken from the Battery. The sylvan landscape along the Hudson River served as a setting for various special attractions and events. An amusement area on the “green” near the ’76 House Tavern, at the Hoboken ferry terminal, offered a variety of attractions, including a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, tenpin alley, wax figures, a camera obscura, a flying machine, or “whirligig,” and a narrow-gauge track with human-powered cars. A steam train on a two-hundred-foot loop offered rides.24 Another popular attraction was Sibyl’s Cave, a cavern excavated at a point in the cliff where a spring flowed from the rock. A pavilion near the site sold refreshments to those desiring stronger drink than spring water.

Pleasure garden proprietors usually drew a substantial proportion of their profit from selling refreshments, especially liquor. Frances Trollope, visiting Elysian Fields during a brief stop in New York in 1830, remarked that, “[A]t Hoboken, as every where else, there are reposoires, which, as you pass them, blast the sense for a moment, by reeking forth the fumes of whiskey and tobacco.” However, she noted that, at Elysian Fields, “[T]he proprietor of the grounds . . . [had] contrived with great taste to render these abominations not unpleasing to the eye; there [was] one in particular, which [had] quite the air of a Grecian Temple, and did they drink wine instead of whiskey . . . might be inscribed to Bacchus.”25

George Foster, city reporter for the Tribune and a major commentator on the New York social scene, also noted that liquor was an important attraction at pleasure gardens. In one sketch he described the scene at Sibyl’s Cave at Elysian Fields:

The little refreshment shop under the trees looks like an ice-cream plaster stuck against the rocks. Nobody wants ‘refreshments,’ my dear girl, while the pure cool water of the Sibyl’s fountain can be had for nothing. What! Yes they do. . . . A little man, with thin bandy legs, whose Bouncing wife and children are a practical illustration of the one-sided effects of matrimony, has bought ‘something to take’ for the whole family. Pop goes the weasel! What is it? Sarsaparilla—pooh!26

Like Frances Trollope, Foster emphasized the social aspect of pleasure gardens over the scenery.

As the nineteenth century progressed, commercial pleasure gardens appealed increas-
Pleasure Gardens, Theme Parks, and the Picturesque

ingly to working-class pleasure-seekers and less to the upper classes. Vauxhall Garden illustrates the evolution. Early in the century it attracted a fashionable clientele. In 1817 President James Monroe visited on the Fourth of July and the marquis de Lafayette spent an evening there in 1824.27 New York guidebooks often recommended Vauxhall Garden as a pleasant and genteel place to spend an afternoon or evening.28 A newspaper editorial in 1807 described the garden as an “elegant place of public amusement . . . [which] may be justly said to rival in point of elegance and beauty any place of the same kind in the European world. . . . In the United States it is without parallel, and in this City there is no place of public resort that offers so great attraction to the gay, the fashionable, and the pleasure-taking world.”29

The neighborhood around Vauxhall weathered major social changes over a forty-year period, however. In the early years, when the garden was well out of town, it attracted a class of visitors who could afford to come by carriage (Fig. 6). As the city expanded, it was gradually surrounded by residences.30 In 1828 the garden was split into two parts by the extension of Lafayette Place. The tract lying along the Bowery continued as Vauxhall Garden, but row

28 Blunt’s Stranger’s Guide to the City of New York (New York, 1817), 136, described the garden simply as a place “to which the inhabitants [of New York] resort during the summer evenings, and regale themselves with food, wine, liquors and confectioneries.”
30 In “ante-bellum days [the Bowery] lay with its southern end amid the slums, its northern amid the aristocracy.” Alvin Harlow, Old Bowery Days (New York: Appleton, 1931), 319.
houses were built on the other parcel, reducing the garden’s size by half. Residents around Vauxhall Garden began to complain of it as a nuisance, particularly objecting to the noise and danger posed by fireworks. By the time Vauxhall Garden closed in 1856, the Herald reported that it had become “the resort of a different class from that which built it up. The fashionables had deserted it and the democracy of society took it altogether to themselves.”31

In the 1840s and 1850s, guidebook writers and city reporters often drew contrasts between fashionable Broadway and the working-class Bowery, symbolically locating different social classes on the map. Vauxhall Garden figured prominently in the Bowery imagery. As one guidebook put it, “[H]ere we are at Vauxhall Garden; a sort of ice-creamery, and general rendezvous for the Bowery fashionables, who assemble, mostly at night—not having time during the day like the Broadway dandies.”32 Stereotypical characters developed to represent this contrast: the Broadway dandies versus the Bowery “b’hoys. “The Bowery b’hoys entered popular culture as characters in a popular play, A Glance at New York by

31 New York Herald, 24 March 1856.
Benjamin Baker, staged in 1848. Baker set the brief final scene of his play in Vauxhall Garden.33

The Bowery b’hoys and “g’hal” were used by writers and newspaper reporters to characterize a certain slice of New York society, a native working class whose ranks included “the butcher-boy, the mechanic with his boisterous family—the b’hoy in red flannel shirt-sleeves and cone-shaped trousers—the shop–woman, the sewing and folding and press–room girl, the straw-braider, the type-rubber, the map–colorer, the paper-box and flower maker, the g’hal, in short in all her various aspects and phases” (Fig. 7).34 Portrayed in the popular media as honest, independent, direct in speech and manners, simple in taste, this class was contrasted to stereotypes of the unfortunate or degenerate poor at one end of the social spectrum and a pretentious, hypocritical upper class at the other.35

In the presidential campaign of 1848, the Whigs held parties at Vauxhall and courted the b’hoys for Zachary Taylor.36 A novel by Cornelius Mathews, The Career of Puffer Hopkins written in 1842, prefigures that political campaign with the story of a fictional ball at Vauxhall Garden attended by a would-be working-class politician, Puffer Hopkins. The ball is hosted by a political ring called the Round-Rimmers. Mathews’s description of Vauxhall Garden satirizes its pretentions to grandeur:

Puffer, entering, was overwhelmed with the gorgeousness and splendor of the spectacle that broke upon him. In the first place, the Garden, to which he was a stranger, was filled with trees—which was a novelty in a New York public garden—some short and bushy, others tall and trim, but actual trees; then there were the thousand eyes or better lurking and glaring out in every direction, in the shape of blue and yellow and red and white lamps, fixed among the trees and against the stalls; then there was a fountain, and then, through two rows of poplars, commanding a noble prospective of two white chimney-tops in the rear, there stretched a . . . ball-room floor.37

By this time Vauxhall had become working-class territory. The upper classes had deserted, as one contemporary observer put it, finding it “vulgar . . . to be seen walking in the same grounds with mechanics, house servants, and laboring people.”38 When Lydia Maria Child visited Vauxhall Garden in 1844, she noted that “being in the Bowery, it is out of the walk

33 Benjamin Baker, A Glance at New York, 1848, quoted in Garrett, “History of Pleasure Gardens,” 632. In this scene, Mose, a Bowery b’hoy, enters the garden with his girlfriend, Lize. He looks around at the arches of colored lamps and remarks, “Say, Lizey, ain’t this high?” Lize responds, “Well, it ain’t nothing else.”

34 Foster, New York by Gas-light, 155.

35 For an analysis of the “new urban semiotic” created by urban reporters such as George Foster and Matthew Hale Smith in New York in the mid-19th century, see Stuart Blumin, “Explaining the New Metropolis: Perception, Depiction, and Analysis in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York City,” Journal of Urban History 11 (1984): 9–38.

36 New York Herald, 24 March 1856.


of the fashionables, who probably ignore its existence, as they do most places for the entertainment of the people at large.”

By mid-century, commercial pleasure gardens were associated with working-class leisure. Observers tended to emphasize the “democratic mix” of the crowds and the working-class tone of the revelry. Lydia Maria Child also visited Hoboken in 1844 and noted:

[T]he boats are crowded all day. The average number that go over every pleasant Sunday, in summer, is over ten thousand. . . . If the influence of groves and streams were all they sought, it would be well; but unfortunately, drink and cigars abound at Hoboken, and sounds are heard there not at all resembling the worship of the heart in the stillness of nature.

George Foster similarly described the scene at Elysian Fields:

40 Ibid.
What a motley crowd! Old and young, men, women and children, those ever-recurring elements of life and movement. Well-dressed and badly-dressed, and scarcely dressed at all—Germans, French, Italians, Americans, with here and there a mincing Londoner, with his cockney gait and trim whiskers. This walk in Hoboken is one of the most absolutely democratic places in the world—the boulevards of social equality, where every rank, state, and condition, existing in our country—except, of course, the tip-top exclusives—meet, mingle, push and elbow their way along with sparse courtesy or civility.41

Large groups sometimes leased pleasure gardens for social events, picnics, and ethnic festivals (Fig. 8). In May 1851, for example, more than ten thousand Germans gathered at Elysian Fields to commemorate the holiday of Pentecost. The initially peaceful picnic turned into a riot. The Tribune reported that prior to the riot “beer flowed in torrents from the barrels on tap, down hundreds of thirsty throats.” The article gave imprecise and contra-

41 Foster, New York by Gas-light, 53.
Vivid press accounts of events such as these, fixed pleasure gardens as a genre, on the social map of the city. They were identified as working-class places and linked in public perception not only with boisterous revelry, cheap entertainment, and liquor consumption but with unruly and potentially dangerous crowds. An editorial in the German paper *Zeitung und Herold* argued that Central Park should be designed as a setting for “popular festivals” and as “lungs of the city” for the working classes, pointing to commercial pleasure gardens such as Elysian Fields as a model. However, this suggestion must be read against a background created by previous newspaper accounts of events such as the 1851 German picnic that turned into a riot.

When the Palace Garden opened in 1858, its owners tried to counter this public perception. Advertisements for the new Palace Garden in 1858 predicted that the new garden would “become the resort of the refined, the fashionable and the intellectual.” The proprietors assured New Yorkers that decorum would be maintained: “It will be the aim of the parties who have leased these extensive premises to make them the most desirable resort of any in the city during the summer months, and to effect this objective they have determined to enforce such rules as will assure the strictest order and decorum. Looking to the most respectable portion of the community for encouragement, the proprietors know they must conduct the management as to give entire satisfaction in every particular, and this they feel confident they are perfectly prepared to do.” A large staff, including guards, was employed to enforce decorum in the Palace Garden. No liquor was sold or consumed on the premises.

But these assurances failed to convince the desired public. The Palace Garden stayed open for only four years. Originally designed as a virtual reproduction of the old Vauxhall Garden on the Bowery, it went through several renovations during its brief existence, as its proprietors searched for a more successful formula. A Civil War regiment was billeted there in the summer of 1861. The garden changed ownership and was renamed Nixon’s Cremorne Garden in 1962, but it closed for good in December of that year. Noting that the “relentless march of improvements” had obliterated older pleasure gardens in New York, the propri-

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42 *New York Tribune*, 27 May 1851.
43 *New York Herald*, 27 May 1851.
44 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 111.
46 *New York Herald*, 27 June 1858.
etors of the new Palace Garden had sought to revive a vanishing tradition. They were swimming against the tide. Pleasure gardens were vanishing from the leisure landscape in New York. Their demise signaled a changing social order.47

The Landscape of Central Park: Picturesque Nature

The landscape of Central Park represented the new social order. Although many of the competition proposals had included features from pleasure gardens, such as avenues, promenades lined with flowerbeds, parade grounds, statues, fountains, aviaries, and conservatories, these ideas were rejected by the park commissioners,48 who chose instead a variant of the picturesque naturalism popular among the English bourgeoisie.49 Shaped by this fashionable aesthetic, Central Park was designed as a series of prospects representing scenes from nature: stately trees framing rolling meadows, large bodies of water, wooded islands, a few carefully chosen architectural accents. This landscape offered a strong contrast to the urban landscape of New York City. Some thought this contrast “grotesque,” and argued that the Greensward Plan ignored the glory and accomplishment of American culture.50 But it represented the culture of the board of park commissioners.

The park commissioners who were given the power to determine the landscape of the new park represented an emerging, self-styled aristocracy in New York.51 Appointed by a Republican-dominated state legislature, the majority of park commissioners were Republicans. They were wealthy businessmen and professionals. The commissioners chose a landscape for Central Park, the Greensward Plan, that signified their own power and authority as a class. Two Democrats on the board objected that the Greensward Plan failed to

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48 Actual plans still exist for only 3 of the competition entries, but verbal descriptions of the other 30 entries are available in the New York Public Library. For a good description and analysis of the various competition entries, see Rosenzweig and Blackmar, The Park and the People, 111–17.


50 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, The Park and the People, 144.

51 Olmsted thought himself part of a “true American aristocracy,” different from a European-style aristocracy with its hereditary structure, but including men who were, by virtue of “cleverness, education, good judgment and civic influence,” a “natural” class of leaders. Its members were Republicans (Democrats did not qualify), bankers, lawyers, wealthy merchants, some descendants of old, wealthy families, and some self-made men. Olmsted excluded from this “natural aristocracy” the “vulgar, presuming and peculiarly snobbish” nouveaux- riches who lusted after the legal privileges of European aristocracy, but the class he describes is essentially an American bourgeoisie. See the letter to Oliver Wolcott Gibbs in The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, vol 4: Defending the Union, 467.
represent the urbane and civilized life of New York, but they were outvoted. They wondered how the rustic style could be modified to create more public access and also to reflect the “highest forms of artificial or civilized life, erected by the wealth and designed by the genius of man.” Acting at the direction of the board, Olmsted and Vaux modified the Greensward Plan to create more circulation in the park, but these modifications made it even more rustic and picturesque.

In contrast to the landscape of commercial pleasure gardens, the landscape of Central Park, sparsely populated in the Greensward Plan renderings, represented an escape from urban crowds and boisterous revelry. Creating a new image for American public space, the designers of Central Park replaced the lively, unpredictable, crowd-filled landscape of commercial pleasure gardens with a monumental, picturesque rendering of nature nearly devoid of human presence (Fig. 9). The rustic Ramble was the focal point of the design—“the picture that people would come to see.” Following the English fashion for picturesque scenery, the Greensward Plan was peopled by tiny distant figures that enhanced the powerful effect of the park’s naturalism.

52 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 144.
53 Ibid., 145.
55 Calvert Vaux to Clarence Cook, 6 June 1865, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, quoted in Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 133.
Prominent participants in the discourse surrounding the creation of Central Park had long emphasized nature as the appropriate theme for the new park landscape. William Cullen Bryant had early envisioned the park as “a piece of conserved nature.” Andrew Jackson Downing called for “space enough to have broad reaches of park and pleasure grounds, with a real feeling of the breadth and beauty of green fields, the perfume and freshness of nature.” The Tribune correspondent quoted at the beginning of this essay rejected landscapes in which “cunning devices [were] studiously disposed to conceal under their meretricious array the chaste beauty of Nature.” Olmsted and Vaux produced a plan of “bold and sweeping” lines, with vistas showing “great breadth in almost every aspect in which they may be contemplated . . . as this character is the highest ideal that can be aimed at for a park under any circumstances.”

In fact, the Greensward Plan offered a particular version of nature—picturesque nature. The vogue for picturesque scenery that spread from England to the United States during the nineteenth century represented a cultivated taste. Wildness, roughness, and rusticity were highly valued. Proponents of the picturesque in the United States, such as Bryant and Downing, modified it to American needs. As Veblen observed, a taste for the picturesque trickled down to the middle class “in such contrivances as rustic fences, bridges, bowers, pavilions, and the like decorative features . . . or by a circuitous drive laid across level ground.” It was a style that paradoxically signified upward mobility.

Scholars of the picturesque have argued that the aesthetic initially appealed to an elite sensibility, but it was quickly adopted by middle-class consumers. In any event, it represented a relation to the land that was based on class. Cultural critic Elizabeth Helsinger argues, for example, that renderings of picturesque landscapes in England offered a range of possible relations to the landscape depicted, “from rural laborers through the gradations of a provincial middle class to rural gentry and aristocracy, not to mention the professional travelers and tourists occasionally glimpsed along the way.” But commodification of the picturesque enforced a distinction between the viewers (that is, the consumers) of the scenery and those who could be imagined solely as objects in the landscape.

Renderings of the Greensward Plan represented the people of New York as small, insignificant objects in a picturesque landscape. Belying the inclusive rhetoric of park promotion, these renderings figuratively exclude the masses from the privileges of possession and circulation enjoyed by consumers of the genre. For although this scenery was ostensibly for the public, the full appreciation of picturesque nature depended upon a cultivated,

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60 Picturesque landscapes were consumed in America, not only in the form of designed landscapes such as Central Park but also in books of picturesque views such as *Picturesque America*, 2 vols., ed. William Cullen Bryant (New York: Appleton, 1894).
class-based sensibility. This was admitted by park proponents, such as Downing, who hoped, nonetheless, that the park would “[raise] up the working man to the same level of enjoyment with the man of leisure and accomplishment.” Olmsted also admitted “that the aesthetic faculties need to be educated—drawn out; that taste and refinement need to be encouraged as well as the useful arts. That there need to be places and times . . . which shall be so attractive to the nature of all but the most depraved men, that the rich and the poor, the cultivated and well bred, and the sturdy and self-made people shall be attracted together and encouraged to assimilate.” The landscape of the Greensward Plan was mythic, i.e., exclusive, reflexive, naturalizing, signifying the power and status of those who commissioned it.

Some proponents of the Central Park landscape expressed concern about public behavior in the park. An editorial in the New York Times worried: “As long as we are governed by the Five Points, our best attempts at elegance and grace will bear some resemblance to jewels in the snouts of swine. Better the Park would never be made at all if it is to become the resort of rapscallions . . . if no attempt is to be made to keep it clear of the intemperate, the boisterous and disorderly.” Concerns about decorum in the park were manifested not only in the editorial pages of the Times, but also in the choice of Olmsted and Vaux’s plan. The Greensward Plan signified decorum. It was like a museum in which patrons know from the ambience that they are expected to speak in whispers and confine themselves to the contemplation of Nature. Not surprisingly, during its early decades, Central Park largely served the segment of New York society that lived by and set the rules of decorum. They came in their carriages to tour the park, incorporating it into their rituals of social intercourse. The working classes stayed away for various reasons, including distance and inaccessibility but also out of preference for pleasure gardens such as Jones Wood, which were also some distance from the city, but where they could spend “their limited leisure time and money in ways that were not permitted or encouraged in the park.”

Conclusions: Landscape and Power

This essay has explored complex relations between landscape, taste, social class, and power in the nineteenth century. Landscape styles and tastes in nineteenth-century New York signified different social and political constituencies at a particular moment in history. When the picturesque Greensward Plan won the Central Park competition, it represented the power and influence of an emerging elite, their bid for control of the growing city. By contrast, the landscape of commercial pleasure gardens represented an immigrant working class, the b’hoys and g’hals of the Bowery, the “democratic” crowds of nineteenth-century.

63 Downing, Rural Essays, 152.
64 Olmstead, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, vol. 2: Slavery and the South, 1852–1857, 244.
67 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, The Park and the People, 233.
New York, lower down on the social scale, but also an increasingly powerful political force. The history of pleasure gardens is a reminder that power relations and competing social constituencies also figure in debates about the landscape of theme parks today.

Certain similarities emerge between nineteenth-century commercial pleasure gardens and contemporary theme parks. Like commercial pleasure gardens, theme parks represent a broad-based, popular culture; masses of visitors flock to theme parks seeking novelty and entertainment. In some ways, contemporary criticism of theme parks echoes nineteenth-century criticism of pleasure gardens in New York. Contemporary critics express concern, for example, that theme parks represent “a studious fudging of the facts,” echoing nineteenth-century criticism that pleasure gardens “made mincemeat of nature.” Some critics today note that the theme park landscape is spreading beyond the boundaries of leisure entertainment and invading places where people live and shop. Similarly, nineteenth-century critics worried about the pleasure garden landscape invading the new public space of Central Park. These similarities may be significant to historians studying theme parks in the future.

Future historians will be interested in relations between landscape and power in the twentieth century. In seeking to understand the landscape of theme parks, they should note the ways in which the landscapes of theme parks represented power relations and competing constituencies in American society during the twentieth century. Perhaps they will wonder whose interests were abetted and whose interests were threatened by theme park landscapes. What were the political and social agendas embedded in theme park landscapes? Which was the more powerful force in twentieth-century American society: Disney–Time–Warner or the Central Park Conservancy? How were these forces represented in landscape terms? These are important questions to ask if we are to understand the complex cultural significance of the theme park landscape. In resurrecting the history of commercial pleasure gardens as antecedents to contemporary theme parks, my purpose is to raise such questions.

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69 Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park*. 
Skansen is the most popular theme park in Sweden. Its theme is Swedish folk culture and Swedish landscapes. It is over one hundred years old, and its history offers a glimpse into both the origins of the Swede’s love of nature and the transition from bourgeois culture to mass culture. Skansen calls attention to the Swedish idea of landscape: rather than a mimetic representation of the countryside, the park is the locus of a transcendental experience of the good old Swedish land. And it enables us to understand the twist given by Skansen’s designer, Arthur Hazelius (1833–1901), to the classical theory of poetics when creating its landscape.

We shall first pay a short visit to Skansen on its hill overlooking Stockholm. Then we shall retrace its origins as an open-air museum for Swedish folk buildings in order to show how it contributed to the development of a bourgeois taste for landscape in Sweden, to the exclusion of the workers’ movement from its pageants. We shall then turn to the 1930s and trace the changes that took place after the Social Democrats came to power in order to show how new rituals were introduced in Skansen allowing its landscape background to become most significant for all Swedes and to provide an emblem for a mass society united by its love for nature and for national landscapes.

I stress the specificity of the idea of landscape in Sweden for several reasons. Mass culture may follow different paths in particular countries. Nevertheless, we shall suggest that landscape architecture in a theme park offers a place where it is possible to experience a mythical view of popular culture rather than merely a place for purely aesthetic contemplation; that landscape architecture is thus engaged in the development of modern myths, and it does so by falling back on a variant of classical poetics that puts a version of popular culture in the place of fable. In so doing, the theme park landscape yields insights into the elusive qualities of meaning when it is embodied by landscape architecture.

For information on the origin of Skansen, as well as other topics in this essay, I am very much indebted to a collection of papers published for the 100th anniversary of Skansen under the direction of Arne Biörnstad, entitled Skansen, under hundra år (Skansen during a Century) (Stockholm: Höganäs, 1991). References to this volume are indicated in many of the notes to this chapter.

1 Although the phrase “the good old days” has conservative associations in Swedish, it also conveys a sense of affectionate attachment to “mother Sweden, the old and free,” not unlike its American counterpart (i.e., “the good old days” celebrated by the Grand Old Party).
“A few years ago,” wrote Selma Lagerlöf in 1906, “there was in Skansen, the large garden outside Stockholm, where so many wonders have been gathered, a little old chap named Klement Larsson. He was from Hälsingland, and he had come to Skansen to play folk dances and other old tunes on his fiddle.”

Klement used to play during the afternoon and roam around in the morning, and one day he came across a tall, handsome old man who was heading for a spot commanding a beautiful view over Stockholm. The stranger said, “Good morning, Klement. How are you? I hope you are not sick; you seem to be growing weaker these days.” Klement was feeling nostalgic, and he explained that he was longing for his home in Hälsingland. This came as a shock to the handsome old man, who began to tell Klement about the history and the glory of Stockholm. He was rather pathetic, and he ended his long lecture by explaining that Stockholm had the power to draw everything to itself so that it had become the central city of the kingdom; it bestowed its gifts, its money, its stamps, its soldiers, judges, and teachers upon the entire land so that it

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3 Ibid., 406.
had become the common good of all Swedes. “And, Klement,” said the handsome old man, “remember also the last thing it has attracted: these old farm buildings at Skansen; the old dances, the old dresses, and the old housewares; its musicians and story tellers. All the good old things have been drawn to Skansen to be honored and for them to be admired again by the people.” Then the handsome old man went away. The next day Klement Larsson received a book as a present that made him realize that it was the king of Sweden who had spoken to him!

This little story in the middle of Nils Holgersson’s wonderful journey across Sweden mirrors the central meaning of the book itself. Selma Lagerlöf wrote this fantastic story of Nils, a mischievous boy turned into a dwarf who travels around Sweden with a flock of wild geese, to teach children living far from one another in various parts of Sweden that they belonged to a single people and land united by its culture and its nature (Fig. 1). Skansen was created with the same intent. Nils Holgersson’s story is an epic celebration of the Swedish nation and of its intimate relation to nature. The meeting of the king and Klement Larsson in Skansen highlights the craving for a national identity that was shared by Swedish elites at the turn of the century.

Stockholm was built upon an archipelago, and Skansen stands on the small hilly island of Djurgården in front of the old town crowned by the royal castle. The park is within walking distance of the modern city center, commanding a sweeping view over the city and its main waterway between the Baltic Sea and Lake Mälaren (Fig. 2). The main entrance to Skansen is located at street level. It leads to a long mechanical stairway that takes the visitor up the hill to a place smaller in scale and with a different atmosphere from the entrance plaza he has left a moment before. Dirt roads passing by old country buildings lead in a slightly haphazard way up to a ridge where wild animals can be seen in a series of landscape enclosures. Most buildings are open to visitors and are inhabited by elderly people in folk costume who engage willingly in conversation about their homeland. They come from the various provinces of Sweden, and each group of buildings alludes to a different province, from Skåne and Blekinge in the south, to the church of Seglora in Västergötland, the farms of Mora in Dalarna, Delsbo in Hälsingland (Klement Larsson’s country in the north of Sweden), and Lapland.

Skansen comprises a variety of traditional buildings, each of them situated in a simulation of its original rural environment: farms are surrounded by small fields in which cows or sheep graze; church steeples stand close by the roads next to small graveyards (Fig. 3); the mansion of Skogaholm has its own pleasure gardens, with pleached trees and arbors; windmills are set on hill rocks to get better exposure to the wind. Skansen offers a spectrum of old building types from all over Sweden (Fig. 4). Some of these buildings, such as the steeple of Håsjö from Jämtland, are spectacular pieces of craftsmanship; others—the soldier’s cottage (soldattorp), the farm laborer’s house (statarlängen), or the forester’s hut (skogarbetarskojan)—are the crudest one could imagine (Fig. 5).

*Ibid., 414.*
2. Map of central Stockholm showing Skansen (right) overlooking the city, with the island of Skeppsholmen (middle ground), and the old city, or gamla stan (background); the king’s palace, or kung slottet, is at left, and the modern city center at the top (from Esselte Kartor, Stockholm Med Förorter)

3. Skansen: Early 18th-century church of Seglora in Västergötland
4. Map of Sweden showing the origins of the main buildings of Skansen (from A. Biörnstad, ed., Skansen under hundra år [Skansen through a hundred years] (Stockholm: Hoganas, 1991)

5. Skansen: Steeple of Hallestad in Ostergotland (left), a poor worker's house, statarlängan from Södermanland (center); a farm from Hornboga in Västergotland (right)
Of course, visiting these places is a pleasurable experience in itself, but there are many other reasons to visit Skansen. In the evening, especially on weekends and during the summer, all sorts of entertainment are to be found: dances, choir singing, open-air concerts, radio or television shows broadcast live from Solliden. Special events coincide with holidays: ritual Swedish celebrations such as midsummer dances around the Maypole, the May bonfire, the Christmas market, or old-time fiddlers’ festivals. More mundane events are organized by business groups, special-interest groups, or government agencies that want to catch public attention. They organize displays in different parts of the park so that they merge in the background of traditional landscape and buildings. Such exhibitions may last a few days or an entire week. In the mind of most Swedish people, Skansen, with its average 1.8 million visits a year in a country of 8.7 million inhabitants, is a magnet, an epitome of Sweden in which the best of the past and the present merge in a most enjoyable way for the pleasure of everyone.

This is undoubtedly a place that qualifies as a theme park in several ways: it is “a phenomenon of mass culture,” which provides entertainment, profit, and education; its landscape serves as a museum and history park “fulfilling even better than museums [its] mandate to ‘endow knowledge, incite pleasure, and stimulate curiosity.’” But this was not always the case.

The Origin of Skansen

Skansen was created in 1891 by Arthur Hazelius, a professor of Swedish language who devoted his later years to the collection and presentation of rural Sweden’s cultural heritage. He was the founder of the Nordic Museum and a few years later of Skansen, a collection of rural buildings where traditional costumes and housewares could be seen in their vernacular environment. Skansen was founded as a park where the visitor would discover the essence of the Swedish landscape (Fig. 6).

This was a very new idea. Its immediate success shows that there was a public in Sweden receptive to such an innovation. This public belonged to the well-educated middle classes and the circles of well-to-do industrialists; many contributed funds for Skansen, a cultural endeavor meant to uplift the morals of the nation. They knew that Swedish society was going through a time of change, and they felt very concerned about its possible outcome, so they welcomed ideas which might contribute to a peaceful future for all Swedes. This is how an invention of Swedish traditions and a love of nature and rural landscape developed hand in hand.

5 A public meeting place with a large open-air concert hall, which is extremely popular.
6 See the call for papers issued by Dumbarton Oaks for the colloquium on theme parks, 24 January 1995.
7 Hazelius introduced feasts between 1893 and 1894. He explained, “[T]hey were intended to help Skansen’s finances and to awake feelings toward the fatherland through celebrations of major historical events of our nation.” A poster dated 5 June 1893 in Stockholm announced the celebration: “SKANSEN, last day of the spring feast, and at the same time large National Feast, celebrating our historical memories, tomorrow on Tuesday, 6 June (Day of Gustaf).” See Biörnstad, “Arthur Hazelius och Skansen” (“Arthur Hazelius and Skansen”), in Biörnstad, Skansen, 46.
Sweden had been a great military power in the seventeenth century, and the loss of Finland to the Russians in 1809 was consequently a shock for the country’s establishment. It spurred the creation of several associations composed of university professors, artists, and poets such as the Götisk Federation (1822) or the Mannhem association, which looked back to the past, and in particular to surviving traditions of Nordic origins, as a source for cultural renaissance. Following the lead of educational reformers in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, the associations advocated a knowledge of the country’s geography and of its people through long rambles through the countryside. They were heavily influenced by Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823–97), a German reformer who believed that the German people had developed a special relationship with nature and that features of regional landscapes accounted for differences among German populations.8 Riehl wanted to fight social ills associated with the development of industry, and he argued that city people had much to learn from rural experience and could do so through solitary walks in the countryside. In *Family* (translated immediately into Swedish), Riehl recommended that workers be housed in communities under the guidance of a fatherly figure, assisted by a motherly warden.9 These ideas were taken up

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8 Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823–97) was a social anthropologist and cultural historian, whose major work was *Die Natugechichte des Völkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Sozial-Politik, 1854–1855* (*The Natural History of the People as a Basis for a Policy for German Society, 1854-1855*). See also B. Grandin, “Grogrunden” (“Origins”), in Börnstad, *Skansen*.

9 Riehl, *Familjen (Family)* (Stockholm, 1856).
by liberal university students from the Scandinavian countries, who organized meetings of Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish students from 1862 to 1876.

Modern Scandinavian history is replete with bloody wars between the three countries, so these students turned to mythical times of pre-Christian culture as a source for fraternizing. Their efforts developed into an intellectual movement—the new Göticism—and into an historical fiction of a common people united by language, gods, and customs. These students demanded that the old Nordic language be reintroduced in university curricula.

Arthur Hazelius grew up in this spirit of reverence for the past and he started going on long rambles through the Swedish provinces when he was nineteen. He took part in two of these international student meetings and made friends there with men who contributed to his interest in the past of Scandinavia. He lectured on Swedish literature at the High Seminar for Lady Teachers in Stockholm in 1864, and he took an active part in the movement for ridding the Swedish language of foreign influences (from 1870 onward).

The revolutions of 1848 had made the upper classes in Europe aware of the risk of social upheaval brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the growing poverty of rural people, who flocked to the cities in search of work. In Sweden these fears materialized at the end of the 1860s. Changes in agricultural techniques and a series of crop failures brought about a massive influx of poor people into city slums, and began a forty-year period of emigration to North America. Shipyard workers went on strike in 1868, and strikes took place in Stockholm from 1869 until 1874.10

The new solidarity among workers which enabled workers on strike to be financially supported was seen as a terrible threat to the social order. Bourgeois families living in Stockholm embraced the new Göticism culture, which upheld traditional Swedish virtues as the epitome of the good society. They turned to a very special group of people, the rural communities of Dalarna, probably because most of the housemaids in Stockholm came from that region, and because they made an exotic contribution to Stockholm street life in their vivid folk costumes.11 Besides, in Dalarna very large farm communities used to live under the same roof under a patriarch’s rule, which was most unfamiliar in the rest of Sweden. The Mora cottage from Dalarna was the first building that moved into Skansen and opened to the public in 1891, but a complete farmstead from Mora parish was only achieved on 15 June 1930. This gave rise to a Dalarna day feast that was to be followed by a series of feast days for each province in turn over the years.

It was during a visit to Dalarna in 1872 that Arthur Hazelius came to realize how the development of modern trade was rapidly obliterating the characteristic features of folk customs. He claimed later that this visit, and the first purchase he then made of a few pieces of folk cloth, had shaped his will to build a museum of Nordic culture in which this rural

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heritage could be preserved. He felt the urge to save as much as possible of the rural culture that was embodied in housewares and artifacts of daily life in order to preserve the true spirit of the nation and to allow people to share a sense of continuity between the present and the past and a sense of community through visits of typical rural homes, and through common enjoyment of some national celebrations such as the spring or midsummer feasts, or national heroes’ anniversaries (Fig. 7).

Giving Form to the Dream of a National Landscape Park

Hazelius’s initial efforts were concentrated on the creation of a large museum. He planned a palace with four wings (only one wing of which was built) on the island of Djurgården facing Stockholm’s old city; it still houses the city’s Nordic Museum. Its construction was decided in 1888 but it was five years before the walls rose above ground, and the project was constantly delayed to the point that it opened only in 1907, six years after Hazelius’s death.

Situated on a hill near the museum on the island of Djurgården, Skansen began as a companion project to the museum. Hazelius conceived of a series of reconstructed old

7. Bedroom in the farm of Delsbo (from N. E. Baehrendtz, Boken om Skansen [Stockholm: Höganas, 1980])

Hazelius himself dated this event to 1872, when he had discovered how rapidly folk features were disappearing from the landscape. See Grandin, “Grogrunden,” quoted in Biörnstad, Skansen, 22.
Michel Conan

rural buildings set up in such a way that they would create a miniature Sweden that residents of Stockholm could visit. Several sources of inspiration for this project are known. One that Hazelius himself mentioned was the 1857 industrial exhibition in Paris, at which the Swedes and the Norwegians (who at the time were under Swedish rule) had met with public acclaim for their exhibition of thirteen cabinets with lifesize dolls in folk costumes and a replica of an old Norwegian farm staffed by guides in local costume on the Champ de Mars. This large Paris garden had been transformed into a park for the exhibition, with buildings representing each of the nations invited.

The Swedish delegation had found an answer to a European dilemma. At the time, all of Europe had been swept by a wave of nationalism in the wake of the Napoleonic wars and by economic and social changes spurred by the bulging new industrial world. Nations were eager to demonstrate the excellence of their products. The first such international exhibition in London at the Crystal Palace in 1851 had met with disappointment since all industrial wares were similar irrespective of their country of origin. Rural architecture, folk customs, and folk garments, to the contrary, exhibited each nation’s character and supported the respective nation’s claims to antiquity. The use of the Champ de Mars as a theme park to display national architecture was emulated in Vienna in 1873. In that same year Hazelius opened his first Nordic exhibit in Stockholm, displaying the lifesize dolls in folk costumes that had met with such success at the 1867 Paris exhibition. He used this pattern again for the Paris international exhibition in 1878, where a panorama from Lapland was widely applauded.

There were several models for Skansen at hand. A friend of Hazelius had drawn up plans for a folk park in Lund, but the park did not open until 1892, one year after Skansen. Hazelius had visited another such park in Norway composed of historical buildings belonging to Oscar II, king of Sweden, set on the grounds of the royal castle of Bygdøy outside Kristiania. The castle had been built in the new Götick style between 1847 and 1852, and the collection of antique rural buildings was started in 1881. It comprised a wooden church from Gol and other vernacular buildings that were directly imitated in Hazelius’s earliest project at Djurgården. (He had purchased Morastugan in Dalarna in 1885.)

This first proposal for a park at Djurgården was published in the Stockholm newspapers in 1890. It consisted of replicas of several buildings: Ornässtugan, which had been exhibited in Paris in 1867; the wooden church of Borgunds in Norway; and the storage room (fatburen) of Björkvik. Hazelius had been offered a small peninsula on the shore of the island of Djurgården, but he was not enthusiastic about the site, preferring a nearby rocky hill that commanded splendid views over Stockholm. On his first visit to Djurgården after he had acquired the site, Hazelius decided where he would locate Morastugan, Blekingestugan and Bolnhästugan (Fig. 8). He made no preparatory plans. When choosing a site he followed his intuition, and of course his very deep acquaintanceship with rural buildings in the Swedish countryside. Hazelius was very keen on landscaping, and during the first six years of

13 Georg Karlin had begun collecting a cultural history for the south of Sweden in 1882 but was unable to find a site in Lund until 1892, whereupon he opened Kulturen, the second oldest open-air museum in the world. It is still in operation.
construction planted six thousand trees, four thousand bushes, and one thousand rose bushes, as well as an abundance of lilies. The construction of a great number of roads at Skansen to memorialize Sweden’s national heroes of his own choice resulted in a rather dense settlement that bears little resemblance to Swedish farms, villages, cultivated land, or forest (Fig. 9).

Early visitors extolled the quality of the landscaping at Skansen. Gustaf af Geigerstam, in an 1892 article in the first issue of *Ord och Bild* (*Word and Image*), described a tour of Skansen and declared that the park demonstrated how diverse natural environments create diverse human tempers or characters within a nation, just as they create differences between national characters.

It felt like a dream to see this exhibition of the old Swedish life, as in a large folk poem, translated into reality that by its very order sets the powers of fantasy into motion. And all those who have been raised in the countryside or who love country life, will certainly undergo a similar experience when they visit this place.¹⁴

After reflecting on the deep relationship between the Lapps and reindeer life in their wilderness environment, Geigerstam noted,

And with such memories in mind one may leave Skansen, memories of the clear
nights in the wild, where cuckoos are singing and divers are reflected in the clear
waters of mountain lakes, into which foamy white torrents gush out of the moun-
tain slopes, and where eternal snow glitters in the red light of a vanishing sun. One
walks slowly down the steep slope. Stockholm lies at one’s feet, bathing in the rich
colored light of autumnal sun with the telephone tower standing out or shrouded
in misty shades, from which thousands of waves shine with their civilizing glitters.\textsuperscript{15}

He experienced almost sensuously the differences of customs and needs between the
people by studying the houses, their contents and their siting in the park. The houses and their

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
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furnishings showed, better than any written word might do, the deep relationship between the land and its inhabitants. This is why these structures were acknowledged as landscape representations by the intellectual elite in Sweden at the end of the nineteenth century.

Hazelius’s Approach to Landscape Architecture

The design of Skansen has set a precedent for a number of open-air museums in Sweden, and in that respect alone it can be seen as a contribution to park design even though its designer was not a landscape architect. Although the original layout has been changed several times and activities have evolved over the years, present-day Skansen has successfully maintained the spirit of Hazelius’s initial project. Indeed, because it was intended as a living memory of old Sweden adapted to contemporary culture, Skansen had to be an ever changing project. Hazelius himself was a highly cultivated man with a background in classical humanities. This may have helped him to forge a landscape design method for himself. His method was further developed by several of his successors who sought to create an attractive place for all Swedes to visit, to imitate Swedish places, and to be true to their models. In a way they shared Jean de la Fontaine’s definition of poetics: there is no rule but one—to please the audience.16 In this respect at least, they were faithful to the classical tradition.

Hazelius did not produce formal plans for the design of the park, but he was known for the very strict directions he gave personally on the site. He was clearly guided, over the years, by an effort to recreate (or at least to emulate) regional landscapes. Hazelius’s intent was to imitate Swedish nature as it ought to be in its most ordinary form around the types of building that he was exhibiting. The notion harkens back to the classical idea of imitation. At Skansen invention was spurned; faithful representation was attempted. Implicitly, however, the ideal of faithfulness acknowledges that perfect representation is unattainable: since perfect representation is impossible, therefore any representation is a renewed creation of an older precedent (Figs. 10, 11). Hazelius’s design principle derives from classical art theory reframed to substitute venerable Swedish traditions for the naturalistic ideals of classical antiquity. Besides imitation and invention, classical art theory demanded that a work of art convey expression, instruction as well as delight, and decorum in each representation.17 It is quite striking that the parallel extends to these three tenets as well, albeit in a very specific way for two of them.

“Expression” brought the sister arts, poetry and painting, together because their genius was thought to grow out of their ability to express human passions. This is the fundamental reason for Roger de Piles’s rejection of Dutch realistic landscape painting: it failed, he argued, to express deep human passions.18 It was expected from classical art that it would stir deep emotions and high moral reflection through its representation of intense human experiences. This certainly applies to Skansen, as the king’s lecture to Klement Larsson implied. In all the

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16 “Pleasing is always my main goal: in order to achieve it, I take a careful look at the taste of the century,” states the preface to “Amours de Psyché et Cupidon” (“The Tale of Psyche and Cupid” in Jean de la Fontaine, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: La Pleiade, Gallainard, 1958), 123.


18 Roger de Piles, Cours de peinture par principes (Painting Course according to Principles), reprint ed. (Geneva: Slatkine, 1969), 19.
buildings visitors are confronted with cultural artifacts that suggest the good life and the joys and miseries that many generations have experienced. Of course, passions of life can even be expressed in their own words by real folk who impersonate a long line of forefathers. Thus when chatting with them, a visitor would travel through time and compare his own way of life to mythical models. This approach to expression does not fit perfectly with the classical view. In paintings by Poussin, for instance, individual passions were supposed to be clearly depicted through gestures and facial features. At Skansen it is rather passions of a cultural group rather than those of a single individual that are evinced and offered for personal interpretation by each visitor. It is a people's passions rather than a person's passions that are presented.

The application of the classical tenets of instruction and delight to Skansen pose far fewer difficulties for they are as much part of the aesthetics of Skansen as they were of classical art. De Piles concluded a short introduction to his theory of painting with these words: “True painting must compel its beholder through the strength and the truthfulness of its imitation, and the beholder to his surprise must go to a painting as if he meant to engage in a discussion with the figures it represents. When it partakes of truthfulness, it seems that it attracts us only for the sake of our delight and of our instruction.”

The same idea applies to Skansen. Indeed Hazelius's followers have been keener than he himself was in their quest for truthfulness as means of delighting and instructing visitors. When Sigurd Erixon supervised the reconstruction of the Mora farmstead at Skansen, his insistence on

10. Skansen: Steeple of Häsjöstapel from Jämtland in winter

19 Ibid.
authenticity led him to demand that turf from Mora parish be used to cover the farmyard. Erixon’s quest for truthfulness implied also that decorum or appropriateness of all details to the time, circumstances, characters, and intentions that contribute to a representation be paid due respect. In Skansen it was clearly sought through archaeological truthfulness in all aspects of folk costume, farm outfits, interior decoration, architecture, or in the choice of language and accent of folk guides in each building, as well as in the appearance of manmade artifacts and of plants in the natural surroundings of each building.

In designing a landscape for each building at Skansen, Hazelius and his followers adopted a variant of classical art theory. When devising each particular landscape, they substituted the Swedish spirit embodied in regional folk artifacts for classical ideals embodied in Greek or Roman high art. Whether similar aesthetic principles are followed in contemporary theme parks is subject to debate.

Land, Landscape, and Culture

We ought to acknowledge, however, that Skansen as a whole does not seem to follow the principle of imitation: it bears no resemblance to Sweden or to Swedish landscapes if Sigurd Erixon, who became known as the Linnaeus of Swedish folk culture, came to work at Skansen in 1915. “It is telling of Sigurd Erixon’s fastidiousness that the well that belongs to Moragården by itself gave rise to a report on the history of wells and their construction.” See B. Lagercrantz, “Nordiska museet, Skansen och hembygdsrörelsens” (“Nordic Museum, Skansen, and the Folk Movement”), in Biörnstad, Skansen, 107. See also I. Tunander and A. Lindblom, “Skansen och kriget” (“Skansen and the War”), in Skansen, 107–8, for a discussion of the turf used in construction.
unless resemblance escapes our eyes (Fig. 12). For that reason one may wonder after all whether it constitutes a contribution to landscape architecture or is a mere collection of symbolic pearls strewn haphazardly. The word landscape in this context raises a vexing problem. Swedish language uses the word landskap with two very different meanings: either to designate a province, or to describe a place (or its representation) that is worthy of aesthetic appreciation. There are twenty-five landskap in the whole of Sweden, according to the first meaning, each of them populated by a nation different from all the others. Dalarna, for instance, as well as Skåne, Hälsingland, or Blekinge are some of these provinces, or nations, as they are called in Uppsala. Each of these provinces could be thought of as a social entity with its own traditions, tools, costumes, housewares, and architecture. The word landskap, then, refers both to the land and to its people. In Skansen, the houses of each landskap, with their decoration and lifesize dolls in folk dress are symbols or representations of a relationship between nature and culture. This representation calls upon a skillful use of rocks, waters, trees, bushes, and various prospects. At Skansen, it attests to its designer’s attention to landscape architecture that was subsequently emulated in other folk parks and in the landscaping of Stockholm by the main landscape architects of the city park department, in the 1930s and later (Fig. 13).21


12. Skansen: View from the rose garden toward the copy of a large steeple in Jämtland, Hästjöstapel. (right) The yellow house (Gula huset), built on the site ca. 1816, was the home of Hazelius until his death.
In order to assess Arthur Hazelius’s contribution to landscape architecture, we should be careful in defining the words that we use. We may no more confuse land management and landscape architecture, than we may confuse farmland and arcadia, a herdsman and a pastoral muse, or land and landscape. Landscape architecture is a special kind of land management that transforms land into landscape. This leaves us with the necessity to define what we mean by landscape. This is usually done in terms of painting, since etymologically the word landscape is believed to have originated as a genre of painting in the sixteenth century.22

Such a definition is obviously too narrow, since it precludes acknowledging garden design as a part of landscape architecture, as well as all landscape art in literature, painting, and mosaics from the Roman Empire.23 Let me suggest a very broad and simple definition: landscape is a cultural form, like language, religion, poetry, or painting. It adds symbolic value to a land by establishing a relationship of equivalence between nature and culture.24 In that sense, Virgil in the Bucolics, Philostratus in the Imagines, Salomon de Caus in the gardens of Heidelberg, André Le Nôtre at Vaux, and Claude Lorrain in his paintings created landscapes that belong to different cultures.25 With the exception of the last, however, Western culture does not acknowledge them as instances of landscape. But we are ready to accept a mountain site or a rocky seashore as perfect examples of a landscape, while this would have been utterly unacceptable to a seventeenth-century art critic such as de Piles.26 Landscape is a culturally bound concept, the meaning of which changes over time. So that we ought to study the culture of the intellectual elite to understand why they acknowledged the jumble of buildings at Skansen as a representation of Sweden that reached into the very depth of the nation’s inner life.

In the 1870s and 1880s there was much concern in Sweden about risks of secession with Norway, even to the extent that some feared war. This tension started to wane at the end of the 1880s. The most liberal members of the Swedish elite began acknowledging the righteousness of Norwegian claims to a separate identity. Hazelius’s Framnäs project, for example, featured two Norwegian buildings that were not included at Skansen three years later. By 1891 liberals were concentrating their interests upon Sweden and sought out even more so than before the quintessentially “Swedish.” A national romantic mood in Sweden superseded the old Nordic romantic mood.

This renewal of interest in Swedishness gave rise to a renaissance among young artists and young writers, who, each in their own way created images of the relationships between

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24 A stimulating definition of landscape along similar lines has been proposed by W. J. Thomas Mitchell in Landscape and Power (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.
25 Some of them express this equivalence relationship in situ, others in visu or in intellectu.
26 De Piles argues that landscape is a representation, not the object of representation: “Landscape is a genre of painting that represents the countryside and all things that can be met there.” See de Piles, Cours de peinture, 98.
Swedes and their land. Artists such as Bruno Liljefors, Karl Nordström, or the famous Prince Eugen established a visual landscape culture that became rapidly popular thanks to illustrations for newspaper special Christmas editions. But the most famous of all these artists is Carl Larsson.

More than any other Swedish artist of his time, Larsson contributed to the construction of an image of the mythical rural past of Sweden. He was a member of a generation of young men and women who felt a need for artistic changes and for renewed attitudes toward rural folklife. These young Swedish artists went to Grez-sur-Loing in France in order to be close to Jean François Millet. Upon his return to Sweden Carl Larsson bought a house in Dalarna, where he created a Swedish arcadia. He produced images of his life

27 Liljefors (1860–1939) was a Swedish landscape painter from Uppsala, who lived in France for 3 years and returned to paint wildlife in his province. Nordström (1855–1923) was a lyrical landscape painter with a strong interest in history and symbolism. Eugen (1865–1947) was a brother of King Gustaf V and a very much admired as a landscape painter, who was striving to express the peculiar mood of the Swedish landscape.

28 Larsson (1853–1919) was one of the most popular Swedish artists. He studied at the Academy of Arts in Stockholm before visiting France, where he painted landscapes in a small village in the vicinity of Fontainebleau. He returned to Sweden to live in Dalarna, where he produced the images of a mythical past of rural happiness.

29 Larsson published several books about his home life in Sundborn, which have been accepted as pictures of a Swedish ideal: De Mina (Mine) (Stockholm: Alb. Bonnier, 1894); Ett Hem åt solsidan (A Home in the Sun) (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1899); and Spadarvet (Crops) (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1906). See E. Eriksson, “Hemmet i Sundborn som svenskt hemnledningsideal” (“The Home at Sundborn as Ideal for Swedish Interiors”), in Carl Larsson, Catalog for an Exhibition on the 200th Anniversary of the National Gallery (Stockholm, 1992).
there and of his environment, showing family rituals, everyday life, relationships between servants and house-master, country people at work or tilling the land, visits to the church, outings into the forested countryside. These images were gathered in book form, offering every Swede a view of the good life. What they depicted, of course, was an idealized bourgeois life with immense appeal to an affluent bourgeois audience. The reasons for the appeal of Larsson’s pictures went deeper.

The influence of the Industrial Revolution was felt in the Nordic countries from the 1830s and 1840s with a growth of the population of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden from 2.4 million to 4.2 million. Yet, the industrial surge dates from the 1870s when the industry and the business share of the national economy began to grow at the expense of the rural economy. In Sweden, this brought about large changes, both in the population and in the landscape of the country: new economic forces were steering the course of country development, new social classes appeared, and large cultural changes took place. The urban bourgeoisie and the industrial working class (some of which, although not the majority, were living in cities) became the main actors of social change. Strikes and social unrest grew during the 1870s and reached crisis-points in 1879, when striking workers at Sundsvall were massacred by Swedish soldiers, and in 1892, when the question of voting rights came to the fore.30 The urban bourgeoisie stood to benefit from this new economic situation at the same time that it perceived the mass uprisings of the poor as a threat. For the bourgeoisie, rural ways of life represented a model of the good life in which all classes would live in peace, each according to its means and accepting the fate that God had bestowed. The affluent middle class subscribed to the ideal of a national identity embodied in folk culture, and they associated the countryside with the recovery of this national identity. Bourgeois culture demanded individual effort and the development of self-discipline and self-sufficiency.31 Actively contemplating nature, by walking, by hunting and fishing and later by emulating the self-sufficient peasant living in the forest or the fisherman on some isolated island, became a symbolic way for achieving self-respect among the bourgeoisie.32 Images of life in Dalarna by Carl Larsson provided a perfect model for this life, and for that reason they were the more enjoyable. Other artists as well contributed to the development of a culture that made various forms of aesthetic enjoyment of wild nature and of folk culture a source for the development of personal, bourgeois identity. Life in the countryside or treks in nature gave rise to ritual practices that allowed the development of similar emotions among these people; and works of art offered expressions of these emotions that could be shared with others and that fostered a sense of belonging to a


32 “Our art shall be . . . like our nature . . . . We shall pay attention to art for the sake of nature, not for the sake of art.” R. Bergh, “Svenskt konstnärskynne” (“The Character of Swedish Art”), in *Ord och Bild* (1900), 135.
common culture. Such processes aimed at grounding personal identity in national identity, in the same way that hunting elk or skiing alone were ways of achieving Swedishness by emulating ancient folk practices. Gustaf af Geigerstam wrote in 1898,

Why do we city dwellers enjoy so much being seen some time every year in the countryside? We need fresh air, we pine for a rest from city noises, street alarms, telephone rings, tramway bells, and steam whistles. We need to rest our nerves after the feverish winter activities, and the over-excitement of work. It is the primitive that we are looking for, the primitive and its pleasures.33

All these activities were seen as testimony to the links between Swedish nature and folk culture, since they could bring back bourgeois memories of typically Swedish experiences of nature. They were symbols of a landscape to be experienced rather than contemplated from a commanding hill in eighteenth-century fashion. Thus we are bound to see that the urban bourgeoisie’s holiday flights to nature that developed at the end of the nineteenth century was predicated upon a strong image that they shared of a relationship between Swedish nature, and the good old Scandinavian culture surviving in folk lives and in country lifestyles.

Folk architecture was as much a symbol of the Swedish landscape for the bourgeoisie

33 Geigerstam, “Hur tankarna komma och gå.”
as the paintings of home life in Dalarna by Carl Larsson, or the description of animal life all around Sweden by Selma Lagerlöf in Nils Holgersson (Fig. 14). All these symbols were to be found collected at Skansen organized so that Sweden’s diversity could be experienced like a trip in the country. In that respect, Skansen is a masterpiece of landscape architecture, at least from the perspective of Swedish bourgeois culture of the early twentieth century.

Modern Skansen

In 1929, twenty-eight years after Arthur Hazelius’s death, Andreas Lindblom was appointed head of Skansen. He wanted to follow in the steps of Hazelius, to contribute to the improvement of this national emblem, and to enhance its representation of Sweden. He also sought to follow the spirit of the present as much as Hazelius had during his own lifetime. Lindblom kept the public informed about new developments at Skansen and answered all criticisms published by the newspapers, being very careful to stay in touch with majority opinions. Since this was a time of momentous political change in Sweden, his policy had a strong impact upon changes in Skansen.

By the 1920s the wave of “national romanticism” was coming to an end. Hazelius had organized annual commemorative fetes in the honor of Gustav II Adolf and Karl XII. Andreas Lindblom discovered that these commemorations did not attract an audience large enough to be profitable, and he slowed down these efforts until he eventually ended the celebrations altogether (that of Karl XII in 1934 and Gustav II Adolf in 1946). Economic reasons similarly led him to cancel the spring fete.

Instead, in order to foster larger public support for Skansen, he followed three lines of policy. Since the Social Democrats increasingly favored voluntary associations and labor organizations, Lindblom involved these interests in organizing special parties in Skansen. In that way he established long-lasting connections between them and the park. He pursued an active development of dances in Skansen (six nights a week during the summer) and choir singing, when the general public was invited to come and sing (as many as four hundred thousand people participated during the summer); and he pursued a search for authenticity in the choice of buildings and of the site planning at Skansen.

The audience responded very favorably to this new policy. Attendance rose from eight hundred thousand visits a year before his appointment to more than two million visits a

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34 “The Director at Skansen was not thrifty with his answers. He would often send his replies on the following day [to the newspapers].” See Tunander and Lindblom, “Skansen och kriget” (as above, note 20), 99.

35 In 1932, Per Albin Hansson won a momentous electoral victory and established the first lasting Social Democratic government in the country.

36 Gustav II Adolf established a Swedish empire around the Baltic Sea and intervened in the Thirty Years War against the Austrian armies. He was killed in 1632 at the battle of Breitenfeld. Karl XII, an absolute king, waged war against Russia and after the battle of Narva in 1700 strengthened Swedish holds around the Baltic Sea. Defeated in 1709 and forced to flee for his life to Istanbul, he managed to return but was killed in 1715 during the siege of a Norwegian city. He is revered among a tiny group of neo-Nazis in Sweden in modern times.

37 Many of them are extremely important in Swedish life. See Hilding Johansson, Folkrörelserna i Sverige (Popular Movements in Sweden) (Stockholm: Sober, 1980).
year ten years later. The dance floor was open every evening in the summer (except Mon-
days) and it came to be known as the largest parenthood office in the country. Skansen,
which had been applauded among conservative circles at the time of its creation, now
came under their attack. In 1943 six deputies from the Union of Peasants (and even some
Social Democrats) publicly criticized the dancing, claiming that “there is a real danger that
Jazz and pleasure industries may, using Skansen as a model, infiltrate even the small culture
parks.”38 They proposed that the state pay forty thousand Swedish crowns annually in com-
pensation to Skansen for stopping the dances; the offer was turned down.

The criticism of Skansen signals the awareness by conservative elites of the advent of
mass culture that was ushered by the Social Democrats’ egalitarian policies in Sweden. Mass
concerts started in 1935. Large rallies of provincial associations, folk organizations, trade
unions (Fig. 15), and state and business organizations use Skansen as a meeting ground to
this day. Thus Skansen has come to reflect modern concerns and contemporary debates
(Fig. 16). Yet this has not been detrimental to its function as a living museum of Swedish
landscapes. To the contrary: Lindblom started replacing the lifesize dolls at Skansen with
real people in folk costume, who would tell stories about life in “their” province or spin the
wool of their sheep, bake their bread in the oven. Skansen became a living museum (Fig.
17). The range of its buildings broadened: urban buildings were brought from Stockholm;
in 1930, more buildings from Mora were assembled around Morastugan to show an entire
farm; a new farm, Delsborgård from Hälsingland was added in 1940 and stood as the
crown piece of the “Swedish acropolis,” as the prefect Arthur Engberg called Skansen in his
inauguration speech.39 During World War II, Skansen became a national symbol and a site
of civil defense meetings. Yet everyday life went on, and the crowds enjoyed Skansen as the
best leisure place in the capital city. In 1944 the Social Democrat newspaper, Dagens Nyheter,
wrote that Skansen was “the ideal folk park of all Sweden” (Fig. 18). This raises a fairly
broad question: how did an elite landscape culture become a mass culture?

From Elitist Museum to Mass Culture Park

Skansen was not originally intended to satisfy popular demands in Stockholm. Rather,
it was constructed for the delight and education of the ruling classes, the industrial bour-
geoisie, the landed gentry and their university allies. Yet it was intended also to win the
ideological allegiance of the working classes. The call for a greater respect for tradition
betrayed fears that the political status quo might be broken. Thus it is not surprising to
observe that Hazelius raised funds for development of Skansen from the government and,
significantly, from rich and noble families in Stockholm. Most pageants and festival days
looked back to old customs: the bonfires of Walpurgis Night, Whit-Sunday, Midsummer

38 See Tunander and Lindblom, “Skansen och kriget”(as above, note 20), 103.
39 Arthur Engberg had been the prefect (landsbygden) of Västernorrlands Län, an administrative region
in the northwest of the country, since 1940. He is remembered as the man behind the creation of the Social
Democratic schools for popular education (folk högskolor) in 1888 and later as a minister of churches in the
Swedish government.
15. Skansen: Fishermen’s feast

16. Poster of energy conservation policies at Skansen
Day, Santa Lucia’s Day, Christmas, New Year’s Day, as well as celebration days dedicated to national heroes: Gustav II Adolf and Karl XII. They included the anniversary of the accession to the Swedish throne by Gustav Vasa, the liberator from Danish power in 1523, an event celebrated for the first time in Swedish history at Skansen on 6 June 1892. Thereafter it became the national flag day, and since 1983 has been Sweden’s national day. The same kind of intent underlies the multiplicity of named paths throughout the park. Their short length is assumed to have resulted from Hazielius’s wish to celebrate too many Swedish glories for such a small place.

To finance the maintenance of the open-air museum Hazielius organized spring celebrations in Skansen with the help of well-to-do Stockholm ladies, who were asked to come with their servants and daughters in folk costume and to run a shop in which they sold lots of small things that they had to provide, donating their earnings to Skansen. Hazielius established a range of entertainment: for coffeeshops, storytellers in the streets, musical performances, and folk dancing. His aim was to get the support of one hundred ladies running at least fifty shops. He also called on affluent sponsors to donate funds for the purchase and relocation of old buildings to Skansen. He succeeded in persuading a celebrated military band to play for free in the park: in 1897 alone they gave one hundred sixty-nine concerts. These events were open to the public at large and they attracted a growing audience, to the point that yearly visits rose from three hundred fifty thousand to six hundred thousand during his lifetime.

On Arthur Hazielius’s death, his son Gunnar took over the leadership of Skansen. He
wanted to make Skansen into a public meeting place for a variety of organizations but particularly political organizations. He made a first attempt in 1902; when he allowed a liberal spokesman to deliver a powerful discourse advocating freedom of speech. This brought such a reaction from the right wing that Gunnar Hazelius’s opponents were able to impose censorship by the National Council for Museums upon all programs for meetings held in Skansen. This outlawed all events in which the Social Democrats took part. Moreover, in 1907 the right-wing press campaigned successfully for a so-called citizen feast to be held in Skansen on 1 May as an open challenge to the trade-union rally that was taking place on the same day at Ladegård.\(^{40}\) Skansen was transformed into a bourgeois stronghold pitted against the working-class socialists. Its landscapes with their theatrical devices were most meaningful for visitors, since they upheld reactionary values and ideologies that they revered and attempted to propagate. The *genius loci* was made into an advocate for right-wing politics.

Political changes took place in Sweden in the early 1930s, and the new director of Skansen, Andreas Lindblom, was able to take advantage of these changes. In an effort to broaden the audience he opened Skansen to all organizations and succeeded in developing strong ties with workers’ unions and with popular movements supported by the Social Democrats. This changed the sponsors and the kinds of events that were taking place in Skansen, but it did not require any significant changes in the museum collections: ever

\(^{40}\) Lagercrantz, “Nordinska museet,” 86.
since Arthur Hazelius’s time a continuous effort had been made to move the poorest people’s houses into Skansen. The collection grew steadily, and in order to make Skansen more geographically representative of a miniature Sweden, Lindblom reshuffled a number of buildings. He located the Lapp Camp at the north end of Skansen, and all buildings belonging to the northern provinces of central Sweden, Hälsingland, and Dalarna close by. He strove to build up entire farmsteads, including the farm animals and the fields to sustain them, instead of moving only one building at a time. He broadened the scope of the building collection by developing an old townscape within Skansen (Fig. 19), as well as bringing in the castle of Skogaholm.

Thus the biggest changes that took place under his direction accentuated the features of Hazelius’s landscape architecture as much as they altered the kind of social events that took place in Skansen and their relationship to the dynamics of social and political life in the country. Such a combination of continuity in landscape aesthetic and changes in the policy for staging events made an elitist open-air museum into a mass-culture theme park. Its audience grew from six hundred thousand to more than two million visitors a year during his tenure. Ever since, Skansen has been an epitome of Sweden, a country whose citizens consider themselves the world’s preeminent nature lovers. The same forms and the same features of landscape architecture that had supported a reactionary view of Swedish society had assumed entirely different meanings.

If you ever go to Sweden, your first visit to Stockholm should include Skansen (Fig. 19).
20. Visitors should follow the king’s advice and take a look from above, over Skansen (that is, over the landscape of Sweden), and over Stockholm, and then “see the joy of the playful waves, and the beauty of shining shores. One should fall under the charm of the place!”

One might spare a thought as well for old Klement Larsson, the poor wretch who fancied that it would be better to live in the poor people’s asylum in his parish rather than be a part of Sweden’s landscape at Skansen, the nostalgic fiddler who could not confuse the real world with its representation. Such a lack of aesthetic judgment would be unbecoming of a modern visitor to a wonderful theme park!

41 Lagerlöf, Nils, 414.
The Museum and the Joy Ride:

Williamsburg Landscapes
and the Specter of Theme Parks

Edward A. Chappell

Why the planners of a symposium and book on theme parks would invite a contribution from an architectural historian working at Colonial Williamsburg is a little frightening to consider. Fellow author Marc Treib offered his own blunt explanation by saying, “Because, Ed, you work for a theme park” (Fig. 1). Everything is relative. The cynic’s dismissive view that Williamsburg is little more than popular entertainment rapidly lost credence when the specter of Disney’s America loomed over northern Virginia. Williamsburg seemed to be reborn as the symbol of virtuous realism, as pure as the driven snow. Yet there remains the sobering remark by English archaeologist Maurice Barley that the planners of York’s Jorvic Viking Centre were inspired by Colonial Williamsburg and Disney World. The Virginia museum itself toyed with Disney comparisons in a series of satiric print and television advertisements run, to considerable acclaim, in 1997 and 1998. For that matter, could Disney World’s popular breakfast-with-Goofy program have some connection with the Williamsburg opportunity for tea with Martha Washington? One can only imagine who a Christian theme park would have over for supper.

It is quite possible that some theme park techniques—like sanitizing history or conflating time and place—were appropriated from museums, which have also been known to simplify the past and stereotype groups of people. Museums have plenty of experience telling banal stories, obscuring the tough, complex, fascinating elements of life with platitudes about aesthetic style and technological progress. Open-air museums too often substitute theming of old-time life for a more nuanced portrayal of the diverse lives actual people experienced.

There are nonetheless profound differences, far beyond the definitional distinction that the theme parks’ objective is profit while museums have the twofold objective of education and preservation—preservation of buildings, objects, landscapes, species, records,

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or skills. Or the fact that museums generally lack anthropomorphic animals with big heads. Quite obviously, things tend to happen faster in theme parks, at least when one isn’t waiting in line. The participant is urged along, gets a kick, then heads off toward the next kick. The kicks are pretty superficial, offering quick recognition in favor of thought-provoking perspective. Certainly action overwhelms reflection. Movement tends to be less controlled in museums, and rides are not the chief means of showing off landscapes and motivating pedestrian movement. Yet there may be some lessons to learn that can enliven museum

planning as well as help define what museums may best avoid. Action and lively entertainment are not evil. Both can cultivate learning as well as generate income.\(^2\) For me, uncritical theming is the crucial issue. Museums should be free to use as much action, surprise, and excitement as useful to stir interest and activate thinking. The high road can be a fast lane. But trotting out popular themes simply because they are soothing and attractive—emphasizing them without a clear educational or preservation objective—is to decline into the commercial realm of theme parks. This is a more fundamentally fearful specter.

**Museums and Theming**

A point essential to thinking critically about the development of Colonial Williamsburg and museum restoration or reconstruction efforts in general—and one that helps to define differences and similarities with theme parks—is that museums creating portraits of life in the past tend to follow conflicting impulses. On the one hand, the educational impetus and a sense of professionalism and honesty spur museum planners to speak truthfully about what has been learned and employ all the direct evidence that rigorous research brings to light. On the other hand, there is a terribly strong impulse to tell an appealing story, create a charming portrait and maintain the seductive links to the traditional culture museums or theme parks, their bad-boy relatives.\(^3\) While museums conscientiously preserve and reproduce fragmentary details of past life, the larger contours of how a community looked can be lost in the free replication of selected elements. As David Lowenthal once remarked in Williamsburg, middle-class Americans seem uniquely wedded to the image of a progressive history, to an optimistic story of development from a happy pre-industrial past to an ever-improving future.\(^4\) History museums bought heavily into progressive interpretations and have been slow to shift their orientation.

American museums began to grapple with dangerous stories outside a Ward-and-June-Cleaver, Panglossian view in the 1980s, but some prominent institutions have recently backed away from almost anything that is controversial.\(^5\) Theme parks are indeed related to museums

\(^2\) Among the most remarkable attempts to present history in a museum setting with fast rides and big sight-and-sound shows was the Valentine Museum’s Riverside effort in Richmond, Va. One wonders if it was not the scale at which race relations were addressed as well as financial overextension that doomed what some called a “McHistory” venture to survive less than 1 year. Hank Burchards, “Down by the Riverside,” *Washington Post*, 3 February 1995, Weekend section, p. 51; Bill McKelway, “Reality Clips Museum Wings,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 13 February 1995, 1A, 8A.

\(^3\) Anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable see institutional interest in charming and seemingly unbiased presentation—what they call “good vibes”—as a principal impediment to helping museum-goers consider social conflict in the past. See *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, N.C., 1997), 220–35.

\(^4\) David Lowenthal, conversation with Colonial Williamsburg Foundation educational staff, 13 May 1996.

in this regard because they more obviously select elements of real or fantasy worlds and turn them into a hyper-reality that is fun, or safely frightening to experience, but seldom disputatious. Like movies, they incorporate more excitement, more sweeping visual impact, than we normally experience in the real world. In Orlando, Fla., Disney’s Animal Kingdom offers fantasy with an environmental theme, using 3-D bug’s eye films shown inside a fourteen-story concrete-and-steel Tree of Life. Dinosaurs charge kids on the bus traveling through Countdown to Extinction; then the kids can chase elephant poachers in Kilimanjaro Safari. “Visitors can expect the unexpected” on central Florida’s Serengeti, but presumably not the mechanical spear-chucking natives that delighted an earlier generation at Disneyland. Billy Hancock, a Kentucky truck driver, compared his visit to the Grand Canyon with the IMAX Theater version and observed, “You can see more of it, more stuff in the movie.” Disney’s Hall of Presidents producer Rick Rothschild observed, “You can’t go anywhere else in the world and see all forty-two presidents at once.” Visitors can be equally assured that no controversial words will flow from the animatronic presidents’ lips.

Reflection rather than rapid-fire recognition is the preferred response of museums, and they often solicit these reflections by using objects. Most of the objects can’t be ridden or even touched. Antique silver wares and boxwood alleés placed in particular museum settings are used to evoke specific intellectual responses, thus granting museums more power to cultivate the thoughts of their visitors.

While their educational intentions are much loftier and their financial expectations more modest, open-air museums can easily slip into creating themed scenes and experiences. My definition of themed experience is one in which an element—often lifted from past or present reality—is projected out of proportion. The theme is borrowed from a different time or place and is promiscuously spread across new settings with minimal concern given to its role in the historical context or as a component in a larger social or political setting. Three disparate examples come to mind.

European open-air museums commonly show visitors a fantasized folk world in which each peasant house is brightly colored and filled with delightful objects. Cupboards groan under the weight of polychrome earthenware, and embroidered fabrics reach to the primly finished roof. Even in eastern Europe, where such museums once taught lessons about the poverty of life in the presocialist dark ages, it’s as though every house and yard were tended by some Romanian Martha Stewart.

Likewise, there may be more underage fife-and-drum corps in lockstep along the streets of American history museums than participated in the entire American Revolution. Such marching musician extravaganzas may be more appropriate for a high school football game than a colonial town, yet to suggest diminishing their ranks would be viewed as dour if not downright unpatriotic. It is no surprise that fife-and-drum corps have recently been

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given the job of stirring emotions and moving crowds at theme parks as well as museums. They have become a marketable commodity in their own right, needing no context beyond a public setting in which to perform.

Finally, in America, blacksmith shops and gristmills can provide a quick and reliable means of evoking a simpler time without substantially addressing the nature of life in the communities where they once stood. A blacksmith shop at the Dollywood theme park in the Great Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee is much like those at many open-air museums, this one engendering nostalgia for the humble mountain home from which Dolly Parton rose to country music stardom. The two-room Parton house also has been recreated at the park, in a manner vaguely reminiscent of a tenant farmer’s house reassembled inside a museum gallery in the Smithsonian’s powerful show “Field to Factory,” recounting the story of African-American migration to northern cities between the world wars. One is overtly kitsch and the other as provocative as a Walker Evans photograph because of their present contexts, though the details barely differ.

Recreating Williamsburg

So certain distinctions between museums and theme parks can be fuzzy, defined by perspective as much as appearance. Yet appearances are fundamental to the life of a museum, as richly illustrated by Williamsburg’s long-running appeal. Its scale and careful elaboration make it a genuinely pleasing place to be. The visual charm of Virginia’s restored colonial capital is a subject worth considering in the context of modern popular culture. I propose to summarize how Colonial Williamsburg developed as a museum and travel destination and to focus particular attention on aspects of its landscape that may be more themed than critically examined. One pertinent revelation is that the landscape may have become less considered, more predictable as the institution evolved. The objective is to help understand how the famous museum came to look as it does and to ponder how it could develop in the future. Part of what keeps museums vital is fair but aggressive reexamination, an educational glasnost. These observations are offered in that spirit.

The invention and use of Colonial Williamsburg, beginning in the 1920s, are a prominent example of how modern history museums have come about. The attraction of visiting historic sites was nothing new in the early decades of the twentieth century. Benson Lossing published his *Pictorial Field-book of the American Revolution* for travelers and armchair explorers in 1855, and by 1858 Mount Vernon was drawn into the safe arms of an organization intent on preserving and offering it for public tours. Civil War battlefields and cemeteries

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became favorite objects of travelers’ attention during the 1880s. Other popular preservation efforts followed, most of them associated with the country’s early leaders, military history, and handsome old buildings. Historic towns such as Yorktown, Va., and Annapolis, Md., often attracted history-minded visitors without the aid of public relations firms or, at times, even much interest from the locals.11

The restoration and preservation of Williamsburg were grounded in similar antiquarian and patriotic concerns, as well as a broader popular interest in regional culture. The town’s aged edifices had long been the object of travelers’ curiosity, and its role in events leading to the Revolutionary War—as well as elements of the Union’s 1862 Peninsula Campaign to end the Civil War—were widely known (Fig. 2). The idea for it, which the visionary Reverend William A. R. Goodwin sold to patron John D. Rockefeller Jr. about what to do with the rich collection of surviving old buildings and a blue-chip past, was dramatically expansive. Goodwin imagined recasting the modern community in its eighteenth-century form. Telephone lines, gas stations, even cars might disappear. Old buildings would be carried back to their ancient state, and lost structures would reappear. The past would be pleasing as well as educational to visit because restoration would return the town to the halcyon days before the industrial age took its ugly toll.12

Goodwin selected and Rockefeller approved the Boston architectural office of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn to begin planning in 1927, and the firm recommended Arthur A. Shurcliff as landscape designer (Fig. 3).13 Shurcliff worked in the Brookline, Mass., office of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot from 1896 to 1905, participating in designs for the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., and the Boston public parks. Shurcliff’s own office handled major commissions for public spaces, primarily in Boston.14 His was a smaller office than the architects’, and he personally oversaw development of each design feature to a degree that William Graves Perry, Thomas Mott Shaw, and Andrew Hepburn could not. Shurcliff often dealt directly with Rockefeller—with or without the architects’ concurrence—and Rockefeller generally found him a persuasive partisan. He worked on Williamsburg landscapes under an open contract until 1934, when he changed to a series of assigned projects, and he reviewed designs after his successor Alden Hopkins was appointed resident landscape architect in 1941. Williamsburg was Shurcliff’s largest commission.15

Both Shurcliff and the architectural staff pursued the project as a grand design problem. They carefully learned and applied a regional and period idiom without much perception of the community’s social composition and the broad spectrum of quality once reflected in its buildings and landscape. Their care in design and craftsmanship is inestimably superior

12 The influential architectural historian Fiske Kimball made the point in a 1927 letter to Goodwin that “Williamsburg in its heyday . . . must have been a vision of Colonial beauty” and that the restoration should proceed with an eye for good design as well as accuracy “to work scrupulously in the style of the very time and place, yet with artistic sensitiveness.” Kimball to Goodwin, 19 November 1927, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.

13 Perry to Goodwin, 30 January 1928, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives; “The Reminiscences of William Graves Perry” (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1956), 97–98. Shurcliff changed his name from Shurtleff several years into the project; therefore, I use the later form, which he employed for most of his Williamsburg career, for the sake of simplicity.


to that of themed environments in commercial parks, but the result has some of the same Potemkin village qualities.  

The coming of the American Revolution was the central story, and the scenes of those early stirrings received initial attention: the lost Virginia Capitol, Raleigh Tavern, an ammunition magazine, and—to a lesser extent—the governor’s residence. Rockefeller spoke reverentially about the opportunity to restore the Williamsburg of the eighteenth-century patriots, “as though we were walking on hallowed ground.” But both Goodwin and Rockefeller had a more complex vision, one that portrayed a wider group of characters than the founding fathers and the foil of a few loyalists. Goodwin even envisioned


17 “John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s Address to the Joint Assembly, 24 February 1934,” Journals of the House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia (Richmond, Va., 1934), 16. Rockefeller used the same turn of phrase in a letter of 21 May 1931 to Mrs. George P. Coleman in response to her letter representing the Plantation Ladies’ Advisory Committee of the Williamsburg Restoration, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.
tourists exchanging their autos for wagons at the edges of the town. Once inside they would encounter tableaux from past times:

A cart driven by an old [N]egro; an ox-cart standing by a water trough; a stagecoach with coachman, footman, and driver, standing in front of the Tavern and used when desired to drive tourists around; a group of men clad in the semblance of Colonial costume under the trees, with a hunting dog and with their guns, as though discussing the chase. (These men might serve as watchmen or in some other needed capacity.) Those and other such scenes were as familiar in the olden days, as the boxwood, the flowers, the lampposts, and the signs we are recalling.18

Williamsburg’s Inspirations

Although a handful of European open-air museums such as Skansen in Sweden had celebrated the folk life of their respective nations or regions, Viollet-le-Duc had freely restored the French city of Carcassone, and Santa Fe, N.M., had begun its transformation into a Hispanic–Native American tourist destination, Goodwin’s vision was new for an American history museum. There were, in fact, no clear prototypes for such a museum that the planners could follow. The absence of direct models is exemplified by the fact that

18 Goodwin to Col. Arthur Woods, 11 October 1930, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives. Also Goodwin to John D. Rockefeller III, 3 March 1934, 1–2, on the need for “truthful reproductions of costumes worn by people in different stages of authority and position” as part of a “theatrical appeal to the imagination” in Williamsburg, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.
architects rather than historians and educators were the chief planners on site in the early years.

Seventy years ago, private estates and art museums were closer analogies than theme parks. I have recently suggested in a paper co-authored with Marley Brown that estate gardens like Beatrice Farrand’s were a model for Shurcliff’s Williamsburg plans. The town was treated like a ruling-class garden, with a single designer developing diverse elements that were internally complete and comprehensible—like a maze or a water garden—but that had relationships with one another, creating an integrated whole. One of the pleasures of Williamsburg’s gardens (Fig. 4) is the opportunity to walk from one to the next without reentering the street, just as one can walk from the rose garden to the English border at Dumbarton Oaks. The experience of moving through varied but linked decorative gardens is much more like visiting an estate than it would be like visiting an eighteenth-century town where obstacles blocked direct movement from one property to the

5. George Campbell’s drawing of a fence design used for the Prentis House, 27 August 1934 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)


20 William Welles Bosworth, principal architect of the Rockefellers’ Kykuit garden at Pocantico Hills, N.Y., observed that “each feature is a part of the whole and linked together with it.” Shurcliff was employed to make changes to the Kykuit garden in the late 1930s, when John D. Rockefeller Jr. prepared to move there. A. R. Roberts and C. Altman, *The Rockefeller Family Home, Kykuit* (New York, 1998), 141–43.
next and few of the sites would be so well planned or tended. In terms of circulation, it is much more like an estate garden than a theme park, where movement is highly manipulated and customers are not continually encouraged to stop and leisurely contemplate the scene.

A more abstract model for creating the history museum at Williamsburg was the art museum. John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife Abby Aldrich Rockefeller were art collectors, and both were instrumental in establishing art museums. Certainly Arthur Shurcliff and his architectural counterparts thought of themselves as artists. Shurcliff in particular presented himself as the charming yet eccentric aesthete, a sort of James McNeill Whistler crossed with Carl Larsson. William Perry talked at length of Shurcliff’s eccentricities and remarked, “But he’s a poet.” One of the restoration’s influential early advisors was R. T. H. Halsey, curator of the American wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The art museum model is relevant because each physical element of the town functioned as a piece of art that could be enjoyed individually while being seen as part of a much larger gallery. The stocks and pillory, the town pump, paved walks, and countless animal hitching posts were all carefully designed by architects or landscape architects in a way that reflected their remarkable interest in the visual qualities of the town. Few things were left in the rough and undecorated state that characterized many buildings and other features of pre-industrial landscape.

Colonial Williamsburg’s resident architect, A. Edwin Kendrew, later observed that John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s experience with planning and maintaining the family’s expansive gardens in Cleveland and Potantico Hills made him more confident to participate in landscape than architectural decisions at Colonial Williamsburg. The Rockefellers enjoyed visiting the Colonial Williamsburg gardens so much that they thought it unnecessary to develop more extensive formal plantings at their own Williamsburg house, Bassett Hall. The Reminiscences of A. Edwin Kendrew (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1993), 1197–99 and 1208–09.

The couple had famously different tastes in art. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller was adventurous and committed to nontraditional art. She led in the founding of the Museum of Modern Art and gave a collection of 1,800 pieces of folk art to Colonial Williamsburg in 1939. Between 1955 and 1956, her husband built a half block from the historic area the present Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum to house these and other folk art objects. His own taste ran to period objects, notably oriental porcelain, and representational academic art, illustrated by his funding of the Cloisters (part of the Metropolitan Museum in New York) and old world museums. Bernice Kert, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family (New York: Random House, 1993), esp. 265–426, 449–56, and 473–76.

The Reminiscences of William Graves Perry, 100. Goodwin made the point that these were artists at work in a touching admonition to the restoration’s president: “Mr. Macomber [resident head of Colonial Williamsburg’s architectural office], as highly developed artists generally are, is a temperamental sensitive nature, and would, I am sure, be encouraged to an even finer self-expression if occasionally he could receive some expression of appreciation from those whose interests he, as an artist, is seeking to serve.” Goodwin to Col. Arthur Woods, 11 October 1933, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives. Thomas Mott Shaw, who never considered the principal artist among his partners, nonetheless drew beguiling sketches of picturesque, informal Williamsburg scenes. Much of the design was produced by staff in the firm’s partnerless drafting room in Williamsburg, and the draftsmen were long judged by their abilities to produce handsome drawings. The principal idiom was the town, of course, not the drawings. Colonial Williamsburg between 1945 and 1946 acquired a selection of Shaw’s historic area sketches, now in Special Collections, John D. Rockefeller Library.
Every house and shop was beautifully planned and crafted. Who, after all, would deliberately put bad paintings in an art gallery? The outbuildings were wrought with nearly equal care, far better than most of their eighteenth-century predecessors. All the ensembles were handsomely framed with plantings and fences (Fig. 5). Virtually all the plants were either dramatically shaped or harmoniously colored. Scruffy grass and volunteer trees were kept to a minimum and even those rough edges allowed in the 1930s and 1940s were smoothed away in the Eisenhower era of the 1950s. Shurcliff used the term picture to describe the ensembles, and “painting the picture” became a common phrase among Rockefeller and the staff. Goodwin referred to “creating the frame” of the chief exhibition sites. Fences, like picture frames, came in dozens of varieties and were kept low, so that visitors could glimpse various yards and gardens at once. While many eighteenth-century fences were as high as five or six feet, those in the twentieth-century restored area were built in the range of three and a half to four feet.

It is a mistake to judge the result as fatuous and “phony,” as Ada Louise Huxtable has done relentlessly, applying 1960s anticcape preservation sentiments to a largely older museum creation. Such dismissal ignores the extent of surviving original buildings and objects woven together with carefully conceived twentieth-century elements that have acquired their own historical importance. Goodwin, Rockefeller, and the designers sincerely sought to recreate a particular eighteenth-century place, essentially as they believed it had looked. The planners and their advisers quickly gave up the initial thought of moving old buildings in from the countryside to occupy the sites of lost Williamsburg buildings and of shifting the locations of some survivors in town.

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26 On lawn maintenance, Branch Bocock to Kenneth Chorley, 30 November 1932, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives. While the planners seem never to have remarked on the more vigorously and completely cropped landscape in the 1950s, the shift is evident in period photographs, and into the 1980s the borders along vegetable beds retained grass worthy of any contemporary American suburb.
28 Revised Fence Folder, 18 April 1946, Architecture and Engineering Department Files, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Fences and Gates, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Architectural Office, ca. 1941. These 2 bound sets of drawings codify more than 40 varieties of fences then found in the historic area.
30 There was discussion between 1928 and 1929 about moving in rural buildings to replace missing ones of comparable size, but the idea was given up soon after 2 houses, Belle Farm in Gloucester County, Va., and Liberty Hall in Hanover County, Va., were demolished and their parts taken to Williamsburg. Neither was ever put up in the historic area. Three 18th-century Williamsburg houses were moved when their sites were destroyed or threatened, and all 3 spent some time on new sites within the restoration zone. One, the Travis House, was moved back to its original site when the property was transferred to the foundation and given historic area status. The other 2 remain on a modern-era street near the restoration area.
Realities and Delights

The rigor of research and its application to the public product can serve to limit museums’ uncritical production of charm. Since 1928 there has been a sustained effort by researchers to illuminate the physical character of the early town and to follow the explicit evidence. While early archaeology and investigation of surviving buildings were rudimentary by today’s standards, the architects tried to follow where evidence seemed to lead them.

Richard Handler and Eric Gable have suggested that changes in pursuit of veracity reveal Colonial Williamsburg is corporately obsessed with crafting an armor of “authenticity” to guard against the theme park label. I would argue that research and restoration at the museum are directed toward ideas and means of presenting them to the public rather than as simple demonstrations of accuracy, although a tradition of trying to get the picture right can be healthy for a history museum in general.31 There are remarkable and oft-told stories of adjustments being made to bring buildings into line with new findings. The most famous examples are the changes made to the rear wall and roof of the main building at the College of William and Mary after materials were ordered and the restoration was under-

way, when researcher Mary Goodwin found front and rear images on an eighteenth-century engraving plate in the Bodleian Library at Oxford in 1929.32

In the last fifteen years, the structure for John Greenhow’s store (dubbed Greenhow Store) has been remodeled to reflect new fieldwork, and a large gritty blacksmith operation has replaced a Shurcliff boxwood garden on the James Anderson property. Twentieth-century foundation plantings have recently been removed from exhibition houses and from properties facing Palace Green and Market Square, which are surrounded largely by original buildings. Most pervasive have been changes of color. Colonial Williamsburg has actively sought to employ early colors found by investigation of paint layers since the 1920s, and many changes were made to address new ideas about exterior colors in the 1950s and 1960s.33 Since the mid-1980s, microscopic pigment and media analysis has enhanced the ability to recognize early colors and to understand their often complex sequence within buildings. These findings are implemented, whether they indicate bright primary colors or the muted hues for which Colonial Williamsburg is best known.34 Repainting the town’s largest house dark red to match its seeming 1770s hue was an effort to enhance reality, not a subtle attempt at public relations.

Each generation views the eighteenth-century community through lenses tinted by their own intellectual perspectives, and admittedly the early planners structured the evidence they found with Beaux-Arts and Arts-and-Crafts perceptions of design. Shurcliff’s plan for the Governor’s Palace garden has an unmistakable Beaux-Arts quality in the ordering of the garden elements, as well as the style of presentation drawing. Copies of Johannes Kip’s late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century aerial views of English country houses and their settings were available to Shurcliff, and his bird’s-eye views of alternate schemes for the formal rear and western gardens and an apparent orangery clearly make reference to the style of Kip’s engravings (Fig. 6).35 This was not the only case in which skillful twentieth-century designers saw connections with period sources arguably more refined than Williamsburg conditions.36 Shurcliff’s prediction that his holly maze in the Palace gardens


35 Shurcliff once curiously cautioned against following Kip’s views too literally because they show plantings of young trees rather than at mature stages of their lives. Arthur Shurcliff, “A Comparison of the Williamsburg Palace Grounds Layout with the Layouts of English Places of the Same General Type and Period . . . ,” Boston, 1 September 1932, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives, 139.

7. William Campbell's drawing of Shurtleff's hedge design, "The Twelve Apostles," beside the diamond-shaped beds like those shown in a ca. 1740 view of the Governor's Palace, from an engraving plate found in the Bodleian Library, January 1933 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

8. Archaeological drawing of Continental Army graves in the Governor's Palace garden, 1930 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
Edward A. Chappell

would delight visitors in spite of the absence of historical basis foreshadows theme park planning, as do the “Twelve Apostles,” large cylindrical hedges that Disney might name for animated movie characters (Fig. 7).

Yet the garden plans are developed from known elements of the Palace’s eighteenth-century state.37 The Bodleian copper plate’s elevated view of the Palace as well as archaeological findings show that Virginia colonists were not dreaming when they criticized Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spottswood’s expensive 1715–20 embellishments of the Palace grounds.38 Shaped walls enclosed the front and side courtyards, the former enriched with elaborate iron gates between piers supporting lion and unicorn figures. A fence with three-dimensional wrought-iron plant forms screened a view from the formal rear garden toward the governor’s pasture or park. The rear parterres were broken by low terraces and framed by brick walls with diamond-set piers. Brick privies at the outer corners were also sited with a diagonal orientation. Walks on axis with a mound covering a semisubterranean icehouse on the northwest and brick steps descending further terraces to the west indicated formal arrangements beyond the ensemble shown on the copper plate. Most remarkable in terms of evidence was the suggestion of parterres along the secondary axis outlined by the graves of one hundred fifty-six Continental Army soldiers (Fig. 8).39 While we may now question Shurcliff’s assumption that this and associated squares were decorative rather than vegetable gardens, and recognize his straight-sided canal as an optimistic reading of the irregular terrain, the designers and the Architect’s Advisory Committee actively rejected a truly single-minded Beaux-Arts scheme that the aspiring draftsman A. Gary Lambert and archaeologist Herbert S. Ragland proposed in 1932 (Fig. 9).40 In short, the Palace garden weaves together somewhat fantastical features meant to delight visitors with major structural elements rigorously based on physical and documentary evidence from the eighteenth century. This is true of some buildings as well as the landscape.

Arthur Shurcliff Gardens, 1929–41: Imagineering

Nevertheless, gardens march to a special beat. Because of their ephemeral nature and popular appeal, decorative Williamsburg landscapes are particularly prone to theming out of proportion to their historical precedents. Let me begin with a small illustration. Goodwin and the architects had seen old gates fitted with self-closing devices that involve hanging an iron ball from a chain attached to the gate and an adjacent post. We know that some such contraptions were used in early Virginia. Recently, for example, a vintage photograph turned

9. A. Gary Lambert and Herbert S. Ragland’s proposal for the Governor’s Palace grounds based on symmetrical placement of features and geometric diagrams, drawn by Singleton Peabody Moorehead, 25 June 1932 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

10. Thomas Mott Shaw’s pencil drawing of the Governor’s Palace, with a fence and gate at the Robert Carter House in the foreground, ca. 1935 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
up showing one still more or less in place on a gate and stone post probably put up for Sir Peyton or Lady Jean Skipwith at Prestwould plantation in the southern Piedmont ca. 1795–1800.\(^\text{41}\) The first generation of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation archaeologists are also said to have excavated a ball with chain fragments in Williamsburg, though the artifact records suggest this may be apocryphal. Goodwin proposed using the devices to keep Williamsburg gates properly closed, and the architects agreed.\(^\text{42}\)

By rough calculation, I estimate that there may now be three hundred balls and chains closing the gates of the historic area (Fig. 10). If one begins to estimate the number of similar devices used at other museums based on the modern Williamsburg precedent, the statistics grow exponentially. My object is not to ridicule the practical application of an object useful in the public presentation of garden re-creations, but simply to illustrate that a minor element from a past community may take on grander proportions when that community is revisited through the medium of a history museum.

The issue is, of course, much larger than this detail suggests. Let me widen the focus.


\(^{42}\) Minutes of meetings held at the offices of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, Williamsburg, Va., 22 July 1931, 6–7; 2 December 1931, 4–5; 11 May 1932, 6, Landscaping Meetings/Programs files, 1931 and 1932–33, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.
We have seen that the Palace grounds were demonstrably well marshaled by 1720, and the Bodleian plate illustrates a formal arrangement of clipped hedges that later eighteenth-century descriptions corroborate in the college yard at William and Mary. Fair enough. But Shurcliff and his successors carried this starched-collared garden mode to virtually every corner of the restored town, without comparable evidence.

Again this was with some framework of information. The landscape architects employed old paths found by the excavators and fence locations noted in considerable detail on the French cartographer’s 1782 map of Williamsburg. But historical imagination filled extremely large voids between such elements. Shurcliff imagined a decorative landscape setting for each house and shop (Fig. 11). Using C. J. Sauthier’s 1769–70 maps of Edenton and several other North Carolina towns as an inspiration, landscape designers created an extraordinary series of formal, decorative gardens. Sauthier shows gardens behind and beside buildings bordering the streets and enclosed by fence lines reminiscent of those on the 1782 Williamsburg map (Fig. 12). Each of the Sauthier gardens is divided into four or more parts by paths, which the cartographer shows as surrounding as well as partitioning the space. What particularly caught Shurcliff’s eye was Sauthier’s occasional use of diagonal and circular divisions, the latter usually at the intersection of central paths. This suggested a popular attention to decorative garden design that was not confined to the major gentry complexes—like Hayes and Pembroke on the outskirts of Edenton. Shurcliff took the Edenton map literally and employed it as an inspiration for how Williamsburg properties were developed in the same era.

Sauthier’s maps have some relevance to eighteenth-century realities, at least in the sense that subgentry town yards could have gardens arranged in a manner as orderly as the houses. A past Dumbarton Oaks symposium paper showed that commissioned British officer’s gardens at Chatham Dockyard were arranged in a related fashion in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century. But it appears that Sauthier used conventionalized patterns for his Edenton gardens, employing order and variety to embellish what may have been a far less refined Chesapeake community.

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45 Gov. William Tryon hired Sauthier, also a French cartographer, to produce maps of the colony’s leading towns. For Shurcliff, Edenton’s was the most consulted of the maps. C. J. Sauthier, “Plan of Town and Port of Edenton in Chowan County, North Carolina,” June 1769, Map Room, British Museum. This and others are published in John Bivins Jr., *The Furniture of Coastal North Carolina* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 1988), 11, 21, 24, 26, 30, 33, 35.


47 Tryon Palace architectural historian Peter Sandbeck suggests that Sauthier’s maps had a promotional quality intended to convince crown officials in London that North Carolina’s towns were developing in a more substantial manner than, in fact, they were.
12. C. J. Sauthier’s plans (detail) of gardens in North Carolina towns, ca. 1769, as compiled by Shurcliff, April 1932 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
chitect John Hawks, with an accompanying pre-1771 plan by Sauthier, showing a very plain garden at the North Carolina governor’s house in New Bern, as well as excavations since 1994, calls into question Sauthier’s comparable work detailing a considerably more fanciful garden there.48 However one interprets Sauthier’s North Carolina work, it is clear that Shurcliff and company applied the idea of decorative gardens rather uncritically at Williamsburg. Thinking more in terms of design grammar than social context, they made ranges of boxwood and extensive floral beds standard elements, irrespective of the property’s owners or tenants.

Varied period elements were conflated in an unlikely form. Shurcliff argued that “the old formal style” survived longer in Virginia than Britain, permitting the extensive use of topiary to represent gardens ostensibly created late in the colonial era.49 While the architects, too, conceived of eighteenth-century Virginia design as being relatively static and monolithic, Shurcliff was particularly inclined to see “old Virginia”—at least in landscape terms—as stretching through the eighteenth century into the post-Civil War era. The belief in continuity is richly illustrated by Shurcliff’s extensive fieldwork in and beyond Virginia. Working with his son, Sidney Nichols Shurcliff, he recorded dozens of venerable gardens in the countryside. Sidney Shurcliff poignantly describes interviewing an elderly blind woman in Richmond and recording her very explicit memories of boxwood plantings

48 Memorandum, Hawks on the Design of the Governor’s House in New Bern, 12 July 1783, Archive de Francisco de Miranda, 5, 95–97, Academia Nacional de la Historia, Caracas, Venezuela, copies on file at Tryon Palace, New Bern, N.C. Indeed, the builder, Gov. Tryon, had a brief and beleaguered career on the property, with limited opportunity for elaborate gardening.

49 Shurcliff, “Gardens of the Governor’s Palace,” and “A Comparison of the Williamsburg Palace Grounds Layout.”
in the Rappahannock River town of Port Royal in the mid-nineteenth century. Such nineteenth- and early twentieth-century landscape evidence from the Chesapeake was artfully woven with early eighteenth-century English material and a thin archaeological framework to create Sauthier-size Williamsburg gardens with minimal attention to the functional implications of their sites.  

Several examples will illustrate the normal pattern. From 1931 to 1932 Shurcliff elaborated a Sauthier garden motif to create a series of triangular box-lined flowerbeds popularly described as a British Union Jack beside a tenement owned by John Custis and his heirs (Fig. 13). Although Custis was famous for his own fine Williamsburg garden, there is less reason to expect costly decorative plantings on the rental property occupied by carpenter John Wheatley from 1746 to 1757.

Diagonally across Duke of Gloucester Street stands a frame house built about 1762 by a successful silversmith and minor retailer, James Geddy Jr. Excavations revealed an old path

50 Sidney Shurcliff, *The Day It Rained Fish*, 32–33 (as above, note 15).
running straight from the rear door toward the back of the lot, and Shurcliff interpreted this as the spine of a linear decorative garden. A series of drawings produced by his office and a skillful Boston delineator named William Campbell between March 1929 and November 1931 shows the evolution of the design as rectangular planting beds lined with low clipped boxwood. In its most elaborate incarnation, the garden was conceived as having a dozen parterres, some broken by half-round niches filled with brick paving or shrubs (Fig. 14), all based on a single marl path that originally led through a work yard that later archaeologists found littered with ash and clinkers from Geddy’s nearby forge.53

Plausible or otherwise, such gardens charmed countless visitors and gained attention in the national press. A reporter for Better Homes and Gardens wrote romantically about Williamsburg’s gardens in 1936:

As I hung on the little white garden gates and gazed at the box glistening in the moonlight . . . I thought I had never seen lovelier pictures. They were perfect. And so I defy you not to fall under the magic spell of Williamsburg’s glamorous garden!54

The public acclaim encouraged further garden development, some of it perhaps more ahistorical. During 1937 and 1938, Shurcliff freely interpreted Sauthier’s rectangular beds with round and square central elements in a strikingly fanciful garden at the reconstructed Palace Green house representing that occupied by carriage-maker Elkanah Deane between 1772 and 1775 (Fig. 15). Offering to sell the property thereafter, Deane’s widow Elizabeth noted “an exceeding good garden and pasture at the back of the dwelling house,” but this was more likely a respectable vegetable garden than what Shurcliff created: a complex series of flowerbeds framed by sharply trimmed boxwood borders and topiary.55 The lack of any historical link between the new garden and this site is illustrated by how, at various stages in the design process, the garden faced Palace Green, was sheltered behind an orchard, and eventually came to rest facing Prince George Street.56


54 D. P. Howerth, “Williamsburg Gardens Bloom Again,” Better Homes and Gardens 14, no. 12 (1936): 54. An article the previous month, H. J. Herbert’s “Williamsburg: The Ideal Home Town,” Better Homes and Gardens 14, no. 11 (1936): 13–15, 74–75, explicitly made the point that the Williamsburg scenes were models for modern-day emulation.

55 Virginia Gazette, 4 November 1775, 3.

15. Elkanah Deane garden, designed by Shurcliff between 1937 and 1938 (photo by Steve Toth courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
Alden Hopkins Gardens, 1941–60: Beyond Belief

The successor who might have introduced more rigorous research and discussion actually further conflated time and space. By 1941 the museum had its own architectural office, and the staff sought a way of limiting Shurcliff’s free hand in Williamsburg landscape design. That year they hired Alden Hopkins (Fig. 16), who, except for an absence during World War II, served as resident landscape architect for Colonial Williamsburg until his death in 1960. He came highly recommended. Hopkins had a master’s degree in landscape architecture from Harvard’s School of Design, where he won the Prix de Rome in 1934. He then spent three years at the American Academy, with support from Abby Rockefeller’s sister, Lucy Aldrich, and he practiced for several years in Washington, D.C. The Williamsburg job provided entrée to many other garden design projects in the region, most notably those funded by the Garden Club of Virginia at Thoroughgood House, Woodlawn, Gunston Hall, the University of Virginia, etc., as well as New York state’s Van Courtland Manor, all in the 1950s. Hopkins did not forge a new approach. Long-time Colonial Williamsburg

57 The Reminiscences of Kendrew (as above, note 21), 342; obituary, Colonial Williamsburg News, September 1960, 1. Hopkins’s drawing collection, privately held, includes many design drawings for affluent private clients as well as museums, with little stylistic distinction between them. Also see D. H. Williams, Historic Virginia Gardens: Preservations by the Garden Club of Virginia (Charlottesville, Va., 1975); Alden Hopkins, “West Lawn Garden Restoration,” in Presentation of the Restored Gardens of the University of Virginia (Charlottesville, 24 April 1952).
architect Singleton Peabody Moorehead thought him more attuned to the local character of Williamsburg gardens, but by the late 1940s, the assumption that each historic property deserved a decorative garden had become so established in the minds of planners as well as visitors that Hopkins pressed on with even less plausibly elaborate garden conceits grafted to disparate sites, at Williamsburg and elsewhere. Outside the town, he plugged dozens of Shurcliff-style gardens into every purported seventeenth-century farm garth and Jeffersonian schoolyard.

At Williamsburg, Shurcliff had argued against planting a flower garden behind the Raleigh Tavern, taverns “being frequented largely by men, and the grounds being used chiefly for the accommodation of horses, vehicles, and servants in the old days.” Such distinctions were lost in the postwar effort to complete the town, however, and Hopkins was content to produce fanciful gardens with flowers and topiary for two working taverns, Christiana Campbell’s and the King’s Arms.

Hopkins began work on gardens for the King’s Arms complex in early 1946, soon after returning from combat in the war. The general project was a large one, to reconstruct both the tavern and Alexander Purdie’s adjoining house for use as Colonial Williamsburg’s best operating tavern and historic area restaurant. Similar assumptions were ultimately made about both properties: that there were service yards nearest the house or tavern and work buildings, beyond which were formal “pleasure gardens,” followed by kitchen gardens and stable yards, each of the latter with stables accessible from the back street. Hopkins’s apparently earliest surviving plan shows only a small marl-paved dining area as decorated with a box hedge, and the greatest area was given to kitchen gardens, but by February 1946 both kitchen gardens had lost ground to decorative gardens, that at King’s Arms with a pair of Union Jacks and Purdie’s with four turf parterres punctuated by crepe myrtles and box topiary clipped in the shape of animals (Fig. 17). The Edenton map was referenced by dividing the tavern’s kitchen garden into squares placed around a circular walk with central geometric topiary. The garden designs underwent several revisions, including simplification of the topiary animals before being executed in 1950. Hopkins freely obfuscated the connections between labor-intensive decorative design and wealth, a problem that dogged the museum in general.

Between 1953 and 1954, he designed comparable gardens as settings for reconstructions of the house Elizabeth Carlos owned from 1772 to 1777 (Fig. 18) and another nearby purchased by David Morton five years later. Both were people of modest means. Carlos

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59 Shurcliff to Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, 10 October 1930, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.
60 Drawing: “Sketch Plan, Purdie’s Dwelling and King’s Arms Landscape,” by Hopkins, n.d.
17. Landscape plans for King’s Arms Tavern and Alexander Purdie House, by Hopkins, February 1946 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

18. Elizabeth Carlos’s yard, with landscaping by Hopkins, 1953–54 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
was unmarried and worked as a seamstress and milliner. In 1773 she rented the property to Mary Dickinson, another milliner. Morton was a tailor. Hopkins envisioned Morton’s garden as a group of four decorative planting beds with concave corners loosely derived from a 1787 plat for a far grander Charleston, S.C., house (Fig. 19). These are strangely focused on a pump under a curved-roof shelter that brings to mind Marie-Antoinette pumping water after milking a cow in east Williamsburg.

Hopkins was a skilled designer, but he left little evidence of research or thinking about the historical implications of his design. Like the early restoration architects, Shurcliff poured great effort into studying what he viewed as relevant material in the countryside. Unlike them, Shurcliff was methodical in presenting this background as well as his designs in extensive reports and publications (Fig. 20). He argued his case articulately if not critically. Perhaps feeling that the research was done and the general lessons learned, Hopkins applied the design grammar to new sites with minimal visits back to the well of fieldwork, and he wrote very little about the sources or philosophy of his design.


63 Most prominently in Shurcliff, “Southern Colonial Places” (as above, note 41).

64 For example, Hopkins’s employment of a pump at the center of the Morton garden may recall the use of fountains surrounded by circular paths in formal 17th–century country house gardens, but he recorded nothing to confirm or deny such a considerable leap. See John Harris, The Artist and the Country House: A History of Country House and Garden View Painting in Britain, 1540–1870, revised ed. (London, 1985), 50–51, 54, 74–75.
Protest and Acceptance

Both townspeople and project architects had questioned Shurcliff’s imaginative new creations, at least before they came to seem inevitable. Williamsburg resident Mary Haldane Coleman made the now-familiar remark in her diary that Shurcliff “has boxwood on the brain.”65 Singleton Moorehead talked about containing “the ‘problem’ of Arthur Shurcliff’s ideas” by forming an archaeological team independent of the landscape architect’s own hired workers before, ultimately, creating “our own landscape group” led by Hopkins.66 Even the projects’ Landscape Advisory Committee, generally placid and slow to meet, questioned the degree of regularity and neatness, extent of boxwood, and absence of vegetable gardens in 1935.67 But Shurcliff was an imaginative artist, and he had an attractive product as well as an engaging personality. His thematic settings were successful as a means of drawing together the newly restored and reconstructed buildings into a whole, providing the sort of total transformation that Rockefeller, accepting Goodwin’s vision, had in mind (Fig. 21). It was a vision of small-town perfection, the cozy counterpart to that other great community-planning project, Rockefeller Center in New York City.68

65 The Reminiscences of Mrs. George P. Coleman (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1956), 62. Also see pp. 56–57 and 70 about the amusement and fear with which Mrs. Coleman regarded Shurcliff’s aggressive approach to the Tucker property where she lived. “Mr. Shurcliff came down like a wolf on the fold again today. He rushed in and out several times with charts and plans for all sorts of alarming ‘landscapes’ in our yard.” Ibid., 62.
67 One member was quoted as remarking, “The time has come to neglect the well-founded satisfaction in what has been done and let Negroes and hound dogs and horses and cattle and casual Southern ways have their day.” Shurcliff to Geddy, Report of the Landscape Advisory Committee, 8 August 1935, 2. Also see pp. 5–7, 9, 13.
68 Wallace, Mickey Mouse History.
The Williamsburg project is particularly interesting because of its formative role and the extent of garden design there, but it is more representative than peculiar in its handling of historic landscapes. Their changing nature has left most early American gardens relatively unknown, in terms of form if not plant species. And because of their visual appeal, particularly in an era when resuscitation of regional artistic traditions was government policy and large landscape projects were widely admired by the traveling public, they have tended to escape the rigors sometimes applied to building restoration. In the 1930s and thereafter, these well-groomed landscapes were potent models for middle-class homes that, like the restored Williamsburg buildings, increasingly were removed from the visual disorder of mixed neighborhoods. Their emulative quality was cultivated by annual garden symposia beginning in 1947, and by 1972 the guidebooks treated landscape as the second of Williamsburg six major appeals.

See, for example, the special Williamsburg issue of *House and Garden* (November 1937), which included “What Williamsburg Means to Gardening,” 51; “Colonial Gardens,” 52, and “Suggestions for Modern Planting,” 53, as well as “Our Williamsburg Houses,” a series of 3 Colonial Williamsburg-style houses with modern floor plans and gardens in Shurcliff’s Williamsburg idiom, 68–79.

Shurcliff’s creation of the recognizable variety of Williamsburg garden came to be considered an appropriate and necessary ingredient at house museums of varied location and date, and the model is sometimes more compelling than the explicit evidence on the property involved. Another architectural historian has observed that an original privy was demolished in the 1950s to create a “Williamsburg-style garden” at William Jay’s 1818 Richards-Owens-Thomas House in Savannah, Ga.71

Garden restoration still marches to a different beat, here and elsewhere. I remember several years ago visiting an archaeological excavation in the yard of an eighteenth-century house in Bermuda. The excavators had found an early masonry watering trough for animals and the unmarked grave of a woman below it. I spoke about this in a talk for the local preservation organization, remarking on the solid evidence for prosaic yard use rather than an ornamental garden now so familiar at such properties. When I returned the next year, the organization had planted a Shurcliffesque garden on the site.

Back to the Future

Recent decades have seen a recrudescence of research on the early Chesapeake, in historical interpretation, architectural research, archaeology, and related disciplines. New discoveries and perspectives have had salient effects on what museums there now show and say. A crucial question is whether museums will harness landscapes to fresh research or apply the old standard of favoring quick recognition, easy comprehension, and no controversy—in short, uncritically themed settings.

There is no absence of new evidence. Landscape research is now developing at a heartening pace. At Williamsburg, more critical reading of the plant records maintained by Joseph Prentis, John Randolph, and St. George Tucker reveal the principal commitment of serious early gardeners to edible plants. Much of their attention was focused on varied species of vegetables and fruit cultivation. Prentis, for example, began keeping a “Monthly Kalendar” in 1775 and a “Garden Book” in 1784, both describing cultivation methods for usable rather than ornamental plants. The implication is that Prentis shared his manuscripts with the community of Williamsburg gardeners before the advent of gardening books published in the region.72 John Custis’s earlier correspondence shows that ornamentals could maintain the intense interest of an elite landowner, but not so extensively for citizens of more ordinary means.73

While the apparent scale of elite plantation gardens has grown dramatically with excavations at Kingsmill, Carter’s Grove, Bacon’s Castle, and Monticello,74 archaeological work on John and Peyton Randolph’s property in Williamsburg has told a more modest story. Planting beds from John Randolph’s era were nicely prepared with oyster shell and bottle glass lining, but they had no formal relationship to the house (Fig. 22). And Judge Prentis’s recommendations for such beds suggest they were probably for asparagus rather than ornamentals. Son Peyton Randolph removed the beds in a major rearrangement of the complex at midcentury, and the evidence indicates no sizable plantings then behind the house or among the outbuildings (Fig. 23).75

Recently, we have had the opportunity to begin excavation of a garden that the Bermu-
23. Rear yard of the Randolph House, 1985. These and adjoining excavations revealed no sizable planting beds after ca. 1755 (photo by Andrew Edwards courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

24. Landscape plan for the St. George Tucker House by Shurcliff, 1932 (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)
dian St. George Tucker developed behind his Williamsburg house after the American Revolution. Tucker was something of a small-town Jefferson: a lawyer, philosopher, poet, and avid gardener. He returned to Williamsburg in 1789 and purchased a Palace Green house that had been owned by the apothecary George Gilmer. Tucker moved the house half a block to face Market Square, turning his back on the old silk-stocking neighborhood in favor of the town’s new focus, the commercial square designed by Francis Nicholson in the 1690s. He raised the central block and extended it at the ends and rear, making it a proper house for an elite postrevolutionary family. In 1932 Shurcliff had used fragments of an existing flower garden to create a large formal garden around an old central path leading from the back door, assuming that Tucker employed the same design grammar that carriage-maker Deane had drawn on in 1772 and Lieutenant Governor Spottswood did fifty years earlier (Fig. 24). Tucker’s descendants lived on in the house until 1994, benignly allowing Shurcliff’s garden to disappear.

An unusually dry summer several years ago made the outline of pre-Shurcliff garden features evident in the ground cover, and landscape architect Kent Brinkley produced two hypothetical plans based on those outlines and an awareness of Tucker’s extensive garden activity. Typically, the records described what and when Tucker planted but seldom precisely where. Brinkley’s hypotheses were entirely reasonable, but the archaeological findings so far have told a different and engaging story. While the most formal part of the landscape was a grid pattern oriented with the house, like its prerevolutionary rural predecessors, here there clearly was an asymmetrical arrangement within the grid.

There is indeed a central marl path intersecting with a lateral one found above an old topsoil layer and below Shurcliff’s path. And there are planting holes, probably about the right size for the roses we know grew here, along the north–south axial paths, and possibly the east–west one. On the other hand, there is only a narrow path on the east side, beyond a ditch or “water table” and just short of a fence at the property line. There is no path on the west side and no fence—only another ditch, with large tree holes along its inner edge (Fig. 25).

Beyond the west ditch are small rectangular planting holes, what I call puppy graves, that the archaeologists interpret as slip holes, where young plants were cultivated before being transplanted. Near the puppy graves are large planting beds, with shovel furrows on the bottom. No planting holes or beds have been found so far toward the center of the southern rectangles. This, combined with an early description by Philip Barraud, who stood at the back door of Tucker’s house and saw a lawn “so beautifully green and so richly bespangled with the yellow flower,” suggests that the most formal part of the landscape consisted of grass, edged with shrubs, trees, and possibly flowers—all of varied sizes on different sides. Beyond the central cross path, the archaeologists have most recently found a planting bed on an oblique angle that seems unrelated to the grid. So far the axial path has disappeared toward the back of the garden, fragmenting the grid. The evidence also seems to be indicating that Tucker’s nursery was located just west of his lawn, left visible beyond the row of fruit trees and a ditch. This provides a sense of the planner’s involvement in the process of gardening—of propagating and moving plants—rather than the almost stagnant quality of most museum gardens, which mature and decline but seldom offer much evidence of activity.
Conclusions

One can easily visualize many conventional museum gardens being transplanted into theme parks: as pretty, colorful, static elements of the scene, without any indication of process or the people involved in the work. Gardeners would disappear as soon as possible after the gates open to the public each morning. The visitor would stop, look, snap a photo, and move on without considering who conceived the design and who did the labor.

If we are able to recreate Tucker's garden in a manner that is at all realistic, it must involve visible action. The absence of barriers between formal and work spaces would seem to dictate that this cannot be reasonably portrayed as a set piece, tended by power trimmers and leaf blowers before eight in the morning. While perhaps more engaging for many museum-goers, it may lack some of the visual charm of traditional historic house gardens. Certainly it will provide less of a model for private emulation. We are committed to learning more about this garden, and we hope to recreate it, with help from pollen and phytolith analysis, as well as careful study of what the holes and beds can tell us about plant size and identification.

Yet we encounter interesting ambivalences among the museum staff about following the archaeological evidence. There have been arguments for creating a symmetrical planting scheme within the grid, carrying the paths equally around each side, omitting the ditches as messy and possibly dangerous, and enclosing the formal landscape to block views toward the work area. There is much sentiment for adding irrigation and invisible drains in areas that must have caused trouble for Tucker's gardeners, and for cultivating conventional flowerbeds without archaeological precedent.

Museums thrive on lively debate as well as intense research, and these suggestions don't disturb me. I find them consequential, however, because they suggest a desire to maintain the twentieth-century traditions of how to do museum landscapes. Put differently, they indicate an uneasiness with representing a past that is less conventional, more incongruous, messier. There is natural comfort and satisfaction in meeting people's expectations, and a little danger in recreating a version of the past that visitors may not immediately recognize or find comprehensible. While Shurcliff's and Hopkins's gardens resonate with many visitors who see them as charming and familiar, larger and more awkward landscapes can underscore the difference between people such as Tucker and ourselves. That gardens like Tucker's were a product of forced labor is only one of the characteristics that separate that past and this present. Slaves rather than taffetaed flower-pickers were the primary figures in such landscapes. Addressing their roles may be more inflammatory than tulips and topiary. But museums, unlike even the supposed “third generation of theme parks,” are about ideas, whether or not they are disquieting or richly marketable.81

I may risk David Lowenthal’s label of “a purveyor of the rectified past,” but not for long, as the evidence builds for a more diverse and intriguing material past than museums now portray. Clearly it is appropriate and useful for museums to preserve and speak intelligently about the landscapes that some earlier restorers have created. The Williamsburg gardens beautifully illustrate a common perception of pre-industrial America, and they have done much to create that perception. Williamsburg’s historic area is both art and history (Fig. 26). The gardens are now significant in their own right as artistic expressions as well as physical historiography. Shurcliff and his successors knit the historic area together, giving it a sense of place that made it an internationally famous destination. These values are sufficiently important that most of the planting arrangements deserve to be maintained in the manner they were in the 1930s and 1950s. Shurcliff did, in fact, create a popular art form, and his landscapes played an integral role in successfully launching a great museum. We should not idly remove his work and that of his less imaginative successors.

It is equally necessary to move on, to engage museum-goers in seeing and thinking about new glimpses of the past—about historical change and about changing perspectives on the past. To present only older twentieth-century versions of history focuses a museum on its own institutional story more than the intended early American subject. Indeed,

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balancing preservation of Shurcliff–Hopkins landscapes with a fresh presentation of ordinary people’s lives epitomizes museum ethics, which are generally absent from theme parks. Only showing the senescent gardens misrepresents the town’s eighteenth-century society, either by ignoring the presence of people like garment-makers Elizabeth Carlos and David Morton or misrepresenting them as sufficiently affluent to expend excess wealth on purely decorative landscapes.

Theme parks as well as museums have demonstrated that seeing action and—better yet—participating in it holds great attraction. In the past, history museums have tended to create or prepare sites and then open them to the public. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Rockefeller and the Williamsburg staff were surprised and worried by the number of travelers who sought to see the new work before it was complete. We now know that observing the work, even trying museum-goers’ hands in the effort, is both more memorable and more marketable. Certainly it is more educational.

There is a powerful teaching role for museums in the next century, especially employing a participatory approach. The fate of our cultural institutions will seem less frightening if we take up this challenge rather than quivering in the boxwood. We cannot today avoid glancing over our shoulders at theme parks, given their ability to attract hoards of people and extract their disposable income. They may represent even a more potent model than the garden cult and art museums did in the 1920s and 1930s. The parks offer relevant lessons about making our stories more accessible and entertaining, or less stuffy. They also suggest visitors will choose a rougher ride. We should be critically selective, however, in what we learn. For us, the new freedom means that once-suppressed subjects can take center stage, not that we should join the rattling sweep through waters both shallow and predictably pretty. If we enliven the museums—intellectually as well as experientially—the theme park generation will come. The specter of the historically themed rollercoaster need not dominate the future of the past.

In conclusion, I should confess that until a year before writing this essay, I had never been to a theme park—only as close as the nearest highway. Like other people, I had impressions of what a theme park is and opinions about its meaning as the quintessential postmodern landscape. But I had never been strapped into anything more exotic than an old-fashioned Ferris wheel—no Alpengeist, no Big Bad Wolf, no Loch Ness Monster, or Twisted Tornado. In terms of entertainment landscapes, I’d lived a horse-and-buggy existence.

No more. In the name of scholarly discourse, I have done the necessary research. I have walked the paths of concocted olde world charm and ridden the glitzy gondolas that carry screaming children away from electronically erupting volcanoes. I have looked into the face of the future as it is being built, somewhat as visitors marveled at American history museums being created earlier in the twentieth century. The face I see bears some familiar features, though they have the hallucinogenic composition of a funhouse mirror. It’s a transformation to which we need not succumb.
The National Park Service’s official booklet for touring Cades Cove, in the Great Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee, opens with a solemn dictate.

Go carefully and observantly into another place and time, one apart from your existence today. See its sights and hear its sounds. Feel the road rise and fall under you. Stop, get out, and sense the rocky paths under your feet. Everything around you speaks of an organic society, one living in and off of things that could be found or grown at home. The human settler that lived among these logs was almost as much a child of the forest as the other beasts (Fig. 1). They pressed close to the breast of the earth and danced with the seasons far more than we do. Like the beaver and the paper hornet, [the settler] built shelter from native woods. He and the bear robbed bee trees and berry bushes. He took live prey, as did other predators. These buildings merely refined man’s life here. Rugged as it was, the pioneer at least understood the hows and whys of his existence.1

According to the tour booklet, the former residents of Cades Cove lived in a harmonious society in touch with itself and in balance with its environment. They were neither alienated nor destructive. Tourists find little to question in the presentation or in the landscape. The cove is a mirror of the suburbs in which its visitors live—a socially homogeneous place. Cades Cove was not, in the official presentation, a landscape of diversity or discontent—there were no social classes. The official story encourages them to see the setting in a golden, romantic light. Under the hand of the National Park Service, the cove has become a themed landscape wrapped in sentimentality, a scene of inspiration and stability.

After a brief historical geography of the area this essay will link Cades Cove, and by implication other historic landscapes in the national parks, to amusement parks and living...
museums elsewhere. On the one hand, the cove is presented using a technique similar to an amusement park ride. Visitor travel is spatially controlled, and particular scenes appear and disappear in a planned order. The visitor need only follow the road to access the National Park Service’s message of goodness: Everything is beautiful, upbeat, and positive. The ugliness, failures, and dangers of the outside world are absent from the landscape. On the other hand, Cades Cove is like a living museum where one can move through, take pleasure from, and yet avoid responsibility for the past. The cove, like both amusement parks and living museums, is presented as a moral landscape suffused with normative lessons. In this case, the virtues being taught are social, aesthetic, and environmental.

2 The policies and practices used at Cades Cove are by no means unique. They are similar to ones employed nationally by the National Park Service. The identification, preservation, and presentation of historic landscapes inside and outside the national parks is an important function of the National Park Service. See, for example, Robert Z. Melnick, Daniel Sporn, and Emma Jane Saxe, Cultural Landscapes: Rural Historic Districts in the National Park System (Washington, D.C.: Park Historic Architecture Division, Cultural Resources Management, National Park Service, 1984); Cathy Gilbert, Four Historic Landscape Studies: Olympic National Park (Seattle: National Park Service, 1984); and Katherine Ahern, Cultural Landscape Bibliography: An Annotated Bibliography on Resources in the National Park System (Washington, D.C.: Park Historic Architecture Division, Cultural Landscape Program, National Park Service, 1992).

To strengthen my analysis, I make a distinction between amusement parks, synchronic venues like Disneyland where the entire place exists at no particular time, and living museums, anachronistic sites like Mystic Seaport where the place is supposed to be a section of the past in the present. As Sorkin points out in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), both these types of entertainment parks and many other landscapes are themed. As a result, it is impossible to precisely delineate the coincidences and distinctions between each category. On the distinctions and resemblances between the 2 types used here, see Andrew Ross, The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life (New York: Verso, 1994), 43–56. Ross includes living museums within a larger category called cultural theme parks, which are the expressions of a global ethnographic tourism industry.

3 Why these particular historic virtues should resonate with the public is unclear. A determination of the most appealing historic aspects of Cades Cove is beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, I have relied on the outstanding analysis of the past’s appeals by David Lowenthal, The Past Is a Foreign Country (New York:
Virtue and Irony in a U.S. National Park

Nevertheless, irony arises when one looks beyond the official presentation. A rich collection of primary and secondary sources reveal that although the National Park Service can draw lessons in moral order out of the cove’s beautiful scenery and historic structures, and present them to visitors as models for life, it does so only by neglecting a contrasting history of resistance and displacement.

In the Great Smoky Mountains

Cades Cove is located in the northwest corner of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the southeastern United States. One of America’s most popular national parks, the Great Smokies received more than ten million visitors in 1999. Like amusement park patrons nationwide, these visitors were middle-class vacationers traveling from the suburbs in their automobiles; many, perhaps the majority, toured Cades Cove.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park encompasses approximately 520,000 acres along the boundary between Tennessee and North Carolina in the southeastern Appalachian Mountains (Fig. 2). An area of abundant precipitation and sharp topography, it includes a wide diversity of plant and animal species.

The park was officially established 15 June 1934, the culmination of four decades of effort by distant and local activists to establish a national park in the southern Appalachians. As early as 1893, for example, the North Carolina legislature had passed a resolution in favor of a park. In Washington, D.C., the American Civic Association took up the issue in April 1906. Nonetheless, success steadily eluded these early activists because the...
2. Great Smoky Mountains National Park in relation to the southeastern United States and Cades Cove within the park
United States held no public lands in the region. Parks such as Yellowstone and Yosemite had been relatively uncontroversial because they had been created from lands already owned by the federal government. A southern Appalachian park, by contrast, could only be created out of private property, an extremely expensive venture. In addition, many people opposed the federal government buying park land no matter what the cost because they saw it as a misuse of taxpayer dollars. As a result, before 1934 only one national park, Acadia in Maine, had been created from private holdings; however, the land had been a gift to the United States. 

Great Smoky Mountains National Park began to come into existence when the federal government, the states of Tennessee and North Carolina, and private donors agreed in 1924 on a strategy like the one used at Acadia; the states and donors would collectively buy the land and give it to the United States for a park. 

The property that became Great Smoky Mountains National Park was held in more than 6,600 separate tracts when land acquisitions began in 1925. One-third was covered in old-growth forest, but the majority had been cut by timber companies or residents and was in various stages of reforestation. Most of the acreage, more than eighty-five percent, was owned by eighteen wood-products companies. Of the remaining fifteen percent, approximately 1,200 tracts were farms and more than five thousand pieces were lots or the sites of summer homes. It took more than ten years to pass the necessary legislation, obtain funding, and then survey, appraise, and ultimately purchase all the property that was to be included in the park. In the end, it cost approximately $12.6 million. The federal government contributed $3.5 million, while $4.1 million was provided through the states of Tennessee and North Carolina. However, the largest amount, $5 million, came at the behest of John D. Rockefeller Jr., who had also provided funds to buy the land that became Acadia National Park and who had begun Colonial Williamsburg.
Terence Young

Cades Cove is an idyllic valley of approximately three thousand rich, alluvial acres surrounded by peaks, some ascending two thousand feet above the valley floor. During the 1920s, it was occupied by about one hundred ten families consisting of approximately six hundred individuals. The primary and traditional activity of the cove’s residents was farming (Fig. 3). Some, however, were also employed in milling and timbering, and a few had taken to renting cabins to tourists and acting as guides. When land-purchasing agents for the park came to the cove, many residents willingly sold their property. The entire cove was owned by the federal government when the park was officially dedicated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 2 September 1940.

Originally, the National Park Service had no preservation plan for the cove. They expected it, like the rest of the land being purchased for the park, to revert to a wild state. This plan fit the traditional national park emphasis on wild nature and the recommendation of the Southern Appalachian National Park Commission, a committee created by Interior Secretary Hubert Work. When the commission had presented the secretary with its 1924 proposal for a park in the Great Smoky Mountains, it had stressed the area’s ruggedness, primeval natural character, and its value as a botanical preserve. The preservation of the resident population and its landscapes were not issues. Structures would be razed while natural vegetation developed without interference. By 1935, however, it was obvious to the National Park Service that the cove’s visual appeal lay in the contrast between an agricultural valley and forested hillsides. During this time, Waldo G. Leland, permanent secretary of the American Council of Learned Societies, sent a letter to Arno Cammerer, director of the National Park Service, asking that the National Park Service make strenuous efforts to record and preserve the native culture of the Great Smokies. Two lengthy studies followed, and the current interpretive program, which has changed little over the years, was begun.

Today approximately two thousand four hundred of the cove’s central acres are pastures grazed by beef cattle and horses or harvested as hay fields (Fig. 4). Along the edge of these acres snakes a paved, eleven-mile loop road connecting visitors to a series of historic buildings surrounded by fields and woodlands (Fig. 5). The visitor can walk, bike, or, most

13 Campbell, Birth of a National Park, 28; Dunn, Cades Cove, 251. The population had hit 685 in 1850, dropped to 219 in 1860, and then increased each decade until it peaked at 709 in 1900. Thereafter it declined. Cades Cove Auto Tour, 1, 3–4; Dunn, Cades Cove, 224.

14 Dunn, Cades Cove, 227, 243.

15 The Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission had purchased 52 farms by the end of 1929. Campbell, Birth of a National Park, 138.


3–4. In the 1930s, Cades Cove residents raised a variety of crops, including corn (above). (photo courtesy of the National Park Service) 4. (below) Nowadays, hay fields dominate the scenery.
popularly, drive the road from location to location. There are many turnouts and shoulders where a family can stop and admire the landscape or, on occasion, pet the horses (Fig. 6). At most stops, one can consult either a sign or the official tour booklet for the description of a structure and its setting. The entire tour can be completed in as little as two hours, or one can linger, ponder, and picnic an entire day away.18

The Cades Cove “Ride”

Cades Cove shares much in its design and message with amusement parks and living museums elsewhere. The origins for both of these sorts of entertainments lie at least as far back as the eighteenth century. At that time, the embellishment of estates with mechanical devices, nostalgia-generating objects, and allusive architecture was popular among the wealthy. Such places as Louis-René Girardin’s Ermenonville (Fig. 7) included features like rural meadows, classical temples, Italian villas, Egyptian ruins, Chinese pagodas, and, in one case, even a Tahitian scene “modeled after Hodges’s illustrations for Captain Cook’s Voyages.”19 The twenty-first century’s versions of these early diversions have, however, become more democratic and less aristocratic. An amusement park such as Florida’s Disney World alludes to the everyday world of the American middle class, while a living museum such as Kentucky’s

5–6. (left) The most popular way to tour Cades Cove is to drive the paved road around its perimeter. (right) Visitors often stop to pet horses along the many turnouts in the road.

18 Cades Cove Auto Tour, 1.

Shaker Village displays the lives of common rather than exceptional people from the past. Both examples presume “an unspecialized . . . kind of education” on the part of visitors.20

Great Smoky Mountains, like many U.S. national parks, is organized primarily around the theme of nature. It offers specialized “attractions” within its bounds, but, unlike a Disneyland, the attractions are spatially intermingled instead of aggregated within commonly subthemed areas. For example, Great Smoky Mountains has family hikes (Fig. 8), waterfalls (Fig. 9), and several historic areas scattered about within the park. By contrast, Disneyland’s Frontierland includes only attractions with similar motifs, such as Country Bear Jamboree and Huck Finn’s Island, while it excludes Fantasyland’s Mister Toad’s Wild Ride and Tomorrowland’s Space Mountain.21

In one sense, Cades Cove is a “ride” within the larger park; similar to amusement park

7. Even in earlier times, amusement parks and living museums entertained and recollected past events. Louis-René Girardin’s Gabrielle Tower at Ermenonville (above) recalls the grief of the property’s proprietor, who was said to have died after hearing of the assassination of Henry IV. (from Alexandre LaBorde, Description des nouveaux jardins de la France)


21 According to National Park Service Glossary of Commonly Used Terms (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1960), 68, the theme of a park, in the case of the Great Smoky Mountains a national park, is the “topic or subject of significance and interest which a park portrays . . . and toward which interpretation and development of the park are directed.” The U.S. national parks, unlike the national battlefields, national monuments, or national recreation areas, exist primarily because of natural features.
8–9. Family hikes (top) and waterfalls (right) are two of the specialized “attractions” offered at Cades Cove. The spatially controlled experiences bear strong similarities to amusement park planning. (photos courtesy of the National Park Service, from the Smokies Guide, summer 1995 issue)
rides, the spatial experience is tightly controlled. One enters the cove from the northeast corner and can travel along the loop road in but one direction (Fig. 10). This regulation of the visitor's movement through the landscape allows the National Park Service to closely manage the visitor experience. For instance, the entrance (Fig. 11) is visually blocked so that the initial scene, which is kept open, is highly dramatic (Fig. 12). As one moves along the road, new vistas open and close, drawing the eye into the middle ground of the valley floor, where the preponderance of light greens and yellows contrasts sharply with the surrounding background of dark green hillsides.

The unidirectionality of the drive also virtually guarantees that a tourist will visit the cove's buildings in a particular order. The National Park Service's foreknowledge of the visitor's travel pattern is reflected in the tour booklet, which emphasizes the official story of Cades Cove at its beginning and end but leaves uninterpreted the buildings along the way in the middle. The tour of Cades Cove is thus similar in structure to a ride such as Space Mountain, where the nominal story—a trip into outer space—is established at the beginning, reprised at the end, and a physically stimulating, uninterpreted roller coaster ride fills the middle. The cove's tour booklet does not attach meaning to each field and building along the road because these middle elements, like a roller coaster, are supposed to be experienced physically within the context of meaning established and reiterated at the beginning and the end of the tour.

Cades Cove, however, also contrasts with some elements of amusement parks. For example, according to Alexander Wilson, the world of Disney is ultimately reducible to one issue: economics. “Disney World,” he declares, “is our fullest representation of space-as-commodity.” Not only do Disney parks encourage consumption, they manage production,
11–12. (top) The parking lot and entrance to Cades Cove. The road bears left to swing around and right into the cove past the hillside ahead. (bottom) Then a dramatic open vista greets visitors after they move from the parking area and approach the entrance.
settlement, and desire. Cades Cove, on the other hand, is largely noncommercial. It is a nineteenth-century rural landscape without a marketplace, and its modern component, a visitor’s center, contains only the smallest of gift shops (Fig. 13).22

**Heritage Cove**

Cades Cove is also a living museum, incorporating at least four aspects in common with open-air museums such as Sturbridge Village and Colonial Williamsburg. First, the concept for the cove was stimulated by the example of Skansen, a park begun in 1891 to celebrate the historic folklife and landscapes of Sweden.23 Unlike Cades Cove, however, there had been no preexisting villages or town on the site before Skansen was raised. Nonetheless, the distinction was unimportant to the early National Park Service planners. When landscape preservation and reenactments were first suggested for the cove in the 1930s, the similarity between it and the decades-old attraction in Sweden was noted positively by the National Park Service. “We have the material,” declared the proposal’s senior author, H. C. Wilburn, “houses, fences, bridges, roads, trails, tools, and other paraphernalia . . . with which to develop [the cove’s] story” (Fig. 14). Quoting the article “Living Museums in Norway and Sweden” from *Regional Review*, Wilburn wrote park Superintendent J. R. Eakin that Skansen had “been designated and developed not only to protect its charming landscapes, but also to . . . pass on strong pleasant impressions . . . of ancient Sweden before modern times transformed it.” The material culture of a pioneer Cades

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23 See Michel Conan, “The Fiddler’s Indecorous Nostalgia,” in this volume.
Cove, Wilburn opined, was “possibly as unique and contrasty” with twentieth-century surroundings and conditions as that at Skansen.24

Second, the cove includes a nationalist agenda. The buildings, preserved like those at other living museums, are described as “typical,” while summer reenactments are presented as examples of the “common man’s” daily life. Both speak to the American visitor’s heritage.25 The people of these mountains, assures the park literature, were not a colorful, regional subculture whose time came and went; rather, “The Great Smokies people played a part in molding and defining our national character.” Their role in creating an American identity is celebrated in the cove so that “we, and future generations, can better understand how our forefathers lived.”26 The cove offers an American past to present-day Americans that, although ambiguous in its details, is clear enough to provide its viewers with a sense of common identity. This message is especially poignant in a national park because the park’s primary function is the preservation of “American” nature, another alleged source of the national character.27

25 According to the National Park Service, Smokies Guide: The Official Newspaper of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, summer 1995, 12–13, these reenactments include blacksmith demonstrations and talks with both the founder of the Primitive Baptist Church and the cove’s first permanent settler. Elsewhere, at Oconaluftee, life on a period farm is reenacted. See Pioneer Farmstead: Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Gatlinburg, Tenn.: Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, n.d.). Reenactments are especially popular in the United States, where the national history is short and origin myths few. Lowenthal, The Past Is a Foreign Country, 298, relates that there are some 800 outdoor museums with living history programs nationwide.
26 At Home in the Smokies, 7.
Third, Cades Cove, like other living museums, is presented as the landmark of a golden age. The misty, distant epoch it depicts was rural, an American arcadia where everyone worked, “fields were in common and plenty was invariable.”\(^{28}\) It was neither a primitive arcadia of hunter–gatherers nor the effortless, pastoral setting first described by Theocritus. Instead, it was a \textit{georgic} arcadia where efforts by yeoman farmers to produce the land’s bounty were revered. This message seems to resonate well with suburbanites, perhaps connecting with their ambivalence toward cities, as it celebrates hard but rewarding work.\(^{29}\)

Fourth, the cove provides particulars on how to organize the good society. As in other living museums, moral order is an important message. The interpreted landscape expresses a past carefully filtered to emphasize its positive aspects. From the National Park Service’s perspective, it appears that the cove’s former residents lived in an unblemished moral economy.

\textbf{A Virtuous Landscape}

According to official literature, the cove’s landscape expresses social, aesthetic, and environmental virtues. The social strengths that a visitor is supposed to note are self-reliance and community. The cove was the world of “organic man, when he was a generalist and not a specialist.” Here had existed a premodern cosmos of fused functions where “the home was a business, school, hospital, orphanage, nursing home and poorhouse.”\(^{30}\) Individuals and families were self-sufficient (Figs. 15, 16). “Each family farmed for a living; each family homestead provided for its own needs and such luxuries as it could create.”\(^{31}\) They were not dependent on a distant, complex, and sometimes capricious web of economic links for life’s material requirements. The cove home was “an almost self-contained economic unit.”\(^{32}\)

While the cove represents self-reliance and independence, it also encapsulates a complementary social virtue—a sense of community.\(^{33}\) According to philosopher Glenn Tinder, the ideal of community, where there is both self-realization and an end to loneliness, has

\(^{27}\) This emphasis on the nationalist character of the cove stands in contrast to the original interpretation. In 1938, the interpretive program stressed the antique character of the cove. Rather than contributing to the development of the national identity, B. Spalding, T. C. Vint, H. C. Bryant, and N. J. Burns, Memorandum for the Director, 17 January 1938, 1, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Library, described it as “a cultural island . . . isolated from the outside world, where we are able to see the survival in our contemporaries of language, social customs, [and] unique processes, that go back to the 18th century and beyond.” This view continued in official brochures, such as the Cades Cove Self-Guiding Auto Tour (Gatlinburg, Tenn.: Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, 1971).

\(^{28}\) Schama, \textit{Landscape and Memory}, 531.

\(^{29}\) The role of the arcadian myth in American life is explored by Leo Marx, \textit{The Machine in the Garden} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). He notes how this idyll has led Americans to “neglect our cities and desert them for the suburbs,” 5. These seekers of rusticity sometimes visit Cades Cove.

\(^{30}\) Cades Cove Auto Tour, 1, 6.

\(^{31}\) National Park Service, \textit{At Home in the Smokies}, 52.

\(^{32}\) The virtues outlined here have not always appeared in the official literature. This particular constellation first appeared in \textit{Cades Cove Auto Tour} (n.d., ca. 1976), no longer in print, and in the newer \textit{Cades Cove Auto Tour} (n.d., ca. 1981), which has been sited throughout this essay.
enticed westerners in every major historical period. It has, however, been “unattainable . . . in any full and stable form.” The cove’s visitors, like most modern people, yearn for a community’s “perfect harmony of whole and part.” Even if they are not members of a community at home, the National Park Service helps them to find its echo in the cove.34 “The community,” explains the tour booklet, “was an important aspect of life to the settlers in a rural society.”35 It arose from the residents’ involvement in local church and school activities as well from as their personal and family interactions “in a way not known in more formal, urban situations” (Fig. 17).36 The community was “an extension of the household by marriage, custom, and economic necessity . . . a partnership of households in association with each other.” Their sense of community provided the residents with feelings of rights balanced with responsibilities. “Community involvement on a personal level was a clearly understood obligation,” notes the tour booklet, and everyone knew when they were obliged. No one had to be told when to act. Their sense of neighborly duty was

33 At Home in the Smokies, 152.
35 Cades Cove Auto Tour, 2.
36 At Home in the Smokies, 86.
“activated almost automatically in cases where family independence was inadequate.” A death or a house raising brought people together “quickly and efficiently.” This place-based association purportedly bound the residents into an emergent whole more supportive than one could find through individual friendships or a nuclear family.37

In addition, the sense of community was supposedly fostered by this georgic arcadia’s economy. “For one hundred years,” notes the official tour booklet, “life in the Cove proceeded at a pace rarely faster than a walk.” People lived at nature’s rather than the machine’s pace. “This allowed time to see and hear the world one lived in. Cowbells in the pasture . . . the wind coming up and the sun going down. A decent ‘howdy’ while walking past a neighbor’s house. All were a part of that life.” The cove’s residents were better able to know and care about each other because they did not have to give over so much of their time to work.38

From these same social and economic activities flowed the cove’s aesthetic virtue. As early as 1938, the National Park Service declared the area to be “one of the most beautiful sections of the park, there being present a spirit of peaceful quiet and complacency which adds much to its charm.” They knew, however, that the charm was not simply natural. Forest clearance had opened the valley and annual tilling had held the forest at bay. It was farming that “account[ed] for the picturesque . . . character of the place.”39 The National

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37 Cades Cove Auto Tour, 2, 20.
38 Ibid.
Park Service has long known that if nothing was done to keep the land clear, the cove would shortly be colonized by trees and lose its arcadian qualities. It was the combination of artifice and nature that generated the cove’s beauty.

Part of the beauty also flows from the area’s well-placed structures and lack of clutter. As one strolls around a building, there are no jarring plantings, no household wastes, and no ill-placed objects to distress the modern sensibility (Fig. 18). All around are grass and paths surrounded by trees. It is a graceful, smooth landscape that is beautiful because it is simple. The spaces flow. The buildings seem organically related to their sites. It is as if, instead of being constructed, each building emerged out of the ground like yet another oak.

This beauty, being so much derived from nature, also directs us to the cove’s environmental virtues. The official message, both subtle and overt, is that the residents of the cove used environmentally appropriate methods. They lived in a time of labor and implements rather than power and technology. They possessed, the tour booklet tells us, only “the tools and skills of an Old World culture, enriched with what they learned from the Indians.” People did not so much command the natural world as work with it. The interaction between the two was more in balance than today. “Neither master of his environment nor

Virtue and Irony in a U.S. National Park

victim of it, [the Cades Cove resident] took what Nature allowed him to have, and made his way. "40 This message is also reinforced by National Park Service activities. For example, the rangers offer public talks that romantically downplay the residents’ impact on the land. According to one such talk, the residents did not extract resources or exploit the land; instead they “survived on the goods that nature provided.”41 “In sum,” the tour booklet concludes, “the ‘good life’ in the Cove was realized through industry, frugality, neighborliness and loyalty.”42 It was a golden time. But was it?

The Irony of Cades Cove

In The Culture of Nature, Alexander Wilson admits that although he rejects the commercialism, planning, and excessive architecture of most living museums and amusement parks in the southern Appalachians, Cades Cove charms him. “It is an enchanting place, popular with tourists.” He feels that the spartan landscape “focuses [the visitor’s attention] on the physical traces of human culture on the land.” It is accessible—“the history of the land can . . . be read. The very surface of the valley is scratched. . . . That history is something we need access to spatially” (emphasis in original). At Cades Cove, unlike other nostalgic sites, “It all somehow connects.”43

Wilson’s positive response to Cades Cove is unsurprising. The cove is a lovely place and, unlike most living museums, encompasses a relatively realistic geography. The social, aesthetic, and environmental virtues of the cove cannot be separated from its three thousand acres. A spatial compression of the buildings and landscape, the kind necessary at an amusement park and most living museums, would undermine the cove’s attraction. At the same time, the National Park Service’s interpretation exhibits some of the hyperreality Jean Baudrillard found typical of American amusement parks.44 Despite the National Park Service’s charming representation, it does not exhaust the cove’s history. The official brochures fail to acknowledge the incongruities and contradictions of the early twenty-first century landscape. It is ironic for the National Park Service to present Cades Cove as a paragon of virtues when its former residents actively resisted the inclusion of their lands in the park. They wished to remain separate because the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Cades Cove within it, mandated their displacement. National parks are treated as sacred spaces intended as settings for nature—not people. This spatial division was made explicit in 1872 with the creation of the first national park, Yellowstone. Its enabling legislation states unequivocally that “all persons who shall locate or settle upon or occupy the [park] . . . shall be considered trespassers and removed therefrom.”45 People, in contrast to nature, are profane. The national parks are premised on the notion that nature improves

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40 Cades Cove Auto Tour, 1–2.
42 Cades Cove Auto Tour, 2.
43 The three other places he visited were the Museum of Appalachia, Dollywood, and Heritage USA. Wilson, The Culture of Nature, 206.
people, but the law is written as if people pollute nature. Therefore, while the landscapes of Cades Cove may have been lovely and the occupants’ way of life exemplary, the people had to leave as the park came into existence.

Although some of the residents sold their land and left willingly, Durwood Dunn, a historian and descendant of cove residents, tells us that the majority viewed relocation with “dread and apprehension.” Most residents would have likely spurned the efforts to buy their property, but Tennessee invoked eminent domain and condemned the land. Some residents, most famously John W. Oliver, a descendant of the cove’s first white settler, fought in court against the residents’ removal. The fight lasted from 1929 until 1935, but the locals ultimately lost their battle and were ordered to leave. Only twelve families were allowed to remain as leaseholders, and many of them were bitter. One of them, Kermit Caughron, recalled in 1984, “The land remained . . . but in the death of the community [I had] lost a way of life and much of [my] freedom.” The situation was even worse for tenant families; when the park was established, twenty-five to thirty families lost their livelihood, their friends, and their place without even the benefit of money from a land sale. A settlement and its practices were demolished to create a park.

However, these people’s lives and their properties, if not they themselves, had long attracted tourists. Having removed the cove’s residents but wishing to maintain their landscapes, the National Park Service hired people to reproduce the residents’ everyday actions and their scenery for visitors. Thus the current reenactments of historic activities are not performed by cove occupants or their descendants but by National Park Service employees (Fig. 19). The beautiful landscape is no longer a byproduct of self-sufficient farming but deliberately maintained through a system of agricultural-use permits; none of the current permittees ever lived in the valley, but that is not important to the National Park Service. “The primary purpose of the program,” declares the park’s master plan, “is to preserve the

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46 For more on the notion that the nature in parks improves people, see Terence G. Young, “San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park and the Search for a Good Society, 1865–1880,” Forest and Conservation History 37 (1993), 4–13; and Young, “Social Reform through Parks.”

47 Dunn, Cades Cove, 247.

48 Campbell, Birth of a National Park, 19, 98–99; Dunn, Cades Cove, 250.

49 Dunn, Cades Cove, 253.

A National Park Service employee gives a performance as an “old-time” school mistress. Actors at Cades Cove must portray the virtuous former residents displaced because of the park’s development. (photo courtesy of the National Park Service, from At Home in the Smokies)

open pastoral appearance of the land”—not the people who created it.51

Such inconsistencies should not surprise us for they are not confined to Cades Cove or even the National Park Service. When the past becomes a mirror for the benefit of the present, David Lowenthal tells us, the mirror makers “extend antiquity, contrive missing continuities, emphasize or invent ancestral prerogatives and achievements, minimize or forget defeat and ignominy.”52 Cades Cove is no exception to the rule; its past reality and current presentation are at variance in at least three ways.53

First, the residents did not live as they are now portrayed. When the park was established in 1934, the cove was not occupied by “pioneers,” “mountaineers,” or any sort of “ancestral” people. They went to public schools in the cove and attended college in places like Louisville.54 They traveled regularly to buy and sell in Sevierville, Maryville, and Knox-

ville. They had served in wars both domestic and foreign.\textsuperscript{55} They had their progressives—people with a steady faith in science and new technology.\textsuperscript{56} Phones had rung, plumbing had worked, and electricity had coursed through cove homes as early as it did elsewhere.\textsuperscript{57} Many residents had even been in favor of the park before the land condemnations began because they had seen the benefits that could have accrued to them from tourism had they been able to remain in the cove.\textsuperscript{58} At the same time, the residents included reactionaries who were, in the words of Dunn, “always isolated from the consensus of the larger community.”\textsuperscript{59} In other words, the residents did not exist in a single, harmonious, premodern community. They were, and had long been, as disparate and modern as nearly any group of rural Americans.

Second, the landscape never appeared as it does today. Like most settings that have been occupied continuously for decades, it was a palimpsest of land uses and structures. There were log cabins in 1934, but they did not dominate the scene as they do now. Frame structures such as the Gregg-Cable House standing alone at the west end of the valley, were common and the sort of dwelling most residents desired (Fig. 20). However, because frame structures were “new” in the 1930s, they were destroyed to foster a sense of historic distance. As Dunn caustically observes, “The single guiding principle [of the National Park Service] was that anything which might remotely suggest progress or advancement beyond the most primitive stages should be destroyed.”\textsuperscript{60} As a part of the “mountain culture” plan that began in 1938, the National Park Service altered the landscape by removing the recent, wood-frame houses, by erecting new buildings based on traditional plans, and by moving more historic structures into the valley.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition to the building alterations on the site, the cove’s landscape had looked different before 1934 because of the residents’ production of many, not just two, agricultural products. Before the establishment of the park the dominant crops were corn, wheat, oats, and rye. Free-ranging hogs were plentiful. Each home had its own vegetable garden, and there were orchards of apples, pears, plums, and peaches.\textsuperscript{62} The landscape was practical as well as beautiful. These traditional activities were all abandoned in favor of the aesthetically pleasing yet relatively inexpensive haying and beef cattle operations.

Third, Cades Cove was not an environmental Eden. The residents’ farms, for example, suffered soil loss from the lack of vegetative cover (Fig. 21), and, as was the practice of many

\textsuperscript{54} Dunn, \textit{Cades Cove}, 221.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Cades Cove Auto Tour}, 2. The booklet mentions too briefly that the cove people were relatively modern. That message is thus lost in the overall characterization of the people as premodern.
\textsuperscript{56} Dunn, \textit{Cades Cove}, 222.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Cades Cove Auto Tour}, 1. Dunn, \textit{Cades Cove}, 251.
\textsuperscript{58} Dunn, \textit{Cades Cove}, 243.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 223.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 256.
\textsuperscript{61} For example, according to an earlier undated National Park Service publication, 1 of the barns in the Cable Mill area was moved there from Cataloochee in 1957. It also tells us that the nearby blacksmith shop was built in the same year. This information is absent from the current tour booklet.
\textsuperscript{62} Dunn, \textit{Cades Cove}, 183.
20. The Gregg-Cable House in the Cable Mill area of Cades Cove (no. 11 in Fig. 10)

21. Cades Cove was not Eden. Environmental degradation, especially soil loss, was common. (photo from Horace Kephart, Our Southern Highlanders)
rural people, they disposed of refuse on site (Fig. 22). The people of Cades Cove did not have a garbage or municipal service to remove nonrecyclable items to a distant landfill. This environmentalist element in the current park publications and activities illustrates the National Park Service’s commitment to the creation of a past with virtues aligned to the present. Remember that these concerns were not mentioned in earlier publications.

The cove clearly contains a tension between history and timelessness. Its past, like the past at many living museums, has been “earlied up” to some nonspecific pioneer period. In this way all the cove’s history has been reduced, conflated, and flattened into a few simple themes. Its links with the present have been consciously sundered in order to move it into the past, where it can be a tribute to and a beneficial message from some indefinite, better age.

Virtue and Irony

Cades Cove, like many of the National Park Service’s historic landscapes, is an attractive, amusing, and nationalistic setting for millions of middle-class Americans. They arrive in their cars from the suburbs and tour around the valley floor in a fashion reminiscent of an amusement park ride. Traveling through the valley in this linear fashion makes it much easier for the National Park Service to weave tales about the landscape and append beautiful scenery to its official tour booklet, since both the cove’s narrative and one-way roads are linear. Visitors read about the former occupants, enter their homes, and gaze upon their

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I borrow this apt neologism from Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (as above, note 3).
fields. The booklet and signage of the National Park Service declare that this was a place of self-reliance, community, beauty, and human–environmental balance. The original residents are presented as an updated version of Thomas Jefferson’s yeoman farmers. The message is clear: The Americans who once lived here partook of the good life during a golden age. Although that age may be past, it should be a model for all visitors. Whether they “hear” the official story, the sheer number of visitors suggests they find this landscape as pleasing as those at Disney World or Colonial Williamsburg. They seem honestly reassured and entertained. I suspect most of them think Cades Cove is a good place for themselves and their families.

As noted, the Cades Cove of the prepark era was not the idyllic, timeless place presented by the National Park Service. The area suffered from environmental degradation and was a working landscape cluttered by agricultural complexity. The social situation was dynamic rather than static; the cove had been a part of the larger economy and included its own social outcasts. The reenactments carried out by employees, the pastoral beauty maintained by permittees, and the carefully arranged and maintained structures do not accurately represent the people and the landscape of the 1920s. These were swept away after many of the former residents were forcibly removed to create the park. The current landscape in Cades Cove, or for that matter any theme park that presents the past as a wholly good place, is ironic because it neglects, obscures, and elides history in order to create a landscape of virtues.

Cades Cove, however, did not have to become what it is. When the boundaries of the land to be acquired were still under discussion in the Tennessee legislature, Cades Cove could have been excluded. Many large and well-established communities, such as Elkmont, Miller’s Cove, Pigeon Forge, Sunshine, Townsend, Tuckalechee Cove, Walland, and Wear Valley, were originally included but then excluded in the face of public protest. Cades Cove’s smaller population and location within the mountains kept it in the park. When the final bill was passed, the cove was the only major settlement within the boundaries of the legislated park.64 The cove, however, could have remained a private enclave within Great Smoky Mountains National Park; most national parks have “inholdings,” that is, private lands within the boundaries. Also, eminent domain did not need to be applied. If the area had been left out of the park, the settlement might have become another “gateway” tourist destination like Gatlinburg. Alternatively, the original plan might have been followed and the land could have been completely instead of selectively transformed after the park was created. All evidence of the recent occupants could have been removed and the cove would have become a forest, like most of the park. If either approach had been taken, there would be fewer contradictions today. It was the effort to include the area within the park, to hold it apart as a themed setting, to physically circumscribe its experience, and to embed the landscape in an edifying history that generated both a representation of virtue and a deep irony.

64 Dunn, Cades Cove, 247.
The Old/New Theme Park:  
The American Agricultural Fair

Carla I. Corbin

The landscapes of the American agricultural fair are both hedonistic and didactic; they exhibit the artificial as well as the authentic, involve the local and the exotic, and are constructed of the permanent and the ephemeral. This is a place structured by ritual, an annual celebration of the bounty of the land, and the work and lives of those who sow, till, and nurture—who produce goods on which others depend, and who are engaged in the intensely physical and sensory processes of making. As an event, it is shaped by the visions and forms of self-representation of communities bound by shared interests and geographical unity, an articulation of symbols that have defined those bonds over time.

The fair as local and regional celebration brings together diverse populations and interests in the common enterprise of creating a complex, expressive, and functional landscape (Fig. 1). These sites comprise both the commemorative and the progressive, and they are rich historically, socially, and visually. Modern fairs take place in two primary dimen-

My research for this project has taken different forms. My family and I traveled with carnivals in the East and Midwest for 6 seasons between 1958 and 1963, forming a direct experience of common conditions, practices, and structures that has served as a base for subsequent questions. I began the more formal investigation of landscape issues of fairs and fairgrounds in 1991, using historic and published materials augmented by field research. In summer 1992, under the auspices of the Penny White Fund of Harvard Graduate School of Design, I conducted field research at 3 fairs in the Northeast ranging from small (about 25,000 attendees) to large (more than 800,000 attendees). Then during summer 1997, I initiated work at 9 fairs and sites in different geographic regions east of the Mississippi River. In fall 1998 I continued the investigation with a minimum of 2 visits to each site, funded by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This phase was three-quarters finished when I completed this essay. My partner in all of the fieldwork has been Jacqueline Hayden, artist and photographer, who has also made substantial contributions in cultural theory and inquiry.

Although historical research on U.S. fairs applies across geographical boundaries, I chose to study those east of the Mississippi because this area has the longest history of fairs of predominantly European origin, and has a more diverse agriculture. In the West, there are 3 historic influences outside my scope: the rodeo as a community event; low-density farm populations in arid areas; and Hispanic and Native American cultures and traditions of celebration.

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tions of time: “real” time for the local participants and exhibitors, the nature of whose involvement is much the same as a century ago, and “historical” time for those who are drawn to the fair as a sort of time capsule where the agrarian heritage of the country is on display. As Donald W. Meinig writes, “Every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes. They are part of the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together.”¹ Each fairground and each annual celebration of the fair is a local increment of this representation of American agrarian life.

Despite changes in its situation that have made the agricultural fair a contemporary site of themed entertainment, its constituent parts have been remarkably enduring, existing in much the same forms as were established by the mid-1800s, structured by the aims of education, exhibition, and entertainment.² The “old” agricultural fair was organized by rituals related to the celebration of harvest, the centrality of agricultural abundance to the success and stability of the country, and a belief in the positive benefits of progress: that new

² Fred Kniffen, “The American Agricultural Fair: The Pattern,” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 39, no. 4 (December 1949), describes “the pattern of the fair [that] had evolved to consist substantially of a fence enclosing track, stables, pens, and some permanent halls. Largely outside the fence were the temporary tents of the showmen, the old equivalent of the modern midway,” 272.
and better machinery, seeds, and methods would equip the farmer to master nature in ever more productive ways. These are all present in the “new” state or county fair, but in the context of important changes that have essentially recast the experience of the fair for the majority of current participants. Of the estimated 158 million who now attend agricultural fairs each year, most are from the city and suburbs—nonfarmers—who, along with entertainment, seek an experience that is an odd combination of the nostalgically familiar and the amusingly different (Fig. 2).³

What does an examination of agricultural fairs have to offer a discourse about landscape, gardens, and theme parks? First, fairgrounds are a distinct type of public landscape, in use for much of the year as an important site of community life, combining civic, commercial, and recreational activities. In contrast with the diminishing numbers of family farms, the fair industry is thriving, with a current estimate of more than 2,700 annual agricultural fairs.⁴

Second, fairs and fairgrounds are simultaneously landscapes and are about land, being rich in representations—permanent and temporary—of larger natural and cultural landscapes. As such, these places have much to tell us that is specific to a community and region through buildings and ornamentation, their presence, absence and placement, and the focus of fair events through participation by institutional, commercial, and civic groups (Fig. 3). Third, unlike most themed environments, the presence of theme at agricultural fairs is the result of development over a period of time. It relies on the participation of two groups: the remaining farm population and the larger group of the nonfarmers. Each of these constituencies has different areas of focus at the fair, but it is their complementary coexistence that is responsible

⁴ International Association of Fairs and Expositions, Springfield, Mo.; 1998 data.
Carla I. Corbin

3. The Allentown (Pa.) Fair’s Agriculture Hall is filled with crafts, baked goods, educational exhibits, and competitively judged displays by the region’s granges, associations that promote agricultural interests.

for the fair’s institutional vitality. Fourth, fairs have the potential to offer an alternative model of a themed environment, in which the theme is present as an organizing frame for any number of fragmentary, alternative versions of the “story.” This use of theme contrasts with that of parks such as Disneyland and Disney World, Six Flags, Busch Gardens, Sea World, and others, in which the visitor’s experience is orchestrated by a single development or management entity whose aim is to maximize commercial profit. 5 It is the more elastic frame that allows the authenticity of the “old” agricultural fair to coexist with the artifice of the “new” agricultural fair.

This exploration begins with a discussion of concepts of landscape that have application in understanding the fairground: what does it mean to speak of a place as being “themed,” and how does theme operate in ordering our experience? It is important to be clear about the distinctions between fairs and other forms of outdoor festival entertainment as a way of understanding how theme organizes, but does not limit, experience and perception at the agricultural fair. A brief account of the history of American fairs—which grew out of, but diverge from, European and English forms—helps in understanding the embedded linkages with region and community.

5 Mark Gottdiener, The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions, and Commercial Spaces (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), describes the selection of themes for such environments, “[which] are constructed and owned by commercial enterprises. The motifs chosen for environments designed and mass marketed for profit are very much like the programs sanctioned by commercial sponsors and owners of television networks. Profit-seeking dictates that they conform to the common denominator of tastes. . . . Theme parks use motifs and images that are already proven commercial products from the competitive worlds of movie making or popular music,” 152–53.
The American Agricultural Fair

The contemporary fairground, although it operates within the tradition of national agrarian heritage, is a distinct type with identifying zones and elements, each with its own population of authors and participants. An investigation of these is the basis for understanding how theme organizes experience at the agricultural fair and how, over time, the fair has moved from being an extension of farm life to being a themed environment. This process has been effected as the larger part of the population has vacated the farm for the city and suburbs. If theme is a frame that orders experience, or positions the viewer, do changes in the position of the viewer recast the frame? A case will be made for this shift, which involves distancing in time, as well as in experience: most of us are sufficiently far from the farm to romanticize agrarian life. Discovering how this contributes to theming involves looking at commonalities and distinctions between theme parks and agricultural fairs. While the latter is here considered primarily as a themed environment, a number of factors contribute to a “looser” frame and a fragmentary mode of representation. Taken together, these engage participants in the construction of individual versions of a narrative, in contrast with the design intent of most theme parks, which is that of a single author-entity, a common viewpoint, and homogeneity of experience.6

Landscape, Theming, and the Agricultural Fair

In speaking of the agricultural fair as a landscape, it is useful to establish in what sense that concept applies, since this is a place of distinct zones that would escape J. B. Jackson’s definition of landscape as that which can be comprehended at a glance, from one place.7 This resonates with the pictorial heritage of the etymology of landscape, implying the static viewer who is outside a scene, which has been composed to aesthetic, painterly ideals. In contrast, most fairgrounds have grown over time, the result of many decisions and factors, partly deliberate and partly contingent, responding to the shifting needs of one area then another. Combinations of aesthetic, ornamental, and functional intents are involved, with the result that the fair, as event and place, is not arranged—except incrementally—on the basis of visual composition. In such places, comprehension builds through experience of the diverse parts and elements, much in the same way as we come to understand the urban landscape or the landscape of the strip, both subjects of Jackson’s attention.

The fairground is clearly an example of a landscape that provides important clues to culture. As Pierce Lewis’s first axiom for reading the landscape states: The man-made landscape . . . provides strong evidence of the kind of people we are, and were, and are in process of becoming.”8 The endurance of the fairground as an American landscape type stems in

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6 Robert Riley has raised the useful question of whether theme parks are more unified than agricultural fairs. One factor in the perceived integration of themed entertainment parks is, as he suggests, the image projected by mass media advertising, which does not necessarily extend to the sites as experienced. It is important to remember, however, that advertising campaigns for the diverse Orlando theme parks, for example, are each explicit about what to expect and that the experience promised is fun.

7 John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.

part from its importance as a site of community activity, as well as being a source of pleasure and locus of memory. More important for this examination, the fairground is also a concentration of representations of farming and agrarian life (Fig. 4). Meinig describes two kinds of symbolic landscapes, those identified with specific institutions or events, and a second type of landscape depiction, “which may be powerfully evocative because they are understood as being a particular kind of place . . . such scenes carry connotations of continuity . . . [acting as] a visible bond between past and present.” The fairground operates as both of these types, being at once institution and event, as well as acting as a powerful medium of temporal connection. The displays of farm equipment, the exhibits by local granges, the educational demonstrations sponsored by government agencies concerned with rural and farming issues, and the barns of livestock for competitive judging all operate in the present for those concerned with the life and business of agriculture, and operate as links to an imagined past of agrarian heritage for the suburban populations that are now the majority audience at the fair. For the latter group, agricultural production is a way of life so distanced from contemporary understanding that experiencing its representations in this annual event constitutes a themed adventure.

Themed environments, while not new, have proliferated in recent years as a way of mass-marketing certain kinds of experience, most often recreation or leisure activities. Such
The American Agricultural Fair places are essentially zones of filtered experience that promise entertainment. One steps out of the routine of daily life and into a place of constructed reality—but a reality that has a proclaimed focus. What is pledged is a particular story; the theme park is a landscape that is about something: someone, someplace, some time. The visitor’s role is that of audience, offering receptivity and a willingness to believe, for a time. For most contemporary theme parks, actual location is not greatly important, except for proximity to a sufficient market; the site is simply the substrate to be written over. The appeal of the themed environment is that which is often missing from daily life: consistency, continuity, and coherence. Here the artifice is accepted, and the extent and craft of the fabrications are admired, second only to the theme as a focus of interest. The primary obligation, however, is not the goal of verisimilitude, but rather to entertain.

This discussion focuses on fairs and theme parks, but there is a tendency to conflate all forms of landscape-scale festive sites as mingling “history and fantasy, reality and simulation . . . [These are] weird compendia: circuses, festivals, and fairs.”10 The agricultural fair, although it shares some characteristics with other forms of outdoor entertainment and is subject to similar influences and trends, has been distinct in important ways from circuses, carnivals, amusement parks, world’s fairs and expositions, and theme parks. First, the fair is a

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5. Fair food: Although less so than in the past, regional fairs reveal much about the culinary heritage of their communities. For example, elephant ears and fried dough originated in the Midwest; funnel cakes, sold here on the Allentown (Pa.) Fair midway, are a treat with northeastern history. (photo by Jacqueline Hayden)

historically established composition of expected events and elements: exhibits and demonstrations of various kinds, the carnival midway, the livestock-judging rings, and entertainment in the grandstand or arena. Second, the fair combines the fixed and the ephemeral with the annual celebration occurring on an established site, often within permanent structures that are used for other functions throughout the year. Third, each fair is defined by the agricultural production of its context, reflecting both the stock animals and crops produced locally, as well as local concerns, interests, foods, and customs (Fig. 5), and thus is rich in representations and references to the larger landscape. Fourth, fairs rely on diverse participation and authorship. As Leslie Prosterman writes, “Fairs exist because of local people’s efforts within each county. . . . [to] fund, organize, [and] execute the fair. It is the Ford County or Carroll County farmers, insurance brokers, telephone installers, housewives, veterinarians, nursery school teachers, and craft store operators who meet year-round to plan the fair and make sure that it comes off.”

At the agricultural fair, the organizing story is that of American agrarian heritage. As a broad and flexible frame, the fair makes it possible for the general public’s nostalgic expectations to be met, and for the modern agricultural industry to market products and methods to a different group of participants—while often at the same time managing to inform and entertain. The fair is a miniature world, authored by many participants operating at scales that range from the individual to multinational corporations, made coherent by accepted “stories” about the role of agriculture in national history and identity, and shared beliefs to do with the virtues and benefits of lives lived cultivating the earth. Many visitors to the fair—distanced from this type of existence—participate in these beliefs, which helps to order their experience of wildly different events and representations of the fair: garish cartoon pigs at a midway game, pungent smells of the hog barn, and the national pork association’s cooking demonstration.

Fair managers market their fairs with slogans that play on memory and image having more to do with Old MacDonald’s farm than with modern agricultural production, and most visitors are there for a good time. Does this render the agricultural fair a theme park? A position of this essay will be that the fairground has become a themed environment, and the use of the designation park may conflict with accepted connotations of a place that has been historically characterized by passive recreation or leisure activities in a pastoral setting. Though many fairgrounds contain parks or have areas that are conventionally parklike in character, using this term for the whole of the fairground is inappropriate. An important dimension of the theme of agriculture and production is that of work: human agency expended on the land to produce food and goods. The actuality of this effort and its processes is present at the fair as the nonfarm majority view cattle judging, crop exhibits, and canned produce. This lends both validity and authenticity to the event and site, as well as depth and resonance to the theme.

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12 Regarding the designation park, what has been retained from this historical understanding is the idea of a place for leisure activity and play, which in contemporary culture often includes entertainment.
The Fair—History, Form, and Architecture

“Originally Latin had two terms for festive events: festum, for ‘public joy, merriment, revelry,’ and feria, meaning ‘abstinence from work in honor of the gods’... In classical Latin, the two terms tended to become synonyms, as the two types of events tended to merge.”¹³ This conflation of play, an interruption of routine, combined with deeper meaning can be seen as an aspect of continuity in the structure of fairs. Prosterman explains: “The mandate of the elevated or socially significant purpose has invested fairs from medieval times to the present with a socially sanctioned reason for being.”¹⁴ In the early era of the American agricultural fair, these purposes included education, improvement, and fellowship—not necessarily entertainment. But “this type of mandate serves to contain and thus allow entertainment to flourish concomitantly. Entertainment draws patrons, but this ‘elevation’ gives point to entertainment.”¹⁵ This uniting of education, competition, and entertainment continues to structure the modern fair and provides an interesting basis of comparison with contemporary theme parks, many of which make some gesture toward being educational. Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Va., with the theme of Old Europe, uses foreign culture as a frame for musical entertainment, rides, and shops. At agricultural fairs, the aim to inform has the more lofty aura of nationalism through focus on the agrarian landscape and the historical ideal of the yeoman farmer.

The fair that developed in the United States during the first decades of the 1800s in the Berkshires and around the District of Columbia was a descendent of the English and European market fairs.¹⁶ The American version of this event developed as a community, then regional celebration that spread from the coastal states westward with settlement and the establishment of farms. Fairs were sponsored by the local agricultural society (later, government support became typical) with the aims of developing and disseminating new methods and technologies for crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and the improvement of

¹⁴ Prosterman, Ordinary Life, 42–43.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Wayne C. Neely, The Agricultural Fair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), describes the transformation of the market fair tradition by circumstances particular to post-Revolutionary War America, 46–71. André Allix, “The Geography of Fairs: Illustrated by Old-World Examples,” Geographical Review 12, no. 4 (October 1922), 532–69, distinguishes between “four analogous institutions which may exist side by side or in combination but which are fundamentally distinct and go back most probably to at least two different origins. In the one group figure the general commodity fair and the recently created sample fair; in the other the town market and the cattle fair,” 532. For Allix, the market fair has historical and economic importance as “the sole mechanism of large-scale commerce, and especially international commerce, in a state of civilization, when there was no security for regular exchange nor were means of transportation organized.” The market fair can be distinguished from the livestock, or agricultural, fair in geographic scope, focus, and quality of experience. Market fairs of necessity reached beyond the local: trading among producers and merchants was the focus, and the quality of the experience was probably cosmopolitan and certainly commercial. The agricultural fair, particularly as developed in America, is rural and local in scope (regional at the state level), has a focus directed to the community, and is festive in nature.
all aspects of farm family life. Competitive exhibiting of agricultural products from sheep and horses to corn and baked goods helped to judge the effectiveness of different methods, breeding programs, seeds, and equipment and to set standards within the community.

The idea of the fair has been linked with place in different ways by different cultures and times. Italian religious celebrations and English market fairs transformed the everyday setting, as the streets of a village or city would be temporarily taken over by vendors, parades, participants, and actors. In France, fairs began with the need to feed pilgrims encamped around a cathedral during a religious holiday, and soon developed into semipermanent sites nearby. Thus the fair as an event became linked with a particular place in the settlement, as well as with characteristic ways of occupying the land.

Fred Kniffen documented fairgrounds and showed that today’s familiar pattern—owned by local fair associations and administered by a board of prominent citizens—was established between 1830 and 1850. Permanent buildings were constructed, often ornamented with carvings and glazed terra-cotta decorations of local crop and livestock imagery: dignified civic structures whose models were found around the town square; and cathedral-like barns with fine materials and glowing illumination from clerestories (Fig. 6); more mundane, boxy barnlike structures for junior livestock judging and housing; and the fair’s centerpiece: the grandstand, with the geometric oval of the racetrack encircling the green lawn of the infield. Harness

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17 Elkanah Watson of Pittsfield, Mass., was the prime mover and promoter of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, incorporated in 1811. One aim was to be more practical than the earlier agricultural societies, emphasizing applications of new developments for working farmers. Agricultural societies modeled on the Berkshire plan also “held an annual cattle show, or as it came to be known later, agricultural fair, and relied on this institution and the interest aroused and prizes awarded at it, to encourage agriculture.” See Neely, The Agricul-tural Fair, 62, 64.

18 The role of the county fair in establishing standards within the community emerged from the research of Leslie Prosterman in the Midwest between 1979 and 1982. See Prosterman, Ordinary Life, Festival Days. This important role of the fair was affirmed by my own fieldwork in 1991, 1997, and 1998 and extended to the scale of the state fair. Interviews with livestock breeders established the importance of show-ring success to selling animals and marketing breeding services.

19 Cornelius Walford, Fairs, Past and Present: A Chapter in the History of Commerce (New York, 1883), cites “learned writers,” who assert “that fairs, as such, took their origin in ancient Rome. Romulus, Servius, Tullius, and the Republic, at its commencement, are severally said to have instituted fairs, in order that the country people might come in every ninth day (nundinae) to hear the laws proclaimed, or the decrees of the people delivered. . . . Booths, tents, and wooden stands for shows were always usual in such places. The fairs were frequently held in the public streets,” 6.


21 See Kniffen, “The American Agricultural Fair,” 268, and Neely, The Agricultural Fair, who cites Charles Andrews (Colonial Folkways, 1919): “Market fairs similar to those of medieval Europe were held in all the American colonies except Connecticut [but] these fairs seem, however, never to have attained the importance that they attained in Europe; many of them had already been abolished or abandoned by the time of the Revolution,” 46. Agricultural fairs, with exhibits and prizes, were initiated in America in the first decade of the 1800s but waxed and waned until “after 1840 [when] hundreds of state and local associations sprang to life, at once reflecting the expansion of American agriculture and constituting important agencies in its development. This was especially true after 1850. So rapid was their increase and so widespread their distribution that Kenyon L. Butterfield [called] 1850 to 1870 ‘the golden age of the agricultural fair’,” 81.
racing, originally the sport of farmers with fast horses, was the typical crowd entertainment.\textsuperscript{22}

The geography of the agricultural fair is mutable, but the constituent elements, precincts, and certain relationships of proximity (Fig. 7) are not. The fixed architecture includes a primary public entrance, a grandstand and racetrack or arena, exhibit and administration buildings, and livestock-judging rings and barns. The mobile or temporary uses or areas of the fair include the independent midways; institutional and commercial displays, sales, and promotions (usually located in and around the exhibit buildings); entertainment and performance spaces, including grandstand events and the carnival midway; and the residential precincts.\textsuperscript{23} The midway areas are now usually asphalt-paved surfaces for pedestrian circulation; they have power and water service but are otherwise unstructured.\textsuperscript{24}

The major areas exist as zones, each with particular populations, experiences, and specific rules for scale, location, and movement corridors. It is important to establish the

\textsuperscript{22} “Horse racing made overtures toward joining agricultural fairs ahead of carnivals . . . Standard bred, light-harness horses are strictly of American origin . . . Harness horses edged into fairs quite naturally as a breed of livestock important in rural living and economy,” See Kniffen (as above, note 2), 269.

\textsuperscript{23} Stuart B. Flexner, \textit{I Hear America Talking} (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), traces the term \textit{midway} to the Midway Plaisance, the “boulevard connecting Chicago’s Washington and Jackson Parks, [which] contained the amusement section of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition,” 245.

\textsuperscript{24} The change from trodden grass, mowed fields, or tanbark has occurred over the past 30 years. When I traveled with shows in the late 1950s and early 1960s, most had these surfaces. By the early 1990s, every site visited during fieldwork had partially or wholly paved carnival midway areas.
7. The primary geography of agricultural fairground elements (graphics by Keith Ervin)

8. The temporary structures of the “independents”—concessions for food, retail sales, and souvenirs—line the pedestrian streets of the New York State Fair in Syracuse, contrasting with the permanent infrastructure of exhibit buildings.
characteristics of each area type, its activities and occupants. The following descriptions are intended to establish typical spatial relationships (Fig. 7).

The independent midways begin inside the gates and extend over much of the public parts of the fairground, acting as a matrix for other, more defined activities (shaded background, Fig. 7; pictured in Fig. 8). These midways are a mix of two groups: independent operators of food and sales concessions, and community groups, such as the Jaycees or the local firehouse, whose food stands or game booths at the fair are annual fundraisers. The former are usually housed in mobile structures—wheeled trailers or demountable frames with canvas tops—that can be placed anywhere on the grounds where customers are likely to be and for which concessionaires pay a privilege fee. Their ubiquity gives them the spatial role of a kind of matrix. Local organizations, in contrast, usually occupy permanent structures (Fig. 9).

The exhibit buildings, also usually near the entrance, house professional and amateur displays, ranging from utility corporations to association promotions, government agency demonstrations, and information booths, and include commercial sales. Usually such commercial—and referential—displays continue outside the buildings, with the standard fleets of farm equipment and tractors, and such miscellany as monuments and markers, and prefabricated outbuildings for the residential market, which are often framed in vestigial representations of domestic landscapes: white picket fences, astroturf, and potted shrubs. Other exhibit buildings are used for display of competitively judged crops, produce, canned goods, baked goods, and needlework as well as other crafts, historically and currently important as an arena for establishing standards of excellence in the farm community.
increasing importance among these are the classes for horticultural displays. Exhibits of entries in flower and plant categories, arrangements, and creative illustrations of set themes invite participation by suburban members of the community, and popular sections in and around exhibit halls are gardens of amateur and commercial efforts, with new hybrid offerings and picturesque landscape constructions. These usually include seating and offer a welcome parklike respite from the intensity of other parts of the fair (Fig. 10).

The livestock-judging arenas—which may be as simple as an open center of a large barn, or as elaborate as a coliseum seating thousands—are usually located to connect with main pedestrian thoroughfares. They form a “mixing” zone for the two primary attending populations—farmers and nonfarmers. It is a public area, where exhibition and judging can be as specialized as breed, age, and function dictate, or as performance-oriented and dramatic as the class for eight-horse Clydesdale hitches, with flashy wagons, patent leather harness, and multicolored ribbons. Most fair visitors spend some of their time here. Interestingly, many also troop through the adjacent barns, which, although public, are not designed for display but rather to meet the needs of efficient housing and care of stock.

Contrasted against these representations of the stolid, the familiar, and the necessary are the jazzy streets lined by games of chance, gaudy prizes, and the noisy, careening rides of the carnival midway. Carnivals are often a family business of a core of concessions, such as rides and shows, that contracts with the local fair board for each event. Other rides, shows, and game and food concessions “book on” for a season or a particular date. Thus the
carnival is flexible, sized for the expected attendance and physical space available. A “lot man” (Fig. 11) lays out the midway before set-up, using knowledge of sizes and clearances for rides and trucks, as well as working to arrive at an equitable distribution of the most advantageous locations among competing equipment owners. Traditionally the layout is oval-shaped, echoing the racetrack form, a linking promenade with both perimeter and center-oriented elements. One end of the oval is treated like a gateway, and the outer ring is lined with games of chance and skill. Usually the emblematic merry-go-round is located as a centerpiece of this entrance, organ music blaring accompaniment to whirling lights and figures.25

In carnival parlance, this midway is divided into a “front end” and a “back end,” a design that meets very specific functional needs of business, circulation, experiential quality, and scale.26 The streetlike corridors of the front end are precisely defined by consistent

25 *Tradition* here reflects my experience, ca. 1958–98, as there is little historic documentation of the morphology of the temporary parts of the fair. Kniffen (as above, note 2) deals with the carnival midway as a component of the agricultural fair, but not with its own characteristic layout. It may be that the forerunners of these linked promenades were the gridlike streets of the Foire St.-Germain of medieval Paris or the plan for London’s Vauxhall Gardens.

26 These expressions have been common carnival vocabulary at least since the mid-1950s. They are current but may begin to pass from use, with the demise of “girl shows,” “sideshows,” human or animal “freaks,” or “curiosities” and “illusions”—all long-time staples of the back end of the midway. Another change observed at the Illinois state fair in 1996 and the North Carolina state fair in 1998 was an increasing fluidity in the arrangement of front versus back elements, possibly signaling the next phase in the morphology of the midway and an erosion of these distinctions.
alignment of the various concessions and are narrower—twenty-five to thirty feet at most—than those of the back end, which range from fifty to a hundred feet. In the front end, game operators must be able to make eye and voice contact with the stream of pedestrians who, able to see other players, are more likely to stop, pay, and play (Fig. 12). This village-like scale, enhanced by the house-schema form of most of the concessions, contrasts with that of the back end, where the expanded foldout facades of shows and funhouses, and the

12. On the carnival midway, a line of concessions forms the perimeter of the front end. Awnings, which serve as weather protection and support for lighting, create a zone of participation, where persistent game operators attempt to convert passersby into players.

13. Owners camp near their dairy cattle, stabled in an open barn at the Allentown (Pa.) Fair. A spare stall, a tent, or a travel vehicle becomes a temporary homestead, with space for an extended group of family and friends to socialize.
elaborate superstructures of rides, tower overhead. The wider circulation-ways here are
needed both for visual perception of the greater heights, as well as for the lines that form
during peak times.

Of an entirely different, quieter, domestic character are the residential precincts, which
are generally separated into homogeneous groups and located close to the work areas of
the inhabitants, and similarly composed of travel trailers, recreational vehicles, and various
ad hoc camping arrangements (Fig. 7). The carnival personnel usually set up behind one
side of the midway; those exhibiting livestock are near the barns and judging rings (Fig.
13); in a third area are the vacationers who come with their own accommodations, but
much as others might to a theme park hotel, stay for the duration of the fair.

Specific instances of these elements and relationships are demonstrated by layouts for
fairs in two very disparate situations (Figs. 14, 15). The Huntingdon County (Pa.) fair (Fig.
14) is a small but popular celebration that has been in operation for more than 136 years.
Attendance in 1992 was estimated to be in the range of twenty-five to thirty thousand
over six days. The fairgrounds are on the outskirts of the small town of Huntingdon and
are parklike in character. There is an interesting juxtaposition between the mature trees in
the camping and carnival areas and the kinetic colors of the midway rides (Fig. 16).

The grounds of the New York state fair (Fig. 15) are located in an industrial area to
the west of Syracuse at the juncture of two interstate highways. The highway to the north
is beyond the parking area, not shown in the diagram. The fair, a ten-day event, is one of
the largest in the country and averaged about eighty-five thousand visitors per day in
1996. The exhibit and activity buildings, which form an extended U-shape around the
racetrack, have pedestrian streets with a distinct urban quality. The central core of exhibit
buildings is arranged around a grassy, tree-planted open court, part of which is used for a
stage and entertainment; the remainder is structured as a formal park with a pond, shade
trees, and picnic tables. The prominence of the dairy industry in New York state is demon-
strated by the dedication (with a carved-stone portal sign) of one wing of the agriculture
building to dairy products and by the size of the dairy cattle barns, which are near the main
entrance and the coliseum. The smaller beef cattle barn, on the other hand, has a compara-
tively remote location, behind the midway and at the far end of the racetrack.

With this disparate geography of midways and barns, exhibit buildings and judging
rings, encamped vacationers and mobile community of carnival folk, how is thematic order
possible at a fairground? All of these parts have a different focus but come together as the
historically defined constituent parts of the fair, loosely connected by the overarching
theme of American agriculture. Theme is given resonance in this situation by authenticity:

27 For 1996 data, see Future Vision: 1997 Directory (Springfield, Mo.: International Association of Fairs
and Expositions, 1997). In 1995 the New York state fair in Syracuse was the 19th-largest in North America.
With paid gate receipts for 3,656,610 visitors over a 24-day period, the Texas state fair in Dallas recorded the

28 Green and Weeks’s design for the fairgrounds, originally in Brickbuilder (1910), was later included in
Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets, An American Vitruvius, reprint ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural
14–15. Each diagram has been separated into 3 layers: at the top are the permanent structures by use and vehicular circulation. The middle and bottom illustrate fair-period uses and types of occupation: the midways, camping, and parking. Note that permanent structures outline streets and parks, providing a framework for the temporary elements of the midways, performance areas, and residential districts. (Graphics by Keith Erwin based on maps provided by fair administrators.)
the livestock barns, judging rings, and displays of domestic skill and craft constitute the oldest parts of the fair—those in which tradition is concentrated. Theme operates not because these places and events are staged to illustrate or reference a narrative, but because of how the majority of fairgoers see them: from the distance of urban and suburban life and experience. Doe-eyed jersey calves and the shining jewel-like colors of jars of beets, carrots, and tomatoes are valued and admired but in terms other than those that were the standards of their production. Rows of canned garden produce are viewed with aesthetic pleasure and perhaps with some longing for the luxury of time to grow, cook, and prepare that which, not so many decades ago, was a necessity for many families.

There is no set route for experiencing the fair. Visitors are usually offered a map and timetable that show in chronological order events happening all over the fairgrounds in disparate venues. Sequence is up to the individual. Observing two or three scheduled events will usually involve traversing the grounds and experiencing the collagelike juxtapositions of one zone against another. Individually, areas may have been arranged with an internal logic but the resulting edges and connections are contingent. Some of these areas have presentation as their primary focus; others are simply accessible. The barns, in particular, are important as functioning for the farmers as an extension of agricultural life. At the same time they offer a nonorchestrated experience for the nonfarmers, an encounter that may include the warm golden sun-smell of straw bedding, as well as the pungent pile of fresh cow dung.

The Construction of Theme: Influences and Changes Shaping the Fair Experience

The transition from local agricultural exhibition to regional themed setting can be broadly characterized as a series of phases, associated primarily with rising industrialism, changes in the population from predominantly rural to urban and suburban, increased
mobility, and finally the development of mass media. The effects include changes—both in
the fair itself and in society—associated with the emergence of modern life.

From the period of the establishment of fairs in the mid-1800s, the next phase of
important changes occurred in the late 1800s, with advances in technology that expanded
the time frame in which the fair could be experienced. The effect of artificial light, first
with fireworks, then acetylene fixtures, and finally electrification, extended the schedule of
programs into the evening hours. Karal Ann Marling notes of the 1898 Minnesota State
Fair: “Lighting was a symbol of technological mastery, of modernity; as such, it rightly
found a place at the . . . fair . . . [a] proving ground for advanced ideas.”30 One result of
lighting and the extension of the fair program into the evening hours was an increased
expectation of professional entertainment. For the larger county fairs, and at the state fairs,
this meant spectacles and performers from outside—neither local in source nor agricultural
in focus. This served to heighten an already existing tension between the civic and educa-
tional purposes of the fair, and the frivolous, possibly immoral distractions of the midway
and entertainers.

Important during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first of the twenti-
eth were the “rapidly rising demand and prices for supplies . . . [which during World War I
urged] the farmer to still more production: ‘Food will win the War.’”31 The farming population’s
role as agent of the country’s survival and the agrarian landscape as the ground of one aspect
of the battle contributed to the romantic ethos of productive land. This focus on the farm’s
impact on the country’s success in the arena of foreign policy gave a nationalistic tone to fair
promotion and an aura of patriotism to the experience of the fair. Such fervor likely boosted
the economic rewards of putting on fairs. The midway section of the fair was established
during these decades, developing from itinerant gypsies, performers, and game operators who
followed festivals, market days, and other sites of public gathering. Against the self-representa-
tion of the resident farming community, the presence of these outsiders sharpened the definition
of what it was to be local: “The carnival workers, or ‘carnies,’ in the midway section . . . were
rough, exotic, and definitely ‘other.’”32 Further, during a time in which the population was
still mainly rural, an important aspect of the development of the midway may have been the
potential for an experience having an urban quality: one of visual and physical density, crowded
by strangers from nearby towns and counties, with novel sights and more than a hint of the
sinful or the strange, some of which still lingers (Fig. 17).

The current phase dates from the era of World War I and the Great Depression, and
has been dependent on the shift in population demographics away from the farm and rural
countryside. After the war and travel brought exposure for many to a larger world, a popu-
lar song copyrighted in 1919 asked, “How ya’ gonna to keep ’em down on the farm / After

30 Karal Ann Marling, Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair (St. Paul:
31 Carl O. Sauer, “Homestead and Community on the Middle Border,” in Changing Rural Landscapes, ed.
32 Prosterman, Ordinary Life, 4.
they’ve seen Par-ee?” Following World War II, the explosive growth of the suburbs followed a reduction in the numbers of those who supported families by farming. In between, modern life was shaped, differing in terms of mobility, sophistication, leisure time, expectations of entertainment, and changes in ideas about rural versus urban values. With the family car becoming commonplace, travel locally and over longer distances became routine, and vacation travel involved trips to regional amusement parks, sightseeing, vacation resorts, national parks, and other destinations, engendering significant changes in the perception and experience of landscape.

Among the results of such literally expanded horizons for the American middle class were the weakening of ties with home and the familiar. In the decades subsequent to the

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32 The lyrics by Sam M. Lewis and music by Walter Donaldson were performed in the 1921 musical *Shuffle Along*, produced and directed by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake.

33 This is a necessarily brief summary of a dynamic historical and cultural period well documented by others. An excellent source on America’s transition from being a rural to a suburban nation is Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). John Jakle’s *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln, Neb.: Schocken Books, 1985) deals with the rise of the automobile and its role in tourism. Many sources exist on the dramatic changes in farming and rural life from the 1800s to the present. Samuel Stokes et al., *Saving America’s Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 28–29, describe a reduction from 44 percent of the American population living on farms in 1880 to 2.2 percent in 1985. In 1986, though agricultural products accounted for 13 percent of American exports, only 2.5 percent of the workforce was directly engaged in agriculture.
disastrous effects of the Depression on ownership of smaller farms, many left situations of family loss for the larger towns and cities. While the city emerged as a wellspring of modernity and literal site of the future, farm and rural life were disparaged in popular slang with common epithets such as “hick town” and “local yokel.” Surprisingly, however, following the suspension of fairs (or a reduction in their scope) during World War II, “The big fairs returned to a great rush of popular enthusiasm when the fighting ended. Paradoxically, fair attendance shot up while the farm population fell just as rapidly.”

What had not changed at the fair was the participation of those who show prize Duroc hogs, canned fruit, and fresh produce, and whose children exhibit calves in the junior classes (Fig. 18). For this group, historically and in the present, Prosterman notes, “The fair as a whole exists to provide a focus to lives associated with agriculture.” For the larger population, however, the view from the suburbs has been colored by a nostalgic belief in the virtues and attractions of rural life, fostered by books, films, and television programs, without the countering reality of experience. J. B. Jackson notes, “Our ties with the countryside no further than twenty miles from our door grow fewer. . . . Without personal involvement we are in the dark as to what is happening on the farm—any farm. And the result is a popular image of rural America which bears a decreasing resemblance to reality . . . [one in which] life has an elemental simplicity and truth.”

This popular image, along with the aestheticizing of farm settings, and the nationalistic and historic links between agriculture and American identity, has reconstituted the fair, for the majority of visitors, as a kind of themed recreational site. Thus if theme is a frame that orders narrative and shapes experience, then the modern agricultural fair shares this mode of perception with Disney World or Dollywood. In the case of the fair, however, theming is less a result of actual changes in the fair than it is an outcome of changes in the cultural lives of the majority of fairgoers over the last eighty years. Additionally, expectations of what awaits at the fair have been shaped for most of us in early years by childhood visits and parents’ stories, as well as by E. B. White’s 1952 children’s classic, Charlotte’s Web, and Phil Stong’s 1932 novel State Fair, whose three movie versions have been followed recently by a hit Broadway musical. Our ignorance of agriculture, however, together with

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36 Prosterman, Ordinary Life, 15.
38 Dollywood is a theme park near Knoxville, Tenn., “on the route to the Smoky Mountain National Park, the most-visited national park in the country.” It opened in 1986 and by 1993 had an annual attendance of more than 9 million. The park consists of “Appalachian home crafts and an overlay of [country music star] Dolly Parton’s personal rise to fame and her connections with the commercial world of country music and Hollywood. . . . Dollywood merchandising and advertising synthesized the 2 distinct codes of Appalachian mountain culture, on the one hand, and glitzy show business signifiers on the other.” See Gottdiener (as above, note 5), The Theming of America, 117, 119.
the contemporary realities of production and economics, has resulted in a situation at the “big, famous fairs . . . with swelling hordes of fairgoers who are ill-prepared to learn much about agriculture from a stroll among hogs, tractors, and real live farmers.”39 The nostalgic longing for the simpler times and the direct experience of the symbolic family farm provides the theme that organizes our perception of the disparate participants and events at the fairground; the subtext is the agrarian landscape and way of life “in which rural equals good and urban stands for evil.” 40

Commonalities and Contrasts between Theme Parks and Agricultural Fairs

An obstacle in thinking comparatively about these two related but interestingly different types of places is the contrast between the well-ordered commercial machine of the modern theme park and the cheerful chaos of the fair. County, state, and regional fairs are, in fact, an industry that generates revenues well in excess of a billion dollars annually, with ever more spectacular rides on the midway and internationally known performers in the grandstand, and they clearly compete with the large theme parks for the same family recreation dollar.41

18. Daughters and sons are often in charge of prize family livestock at the fair and are expert at maintaining their barn areas for the best presentation and grooming for the show rings. (photo by Jacqueline Hayden)

What is shared by theme parks and the modern agricultural fair is a frame that engages expectations and offers predictability. Both Disney World and the state fair are dominated by delimited landscapes of the safest kind: the past. In such presentations, editing is the art of selective memory, and points of view can be tailored to the demographics of the market. At the fair, many visitors can be nostalgic for a way of life never personally experienced in any consequential manner and can mourn the decline of the family farm, which is “romanticized in the process of its disappearance elsewhere ... Romance and recollection are key.” The Disney Corporation’s 1994 plan to build Disney’s America in suburban Virginia west of Washington, D.C., featured a county fair, apparently a necessary inclusion in this definitive trip to the country’s past.

There are, however, important differences between the theme park and the agricultural fair. Three obvious distinctions relate to accessibility: schedule, economics, and geographic distribution. The theme park is typically located in an area with clement weather year-round, which allows uninterrupted operation, or at the very least, for an extended vacation season. In contrast, small local and county fairs have the brief life-span of four days to a week; larger state and regional fairs extend a week or two. The longer time-frame of availability of major theme parks in contrast with the annual trip to the fair colors the latter with the particularity of a seasonal ritual. A billboard at the 1992 Allentown (Pa.) Fair proclaimed, “Don’t leave summer without it!” Although delimited in time, agricultural fairs are more accessible than theme parks in several important ways. Most county fairs cost four dollars or less for an adult, and state fairs make efforts to keep admission prices low while

42 The starting point for Walt Disney in California was a miniature railroad running through a pastoral landscape of historic pastiches: a farm, a lake with a steamboat, a mill, and an “Old West” area with cowboys, an Indian encampment, and a village with the prominent sign “Old Town” on the rail depot. An early site plan from 1951 is illustrated in Karal A. Marling, “Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks,” Designing Disney’s Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance, ed. Karal A. Marling (New York: Canadian Centre for Architecture and Flammarion Press, 1997), 39. When the park opened, it included Main Street, Fantasyland, Adventuredland, and Tomorrowland. Main Street is very much sited in the past, and both Frontierland and Adventuredland were also intended to be distant in time. The former was said to represent “a period of about 1840” (p. 103), and Adventuredland “was meant to let the passengers stare alongside Bogart and Hepburn on their harrowing trip into film immortality,” (p. 105). While Tomorrowland is obviously a fantasy venture in another time-direction, the frame for the experience is the entrance through Main Street. It is noteworthy that the least successful parts of Disneyworld are future-oriented. Marling writes, “Orlando’s Tomorrowland is a 1920s and 1930s version of the future” (p. 140).

Much of the theme park world, of course, has to do with fantasy, but there are 2 ways in which the past plays a role for adult visitors. First, in experiences such as Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride, the details of the production—the cars, the clothing, and the scenes—are taken from an indeterminate place in the past around the turn of the 20th century. Second, adults are as important an audience in theme parks as children. For them, miniaturization has the effect of playing with perception and rendering much of the theme park world toy-size relative to adult scale. And the past tugs in another way: childhood associations with fairy tales, cartoon characters, and fantasy evoke nostalgia for earlier times in our own personal histories.


44 The Architecture of Reassurance: Designing the Disney Theme Parks was an exhibition (Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, June 1997) that included a study model for Disney’s proposed America theme park, where an agricultural fair was 1 of 9 areas. American Studies scholar Karal Ann Marling was guest curator.
providing a variety of free entertainment and performances. The greater number means shorter travel times for fairgoers, rather than the commitment of vacation time and air travel and hotel costs that a visit to a major theme park entails.

This geographic distribution also translates into a specificity linked to regional products and local concerns. Although “American county fairs throughout the country display similar characteristics in their basic structure and aims,” clear emphasis is placed on local products in the produce, craft, and exhibit halls, as well as in the livestock precincts, all of which colors and differentiates fairs from each other. This is in important contrast with Michael Sorkin’s description of the antispecificity of the theme park as “the place that embodies it all, the ageographia.”

Ownership and management control are also areas of distinction between theme parks and agricultural fairs that affect the homogeneity or diversity of these landscapes. Most theme parks are essentially a single vision—of one person or one corporate entity—while fairs are a composite of traditional forms and local heritage, and reflect changes in the area’s sociology, economics, and current events. Within the management framework of the fair board—and with large fairs, a professional manager—there is considerable latitude for individuals, groups, institutions, and business and corporate participants to define their own ways of participation and deliver their overt messages—if any—to the public.

There is both similarity and contrast in the respective modes of reference and representation. These involve important issues relating to how connections are made, both within a community and at the scale of the larger national “community,” that rely in part on how history is understood collectively: the shared images and symbolic landscapes. Most themed environments mine memory for market share and reference another place or time—sometimes both—with representations in the form of buildings, landscapes, and artifacts such as lighting, benches, and garden ornaments. The Disney parks take license with space and time, appropriate stories from fairy tales, and create physical realizations of geographies originally invented in Disney films. Agricultural fairs engage in the marketing of nostalgia as well; the one hundred and fiftieth Duchess County (N.Y.) Fair was advertised as “A Six Day Celebration of Country Traditions,” which probably had little to do with the reality of farming in upstate New York on the eve of the twenty-first century.

45 This is based on my study of 9 fairs. Among county fairs I visited between 1995 and 1997, 1-day adult admission ranged between $3 and $4. State fairs in the study group—Illinois, New York, and North Carolina—ranged between $3 and $7 for the 1998 season. Many fairs offer discounted admissions, either through advance purchase, commercial sponsors, or multiple-day or group reductions. Many fairs also scheduled reduced admission or free days for certain groups, senior citizens and children being the most frequent beneficiaries.

46 Prosterman, Ordinary Life, 3.

47 Sorkin, Theme Park, xv.

At both the theme park and the agricultural fair, three approaches to time coexist: first, nostalgic, backward-looking landscapes; second, progressive, futuristic speculation; and third, the present. The primary distinction lies in the latter. At most theme parks the present is a carefully designed experience aimed toward creating a pleasant, seamless fantasy; in contrast, the fair is collage-like, a sensory jumble of sound, smell, and kinetic visuals against the pungent, unedited reality of “real-time” farm activity. Edward Ball asserts, “The kernel of theming lies in the priority of the image over the lived, phenomenological experience.”

The diverse representations of the fair, in common with the modern themed landscape, include imagery that is electronic, statistical, simulated, and dramatized, but the fair also includes experience that is not managed or controlled. The least orchestrated zone of the fairground for the urban and suburban visitor features the livestock barns and judging rings, and displays and demonstrations concerning farm products, where one simply has access to wander, listen, look, and smell in settings that are typically not designed to accommodate display to the outsider. Although the experience of the average family on a fair outing can in no way encompass the reality of farm life, watching at close range as a farm child casually and confidently maneuvers a full-grown Holstein is tangible and vivid for her suburban counterpart. This is played out in other parts of the fair, as Prosterman observes: “The preserved tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables represented thought, planning, and care and collaboration with nonhuman natural forces.”

Thus, although presentation is involved, the primary aim is not “packaged” communication to the nonfarm majority of fair visitors, but rather presentation as dialogue within the farm culture that participates in the fair competitively. The concreteness of this is particularly demonstrated within the livestock classes, which have real impact on the year-round marketing of breeding stock, whose quality is partly established in the fair show rings. The typical visitor—the tourist from an urbanized world—has access both to the ritual-like choreography of the judging process, and to the unchoreographed preparations and daily life of the barns. United by the theme of American agriculture, the artifice of displays and entertainments directed toward the majority of fair visitors coexists with the authentic processes of the local farm community.

There is also divergence between the theme park and the fairground in the scale and scope of reference. Many theme parks advertise the completeness of their constructed worlds while isolating such places from their surroundings. Busch Gardens in Virginia proclaims that the visitor can experience all of Old Europe, and the naming of the Disney parks in this country is revealing: Disneyland, Disney World, and the unsuccessful attempt to develop Disney’s America in the suburbs west of Washington, D.C. At the fair, however, exhibits mounted by corporations and government agencies, booths of political groups, the Rotary Club food concession, the grange displays, and the life of the stock barns all reference ongoing natural and cultural processes. Cattle, sheep, poultry, corn shocks, and toma-

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49 Ball, “To Theme or Not to Theme,” 31.
50 Prosterman, Ordinary Life, 1.
toes at once represent an actual place, are products with which the community’s standards for quality are judged, and are material artifacts of that life (Fig. 19). Evidence of the concerns, processes, and activities of the farming, rural, and agricultural worlds can be found in the club displays, pamphlets, equipment, and government agency exhibits that, for the suburban and urban visitor, contribute to a greater understanding of this parallel world that is the source of the milk, bread, eggs, and other products in local supermarkets. There is both the vivid fragment and the world that these reference.

Thus a primary difference between the agricultural fair and the theme park is the necessary participation of the fair viewer in the conceptual construction of wholes from a mix that contains both the artificial and the real. This latitude in individual experience of the fair is alien to the aim of the theme park, which is the control and homogenization of experience. The fair industry as a whole and each event taken separately are too diverse and decentralized to be amenable to domination by a corporate megabusiness bent on providing a standardized experience with a “Fairland” in every county and a “Fair World” in every state.

The Uses of Theme

As has been described, the transition from local seasonal ritual to a unique type of themed landscape has moved by successive and incremental changes having to do with place and culture from the late nineteenth into the twenty-first century. The changes have come from within the worlds of agricultural life and production, and from the new landscape types inhabited by those who, because of emerging models of the future, left the farm. The view from the city back toward the remaining and imagined rural countryside has become increasingly nostalgic and of an aesthetic rather than an experiential nature.
Reduced in size by distance and perspective at the fair, the farm’s scale becomes gardenlike. And this is something we think we understand, as suburbanites now diligently tend the largest acreage of yard and domestic gardens in U.S. history. The farm fields are an apparent parallel, with a welcome tangibility and directness of purpose, and cycles that can be observed from the car window while driving the interstate.

Theme at the agricultural fair operates as a framework for a variety of experiences, levels of authenticity and artifice, and a diversity of authors. What it also provides is a connection between those aspects that are familiar—or at least thought to be known—and those that are new. Experience of the fair can be seen as a result of interactions between a series of overlays of meaning and use that have potential for richness and depth that exceeds the circumstances of conventional theme parks. These layers include function, both for the farm community, as well as for the larger community, which uses the fairground throughout the year. Another dimension is culture, in the sense Lewis describes, both in terms of historic continuity and in being the place where different communities meet each other. Symbolism also plays a part, in the sense Meinig describes, wherein representations speak to our agrarian heritage, to the importance of agriculture in national identity, and to popularly held ideas about the virtues of rural life. A final component is commercial economics, since fairs are an important venue of the outdoor entertainment industry.

Visitors experience some mix of these concrete and conceptual realities that together make up the fair. Much about the layers—function, culture, and symbolism—has a great deal to do with the design, perception, and use of landscape through the power of the unifying theme of agriculture. The human effort of work upon the land needed to produce crops and livestock is deeply linked to American national identity and cultural heritage: many of us are only a few generations from the farm. Cultivation of the land for food is as fundamental to the idea of landscape architecture as shelter is for architecture.

Nostalgia is a powerful tool for marketing, and fair managers use tradition to promote fairs. But an important presence at the fair in this country from its beginning has been the future and the framing of progressive visions of different aspects of technology, production, and daily life. Although fair visitors from the suburbs still enjoy the barnyard petting zoos of baby farm animals, will stand in line for their children to milk a cow, or walk through a farrowing shed, these sentimental experiences are offered in the same context as exhibits and information on contemporary rural, agricultural, food processing, conservation, and environmental issues. So in addition to entertainment, the fair offers an opportunity for those involved in agricultural production and those who depend on its products to meet on common ground, a relationship rooted in the past that looks toward the future. This potential for connection has not been lost on fair managers, and the continuing popularity of the fair is testimony that “the big, urbanized fairs have started to realize that they are superbly well

51 Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape,” 15.
positioned to teach city folk and suburbanites . . . [offering] a promising place to teach some elementary agricultural lessons to people who eat but do not sow.”

Agricultural fairs and theme parks, at first thought, seem an unlikely match for comparison. The case for the discussion was made on the following bases. Fairgrounds are a viable and vital public landscape; a region’s fairs are representative of both place and community; theme has developed at the fair as the greater population has become distanced from agrarian life; and theme operates at the fair in unique ways. The first three of these have implications for how we view, use, and develop fairgrounds as public landscapes: understanding these as places of present value and future potential. The fourth has broader implications, as theme has increasing influence on American life and landscape. At most sites, this is realized as a mix of entertainment and commercial enterprise that is now becoming an expectation in other settings, regardless of alternative intents. Disneyland, Disney World, Busch Gardens, the Six Flags parks, and Universal Studios Florida, to name a few, exist and prosper because they deliver what has become a highly valued recreational experience. The corporate-commercial model of theming becomes problematic, however, when extended to other landscapes: state and national parks, historical sites, and places of solemnity and dignity are some examples. The agricultural fair is important as a demonstration that theme and substance are not mutually exclusive. It supports recognition that theme can operate in different ways, notably as a connector that has potential for enrichment through juxtapositions from which individuals can construct alternative meanings and experiences. Finally, theme, when used as an organizing rather than limiting concept, offers opportunities to diversify and increase participation through active involvement specific to place and community.

Theme Park, Themed Living:
The Case of Huis Ten Bosch [Japan]

Marc Treib

Prologue
The landscape of the theme park can be evaluated along two axes: that of space and that of
time. From mixed origins in the exotic pavilions of the landscape garden and the popular
amusements of the Luna Park, the theme park amalgamated time and space to create an
integrated landscape of escape beyond that of momentary diversion. Once the level of
mere subsistence has been achieved, an almost innate human desire to experience novelty
begins to surface. Folk cultures are limited in space and develop only slowly over time; and
within accepted parameters, material culture experiments only with circumscribed expres-
sions of difference. Given the economic means, the access to foreign influence and prod-
ucts, and the social license to play out fantasies of escape, landscapes become a hybrid
product that integrates elements of both native and alien culture. These borrowings may be
those of alien space or those of alien time. In the case of Huis Ten Bosch, near Nagasaki,
Japan, those borrowings span both place and time (Figs. 1, 2).

The escapist landscape demands both the suspension of (geographic) belief and an
acquiescence in requisite social performance. It could be argued, for example, that a Chinese
or Japanese garden or pavilion created on the grounds of a European royal estate qualifies as
an early prototype of the twentieth-century theme park.¹ But to remain (and act) a French
queen within a setting such as the Hameau at Versailles is different from voluntarily pretend-
ing to be in the Wild West, the future, or eighteenth-century Holland (while remaining in

¹ Ignorance of the original setting—or at least distance from it and inexperience with it—normally aids in producing delight with the contrived representation. In Scandinavia, for example, 18th-century landscapes such as Frederiksborg in Denmark (designed by Johan Cornelius Krieger in 1729) or Haga Park in Stockholm (designed by Frederik Magnus Piper ca. 1783) played on verbal accounts or book illustrations, often by au-
thors who had never seen the real thing. Even at this time, the suggestion of place through image was sufficient
to bias the reading of the landscape before one’s eyes as exotic—and true. For Frederiksborg, see Sven-Ingvar
Andersson, “Havekunsten i Danmark,” Arkitektur DK, no. 4 (1990), 133–71; on Haga Park, see Sten Karling et
al., Frederik Magnus Piper och den romantiska parken (Stockholm: Kungliga Akademien för de fria Konsterna och
Japan). Thus notions of expectation, legibility, and deportment are all critical aspects of defining the theme park, and all feed this reading of the landscape of Huis Ten Bosch.2

A History of Construction History

In July 1983 the Nagasaki Hollander Village amusement park opened in Seihi, about one-half hour’s travel from Nagasaki. Why a Hollander village? In 1543 the Portuguese first landed on Japan’s southern island of Kyushu, driven by the threefold goals of economic gain, religious conversion, and political influence.3 The Dutch and English established trading settlements on the island shortly thereafter, in 1613 and 1617, respectively. The conflicts between varied national interests and those between the Spanish Franciscans

2 Because the power and effect of any image have definite limits, visitors must willingly participate in the charade with little attempt to uncover the true story behind the scene before their eyes. This is particularly true for those who have really been there—for example, those who have been to Paris and are now confronted with a replica of the Eiffel Tower in Orlando, Fla. But most entertainment also requires us to place our logic on hold, taking delight in being fooled.

and the Portuguese Jesuits caused the Japanese shogunate to raise a wary eye toward the Europeans. For several reasons, including the basic tolerance of the indigenous Shinto religion, Catholicism began to take ground in Kyushu. The Protestant Dutch and English cautioned the government about the pernicious influence of a religious sect loyal above all to Rome.4 Fed by the acknowledgment of superior technology and arms, as well as the threat of European takeover, the government forbade Christianity and closed the country to almost all foreign contact in 1587; after a brief period of reopening, Japan was decisively sealed by the Tokugawa shogunate in 1617.

For two hundred years (1641–1858), a single window to the West was left open in Nagasaki: the sole source of medical, botanical, and technological knowledge, the sole source for the import of European material culture. From roughly 1600 to 1867, the Dutch trading colony impounded on the artificial island of Deshima in Nagasaki harbor served as

this small sluice through which Europe entered Japan. Memories of this limited presence endure in the region, as do remnants of the Portuguese presence from earlier days. Thus the associations of Nagasaki with the Netherlands remain indelible to the Japanese. (The less felicitous association with the atomic bomb has been added in this century.) When Japanese people think of Nagasaki, they think of the Dutch, and they think of the city’s mixed culture (including the Chinese) expressed in architectural styles, festivals, and foods.5

The makers of Hollander Village tapped these associations in the design of the theme park, adding a Dutch gloss to the rather standard rides of a standard amusement park. While the incultrated landscape included a tall ship museum and a replica of a wharf, the gothic venue, mirror maze, a miniature replica of Madurodam and a carrousel catered to a younger clientele. A country club, with a golf course by Jack Nicklaus, is not far away, one assumes aimed for the childless or those requiring time out from a hectic schedule of waiting in line. Despite its relatively small scale, the park has been an economic success, instigating an expanded vision in the mind of the park’s founder.

In 1988 Yoshikuni Kamichika assembled a group of major investors to create the logical extension of the Hollander Village: Huis Ten Bosch. But this “theme park” would be quite different from its predecessor. For one, it would be slanted toward adults rather than children; and in their creation of a viable townscape—a model for future Japanese dwellings—Kamichika and his investors were dead serious. Townscape, in fact, rather than any particular ride or diversion, was the basis of the park. The themed landscape would evoke the presence of Holland, dissolving the boundaries between the (mostly) Japanese visitors and their actual presence in Japan. Like the original idea behind Disney’s Epcot—an “Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow”—Huis Ten Bosch was conceived to serve not only as a themed resort in the present but as a town center at some time in the future.6 Thus, its (curious) message is that in another country, at another time, one can find the means to develop a feasible community center for Japan today and in the future. Behind this assumption lies the notion that the experience of the theme park can provide the basis for themed living—by eradicating the borders around the theme park, the theme park is

5 The European contact also left loan words in the Japanese language, among them jubon, from the Portuguese for pants and pan for bread. In Nagasaki, a local specialty is kasumiten, from castella, a kind of pound cake. The linguistic Dutch legacy in Japan is far less evident than the Portuguese, however. The Netherlands’ principal contribution was made in the sciences and trade goods, among them lead, tin, licorice, mangoes, saffron, soap, alarm clocks, microscopes, eyeglasses, and pencils. This list was drawn from Herbert E. Plutschow, Historical Nagasaki (Tokyo: Japan Times, 1983), 61. For a discussion of the Dutch presence in Nagasaki, see ibid., 45–71.

6 Epcot was originally intended as a living community that would offer to all the comfort, homogeneity, and “aw-shucks” village—America as Disneyland itself—a place where American living was the very theme. As Walt Disney himself phrased it on the inside rear cover of The Story of Walt Disney World (Orlando, Fla.: Walt Disney World, 1971), “a place] where people actually live a life they can’t find anywhere else in the world today.” The project was stillborn, however, and over time Epcot evolved into a theme park segment that presented the Global Village to Central Florida and thousands of visitors from all over the world. Only recently, with the construction of Celebration, has the Disney empire established a true living community, extending its involvement with hostleries at its various parks.
rendered coincident with the contemporary landscape and viable as a setting for contemporary communal and individual living. 7

Although Westerners—and certainly many Japanese—may well regard the idea behind Huis Ten Bosch as just short of “nuts,” the seriousness with which the project has been realized cannot be as easily faulted. The investment has been enormous: roughly U.S.$2.5 billion for the one hundred fifty-two hectares of the first phase. To begin planning and design, a binational team of Dutch and Japanese architects and designers, ecologists, and urbanists laid the groundwork for the project. They began by using the technology of shoreline management and land reclamation drawn from centuries of Dutch experience. Much of the park’s site had been reclaimed from the sea centuries ago. During the 1940s, the site was expanded for military purposes and again, during the 1980s for industrial uses that never materialized. For Huis Ten Bosch, more land was created, drained, dredged, or filled, all

7 The most prescient text on the subject is Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Schocken Books, 1976). Here, we may also reverse the fascination of the West with the Orient, as revealed in Roland Barthes, The Empire of Signs, reprint ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982). See pp. 3–4: “What can be addressed, in the consideration of the Orient, are not other symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom (though the latter might appear thoroughly desirable); it is the possibility of difference, or a mutation, or a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems.” This thought seems to lie at the root of the theme park in general and Huis Ten Bosch—the rideless amusement park—in particular.
following exacting ecological practice. The Japanese planning team found, for example, that stone seawalls are more conducive to marine life than are the impervious monolithic surfaces of concrete. As a result there are no concrete seawalls along the land’s perimeter, a practice that, as predicted, has succeeded in nurturing sea life. (The townscape of the park is similarly devoid of concrete paving and exposed concrete building surfaces—although this is a question of tactility and visual aesthetics rather than ecology.) The corporation also manages the Nagasaki BioPark, itself a display of ecology teamed with a Japanese fondness for animals.8

Once the basic landform and superstructure had been provided, the Huis Ten Bosch “townscape” and its cultural landscape were developed. The large architectural firm of Nihon Sekkei, in collaboration with Dutch architect Fred Hofman, made use of architectonic bits and urban pieces drawn from historical Dutch cities: the tower from Utrecht; parts of the castle at Nijenrode; and a complete re-creation of the palace—and garden (more convincing than the recently recreated grounds of Het Loo in the Netherlands!)—of Huis Ten Bosch (Fig. 3).9

The purloined architectural elements were not used as isolated features nor casually meshed as an accidental pastiche. Nor were they “rides” in the conventional sense of the theme park. In a curious way, they were regarded as one would the normal elements of any urban scheme: towers complemented squares, areas of enclosure opened to squares or vistas, corridors—both land and sea—were configured for fluid circulation (Figs. 4, 5). In many ways, the picturesque planning suggests the ideas of the nineteenth-century Austrian architect Camillo Sitte, who suggested that one could learn from the spatial designs of past ages—particularly the medieval.10 The planners, including Fukuoka landscape architect Motokazu Tashiro and Dutch consultant Ted van Keulen, integrated this carefully devised townscape with extensive and carefully managed flowerbeds, grassed banks, miles of canals, and massive tree plantations. (According to the attraction’s press release, forty thousand trees

8 Seen cynically, the BioPark is essentially a theme park in which nature and animals provide the theme. Its plays on the Japanese fascination with kawaii-mono (that is, “cute things”), although BioPark does broadcast an ecological message to a nation that probably uses resources for packaging to a greater extent than any other in the world.

9 Although based on historical designs, the garden for Het Loo, outside Apeldoorn, Netherlands, was reconstructed only in the mid-1980s. Given the reliance of the scheme on extensive and relatively flat parterres, the garden’s space is far less articulated and defined than the townscape of Huis Ten Bosch. As pure pattern in vegetation and gravel, however, it is a marvel. See Rijksmuseum Paleis Het Loo (Apeldoorn, Netherlands: Stichting ’T Konings Loo, 1988).

10 In 1889 Sitte published Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen (City Planning according to Artistic Principles) as a reaction against the dissolution of urban space that accompanied the mid-19th-century development of the Ringstrasse in Vienna. Sitte looked back to historical examples of plazas—principally in northern Europe—to provide clues for designing new, clearly defined urban spaces. Although his message was made more available to American readers in a French translation (L’Art de bâtir les villes) by Camille Martin in 1902, it was not until 1945 that an English translation by Charles T. Stewart appeared; the most recent translation of this influential book, as well as an exhaustive scholarly study of the author and his work, is in George and Christiane Collins, eds., Camillo Sitte: The Birth of Modern City Planning (New York: Rizzoli International, 1986).
4. Utrecht Plaza, seemingly planned in accord with the principles of Camillo Sitte

5. The waterscape of Huis Ten Bosch: The Kasteel Nijenrode (rear) and the Domtoren beyond
and three hundred thousand flowers were planted.) Huis Ten Bosch is, above all, a park that uses water and plantings as the visual and experiential glue between architectural elements (Fig. 6).

Given the Japanese appreciation of nature in general and of flowers in particular, the flora of Huis Ten Bosch are themselves themed features. In June 1995, for example, thousands of hydrangeas were dispersed throughout the park, and the hydrangea festival was itself billed as a tourist draw (Fig. 7). Like the architectural detailing of its buildings, each aspect of the landscape is both considered and convincing. And as a totality, the themed city center of Huis Ten Bosch tends to work as an architectural hallucinogen that removes its visitors from Japan and drops them into Holland. (The trance is broken, however, by the dramatic mountains that form the backdrop to the development.)

Little really takes place at Huis Ten Bosch besides extensive commercial areas—seventy shops and sixty restaurants—that also draw on Dutch produce such as chocolate, cheese, beer, and the like. But it is really the cultural landscape conjured through building and vegetation that is itself the destination and the purpose for the visit. On average, between eight and ten thousand visitors a day come to share the experience.\footnote{The 1998 tallies (from “Tokyo Disneyland World’s Top Park,” \textit{Asahi Evening News}, 31 December 1998) for attendance at the world’s theme parks declined by 4 percent from the previous year; in Asia, ticket sales were hampered by the region’s economic slide. Tokyo Disneyland was the top draw worldwide with 16.7 million visitors, nonetheless; Huis Ten Bosch ranked 3rd in Japan and 16th worldwide.}

\footnote{In some respects, the shops are “self-themed”: the selection of products, many of Dutch export, reinforces the character of the architecture and suggests the manner in which visitors should act.}

6. Abundant planting complements the townscape and its statuary.
One buys a comprehensive ticket (for $45 U.S. at the summer 1995 exchange rate), for admission to a number of separate divertissements and, protected from the elements by a translucent roof, one seeks the appropriate gateway. The entrance ticket is actually a magnetically coded entrance card, but young women ceremoniously insert the card into the machine for the visitor. One must be polite (Fig. 8). First, let’s stop to have our picture taken—as we will many times today (Fig. 9). The attractions vary in scope and interest: a museum drawn from the house of a Dutch doctor in seventeenth-century Nagasaki; a fantasy environment of three-dimensional projection extracted from prints by M. C. Escher; a museum of music boxes and automata. A nod in the direction of children is the Great Voyage Theater, a large-screen film presentation of the sea voyage from Holland to Japan in the seventeenth century. The audience is set within a boxed area, which can jerk, shake, and shimmy in accord with the roughness of the seas and the severity of the perceived storm.

These presentations are, for the most part, neither interesting nor impressive, and only the palace of Huis Ten Bosch—which in summer 1995 featured a fine exhibition of Euro-

It is customary in Japan to be greeted with a bow at homes, shops, or hotels. Until quite recently, large department stores employed teams of young women (who doubled as elevator operators and information staff) to meet shoppers at the door or at the foot of the escalator with a “welcome” greeting and discreet bow. One sees at Huis Ten Bosch a residual form of this social nicety; thus far management has resisted the urge to implement more economical, fully automated entrance methods.

I lived through a similar media presentation using the computer-generated technology of Star Wars at Disneyland Paris (formerly EuroDisney). Clearly, the particular imagery of this “ride” is secondary to the intended feeling of haptic involvement with the scene projected before its viewers.
8. Entrance to the theme park with the Kasteel Nijenrode beyond

9. Tourists at work: Like many tourist destinations in Japan, Huis Ten Bosch provides myriad photo opportunities for visitors seeking to make the landscape the stuff of memories.
pean Baroque paintings—really merits the name museum (Fig. 10). Given the numbers of people that frequent Huis Ten Bosch, the visitor is led in a rigorous and linear path through the palace museum, but one is impressed with the palpability of the Dutch milieu. The exhibition program is impressive, and the presence of a small branch of the University of Leiden within Huis Ten Bosch seems to have added a gloss of academic respectability to the project. The gardens are developed in a relentlessly formal style, seemingly untouched by the native Japanese garden aesthetic. A magnificent tunnel encircles the principal parterre, itself kept in eloquent trim. The garden is, quite obviously, a park with a theme, in this case evoking the formality and spatial disposition so foreign to Japanese garden design (Figs. 11, 12). Although topiary is found both in Japan and the West, topiary elements predominate at Huis Ten Bosch: there is no mixture of formal and informal elements, as there is generally in Japan. But in comparison with the recreated garden at Het Loo, Huis Ten Bosch does quite well.

10. Paleis Huis Ten Bosch

15 Topiary (karikomi in Japanese) as an artistic practice dates back to at least the late 16th century. At that time, the masters of the emerging cult of the tea ceremony saw aesthetic potential in adopting the tight pruning required to stimulate the growth of new, small leaves on tea bushes. It was rare, however, that topiary forms served purely architectonic purposes; more often, the formal order of the bushes was embedded within a softer, less formal terrain, playing the hard against the soft, the geometric against the more natural. See Marc Treib, “Modes of Formality: The Distilled Complexity of Japanese Design,” Landscape Journal (spring 1993), 2–16.
11–12. Views of the formal gardens of the Paleis Huis Ten Bosch. Given Japan’s heavy rainfall, the garden’s plantings grow vigorously.
The makers of Huis Ten Bosch have understood the importance of the garden and palace as an ensemble, as they have understood the role of vegetation and water throughout the park as the equivalent of a cinematic dissolve or fade in cinema. Greenery and water serve as the buffers between architectural pieces not physically conjoined (Fig. 13). In this respect, the landscape of Huis Ten Bosch shares equal billing with architecture and adds an overlay of life—however restrained—to the inert bricks and stones.

The palace museum is the highlight destination within the park. More often, one pays the stiff admission price only for the right to freely spend more money in the shops and restaurants—and to visit this evocation of Holland. Like the leaps of architectural association—from Holland to Nagasaki to Huis Ten Bosch’s brick buildings—the products sold in the shops and the food served in the bars and restaurants are more important for their contribution to the collective image of the place than for any inherent value as artifact or cuisine.

The Clientele

Who goes there and what do they do? Huis Ten Bosch was a success from the day it opened in 1992, with roughly four million visitors a year as of 1996. The visitors are not children: demographic studies (carried out within the park each month using questionnaires) show that the majority of the visitors are women and that people in their thirties and forties are the principal age groups. In particular, it is women in pairs or in groups—spanning a range of ages from twenty to fifty—that constitute the majority of visitors. This is only somewhat surprising, however, since this age group is the one that frequents cultural sites of all kinds in Japan. The surprise is that Huis Ten Bosch can be read as a cultural destination and that these women are able and willing to spend the costly fees for admission and participation in the theme park’s offerings.

Children are not amused here and instead visit the Hollander Village, connected to Huis Ten Bosch by a forty-minute ferry ride across the bay. Conversely, visitors arrive by train on the special Huis Ten Bosch express that runs from Fukuoka in the north to Nagasaki in the south, or by tour bus, or to a lesser degree by private auto. The adults who want to go to Huis Ten Bosch want to stay there. The four theme hotels, unlike Disneyland Paris, are located within and throughout the themed center, adding bulk to the myth of the Dutch architectural landscape and fulfilling the fantasy to a greater extent (Fig. 14). The prices rival those of the best hotels in central Tokyo—in summer 1995, from $420 to $750 a night for a double room (with an exchange rate of ¥85 to the U.S. dollar)—they are among the

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16 Early cinema was faced with the problem of replicating the structure of theater (the “photoplay”): constructing a film in acts. Without the physical intervention of the descending curtain, some device was necessary to effect a transition between scenes. These took various forms: the “fade to black,” the “wipe,” or any number of other ways to distinguish the end of one scene from the beginning of the next. In many theme parks, vegetation is used in just the same way, as a neutral—now green—transition between a Cambodian temple and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Ride.

17 The Dutch food I ate at Huis Ten Bosch was quite credible, however. Certainly, the Japanese have no difficulty reproducing the cuisine of any nation, should they desire to do so. Beer, for example, is imported from the Netherlands, guaranteeing its authenticity as a true Dutch product.
13. Building and vegetation form one landscape compound, at times functioning like cinematic scenes.

14. Unlike most theme parks, Huis Ten Bosch integrates its major hotels within the townscape.
(courtesy of Huis Ten Bosch)
most heavily booked hotels in the country. In fact, the Hotel Europe claims the highest occupancy rate of any hotel in Japan and must be booked almost a year in advance for the more popular spring and autumn months.

At present, lodgings within the park can handle only about two thousand people a night, while studies show that three times that many visitors would prefer to stay on site for several days. (Huis Ten Bosch is about an hour and a half from Fukuoka to the north and Nagasaki to the south, a trip just long enough to make staying in the park desirable, particularly when evening activities are planned.) In all, the makers of Huis Ten Bosch have created a landscape that is regarded by Japanese visitors (most of whom have never been out of Japan and many of whom come from the southern island) as unique, interesting, historical, fun, and worth a visit of two or three days. Often arriving in groups, they are informed that Huis Ten Bosch is just like Holland and are encouraged to shop, eat, learn, and experience the Netherlands of the seventeenth century right there on Kyushu. 18

In addition to the hotels, detached villas in the Dutch style contribute to the extent and character of the overall landscape. Wassenaar, as this district is called, is one of the more unusual aspects of the development, introducing living units within the themed center (Fig. 15). It also blurs the distinction between development as a theatrical background against which to be seen and development as an actual stage upon which to live (none of the villa inhabitants dress in costume, however). Vegetation continues the lines of the villas, in a rather un-Dutch manner. The promotional brochure notes, “Contrary to Japanese houses, Dutch houses are very spacious and have large windows so that light can easily penetrate. People spend a lot of their free time at home, therefore the houses are cozy. . . . This is the kind of life Huis Ten Bosch is introducing to Japan.”

Most of the villas that line the canals and serve as backdrops for the boat tours are constructed by the Huis Ten Bosch corporation for sale to individuals; some are intended as time-share units for the employees of companies. Their occupants tend to be local, with the cities of Fukuoka and Kita-Kyushu as the most distant points of origin. An additional facility, the Wellness Center, located on its own pond near the reconstructed Huis Ten Bosch palace offers Forest Villa and taps into the health and fitness trend.

Currently, two apartment blocks are under construction just beyond the limits of the park and are beginning to efface the distinction between the paid zone within the park and the evolving modified cultural landscape beyond. The theme, however, remains constant, and these blocks portend what is to come. The first Disneyland (in Anaheim, Calif.) showed that to direct development and make a maximum return on the investment dollar, it was necessary to control the land and development surrounding the park. By the time Walt Disney World was constructed in the early 1970s, the company had created its own admin-

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18 At Huis Ten Bosch, Japanese or Asian visitors can easily believe themselves transported to Holland: the townscape is right; the food and drinks are right; the ambiance seems right—little matter the surrounding mountains, the nearly exclusively Japanese faces, or the language spoken. Best of all, they needn’t worry about jet lag, a new language and currency, and all the real inconveniences and difficulties of foreign travel. As Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: New American Library, 1964), noted, the purpose of this variety of tourist venues is to take the travail out of travel.
istrative unit from four Florida counties, in effect creating its own Magic Kingdom. Disneyland Paris, located in agricultural fields almost an hour from the French capital, furthered the process of development by erecting five thousand rooms in hotels that varied in theme from the American Wild West to a pallid evocation of New York.19 The hotels at Disneyland Paris were situated beyond the theme park, set in what was intended to be symbiotic proximity that still allowed the resort its own identity for conferences and recreation. Huis Ten Bosch, by contrast, fully integrated its hotels within the park, with any potential conflicts in admission and luggage-handling dispelled through administrative management rather than geographic planning. During its early years, the themed housing beyond the limits of the Huis Ten Bosch will broaden the perceived limits of the theme park; in the future—if development proceeds according to plan—the link between the two zones will be seamless and may even disappear.

In fact, it is the management’s hope—and intention—that when the massive construction debt has been amortized in about twenty years, the admission charge will be dropped completely. By that time, a community planned on Dutch lines will have developed incrementally around today’s theme park center; what had been a zone controlled by a restrictive admission will have become the thriving city center of a new town on the western shore of Omura Bay. In some ways, this is a bizarre idea. The double displacement

in space and time—Holland, not Japan; seventeenth or eighteenth century, not the twentieth or twenty-first—challenges comprehension along normal channels. One must keep in mind, however, the relative homogeneity of Japan and the Japanese and the overall uniqueness of the Huis Ten Bosch environment. Certainly, the notion that this is a prototype for today’s and tomorrow’s communities is open to challenge; that it is a curious—and so far successful—attempt is not.

To understand more fully, perhaps, the attraction of a development such as Huis Ten Bosch, one need only look to the state of the Japanese city today. Metropolises such as Tokyo and Osaka developed from seventeenth-century castle towns, once structured by ordinance and fiat, once clear diagrams of rank and trade. But in the modern period, in the century of industrialization—which meant westernization—the perceived planning of the city diminished, leaving little traditional urban structure except the neighborhood unit. Land has become even more scarce, and to own one’s house is an elusive dream for all but the very affluent. The pollution of air and water has been a nagging problem in the past, but great strides have been made in the last decade to reduce the real, as opposed to perceived dangers they create.²⁰ Visually, the city lives in turmoil; appreciated by Westerners for its dynamic characteristics, it is less appreciated by those raising families within (Fig. 16). Even for architects, the austere architecture of Tadao Ando is appreciated primarily for its

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²⁰ The supremacy of Tokyo’s visual horrors as a topic of international conversation has been superseded by the threat of catastrophic earthquake, however. See Peter Popham, Tokyo: The City at the End of the World (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985).
fashioning of a quiet moment within a world of seeming chaos. Like Ando’s architecture—like the television that purveys exotic places and people—Huis Ten Bosch provides a respite, however contrived. For the young and single, the Japanese city is still the place to study and to live their lives. But marriage forces couples and families to the periphery, to crowded apartments set willy-nilly and cheek by jowl. Then comes the daily commute.

Enter the tranquility and planned order of Huis Ten Bosch as a short-term balm. It seems a dream; it is a dream, divorced in place, in time, a dream of somewhere across the sea that never really was (Fig. 17). And yet here it is in Japan. Many Japanese apartment blocks or housing developments, as in the United States, use evocative titles to suggest status or location: “L’Etoile Apartments” and the like. In some instances, weak imagery is applied but only to a single building: an entrance through a miniature version of the Arc de Triomphe, for example. At Huis Ten Bosch it is, and will continue to be, all the buildings that share the same unique vocabulary, the same ordered, clean, exotic townscape. This is its attraction.

21 Tadao Ando is known for a pared-down minimalism, use of light, and continued use of exposed concrete. He explains that his austere palette responds to the harshness of the Japanese environment; the only architectural means to reattach human existence with nature today is through light, i.e., the sky. Among numerous publications on the architect, see Kenneth Frampton, ed., Tadao Ando: Buildings, Projects, Writings (New York: Rizzoli International, 1984), and Yukio Futagawa, ed., GA Architect: Tadao Ando (Tokyo: ADA Edita, 1987).

22 Obviously this is but one aspect of Huis Ten Bosch’s appeal. There is also the attractive aspect of something new, time off from work, time away with friends, and travel related to conspicuous consumption. But the attraction of a quiet, orderly place such as Huis Ten Bosch is quite strong for the current generation.
And yet you can’t really live at Huis Ten Bosch, can you? Who would live there? Anyone working in Nagasaki or Fukuoka would have a long commute; Sasebo, however, is closer, only fifteen miles away. The vision suggests that work will develop around the theme park, perhaps at first to serve those working at the park, but in time the services and accoutrements of urbanity necessary to service those services, and so on—as it has been in the past.

**Theme Park, Themed Living**

Huis Ten Bosch thus suggests the next step in creating distinct and exotic environments that may trace to the follies of the English landscape garden or the mythic references to the Chinese immortals in the seventeenth-century gardens of the Japanese. It also suggests a basic human urge to seek the unusual and the exotic, however domesticated and “recontextualized” that environment may become in the process. MacCannell has suggested that the single myth that links postindustrial societies throughout the world is the dissatisfaction with our quotidian lives. According to MacCannell, we feel that we no longer live in the real time, at the real place. Thus we search to find that real existence, and it is this search that makes us perpetual tourists. Perhaps because of geographic proscriptions, perhaps because of the subsistence needs, perhaps because we seek a spiritual fulfillment, sometime long ago we were content with what we had where we had it. Now we search, we look, we become pilgrims for the true cultural landscape and the real life. Perhaps it’s just because it all seemed so simple “then.” J. B. Jackson once pointed out that the “good old days” must be positioned no later than the era of our great-grandparents; it is important that no one alive today can tell us what those times were really like.

Of course, it is easy to confront and even deny MacCannell’s pronouncement, but it is difficult to dismiss it completely. Admittedly, some people leave home to seek, albeit temporarily, displacement in exotic environments, thereafter happily returning to the comfort of a routine in a familiar setting. For them, the theme park functions as a halfway house between the normal and the extraordinary, a “filet of travel”: all the appearance without any of the work, travel without travail. We can neither fully accept nor fully dispute MacCannell’s myth because there is no way that we can ever gather sufficient evidence. We remain perpetual tourists regardless, whether as part of a subconscious quest or a conscious seeking of the new.

In many ways, a themed town center differs little from those townscapes condoned by the prescriptive style ordinance of Santa Fe, in New Mexico, and more directly, the contrived cultural landscape of Seaside, Fla. Santa Fe passed its Historic Style Ordinance in 1957, prompted by the perceived threat of modernism upon its urban fabric. The ordinance dictates that one must build in the Old Santa Fe style (a conglomerate of Pueblo and early Spanish architectural vernaculars) or the New Santa Fe style (the New Mexican version of the nineteenth-century Greek Revival termed Territorial). In fact, the style is rarely authen-

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23 MacCannell, *The Tourist* (as above, note 7).

tic in its look, much less in its materials. It is as much a fantasy as Huis Ten Bosch, a romantic reinterpretation of the way things never were. But, unlike the Japanese theme park, it is based on a manner of building indigenous to the area, intended to evoke a sense of a former time in that very location. The Historic Style Ordinance at first governed only the central area of the city, although its area of jurisdiction has been extended at least twice. The ordinance did not address townscape, however, and some buildings in the appropriate style fit very uncomfortably within the historic pattern of walls and courtyards. Of great interest, I think, is that one could never perceive where the historic style district ended and the rest of the city began. People coming to Santa Fe from outside the area wanted to build in the traditional styles; they wanted to live as they were supposed to; they wanted to play out the theater of the Southwest in a simulated adobe home. That’s why they move there from New York.

Seaside, a planned community in Florida, was designed by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk in the late 1970s. It has been a huge commercial success and has spawned lesser versions across the country, often executed with far less thought and feeling. Duany and Plater-Zyberk attempted to codify the essence of Florida “cracker” construction and to assemble structures that would cohere as a vital community. In the case of Seaside, unlike in Santa Fe, the building code prescribed structures that had not occupied the site in prior eras, although they derived from prototypes in roughly the same geographic area. The houses are made of wood; they share a similar range of roof pitches; they must have a fence and a porch. Intended as a resort community, Seaside houses people from outside the area, and one supposes that they are people of means who can afford to play at being in a nineteenth-century small town on Florida’s “Redneck Riviera.” That’s why they move there from New York.

Huis Ten Bosch does both Santa Fe and Seaside one better in audacity: it draws nothing from its immediate surroundings, except the water’s edge, and nothing from its era—nothing, that is, except a nearly miraculous system of technical services that lace the park’s venues beneath this evocation of historic Holland. This arrangement suggests a convenient metaphor: at Huis Ten Bosch, technology—the prime indicator of our century—is literally driven underground. In its place, one encounters a brick-and-stone evocation of a dreamworld that never was in that place—or in any place—before. On one level, the lesson of Huis Ten Bosch may be the contemporary attraction of planning and planned unit

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25 Since the exemplars of any architectural style will, of necessity, display considerable variation, it is virtual impossible to codify its idiom. The Santa Fe (N.M.) Historic Style Ordinance governed the replication of the look of historic buildings but not necessarily their essence. Crucial concerns, such as building typology, configuration, set-back, and the greater townscape, were not specified in the original 1957 document. More recently, the municipal planning agency has tried to redress the ordinance’s shortcomings, considering far more than the color of the buildings or the distance of a window or door from a corner.

18. Over the next 2 decades, the area of Huis Ten Bosch will expand, filling in empty sites within the park and developing the areas surrounding the park in appropriate architectural idiom.
development. But there is a second aspect, and that is the power of the image (Fig. 18). The ubiquity of the image in photographs, printing, and electronic media has fostered a culture in which the look far outweighs the substance. We can call it exotic; we can call it phony; we can call it escapist; we can call it bizarre. But we cannot dismiss the power of the image and the power of a themed environment to provide a comforting barrier between everything we think is wrong with the world right now, and everything we think was right with the world back then—wherever in the world that “then” might happen to have been.
Landscapes of Theme Park Rides:
Media, Modes, Messages

Brenda J. Brown

Elsewhere is always paradise. To escape from our everyday surroundings is to experience the feeling of entering another world. The desire to encounter the duality of existence, ever present in the history of humanity, sends us in search of a world different from our own, rich with possibilities.¹

The new landscape, seen at a rapid, sometimes even terrifying pace, is composed of rushing air, shifting lights, clouds, waves, a constantly moving, changing horizon, a constantly changing surface beneath the ski, the wheel, the rudder, the wing. The view is no longer static.²

The fundamental requirement of elsewhere is that it be an other. Elsewhere may be heaven, but it may also be hell, or hell disguised as heaven, or heaven disguised as hell. Elsewhere can take many forms, especially if one includes the elsewhere of the human psychophysiology and imagination—triggered by, manifested as, or independent from physically tangible spaces and their representations. As with theme parks and many of their antecedents, the power of landscapes of theme park rides is the power of their elsewhere.³

Landscapes of theme park rides are dynamic landscapes, landscapes of motion. In these

I am grateful to Robert B. Riley, Terry Young, James Wescoat, Philip Boyland, and two anonymous reviewers for constructive comments and criticisms on earlier versions of this essay. My photographs at The Magic Kingdom and Epcot are reproduced here with permission of Disney Enterprises Inc.; likewise, my photographs of Kongfrontation are reproduced with permission of Universal Studios Florida. They may not be reproduced without further permission.

³ Theme parks have been described as “giant limen thresholds,” and sites of “playful pilgrimage.” See A. Moore, “Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and Playful Pilgrimage Center,” Anthropological Quarterly 53, no. 4 (1980), 207, and as “territorial complexes given over to the introverted system of the game . . . a game with its essential parts . . . uncertainty and the risk of failure [removed].” See Auricoste, “Leisure Parks in Europe,” 494.
landscapes out-of-the-ordinary movement is integral and essential, even when in sometimes complex and highly sophisticated choreographies, it works in concert with sound, story, and a fabricated or preexisting visual landscape. Landscapes of theme park rides are designed landscapes, spatially and temporally circumscribed, highly controlled, and very popular. They thus can serve as models—or foils—for other landscapes of movement, especially those designed ones in which movement works with sound, story, or visual landscape.4 Their analysis shows ways in which dynamic landscapes can be composed for varied effects and purposes.

The elsewheres with which this essay is primarily concerned are born of ride landscapes’ occupation of real space and time. These elsewheres are augmented, reinforced, and characterized by what these dynamic landscapes present and how they physiologically and psychologically affect riders’ perceptions.

Yet contemporary theme park landscapes work within larger contexts—historical, spatial, and cultural—and for all their otherness, so do their elsewheres. Landscapes of rides have long been popular, and this suggests that they fulfill some basic human propensities: among others, pleasure in spectacles, alternative perspectives, novel kinesthetic experiences (perhaps leading to altered states of consciousness), sensational thrills, and immersion in three-dimensional plotted stories.5 They merit our attention for this reason alone. Like their predecessors, landscapes of theme park rides charm and captivate; they are spatiotemporal elsewheres, humanly constructed and humanly inhabited. However, while many contemporary rides maintain the same compositional categories as their predecessors, often their elements and composition have changed, making for different messages as well as different media and modes.

The elsewhere of the theme park and the elsewheres of its rides are symbiotic. As in earlier amusement parks, world’s fairs, pleasure gardens, and carnivals, the theme park’s macrocosmic Elsewhere is created in part by the many microcosmic elsewheres one may experience within park boundaries—and, in many cases, elsewhere is found in the landscape of a ride. Conversely, the elsewhere of a ride is often strengthened by its location within such an other-worldly precinct. This symbiotic relationship is as old as rides and the most ancient theme park antecedents. However, since the period at the turn of the century—the heyday of world expositions and amusement parks and the advent of rides with extensive fabricated landscapes and plots—the manipulation of this relationship has become increasingly conscious and deliberate. In today’s most prominent theme parks, it is highly tuned. Park identity and theme support and are supported by ride landscapes’ media, modes, and messages.

In a still broader context, rides have historically involved playful and entertaining applications of technologies originally developed for work; they have expressed another
side of technological cultures—and they continue to do so today. Some theme park rides differ little from their predecessors. They continue to charm and captivate; they are seemingly perennially popular, tried and true exemplars of the genre. However, their presence within a theme park is also emblematic. They represent earlier, preindustrial, industrial, and mechanical eras (in particular, their kindlier and gentler aspects), as well as ride landscapes of visitors’ memories. Other ride landscapes, although composed of the same basic elements and devices as their predecessors, use more highly developed technologies to create new expressions and experiences of transcendental elsewheres. Still others, again employing similar compositional elements and devices, are emblematic of, and endemic to, a postindustrial world, a world of electronic production and mass communication. While these latter landscapes are certainly elsewheres, they also ground ubiquitous multimedia everywheres to very specific spaces and times. In their range and variety, the elsewheres of contemporary theme park ride landscapes both reflect traditions and show ways our culture’s relationship to technology as well as some of our elsewheres are uniquely ours.

Here, ride landscapes at The Magic Kingdom and Epcot, both part of the Walt Disney World Resort, and at Universal Studios Florida, all in the Orlando area, serve as illustrative, contemporary exemplars. These rides and the parks in which they are situated are not in all ways typical, and, as will be seen, they differ from one another. Yet these theme parks and their diverse rides are among the most famous, the most popular, the most polished, the most compositionally complex, and the most technologically sophisticated in existence. These theme parks are typical in that rides are essential to them and in that what their rides adopt, adapt, develop, and reject from predecessors helps make them what they are.6

*Landscapes of Rides: Definitions*

A *ride* is a designed structure, including vehicle and course, in which—and sometimes through which—persons are conveyed, primarily for entertainment: riveted excitement, relaxed pleasure, sublime awe, or some combination of these. Rides’ forms include swings, seesaws, horizontal and vertical wheels, and car-traversed linear courses, usually over varied topographies and configurations. They range from carrousels to roller coasters, from Ferris wheels to computer-based flight simulators, from interior scenic voyages to monorails. Rides necessarily involve technology, an application of science and knowledge regarding how things work.

*Landscapes of rides, or ride landscapes,* can be considered from two perspectives: interior

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6 Epcot and the Magic Kingdom were 2 of the 4 theme parks at Walt Disney World Resort when this essay was written (Disney-MGM Studios is the third and Disney’s Animal Kingdom is the fourth). Universal Studios Florida is a totally separate entity—related to but quite different in concept—from Universal Studios Hollywood. Rides at Walt Disney World Resort and Universal Studios Florida are not really typical of rides at other contemporary theme parks. Although other theme parks range widely, most of their rides lack the elaborately constructed landscapes of The Walt Disney Company and Universal Studios. Many of the other parks highlight thrill rides and more closely resemble earlier amusement parks. It is also relevant to note here that the term *theme park* seems to have arisen with Disneyland Park in Anaheim, Calif. It designated Disneyland—with its references to a world, or worlds, previously created in other media—as different from previous amusement parks.
and exterior. From the interior—from the rider’s perspective—the landscape experienced in the course of a ride is the landscape of that ride. The ride is a largely self-contained, multisensorial kinetic composition, a landscape intended for and only really known by those who ride it. This landscape is composed of four elements: movement, sound, visual landscape, and story.

Movement is the most basic and distinctive element. Movement, encompassing tempo, vibration, rhythm, sequence, course, duration, and phrasing (the compositional variations, nuances, and relationships of such things as rises and falls, straightaways and curves, different tempos, and different rhythms) necessarily makes ride landscapes spatial and temporal. Movement influences a rider’s mood, psychophysiology, and what she or he visually or otherwise perceives. Powerful or gentle, smooth or erratic, movement can connote efficient technology or technology gone haywire.

Sound in ride landscapes may be background or foreground, incidental or programmed. It may be a byproduct of conveyance systems; it may emanate from unrelated surroundings; it may be designed as integral to the ride. It may be voice-over narration, music, or cacophony. It may be rhythmic, atmospheric, and part of dramatic development.

The visual landscape—the material landscape that riders see—may be preexisting, designed, symbolic, literally representational, miniaturized, or combinations of these. It encompasses what can be seen of the ride’s structure and conveyance system (including vehicles), what has been fabricated as an environment, and scenes designed to unfold sequentially. It also includes what riders see exterior to the ride’s construction: the park, or part of the park (which may or may not be related thematically to the ride), or other surrounding landscape.

Story is less tangible. Stories are told through temporal and spatial events, sequentially related over a ride’s course. They are embedded by the ride’s designer and conveyed through the first three elements. They are sequential, and they have plot. Indeed, as will be seen, ride landscapes are typically expressive of plot’s interlocked meanings: “a small piece of ground, used for a specific purpose,” and “a series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or drama.” Although visitors’ progressions and a story’s sequential events also coincide in other designed landscapes, in ride landscapes, progress and therefore the plot’s unfolding are usually mechanized and thus uniformly and relatively consistently controlled. They are little subject to a visitor’s energy or whims, an official guide’s interpretation, or written proscriptions.

From this interior perspective the ride landscape is necessarily dynamic. It is a landscape

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7 I quite deliberately use story rather than narrative in analyzing ride landscapes. Writers today use narrative in varying ways. In regard to landscape and design, it has been used to refer to the mega-message of a designed landscape; to a sequence of nonreferential events within a landscape; and to a design’s multileveled, variously expressed, nonlinearly experienced symbolic system; as well as to a landscape’s sequential symbolic or referential events. Simon Pugh, referring to Roland Barthes, notes that narrative is contemporarily used to denote a way of telling stories and should not be confused with story (the events of the narrative given chronologically) or plot (the order of narrated events). See Simon Pugh, Garden-Nature-Language (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1988). See also Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot (New York: Knopf, 1984), who defines plot as “a structuring operation elicited by, and made necessary by, those meanings that develop through succession and time. He also draws attention to plot’s multiple meanings.
based on space and time, where movement combines with sound and story as well as with relatively stationary visual components more commonly identified as a landscape. Elsewhere may be based on the psychophysical effects of movement and its attendant sounds; it may be based on unusual views of the larger environs; it may be based on representations of a real or imagined landscape and incidents within it; it may be based on how views, representations, movement, sound, and sequential incidents interact and combine with one another.

From the exterior, that is the observer’s perspective, rides are vital components of a larger landscape. As distinctive attractions, landmarks, and spectacles, rides strongly influence park visitors’ circulation and behavior. An entire park, or some portion of it, might be conceived as a landscape of rides. Traditionally that landscape looked dynamic; its elsewhere was built on diverse machines and riding people on kinetic display. Now, however, many rides and their landscapes are hidden in architecture ranging from the fantastically evocative, to the thematically tasteful, to the bland and innocuous.

In fact, exterior and interior perspectives interact and combine in our experiences of ride landscapes and in our notions of their elsewhere, as they interacted and combined in those of theme park antecedents. This discussion, then, necessarily encompasses both points of view. However, because I am most interested in these landscapes as designed landscapes and because I believe it more basic, here I will pay most attention to the interior view—the rider’s perspective—on the varied orchestrations and effects of visual landscape, movement, sound, and story. This formal analysis structures my comparison of contemporary theme park rides to their antecedents and is also potentially applicable to other designed landscapes.

**Historical Context**

**Rides, Technology, and Larger Landscapes**

The history of rides entwines with histories of technology and landscapes, both everyday landscapes of work and landscapes of elsewhere, in particular the human-constructed elsewhere of theme park antecedents. Timber slides, ice slides, and river cotton chutes, all credited as precedents to America’s roller coaster, were labor-saving machines that doubled as devices to propel people at play. The first (so named) carrousel was a seventeenth-century device used by young men training for the Paris Carrousel’s ring-spearing tournament.8 Pennsylvania’s Mauch Chunk Switchback Railway, often considered America’s first railroad and its first roller coaster, began as a means to transport coal.9 Modern technology not only made possible the rides at America’s early amusement parks; it made it possible

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8 “The first of these French carrouels (great displays of raiment and horsemanship) took place during the reign of Henry Navarre (1553–1610) and the most famous one occurred on June 5 and 6, 1662. It was a great spectacle given by Henry’s grandson, Louis XIV, to impress his teenage mistress, Louise de la Valarie. It was staged in the area between the Tuileries and the Louvre [the area now known as the Carrousel].” See Frederick Fried, *A Pictorial History of the Carrousel* (New York: Barnes, 1964), 13–14.

for large numbers of visitors to reach them. Turn-of-the-century amusement parks were often at the end of trolley lines; indeed, they were typically owned by trolley companies. Many rides proudly displayed their working machinery, others, such as The Tickler (Fig. 1), whose spinning cars rolled jerkily down a winding alleyway caroming into one another, showed technology in an irreverent light, subverting images of productive mechanical efficiency with one’s of loss of control and restraint. ¹⁰ (Later, technology developed for flight training led to simulator rides.)

Rides, especially many rides in close proximity, each with its own distinctive form and kinetics, were often key ingredients of early festivals, fairs, and pleasure gardens. Certainly they were vital to amusement parks. For observers, rides were varied, integral, and dynamic elements of the landscape they surveyed. For riders, rides’ courses and motions provided diverse, out-of-the-ordinary psychophysical experiences and unusual visual perspectives. These theme park antecedents offered the possibility of many such experiences within a short span of time, just as they displayed many rides in one defined space.

An early seventeenth-century watercolor depicts a Turkish fair with several rides and many riders (Fig. 2). Slides and ramps were part of Byzantine fairs, Greek marathons, and

Wishram Indian games; man- or animal-powered swings and merry-go-rounds were part of fourteenth-century England’s St. Bartholomew fairs; and hand-driven carrousels, swings with decorated chairs, and ups-and-downs were part of Prater, the two-thousand acre wooded entertainment area that Joseph II built in Vienna in 1766.11 Rides in Paris’s early nineteenth-century pleasure gardens could be seen in relation to one another, as well as in their relation to the rest of the garden’s sylvan environs (Fig. 3). They offered elevated views of the landscape and human and mechanical spectacles (Fig. 4). Some, such as Beaujon Gardens’ Aerial Walks (Promenades Aeriennes) with its specially planted areas within and adjacent (Fig. 5) and Ruggieri Gardens’ Niagara Falls with its rocks and flume (Fig. 6) had landscapes created for them. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American amusement parks typically brought together a greater number of rides, many of which had large skeletal structures. Ferris wheels, roller coasters, aerial swings, and other rides, often in concert with fanciful architecture and existing landforms, made amusement park skylines unique. They were particularly impressive at night, when lights selectively illumined and abstracted their forms and, working with darkness, subsumed them into a glittering kinetic whole (Fig. 7).

11 Regarding slides and ramps, see Cartmell, Incredible Scream Machine, 19; on St. Bartholomew fairs, see Frederick Fried, Built to Amuse: Views from America’s Past (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1990); on the Prater pleasure grounds, see Adams, American Amusement Park Industry, 7.
3–6. Views of rides in early 19th-century Paris pleasure gardens
(courtesy of the Musée Carnavalet, Paris © Phototèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris)
3. (top left) The Tower of Aeolus, Tivoli Gardens (Tour d’Eole promenade aérienne à Tivoli), lithograph by C. Motte, after 1800
4. (bottom left) “Le Supreme Bon Ton, no. 29,” The Russian Mountains of Belleville (Les Montagnes russes de Belleville), anonymous engraving, 1817
5. (above) Aerial Walks (Promenade Aériennes), Beaujon Gardens, Paris, engraving by Lerouge, 1817
6. (below) Niagara Falls (Saut du Niagara), Ruggieri Gardens, Paris, early 19th century, anonymous print
Developments in Ride Landscape Compositions

In today’s theme parks the relative importance of any ride landscape element—movement, sound, visual landscape, or story—varies, often widely, from ride to ride; so does the character of these elements and the ways in which they combine with one another. Movement remains the defining element, but any one of the elements can be carefully manipulated or made to dominate in riders’ experiences. There has not, however, always been such range and variety, or such control. Although rides have long been subject to evolution, many changes significant for contemporary theme park rides date from the turn of the twentieth century. Great numbers of rides were built at that time, and, with technological developments and increased sophistication within the genre, new rides began to be designed that had carefully nuanced motion, elaborate fabricated landscapes, stories with increasingly complicated plots, and new uses and sorts of sound.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, designers explored not only how to make rides faster but also how to incorporate the psychological effects of phrased
movement. These investigations coincided with an enlarged awareness of the visual landscape. New rides provided pleasant and unusual views, but they were also often carefully situated in scenic and dramatic preexisting landscapes. Land forms that suggested far-off places and provided topography for a ride’s course had been constructed previously (Figs. 5, 6), but now visual landscapes began to be built indoors. In these interior landscapes, greater variety, detail, and exoticism became possible. Stories, once merely suggested by a ride’s name, vehicles, or motion, began to have more intricate plots. Sound, once limited to incidental noise or background music, began to be used to dramatize plot and heighten the excitement that ensues from phrased motion.

Movement

Movement appears paramount in the rides at the Turkish fair (Fig. 2). Oscillating and revolving, rhythmic and repetitive, these are variations on swings, seesaws, and wheels (carrousels)—rides still popular today. Such rides are often thought gentle and soothing, appropriate for young children and the elderly, however one cannot tell from this illustration whether these riders’ experiences were so tranquil. Certainly, later larger and faster variations on these forms were far from gentle. The Human Whirlpool at Steeplechase Park—a spinning disc that flung men and women out from its center to tumble together on the floor (Fig. 8)—was an unmerciful variation on the wheel. So was the Round-Up of my childhood; its swift rotations took it from horizontal to vertical, so that standing facing inward, isolated in one of the shallow stalls on its expanded-steel-lined perimeter, one knew firsthand the power of centrifugal force. Individual kinesthetic experience—and perhaps nausea—were highlighted.

In the landscapes of roller coasters and their antecedents, movement is linear and phrased rather than repetitive and rhythmic. Sensations of speed, exhilaration, and delicious terror have long been central. Contemporary descriptions of Paris’s early Russian Mountains (Fig. 4), with one steep downhill followed by a smaller uphill, claimed invigorating, healthful, frightening, and ennobling effects. Advocates championed the ride’s efficacy in “combating the diseases of the nerves and dissipating all low spirits” and remarked on how riding became “a mark of honor in displaying . . . courage and self-control.” While Russian Mountains depended primarily on slope and speed, as its descendents developed, courses grew longer, circular, and topographically more complicated, and phrasing became increasingly important. Famed roller coaster designer John Allen once remarked, “You don’t need a degree in engineering to design roller coasters . . . you need a degree in psychology—plus courage.”

Robert Cartmell observes how between 1900 and 1920 designers began to manipulate illusion and deception to make roller coasters seem

faster, scarier, and higher by planning the climb uphill to be intentionally slow. The

12 Quoted in Cartmell, Incredible Scream Machine, 21.
Brenda J. Brown

car was allowed to dangle at the top to let passengers realize the height and think of the supposed dangers ahead. Then the cars bulleted through the forest of trestles to provide the illusion of traveling one hundred miles per hour. When the momentum decreased, passengers were thrown into a curve to hide the loss of speed.13

Visual landscapes

Although such carefully composed landscapes of movement were thrilling enough to be self-sufficient, designers of this period often incorporated existing landscapes to heighten drama. Third railers careened along palisades, aerial swings circled over the sea, roller coasters plunged into and rose out of ravines. Movement and kinesthetic excitement remained paramount, but observant riders might glimpse unique natural and cultural surroundings. Kennywood Park's Pippin (now the Thunderbolt) dipped into ravines adjacent to the Allegheny River, across which could be seen U.S. Steel-Edgar Thompson Works (Fig. 9). From the top of Shoot the Chutes, riders could see all of Coney Island's Luna Park and the Atlantic Ocean beyond—before they plummeted down its watery incline and splashed into a lake (Fig. 10).

Rides offering unusual visual perspectives (Fig. 3) and rides combining kinesthetic thrills and scenic vistas predate amusement parks' century-spanning heyday. The Mauch Chunk Switchback Railway became a tourist attraction in 1872. Earlier pleasure railways had provided views of the sylvan areas they traversed at less than ten miles per hour, but the Mauch Chunk offered more sublime delights.14 It had a thrilling ascent, even more thrilling descents with suspenseful curves, and seventeen of its eighteen miles were downhill. Riders enjoyed spectacular views of what, largely because of the railway, became known as the Switzerland of America—the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Lehigh River, and the Lehigh Water Gap.15

LaMarcus Adna Thompson surely was aware of the Mauch Chunk when he designed his first scenic railway in 1887. Previous rides had been “landscaped” and had represented and evoked other landscapes (Figs. 5, 6), but Thompson created and fabricated three-dimensional representational landscapes to be viewed sequentially. Movement facilitated and enhanced appreciation of these landscapes; it made their unfoldment possible and emphasized the overall mood. Still, as these rides often retained slow climbs, precipitous drops, and splashing plunges, kinesthetic experience at times still predominated; it could also alternate with predominately visual passages.

Riders on Thompson's first scenic railway viewed indoor tableaux, panoramas, and biblical scenes illumined by car-tripped switches and flood lamps, as well as the outdoor lackluster environs of Atlantic City, N.J.16 In later versions the visual landscape was often

13 Ibid., 79.
14 Variations on such “pleasure railways” were found in Hoboken in 1835, see Cartmell, Incredible Scream Machine, 76; and at Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exposition, see Edo McCullough, World's Fair Midways (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 32.
16 Ibid., 49.
9. Kennywood Park, Pittsburgh, Pa.: Tracks of the Thunderbolt, originally the Pippin (designed by John A. Miller and built in 1924), and those of the Steel Phantom built in 1991. (left) Leaving Thunderbolt station; (center) the coaster’s course dipping and rising through the ravine; (right) looking across the Thunderbolt tracks down into the ravine and across the Allegheny River to U.S. Steel-Edgar Thompson Works, 1996

10. Looking down Shoot the Chutes at night, Luna Park, Coney Island, N.Y., 1920 (courtesy of the Lake County [Il.] Museum, Curt Teich Postcard Archives)
more consistent and controlled. Rides such as Pike’s Peak and The Alps had landforms that served as both exterior surfaces and interior environments. Wax-figure vignettes and landscapes’ “natural events” were part of one varied but continuous geography. The visual landscape of rides such as Dragon’s Gorge (Fig. 11) and later scenic railways were, like their prototype, amalgamations of landscape fragments—scenic, often exotic, and conducive to kinesthetic excitement. Dragon’s Gorge included Arctic regions and the bottom of the sea; the Venice Scenic Railway featured the mirage of a complete Egyptian temple, as well as huge tunneled mountains made of wire, burlap, and plaster that extended over an ocean pier (Figs. 12, 13). These rides were in a sense contemplations on popular notions of scenic; the created and represented landscape was both background and subject. They also represented the microcosmic aspect of early world’s fair midways with their diverse, populated, foreign villages, and of Luna Park with its plaster architecture that merged the Oriental, Moorish, Italian Renaissance, and fantastic (Fig. 10).18

11. Dragon’s Gorge, Luna Park, Coney Island, N.Y., 1920 (courtesy of the Lake County [Ill.] Museum, Curt Teich Postcard Archives)

18 In its juxtaposition of landscape fragments, the Midway at Chicago’s 1893 Columbia Exposition set the standard for later World’s Fair midways. Among its attractions were German, Australian, Chinese, Irish, Samoan, and African villages (the last complete with 60 native warriors), the streets of Cairo, Indian jugglers, and reproductions of the USS Oregon and Ireland’s Donegal Castle. See McCullough, World’s Fair Midways, 36–50.
By joining three-dimensional landscapes and phrased sequential movement with a beginning and end, scenic railways suggested plotted stories. They were miniature excursions, analogues to real or imagined journeys in real space, but also spatiotemporal analogues to stories’ time-based worlds. They went beyond suggesting other landscapes and offering cues to their dramas (as in the first carrousel or Niagara Falls at Ruggieri Gardens) to present stories with set, explicit, sequential plot lines. And the stories need not only be about passage through the landscape; other dramas, played out by all sorts of characters, could be superimposed or embedded and could unfold with the visual landscape. In enclosing part or all of the ride’s course, constructing elaborate and extensive visual landscapes, incorporating special effects made possible by electricity, and beginning to develop plotted adventures, Thompson and his scenic railways were innovative and influential. Scenic railways by others followed; some were even built for traveling fairs and carnivals.
Sound and story

However, Frederic Thompson and George Dundy’s A Trip to the Moon, originally created for the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y., built on other aspects of L.A. Thompson’s work. Unlike a scenic railway, it de-emphasized phrased movement; in fact, its motions were repetitive. But that movement worked with special effects, music, narration, representations and miniaturizations of fantastic and exotic landscapes, theater, and illusion, so that riders were immersed in wonderful and novel environs and traversed a story spatially and temporally. The exposition’s official catalogue and guidebook describes how visitors were “enabled to make a tour of the stars and planets, to really dart through space” (Fig. 14). The flapping winged spaceship occupied the center of a large round building and had portholes from which thirty passengers could peer out at lights and images projected on surrounding walls and floors. These worked with the ship’s swaying to give the impression of flight. The tourist could “recline upon his steamer chair and listen to sweet strains of music while soaring off.”19 Riders were flown up over the fairgrounds, over Niagara Falls, away from the shrinking Earth, into space. After passing through an electrical storm, the ship entered the Moon’s atmosphere and dropped slowly through “a sea of sunlit clouds” to land. Passengers were then escorted through the Moon’s underground caverns, past its curious inhabitants, to be greeted by the Man in the Moon and dancing Moon Maidens, who offered bits of the Moon’s green cheese (Fig. 15).20

A Trip to the Moon broke from precedents with its extraterrestrial landscape subject and setting, its two-and three-dimensional landscape representations, its illusions of movement, and its plotted story in which riders were participants (however passive) rather than observers, and whose unfoldment was tied to the vehicle’s seeming, rather than actual, course. It used sound in new ways—as narration, music, and part of a theatrical production. Sound was no longer limited to the incidental—to the ambient din of the park, the whoosh of rushing air, a roller coaster’s safety ratchet, riders’ screams—or to accompanying rhythmic music such as that of the military band organs that became standard on carousels.

A Trip to the Moon, like L.A. Thompson’s Scenic Railways, influenced many rides that followed. L. A. Thompson and Frederic Thompson and George Dundy went on to design more landscape adventures for world expositions and world’s fairs as well as for amusement parks—and so did others. At the 1939 New York World’s Fair, rides clearly descendent from theirs were part of the fair proper rather than being relegated to the less prestigious and less dignified midway as they had previously. However, these were not independent, fanciful, or whimsical landscape adventures. Democracy’s and General Motors’ Highways and Horizons stories supported that fair’s theme: “Building the World of Tomorrow . . . A promise for the Future, built with the tools of Today, upon the experience of Yesterday.”21 They were proto-

types for “educational excursion” rides at later world’s fairs and brought a new twist to the age-old relationship of rides and technology. Not only could rides incorporate, display, and parody technology; they could also soft-sell its products. Amusement parks’ images and successes had previously been tied to rides, but now ride landscapes, in particular their stories, bolstered more defined and focused park elsewhere. A park’s landscapes of rides could reinforce, elaborate on, and vary specific, unified, and unifying themes. While this development reflected increased technological sophistication, it also involved compositional emphases.

22 Steeplechase Park on Coney Island, for instance, featured the Steeplechase, an undulating, curving racetrack featuring metal horses on gravity-spied wheels; it was one of several park rides that encouraged riders’ bodily contact.
Landscapes of Theme Park Rides

Like their antecedents, many theme park ride landscapes incorporate and reflect technologies of their time. New technological developments make possible more spectacular effects, more specificity and detail in visual landscape and sound, and more proprietary consistency and control. But landscapes of theme park rides, like theme parks, entwine with technology in new ways.

Rides at Disney’s Epcot, like the park itself, carry on the world’s fair tradition that began in 1939. Precursors to infomercials, they celebrate technology, big business, a bright future, and an overarching fair theme. The Magic Kingdom and Universal Studios Florida, through their iterations and variations on mass media images and mass media experiences, and indeed in their very concepts and structures, enmesh with technology in a way unrealized before the creation of Disneyland Park in California—and so do their rides. Disneyland, after all, was created as a home for three-dimensional incarnations of Disney’s celluloid creations, but with *The Mickey Mouse Club* television show, it was also a continuing, feeding-back mass media event. Mechanical and electronic production and reproduction are implicit in the theming of the Magic Kingdom and Universal Studios Florida and are implicated in their landscapes of rides.

Like their antecedents, these three theme parks’ ride landscapes use, glorify, parody, display, and sell technology. However, even as they reveal and reinforce a technology of entertainment mass media that was not operative in theme park antecedents, by their very existence and continuing success they testify to the power of unique, site-specific landscapes. It may be in this dichotomous relationship that their elsewhere’s differ most from earlier ones.

Whatever their relationship to contemporary technologies, the elsewhere’s, like the theme, of each theme park vary. Compositions of ride landscapes and relation to park theme and precedents vary too. While Epcot is a permanent, domesticated world’s fair (filtered, tamed, and homogenized by The Disney Company), the Magic Kingdom resembles earlier amusement parks and carnivals. In this it is like Disneyland Park, built as an alternative, cleaned-up, family-oriented version of sullied prototypes. Universal Studios Florida, though influenced by world’s fairs and amusement parks, also has origins in filmmaking Hollywood, in tours of studios and movie sets. Many of its rides have a “backstage” aspect. Despite the Magic Kingdom’s and Universal Studios Florida’s common ties to the film industry, ride landscapes at Universal Studios often resemble those at Epcot more than those at the Magic Kingdom. This is partly because of differences in lineage and composition, but it is also because the Magic Kingdom, like Disneyland Park, reflects Walt Disney’s idiosyncratic vision, persistent drive, endless ministrations, obsessive attention, and evolving ideal of perfection. Its elsewhere’s are more quirky and surprising, more multidimensional, more elsewhere. Epcot and Universal Studios present less individuated, corporate faces; they are not so expressive of one man’s imagination.

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For the observer, the obvious difference is exposure. At Epcot and Universal Studios, the rides’ structures and visual landscapes are rarely visible from the outside, and there are few opportunities for observers and riders to interact. The rides’ elaborate multimedia compositions and technological complexity coincide with their containment within buildings, buildings whose forms usually reveal little of the rides’ configurations. Enclosure makes things easier technically and helps keep parks’ real world facades unbroken (Fig. 16). It lessens the complications of creating unified elsewhere in which transitions from New York to San Francisco (as at Universal Studios Florida) or from Mexico to China (as at Epcot) are nearly seamless. At the Magic Kingdom, in contrast, rides range from completely concealed to completely exposed. Rides are visible as bared kinetic structures and as elaborate fanciful fabricated visual landscapes. Buildings often indicate the rides they contain through overall structure or facade. Some ride landscapes are spectacles, and riders and observers interact (Fig. 17).

The differences and similarities from the rider’s perspective are more complex. At Epcot, educational landscape excursions and bright and optimistic stories work with other compositional elements to portray the past, present, and future of technologies—communication, transportation, agriculture, energy—and in this context also promote a large corporation. In the ride landscapes of the Magic Kingdom and Universal Studios Florida, stories, visual landscapes, and sound are usually variations on elsewhere previously created in film or other mass media (linked to The Disney Company and Universal Studios, respectively). However, differences between the theme parks’ ride landscapes go beyond story subjects and visual landscape representation. These elsewhere are constructed not only of the what, or even the how, of story and visual landscape; they are also constructed of the what and how of movement and sound. They are based on the entire composition, on which elements are emphasized and how elements work together.

The stories of Epcot’s rides are usually didactic, self-righteously validating, narrated from
on high, and portentous; the stories of Universal Studios’ rides are theatrical, engulfing, and self-parodying, poking fun at their illusions even as they glory in them. Nevertheless, both parks’ best ride landscapes favor story and visual landscape over movement. Sound—whether music or narration—reinforces story or visual landscape more than movement. In contrast, the best ride landscapes at the Magic Kingdom are complex orchestrated compositions in which articulated and modulated movement is almost always key; sound’s role is more varied.

17. The Skyway and Space Mountain, The Magic Kingdom, Walt Disney World Resort, Florida, 1996 (author photo used by permission of Disney Enterprises Inc.)
Simulator Rides

Still, all three theme parks have simulator rides, and these landscape compositions resemble one another. The visual landscapes—a human body’s interior in Body Wars, a populated outer space in Star Tours, and future and past California locales in Back to the Future (Fig. 18)—are all filmed and refer to earlier movies. In all three rides, riders pitch, grind, bump, and lurch; film conveys virtual motion; a simply plotted story centers on a chase; and sound emphasizes the journey.

Simulator rides relate contemporary landscape experience and contemporary technology directly. Like The Tickler (Fig. 1) and like the movies from which they derive, they parody contemporary and future technology at the same time that they embrace them. As trips of the future, imagined with irony and humor, they are part of a tradition extending back to A Trip to the Moon, even, like that antecedent using images of the parks to help convey their illusory journeys (compare the last image of Fig. 18 with Fig. 14). However, here technology is computerized rather than mechanical, and this motion is far from that of a swinging ship. In fact, the out-of-kilter coordination of kinesthetic and visual effects fits with the erratic piloting of Star Tour’s droids and Back to the Future’s eccentric scientist Doc Brown’s funky, futuristic GMC Dolorean.

While advertisements for A Trip to the Moon made it sound like a luxurious voyage, and those for earlier Russian Mountains promoted health benefits, these rides have posted health warnings. People often get sick on simulator rides, and this underlines the peculiar ways that the rides’ images of moving through unusual landscapes conjoin with actual kinesthetic motion. Motion sickness typically arises from perceptual disjunctions between visual experience and physical motion. Here correlation remains rough, partly because technology for synchronizing real and imaged movement remains crude. Although the popularity of simulator rides attests to the continuing attraction of unusual kinesthetic

18. Back to the Future sequence: (from far left) Boarding; Hill Valley’s 2015 strip; moving back in time; the ice caves, prehistoric Pine Valley; back home to Doc Brown’s lab (photos courtesy of Don Ceppi, East/West ™ Productions U.S.A.)
experiences, it also raises questions about past and contemporary expectations and experiences of movement. Nausea-producing rides predate simulators, but contemporary technology and experience have likely upped the stimulation ante.

**Rhythmic Motion**

Only the Magic Kingdom has rides based on rhythmic and circumrotational motion like those at the Turkish fair (Fig. 2). Cinderella’s Golden Carrousel, Dumbo the Flying Elephant, Mad Tea Party, even AstroOrbiter have formal correlates at most carnivals and amusement parks, but Epcot and Universal Studios have nothing like them. While each offers a distinctive kinesthetic experience, the first three are also important because they trigger nostalgia. They are thematically costumed variations on classic forms, opposites of simulator rides. Although popular with young children, their structures, motions, and sounds can gently stir adults’ sensations of the past, whether derived from childhood or historical accounts. The technology they display is not today’s. Like Disney’s Main Street USA, they evoke earlier, gentler, more innocent, perhaps mythical eras.

Rhythmic motion is also essential to Peter Pan’s Flight and Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride at the Magic Kingdom. Yet these rides offer linear scenic excursions rather than repetitive revolutions. Their ancestors include L. A. Thompson’s Scenic Railways as well as carrousels, swings, and The Tickler. Motion synchronizes with music and the unfoldment of fabricated visual landscapes viewed from unusual perspectives. The vehicles—flying sailing ships reminiscent of those of The Tower of Aeolus (Fig. 3) in Peter Pan’s Flight (Fig. 19), shining, fast-turning roadsters in Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride (Fig. 20)—are fitting passports into these three-dimensional recreations of the Disney animated films *Peter Pan* and *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*. However, here stories lie beneath the surface, to be inferred from

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24 In the time between completion of this essay and its publication, Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride had, amidst protests, been removed from The Magic Kingdom. However, the ride remains at Disneyland Park in Anaheim, Calif.
Landscapes of Theme Park Rides

incidents. There is no narration and little dialogue. Each ride has one rhythmic, continuously repeating song that fills even the waiting area, and, for the ride’s course, the vehicles’ motions are similarly rhythmic and continuous.

As if in time to the lilting, sprightly beat of the music box’s tinkling “You Can Fly,” Peter Pan’s brightly colored sailing ships gently rise and dip, sway, glide, and tack over a series of cast, carved, and constructed landscapes whose varied sizes suggest varied flight heights. In contrast, the bright and shiny cars of Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride, seemingly erratically, but incorrigibly weave and wind through brightly painted panels, ranging from cartoon bucolism (complete with thatch-roofed cottages and hollyhocks) to surrealistic warning signs. While Peter Pan’s flying ships glide smoothly from one scene to the next—Bloomsbury nursery, nighttime London, Never Land at dawn—Mr. Toad’s roadsters abruptly enter and exit through doors, cabinets, fireplaces, barns, and haystacks. In both rides sounds are incidental, but in Peter Pan’s Flight they are observed—traffic, Big Ben, sirens, syncopated tom-toms, the crocodile’s ticking clock—and punctuate the music box’s melodic evenness. In Mr. Toad they are of a piece with the musical whirlwind and result from one’s progress: clanking and falling armor, clattering and breaking dishes, cackling and flying chickens . . . an engine’s rumble, a whistle’s squeal, a headlight . . . silence . . . darkness, indiscernible rumbling, and, noisily, hell.

Scenic Railways, Excursions, and Adventures

Splash Mountain is a more straightforward adaptation of the scenic railway, though its cars are hollow “floating logs,” and it includes five flumes. Like Peter Pan’s Flight and Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride, it is a tour through a landscape recreated from a book-inspired film, in this case Disney’s Song of the South. However, here movement is phrased and topographic, and music supports landscape unfoldment and story development rather than vehicles’ rhythmic motion.

Riders tour the mountain’s “natural” and cultural landscape. The three songs that play in different sections reinforce the sense of being a tourist on holiday—or a tourist on holiday in a movie. The fanciful mountain, reminiscent of L. A. Thompson’s Scenic Railway (Fig. 13) and The Alps, is threaded with caverns, and the ride’s course incorporates interior and exterior spaces (Figs. 21, 22) with unique glimpses of the park environs. The mountain contains distinctive, smaller landscapes—a domestic mountaintop community, a populated forest, an oversized frog pond, a river bayou, a cavern lair, and not least, a briar patch surrounded by water—all scaled to small–child, enlarged–animal scale. Natural and human–formed elements sit side by side—real and plastic plants, real water where plastic frogs and fish leap and beside which living lizards sun (Fig. 22).

Sequential vignettes of Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, Brer Bear, and other animals in the community, sometimes heard conversing, are the primary conveyers of the story. Songs and the intervals between them contribute to the sequential drama of story, visual landscape, and movement. When the log shoots down the first hill and cruises around the briar patch, it is an introduction to the landscape and a foreshadowing of the events ahead. The buoyant, animal–full, splashing cavern where “Laughin’ Place” is heard is a break in dramatic developments as
well as a different sublandscape and subculture. The songs stop when the log boats make the long, long climb uphill to Brer Fox’s den, the ride’s kinesthetic and dramatic climax, before the steepest and most thrilling descent, when riders are transformed from engaged viewers to reacting, if not acting, characters. Each becomes Brer Rabbit, shooting down, through and under the briar patch to freedom and the landscape beyond. In that passage, the story viewers have been watching and their own kinesthetic journeys merge.

The visual landscapes, sounds, and stories of Kongfrontation and Spaceship Earth (at Universal Studios and Epcot, respectively) differ from one another, but, in contrast to The Magic Kingdom landscapes discussed above, movement is subservient in both rides. Movement serves to regulate progress through the story and views of the visual landscape, little more. Indeed, the sluggish, obviously mechanical motions of Spaceship Earth’s blue molded-plastic cars are often at odds with the tantalizing, shorthand landscape scenes intended to convey the richness of entire civilizations, and that which is viewed in the circular course of Kongfrontation’s trolley is only part of its visual landscape. Indeed, reminiscent of A Trip to the Moon, both ride landscapes extend beyond their vehicles’ courses. Kongfrontation’s encompasses the waiting area; Spaceship Earth’s the penultimate interactive demonstration and play area.

Spaceship Earth is the most successful and compositionally complex of Future World’s didactic rides.25 Like Nestle’s Living with the Land, whose subject is agriculture, and United

25 Michael Harrington effectively portrayed the insidiousness of Epcot’s corporate educational benevolence in “To the Disney Station,” Harpers (January 1979).
22. Sequential vignettes and landscape scenes from Splash Mountain: (top left) Domestic settlement and (top right) introduction to the coming drama; (left center) capture of Brer Rabbit; (below) approaching dramatic and kinesthetic climax at Brer Fox’s lair where Brer Rabbit is tied over a fire at top of hill; (lower left) chute down through and under the briar patch; (lower right) Brer Rabbit with Mr. Blue Bird on his shoulder — “There’s no place like home!”
Technology's Horizons, with its historical and contemporary images of the future, Spaceship Earth's visual landscapes and narrated story culminate in visions of a bright, future, corporately assisted, high-technological world. Spaceship Earth links landscape images to developments in communications. Its history and future vision of human communication are conveyed primarily through visual landscapes and sound. Sequential, detailed, lifesized, audio-animatronically populated period dioramas are furnished with period noises—spoken Egyptian and Greek, Renaissance strings, early jazz pianos, ringing telephones (Fig. 23). The present-future section ends with landscape dioramas of geographically separated places now linked by technology; they portray a world, in particular a world of people, brought together. However, high-tech communication is the real hero: universal, pure, transcendental, site independent, and symbolized by light—the same light that synchronizes with music to create encompassing environments, and that massages and dramatizes the most important parts of the narration. The final scene is a sparkling city of tomorrow from which light spirals to create an independent visual environment, joining upbeat electronically enhanced music for the ride’s concluding passage. Riders disembark into AT&T's green-neon–lit Global Neighborhood, a high-tech, geography-independent, communications–interactive playground.

While Spaceship Earth is a sincere variation on an old theme, Kongfrontation—like Universal Studios Florida’s Jaws and ET Adventure—is self-consciously and simultaneously of the here and now and movies’ created worlds. King Kong is on the prowl again and

26 Fjellman points to the ironies of AT&T’s co-option of Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic dome and the term spaceship earth. He notes that despite the vocabulary, nothing on the ride refers to that spaceship’s fragility or its dependence on human care. Stephen Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 87–91. That fragility might be inferred by the small size of the Earth’s image in the ride’s climax; however, its diminution more clearly supports the notion that it has become smaller in the face of human achievements.
wreaking havoc; part of New York must be evacuated, so a tram adventure over Manhattan ensues. Each car has a driver who, explaining and commenting, is a narrative bridge into the drama, and who, by peering, ducking, shielding and cowering, is a bodily bridge into the pyrotechnic action. During the tram’s course, riders twice encounter Kong—huge, close, open-mouthed, gesticulating, hunted by helicopter, blinded by searchlights—who hits and jostles the car and causes heat-producing fires in the city streets (Fig. 24) before the tram recovers and arrives safely back at the station.

Yet Kongfrontation’s landscape goes beyond that of the ride’s plot—spatially, temporally, and experientially. Its lifelike cityscape set of neighborhood stores, TV- and lamp-lit apartments, fire escapes, and billboards, over and through which the tram travels (Fig. 24) continues into areas through which riders pass before boarding and merges seamlessly with the New York transit station—complete with graffiti and posters advertising Universal Studio films and TV shows—where riders wait (Fig. 25). Interspersed with advertisements for current TV shows, station monitors broadcast news bulletins about Kong’s escape and conjectured whereabouts. The evacuation time periodically announced is the current real time. Beneath and above the din, strains from the *King Kong* movie theme periodically resound. Cleverly and ironically, Kongfrontation is most effective when most crowded; the longer one waits, the more the story’s suspense and agitation build. Kongfrontation wittily
and winkinglly combines theater and life. Presaged by the incorporation of theatrical passages in A Trip to the Moon, this combination fosters psychological immersion, even if twinged with self-conscious parody and blatant cooperate self-reinforcement. Kongfrontation is at once of the here and now, of a created fictive situation and story, and of cinema’s illusions. These multiple layers are epitomized at the ride’s end, when a news flash appears on the tram’s monitor showing tram and passengers—including you—assaaulted by Kong.

Roller Coaster

Rides that emphasize visual fabricated landscapes and theatrical effects may seem contrived and labored if compared to the Magic Kingdom’s Space Mountain. Here, the fabricated visual landscape is minimal and suggested, and it merges with fast and thrilling phrased movement in a way that approaches poetry. The ride’s course and motion are in the tradition of the great roller coasters; it begins with just such a slow suspenseful climb that Cartmell describes as typical of the early twentieth century. But Space Mountain’s aerodynamic cars inch up a narrow tunnel isolated from the boarding area, to space, then plunge into oceanic darkness. Here darkness is not the absence of light; it is a palpable presence in which experiences of sound, touch, and motion are heightened.

Although perhaps reminiscent of nighttime amusement park roller coasters, Space Mountain’s insulation, quiet—only occasionally broken by screams, shrieks, and car-and-track friction—and darkness in all its nonspecificity, make the ride unique, imaginatively

evocative, and psychologically reverberant. The spaceship’s accelerations and decelerations, its gravity-powered plunges and rises, its banks and straightaways, and its rhythmic clickety-clacks take place in a blackness broken only by small bright stars, shooting comets, and occasionally other ships’ passing glows. Here, carnival-like thrills and cosmological, if naïve, wonder may fuse.

Conclusions

The symbiotic Elsewheres and elsewhere of theme parks and theme park rides are variations on an old theme; Elsewheres of theme park antecedents and earlier landscapes of rides were similarly interdependent. Coney Island’s Steeplechase Park, Luna Park, and Dreamland, for instance, had distinctive identities that were purveyed by rides as well as by architecture, park layout, lighting, and park policy. Because they were successful, Ingersoll’s


27 Space Mountain’s landscape has also attracted Simon Schama’s attention. In Landscape and Memory (New York: Knopf, 1995, 489), he likens its landscape and landscape experience to what 18th-century mountaineer Ramond de Carbonniers encountered on Mont Perdu in the Pyrenees: “The essential faculty of Enlightenment man, reason, seemed to fail the mountaineer. . . . For when the climber is surrounded both above and below by cloud, mist and granular snow, his power of measurement, of relative scale, is alarmingly disrupted. . . . Lost in exterior space, he is disconcerted to see a whole prospect open up: the endless space of our interior self. Petrarch had thought this the landscape of his soul. Ramond envisaged it as the frighteningly roomy contours of the mind. The designer of “Space Mountain” for [Walt] Disney World must have understood this perfectly, even without benefit of reading the forgotten Pyrenean. For inside the concrete Matterhorn, there is total darkness save for the shrieks of victims thrown up and down the pitch-black precipices of its indeterminate space.”
Brenda J. Brown

Luna Parks (and other amusement parks)—complete with rides—were duplicated with little modification all over the United States and in South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. However, in contemporary variations at Epcot, Universal Studios Florida, and the Magic Kingdom, the interrelationship of Elsewhere and elsewhere is more studied and consciously manipulated—it is based on a theme. Theming implies a specific unifying subject and premise. In these theme parks, themes are made manifest through visual images and stories enmeshed with mass media and its technologies. These Elsewheres and elsewhere differ from antecedents partly because technology and its place in our lives have changed.

Like their ancestors, riders of theme park rides enjoy novel kinesthetic and visual sensations, delight in unusual perspectives and imagined places (Fig. 26), are transported in evocative vehicles, are enchanted by miniaturized and compressed, simultaneously fictive and real journeys and excursions, and take pleasure in displays of technology and technology run amok.

Compositions of theme park ride landscapes continue to be built on movement, visual landscape, sound, and story. However, many of these rides are distinguished from antecedents by their greater reliance on fabricated visual landscapes, stories, and engineered sound; in fact, none relies on a preexisting landscape. It is also in the use of visual landscape and story that various contemporary park rides most obviously differ from one another. However, movement, though less obvious, is also important. It further defines and underlines differences and similarities among Elsewheres and elsewhere.

The visual landscapes of Epcot’s rides are lush, exotic, nostalgic, futuristic, visionary, and pyrotechnic. Still, without edifying narrated stories and stirring music, the landscape representations at which Spaceship Earth riders peer as they move solemnly, if sometimes jerkily, past, would likely seem naïve. We are too sophisticated now for L. A. Thompson’s simple variations on the scenic. As it is, these carefully crafted visual landscapes provide charming, emotionally charged touchstones for stories—variations on the theme of a proud past, an exciting present, and a promising future through big business technology—that might otherwise seem abstract, cool, and technical. Stories, visual landscapes, and characters in Universal Studios Florida ride landscapes are based on Universal Studios films, as is the landscape of the park itself.28

These visual landscapes generally represent real American places: a residential neighborhood in Manhattan, a New England fishing village, a suburban neighborhood and its more rustic environs in the West. Unlike at Epcot, the visual landscapes of a Universal Studios ride are not scenes to be viewed in a detached manner; they are engulfing environments that riders temporarily inhabit, even while waiting, and they are revealed further over the ride’s course. Often these encompassing settings are also populated by actors, simultaneously characters in the story, essential to the story’s telling, and expressions of Universal Studios’ postmodernistic self-consciousness. Here, the tricks and illusions at the heart of cinematic technology are exposed and parodied even as they are venerated. Stories

28 However, parts of Universal Studios Florida are also used as sets for new films.
27. Sacro Monte (dedicated to St. Francis), Orta, Italy, 1993: (top left) Approach to the highest point; (top right) climactic chapel; (center left) diorama of St. Francis receiving the stigmata; (center right) turn in path directing visitor’s gaze toward Lake Orta; (lower left) continuing descent on the avenue of the stars.
and visual landscapes at the Magic Kingdom are also linked to film. However, as these Disney films are often animated and fanciful, their landscapes are less tied to real places and more tied to specific, uniquely cinematic creations. Unlike Universal Studios Florida, the Magic Kingdom works hard to keep its illusions of other worlds unbroken—in landscapes of rides and in the larger park. There is no mistaking its rides’ visual landscapes, characters, and stories for the everyday, and these elsewheres are further defined by distinctive motion.

Visual landscapes’ prominence in so many ride landscapes bears witness to landscape representation’s power to charm, thrill, inspire, scare, and sell, as well as to tell stories. But movement defines this landscape genre, and it is in movement’s varieties and uses that designers of other landscapes may find the most practical lessons. Mechanized movement (as often employed at Epcot and Universal Studios Florida) can simply facilitate orderly progression but, as in even the earliest examples discussed, it can also flavor—even determine—the landscape experienced. At the Magic Kingdom, motion is most elegant and developed. Together with music, the wends and winds of Mr. Toad’s roadsters set that madcap adventure’s tenor. In Peter Pan’s Flight, continual rhythmic, lilting movement reinforces the fabled perpetuity of Never Land and the suggested perpetuity of “You Can Fly.” When designers and critics debate landscape narratives’ legibility, Splash Mountain is a reminder and exemplar of the pleasures of movement, visual landscape, and story meshing in a plot’s unfoldment. Movement in the “here and now” artfully synchronizes with the story’s ups and downs, turns, conflicts, and resolutions. Such a wedding of movement, popular story, and topography re-
calls, ironically and profanely, the Christian Sacro Monte (Fig. 27). Though the context and end effects are different, the formal structure—a hero’s tale, sequential story-carrying vignettes by which visitors pass, the synchronization of turns in the landscape with turns in the story, and of story climax with a landscape high point—is similar. In fact, the similarities in structure and differences in effects suggest extremes in a range of possibilities for other rides and landscapes that meld popular plotted story, topography, and movement (Fig. 28). If we do not like Splash Mountain’s messages, we might consider different messages to create and convey through its media and modes.

Landscapes of rides comprise an engaging design genre, and the ones discussed here are some of the most artful. They are worth designers’ attention in and of themselves, as is any artful design. But to design landscapes based on movement, sound, and story (as well as a visual landscape) can be a tough corrective to the typical designer’s bias toward the sense of sight and reliance on plan and section drawings. The control and controlling inherent to landscapes of rides limits application of their lessons in other landscapes. Still, like poetry to prose, the genre’s limitations and constraints make it useful for exploring multisensorial, time-based aspects of landscape design. Real and hypothetical ride landscapes can help when investigating how sound and visual landscape reinforce and play off one another, examining techniques of visual landscape representation, identifying ingredients necessary to a fanciful landscape, coordinating movement, topography, visual landscape, and story unfoldment, or honing movement as a defining landscape element. The design of ride landscapes may also be useful because it forces designers to confront technology. So working playfully in a landscape genre that embraces technology can be an engaging and nonthreatening way to consider relationships of technology, culture, nature, and landscape.29 Indeed it may also be in these relationships that theme park rides most differ from their antecedents and are most contemporary.

Elaborate multimedia simulator rides are, of course, new in the era of theme parks. New technology facilitates their arrhythmic motions and the incorporation of filmed visual landscapes. Epcot rides are updated periodically so that their stories of technology will be current; Universal Studios seeks to display the latest special effects; new technological developments make possible the slight variations that repeat riders note in the Magic Kingdom’s audio-animatronic characters’ conversations. However, a more significant difference results from mass media technology’s effect on elsewhere’s fundamental requirement to be an other.

Walter Benjamin and John Berger have observed how mechanical reproduction removed the images of sacred objects and art from any preserve. Images became “ephemeral, valueless and free,” surrounding us “in the same way as language surrounds us.”30 The Magic...
Kingdom and Universal Studios do not deal in art, but they do deal in images. They deal also
in cinema’s spatiotemporal worlds of moving images and stories, products of electronic as
well as mechanical production and reproduction, that, especially with TV and videos, are for
some as ephemeral, ubiquitous, free-floating, and surrounding as the reproduced, seemingly
omnipresent, static images. Yet in a curious turn, landscapes of theme park rides can bind
mass-produced images of visual landscapes, sounds, and stories to one defined multisensorial
space–time. Elswhere of earlier landscapes of rides also drew on popular and popularized
images; the Bible, mythology, travel literature and publicity, and works by Jules Verne were
among the sources. Many theme park antecedents were big and profitable businesses, and
surely rides have long entwined with technology and in various ways sold it. But the work-
ings of today’s mass media technology are less visible, even though its manifestations are more
pervasive. Floating, ubiquitous, cinematic landscapes are grounded in rides’ dynamic circum-
scriptions. Ride landscapes gain stature because in their site–specificity, they seem like pre-
serves, sources, or originals in relation to other manifestations of the images on which they
are based. The elswhere of these theme park ride landscapes are simultaneously another and
an other, simultaneously iterations of multimedia worlds and those worlds made real site, real
time, real landscape specific.

Still, though the elswhere of most theme park rides fuse with multimedia worlds, not
all do. And some landscapes of rides are so powerful they render such relationships insignifi-
cant. Space Mountain exemplifies both points. It also does what only a ride can; it is an
epitome of rides’ unique and age–old possibilities. Its elsewhere attains the sublime, trans-
cending animated films, songs, fictive places, even its own symbiotic relationship to the Magic
Kingdom. No static visual image, its world is of plunges and rises, of darkness and of fleeting
light, of silence and elusive sound. It is archetypal—archetypal in the sense of primal,
psychologically reverberant—because it is, or becomes, something inside as well as outside us.

31 This phenomenon recalls Moore’s (as above, note 3) characterization of The Magic Kingdom as a site
of playful pilgrimage. However, my primary concern is with the role of images and their interactions with a
site and the technology of mass media; Moore focuses on visitor behaviors.
Chinese Theme Parks
and National Identity

Nick Stanley

It might seem a somewhat unusual quest to seek an expression of the politics of nationalism in the layout of theme parks, but the conception, construction, and functioning of theme parks in China and Taiwan help clarify what is at issue in the generation of national identity. This search for national identity provides these parks with an alternative to, as well as a revisionist critique of, Western models.

For this essay, I selected five “cultural theme parks.” Each in its own way offers the visitor a theatrical experience that seeks to suggest realism through the performances of a variety of indigenous peoples in an elaborately constructed setting of both landscape and architecture. Each suggests how Chinese identity is constructed, displayed, and consumed. All of these cultural theme parks have opened in the last decade, and all have had charismatic and successful entrepreneurs pouring in capital with an expectation that the parks will make a respectable return on investment from ticket sales. No government money appears to be directly involved in the construction or running costs.

Two of the five examples chosen come from Taiwan, the other three from mainland China. The Taiwan Folk Village at Changhua seeks to preserve elements of traditional Chinese everyday life against the pressure of modern industrialism. The implied claim at this

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1 “Cultural theme parks or centers—‘living museums’ of traditional culture without any actual resident inhabitants—are the primary spectacle of ethnographic tourism.” See Andrew Ross, The Chicago Theory of Life: Nature’s Debt to Society (London: Verso, 1994), 43.
park is that much tradition has been preserved in Taiwan but has been lost in China (the Cultural Revolution is specifically remembered in this context) and that here people can come to refresh their memory and commitment to tradition. In landscape terms, Taiwan Folk Village offers a specifically Chinese motif: the “old town” style. The second Taiwanese cultural park—the Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village (FACV) in Nantou County takes a different tack. It seeks Taiwanese identity in relation to that of the Taiwanese indigenous Austronesian aboriginals, seen as the original inhabitants of Taiwan. This attention to minority peoples is also followed in the three examples taken from Shenzhen in Guangdong province in southeastern China, situated twenty kilometers from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Here I consider three adjacent parks, all designed by the same management and unfolding a complex and intricate vision of Chinese identity. The first, Splendid China, provides an introduction to the topography of China and employs miniaturization as a central theme. The second, China Folk Culture Villages, integrates China’s minority peoples into the Chinese national identity and uses “reformed architecture” as an integrative motif. The third, Window of the World, offers the Chinese visitor a vision of the world outside China, with an implied contrast between the babel of internationalism and the stability of China.

Although the five cultural theme parks discussed here suggest variety in their approaches, they nevertheless represent something common but profoundly different from what a visitor to cultural theme parks elsewhere in the world might expect. There are many easy parallels to be made with traditions born in Europe and North America, and some of these borrowings have been explicitly recognized in the Chinese plans. But none of these parks accepts the easy visual cultural stereotypes of Disney’s Epcot, nor do they subscribe to the internationalist universalism to be found in Tokyo Disneyland or Disneyland Paris. Each of the five cultural parks discussed here provides material that repudiates the mission of most world theme parks and installs what is seen as a self-sustaining viable alternative oriented to a specifically Chinese audience. Although there is a regular trickle of foreign tourists at all sites (Taiwanese and overseas Chinese at Shenzhen and Japanese in Taiwan), audiences remain overwhelmingly local.

This phenomenon can be described as Chinese-style tourism “with distinctive national features.” As the creator of the Shenzhen complex remarked, “[E]very element in the display should consistently exclude foreign and nonfolk influences; no foreign handicrafts, no McDonald’s hamburgers.” All five parks share two general features that extend the notion of Chinese-style tourism to include issues of nationalism. First, all the parks attempt a form of ethnographic realism that assumes “a mimetic relationship between the

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Chinese Theme Parks and National Identity

The visitor is invited not only to inspect but also to enter the theatrical sense of the occasion. This theatricality is made possible through three-dimensional sets that in all cases use landscaping to create the "proper" setting. In Shenzhen, lakes have been dug and the displays situated around them. The natural drop of a hillside has been employed to place each park. In this appropriate setting of ersatz mountains and lakes, care is taken in the construction of ethnic villages. Second, in order to strengthen the Chinese identity of the parks, the landscape and architecture are fused together by performance. All five parks employ indigenous peoples to interpret, to demonstrate aspects of daily and ritual events, and, above all, to perform. Shows provide the central thematic attractions that concentrate the visitor's experience. These parks draw upon some specifically Chinese antecedents. The shan-shui hua (painting of mountains and water) tradition is particularly suited to the designing of theme parks as a continuation of the tradition of Chinese landscape gardening. In Chinese formal gardens, water and rocks provide the basic structure following Taoist principles of analogy that maintain that rivers "constituted the arteries of the earth, while the mountains were considered to represent its skeleton." Plants are merely the "hair." Creating hills had the practical advantage of taking care of the soil generated by dredging lakes. The parks in Shenzhen, in particular, made from reclaimed paddy fields on the banks of the Pearl River delta, follow the tradition of constructing lakes in unpropitious, flat sites to create a landscape "more natural than nature." But there are other Chinese historic exemplars that support the ideas found in contemporary theme parks. In a famous classic, The Story of the Stone, the head of the family, Jia Zheng, and his son Baoyu are shown visiting a newly made landscape garden. After they have strolled around the lakes and mountains they come upon "a little group of reed-thatched cottages." These apparently humble dwellings please Jia Zheng: "'Ah, now here is a place with a purpose!' said Jia Zheng with a pleased smile. 'It may have been made by human artifice, but the sight of it is nonetheless moving. In me it awakens the desire to get back to the land, to a life of rural simplicity. Let us go in and rest a while!'" This leads to an interesting discussion between Jia Zheng and Baoyu about the definition of naturalism and whether such a mock village can be anything other than an incongruous and artificial contrivance. Although the discussion is left teasingly incomplete when the argument is broken off suddenly by the author, the tale demonstrates that issues of representation, evocation, and constructed settings were a subject of debate in eighteenth-century China.

Several even more elaborate examples contributed to a specifically Chinese form of

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8 "The smaller lakes of China's most famous beauty spots are essentially all man-made. The West Lake at Hangzhou, the Kunming Lake of the Summer Palace, and the newly made Seven Star Crag Lakes at Kwantung were all more or less created out of ancient marsh lands, but so skilfully dredged and so carefully damned that they all look more natural than nature." See Maggie Keswick, The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture, (London: Academy Editions, 1978), 167.
themed park, Jean-Denis Attiret provides an account of the emperor's miniature Pekin: “Tis square; and each side is near a mile long. It has Four Gates, answering the Four principal Points of the Compass; with Towers, Walls, Parapets, and Battlements. It has its Streets, Squares, Temples, Exchanges, Markets, Shops, Tribunals, Palaces, and a Port for Vessels. In one Word, every thing that is at Pekin in Large, is there represented in Miniature.”

In this miniature city, eunuchs enacted the daily life of the people, dressed in appropriate garb, to give a realistic representation of the “Commerce, Marketings, Arts, Trades, Bustle and Hurry, and even all the Rogueries, usual in great Cities,” to provide a simulacrum for the emperor, who could not partake of ordinary life.

There is, then, a tradition in Chinese garden aesthetics of representing landscapes with architecture and even performance readily available for the modern constructor of theme parks. Indeed, many of the themes evident in contemporary Chinese theme parks are already present in traditional Chinese garden design: miniaturization, shan-shui hua, viewing pavilions, and performance. Even the business, the sudden changes of vista, the piling up of detail to the extent of creating disorientation in the viewer—all of these are present in the parks discussed below. This is not theming in the Western sense of the term but the creation of a terrain that is specifically Chinese. There is no resorting to the easy visual cultural stereotypes of Epcot nor to the internationalist universalism to be found throughout Disney creations and copied assiduously in other Western parks. Chinese parks require work and recognition in both time and space. Viewers need to bring specific historical and topographic knowledge to their visit.

Taiwan’s Ambiguous Sense of Nationality

The culture parks in Taiwan demonstrate a deep ambiguity in their focus and orientation. A political and cultural question lies at the heart of Taiwanese identity, and it has gained in significance over time: Who are the Taiwanese and how do they relate to China? Even the term Taiwan is politically fraught. The Taiwanese government sees itself as the legitimate successor to the prewar Chinese republic and in consequence calls itself the Republic of China, a claim that is entirely repudiated by Beijing, which treats the island as a renegade province to be restored to the nation. Consequently, even titles have profound political reverberations. In their different ways each of the Taiwanese parks attempts its own answer to the question of Taiwan’s identity, largely through landscape and architecture, judiciously supplemented by forms of human interpretation. The first, Taiwan Folk Village, offers a modest and unobtrusive display of indigenous buildings, while reserving, in Skansen style, pride of place for Han (ethnic majority Chinese) architecture and life. The second, the Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village, or FACV in this chapter, looks to a pre-Han past on the island of Taiwan. This culture park incorporates not only a consideration of indigenous inhabitants but also the research conducted by Japanese scholars, who, during the first forty-five years of

11 Attiret, A Particular Account, 27.
of their work.

Taiwan Folk Village at Changhua opened in 1993. It extends over one hundred forty-five acres and is set on a gently falling hillside. At the top of the park are a waterfall and an artificial river; four small lakes dot the park. A small infrequently visited section at the top of the hill is devoted to aboriginal cultures, but the attempt is desultory: “The culture at Taiwan Folk Village is Taiwanese Han, and the guidebook sets the tone: The changes in Taiwanese society have been too drastic. The scenery I knew as a child, bit by bit, has disappeared. Suddenly our lives have become a rift. The establishment of Taiwan Folk Village is to fill the cultural gap in modern Taiwanese life. Here we preserve for you the most complete Taiwan folk culture. Not just buildings or ancient cultural objects for display. More important, we recreate and present for you the true forms of early Taiwan life.”

The language is curiously reminiscent of Arthur Hazelius’s philosophy at Skansen. As in Sweden, Taiwanese traditional life is to be found primarily in architecture. Resiting original heritage buildings in the park is the preferred alternative; when this is not possible exact, replicas have been built. The resiting to Taiwan Folk Village of the two hundred-year-old Dien Au Temple is part of the program of representing heritage architecture in the park, where it is flanked by examples of “old town” style (Fig. 1).

12 Taiwan Folk Village Guide (Changhua Hsien, Taiwan: Taiwan Folk Village, 1993), 26.
“Old towns” have sprung up throughout China. Ann Anagnost describes them as “a recreation of the ‘color and flavor’” (guse guxiang) of the past and a marketplace enclosed within an urban space. Such constructions do not have to look old but are built in the style of vernacular architecture including the design of the streets and neighborhoods from which they are separated. Reconstruction, even if it means bulldozing ruins, is seen as part of modernization. As Tim Oakes has noted, “[F]ar from threatening a traditional landscape, modernisation was awaited as the impetus for rebuilding what outsiders expected to be there.” The massive red-brick Changhua City west gate reproduced as the entrance to Taiwan Folk Village (Fig. 2) and the Ming Dynasty houses and streets are all constructed of contemporary materials that nonetheless suggest antiquity and continuity with a hazy past.

Taiwanese culture is represented by performances of traditional trades in a village at the foot of the city walls and in a way that calls to mind the account of the emperor’s miniature Pekin. Here, noodles, wine, camphor, and paper are prepared by demonstrators, and visitors are invited to try their hand. Cultural performances are offered by troupes such as the Cantonese Lion Dancers. Political endorsement is provided by the official portrait of Taiwan’s president.

Lee Teng-hui visiting the park shortly after its opening. To make money, the park also runs a fun fair at the top of the hill, overshadowing (in every sense) the aboriginal village.

Taiwan Folk Village has constructed Taiwan’s past in the idiom of mainland China. It is the disappearance of Chinese architecture, way of life, and manufacture that provides the logical linkage in the park’s presentation. Here, performers do not integrate the landscape and architecture; they are antique relics, akin to those found in open-air museums in North America or Europe. The park at Changhua serves, nevertheless, to amplify the sense of Chinese-style tourism, which grows from a traditionalist view that stresses the uniqueness of all Chinese culture and experience.¹⁶

The FACV in Nantou County was completed in 1987 (Fig. 3). It is situated close to one of Taiwan’s main tourist attractions, the Sun Moon Lake, a paradigm of the Chinese

¹⁶“This approach reinforces a traditionalist view of Chinese culture described as Huaxia, which stresses a set of primordial values that is both a source of cultural uniqueness (vis-à-vis other people) as well as myth of historical origin.” See Allen Chun, “The Culture Industry as National Enterprise: The Politics of Heritage in Contemporary Taiwan,” *Culture and Policy* 6, no. 1 (1994), 73.
picturesque: a setting of mountain and water. The park follows one of the precepts of Chinese garden design and offers a linear narrative, as though a painted scroll has been unrolled from the top to the bottom of a mountain. The FACV is dedicated to portraying the nine aboriginal peoples of Taiwan in a series of villages that are strung down a hill. The park covers one hundred fifty acres, mostly on the hillside with a level European Palace Garden of fifteen acres on the valley floor. Academic authority is invoked throughout the hillside display. As the guidebook notes, “All aspects of the layout and architecture of the houses have been completed under the guidance of learned experts, so as to convey a genuine idea of traditional aboriginal culture.” Detailed axonometric drawings of aboriginal villages, based on fieldwork conducted by the Japanese ethnographer Chijiwa Suketaro between 1938 and 1943, are displayed: They were used as a basis for construction, and Dr. Suketaro was a consultant in the design of this park. Academic authority is invoked solemnly throughout this series of displays, but, as one critical ethnographer has remarked, citing academic work and applying it honestly are not necessarily synonymous. This observation has implications for all of the cultural parks under discussion.

17 “The Chinese did not lay out their gardens to be conceptualised from above in a cerebral helicopter as the French and Italians did. The Chinese garden was to be perceived as a linear sequence, the scroll painting you enter in fancy that seems infinite.” Jencks in Keswick, *Chinese Garden*, 200.
19 Personal communication, Tsui Ping Ho, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 28 March 1995.
The buildings are furnished with original and reproduction objects of daily life and are staffed by indigenous interpreters. Toward the top of the hill is the Naruwan Theater (Fig. 4). In the words of the guidebook, “[H]ere the FACV Youth Troupe, made up of enthusiastic and talented young people from each of the nine Taiwan aboriginal tribes, performs traditional songs and dances for the enjoyment of our guests.” These performers invite visitors down to the foot of the hill to take part in another performance at the World’s Stage on the plaza. This journey serves to link two other elements with the aboriginal culture villages: the Future World and the European Palace Garden (Fig. 5). Future World offers rides and other forms of amusement park attractions, and it also has a prominent laser fountain. It is the European garden, situated opposite the main entrance to the park, that provides the visual surprise and a hint of other provenance—not only Europe but also Japan, where exemplars of European sites are common. This site provides an idealized formal garden. The rationale for the display is itself noteworthy: the area around Sun Moon Lake has been regarded as one of the finest beauty spots in Taiwan with its attractive combination of mountain and lakeside scenery. However, with overseas tourism on the increase in recent years as local incomes have risen, many Taiwanese have become

20 Guidebook, Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village (Nantou County, Taiwan: Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village Tourism Company), 1995.
21 Martin Parr illustrates Tobu World Square and other exemplars in Small World (Stockport, Cheshire, UK: Dewi Lewis, 1995), 62.
attracted by historic European culture. Therefore, the proprietors have taken advantage of this magnificent setting to create a European-style garden covering six hectares for visitors to enjoy right at home. The FACV thus backs a number of options at the same time. Serious purpose and thematic unity are provided by the aboriginal villages, all authentically reproduced. These villages are, however, only one of three elements in the park. On arrival, visitors can choose between the European Palace Garden or the World Plaza. The culture villages lie beyond the World Plaza. It is quite feasible to spend a day at the park enjoying rides and eating in the European Palace without venturing into the villages beyond. The FACV is constantly upgrading the facility so that competition among the various elements of the park becomes ever more intense. The FACV manages to have its academic respectability as well as its Western theme park rides. It also enables one to visit Europe without the attendant nuisance of actual travel. The question remains, however, whether this spectacle sates the appetite or stimulates the visitor to travel to see the real thing. All in all, the FACV is uncertain in its presentation as to how the elements interrelate, perhaps itself symptomatic of the self-image that troubles many Taiwanese.

**Shenzhen**

Splendid China, the first of the parks to open in Shenzhen, started operations in 1989. It provides a highly didactic experience for the visitor. The marketing plan behind the tourist attraction was “to give more people of the world better understanding of China, and thus promote the friendly contacts between the peoples of China and other countries and give great impetus to the development of China’s tourism.” Situated close to Hong Kong, Splendid China was designed to provide an introduction to China. The visitor from mainland China remains the main focus of attention. Splendid China offers the clearest case of Chinese-style tourism philosophy in action, all delivered through the use of miniaturation. It follows the precepts of the eighteenth-century writer Shen Fu: “In laying out garden pavilions and towers, suites of rooms and covered walkways, piling up rocks into mountains, or planting flowers to form a desired shape, the aim is to see the small in the large, to see the large in the small, to see the real in the illusory and to see the illusory in the real.”

Although Splendid China is in many ways the most traditional of the Shenzhen parks, it is also the nearest to the European model from which it borrows. Ma Chi Man, the architect and former manager of the Splendid China project, describes its genesis: “During my trip to Europe in 1985, I visited the famous Madurodam ‘Lilliputian Land’ in Holland when an idea came to me and I was thinking how great it would be if we could build a miniature scenic spot in which China’s renowned scenic attractions and historical sites could be concentratedly displayed so that people could admire and know more about China’s beautiful wonders, splendid history, and culture, as well as various national customs.”

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22 Yao Te-hsiung, *FACV*, 149.
Chinese Theme Parks and National Identity

and habits in shorter time.” What was it that so attracted Ma Chi Man to Madurodam? Possibly the folk tradition dimly visible at Skansen in Sweden, but it is more likely that he was taken by the panoptic possibilities that it offered viewers in terms of scale. Miniaturization permitted Ma to offer, within the space of seventy-five acres, fifteen major landscape features, including mountain ranges and passes, the famous stone forest at Lunan in Yunnan province, the Yangzi River gorges, and the Huangguoshu Falls in Guizhou province. These physical features are in some rough relationship to actual geography. Taiwan, in particular, is accurately represented with its principal tourist sites, the Sun Moon Lake and the Yehliu Queen’s Head Rock. The landscape includes forty-eight major historic Chinese constructions, with the Great Wall encompassing a quarter of the site. Many of these are religious structures, such as temples, mosques, pagodas, and stupas. Visitors to Splendid China do not need an aerial perspective to take in the whole: Chinese topography and architecture are literally at their feet. As if to reinforce the sense of “Chineseness,” another feature of Madurodam is introduced: “Sixty-five thousand lifelike pottery figurines spreading over in groups in front of the magnificent ancient buildings, in the picturesque natural spots and dwelling houses with unique local characteristics . . . are harmoniously and skilfully integrated with the scenic attractions to form a pleasing whole, expressing the cream of glorious culture and the long history of the Chinese nation.”

These figurines are also used to populate the minority regions. The peoples of the southwest are represented by costumed miniatures of the Bai and Dai peoples; Mongolians are shown at a fair on the Mongolian grassland. Visitors in this most oxymoronic of parks are in the presence of authority: “The World’s Largest Miniature Spot.” They are also reminded that they have seen the whole nation, including, of course, those who define it by being both of and not of China: the border minority peoples. What visitors are not shown is any item of modern history. As Ann Anagnost argues, “‘Splendid China’ reassures the viewer that the model, in its exquisite detail, is in fact an accurate copy of an original existing somewhere in pure reality.” Such are the power and authority of miniaturization to insist upon its vision of reality.

China Folk Culture Villages (FCV) set about providing a fuller sense of visitor engagement when it opened in 1991. It benefited from international comparative research, as well as from a fruitful relationship with the Polynesian Cultural Center, which had a clear marketing vision of how to promote eth-

27 The World’s Largest Miniature Scenic Spot (as above, note 23).
29 “Study tours were made by people concerned with the project in minority regions and countries such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan where a great amount of first-hand valuable information was gathered about the local ethnic cultural tourist attractions.” See Shen Ping and Cheung Yuet Sim, eds., China Folk Culture Villages (Hong Kong, 1991), 4.
30 The pivotal role played by the Polynesian Cultural Center in ethnographic tourist representations, particularly throughout the Pacific Basin, needs to be stressed. See Nick Stanley, Being Ourselves for You: The Global Display of Cultures (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998).
nographic representations within well-designed and attractive “villages” staffed by indigenous peoples. Although at forty-five acres only half the size of Splendid China, the FCV nevertheless sought to create a “beautiful landscape.” As the catalogue states, “[T]he landscape of the villages, which is the product of the clever use of the natural environment and architectural features of various villages, reproduces in a creative way the natural wonders of mountains and rivers, thus heightening the expressive effect of the customs and conditions of different nationalities.”31 Although no attempt is made to suggest geographic accuracy, a lake “with a navigable course two kilometres long” provides a central focus.32 Following Chinese garden design in its reference to classical painting, the lake serves as the equivalent of the void space in the painting, covering more than half the area of the picture or, in this case, the park.33 Again, following the tradition of garden design, “pavilions” of various kinds are strung around Ciuhu Lake. At the northern end is a large waterfall set against a model of Yunnan’s Stone Forest (Fig. 6). Although manifestly constructed from reinforced concrete, this waterfall mountain follows Li Liweng’s prescription for an artificial mountain (Fig. 7):34 It contains passages and caverns through which visitors can walk; it has observation points through which the site can be seen panoramically, and it is insubstantial.

31 China Folk Culture Villages, 4.
32 Ibid., 19.
33 Tsu, Landscape Design, 63.
34 Li Liweng’s formal aspects to be sought in a fine rock are discussed by Keswick, Chinese Garden, 161.
The display strategy is the opposite of that at Splendid China. Although miniaturized, the physical features are on a sufficiently large scale to engulf visitors. The real Stone Forest is a spot much visited by Chinese and international tourists. Near this model Stone Forest, the Yi, the inhabitants of the Stone Forest district, have their village. Ciuhu Lake not only provides a landscape backdrop but also supports architecture and people. Twelve different bridges are strung over it in varying regional and historic styles, and both performers and visitors navigate its surface. The lake also sports the most Chinese of aesthetic developments: the Folk Laser Music Fountain. This paradoxically named entertainment consists of a range of computer-controlled water jets, which are lit with changing colors. Shape, color, and rhythm can be supplemented by lasers and synchronized with music. Such technically sophisticated fountains are already highly popular in China and offer a safer variant of the fireworks display.

On the perimeter of the lake are twenty other well-known scenic places from around China and twenty-four villages built in the architectural vernacular of twenty-one selected ethnic minority peoples of China. As elsewhere, there is no attempt to simulate antiquity in these buildings. Contemporary ethnic architecture at the FCV follows the principles of "reformed architecture." For example, in the Zhuang compound (Fig. 8) the traditional intermingling of people with animals is replaced with segregated premises: Animals are

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housed beneath humans, who inhabit the first floor. Similarly, the Mongolian yurt sports an air-conditioning unit, as do actual reformed-architecture yurt settlements in Mongolia. The interiors of the Zhuang village insist that tradition is consistent with modernization: Modern electric equipment has a rightful place in the home. However, reconstructions also come with a political agenda at the FCV, as they do in Splendid China. Two of the largest structures, a stone watchtower and a lamasery, come from Tibet. It is in “Tibet” that official visits by Chinese leaders are often posed, although, perhaps surprisingly, when Deng Xiaoping visited the FCV in January 1992, he was taken to see a shaman performing a traditional scaling of a ladder of swords (Fig. 9). Yet there are signs that landscape, architecture, and people do not always marry as happily as the creators of the park would wish. Four of the twenty-one nationalities represented are Muslim, yet none is so identified. The mosque, finished two years after the rest of the park, is a mosque only in its exterior. The interior is a shop for Uygur products.

Performance at the FCV cements the experience in a way impossible in Splendid China. All the villages are inhabited by the respective minority people. Most are welcoming and willing to patiently answer questions about the topography, architecture, crafts, and way of life. These attendants provide what most cultural parks with interpreters seem never able to do: to let the ethnographic subjects become interpreters rather than objects. The performers engage the tourists not only as site guides but also through regular performances in the village during the day and at the folk arts parade and performance at the Central Theater in the evening. The village performances spill out from the village and become musical processions around the lake, taking the visitors with them, sometimes also in hired
ethnic costume. Performers thus offer a vital mediating role, interpreting their culture, situating it within that of other Chinese people, and offering human form to the landscape, architecture, and interior design.

The overwhelming majority of visitors to the FCV are themselves Chinese, mostly from the surrounding provinces in the most developed region of China. What the visitors acquire is a mode of tourist experience, itself a form of modernity, where this form of cultural consumption has great novelty for well-paid workers, officials, and the military. The representation of the far reaches of China is as much part of contemporary display as the Folk Laser Music Fountain. Minority regions are as subject to reform and renewal as the Special Economic Zone in which the FCV is situated. The significance of minority nationalities is that they offer China a future less hidebound than the past—multiethnic and highly marketable, both externally and internally and “a multinational nation-state that must be reckoned with by other multinational, “modern” nation-states.”


37 Regarding a multietnic society, see Litzinger, 39: “The rehabilitation of ethnology (minzuxue) in the late 1970s, the influx of foreign scholars studying the ‘peripheral peoples’ of China, the obsessive concern with tradition in late-1980s China, and the emergence of a tourist industry which is banking on the consolidation of the exotic have all served to create an image of China as a multiethnic, culturally plural nation.” This final quotation is from Dru Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities,” Journal of Asian Studies 53, no. 1 (1994), 96.
The last of the parks considered here, Window of the World, offers the sharpest of contrasts with the others, yet it completes, albeit in negative form, the picture of Chinese-style tourism. The largest of the parks in Shenzhen, it opened in 1995. The logic of the enterprise is simple: If Splendid China provides for local and foreign tourists a trip round China's topography and culture, and the Folk Culture Villages extend the notion of Chinese-ness to the non-Han citizens living mostly in the farthest reaches of China's authority, as well as providing an opportunity for the visitor to interact and learn from the minority people themselves, then Window of the World brings the rest of the world to China. It does so, but, it should be stressed, strictly on Chinese terms. This is not like the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village, where the rest of the world is represented by various forms of rides or amusements. It is in Window of the World that the full picture of Chinese-style tourism becomes evident. The promotional poster for the park reminds the visitor that the rest of the world is seen in relation to China. In this respect it is the logical and the more enthusiastic successor to Taiwan’s Folk Culture Villages. The entrance reinforces the point. One emerges from the subway into I. M. Pei's pyramid at the Louvre (Fig. 10). This is a replica of the work of a U.S. citizen of Chinese parentage and the architect of the Bank of China’s building in Hong Kong. To underscore the point, the title of the park in Chinese characters is in the hand of the president of China, Jiang Zemin, composed on the occasion of his visit.
The park is likely to bewilder the unorientated visitor. Although twice the size of Splendid China, it appears cramped in the way that a traditional Chinese garden might be, and, with its sudden changes of perspectives, the logic of display is hard to grasp. There is a rather vague geographic sense to the arrangement. The Americas are to the west of Africa and Europe. The South Pacific is likewise banished to the southeast, though Europe extends to meet it. Miniaturization is employed to pack in as much material as possible. The immensity of the Africa Safari Park, Kenya, is suggested by huge herds of miniature wildlife. Scale changes make for some surprises. The juxtaposition of Stonehenge and Buckingham Palace at 1:2 and 1:15 scale, respectively (Fig. 11), and, in America, of Manhattan (1:100), the Capitol building (1:15), Mount Rushmore, and the Grand Canyon require the viewer to refocus constantly (Fig. 12). Some of the effects are, however, theatrically exciting, especially the waterfall representing Niagara Falls. It may be that this confusion of scale is troublesome only for those who know the originals. The landscape at Window of the World is not designed to produce verisimilitude but to provide a photographically recognizable set of structures. Scale is of no significance; items can be cropped, enlarged, reduced, and collaged at will by the photographer. Window of the World offers a feast of photo opportunities.

The same may be said of performance. Chinese female performers as equestrian horseguards at the Arc de Triomphe provide entertainment but hardly suggest serious imi-
tation. However, there is an interesting lack of congruence between the attention paid to a continent or country and the peopling of it. Europe has thirty-six structures and two performances (stiff, military, and formal). Asia has thirty-five buildings. Only the Japanese complex is staffed, mostly by Chinese minority young women and men. North America, with twenty-two buildings, is represented by an ethnic minority, “North American Indians,” not specified but undoubtedly from the Pacific Northwest. These performers are, again, Chinese minority people. The Maori performance before the Marae, one of only five oceanic structures, is staffed by dancers from Yunnan in a performance bewildering in the variety of its choreographic references (Fig. 13). Africa has only eight structures, but again it is the site of a major series of performances by members of the Wa people, chosen, no doubt, for the color of their skin. It is perhaps no coincidence that the representation of European diaspora civilizations should be portrayed in a way analogous to the way that China shows itself: through its minorities. The impact is more than merely ironic. Whether intentional or not, Window of the World turns the table neatly on the World’s Fair tradition, which offered “native displays and performances: Demonstrations of pottery and weaving techniques, the staging of indigenous performance and ritual and the environments

that simulate the architecture, costume, and cuisine of the various nations and peoples.”

There are two contradictory ways of reading Window of the World. On the one hand, it can be seen as a deliciously ironic parody and riposte to the World’s Fair tradition. There is evidence to substantiate such a view, and it is consistent with the treatment in Splendid China and the Folk Culture Villages of paying special attention to minority cultures. The “Maoris” and the “American Indians” remind the visitor of the continuities in the world—as well as the physical differences. However, the treatment of Africans reminds us that the residue of imperial tradition, with its evolutionary schema, finds a home in China. As the catalogue states, “Living in such a severe environment as black Africa, its people, however, store infinite vitalities. On festival nights, they always make bonfires beside their camps, singing and dancing, in a speed and rhythm simple but wild, which reflects the primitive impulse and talent from the bottom of life.”

Evidently this Chinese interest in minority peoples in Western societies is no defense against a very old-fashioned view of Africa. The African performances are among the most popular and most discussed by visitors at Window of the World.

Chinese-Style Tourism and Chinese Theme Parks

What, at the end of the day, distinguishes Chinese culture parks from others? I have argued that the defining feature is to be found in a specific sense of nationalism. But this surfaces in two distinct forms. In Taiwan, landscape and architecture provide a poorly hidden excuse for the development of a regional, if not a national, consciousness. The prominent reference in the Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Park to indigenous peoples and their study during the period of Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945 suggests an alternative trajectory for Taiwanese destiny. Similarly, the relocation and restoration of buildings in the Taiwan Folk Village emphasize the specificity of regional architecture: “a living history of architectural development in Taiwan during the past three hundred years.” At the same time, both parks “balance” their displays with elements of internationalism (the World Plaza and European Palace Garden at Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village, the rides and fun fair at Taiwan Folk Village).

At Shenzhen, the picture is of a complex sense of nationalism combined with a critique of Western models. Splendid China sets out the alternative agenda clearly: “to replenish space among scenic spots. ‘Realistic activities’ scenes with national flavour also depict vividly the age-old Chinese cultural traditions and local customs. All views are modelled on real objects and based on full and accurate facts. The project thereby is a perfect combination of entertainment and learning, art, knowledge and education.” Miniaturization in Splendid China provides a panoptikon without history. The Folk Culture Villages further serve this ahistoric present by showing how a great variety of peoples can share a landscape and contribute different cultural perspectives based on topography, architecture, dress, and performance; landscapes, buildings, and people belong together. Window of the World confirms the stability of the Middle Kingdom in its depiction of the rest of the world as a perplexing kaleidoscope not to be taken altogether seriously.

Chinese cultural theme parks are incompatible with Western internationalism. The apparent failure of the second-generation Splendid China in Orlando, Fla., to kindle tourist enthusiasm relates, I suggest, to the contradiction between its purpose and program. (“See wonders like The Great Wall and The Stone Forest, Touch the exquisite work of China’s artisans.”) Bluntly, who, apart from a few old “China-hands,” would go to see a Chinese version of China when a better-packaged, more accessible, and more enjoyable one is available up the road at Walt Disney World?

However, a serious question arises as to whether this Chinese-style tourism can survive in its present form. The future may not be quite so rosy. There are already some ominous signs. The replica of Splendid China built by Chinese enterprise in Orlando right...
next to Walt Disney World has not been a conspicuous success. The didacticism and lack
of high-technology attractions leave most visitors bemused and disappointed. The hostile
attentions of pro-Tibetan independence groups holding regular demonstrations outside
the gates have reinforced the difference that political perspective can contribute. Splendid
China has not transplanted well to the Disney environment. Attendance is also slipping
badly at Shenzhen. This decline may reflect the high cost of entrance combined with
more choice. China has been swept with a theme park mania: from one competitor in
1993, Shenzhen now faces at least twenty others, which range from one respectfully de-
voted to Confucius in Qufu to the excitement of an “earthquake park” on the site of the
major disaster at Tianjin. Down the road in Guangzhou, the Grand World Scenic Park has
moved closer to Western expectations with attractions such as helicopters and water scoot-
ers. The desire for entertainment may well be outstripping the appetite for an ethnically
inflected form of visual nationalism.

Nevertheless, Chinese theme parks remain visually, compositionally, and historically
distinct. The debt to traditional Chinese garden landscape is unmistakable if not always
immediately recognizable. The “audio-animatronic” elephants spurring water from their
trunks and the electric sheep grazing in the village at the China Folk Culture Villages
obviously provide a ready reference to the world of Disney, but the layout of the Taiwanese
parks and even Window of the World reminds the non-Chinese visitor that there remains
a quite distinct and vital tradition that is special to contemporary Chinese theme parks. The
superficial resemblance to Western exemplars hardly disguises how differently these institu-
tions operate within a highly self-conscious nationalist environment. Postmodern appear-
ance belies the underlying logic common to all five of the parks discussed here. Although
modernity is highly attractive to the Chinese, it is in a decidedly Chinese mode. The land-
scapes of Chinese theme parks are emphatically not postmodern, and only modern within
a tightly defined view of Chinese values. There is as yet little likelihood that they will come
to resemble “China” at Epcot Center in Walt Disney World.

43 A revealing account of the sort of “hot capital” involved is detailed in Harrison Salisbury, New Emper-

44 Bao Jigang (of Zhongshan University) provided the following attendance figures for Shenzhen:

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In contrast, between June 1995 and 1996, Window of the World attracted 5 million visitors.
Contributors

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Contributors

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