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SIGNAL 3: ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCES IN THE AMERICAN THEME PARK INDUSTRY

by

SCOTT A. LUKAS

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

Signal 3:
Ethnographic Experiences In The American Theme Park Industry

by

Scott A. Lukas

This dissertation investigates the social, political and historical dimensions of the American theme park industry. Specifically, the research seeks to ethnologically analyze the "American theme park" as a multi-faceted space of socio-cultural formation, reformation, contestation and representation. Through a multi-sited approach, the thesis investigates theme parks, both extinct and extant, from the everyday perspectives of patrons and workers, in the closed rooms of designers, managers and elite decision-makers, and in the numerous spaces of material culture, multi-media representation and design which so makeup the place of study. The ethnographic research is based on two-years of participant-observation at a major American theme park, where the author was a trainer, as well as two years of subsequent research in over twenty additional theme parks and amusement venues, like Las Vegas casinos, throughout the country. As "edge work," the author investigates the complexities of representation, authorship and fieldwork as they emerge in a textual and performative scene of writing and evocation, ultimately challenging distinctions of ethnography and fiction.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following theme parks, amusement venues and casinos for responding to my requests for press kits: Southern Adventures (Alabama); in Arizona, Enchanted Island, Old Tucson Studios, Rawhide; in California, Adventure City, Disneyland, Knott’s Berry Farm, Paramount’s Great America, Raging Waters, Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Santa’s Village, Six Flags California; Water World in Colorado; Quassy Amusement Park in Connecticut; in Florida, Busch Gardens, Florida Cypress Gardens, Jungle Larry’s Caribbean Gardens, Lion Country Safari, Sea World of Florida, Silver Springs—Wild Waters, Splendid China, Universal Studios Florida, Walt Disney World, Weeki Wachee Spring, Wet’n Wild; Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town and Six Flags Over Georgia in Georgia; Silverwood Theme Park in Idaho; Six Flags Great America and Three Worlds of Santa’s Village in Illinois; in Indiana, Fun Spot and Holiday World; Adventureland in Iowa; Kentucky Kingdom in Kentucky; in Maine, Fun Town U.S.A.; Adventure World Family Theme Park and Frontier Town in Maryland; in Massachusetts, Fantasyland, Riverside Park, Star Land Recreation Center and Whalom Park; Michigan’s Adventures; Cedar Lake Farm, Knott’s Camp Snoopy, Valleyfair in Minnesota; Silver Dollar City, Six Flags Mid-America and World’s of Fun in Missouri; Ponderosa Ranch, Wild Island in Nevada; Canobie Lake Park, Story Land, The Whale’s Tale Water Park in New Hampshire; Clementon Amusement Park and Six Flags Great Adventure in
New Jersey; in New York, Astroland, Darien Lake, Enchanted Forest, the Great Escape, Midway Park and Playland Park; Paramount’s Carowinds, Santa’s Land and Tweetsie Railroad in North Carolina; in Ohio, The Beach Waterpark, Cedar Point, Erieview Park, Paramount’s Kings Island, Sea World Ohio, Wyandot Lake Park; Frontier City, Arbuckle Wilderness in Oklahoma; Enchanted Forest in Oregon; in Pennsylvania, Bland’s Park, Dorney Park and Animal Kingdom, Dutch Wonderland, Hersheypark, Idlewild Park, Kennywood, Lakemont Park, Sesame Place, Bushkill Park; Fun Spot, Myrtle Beach Pavilion in South Carolina; Wild Water West Park in South Dakota; in Tennessee, Dollywood, Libertyland and Ober Gatlinburg; in Texas, Splashtown, Six Flags Fiesta Texas, Sandy Lake Amusement Park, Sea World of Texas, Schlitterbahn; in Virginia, Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Ocean Breeze, Paramount’s Kings Dominion; in Wisconsin, Family Land, Noah’s Ark Family Park, Thumb Park; in Nevada, the following casinos: Circus Circus, Stratosphere, Tropicana, Barbary Coast, Bally’s, Rio, New York, New York, Luxor, Hard Rock and Caesars Palace; in Austria, Bobbejaanland, Meli Park and Walibi; in Canada, Africa Lion Safari and Game Farm, Calaway Park, Centerville Amusement Park, Playland, Paramount’s Canada’s Wonderland, Rainbow Valley, La Ronde, Santa’s Village, Sportsworld, and Parc Safari; A/S Farup Aquapark and Sommerland in Denmark; in England, Alton Towers, American Adventure Amusement Park, Blackpool Pleasure Beach, Drayton Manor and Thorpe Park; in Finland, Linnanmaki Amusement Park, Tampereen Sarkanniemi Oy; Parc Asterix S.A. and Disneyland Paris in France; in Germany, Aqua Tropicana im Ostseebad Damp, Aquatoll, Dinosaurier Park Muenchehagen, Erlebnispark Tripsdrill, Erlebnispark Ziegenhagen, Fraenkisches Wunderland Plech, Heide-Park, Holiday Park, Phantasialand, Sportparadies Gelsenkirchen and Taunus-Wunderland; Esselworld and Waterworld in India; Duinre...
Efteling, Recreatiepark Beekse Bergen and Zeedierenpark Harderwijk, all in the Netherlands; Telemark Sommarland in Norway; Tang Dynasty City in Singapore; in Spain, Aqua Brava, Parque Atracciones Zaragoza, Parque de Atracciones Casa de Campo de Madrid, Aspro in Spain; Fyrishov, Jamtli Historieland and Liseberg in Sweden; and Window on China in Taiwan.

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From AstroWorld, I extend a warm “thank you” to Cindy and Emily for their caring and willingness to discuss just about anything I asked them. I owe special acknowledgments to the members of my dissertation committee and the student and faculty colleagues of mine at Rice University. They have been inspirational to the project and to my personal growth as an anthropologist. I also wish to personally thank Andrea Aureli, Alexi Elfimov and Denise Youngblood for offering personal and professional support. Special thanks too to Carole Speranza of Rice University. Thanks are also to be given to the many few at Valparaiso University, students and faculty members, who understood all along what I was “up to” in my research and my teaching. “Thank you” to Nathan Eaton, a student of mine at Valparaiso University, for his work in clarifying police and military radio codes as they relate to the dissertation title.
I would also like to thank Thad Donovan for his friendship and his invaluable assistance in transferring videos to photos, in providing the "amusement ship" illustration and in answering questions related to the layout of the printed text. I also would like to acknowledge the friendship and intellectual advice of Nandini Bhattacharya of Valparaiso University. As well, I thank Mark Day for his friendship. Lastly, I wish to thank my parents for their continued support.
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All units respond. The Operations Office will double check with Security to see if Medical Services has been notified. The General Manager or person in charge of the department will be notified. All divisions should be notified by the person in charge of the park. YOUR ACTIONS: Stay off of the radio and report to area for crowd control. AstroWorld, Radio Procedures and Signals, 1994.
CHAPTER 1

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

I want to turn what I’ve learned from my timeless downward-watching into sustaining a hasty glance.¹

Kudamm #232

Standing at the *Imbiss* in Berlin, Germany, the year 1994, I feel like Peter Falk in a Wim Wenders movie, talking to sprits that may or may not be there. This is the backdrop, my recollective-point-of-orientation directing and guiding me to paper. I sit down nearly five years later, with the task of writing a life-story that isn’t supposed to resemble a life-story: convention dictates convention, just as nameless agencies determine the fate of ethnographic projects like mine. When I ask you to accept what I am doing, what I will propose and lay to paper, I know that I have no image of you, nor a figuration of the nature of your glance, to cuddle next to my tear, my master inscription which is to unfold across multiple times and spaces. *I have no idea:* tag to the end of that “who you are,” “what it was,” “where it went,” “who am I in relation to...” I can only think about the task now, *putting it down.* But YOU are a master-enigma, a trace of uncertainty and horror that runs through the snaking pathways of this writing. If I didn’t have YOU, I could not write, and having YOU I can not write. This is how projects such as these begin and end—with and for irony, and wishing to
simultaneously bring forth and cast away memory and its antecedents.

I am looking through memory, and I metaphorically change my glance by running it through a multiple number of Photoshop filters, when it begins to lose track of its own appearance. The window-on-the-world...I think about "ethnography"—that shibboleth staring back at me from the other side of my filter—and begin to lose sight of what the writing will look like. I begin to think of places, people, spaces and happenings unrelated to and unrehearsed by the dictates proposed by me and others in the writing of a magnum opus, a dissertation on American theme parks. What is the connection between the theme parks I write of and the feelings I had in Berlin? There is no connection, neither epistemological, anthropological nor methodological: the two stand in complete misalignment, yet they somehow come to be related in every way, in my mind, through a series of instances, thoughts and feelings henceforth unencumbered by the requirements of academic pursuits. Analysis, O bitter fiend at my side. Ethnography, you haven't been kind to me lately. Consciousness, where are you when I need you? Writing, what perverted thing do I have in store for you? In the first place, I write without feeling connections.

Tribute

The event begins promptly at ten in the morning. I am standing outside the Season Pass Processing Center with Jennifer, Jeff, Cindy and Randy. This was the 95' season and our training group was quizzing employees on their knowledge of new Six Flags corporate slogans and guest interaction strategies. The workers who knew the material were awarded Bugs Bunny Bucks, park dollar bills which one could later redeem at the Company store for prizes and
novelty items. Employees and management staff trickle in the large auditorium which was to be transformed into a stage of tribute—a performance-event known as the Park Kick-Off. Management had hoped that it would instill pride and company loyalty in new employees, and reinvigorate re-hires who were likely burned out from the long 94' season.

The slide show and music were not ready to go once most of the persons had been seated, and Joseph, a sergeant from Security, is desperately fussing with the equipment to get the show going. I am seated with the other coordinators in the front row of the auditorium and we hear grumbling and mumbling: "When is this shit gonna' get started?" Someone from management cocks his head around, indicating his displeasure with the impatience of the audience. Joseph eventually gets the slides running, and we are treated to pictures of AstroWorld employees smiling for the camera, as it were, while musical lyrics announced the season's theme: "Right here, right now, there is no other place I would rather be!" Following the slides, a number of the management staff spoke about their park experiences and stated why they loved working at AstroWorld so much. A bird show follows featuring animals from the park's World of Birds show. A white bird flaps across the stage to an employee's arm from the trainer's. "People think this is really cool," I whisper to Randy. The clapping then ends. People filter back out of the auditorium; two had been terminated at the event, both for asking "where their fuckin' food was?" I make my way out of the double doors of the Season Pass center, squinting at the sunlight as it hits me. I look down at my watch and I am distracted as a woman to my left moans, "This sucks!"
Possessed by Voices

Everything you have been taught, is often an explicit or unspoken motivation behind academic work. "Learn from your predecessors," that had also been written across the pedagogical faces of many a teacher I had met in two of the four-fields anthropology departments in which I had worked. Just about ten years of study in cultural anthropology. I wasn't like some others; I completed all of my degrees in this discipline, and I find myself feeling existential in the morning beside my cup of over-brewed coffee and willing laptop. Ten years ago I was drawn into the discipline with stories of scarification rites, of rituals unheard of by a Midwesterner, of practices previously made bizarre through a media-indoctrination of people and images realized by the legacies of the primitive, the modern. Ten years ago I'm sure that I thought that I would write an analytic dissertation, a thesis flowing with rich details of rituals, with findings of "what the people did" and "what the people thought," maybe thrown together with some musings of my authorial reflexivity, but just a bit of that...then, ten years ago. But that is not going to happen, and it isn't going to happen just because of my authorial conventions, my own decisions about what I will and will not include in this writing, and it isn't going to happen because I feel that the manner in which I write and the operations that I impose on the construction of my ethnographic sites are somehow constitutive of "the experimental" or of "contemporary ethnography," and it isn't going to happen because I feel constrained to write in such ways to meet the needs and desires of my audiences. None of that.
The decisions to *write this way* or to make the sorts of epistemological leaps I will, or to produce the anthropological stunt-shows you will pay to see by your own culpability are all, already, the constituents of a "writing machine" (cf. Marcus 1996:12), in that they are not the products of *inventio* or the outcomes of *fabula* nor the results of the greater "mysteries of the world," instead *they have already been written*, and they are the automatic outcomes of larger epistemological forces far removed from the topical concerns of this dissertation.² Like Serres' parasite (1982) these parts move unencumbered; they are the traces of logos, alphabetic writing, social stratification, evil. I am writing in America, as an American, and I am writing on top of the largest palimpsest ever fashioned—a mound of inescapable shit that simultaneously covers and seduces (cf. Genette 1997).

My decisions on what to write of and how to write it, take into account the great absurdity facing every writer and witness of the world, as Maurice Blanchot suggests in his exegesis of writing and disasters, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Blanchot 1986). From the start, we must realize that our project, our ethnographic vision-quest, is doubly-thwarted and flawed in two ways, by writing (inscription) and by looking (vision).³ My decisions on what to write of
and how to write it, begin with the orientations provided by loss: the loss of vision, the loss of being able to speak, the loss of writing ("writer's block"), the losses of the self (as ethnographer, as human). In many ways I am writing my own disaster story, but like Adorno's comments on philosophy after the Holocaust, I cannot claim that the writing I embark on to produce meaning is representative of feelings or conditions unique or more horrific than others; such an assumption would be foolish indeed.

What I will claim, though, is that the decisions mediated in my writing of this text are ones enacted in the spaces of a series of losses which, though to be enumerated later, may be summarized in my ethnographic collage with which I began this chapter: Berlin...American theme parks. Such is a connection which seems ethnographically unmotivated by anything substantial save perhaps the notions of collage summarized in ideas governing "ethnographic surrealism" (cf. Clifford 1988). I would argue today that this particular assumption, that certain ethnographic decisions are created under the auspices of mere method, is part and parcel of the problem facing contemporary ethnography. It is a problem felt in the circles of those ethnographers who write "experimental ethnography," and it is a problem taking on the likeness of a piece in a never-ending chess game played by ethnographic conservatives who seek to enslave it and "us" in the match. It is my contention that many anthropologists have stumbled along the way, and this is why the connections summarized in the analytical and ethnographic eyes of readers of my work will lead to the false conclusion that the ethnographic and scriptural constructs I employ are the results of ethnographic surrealism, cultural critique, historical particularism, cultural relativism, etc. They are none of those, and they are all of those. The ethnographer has forgotten about the import of allegory and its ability to impart
in the mind, body and soul of the watcher-writer a specific possession-state—a new working out of being in a non-mapped, unspecified, overly erotic, highly excited state of the channeling of voices. Listen and forget.

The Automatic Writing of the World

Writing is an illness we cannot treat but only recover from (Tyler 1992:5).

...and I am consumed; I consume the world, and I forget both...

I wish to specify the particularities of my own ethnographic sensibilities later, but let me now comment on the image. The image is a powerful metaphorical force of orientation for my own writing of the world; it is the image that takes me back to Berlin and allows me to only now reflect on what happened to that ethnography I was supposed to write; it is the image that allows me to think about all of the horror and disillusion that comes with the pretenses of doing ethnography, or for merely being-in-the-world for that matter. The image is my own marker of identity in waiting, of projects unfulfilled, of memories abound and of futures past. The image is about feeling for a “place,” be it geographically real or narratively produced, and then realizing that that place is forever lost in something bigger than yet contained in the self.
Consider Walter Benjamin's provocative statement, "...because the longing we feel for a place determines it as much as does its outward image" (1978:40). Benjamin's notion of a graphic rendition of one's sphere of life (ibid:5) brings to my mind a series of maps—not cartographic or "to scale" but proto-Situationist and drifting, ones indicating not mere routes but roots, subterranean passages and tunnels (cf. Benjamin 1978:9) leading to spaces known and unknown, academic and practical, personal and public, to configurations of discourse—the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), the banyan tree (Tyler 1995a:80), nomadism (Lyotard 1984, 1985)—and seepages of everyday life (being on the job, fucking late at night, shooting pool at the tavern), to feelings and wanderings uncharted on explorers' maps or psychoanalysts' charts. I take 7,000 ghosts in a suitcase when I travel from Gary, Indiana to Albion, Michigan to Bloomington, Indiana to Iowa City, Iowa to Houston, Texas, to Berlin, Germany, to Elysburg, Pennsylvania to Orlando, Florida to Valparaiso, Indiana. A series of paths which do not know their own ends, beginnings or middles.

Graphically I think of a performance piece which cannot be represented in paper transcription, in Laban notation, on audio tape or on video disc, and then I apply the performance to a machine-shop of metaphors I am attempting to use in the construction of my ethnography. I wish it were true that the performance and the ethnography were one and the same, but they are not and I am forced to write. This is a feeling, a consequence?, that Julie Taylor evokes in her work on "paper tangos" (1998); it is a feeling that one is forced to strip away the being of the self and the other in a moment of violence brought on by the text.
The text is everything, it is everything we are about as ethnographers...I think back and have a moment of shock in Iowa City as I am chastised by an anthropologist who tells me to stop worrying about writing because "it is what we do...it is what we have always done." I walk out of the room thinking that something is wrong, that some personal, political act far worse than the acts brought on by alphabetic closure of ethnographic writing moments is waiting behind three doors. I remember standing frustrated in a muddy field in Bloomington, Indiana protesting the Gulf War and then later trying to justify and write-up my activism on text (Lukas 1991). Did it work? I think of the time at Albion College when I used newly acquired anthropological terms to confront student colleagues upset with the representation of defecation in a Dali painting. I recall a professor in a political anthropology course at Indiana University telling the class that there were only two things we needed to know about art: good and bad. Later, I am writing a narrative on my field study at an Iowa City bar; it the project I was completing with two colleagues and friends, one an Asian-American woman, the other a European-American male, for Margery Wolf's "Reading and Writing Ethnography" seminar; we read our narratives to the class, and I remember the disparity in them as Emily mentions her different field perceptions and narrativization of the predominantly European-American clientele of the place. I thought about writing difference, about writing differently and about different writings...I am then transported to Houston, Texas once again, trying to explain and justify my proposed research on Berlin city-planning; he surprises me and requests that I describe the project in German; I look dumfounded and I utter, "Was?" I am in Berlin, before that time, talking to my friend and informant Badi Mostafa who asks me if I can run as we walk near Prenzlauerberg, waiting for others "behind a door." I never saw or heard from him after my short trip to the city. It is then just a few years
back and I am sitting in George Marcus’ “Proseminar,” in which all of the students were trying to put to paper research projects; I can’t remember most of them, but I recall mine as I look back at it a few days ago in August, 1997: “What’s all of this stuff about African griots and cyberpunks?,” I think out loud for just a moment...and there was some writing on “Research Proposal v. 7.2” which reads, “what is the open text?” I feel juxtaposed to my own memories as I once thought about what it was like to perform on stage, with lights so bright and an audience so blurred that one loses all memory, consciousness, autonomy, everything really except for that moment itself. We are all in the course “Multimedia Improvisation” when one person asks me, “What does the anthropologist think about ritual?” “It happens,” I respond, shuddering later in the evening. Then, I am at a theme park in the summer of 1997; I don’t remember which one, but I am amused at my reflection in a pane of glass near a ride Q-line. Next to my impression on glass is a kitsch mad-person, laughing to prerecorded music, rocking back and forth in a mechanical motion. Then, the multiple images make love to one another in reflection. Was?

I have an image in my head as I watch a scene in Wings of Desire. It is I, atop the Siegessäule reading a copy of one of many grant proposals to do research in that city, and it is then I who looks down upon the city; it is a vision that responds to my quest, to my musings about ethnography and the discipline of which I am an often unwilling member. Why did none of these get accepted? Was there something I was missing? Had someone/something missed me? I look to the west and see faded book pictures of Nazi tanks rolling down the thoroughfares of the city. I even create an image of Vegas as I sit there wondering about seeing and writing. “The city looks nice today,” I shout at the top of my lungs without abandon, just before I tap the keys to strike up the
opening epigram to the dissertation. Downward-looking, the sustenance of specific glances, remembering...remembering what on the Siegessäule?

I remember Wim Wenders saying that the majesty of Berlin is “that you can see the sky” (in Berlin City Forum 1992:53). The sky is something that I do not remember in Orlando nor in Williamsburg, just ground and movement. I think, “this is everything,” listening to a Henry Rollins’ spoken-word performance (cf. Rollins 1996), and I construe a shaky rendition of my performance piece metaphor for ethnography; second-hand, of course, of multiple generations and reeling from aliasing; it begins to take on the appearance of a situation (read Situationist), a situation like many or all others, “inspired by an object, a fragment, a present obsession, never by an idea” (Baudrillard 1996a:1). Each memory I have, many which may appear unrelated to my ethnographic object, constitutes its own “micro-narrative” (Chambers 1994:52), a stain in a point of dwelling which resists its own dwelling. There’s a head on a stake—it may or may not be mine, or it may be that of writing itself, from that point on to be known to the world as an aberration.
America

The ability to deceive ourselves and to be sincere...is the defining characteristic of what it means to be American (Shaviro 1997:22).

In treating American culture one must resort to an analysis that goes only a shade beyond impressionism (Kluckholn 1957:175-6).

...instead, as if by a strange curse, I find that at the end of my student life as an anthropologist I am once again trapped in America, encompassed by personal, political and disciplinary forces around me. On many occasions I look in the mirror thinking, what am I doing with theme parks? On others I find myself driving on the interstate to a park with the greatest sense of dread and apprehension. It does not help the cause of writing ethnography when so many seemingly vaporous yet mundane forces are circling around me, on the hunt...waiting for me to stumble.7

When I set out to write my dissertation a number of factors were considered. As I have suggested outright, it was not my original intention to write of my theme park experiences when I took up shop as a trainer at Six Flags AstroWorld. I took the job on accident: I saw a job posting at the Rice University career center for a training position there; I thought that the experience would be interesting, possibly entertaining, and I had always enjoyed theme parks for their rides. This was my motivation for working at AstroWorld. Later, after my grants for work in Berlin had failed to gain approval, I began my first full-time teaching position at Valparaiso University and I then realized that for numerous reasons, personal and epistemological, my ethnography would be on the subject of American theme parks.8
I do not wish to dedicate a great deal of space to listing previous work on American studies and theme parks, as I plan to incorporate such sources throughout the ethnographic and historical sections of the writing. However, I would remind the reader of one important fact regarding the doing of anthropology in the United States, namely perception. As many have commented, the status of anthropologists doing ethnography at home is a particularly low one. Even collected works, such as the disappointing *Symbolizing America* (Varenne 1986a), justify the anthropology of America by listing the qualifications (referencing prior "legitimate" work in foreign fields) of indigenous American ethnographers: “Drummond in Guyana...Myerhoff among Huichol Indians...Singer and Moffatt in India” (Varenne 1986b:4). The topic of indigenous ethnographers, native ethnographers or “marginal natives” and anthropology in “home countries” (cf. Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Okely 1996; Varenne 1986b:2) has received a minimum of disciplinary attention, with exceptions being recent cultural studies work and other hybrid projects (cf. Marcus 1991). Kathleen Stewart’s new ethnography, *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996), is one in a growing tradition of U.S. residents doing the Anthropology of America. There the etic-emic dimensions of traditional ethnography are deployed and erased in a substantially reflexive and informed piece of scholarship.

The early examples of the Anthropology of America, like *Symbolizing America*, seem to lack both seriousness and rigor in their understanding of various “American” topics: from the college dorm (Moffatt 1989), to the bottomless cup of coffee to the bagel (cf. Harris 1981; Kottak 1982; Lantis 1955; Montague & Arens 1981; Spindler & Spindler 1983). They, like other examples of American studies in other disciplines, find themselves caught in conundrums
of trying to define "America" or being "American," or being forced to ask questions about "community" or ruminate on "American values" (cf. Spindler & Spindler 1983). Other studies rightly warn of the problems inherent in the Anthropology of America, such as the exoticizing of the mundane (cf. Varenne 1986c:35), yet the same studies often ironically misconstrue politics and representation as they advocate a traditionalist approach to writing ethnography; this itself perhaps being a reaction to the stigma of American anthropology, which is unfortunately addressed by ethnography that appears pedestrian, misinformed, mainstream and predominantly "safe."

Indeed, one of the motivations of this project was the fact that much of the previous work in American studies and in theme parks in particular was impoverished in many respects. Recent cultural studies collections (cf. Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler 1992; Muikerji & Schudson 1991) have placed less emphasis on national questions of character and community, and have instead focused attention on topics at "home," ones specific to particular communities and practices—an inheritance from British cultural studies. Such work is intriguing, but it too fails to be completely compelling, perhaps due to the heightened attention to popular form while lessening concerns with institutional analyses. Another disappointing category of the Anthropology of America is exemplified in works like Marshall Blonsky's American Mythologies (1992) in which the author-semiotician tries to "discover the typography of [a] vast mythical land" (ibid:xiii).12 Other existential texts on the United States, Jean Baudrillard's America being perhaps the most famous (1986), maintain a lack of ethnographic ground—that is they do not directly deal with people in interviews or in first-person ethnographic encounters—yet they do provide some insight on the nature of cultural practices and conditions of being in the

My current research draws most notably on the mythology of these American texts, ones I will label “American escape attempts,” in that they posit a number of allegorical and metaphorical connections between places and spaces and the people in them. The psychological conditions intuited in such writing—conditions that are drawn from the pen of a voyeur-writer who is herself the character in a larger “novel of America” over which she has no authorial control—are themselves the markers of a new category of ethnography. Here performance practice, philosophy of being, geographic analysis and psychoanalysis come full circle in an ethnographer’s moment. The “American escape attempt,” though resembling the fatal writing of a Baudrillard (1990a), comes to shape as a meeting of various lines of seepage: from the mass hegemony of the theme park to its effects on patrons and workers, back to the body of the ethnographer as she attempts to cope with a fear that is simultaneously pronounced and unspoken. It is about evoking America and theme parks without recourse to method. Welcome to America, and you’re not welcome!

Three Scans

Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life (Baudrillard 1986:11).

Scan 1. Juxtaposed on my scanner is a bottle, a piece of wreckage off a World War II Japanese transport sunk somewhere off Kwajaline Island in the Marshalls, and a small piece of paper, labeled “das Unrecht,” which was a
vocabulary aid for my study of the German language. I begin to adjust the brightness and contrast on the software controlling the scanner...slowly the bottle, which had appeared as a black mass smudged across a black background, begins to take shape. The scanner rolls down the page and on my laptop the picture begins to fill in: with the new software settings, the bottle and white paper begin to separate from one another; the image has taken on an uncanny illusion of depth as the bottle is thrown to the foreground. The bottle has nothing to do with anything, really, it was just there, in a box in a storage closet storing old notes and texts from Berlin; a box which I hadn’t opened in years. Underneath the bottle, more white flash cards and loads of miscellaneous papers, with a notebook or two containing fieldnotes from Berlin. Notes about places to see, addresses of people whom I would later contact...and I discover that in the back of the notebook were audit notes, indications of the performance of various individuals at the AstroWorld theme park. Apparently I had used the book twice, for two different sets of notes, from two different times and spaces. Yet, I think looking at the bottle, how I am reminded of Sandy Stone’s autobiographical story of looking at her boots (1995:1), and I am forced to needlessly separate the two...two different experiences and hundreds of thousands of irreconcilable people, places, events and times. I close here, then, with the realization that my work in Berlin is finished, perhaps momentarily at least, and I also have come to the conclusion that that research, much like my
study of theme parks, never really began...and so I begin anew looking at a bottle. The theme park is finished.

Scan 2. I am in the process of adding color to a digital scan of Joseph Beuys, the great performance artist and maker of mystery and the sublime. A postcard picture of the Magic Kingdom’s castle rests on the desk near the scanner; it forces me to reflect on the purpose of scanning, whether in the field or on the desktop, and not just for the reason of spinning metaphors. Each picture here, as it emerges onto the screen, betwixt and between a section of text, becomes its own conductor of ideas, a battery or copper conduit that acts as a site of energy production. The remembrance here is to the forgotten Beuys, whose works were their own energy centers making connections between felt and coyotes, between America and its citizens (cf. Beuys 1990:iix, 84). The photo of Beuys begins to take shape, and the color along the edges of his body imputes a certain mystery as I begin to imagine his shriek just as the radiation from the flatbed runs across his now multiply-duplicated and distributed image.

Scan 3. A series of images from Kennywood, Knoebels, Hersheypark, Paramount parks, form a hierarchy of moments in my recollection of a summer’s trips. Alone and on a road, the images from the camcorder rest themselves in 010011001001’s on a tape. I take it later and perform alterations on the digital surface of the medium, without even scratching its magnetic throne. Zooming in then out, filtering it in multiple ways, and finally freezing it as a STILL—holding for me to use somewhere else, again next to a stack of lifeless text. These stills cry out to be heard: “Where are we to go after you have finished with us, after you have captured our intimacy?” These frozen bodies laugh back at me. Scan after scan makes one feel complicit in something larger, some series of happenings not necessarily related to informants or specific field
situations (cf. Marcus 1997b), but to an ethos of dread that is partially self-imposed and partially resultant of forces beyond and within me: a sign advertising a store on the side of the road has the effect of transforming a chapter of the dissertation, though I never knew it. Ideas, dimensions, STILLS begin to circulate in my conscious and unconscious acts and thoughts, though they never meet in any center to form an economy. They have escaped the radiation from above. I, have not.

The Laboratory of Dialogue

The art work is something else over and above the thingly element. This something else in the work constitutes its artistic nature. The art work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is, allo agoreuei. The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made (Heidegger 1971:19-20).

For me, the appeal for writing has been the opportunity it provides for displacement, not for what is often assumed to be the goal or purpose of writing—finding places, marking them for future reference, or for telling stories that analyze or inform. We are inspired to write, Walter Benjamin says (1986b), by the impulse towards a “script,” one resultant of the imposing face of allegory—that which is “always in excess” (Owens 1984:215). Limited durations of existence, embedded in field encounters (cf. Owens 1984:206), are motivations for the form and intent of this work. I seek not to speak of or about theme parks, rather I try to act in the manner of a Joseph Beuys, seeing that the idea does not originate in my body or mind; it is a message transmitted through me, from another (cf. Beuys 1990:83); and after it rests on paper, it does not “fill a gap,” it tests out and camps in a gap.14 As it is read, it is my hope that the THEME
PARK will be remembered for what it was. Or, as one author offers, it is the task of the allegorist to simultaneously respect and abuse one’s object or image of study:

> Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He [sic] lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (**allos** = other + **agoreuein**= to speak). He [sic] does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he [sic] adds another meaning to the image...the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement. This is why allegory is condemned, but it is also the source of its theoretical significance (Owens 1984:205).15

I do not ask the reader to accept the authority of allegory, or to recognize the stories I tell, the images I present as means to being convinced or being made apparent.16 Like Passaro’s comments on the doing of fieldwork in uncontrolled, hybrid spaces that continually fold in on and expand outwards,17 I realize that a talk here, a moment there, a picture of, a drive to, are all constituents of a fleeting landscape that itself is also the very piece of writing I have composed. I imagine that what I write is like J.G. Ballard’s use and reuse of the *Warren Commission Report*, a playing with assassination lore detritus; though I dig up my fiction in an old toy chest of pamphlets, informant voices, mechanical ride cycles and digitized images (cf. Ballard 1984:9-10).

What I write is fiction insofar as all ethnography is fictive: our characters the informants we imagine—those we can never fully imprison in language. As Baudrillard writes, I wish to think of this text as a “bringing [of] illusion into play...where it can still utter without having to signify” (Baudrillard 1993b:179). Or as Stephen Tyler offers, “evocation that can be written is not evocation” (1997:1)...and if it were that one could try to write forever without ever even having to *print out results*, one could play in the endlessness of the signifiers that
make up the world—what artist Abdel Hernandez identifies as an "unlimited fieldwork," that *which is* evocation (1997:18).

I close here in moving towards an outline of the dissertation by ruminating on three dialogues, each of which is related to my conceptualization of the project as both a field and writing effort. The first is with *scripteur*\(^\text{18}\) Stephen A. Tyler, speaking with anthropological theory and method:\(^\text{19}\)

You weren't trying to get anyone to do something; you weren't trying to describe something; and you weren't making any claims about knowing anything. Nor were you making really any claims about anything being there. I think some people mistook the idea [of evocation] somewhat for the notion that in trying to write evocatively you were trying to bring out something that was already in the reader's mind. That was not my understanding. My idea was that you might well do that—you might evoke something that was there, hidden or forgotten—but more importantly the act of reading itself would evoke something that was maybe unknown to the reader himself or herself. It was this evocative process that was being aimed at rather than the production of knowledge or the production of action—getting someone to act in a particular way—or even the production of an aesthetic response. The evocative response might be aesthetic or it could be any kind [of response]. You weren't trying to control the reader's response (Lukas 1996a:23-4).\(^\text{20}\)

Dear Anthropology:

I want to respond to your suggestions that I work on my analysis, that I develop a greater sense of gratitude to disciplinary work, that I begin to write scenes that will be exemplary in their own rights, that I should respect the lineage of ethnographic modernism, from Malinowski to Herzfeld, and that I might abandon my interest in evocation and allegory so that I could get back on track. I wish that you could accept what it is that I have just written. And if you too could only know that what I am trying to get across in my writing is beyond me—that's where it comes from, but if that is evocation, well I don't really know.
The second is Joseph Beuys’ work, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, a long conversation between the artist and a coyote:

I believe I made contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States’ energy constellation...you could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted....I wanted to concentrate only on the coyote. I wanted to isolate myself, insulate myself, see nothing of America other than the coyote....and when I try to speak with the spiritual existence of this totality of animals, the question arises of whether one could not speak with these higher existences too, with these deities and elemental spirits (Beuys 1990:141-2).

Dear Coyote:

Let me open by expressing my general condolences. Thanks for letting me know about the countryside. I had heard that things were brutal and cruel, but I had no idea of the extent. You know, on the face of this country is built absolute brutality, hate, fear and fascism. I think about how each shift of the dirt under your paws is reflective of a terror that occurs daily in this land. You have felt the earth move beneath your feet; you have felt the tumbling down, the tumbling down. And what is one to do? You have the luxury of running through the brush—I hope that you don’t get shot!—and I have the luxury of writing about it to the end of eventually isolating myself—never knowing what the shifting dirt would feel like under my feet.

The final dialogue is one between a theorist and the text *The Atrocity Exhibition* by J.G. Ballard (1990a):

*The Atrocity Exhibition* coincides with a dissolution of legibility generated by the very efficacy and supremacy of the spectacle. Ballard’s landscape, the city interpenetrated by image/events of car crashes, assassinations, celebrities; astronauts, and war crimes, demands an unremitting effort of decipherment, an effort rendered impossible, however, by the equivalence of everything glutting the field. A fully saturated spectacular space neutralizes the interpretive delirium of paranoia at the very moment of inciting it...[all of these elements] become part of an opaque
text that cannot be read and no longer claims significance (Crary 1984:291).

Dear Nightmare Landscape:

Since the last time we spoke, I think it was I got into a squabble with a Midwesterner in Wal-Mart, I had some opportunity to reflect on our numerous conversations throughout the years. I remember the double-dates we had with social stratification and hegemony, and how you told them both to keep on keep going, just for the sake of the surrealism of everyday life. I started to try and make sense of it all and what I realized over an afternoon coffee was that as my understandings of this world have become more and more incomprehensible, the reasons for the understandings seeming more and more pointless. I guess that is what the theoretical physicists say about the universe. But you have got it made, unlike me. You get to watch the drive-bys, the collapsing buildings, the S&L scandals, all the sex in the White House, the looting of stores, even the fuck-ups and goings-on of popular amusement places, even if they now seem passé and overdetermined to you. Oh yeah, one last thing. What I have learned recently about trying to evoke you on paper is that you really make my head hurt. And I’ve still got Writer’s Block to boot!

Outline of a Program of Study

The end of the book will have meant that the play of empirical research will have produced no written object representing that research (Tyler 1995a:87).

The second chapter of my thesis provides the reader with an historical introduction to the topic of theme and amusement parks, specifically with
emphasis on the political, economic and social aspects of them, and with attention to the development of parks in often parallel accord with American social and institutional forms and themes, including class, nationalism, technology, space and land use, consumption, transportation and the family. Chapter three is a lengthy chapter as it addresses the "everyday life" of theme parks. What I focus on is ethnographic reporting and relating of the many field encounters in two years work at Six Flags Astroworld in Houston, Texas. I also consider the narratives and life-histories of managers, minimum-wage workers, park patrons and other "outsiders" in theme park culture as a way of relating how the everyday is construed. Significant themes, such as surveillance and management training techniques, will also comprise my telling of the field research. Chapter four is dedicated to theories of machines, specifically theme park rides and miscellaneous devices therein, such as ATMs and automated sinks. In this writing I establish connections between humans and machines, cybernetics, and postulate on the evolution of theme park rides since the time of Coney Island parks. It is an existential chapter in that I speculate on the psychological states of riders who embark on ride journeys.

The fifth chapter takes as its inspiration the theories of space and geography. Building on the historical work of Lefebvre, Benjamin and Canetti, I present a case study of several parks with emphasis on their spatial and geographic constructions. With reference to theories of travel and the Situationists' use of spatial theory and practice, I additionally develop an appreciation of the role of memory in theme parks and suggested plans for rethinking space, agency and resistance. Chapter 6 is a text on the imbrication of themeing technologies in various U.S. theme parks. I there consider how themeing relates to overarching messages, such as those of American white
supremacy in the Dollywood park, or those related to consumerism and waste. I also integrate my own experience with driving to and from theme parks in 1996 as a further explanation of my constitution of the ethnographic THEME PARK. The next chapter, seven, is dedicated to a discussion of contemporary ethnography and performance art. My point is to reconcile the disjuncture between contemporary critiques of anthropology generated in the 1980s and the possibilities provided by performance art and the historical avant-gardes as they relate textuality to experience, in ways similar to the critiques in cultural anthropology. Chapter 8 represents an illustration of the travel component of theme park culture. Specifically, I address how travel and popular amusements are integrated in vacation packages and the like. I also connect specific unseen aspects of the THEME PARK, like park resort hotels, to larger concerns of the fieldwork. The ninth and final chapter uses the concept of death and the limit to discuss both the limitations of the present research and the ultimate question of human limits as they are presented in theme park culture and theme park existentialism.

In addition to the chapters outlined here, the reader will note my insertion of what I term "Interruptions" throughout this text. As a now more distant interlocutor of the "Rice project," I have used distance to reflect on and better understand the disciplinary critiques of the past and the present that the Rice Anthropology Department helped to initiate. It was and continues to be a challenge to fully comprehend the various dimensions of such critiques beyond their epistemological levels. It is therefore my intention to write the ethnography with such critiques in mind; moreover, I wish to instantiate and enact such approaches in the writing itself. It is incredibly difficult to manage and bring into kinship such a diverse range of personal and disciplinary
concerns. As Noam Chomsky has suggested, it is often impossible to sustain even a close relationship between personally-felt orientations to the world and those of the university classroom and academic text. It is a personal goal of mine to create such a kinship, however perilous it might seem, and to revisit the “eighties” in a new light. In attempting to balance my personal attachments, such as those to the avant-gardes, performance practice and experimental representation, with my desire to be an informed fieldworker, I will include a number of textual “interruptions” to the form and pace of the main text. These interruptions are somewhat metonymic, as I find myself thinking of staring off at something profound or mundane as I sit in a theme park over the summer looking for significance, personal and disciplinary. I hope to use this writing to show the tenability of the “Rice project,” as well as associated schools of anthropological and performance-based criticism, however tenuous it all may seem given the waves of critiques which have followed the Flood.

Exegesis on Method

Meaningless work is obviously the most important and significant art form today...[it] will be enjoyed and hated by intellectuals—though they should understand it...by meaningless work I mean work which does not make you money or accomplish a conventional purpose. For instance...digging a hole, then covering it...[or] filing letters in a filing cabinet (De Maria 1996:526).

Aside from detailing to the reader the form and nature of my ethnographic fieldwork, I would like to first provide three reflections on methodology. Specifically, I hope to bring into question the quest for truth and the search for objectivity—two specters which continue to haunt cultural anthropology.21
Reflection one: I am at the European Studies Conference in Omaha, Nebraska a few years back. Prior to a paper I gave on the diasporic elements of Dadaism, an individual steps to the podium to offer his musings on the need for objectivity and science in academic pursuits. He was doing his talk from memory, a sort of academic improvisation. He begins to quote John O'Neill, a critic of postmodernism, to make his case, “In the words of John O'Neill, the aim of method...the aim of method is to...wait, let me start over...the aim of method...” He never did tell us what the aim of method was on that day.

Reflection two: A colleague in the department in which I teach was arranging to have student aides work with his criminological data on prisons. The students were to be paid to enter, correct and verify numerical information derived from case studies of individual prisoners. Eventually, the information was compiled in a computer program (SPSX). The next day I found myself walking down the hall thinking, “I don’t have any data!,” or at least not a computer that can compile them!

Reflection three: In the summer of 1997 I undertook a series of research trips across the country to many theme parks. While at these various parks, I applied a five-page survey I had developed. In the previous school semester I had taught a research methods course which was heavily based in qualitative methods, including fiction writing. One of the things I stressed to the students, in my having to teach some fragments, at least, of sociological method, was the need to create “clear,” “unambiguous” survey questions. Most of them did that. I passed out one hundred surveys that summer, complete with self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Out of the one hundred I received four in the mail. I think that amounts to four percent or so. Of the four, one was completely blank, another was hardly usable, containing the response to the question, “What
upsets you most about going to theme parks?, in "I hate faggots!" and "There aren't enough babes here." So much for method!

The research builds on two years of ethnographic study at a major American theme park, Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston, Texas. For this time I acted as a full-time employee in the capacity of "training coordinator" at the theme park. This period of employment lasted from 1993 to 1995. As a result of this position, I bring to the research an in-depth understanding of the theme park industry, from both a managerial and patron-based perspective. Though this forms the major ethnographic component of the dissertation, I have conducted additional shorter studies at other theme parks outside of the Six Flags network. These supplementary studies include: Walt Disney World (The Magic Kingdom, EPCOT Center, Disney MGM Studios), Universal Studios Florida, Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio (all in 1995-1996), Wisconsin Dells entertainment area (1996), Las Vegas, Nevada entertainment venues (1996 and 1997), Paramount theme parks in 1997 (including Paramount's Kings Dominion, Paramount's Kings Island and Paramount's Carowinds), Busch Gardens Williamsburg (1997), Dollywood (1997), Knoebels (1997), Hersheypark (1997),
Kennywood (1997), and the Colonial Williamsburg historical area (1997). Additionally, I have also conducted research in the following Six Flags parks from 1995 through 1997: Six Flags Great America and Six Flags Over Texas. The combination of these visits in significantly different theme parks and entertainment venues will allow for an ethnological understanding of theme parks beyond the one park of my major ethnographic focus.

My project involves over two years of study as a participant in and observer of American theme park and amusement venues. The ethnographic context of the research involves observation, various levels of "patiently listening," interviews (structured and unstructured), conversation as well as video and audio documentation. Additionally, I have employed sociological survey work in the most current (1997) phase of the research. Significant archival work also complements the historical aspects of the thesis, this includes library research at sites in Texas, Indiana and Illinois. I have also made follow-up phone calls to individuals from a number of the parks I have researched on the ground. These inquiries varied in content, but were used to supplement vacancies in some of the ethnographic material. Further, over five hundred of the world's foreign and domestic theme and amusement venues were solicited for information (press-kits, maps, texts and videos) in the summer of 1997. Such material allows for an even greater comparative component to the dissertation, especially considering my inability to visit more parks, such as those in the California region. The writing of the ethnography draws on Ph.D. study conducted in the Department of Anthropology at Rice University from 1993-1996. As such, the ethnography approaches the object of American theme parks from analytical, political and aesthetic dimensions. It is written as a multi-sited project, to borrow George Marcus' concept (1995a), with attention to mixed-
media theory and varied background sources (drawn from anthropology, cultural studies, history, aesthetic theory, critical social theory, urban and geographic studies). It is written much in the tradition of historical ethnological projects, broad in scope and intent, yet it merges such global concern with the historical, particular concerns of contemporary writing and representational practices.

**Interruption: Life on a Stage**

The schizo is bereft of every scene, open to everything in spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion. He is himself obscene, the obscene prey of the world's obscenity. What characterizes him is less the loss of the real, the light years of estrangement from the real, the pathos of distance and radical separation, as it is commonly said: but, very much to the contrary, the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat. It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the overexposure and transparence of the world which traverses him without obstacle. He can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as a mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence (Baudrillard 1983b:133).

The lights appear to the West, there on the stage. I am blinded and I am reborn. For sometime now I had been participating in a number of performance events and explorations, either as a soloist or as a collaborator in a series of pieces, events and readings of various origins and commitments. The pieces vary in their impositions on audiences, in the different materials they used and the spaces they commanded, as well as in the effects they produced in me. Many of them were "failures" in my mind, others were oppositely successful even if the audience had not budged even once during the given performance. What I recall most about these times was the movement on the stage and the trance-like state that was created by my immersion in the space, whether it was a bar or a
performance hall. It is impossible to recreate that movement, and the trances do come as easily, any longer.

When I set out to write *Signal 3* I kept in mind the space of the stage, not as it might be used as an analytic which is so commonly stated as a "use" of performance, and I began to think about the possibilities of bridging three realms—performance practice, writing and fieldwork. The work as it would be constituted, from field to text to audience, would take on a resemblance not to the stage performance in which affect and effect are predetermined in an already-known outcome, but to the idea of transformation. The text would be a "battery of metamorphosis machines," representative of a world without clearly-defined objects or realist narratives (Lyotard 1990:36). The "worlds" as I here describe them are realized as a "multiplicity of apparatuses that transform units of energy into one another" (ibid.)—energy in people, events, conversations, smells. Accordingly, the writer-performer must utilize a multiple number of these apparatuses, be they textual, field-based or performance-inspired. So when I think of transformation and the role that it plays in my writing I wish to state the predominance that my own metamorphosis plays in this text—something which I may or may not achieve.

I also wish to make it clear that the text I have written is not representative of a whole or "real" world; neither is it the product of cinematic effects which will entertain or inform the reader. Instead, I write inside and outside of a world that is moved through by me; similarly, as I will represent with metaphors of channeling, evocation and allegory, it moves through me like the current that powers a sequencer or an effects unit on a performance stage. The moment is temporary for the current is to run its own course by performance’s end. The important lesson is that offered by movement and the
temporary stasis given by the stage, the field, the text: to move is to be, and to remember is to have been the movement. The theme park is eaten up, and it has already eaten me.

The best way to know a thing is to eat it lick it.
Sam Francis Bonnard in Lyotard (1993b).
NOTES

1Damien, an angel in Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire*.

2As Lyotard writes, “And in fact we are always under the influence of some narrative, things have already been told us already, and we ourselves have always already been told” (in Tyler 1987a:89).

3This is a point forgotten by the ethnographic conservatives who continue to dream and whine for the “lost days of ethnography” in which both vision and inscription were still sacred cows.

4In Chapter 7 I discuss the problems of this label, “experimental ethnography,” in much more detail.

5The same number of oaks intended to be planted in Joseph Beuys’ piece for Kassel (Beuys 1990:109-116).


7A strange thing occurs when I go to university cocktail parties or like gatherings. While discussing matters academic, someone might ask the question, “Scott, what is the subject of your research?” “Me? I’m writing a dissertation on theme parks.” Needless to say I never expected to be writing a dissertation on theme parks. I had every intention to go to Berlin, speak, work and write in a “foreign” environment, and produce a somewhat traditional ethnography on my experiences and studies of city-planning.

8I asked a friend and colleague the other day about doing research in light of one’s own positionality and potential for danger, harm or mishap in the field. We were talking about Philippe Bourgois’ (1996) recent ethnography of crack gangs in New York City. One page in particular mentions the ethnographer’s precarious status in the field, being mugged, witnessing murders and experiencing assorted forms of mayhem while there. It’s what anthropologist Douglas Holmes has called “dangerous ethnography” (1995), getting involved in the field over one’s head, risking it, getting into dangers physical and psychological. My friend concluded that the search for knowledge itself is validation for all ethnography, whether “dangerous” or not. I have read and am aware of (cultural) anthropology’s developing status as a spectator sport of sorts: in the academy we are taught on ethnographies of the past, written in harsh conditions, under duress or in times of war, or even reconstructed entirely in the head (cf Leach 1954; Sanjek 1990); in the popular culture realm of the discipline we cultural anthropologists are wrongly lumped in with Indiana Jones or unspecified “anthropologists” in other Hollywood feature films. So when my friend responds and lends justification to my American research I can sit back and say, “Sure, this is legitimate, as is any other project,” but some other adventurous side of me thinks back to walking around near Potsdamer in Berlin at three in the morning wondering, “if something would happen.” Nothing did. I was never mugged and I have never been assaulted, at least physically, in a theme park. They are mundane places, and they are generally safe places...and they are now the subject of my research.

9I am very aware of the problems associated with the use of the term “America” or “American” to refer to the country or the people in the United States. I use the term with the political acknowledgment of the many peoples of “America,” Brazilian, Canadian, Mexican, etc. I use it in lieu of saying “United Statesian” people or “United States ethnography.”

10Anthropology is a field built on the exoticism of others, and on specific characteristics of self and other, of discovery and translation mediated in an unfamiliar-then-familiar setting.

11A work ultimately deconstructing the roles and expectations of informants and anthropologists in the backdrop of a United States field.

12Unfortunately, the author’s method there is to interview and represent media figures like Ted Kopple and Stephen King as clues to the culture industry and the existential conditions of the
United States.

Thanks to Paul Witek for having found this bottle in the ocean.

Stephen Tyler says that “evocation works in filling the gaps, spaces and in-betweens languages cannot inhabit” (1997:2).

Another related methodological suggestion is stated by John Caputo, “what I mean by hermeneutics in its radicalized mode has all along been this willingness to stay in play, to stay with the flux, without bailing out at the last moment. Radical hermeneutics...is the philosophy of kinesis” (1987:198). Within the context of science and feminism, Donna Haraway offers another possibility for a “knowing” that is based on kinesis: “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. In this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway 1991b:190).

Like a performance art work, allegory privileges appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity and hybridization (Owens 1984:209).

The suggestion is that New York City is both a heterogeneous space and a familiar one to an indigenous member of the United States. As a result a problem arises in the doing of ethnography, namely “being too close to see well” (Passaro 1997:152).

This term is drawn from Sayre (1989:31) in reference to the art world and the dialogues that some artists, like Warhol, generate with culture.

The critiques of Tyler’s work are numerous and widespread (cf. Birth 1990; Scholte 1987; Stoller 1991). Most suggest that Tyler’s work, exemplified by these critics in their emphasis on the piece “Postmodern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document” (Tyler 1987a:199-216), is confused, incomprehensible, and apolitical. As I would suggest with the work of any scripteur, the possibility of dialogue or understanding is impossible if the critics cannot figure out what to look for. What these fellows have done is to coopt the message, the inspiration that evocation could provide for ethnographic writing and fieldwork, into a simple equation of language and politics. Artist Abdel Hernandez is an example of an individual who has not missed the point in this regard (cf. Marcus 1997a; Tyler 1997).

Another related point is Tyler’s discussion of the demise of the “text”: “the end of the book might imply the ‘free play’ of writing, where writing, freed from the impossible burden of representing something other than itself, becomes the course and means of a hyper-reality, a reality that depends on a writing that depends on no representations, a reality that will have been co-existent, co-created, co-extensive with the writing of it, whose ‘before-ness’ will have been created by the priority of writing free to displace its own priority at the same time as it affirms it” (Tyler 1995a:87).

My point of orientation is here to the work of the late “anarchist” philosopher of science Paul K. Feyerabend (1975, 1978, 1987, 1991). His pleas to move science into the hands of laypersons, as well as his powerful deconstructions of the rhetoric and hegemony of the natural sciences have never been so well-stated and argued.

Karen Finley suggests that she too has difficulty watching the pieces she has created on video: “I have to close my eyes. I don’t know who that person is” (Carr 1993:127); and, like many other artists of the stage, she contends that her pieces allow her to get into a trance state (ibid.).
CHAPTER 2

THE THEME AND AMUSEMENT PARK INDUSTRY: A PARTIAL HISTORY

The unrestrained historical sense, pushed to its logical extreme, uproots the future, because it destroys illusions and robs existing things of the only atmosphere in which they can live (Nietzsche in White 1978:32).

The historical past...is, like our personal pasts, at best a myth, justifying our gamble on a specific future, and at worst a lie, a retrospective rationalization of what we have in fact become through our choices (White 1978:39).

Patrons on Parade

It was my original intention to write this chapter in the manner of a "proper history," a recording of places, details, persons and facts linked to the object of study, the American theme park industry. I had wanted to detail how the THEME PARK had grown from picnic grooves and trolley parks, to mass spectacle, to elaborate theme venues of monumental corporate investment. Much of the literature takes such an approach, one in which the theme park becomes an emblem not only of its own past and present but also of the country of its residence—the theme park comes to represent America, through its accouterments, like the roller coaster (Neil 1981), and through its varied existence as an American (spatial) landmark (Cox 1976). The theme park has
symbolized America in many respects, and likewise many American values, like individualism, excess and competition, are mythologized within the berms of parks. Many well-written monographs and films offer insight on the history of the theme park industry through focus on particular eras, such as the Coney Island period of parks, regional parks, as in the case of Ohio and Pennsylvania parks (Bush and Hershey 1992; Bush et al. 1977, 1979; Jacques 1992), the parallel growth of amusement parks alongside the industrial revolution and related technologies, such as trolley parks, the emergence of theme parks in reference to specific exhibitionary traditions, such as the allegory of the Midway at the World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893, the tie of the amusement park industry to other developments in American consumerism and entertainment patterns, such as the effect of the automobile on theme park patronage (cf. Adams 1991), and the analysis of particular ride “narratives” having communicated their own histories of specific parks, as is the case of many descriptions of roller coaster rides and riders’ perceptions of speed while on them.

What is disappointing about the historical representation of the American theme park is that so many other voices have remained unheard, and paths have been erased or relegated to minor status.¹ For example, save some films dealing with Coney Island parks and some regional parks, such as Cedar Point and Kennywood, the published accounts of theme parks in this country say almost nothing about the many individuals who have visited and worked in industry parks. Unfortunately, such personal narratives have been lost, with the exception of those written by famous individuals, such as Maxim Gorky’s diatribe against Coney Island (1907), or those accounts provided by journalists.²

In producing my own “history” of the amusement/theme park industry, I borrow James Clifford’s notion of “partial truths” (1986:7), to suggest a
retelling of my story from a perspective that is partial: it is politically motivated and geared in specific directions, and it is only one piece or one part of a much more complex and fleeting history of the industry. Such an account should not alarm the reader, as it is my contention that this sort of partial tale is appropriate to the conventions I am forwarding in regards to the doing and writing of ethnography.

What is often perplexing, for the anthropologist and the historian, is the manner in which a researcher goes about deciding how one’s extinct and extant subjects are to interrelate in the text. Commonly, in specific reference to the theme park environment, academics have conceptualized the industry as a mere C-to-D chronology, beginning with Coney Island and ending with Disney. Park workers are portrayed as working in theme parks in situ, as knowledge about theme park history or even their home park’s history is not ubiquitously known or shared. A number of my informants expressed discontent about the lack of interest management had in their own park’s history. Stories of how things used to be done, shared urban legends, and stories of park tragedies and disasters formed an active part of the collective memory of workers and some of management—though it was generally acknowledged that management’s rendering of history was for the “bottom line,” for figuring out how to make a buck on using the lessons of the past to “do things better.” Patrons are left running for the nearest ride, perhaps the simulator, with the desire for the newest, most historically-detached, and novel technological innovation they can find. In traveling this summer to the East, I did find that many patrons concerned themselves with “their park’s” history. Tales of youth fill the picture books of Kennywood and Knoebels; a bridge connecting two theme lands in Busch Gardens Williamsburg connects the past to the present through the
stories told by graffiti. Even visitors to Walt Disney parks find comfort in moments that are worthy of reminiscence while on site.

As it has been told, retold, felt and passed on, the history of the American theme park is an often disappointedly limited and narrow one. Indeed, further historical research into the nature of the industry from its earliest times to the present is needed and should be encouraged (perhaps in terms of the evolution of ride technology, the development of theme park stage entertainment, or the changing metaphors of theme park public-worker interactions); however, I do not intend to offer that sort of contribution to the literature. My concern, somewhat alluded to in a notion of Vico’s, is geared beyond the history of parks themselves to an orientation of a “poetic metaphysics,” being that “science that looks for proof not in the external world, but in the very modifications of the mind that mediates on it” (in Koolhaas 1994:9). My focus is on how stories, of past, present and futures, develop in multiple convergent and divergent ways. Unlike the rules of rudimentary geometry, there is no presupposition that two worlds or expressions of them, no matter how disconnected by time or space, will not, as is said of two “straight lines,” ever meet in the future.

Though often assembling their work in accord with tropes of positionality and reflexivity, historians and ethnographers have generally maintained unclear connections to their objects of study; this is especially true when the research topic is of the popular realm of life. As Timothy Mitchell explains:

There is a contradiction between the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and experience it directly; a contradiction which world exhibitions were built to accommodate and overcome (Mitchell 1988:29).
Mitchell’s quotation is especially intuitive, and in reading it I would extend the prophecy explained by world exhibitions to also include the theme park. Additionally, if one were to reflect on the consuming passion of academic and scholarly work, it is possible to apply Mitchell’s notion to the academic researcher who, like the consumer and traveler, is in perpetual pursuit of the exotic, of the novel and the profound; and it is she, too, who attempts to come to terms with the contradictions inherent to the spaces of lived research in which she so moves. To approach and appreciate the history of the theme park I contend that one must abandon the linearity of re-presenting the theme park as an evolutive entity, one understood in reference to major discoveries and periods of distinctive personalities. One must too be careful so as to not forget the “past,” and brush away the rich traditions of many regional parks erased in the *rush to judgment* which cites 1955, the “Birth of Disneyland,” as the beginning and end of theme park being.

As a decidedly partial and personal project, I here deliberate on a plan of action, a floor plan of theme parks with marked reference to the style of architect and historian Rem Koolhaas’ “Coney Island: The Technology of the Fantastic” in his *Delirious New York* (1994), as well as to other textual histories of popular amusements, mass culture and the United States which, though laying no claim to building histories of their sites, are nonetheless indebted to the manner of presenting histories as *fabula* (cf. Tyler 1993b), as pieces in the bigger puzzles of human consciousness, mythology and unresolved allegories (cf. Baudrillard 1986; Kroker 1993; Kroker & Cook 1986; Kroker & Kroker 1996; Olalquiaga 1992; Pfohl 1992; Rugoff 1995; Shaviro 1997).

In Koolhaas’ case he marks particular trajectories in the evolution of Coney Island parks much in the style of an artist’s manifesto, by labeling certain
persons, themes and things as significant not entirely because of their historical precedence, the influences they project on other parks of the future, but in their own indifferent allegorical effects on others and other things, however connected or disconnected to the proper edges of the THEME PARK. Koolhaas indicates certain tendencies which he suggests develop later, not necessarily "in a line," and offers them as possible walkways into spaces other and as "histories" submitted to a type of unfinished research (Koolhaas 1994:34). The theme park is a "mountain range of evidence without manifesto" (ibid:9). I wish to write a manifesto.

I follow a similar track in moving the focus beyond Coney parks of turn-of-the-century America to the historical present, of parks so unheard of that one could fly over them with an airplane without giving them due notice. Like Koolhaas' "research" on Coney Island and Manhattan, I present the reader a scattered timetable of theme parks, one reminiscent of the stroll, the wander of the flâneur, who in the mind of the Situationist artist is completely content with missing accepted landmarks, with strolling off the beaten path, with ignoring signs of orientation, with deliberately not asking questions and with following a mysterious stranger to wherever s/he may travel (cf. Jenks 1995). And if questions should be raised about the legitimacy of this approach, I ask you to
think about a stranger, one entirely of your own choosing, and to consider the extent of the knowledge you could acquire in a brief passing with this person. In so seeking that face you may or may not even be able to look the person in the eyes. And even if your eyes cross, you will never be certain to have been able to comprehend and appreciate the look, nor the gaze back of the stranger upon you.

Prehistory

Play. Some have directly connected play with plight (Skeat 1993:355). Play entails contradiction, fantasy, ritual passage, escape, the meta-world, referentiality and symbolism, and anthropologists have often looked to it as a source of cultural insight into a people and their customs. We cannot archaeologically determine the origins of play in our prehistory as humans, but we can make the suggestion that play and plight are related. In Stanley Kubrick's 2001 we are shown a progression of early primates who use bones in the context of work and subsistence (the tool), later in the manner of amusement (the toy) and finally in the mode of battle and attack (the weapon). If we seek to write the existential history of play we may find ourselves, thousands of years after 2001's "humans," in a theme park with humans feigning death on rides or back with nature on a mountainside undertaking "risk tourism." Regardless, as we see humans striving to push their own mortal limits to the absolute edge of play. Play is endemic and entirely mysterious, and its continual ability to fascinate us has facilitated the growth of amusements in this and other countries; what may be called "regimes of play" or "play industries."
On the Blood of the Dead: 1133

Rahere, a monk and former jester to Henry I, builds a priory and hospital on the Smithfield common, the prior execution grounds for criminals. The monk organizes a ten-day trade fair, with separate stalls maintained for the display of various goods (Adams 1991:1-2). The spectacle of the scaffold (cf. Foucault 1979) is supplanted by the spectacle of the sale, which in turn creates specific psychological effects in the consumer in this new space. This place is what is to be found later in the shopping mall and the midway.

People Pass the Day: Circa 1620

Large parks, known as “pleasure gardens,” begin to spread across England, France and other parts of Europe. A variety of sporting activities were offered to visitors in an atmosphere of pleasantry: flowers, fountains and landscaped pathways. Food stands and novelties helped people pass the day, while oil lights offered patrons an escape from dimly-lit homes (Kyriazi 1976:12). From blood we acquire “civility” and the assumption that having a good time will lead to a restful soul. What is gained by the passing of time in the presence of the masses? This question will be analyzed hundreds of years later in the transformation of pleasure gardens into spaces of even more organized play, where work and leisure time are mysteriously diluted into one admixture under capitalism (cf. Simon & Henderson 1997).
The Puppet with Tears: 1641

In the area of Long Island the first cattle fair is held. These early entertainment venues emphasized trading, but added an element of pleasure to social functionality—tightrope performers, fiddlers and puppet shows (Wilmeth 1982). The fair tradition continued to spread throughout the colonies in the years following. There is a vision of one of these shows in which a disruptive cow begins its own mini passion play, stampeding through the grounds and generally raising the level of anxiety at the fair. A puppeteer narrowly escapes injury though one of his puppets is not so lucky: it is trampled by the cow. Later its owner finds the puppet in a pile of mud; looking at the eye of the device he notes what resembles a tear of mud. “So, there is a little bit of you in me,” he says to the molded doll.

Disney on Ice: 1650

As early as this year Russian ice slides grew popular in St. Petersburg, and in some cases they became the passion of royalty (Mangels 1952:82-3). Ice is a conduit for pleasure, though its ability to “generate” has been transformed by climatology. Sledding is a popular pastime, while major ice slides are far too impractical to sustain in what is a predominantly summer industry. Leave pleasure for the skaters, then.
Farewell Forever: 1661

The first internationally-known English resort, Vauxhall Gardens, opens in 1661. Vauxhall was the first pay-as-you-go park, allowing patrons to purchase thrills on specific attractions that interested them. In 1728 an admission charge was assessed on all those entering the gardens. It was to operate until 1850 at which time, on July 25 of that year, a fireworks display spelled out the words Farewell Forever (Mangels 1952:6-7; Kyriazi 1976:13-14). These would remain in the night sky across the ocean from the States long after 1661. In 1955 the remnants of these signs are metaphorically felt in California, just after the opening of Disneyland. And they are still in the skies welcoming the opening of each new theme park in this country; they mark a farewell with each beginning.

Extreme Sporting: Sometime in the Early 1700s

Balloon ascensions become part of the European park tradition, to be accompanied by the thrills of parachute jumping, feats of daring such as trapeze acts, as well as the emergence of social dancing and music (Kyriazi 1976:12-13).
Some patrons began to express doubt about the future of the pleasure gardens; it seems that gambling and prostitution had begun to creep in on the burgeoning entertainment industry (ibid.). We are witness to the birth of Vegas in Europe: masses of people, extreme risks, spectacles in the air, large scale pleasure for all. Leave it for the Americans, though, to get it right!

Trigger Point Animates Monster: 1750

It is reported that fireworks began to be a major attraction at the pleasure gardens (Mangels 1952:6). At London’s Jenny’s Whim, an automatic mechanical monster thrilled visitors, coming to life when a spring was trodden upon. Distorting mirrors also began to thrill patrons in this and other parks (ibid:9, 10). “Mother, is it real?,” a boy asks a woman who smiles back with a look of amusement. Later the whole family will experience the pleasure of distortion in the mirror: they will transform their looks and the institution of family-based amusements that will later dominate tourism and the theme park.

Watch the Skies: 1766

A French family of entrepreneurs, not to be outdone by the English, establish Ruggieri Gardens, complete with enclosed shelters for picnicking in case of rain. Two days before the fall of the Bastille, the park closes due to falling revenue (Mangels 1952:11). The weather is unpredictable, the amusement operator knows well. The modern theme park industry has founded itself on enclosure—hoping to generate pleasure inside even if it rains. Wet rides defeat.
Marylebone Gardens in London gains notoriety for its bakery ovens and for the “rich, seeded plumcakes and almond cheesecakes baked by the young daughter of the proprietor” (Mangels 1952:8). The modern theme park is perpetuated through its food, most of which is made possible through cooking oil. The theme park patron runs on grease, like the ride dependent on lubrication. The sum of people, vats of cooking oil and rides that drip grease on patrons can be summarized as one giant mechanical creation, like those entities in *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, consuming everything metallic in their paths.

**Freeze Fucker, Freeze!: Circa 1775**

In response to crimes occurring with travelers walking in English garden parks at night, some parks establish companies of peace officers to protect the unwary amusement-seekers (Mangels 1952:8-9). The contemporary theme park institutes this earlier form of policing right here in the United States. As Mike
Davis has written (1992a, 1992b), American pleasure spaces of the late twentieth century are to be known more for their eyes and ears—the hallmarks of public surveillance—than for velocity or the general movement of crowds seeking pleasure and thrills.

We Want More: 1776

It is said that the public at Marylebone Gardens began to lose interest in the attractions there (Mangels 1952:9). The beginning of the end? Opryland closes in 1997, but do not worry, we will build more, and ones bigger and better. This is America, you know, and the rides have been resold.

I am Walt Disney: 1777

Some eleven years have passed since the opening of the Prater, a two thousand-acre expanse of woods in Vienna. As a democratic gift to his people, Joseph II opened his former hunting grounds as a carefully crafted landscape complete with simple mechanized rides, swings, refreshment booths and entertainment. Reportedly, the Prater was witness to a mingling of social classes, seemingly
unaware of the differences amongst fellow thrill-seekers (Adams 1991:7-9). Like modern amusement parks, each new mechanical innovation, like the Ferris wheel, was quickly added to the ride repertoire of the Prater (Mangels 1952:14). Joseph II is Walt Disney.

With Taffeta Wings: 1798

As a publicity stunt Parisian M. Calais, wearing taffeta wings, is raised to a mast above the ground at Jardin Marbeuf. As he attempts to glide to the ground, Calais experiences a broken nose at the end of his fall (Mangels 1952:13). His wings will however carry much of the amusement industry well into the end of the millennium.

Fair Period (●)

Early American amusement parks, unlike the development of English parks in the spaces of taverns and inns, grew out of the picnic ground tradition (Mangels 1952:17), a tradition that is alive and well in contemporary parks like Kennywood in Pennsylvania. The end of this century, the nineteenth, would see the greatest growth of the industry, an era which would find the American fair, so long a marker of American amusement history with its spontaneity, liveliness and unpredictability, pass into amusement oblivion.
Re-enactment: Early 1800s

Jones's Wood opens in New York City. It is considered to be the first of America's large parks with 153 acres of games, merry-go-rounds, swings, refreshments, donkey rides and beer drinking (Kyriazi 1976:16). The amusement locale also offered large-scale spectacles, such as the Battle of Magenta, which drew large audiences (Mangles 1952:18). Such recreations would become commonplace at parks like Riverview in Chicago, offering the Sinking of the Titanic and the Battle of the Monitor and the Merrimac sometime around 1904 (ibid:22), and in the many venues of Coney Island era parks. History is personified in public amusements by a reliving of the past that is fraught with tragedy and disaster. We live for those moments.

Technology Transfer: 1804

An unknown Frenchman has the idea of bringing Russian ice slides to his country around this time. Unfortunately, climate differences would prevent such a transfer of technology. The undaunted individual devised a timber-based inclined device, utilizing carriages on tracks instead of sleds, giving birth to what some dub as the first roller coaster (Mangles 1952:83). The device was quite frightening, resulted in some accidents and forced the rider to undertake a hefty climb to the top of the ride's superstructure (ibid.). In 1817 another such ride was built, Belleville Mountains in France, which resembled more a castle with a slide than the lattice-endowed structures of the modern roller coaster known so intimately by Americans. The transfer of ride technology is soon to become a mere formality, an operation placed in the hands of auteur ride designers like Bolliger & Mabillard or expert theme park engineers. They, too,
learn from the past. It is unknowingly plotted out on sophisticated CAD and
design rendering programs on their computers.

Get Um’ Wet: 1815

Sometime after the re-opening of Ruggieri Gardens in this year, a ride called
Saut du Niagara was built. It was the predecessor to the popular Shoot-the-
Chutes ride which would thrill many patrons in American theme parks
(Mangels 1952:11).

The Sociality of the Family: 1818

After crossing the Alleghany Mountains in 1818, Thomas Jenkins Kenny
purchased a tract of land on the banks of the Monongahela River in
Pennsylvania for about five pounds and a barrel of whiskey (Mangels 1952:23).
Kenny welcomed picnickers and encouraged families to hold their gatherings
there. In 1898 a section of the land is leased to the Mellon family of Pittsburgh;
they construct a trolley park in hopes of increasing business on their streetcar system (ibid:23-4). One cannot forget the family in the archaeology of the theme park, nor the slogans that will follow its further institutionalization in the amusement industry and its commercialization as a form. "We're a family-oriented park!"

Lessees: 1830s

State fairs become a popular occasion for the display of new agricultural and social technology (Wilmeth 1982). Initially, fair operators attempted to provide their own entertainment, such as horse races, but operating costs grew too high necessitating the renting of concession and midway spaces to traveling showmen (ibid.). In a meeting at an unspecified theme park, company workers are complaining to management about the performance of lessees at a McDonalds restaurant in the park. "Why shouldn't they be made to follow the same rules of being friendly to guests that we have to follow?"

Nature Made Accessible: 1850s

Traveling circuses become a popular tradition in the United States (Wilmeth 1982), perhaps so in response to bourgeois city entertainment, the reservation of pleasure for a select few (cf. Nasaw 1993:2). Also, as made possible by new transportation technologies, the outdoor resort industry grew as thousands of willing Americans went to the sea to discover the incredible appeal of nature (Flint 1982:100). Next to the sea was to come bigger and bigger resorts, and in the case of Coney Island, the simultaneous bathing of one million nature lovers.
Being Transported: 1870 to 1920

An unbridled expansion of the city. Commercial amusement centers are completely tied to the status of the city as a phenomenon of growth (Nasaw 1993:3). As well, two other social changes mark their effects on the amusement park: (1) an increase in family income spending on non-utilitarian items and activities (Butsch 1990:14), (2) an increase in the status of large corporate firms, especially as indicated by their ability to effectively combine mass production with mass distribution (ibid.). Near the same time beach resorts are opened to the masses, the working-class, and born is a modern exodus from the city to the park and resort. Ferry boats, steamers and streetcars act as arteries of the system of central pleasure (cf. Nasaw 1993:80).

Looking Down: 1876

At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition the Sawyer Observatory, a three hundred foot observation tower with steam-powered elevators premiered to much anticipation and subsequent popularity (Onosko 1978:10). Later moved to Coney Island’s Steeplechase park in 1881, it is renamed the “Iron Tower,” and is considered by some authorities to be the first mechanized ride at Coney (ibid.). Looking down: a technology purported for the pleasure of a patron’s view while at the top, when reality tells us that this birth is the true realization of voyeurism and surveillance from the future. These are two natural outcomes of the generation of new pleasure instances.
Much has been said about the exposition, a form offering an image of the earth, one natural and technological, in a controllable, available, ordered and intelligible space (cf. de Cauter 1993:8). The Columbian Exposition of 1893 is the bearer of the prehistory of organized amusements in which the space of play comes to supplant play itself. We move from intoxicating beer gardens and puppet shows to full-scale, wholly sustainable amusement worlds. These are the places of the new imperialists of the late twentieth century. They do not go away to conquer and loot; they do it at home in colonies they have themselves built.
Boss: 1894

John Y. McKane, the political boss of Coney Island whose real estate dealings brought him much prosperity in the 1880s, ends up in Sing-Sing, the victim of his own corruption. Those who would follow in his steps, Tilyou and the others, would have to deal with Coney’s smudged past (cf. Kasson 1978:34). They would have to make entertainment “wholesome again.” McKane lives! A slogan that might be painted on the walls of many parks in the current amusement industry.

Seminar: Coney Island

A seminar is now necessary, one comprising the mysteries, fantasies and happenings of Coney Island from a period of prosperity, approximately 1895 through 1915. It is a seminar on four parks, Sea Lion Park, Steeplechase, Luna Park, and Dreamland. It covers water, again: Coney parks drew on the beach and the human desire to get in the water. From 1829-1875 and 1876-1896 the island sees two predecessor eras to the years of enclosed amusement spaces—a beach resort era and a hotel/midway era respectively (Snow & Wright 1976:962). This seminar has no interest in these eras, instead the work sets its attention on the bandwidth of these four parks’ fabulations.

That “Coney now lives largely on the borrowed capital of its past” (Kasson 1978:3) is understood to suggest two items: (1) Coney and its parks have been mystified and personified as archetypes: they are desired, as historical blips on the screen, yet it is unlikely that a population accustomed to Disney’s “American vision” or other parks’ high tech, thrill ride platforms could
grow fond of the sort of charm that Coney parks manifested. (2) Coney may have been the last great romantic hope for popular amusements—if it were possible to sustain the "surrealism of everyday life" constructed in Coney's many years of existence. We now know that the object of popular desire is today a much more realist, predictable and thoroughly marketed one.

This particular seminar begins with the exegetical potential of myth, a premise that myth itself is responsible for both the understandings of Coney parks that scholars and laypersons carry with them today and for the sorts of impacts that such parks had on the maintenance, operation and design of contemporary theme parks. Coney Island was dubbed a powerful new sensibility, an aesthetic force, notion or direction (cf. Kasson 1978:88) that would later govern the conditions of popular amusements within and without the theme park world.

When one thinks of "direction," one should not assume linearity or progression between the aesthetics of these parks, nor should one conclude a clear typological affinity between these and the parks of today. Direction is rooted in myth, a steering of the world and those in it on two possible courses: the fabulous (the sublime), and death (the void). The seminar will suggest how the four parks of Coney exhibit characteristics betwixt and between two such poles. The "History of Coney Island," then, is reconcilable only if the participant is willing to forget about the utility of connections previously made in the study of the evolution of amusement sites. Coney parks were living on borrowed time, and much like the parks of today that time was channeled through a fabulous filter of myth, a lens detailing human passions of the innermost quality. History teaches us new lessons...the seminar begins...
Lesson 1: Sea Lion Park

On July 4, 1895 Captain Paul Boyton, the first frogman, opens the world’s first enclosed amusement park (Kyriazi 1976:38). *Hero.* Boyton is a self-made man; he devises an inflatable rubber suit for his diving expeditions, and he takes himself through the English Channel and other of the world’s waterways. Like an animation artist who would follow him sixty years later, Boyton is a performer, touring the world from 1896 on with his troupe of juggling sea lion; as such he is the first *performance artist* of the theme park world. Boyton is a water-master, and his actions quickly teach two important fables about the contemporary theme park. First, he builds on a theme. His is water, and not unlike the popular water parks of the late 1990s, Boyton uses water in a variety of ways: water for the animals and sea creatures to thrill the public (in this way Boyton paves the way for Anheuser-Busch’s modern-day Sea World parks), and water for the people, the Shoot-the-Chutes gains prominence at Sea Lion Park, and the related “old mill” ride gains notoriety as an attraction that can “get the people wet.”

Boyton fully makes water an industry: he takes offshoots of the Shoot-the-Chutes to other parks and amusement venues in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco (Kyriazi 1976:38). He also uses water for himself: he is like Poseidon, and all who enter his water realm are subject to his rules. Like a water god Boyton establishes the first one-price, pay-as-you-enter admission fee in modern history, and offers the first system of grouping rides together in a bermed location. He also installs the Flip-Flap, a looping roller coaster, and although people are thrilled with another use of water on the device—the unsinkable glass of water which stays full through the ride’s loop—Boyton soon learns that *terror can only be used so much to thrill the natives.* Soon he discovers that the
"repeatability principle of rides"—the draw that compels persons to ride a ride over and over again—was not present with the Flip-Flap (cf. Kyriazi 1976:41). It was simply too rough a ride. Sea Lion Park gave the customer variety entertainment, a soon-to-be-slogan of the contemporary theme park's obsession with the new and the fanciful, yet it failed to produce a sufficient thesis as to the nature of terror and its ultimate maintenance. As the Flip-Flap showed, it is often unclear as to how far a true myth, like looping terror, can be pushed.

Brake

As Coney parks begin their dominance of the seashore, two principles are manifest. Resort. What does the amusement park owner have to resort to in order to establish a profitable and popular business? What infrastructural decisions necessitate the creation of a resort? A resort "implies a presence...of a region of people existing under conditions that require them to escape occasionally to recover their equilibrium" (Koolhaas 1994:30-2). The theme park mandates that a resort hotel be built. Super-Natural. To survive "as a resort—a place offering contrast—Coney Island is forced to mutate: it must turn itself into the total opposite of Nature" (ibid:32). Coney Island anticipates the city, it builds itself in the image of Manhattan, yet it must overcome it. Today parks (like Busch Gardens Williamsburg) have attempted to return to nature, yet on the park's own (human) terms.11
Lesson 2: Steeplechase

*Florida Bottled Sun.* At the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition George Tilyou operated a stand selling authentic boxes of beach sand and bottles of authentic sea water (Kyriazi 1976:44). Tilyou made a killing, selling more boxes and bottles than he could fill to Midwesterners. *Inspiration.* Tilyou travels with his wife, Mary O’Donnell, on honeymoon to the 1893 Chicago Exposition. Seeing the massive Ferris wheel there, he orders one of his own and places it on a leased lot at Coney Island. Two years later he is again inspired, this time by Boyton’s Sea Lion Park and its enclosed amusement encampment. Tilyou takes another research trip in 1901, traveling to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. There he sets his eyes on Frederic Thompson and Elmer Dundy’s *A Trip to the Moon,* a ride simulating extra-terrestrial travel. The three strike a deal allowing Tilyou to operate the ride on concession at his park following the exposition (Kyriazi 1976:59).
Funny Face. In 1897 Tilyou, the once amateur real-estate broker now professional showman, opens his own park, Steeplechase. Tilyou’s parents, Ellen and Peter, knew the amusement business. They operated the Surf House there since 1865, but their son knows that it will take much more than a simple amusement house to conquer Coney. Steeplechase featured a mechanized horse track, running twenty-four hours a day and the park offered games and attractions based on theatricality and vertigo (Kasson 1978:59), as well as a number of other themed rides and attractions. Berm. Steeplechase park has its own wall, separating itself in opposition to the rest of the island: “Tilyou’s wall defines a territory than can—theoretically—be shaped and controlled by a single individual and is thereby invested with a thematic potential” (Koolhaas 1994:38). The wall announces Steeplechase’s presence and like the next one hundred years of theme parks to follow, it is symbolic of the nation state—in so far as a theme park, like Walt Disney World, takes on the characteristics of a nation. As Tilyou bragged, “if Paris is France, Coney Island, between June and September, is the World” (McCullough 1957:291). Arms Race. As Luna Park opens in 1903, Tilyou feels upstaged so he builds the world’s largest fireproof amusement building (Koolhaas 1994:43). Disaster. Rain causes some drop in the attendance in 1902, but Steeplechase is sustained. In 1907 a fire levels the park and on the next day Tilyou proudly plans the park’s revitalization:

I had troubles yesterday that I have not today.
I have troubles today that I had not yesterday.
On this site will be erected a bigger, better Steeplechase Park.
Admission to the Burning Ruins—10 cents (Kyriazi 1976:82).

Steeplechase reopens and offers an even more successful amusement, a Pavilion of Fun complete with the Human Roulette Wheel and the Human Pool Table. Hysteria. Tilyou’s park in retrospect seems accidental, created to satisfy human
entertainment needs (cf. Koolhaas 1994:45), and its inability to prosper suggests something about the nature of the contemporary amusement business. Tilyou dies in 1914.

**Trim Brake**

There is a definitive pedagogy to the rides at Coney. They both exhibit and bear human social forms. *Family*. Today there is no longer a need for subversive rides which define and maintain the “family,” yet Coney’s Barrel of Love is reminiscent of a past in which men and women were forced to be together: “one feeds men into the machine, the other women...the unrelenting rotation of the machine fabricates synthetic intimacy between people who would never otherwise have met” (Koolhaas 1994:35). Reportedly, some Coney couples married on the spot (ibid:42).

**Lesson 3: Luna Park**

*Amusement Residue*. Frederich Thompson, architectural school drop-out and dreamer, and Elmer Dundy, fair, attraction and concession professional, repossess A Trip to the Moon from Steeplechase and relocate it on the site of Sea Lion Park. There they raze Boyton’s creation, saving only the Shoot-the-Chutes and the lagoon, and open Luna Park on the second of May, 1903. Unlike Sea Lion Park, a genteel performance showcase, and Steeplechase, an energetic yet relatively unthemmed space, Luna’s designers set out to create the world anew. The first important element of the park is Thompson’s doing who, then as an unhappy architect, was frustrated with the prevailing Beaux-Arts System.
(Koolhaas 1994:38). As Coney’s first important outsider, Thompson is to have signaled a later age, predicted in Frank Albert’s polemic against the non-amusement park operator (1910) and manifested in today’s theme park. As a renegade Thompson rejects tradition on the site of tradition (Sea Lion Park).

What he designates for Luna is an anti-architectural manifesto:

You see, I have built Luna Park on a definite architectural plan. As it is a place of amusement, I have eliminated all classical conventional forms from its structure and taken a sort of free renaissance and oriental type for my model, using spires and minarets wherever I could, in order to get the restive, joyous effect to be derived always from the graceful lines given in this style of architecture (Koolhaas 1994:39).

A random forest of 1,221 towers, minarets and domes litter the skyline at Luna for the park becomes a testing ground for Thompson’s architectural experiments (ibid:43). Theme. Luna may be called the first completely themed amusement park; its subject was the moon and through berming, Thompson and Dundy create what Rem Koolhaas calls a secondary isolation: “Thompson doubles the isolation of Luna Park by imposing a theme that embraces the entire site in a system of metaphorical meanings: its surface is to be ‘not of this earth’ but part of the moon” (1994:38). Movement and Lights. In the words of the scientist Thompson, Luna was to move, in various directions, to be like another world; for stasis would indicate anomaly. Lights, forming a second skyline, create an illusory effect of the never-ending amusement day (cf. Koolhaas 1994:41).

Compaction. Thompson and Dundy do more than create a highly themed architectural triumph. They create an organization, a thirty-eight acre site with a complete system of communications, a telegraph office, 1,300,000 electric lights and 1,700 seasonal employees (ibid:42). Luna Park is the real deal—it is organized to be a park, and as a park, like those of the contemporary world, it is an organization en masse. Artificiality. The cardboard facade:
Luna Park is the first manifestation of a curse that is to haunt the architectural profession for the rest of its life, the formula: technology + cardboard (or any other flimsy material) = reality (Koolhaas 1994:42).

Luna is completely artificial, a simulation of a world that does not exist anywhere else: it is anti-representational; it defies both order and explanation. If the Columbian Exposition were authentic and if it invited discipline and self-control, Luna offered the opposite: escape, release, mayhem, the wild show. *Spectacle.* A series of recreated disasters flooded Luna’s land: Texas’ Galveston Flood of 1906, and Fire and Flames, featuring an entire city block that was set on fire and promptly extinguished. Though Dreamland is to institutionalize the spectacle, Luna Park’s technological shows are the first of the sophisticated amusement shows which will become increasingly popular in post-Disney parks, the so-called “stunt shows.” Other exotic sites, an Eskimo village, wild animal shows, a 5,200 seat theater built at a cost of $3.5 million, the electrocution of an Elephant named Topsy, and a series of off-beat rides, all lent credibility to Thompson and Dundy’s spectacle on the moon. Thompson, it is written, was apparently distraught at the sight of customers sitting on Luna’s benches and on
such an occasion, he would dispatch a band to revive the park's unlucky somnambulists (cf. Kasson 1978:82). Like the other parks, Luna experiences fires, one in 1914, another in 1942, and the park eventually ends up being another parking lot. It is something entirely beyond the flames, though, that brings the park down. *A Frankenstein Monster*. Like Tilyou, Thompson:

...is finally unable or unwilling to use his private realm, with all its metaphorical potential, for the design of culture...[his] talent for creating the new far exceeds his ability to control its contents (Koolhaas 1994:42).

Succumbing to alcohol, Thompson passes on to the moon in 1919, eight years following Dundy's trip.

**Station Brake**

*Science*. What a better place to test the human condition than at Coney Island! George Tilyou's son said that Steeplechase stood as a gigantic social experiment, a constructed lab of human nature (Kasson 1978:59). *Corpse*. The dead come out in the morning at Coney as its police officers collect the corpses from the beachhead (Koolhaas 1994:97). *Statue*. The symbols of America? Some suggest the Statue of Liberty as the apical symbol of the country, yet it was Coney Island, not the Statue, which immigrants noted arriving on ship on the American shore (Kyriazi 1976:69). Could there have been an adjustment made to hold citizenship ceremonies on the beach near Coney?
Lesson 4: Dreamland

It was the park to end all parks, designed by Republican state senator and real-estate promoter William H. Reynolds. Opening in 1904 the park graced fifteen acres of Coney Island and employed 4,000 workers. Color. Unlike previous parks Reynolds built Dreamland without it: its buildings were snow white, perhaps reminiscent of the White City. Class. Dreamland is built as the post-proletarian park, and Reynolds intends to attract all classes of people to it (History of Coney Island 1904:10). Lifting. Dreamland is not satisfied in being the newest park or the most novel, instead it must be the park containing all other parks—it must lift elements from other Coney parks in order to present itself as the most seamless. Dreamland appropriates each component from the

...typology of pleasure established by its predecessors but arranges them in a single programmatic composition in which the presence of each attraction is indispensable to the impact of the others (Koolhaas 1994:45).
Control. To successfully realize his dream, Reynolds must carefully add the elements of control to his design. He creates a park where 250,000 people are always assured of a perfect view of everything, without fear of congestion. The carefully planned level and inclined walkways (ibid:46) remind one of the contemporary multi-media theater guaranteeing that “every seat has a good view.” Costume Characters. The contemporary theme park prides itself on its characters, those happy-go-lucky furry creatures who bring smiles to children’s faces. At Dreamland Reynolds assembled what Rem Koolhaas calls a “proto-Dadaist army,” a collection of popcorn and peanuts boys all dressed like Mephistopheles, and instructed by an actress who gave them meaningless commands and signed nonsense signals for the pleasure of the customers (ibid.).

Experimental Community. We now know of the exoticism brought from world’s expositions to amusement parks like Coney. Samuel Gumpertz, one of the park’s managers, carried the trope of the exotic to new levels. Gumpertz is unknown to the world, he is mentioned very little in amusement texts, and I do not believe that anthropological students of the exotic have heard of him. Yet, he is perhaps the grandfather of American exoticism. Consider his Lilliputia, the Midget City—a town of “midgets” complete with parliament, fire department and sex, where homosexuality, nymphomania and so on were encouraged in the city; or the Dreamland Circus Sideshow—a presentation of the master’s “freaks” on the ashes of Dreamland after its last fire; or the Siamese twin girls who separated and ran away from one another during a staged sideshow argument (Kyriazi 1976:72, 75). Gumpertz began an experimental science of the exotic and brought in some 3,800 persons of “inhuman mutations and aberrations” (ibid:72) from around the world. He had been everywhere:
Yes, look well upon this group of savages, ladies and gentlemen! They are the dread Igorots, fierce head-hunters from the Philippine Islands! And what you see before you is but a miserable tithe of the vast anthropological, educational, thrilling, and altogether unimaginable sights that will unfold before you as you pass through the Igorot Village! (in McCullough 1957:258).

Samuel Gumpertz was the first and last Raymond Roussel of the amusement park world. *Science Class.* Reynolds brings in Brazilian scientist and inventor Santos Dumont to conduct complicated airship experiments and demonstrations (Koolhaas 1994:59). Like the theme of Reynolds’ park, Santos’ experiments are meaningless: there are no outside world applications of them, and their only function is to mystify the crowd through “science” and aerial technology. The Beacon Tower, having a floodlight visible from thirty miles, and the Leap Frog Railway, a strange track contraption whose cars humped one another, are two further examples of Dreamland’s “messing with” science and technology. It has been suggested that Reynolds’ penchant for the exotic, spectacular and scientific led to the park’s eventual demise into fire, the greatest of Coney’s fires in 1911, and its final status as a parking lot. In the end people came to Dreamland to be awed, but they went to Steeplechase and Luna to have fun (Kyriazi 1976:70). After all, you can only buy so many Igorots and play so much science.

**Brakeroom**

*Casino Worlds.* It is possible that one could cite Samuel Friede’s Globe Tower of 1906 as the world’s first casino-entertainment complex. Described as a “world inside a world,” the globe had everything: a self-contained sphere of 5,000,000 square feet, a capacity of 50,000 people at a time and it displayed a new attraction, restaurant or show every fifty feet (cf. Koolhaas 1994:71-75). *Men.* In
the four worlds of the seminar, one is taught of the hegemony of the male amusement park owner, each with his own personality: Boyton, the explorer and performer, Tilyou, the amusement expert, Thompson, the professional architect, and Reynolds, the developer and politician (cf. Koolhaas 1994:75). They will not be the last in this line, either. Grotesque. The amusement park industry builds from the ground up on the ruins of human mystery as it is embodied in the unknown, the grotesque, the forbidden. Such is a myth presented to Coney's patrons: it "heightened the visitors' sense that they had penetrated a marvelous realm of transformation, subject to laws all its own" (Kasson 1978:50). The embodiment of this myth is multiple: in strange rides, in Igorots, in funhouses. Strangeness is its own hegemony. Lunacy. A number of critics expressed disgust over Coney parks, and some, like iconoclast James Gibbons Huneker, suggested their dismantling: "once en masse...humanity sheds its civilization and becomes half child, half savage" (Kasson 1978:96). In the life of contemporary theme parks, the voice of this sort has mutated into movie effects. City. The city is the ironic harbinger of amusement doom as the parks become overwhelmed by the growth of large American cities like New York, cities which had once nourished them so nicely (cf. Snow & Wright 1976:971). Jurisdiction. By 1938 the beach and boardwalk areas of Coney had been placed under the control of the parks department. Dr. Coney, no relation to "Coney" except for his role as the Island's most famous pediatrician, made the following assertion regarding the changed Island:

See all those rubbish cans lining the rail...Moses15 put them there. Why, you used to come out here in the morning and find the boardwalk cluttered with all sorts of junk. Now look at it. It's clean. I have been here for thirty-five years, and I have known Coney Island when it was truly great. But the Island has gone backward, and now it has reached the end. Maybe Mr. Moses can restore it, but I don't know. Maybe by force (Kyriazi 1976:79-80).
Death: Seminar Ends

The noise has subsided at Coney Island. One wonders about the value of a seminar that leads nowhere, save to a cliff of potentiality from which one is then dropped. There are three closing thoughts to this seminar. One, Freud’s only visit to the United States takes him to Niagara Falls—August 29, 1909. He sends a letter to his wife which includes the following words, “America is a mistake, a gigantic mistake, it is true, but none the less a mistake” (McCullough 1957:13). Psychoanalysis and amusement parks: amusement historians like McCullough spend hours having their own fantasies about the subject. What if Freud would have visited Coney instead of Niagara Falls? Would he have been a changed man too? They wonder. Two, John Kasson, in *Amusing the Million*, describes the transformation of Coney era amusements to the present.

[Coney Island] represented a festival that did not express joy about something, but offered “fun” in a managed celebration for commercial ends. Dispensing standardized amusement, it demanded standardized responses....amusement parks...pioneered merchandising techniques that designers of shopping malls would later adopt: dramatizing objects of desire, elevating goods and attractions to fetishes....as the cultural upheaval of the twentieth century has solidified, these characteristics of amusement parks have grown increasingly pronounced. Offended by the tawdriness of amusement parks such as Coney Island, Walt Disney
sanitized them for the solidly middle class...Florida's Disney World and the myriad "theme" parks that dot the country have perfected the administration of amusement in a way at which Tilyou and Thompson would have marveled. In the process these new parks have also stripped amusement of the vulgar exuberance that gave Coney Island its vitality...the elements of farce, clowning, and nonsense have given way to the canned reverence and robotized responses of Disney's "Hall of the Presidents." Sexual symbolism has been supplanted by technological perfectionism; urban heterogeneity has yielded to the clean-cut corporate homogeneity of "the American way" (Kasson 1978:105-6).

Three, in a recent OP-ED piece in the New York Times the prospects of rebuilding Coney's traditions are discussed by city planners, theme park consultants and folklorists. The debate centers on two possibilities: a virtual-reality, mega-complex or an "old-fashioned," grungy theme park. Steve Zeitlin, a folklorist, describes children who talk of the "memories and stories...layered on Coney Island." When Zeitlin asks them how they could possibly be a part of such memories, they talk about eating cheese fries and taking part in various activities on the beach:

For a new generation of children, many black and Latino, it's still the beach, it's still an amusement center. The thrills still churn to memories...an amusement area...would build on those memories. A Sportsplex/retail/theater complex might well put them to rest (Zeitlin 1997:19).

Kent and Secunda (1997) present an opinion in sharp contrast, citing the needs of industry and the possibility of transforming the historic space into a successful area of growth, while Dick Zigun, an amusement consultant to Astroland park on Coney Island, suggests a revival of historic proportions. He states, "our sense of fun is not Disney-like. Special events here need to be avant-garde. After all, this is the neighborhood that electrocuted an elephant" (1997:19). Zigun's plan includes the rebuilding of a number of traditional elements, rides, amusement areas, shows and architectural features, reminiscent
of Coney’s past. The seminar thus closes with two myths—that of absence and that of history.

**Numbers: 1919**

An estimated 1,500 amusement parks populate the United States (Onosko 1978:14), just a year before the beginnings of the great coaster age. The onset of the Second World War and the growth of automobile-induced travel would have major impacts on what the theme park would soon come to resemble.

**Programmatic Versus Absolute Music: Circa 1950**

Soon the amusement park would grow more and more structured. Unlike Coney’s offerings of a *deprogrammed amusement experience*, where one could walk unencumbered by narrative, to discover for oneself one’s “own program by walking from stand to stand, listening to the barkers, reading the attraction boards, and deciding whether to enter or pass on by” (Nasaw 1993:82),\(^{17}\) the modern theme park has planning down to an opaque science: pre-programmed, rehearsed, and absolutely without spontaneity.

** Interruption: The Manager**

In the summer of 1997 I wrote the CEO of Universal Studios Florida in response to my inability to secure information from the park’s Public Relations office. I had phoned requesting a press kit for my writing, but upon speaking to a
worker in this office I was told that press kits were not available to the public.
In my letter to Universal I expressed my disappointment. Later I received a
reply from James A. Canfield, the Vice President of Publicity and Public
Relations at the park:

Let me begin by expressing our apology for the manner in which your
request for a Universal Studios Florida press kit was handled by
personnel in the Publicity Department. Enclosed you will find press kits
which I hope will be of use to you in your dissertation. As an ex-New
Yorker with fond early childhood memories of Coney Island and its
Tilyou's "Steplechase" [sic], I was very much taken by your reference. It
brought back fond memories. Be assured that we go forward with the
greatest respect and appreciation for these early pioneers.
Of course, there is a radical potential in such “minor literature” (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1986).

Recent texts including *Inside the Mouse* (The Project on Disney 1995) and *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Davis 1997) do draw significant attention to the everyday nature of experience in theme parks. Such texts are positive signs of future “ethnographic” accounts to come.

I am also drawn to Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to history in A Thousand Plateaus (1987), with time taking on the qualities of trajectories.

Knoebels in Elysburg, Pennsylvania is indeed that hard to find. It cannot be seen from the air, and I can attest to getting lost for at least a couple of hours this summer trying to find it in the foothills of Pennsylvania.

Even the appearance of ritual among grave sites in archaeological finds involves a great deal of inference in so connecting material remains, like grave bits, and ideology, ritualistic behavior or forms of expressive culture.

For more on this tradition see Wroth (1896).

Kyriazi’s reporting of these and other details are suspiciously similar in content and wording to Mangel’s earlier 1952 account of the amusement park history.

See O’Brien (1981) for more on the Vienna park traditions.

For my understanding of myth I draw on Bataille’s suggestion as it plays in everyday life situations as well as in the circulations of discourse of aesthetic movements like the Surrealists (1994).

The reader may note a contradiction here in terms of my suggesting that Coney parks were both influential on future designers as well as being relegated to a forgotten status in modern amusements. The fact is that many of the ride and show technologies, such as water rides or disaster shows, did find their way into the modern theme park industry. What is found is that regardless of this prehistoric influence, these parks are domesticated; the technologies are applied in novel and sanitized contexts (cf. Kasson 1978:105-6).

See Chapter 5 for more on this principle.

Bob Pittman, who is the MTV founder.

*Electrification.* The possibility of a fire is averted with the electric lamp (cf. Nasaw 1993:6-9). By 1904 ninety-four percent of streetcars are electric, a fact connecting the populace with the park like never before (ibid:9). With Coney’s “electrified bathing,” working-class individuals could begin to expand their play spaces into the sea, a definite response to class struggle. Space had become a premium with the frontier ever-shrinking (cf. Butsch 1990:13). Electricity also offered its own competitive edge to the amusement park industry: television and radio would soon offer alternatives to “going out” (Wilmet 1982). For more on the spectacle of lights see Nye (1990).

The Leap-the-Gap coaster, a ride whose train would shoot off the track, over a pit and onto another track, was fortunately never built at Luna (Kyriazi 1976:63-4).

When I first read the quotation I thought the doctor was talking about Moses from the Bible. I wish he were.

Thanks to Thomas Holien of the Department of History at Valparaiso University for pointing out this piece to me.

I am reminded of an experience I had in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana. In a strange way shop keepers, especially restaurant owners, rattle off the menu items and attractions to be found inside their establishments. In a special way the French Quarter maintains some of the properties of a disorganized Coney Island, amidst all of the predictable karoke bars.
CHAPTER 3

EVERYDAY LIFE: WORKING IN AND AROUND ASTROWORLD

Contemporary leisure has already judged itself (Anon. in Gray 1974:9).

Theme Park Street

To walk slowly down lively streets is a special pleasure. To be left behind by the rush of the others—this is a bath in the surf. But my dear fellow[s]...do not make it easy, however gracefully one might move out of their way. I always receive suspicious looks whenever I try to stroll as a flâneur between the shops....I would like to linger with the first glance (Hessell 1994:420-1).

My life began and ended in a theme park.

It was the Halloween Festival and the greatest show of the year began. A giant Pumpkinhead dancer tramped around the stage while music roared through speakers. By the end of the show most of the cardboard props and scenery had been trampled and knocked over by the Pumpkinhead. Patrons and workers rejoiced in harmonious laughter, and for just this brief moment of kitsch, both parties were in unanimous agreement. These are the stories of cardboard truths.

This chapter tracks two years work in a major American theme park, Six Flags AstroWorld. As I have argued, many historic and extant studies of
amusement and theme parks have emphasized the symbolic linkages of parks and American culture through the foci of consumerism and consumption, most notably, nationalism, the family, and class, while others have stressed the contrast between the "outside" appearances of parks and the "real inside" of such places with such variables as worker apathy, management scandal and public relations nightmares—a sort of evil underbelly of the theme park. This thesis identifies such approaches, yet it takes a different path.

I understand the American theme park as a lived environment of fear, yearning, distrust, circumscribed conspiracies and unrealized threats and posturing. Fear, as it is understood in popular perceptions and representations of the object THEME PARK,² is manifested as a symptom of life in contemporary American culture (cf. De Becker 1997). Going to the theme park is seen as an avoidance of the nightmare landscapes of crime, poverty, the threatened family and street-driven paranoia. This is after all Disney's mode of existence: construct the society-that-isn't, yet hope it could be. What this writing
seeks to undertake is a representation of the latency of fear in the magical midways and spaces of pleasure parks. It is argued that the majority of theoretical studies of theme park environments have rarely addressed the existential conditions of the worker and the patron as well as their mediated relationships.

Fear, latency, panic, suspicion, conspiracy, here lumped together as a series of symptoms of both the contemporary United States and popular amusements, are tropes of association, metonymic of the everyday, and theoretically driven by my association with AstroWorld as a trainer and worker. These "symptoms" are derived from a specific ethnographic sensibility that is neither analytic nor methodologically complete. I remember many moments on theme park streets, and these further charge my allegories: a patron and worker exchange glances, each wondering what the other is thinking; each assuming dark motives and unknown desires in the other. Like many of the quotidian activities of the THEME PARK, this moment is the product of a glance between persons. Later, a third patron comments to the first: "Even this place isn't safe anymore." These are not the "tough streets," yet as Brian Massumi contends, even the most subtle of gestures, even the most mundane of places or situations gives shape to a culture that is more and more predicated on fear, deception, distrust (Massumi 1993b).

Why all the hype about fear and loathing, and why write about it at all? My two years experience at AstroWorld would not, after all, suggest that the American theme park is the exemplary site of moral panic and conspiratorial actions. Compared to other sites in the ecology of fear, this story would not even be representative of it, yet there is a tale here that shows its own eccentricities and also resonates with the other antecedents in the ecology in
which I move and am moved. The way I employ this conflation of conspiracy, fear, trembling and suspicion is through a series of conversations with myself, my former fellow workers in the industry and other voices and metaphors of theme parks extinct and extant. In most instances I feel my role as a surveyor and representative of the topic to be more akin to the roller coaster mule than the boutonniere-wearing rider. Theme parks make me shudder, even after my association with them has vanished along into the midways of deserted and defunct theme parks.

In so writing of these experiences here, I do not expect to propose a complete explanation of the space I have delimited. Rather, I hope to take a few glimpses of a place which still personally gives me the "willies" for a variety of reasons. The THEME PARK, something I would like to variably evoke, is its own space of trembling. I suggest the following preliminary observations on the work as a way of establishing some priorities in the thesis which resonate with my personal experiences with theme parks.

Panic is the psychological mode of the contemporary world (cf. Kroker, Kroker & Cook 1989). In the THEME PARK panic is often as minor as a spilled drink or as serious as a ride that will not work. It is the lifeblood of the circular geography that surrounds its weary patrons and workers.

Fear is realized as both a waiting and a wanting. In the THEME PARK the boundaries of kitsch fear and real fear have completely disintegrated. Themed fear is the uniformed worker slugging the patron, or the costume character making sexual advances at a child.
Conspiracy has become the theoretical expression of panic and fear in the defined moment in which an individual feels a loss of agency and/or explanatory social power. In the THEME PARK, for the worker it is the little voice that tells one “something is up” (cf. De Becker 1997); for the patron it is an acknowledgment-identification of a capricious park with less than ideal workers.

Consumption is the Rosetta stone that drives the THEME PARK. Forget about television advertising, Coca-Cola is sponsoring the newest ride in the park! After Coney Island, consumption is the only excuse that gives the THEME PARK its tangibility.

Trembling is the psycho-physical response to the apparent decline of human will and the rise of chaotic world conditions. It is also the response of the non-living world as it increasingly casts doubt on the validity of human rationality and subjectivity. The THEME PARK trembles because it is tired of people having fun (cf. Baudrillard 1990a).

Surveillance is what makes the THEME PARK plausible; it is the emotive source that draws people together and pushes them apart. Surveillance “is not simply applied, it is also experienced by users, subjects, and audiences” (Marx 1996:193).

In this lengthy chapter I undertake an exegesis of the AstroWorld theme park as I had come to know it; this is very much an interpretation of the park as a “system,” yet also as a site of becoming and happenings. In now having written of theme parks and their connections to contemporary U.S. culture for over three years, I am forwarding an approach grounded in the quotidian, the everyday. De Certeau and others have explicitly drawn attention to the concept
of the everyday, what I identify as the "culture of the everyday," in a variety of epistemological contexts (cf. de Certeau 1988; Goffman 1959; Kaschuba 1995; Lefebvre 1971, 1991; Lüdtke 1995; Shotter 1993). With few exceptions the literature on theme parks has failed to address the most complex issues such as the nature of the interactions between persons in theme parks. I see this current work as filling a void, and ultimately, complementing the previous literature. As I will suggest near the end of this chapter, the look I take at the "everyday life" of a theme park is not out of mere fascination or for the purpose of ethnographic rigor, rather I suggest that the reason for analyzing the everyday, in this or any other capitalist setting, is to ultimately transform it (cf. Gray 1974:33). Whether or not this is possible, an idea I ponder in my final chapter, is for you to determine.

The Six Flags Industry

The theme park that has oriented many of my perceptions of the industry, a place where I spent two seasons working as a Training Coordinator, is Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston, Texas. Eighty Six Flags, considered to be the second largest theme park corporation in the world (O'Brien and O'Brien 1996:9), has parks located throughout the United States: Six Flags Great Adventure and Six Flags Wild Safari Animal park in New Jersey; Six Flags Over Georgia in Atlanta, Georgia; Six Flags Great America in Gurnee, Illinois; Six Flags St. Louis (formerly Six Flags Mid-America) in Eureka, Missouri; Six Flags AstroWorld and Six Flags WaterWorld (both parks referred to as Six Flags Houston); Six Flags Over Texas and Six Flags Hurricane Harbor in Arlington, Texas; Six Flags Fiesta Texas in San Antonio, Texas; Six Flags Magic Mountain and Six Flags Hurricane
Harbor in Los Angeles, California. The newest Six Flags park is Six Flags Over New England; still in the development stages, it will be located in the Hartford, Connecticut area\textsuperscript{9} [See Table 1].

In what has become the most important allegory for the Six Flags corporation, the birth of Six Flags begins with Angus G. Wynne, Jr., the son of a wealthy Texas oil man. Wynne's inspiration came in a trip to Disneyland in the late fifties, and what he envisioned was a park fashioned in his own, Texas image:

[Wynne's] great notion was to create a theme park that would be large in scope and filled with fantasy, like Disneyland, yet closer to the Guests so that a family visit would be easier and more affordable. And in the tradition of his wild west Texas roots, Wynne wanted more emphasis on thrills and excitement (AstroWorld 1994:3).

Angus Wynne opened the first Six Flags park, Six Flags Over Texas\textsuperscript{10} in Arlington, Texas, on August 15, 1961, and with it the Six Flags creator was to usher in a number of innovations in the industry including, the pay-one-price ticket,\textsuperscript{11} the first log-flume ride, the tubular steel roller coaster, white water rafting rides, and Broadway style musical revues (AstroWorld 1994:3; O'Brien and O'Brien 1996:7). Involving Hollywood designer Randall Duell in his vision, Wynne opened Six Flags Over Texas with six theme lands, each represented by the six nations whose flags had flown over the United States: Spain, France, Mexico, the Confederacy,\textsuperscript{12} the Republic of Texas and the United States of America.

By the end of his second year of operation, Wynne’s concept in Arlington was a huge success. He opened Six Flags Over Georgia in 1967 and Six Flags Over Mid-America in 1971. Throughout the 1970s Wynne began to look for other parks to add to his growing amusement corporation, and he acquired
AstroWorld in 1975, Great Adventure in 1978; these purchased parks were the original labor of entrepreneur-businessmen Judge Roy Hofheinz and Warner LeRoy respectively (O’Brien and O’Brien 1996:8). One year later Angus Wynne dies, but another buy-out occurred as Magic Mountain was purchased in the Los Angeles area. In 1983 Six Flags WaterWorld was built on a plot of land adjacent to AstroWorld and a year later Great America was purchased from the Marriott Corporation. In 1996 Fiesta Texas in San Antonio was the last of the late nineties purchases for the Six Flags Corporation. In 1991 Six Flags became a part of the Time Warner Corporation (Fabrikant 1995; Reilly 1993; Shapiro 1995), eventually allowing Six Flags parks to incorporate Warner Brothers movie themes and icons, such as Batman rides, as well as the popular Looney Tunes cartoon characters.13

In 1995 Time Warner sells 51% of its Six Flags stock to Boston Ventures for $200 million and the transfer of $800 million in the theme park concern’s debt. The Time Warner CEO calls the move, “a major step toward our stated goal of debt reduction” (Shapiro 1995:A4). On February 9, 1998, in what is the largest theme park acquisition in the history of the industry, Premier Parks purchased the 12-park Six Flags chain for a reported $1.9 billion (O’Brien 1998b:1). The move stunned many industry representatives, as Premier had unsuccessfully attempted to purchase one park, Six Flags Over Texas, in 1997. Having made steady acquisitions of parks across the country in the early and mid-nineties (O’Brien 1997f), Premier now controls thirty-one regional theme parks in the United States and Europe (O’Brien 1998b:15).
AstroWorld: The System

In my first season of association with the park, AstroWorld was structured as follows:

Finance Division
- Cash Control
- Finance
- Fire & Safety
- Medical Services
- Purchasing/Warehouse

Maintenance Division

Marketing Division

Operations Division
- Admissions
- Grounds Quality/Custodial Services
- Rides Department
- Security/Parking Lot
- Entertainment
- WaterWorld

Retail Division
- Food Service
- Games and Attractions
- Merchandising

Human Resources/Wardrobe
- Human Resources

In subsequent years some alterations of this basic hierarchical corporate model were made. Generally, the rigid division structure led to what was perceived as a ubiquitous tension between departments. Security officers may have felt superior to members of Rides, or Parking Lot hosts and hostesses may have emoted concerns about the lack of respect they received as compared to other departments. Of course many of these feelings were results of specific on-the-job circumstances—for example, the frustrations felt by a department whose members are “back stage,” like Wardrobe or Warehouse, versus those whose
members worked "front stage," like Rides or Grounds Quality. As a company AstroWorld attempted to negate interdepartmental disputes, stating that as a "team" all of the departments in the park work together equally to create a fun, safe and exciting environment for patrons. I will now address the more specific ethos of work characteristic of theme park employment and general mass service-based industries. The question I will attempt to answer is, how does management bridge the gaps between rigid organizational structure and the desire to maintain hospitable lines of communication and positive work ethos while at the same time attempting to please patrons?

In the 1994 version of the Host and Hostess Handbook, AstroWorld President Phil Clark offered a "welcome back" statement to rehire employees (AstroWorld 1994:7):

Congratulations and welcome to the 1994 Six Flags Theme Park Team. You have been carefully selected to take on the responsibility and commitment to make each and every one of our Guests' visits enjoyable and memorable....You have been cast as a Host or Hostess. Each day you will be challenged to create a very special occasion for the many Park Guests you will serve and entertain. Talk to the people you encounter. Smile and anticipate their needs. Offer suggestions, directions or a helping hand whenever possible. This attention to detail and the caring attitude we convey to our Guests creates a truly memorable experience. You must remember, even though it may be just another work day for us, it is a very special time for our Guests, many of whom have carefully planned and saved for their visit to Six Flags AstroWorld/WaterWorld. Six Flags has never been a better place to work (AstroWorld 1994:7).

Clark goes on to talk of the new rides, attractions and innovations planned for the 1994 season, giving the overall impression that AstroWorld was an exciting place, fluid and ever-changing to meet the needs of the appreciated customers. What is interesting about Clark's message is his constant attention to the "needs" of the patron. The general implication of this patron-orientation, as I
chart later in this chapter, is the creation of a specific mode of service-servitude in which the patron’s spending and associated on-site happiness and enjoyment are the markers by which all other standards are judged. The mentioning of “it may just be another work day for us” in the above excerpt also ironically highlights a fact of AstroWorld’s occupational system. Workers would get burned out over the course of a season, they would get angry with fellow employees or even patrons, and many would ultimately express their anger and outrage as a circumstance of working in a system—a place that treats people like commodities to be moved and rearranged so that the bottom line of serving patrons is never compromised.

The annual appearance of Clark’s welcome, as well as similar letters from CEO Bob Pittman and President Larry Cochran in the Host and Hostess handbook and in occasional company newsletters throughout the season, gave rehires something to talk about, usually amounting to “the same old shit” comment, but new employees sometimes viewed such narratives as a reflection of the general personability of AstroWorld and its management. Rehires had heard this rhetoric before and experience told them that by season’s end, given all of the circumstances of AstroWorld’s culture—burnout, employee retention problems, inadequate communication between employees, difficulties with management—it was unlikely that innovation, flexibility or caring, the buzzwords of company newsletters, would really do much to alter the problems associated with the system.

The theme park industry, in a way akin to other mass-service lines of work like the fast food world, relies on procuring large numbers of low-paid workers willing to work under any conditions in a large-enough area to draw sufficient numbers of customers. It certainly is the case that in a large city like
Houston, there are thousands of people looking for work, even if employment only means a minimum-wage job. The difficulty for AstroWorld, specifically the Human Resources office, was not finding bodies to put in uniform, as I suggest there are significant arms of the HR department that specialized in community recruitment, rather the challenge lay in keeping its employees "in line," essentially routinizing the work force of the park. We can generally say that the emphasis on theme park employment is on work that is of a routinized nature, whereby the worker lacks decision-making in the company (cf. Leidner 1993); as well, though often backed with rhetoric like Clark's of "innovation" and "change," the employment practices at the park are designed to produce what I call minimal workers—low-paid, minimally-trained or skilled employees who ultimately serve to foster profits while lowering the operational costs of the company (cf. Smith 1982).

All being said, the SYSTEM of the AstroWorld theme park would seem ingenious given the potential work bases from which to draw; however, such routinization has one endemic flaw and that is the fact that people are generally unpredictable. The mix of unpredictable employees and a work environment prone to flux created the challenge for AstroWorld to effectively mold its people into disciplined and essentially docile employees (Foucault 1979). The SYSTEM establishes itself in its daily operation, perpetuated by its impact on the working-class population of AstroWorld. I do not wish to create a hypothesis that the nature of work at AstroWorld was simply that of a "working machine" in which parts (employees) simply fit into the operational whole of the system, but the reader must realize that in any industry where the primary employees are paid so little, and where unpredictability and large numbers of patrons mix, one must recognize and reflect on the inadequacies of a system that in its
operation legitimizes the perpetuation of itself to the devaluation of its workers (cf. Nash 1993).

Themeing is conducive to producing accountability, the reliability of workers and a standardized product. Themeing, as will be documented in Chapter 6, produces a sense of satisfaction in theme park patrons, as the theme land is just unfamiliar enough to allow a guest a cognitive break with everyday life, yet just familiar enough to make the patron feel at ease, safe and important in a service-centered place. Likewise, themeing creates a series of scripts for the employees. A standard script, what was called “Guest First” or “Academy of Excellence” at AstroWorld, communicates the company’s major goals as they relate to the serving of its clientele, while a specialized script is represented in a number of specific and contextually-based or “themed” messages that are present throughout the park. Both assure compliance on the part of the workers in different manners: work itself is feigned as being fun, pleasurable, without reference to time, and through the employment of a “Western” spiel in a Western theme land, for example, the worker reinforces company vision without
having to rely on creative interactions with patrons—what is referred as a dependence on "ethnomethodological competence" (Stinchcombe 1990). As Leidner suggests, "by scripting interactions, employers can try to limit their reliance on the ethnomethodological competence of their workers" (1993:7).

**Improving the Self**

A common theme of Six Flags AstroWorld rhetoric, in part projected in training classes and also exemplified in park management philosophy, was the idea of employee self-improvement. Only a small percentage of AstroWorld seasonal workers would actually ever become permanent, year-round employees. Not surprisingly management talked of using park training and on-the-job work as ways of providing social and workplace skills for their employees. This attitude is reflected in a non-Six Flags source on theme park employment prospects:

The theme park business is a business you can try out right now. If you like it, then you can stick with it. If you find that it doesn’t appeal to you, then you can take what you have learned and apply it to something else (The Institute for Research 1995:2).

Presumably, one’s time spent attending to patron concerns, being a ride operator, a retail worker or other park position, would prepare one for work outside the park, whenever that would occur. Although in my opinion this was not an entirely plausible goal—many of the seasonals went on to college, left the park in dissatisfaction to perhaps pick up another minimum-wage job in Houston—some workers did find their first job at AstroWorld to be a rewarding one in a preparatory sense.
In the opinion of some former and then current employees, self-
improvement was a noticeable facet of theme park employment. This was the case with Jessica, a former Rides hostess who had nothing but words of praise for AstroWorld and the role of her employment in having transformed her own sense of being a worker and a person. She expresses these feelings in a excerpt from one of our conversations:

I can definitely say that AstroWorld prepared me for the public. It gave me great skills and I know how to handle customer complaints much better because of my work at the park. I'm now working at a [Houston] clothing store and we deal with many of the same things that I had to handle at AstroWorld. It was great preparation and I would definitely say that I grew from it [Six Flags employment].
Jessica’s experience is not necessarily the norm. She, a European-American from a middle-class family, did not experience the same sorts of off-the-job hardships that many of AstroWorld’s employees dealt with on a daily basis. What was a more common worker attitude was a product of difficult life experiences and difficulties felt inside and out of AstroWorld. Hard work, honesty and respect of authority were built into the value system of the park’s culture, and many employees upheld them insofar as doing so would guarantee a full-season’s work.

For most the attitude of “I am here for the season and that’s it!” reflected what was the result of discontinuity between the imposed values of AstroWorld and worker ethos in the park. Many workers suggested to me that their reasons for working at AstroWorld were much less pragmatic than on-the-job preparation for future careers or for general self-improvement, like developing “people skills” and so forth. Instead, they found work in the park to be fun, sometimes challenging, a way to meet people, and if they acquired some job
skills like public relations ability at the same time, then great! Otherwise, though, the bitterness that would ensue in a given season's relations between workers, management and the public would leave workers loaded with apathy when it came to reconciling their work with their life histories.\textsuperscript{15}

It is interesting to note that the relationship between the nature of work in a theme park service-industry and its effects on the self (cf. Rose, Nikolas 1993), which I believe follows a model of "therapeutic interventionism" at AstroWorld, was once paralleled in the pedagogical function of historic theme parks in reference to patrons. As was the case with Coney Island parks, it was the unstated mission of these places to school its citizens (cf. Kasson 1978), as was also the case with the civilizing efforts of world's expositions.\textsuperscript{16} One could argue that this role hasn't changed: Disney parks present a homogenous view of American history, among other things, with the effect of lessening social discord and controversy while visitors are on-site, and planting specific hegemonic seeds of conformity and control even after visitors have safely returned home. What I argue is that at AstroWorld, and also at some of the other parks at which I have done more limited research, the model of intervention falls from the milieu of citizenry into the realm of employee life. \textit{Employees are to be improved upon.}

Many of AstroWorld's elites, those workers at the full-time, supervisory level, told me of the importance of the company's normalizing potential. To paraphrase one supervisor:

These [Houston] kids often come from bad homes, and we give them something to look forward to here. We give them skills they can use later in life. Somebody has to do that.
Leidner indicates a parallel example in the fast food industry, suggesting that the theme park industry is not unique in its deployment of such normative strategies:

Employers who standardize...labor processes exert a cultural influence that extends beyond the workplace. Their organizational control strategies reach deeply into the lives of workers, encouraging them to take an instrumental stance toward their own personalities and toward other people (Leidner 1993:21).

The system's marks on the self\textsuperscript{17} are manifested in the everyday interactions of the worker with the worker or the worker with the patron: "It's not my job to do that, lady!," a tripper\textsuperscript{18} shouts as he refuses to help a woman and her children with some packages on their exit from the Astroway's cars. Later the employee is disciplined by his supervisor, who terminates the tripper for being insubordinate during the Corrective Interview. Much of management's talk about being flexible, of developing a culture of trust (cf. Bergquist 1993:173; Clegg 1990) was in theory geared at the minimum-wage worker. In fact among supervisors and full-time park employees, those more likely or able to go off park after work to drink or "shoot the shit," interventionism was more appropriate to their work ethos. Many of AstroWorld's management spoke of the value of park employment. This is reflected by Dave, a former Food Service supervisor who told me that the work he did and the skills he acquired were invaluable as they allowed him to excel in his next career. Related to the overall process of establishing the priority of the park's system over the lives of its workers is the condition I refer to as "imaging."
Imaging

Stand tall and stay accessible to guests, a neat fresh appearance, communicate clearly, no cigarette smoking in guest view, refrain from showing personal affection in view of guests (AstroWorld 1994:34).

One level of "imaging," the process by which theme park culture is constructed and maintained, is AstroWorld's sense of personal/corporate image—how it is perceived as a "whole," as "AstroWorld" by the public. In addition to various special events held in the park, ranging from a gospel choir spectacular named Voices of Triumph in June of the 1994 season, to a Fourth of July celebration, a Sports Illustrated sports festival from the later part of July to the first week of August in 1994, to the popular October Fright Fest, December Christmas in the Park event and a New Year's Eve celebration, AstroWorld offered special events that catered to a positive public image.19 These included: Kick Drugs Out of America, Junior Golf Day, Baptist Youth Day, Joy Fest, Girl Scout Family Day, Boy Scout Family Day, Educator's Day and Physics Day.
It was the goal of specific divisions, like Marketing, to attend to the park’s overall image. Obsessiveness about how the public felt about the park was in part measured by auditors who asked guests questions from the most general to most specific lines regarding their visit on a given day. In turn Operations employees, by adhering to company rules and regulations of conduct, assured that a positive, family-oriented presentation of AstroWorld was carried outside of the office into the park; or at least this was the goal of management.

Unlike the backbone provided by this first level, imaging occurs in a second way which is more specific and centers on crises, or the way in which the Company responds to them. As I refer to it in this chapter, this level of discursive play was realized as a reaction-formation to events, circumstances, threats, distractions or deviations from the outward appearance of the park that dictated (sometimes immediate) action. In the instance of a major ride accident at another park, AstroWorld management and Public Relations officials moved quickly to create a picture of the “safe park” versus the “unsafe park” in the event of receiving negative press following another park’s accident. When a shooting occurred at a restaurant one year, one which was not on park property but fairly close to the Houston landmark, a local television station reported the incident as a shooting “near AstroWorld.” After the report aired, a number of Operations management expressed disgust over the inaccuracy of the newscast. Sometime later in the same season a different Houston television station did an investigative segment on AstroWorld’s policy of searching individuals at the front gate. Though I have not been able to locate the report, I learned that it suggested racial motivations behind patron searches of bags and purses. Again, Public Relations and management attempted to diffuse the criticism by stating
that the policy was intended to protect Guests and that it was randomly applied
to all Guests, regardless of race or gender.

Body searches, shootings, even fights were not the norm, and what is the
primary manifestation of this aspect of imaging is the everyday conflict
situation. A child is inaccurately checked for height on a ride and is told that
she cannot board the ride which in turn perpetuates a shouting sequence by the
child’s parents. They argue that she is tall enough to ride and demand that she
be allowed to board to which an employee responds, “I’m sorry but we have to
follow the exact height specifications of our ride. They are designed this way
for everyone’s safety.” In the meantime a number of other guests in line are
shouting “Let her ride! Let her ride!” in complete support of the parents who
now feel ever more justified in their event-strike in the ride Q-house. The
couple finally leaves with the child when they determine that the employee will
not budge in the matter. “We’re talking to the park president! You can be sure
of that!,” they angrily storm off. Imaging was one’s ability to react to a conflict
situation in a timely, appropriate and friendly manner. I personally got
frustrated in such conflict situations. I was disappointed with the recalcitrance
of many adult patrons who complained at every possible chance or challenged
the authority of anyone they saw, but I too was a part of the system and I was
not prone to resisting patrons.21

In addition to the company’s efforts at self-imaging,22 there is the issue of
the imaging of employees, a third level of this analysis. Partially summarized in
the conception of “Perception Is Reality,” a slogan that was beat into the heads
of all employees during my two seasons at the park, the AstroWorld employee
was under the constant scrutiny of dress code rules and “being on stage
concepts”: 
Your Role Expectations:

Act One: Be safe, make guest service a top priority, help keep the park clean and beautiful, look and act the part of a professional Host or Hostess

Act Two: When you step into the Parks, you are always “On Stage.” Our Stage Look has helped give Six Flags its great reputation—a reputation you will need to live up to every day (AstroWorld 1994:12).23

This main focus of this level of imaging is summarized in the Six Flags corporate slogan of “being on stage.” A new employee was made aware of this policy during the HR interview.24 Upon one’s hiring, constant reminders of the requirements of “being on stage” were given either verbally or through company handouts. Although hairpieces were allowed, any “excessive” or “extreme” hairstyles were not allowed. Long sideburns, fingernails longer than 1/4 inch past the finger (for hostesses), facial hair and wearing of hats or visible jewelry were all considered dress code violations (AstroWorld 1994:35).25 Employees are taught how to act by how they look—a combination of the uniformity of dress and one’s manner of self-presentation “while in costume.” Management considered this look to be the park’s main way of positively connecting with the public, thus keeping their sustained patronage. What is desired of employees is their willingness to psychologically and physically exhibit company policy/vision/image in their very bodies and manners of interaction with the public, an agenda thoroughly established by the Disney corporation’s famous strict employee policies.

In keeping with AstroWorld’s dress code policy, there was a strict rule regarding the wearing of socks with uniforms: they must be white, anklet socks; and one may not roll down tube socks to the ankle. Some employees ignored this rule, and were often caught in the park by an upper-level worker, being
then told to go back to the company store to purchase the appropriate socks. Many, though, were not caught and a resultant general malaise filled AstroWorld. I would hear many managers moaning about the fact that dress code, specifically "wrong socks," was not being followed. Visits to other parks, whether of Six Flags or other corporate affiliation, struck notes of comparison: "Their employees at least have the same kind of socks, and they tuck in their shirts too!" This and others were common reactions to the dress code problem at AstroWorld. Management saw it as "losing the battle" in the war for appearance.

Beyond dress code was the manner of worker appearance: did one look confident, how did one hold oneself? Employees were told from day one of employment to "take control of how you project yourselves." It was said that although one may not be able to talk to all the guests in the park on a given day, one could certainly make a positive visual impression with all or most patrons: "A Guest fifty feet away can tell by your posture if you like your job; so stand up straight and make the right impression!" As I later illustrate, the issue of employee stage appearance would become a major point of contention in theme park culture.

To summarize my suggestions regarding the practice of theme park imaging, as manufactured in slogans, park campaigns, training materials, interactions at every level of the park, and in the minds and bodies of workers, let me point to its significance in a description of one day of work at AstroWorld's Guest Relations office. There I was observing the taking of patron complaints and compliments at the park's front gate. I noted that more than twenty people had angrily complained about a number of ride shutdowns which had occurred in the same relative period of time on that given day. Guest
Relations individuals were excellent rhetors and they knew how to deal with upset patrons better than most. The perception of the patrons on this day was that no one cared about all of the shutdowns: “The workers didn’t even say ‘sorry,’” one man replied to a Guest Relations employee in the middle of a heated conversation. The disgruntled person is told of the many other possible things he could do in the park even in the event of a ride being “temporarily closed for mechanical adjustments.” Patrons equated the perceived “don’t care” attitude with broken rides, AstroWorld apathy and rising admission fees (cf. Anon. 1997e; O’Brien 1997a; Zoltak 1998). Overall their image of the park became tainted, and in some cases Guest Relations offered “comp” tickets as a way of appeasing them and hopefully securing their patronage in the future.

In sum, the situation I have described is highly economic—predicated on AstroWorld’s dependence on patronage, its ability to “image” its grounds and employees, and the mood (swings) of park visitors. Too often these related levels of theme park culture are shown through the lens of simulation or are tested on the theories of hyperreality; the assumption being that all levels of theme park culture are made up of everyday interactions that are hallucinatory or primarily iconic in character (cf. Rojek 1995:149). Imaging does obviously work through various techniques of simulation, like the “easiness effect” that occurs when a patron sees an employee “in costume,” but one must not forget the role that simple and deterministic economics plays in the lifeblood of the theme park.
Grievance

The front line won’t lie (Heil, Parker, Tate 1995:vx).

If you are prone to emotional mood swings, stay out of the theme park business (The Institute for Research 1995:17).

On the day of my first impression of this theme park—it was the day of my interview in Human Resources—I was struck at how disorganized things seemed to be at the company. People were moving around, like chickens without heads, and I was told by numerous persons to “wait a minute” while something else was being finished. It was my introduction to the park, and experiences of alienation, angst and feelings of disassociation within a given company are common to the capitalist worldview. In this world the theme park is no exception. That day, though, and the many others that followed, left me thinking about the common lack of humanity that existed on an everyday level at AstroWorld. Do not get me wrong, I do not wish to imply here that there were no “good people” at AstroWorld, as I think fondly of many of the people still or formerly there, but what I want to question is why it is that so many workers at the park expressed discontent during their employment there? My
implication is that the quotidian experiences of theme park workers, and in some cases those of patrons as well, are characterized by what might be called processes of fragmentation or social saturation (cf. Gergen 1991). From a cultural standpoint I am interested in the general philosophical question of how individuals develop their own life-histories in light of their identifications within social groups and places, specifically connections with workplaces and co-workers and patrons (cf. Schwartzmann and Berman 1994), as well as the associated issue of how people historicize and similarly comment on their own self-worth through specific cultural practices of participation, disassociation and negotiation, even if the historicizing process is markedly short in duration (cf. Faubion 1993). What I describe in this section are a number of thematic issues and situations which seemed to raised the greatest concern among employees in AstroWorld park culture.\textsuperscript{27} These are the elements I identify as being the major “blocks” among employees evident in two years of participant-observation.\textsuperscript{28}

**NAME TAGS**

Six Flags, like the other major corporate theme parks, uses the name tag as a way of establishing familial connections between patron and worker. Similarly, there is the use of the name tag to suggest non-hierarchical, collegial relations among workers, especially the working class and management. The address of other workers in the park using the first name was recommended in the employee manual (AstroWorld 1994:12), and it was a common practice in the park. Employees were however told that they “may not wear their name tag or any wardrobe articles while in the Park and not working” (AstroWorld 1994:39). The name tag is a part of the uniform, and the emphasis on stage
behavior suggests that names are but a part of the overall marketing of performance at AstroWorld. First names may connote sincerity in some social contexts, yet in the park they simply become a marker. Additionally, hierarchy is firmly established, not lessened, through the use of name tags. Color-coding establishes one's position in the company: a Black Tag indicates an entry level worker, one making $4.35 an hour; a Red Tag indicates a lead, one who makes $4.55 an hour; a Green Tag was rarer and signified a front gate auditor; Blue Tags were the most prestigious, indicating a supervisor or person from upper management. With Blue tags the pay rates varied—Training Coordinators and Area Supervisors generally made $6 an hour, while a full-time manager made a yearly $15,000 and up. In addition to the color of name tags, certain recognition programs, like Service Superstar, awarded one a gold “Six Flags” lettering replacing the colored one. Some saw these additions to the standard tags as elitist and responsible for further stratifying park culture.

MONEY

In a fishy section from a training seminar, employees are asked to rank what they think is the most important to the least important of motivation factors in a company. Employees typically mark “Good wages” as number one or two, along with “Good working conditions.” The “trick” of this exercise is that employees are then told the “correct answers” as they are asked to write in the “actual” numerical rankings of ten motivating factors following their working through the exercise. “Full appreciation of work done,” they are told, is number one, with “Good wages” being number five on the list (Academy of Excellence 1995:6). Obviously, with such an unsubstantiated list, results and opinions
would differ greatly between working-class workers and the management staff as to the legitimacy of these rankings. As many have argued in case-studies of the service industry, pay does make a difference (cf. Leidner 1993:4), and it is commonly the subject of personal reflection, the cause of employee-employee conflict and a motivating factor in the development of personal psychological crises in work settings. Management was under no obligation to review employee complaints as they related to pay-issues. The general attitude was, "If you want to get this job, you must come to accept the salary." Even the complaints of some Rides crews, whose workers worked longer periods in the hot Houston sun as compared to crews of shady rides, were not rewarded with higher salaries.

**Discipline and Punish**

AstroWorld employees were afforded the opportunity to file a grievance with the company in cases of termination or conflict with fellow workers or managers (AstroWorld 1994:31). Depending on the nature of the dismissal, which was detailed on the employee's termination papers as a code, some workers were not ever allowed to return to park grounds, even as a paying customer! In some circumstances Human Resources conducted investigations into the firings of employees, though it was general knowledge that being terminated meant that one was never likely to be welcomed back to the park. Employees could also request a transfer to another department as a way of "escaping" the circumstances of a current department (AstroWorld 1994:38).
The process of getting “termed out” was not a particularly pleasant one. The typical termination scenario, and I say “typical” in reference to the large number of terminations I witnessed or knew about over two years, might have involved an employee who had “gotten out of line” at her/his ride, perhaps fighting with a guest, disrespecting his lead or supervisor, etc. Another possible situation included obvious violations like till theft at Front Gate or excessive absences. Any of these and many others were reasons for what was called a Corrective Interview. The Corrective Interview was essentially the trail before the guillotine: in the company of a witness, who could be anyone from a manager to an Operations office worker (as was commonly the case), the employee had an “interview” with the supervisor, generally a “blue tag.” These meetings followed a strict order of business, something mandated by Human Resources to assure “fairness” in the process. After being told about her/his park violation, there was an opportunity for the worker to respond, followed by signatures by all members present on an employee control card.31

There are some real difficulties with the operation of AstroWorld’s disciplinary policy, one of the main ones being that the supervisor had the discretion of firing or not firing the individual following the C.I. Management saw the process as a way of empowering lower-level supervisors by giving them the task of keeping their employees in shape; of course, this also reduced blame and suspicion as the decision to terminate was not (generally) made by upper-level management.32 The saddest part about the termination proceedings was the “walk around” that occurred following the termination. A released worker was walked through wardrobe to turn in her/his uniform, taken to the Company Store to pick up any complimentary tickets due, to the Operations office to fill out final paperwork, and finally to Security to turn in the company
One of the strangest Corrective Interviews occurred on one of my first working days at the park while doing some paperwork and filing in the Operations office. On this particular day employee paychecks were also being distributed. A disgruntled custodian walked in and became quite irate when he discovered that his paycheck was not ready: “This is the second fucking week without a check! This is bullshit!” The timid office workers did not know how to react to the individual and they kept their silence while he continued his tirade. He then proceeded to rip a top off of a table and throw it across the room, followed shortly by a round of miscellaneous binders, folders and papers. Things got a bit tense in the office until the Vice-President of Operations came barreling down the hall. “Calm down! Do you think you can act like this to one of our guests?” “No! But I want my paycheck!” “Well just think of how our guests depend on you. The people in Operations are also your guests so you need to treat them just the same.” Security then arrived and took the custodian outside. Later as he was being “termed out” by a supervisor, he pulled down his pants and with exposed buttocks exclaimed, “Tell me when you’re finished fucking me up the ass!”
Promotions

What's the best way to get a promotion? Threaten someone with something you know. In one case a Rides supervisor had rigged a conveyer on a pontoon boat ride while in the presence of another Rides worker, and in turn a patron was injured. The second ride attendant gave management an ultimatum and threatened that he would report the company negligence to all of the local newspapers and television stations if he were not appointed a Rides supervisor. He was given the position, and whenever promotions for Rides supervisor occurred, many of the candidates failing promotion told the story as a way of recalling management practice and lessening personal disappointment. The practice of the threat seemed to carry more influence and greater effectiveness than trying to showcase one's abilities or negotiate one's position with management.

It was generally known that the park's Vice-President had little respect for the park's Rides and Grounds Quality supervisors. Many knew the story of the Vice-President once referring to Rides supervisors as "pencil-necked geeks." The supervisors, perhaps more knowledgeable of park operations and power-management than their bosses, responded when park situations led to frustration and impossibility. In one season, three-fourths of the Rides supervisors, after having been down-sized from twenty-two to four, threatened Operations with quitting if staffing did not improve in their ride areas. The supervisors of course did not quit, knowing that staffing was only partially controlled by Operations, as Human Resources, the department responsible for all aspects of initial employee matters including hiring, was commonly unable to hire "quality" workers to run the rides. The politics of staffing and promotion were pronounced and of a level that saw some qualified workers
never attaining an advertised position because of company or departmental politics.³³

**Adjudication: What's Up Doc?: 1995**

Welcome to What’s Up Doc? We want to know how YOUR work experience has been at SFAW so far.... At SFAW we believe if our employees enjoy their jobs we will treat our Guests well. So, we really want to know how your experience has been as an employee so far at SFAW. Please give us your honest feedback. The survey is completely confidential.³⁴

Like the defunct Cues to Guest Services class of 1994, the What’s Up Doc? (WUD?) follow-up class brought together employees from the Operations division, as well as from other divisions, such as Security. Aside from providing employees with continued iteration of company policies, described in WUD? as “making sure our Guests get what they need from you the employee,” the course sought to create the impression of company spirit—“You are gathered here with persons you may have not met before [people from other departments]” —and it culminated in a What's Up Doc-torate. This class, as did a majority of training classes at AstroWorld, relied on the use of flip charts to provide information to the trainees, such as how to develop “World Class Service” standards or heavily-used role-playing situations.³⁵ Such props were planned set-ups for the seminar’s goal, which was the opportunity for employees to offer feedback to management on their park experiences, how they had been getting along with other workers in their area, and, ultimately, to allow them the opportunity to vent their frustrations.

As I found in facilitating a number of the sessions, management was not particularly ready for frank, emotional and at times critically-insightful
reflections on the operation of the park. An employee survey was used as a means of facilitating feedback. It was considered to be “five pages too many!” by many of the workers with whom I spoke, and invariably the survey did more to assess departmental training and to boost management confidence in training and overall faith in the operational quality of the park than allow employees a real forum for their complaints and concerns—at least not to a significant end like the effecting of real change in park procedures. The segment following the writing-up of the surveys was the most colorful portion of the seminar; and for me the most ethnographically insightful. There the opportunity was had to tell management or representatives of management, who would later communicate the class’s findings, what suggestions they, the employees, would recommend for AstroWorld. Here are a few selections from one of the classes I attended on June 12, 1995:

DON’T LIKE: custodians sitting around; wardrobe giving out wrong (large sizes); random questions by patrons they are unprepared to answer; poor food and small quantity in canteen, want better canteen like SFOT (25 cent increase and nothing in return); dumpsters: people putting cardboard in wrong ones or not cleaning up the back of their retail/food area near the dumpsters; broken Coke machines near wardrobe; Security needs more authority in the parking lot; Security doesn’t pick up trash (Security: we have to scan crowds for criminals and don’t have the time); guests take advantage of us, especially at Guest Relations; need new computer system (auditor), as one now is too archaic; uniforms need pockets to hold things; Security wants shorts, not pants; bad wardrobe hours.

LIKE: Three cited park employees to be very personal, though these three were outnumbered by the 24 negative comments I recorded. One person said, “I felt good when I helped a guest.” This was the only such comment I received.

Though the idea of providing employees with a conversational outlet for their concerns and needs is ethically important, were one to attempt to move a company towards a more democratic model of the corporation (cf. Clegg 1990),
management would need to rely much less on the outmoded tropes of familial contact and "sympathetic" interactionism with which they were familiar. As a training department our input was limited in these matters. If the Six Flags corporate training office in Parsippany invented a new training program, like WUD?, we simply molded it into our curriculum at AstroWorld.

Perks

The park stressed the significance of the period of employment by highlighting the value of a season of work at AstroWorld. In the Training department we taught employees that working at the park was to be a unique experience: you will have a fun time; you will meet new friends and colleagues; you may have the opportunity to eventually become a manager or lead in the park, perhaps leading to a full-time position at AstroWorld. One of the ways in which this last suggestion was developed was through the telling of management biographies. These acted as testimonials for the park in general, touted it as having a fair work atmosphere and boasted of the numerous possibilities for upward mobility: "Our own Vice-President began his career as an entry-level Entertainment worker." This was the message that was commonly told to our employees.

A further employee "perk," referencing the interactionist model once again, is reflected in a quote from the Host and Hostess Handbook from 1994:

Six Flags shines an important spotlight on your career even when your formal employment ends here. You will remain a Six Flags Team Member for life because the valuable people skills and positive attitudes you develop at Six Flags will accompany you throughout your lifetime (AstroWorld 1994:12).
In my opinion, the company did have some beneficial programs for employees, such as low-cost housing at the University of Houston, offered for $63 per week, or free shuttle service to and from work from selected areas in Metropolitan Houston. Many of the incentives were seen as excuses by employees, as “gimmicks” poorly compensating people for low wages or tough work conditions.

**Emotions**

Van Maanen and Kunda’s (1989) study of ride workers at Disneyland, and Hochschild’s case study of Delta airlines employees (1983) both describe the experiences of employees in the service industry in which emotion is an integral and required part of employment. Emotional labor:

Requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others—in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality (Hochschild 1983:7).

Seeming to love one’s job becomes a part of the job itself (ibid:6), and I have described in numerous segments of this chapter how AstroWorld workers saw management’s deployment of emotions in the park as shameful and disrespectful. The patron was priority number one, and workers were expected to attend to her/his every need, even if this meant resorting to a form of self-directed dehumanization. More often than not the theme park employee was subject to constant mood swings, from the patron, the fellow worker and the park lead or manager; it is an environment that produces such variety in emotions, but more importantly AstroWorld’s constant tug on the emotions of its employees, and more specifically its devaluation of worker worth, is
reflective of larger cultural processes common to the service industry and state capitalism itself (cf. Hochschild 1983; Mestrovic 1997).

The Consequence of Emotional Labor?: Going Nuts in the Office

Her name was Jess. Once she went nuts in the park—something you did not want to show the guests, or the bosses. Falling down on a crowded day due perhaps to a temporary bout of psychosis and heat exhaustion, she got transferred to the Operations office and became more bitter. She had worked for a season and a half to become a Rides supervisor, and one bad day in the sun had gotten her this. She left the company shortly after having laid down for some ten minutes in the Operations office during rush hour. Other workers walked over her and continued to do their office work. She, like many of the other female Rides supervisors, had been treated unfairly by the Operations management team—it was said that her training schedule was deliberately being delayed to prevent her final promotion.
Mission Guests: Corporate Side

Most of you would think of a Guest only in terms of a Park visitor; however, Guests include anyone we come in contact with, in person or over the telephone. No matter where you work, whether in the Park or behind the scenes, you will have a Guest to serve...[you should] treat everyone as if they were a Guest in your home (AstroWorld 1994:13).

By far the least appealing aspect of a career in the theme park business is dealing with the unpleasant people who seem to be drawn to theme parks. You will wonder why nobody told these people that the days of amusement parks being filthy, obnoxious places has long sense passed...loudmouthed rude people should not be attracted to such nice places, but they are. You will have to deal with them (The Institute for Research 1995:19).

One incident in particular seems to leave a mark in my memory, and I recall it in here thinking about patrons, or “Guests” as we were instructed to call them. They, the object of every theme park’s passion. It was early in the season, perhaps 1994 or 1995, I can’t exactly remember, when a middle-aged European American male asked for some help with the ordering of his food at Popeye’s Chicken. Apparently he had experienced some difficulty with his order and he requested that I speak to one of the workers there. Honestly, I did not have the patience for his “problem” that day, but I was generally good about putting on my “Guest First” hat so I proceeded to look into his troubles.

The exact nature of the problem escapes my mind, but besides speaking to one of the Popeye’s worker, which like most dealings with patrons was more to appease the guest than to actually address a “problem,” I soon found that I was assisting the man in carrying his food to his family: “Could you help me with these? It’s too much to carry.” “Sure,” I responded. Of course the man’s family was to be found halfway across the park in the Mexicana section, and I was dodging oncoming persons with the man while carrying drinks and
chicken; such is the fate of any poor fool who finds herself or himself walking with food and drinks in a crowded theme park. After we finally met his family, which was about twenty minutes after the adventure had begun, I dropped the food off and waited patiently like a puppy for a “Thanks so much!” from the guy or his family. Well, that day I instead received the American Spirit, which was a no response, a “No Thank You Fuckin’ Very Much!”

My story is one of many, and though I did not come into contact with as many patrons as the average Rides or Grounds Quality attendant, I did have the opportunity to interact with them on a daily basis. Blue Tags like myself were commonly approached by patrons, many thinking that our uniforms were markers of park authority and that we could better attend to their needs. What I would like to address in this brief section is the issue of patron-worker interactions, what might be more generally referred to as the maintenance of an economy of patronage.

The Six Flags corporate office seemed to change its tone related to guests on a seasonal basis. From Guest First to Gold Standard: the paradigms changed but the motivations remained the same. In one company letter dated in 1993, Six Flags CEO Bob Pittman suggests that the corporation had “placed too much emphasis on the operational task in theme parks” (Pittman 1993:2). According to Pittman, what was needed for the 1994 season was a more pronounced focus on guests and their needs: “operational tasks are obviously important, but they cannot be our total focus. Our job is to serve our guests and we operate our parks to entertain them” (ibid.).

Addressing the issue of patronage, Six Flags AstroWorld attempted to assess patron needs and determine the best strategy for preserving continued
visits of a consistent population. It was the goal of an expanded Front Gate auditing team to better analyze these mysteries, of creating happy patrons as opposed to angry ones. It’s like the reaction one has to make in the game Theme Park (Bullfrog Software 1995) when a computer simulated patron is angry: quick, dispatch a grounds crew to clean up vomit, or send a happy cartoon character to cheer up a group of whining kids. Marketing assessments, unlike the superficial icons in Theme Park, indicating “happy,” “sad,” or whatever, were based on the assumption that one had to engage the guest on her own ground—in the theme park. Auditors were charged with interviewing patrons, and anyone who has ever been to a theme park has probably at least seen the ubiquitous auditor: “What was your favorite ride?” “How did you find the service at Popeye’s to be?” Guest dissatisfaction is the much feared outcome of a bad outing at the theme park.

Answers from the population at AstroWorld are compiled; the data is reviewed by Operations personnel and by others. The unpredictability of the theme park business is what made the assessor’s job more difficult. One can say that major global events, like rain or unexpected closings of major rides or attractions, will generally set off park visitors. The nature of the mass service entertainment industry is its own worst enemy: a guest standing in line is liable to get angry when the sun begins to shine. For management the main metaphor of understanding and relating to a patron was the “happy face,” illustrated in the following testimonial from the AstroWorld employee handbook:

Days at the Parks always end happily because at Six Flags we believe nothing is as rewarding as helping others have a great time (AstroWorld 1994:12).
Mission Guests: Worker Interaction Side

Hosts [hostesses] defer to guests because they are guests, regardless of their social status (Leidner 1993:129).

From a managerial perspective the patron was predictable—he or she was fickle, yet due to the enormous number of repetitions of patron-worker interactions in the park, it was seen as wholly possible to control most situations, what could be called preventive action, or an attempt to fix other situations that were just starting to get out of hand. The patronage economy never sleeps.

As I show in Table 2, a majority of patrons were repeat visitors to AstroWorld, as well as being residents of Houston or living with fifty miles of the city. From a demographic standpoint, a theme park like AstroWorld was not as diverse a space as a major airport or even a shopping mall, where different races, ages, classes come together for travel or commerce. Aside from drawing on a rather homogenous demographic base, park workers did deal with a number of patron situations which often demanded creative and immediate responses.41
A majority of the guest complaints related to perceptions of park policies, specifically in the feeling of inadequacies or improper/inconsistent applications of these policies. Patrons yelled about the various aspects of height-checking on rides, expressed hysteria over the allowing of some patrons with disabilities to jump in front of them in line,\textsuperscript{42} and complained about how tense park situations, like fights of various sorts, were handled. Other patrons were upset with practical matters, like clothing stained from ride fluids, poor or unexciting rides, bad food,\textsuperscript{43} or the presence of workers they perceived to be rude.\textsuperscript{44} Conflicts between patrons and employees, both entry-level and lead workers, were also a common topic of patron dissatisfaction.\textsuperscript{45}

One report from Six Flags Magic Mountain humorously relates the common occurrence of battles between patrons and employees, in this case between the visitors and costume characters like Daffy Duck and Foghorn Leghorn (Gonzalez 1993:A1). In the second season at AstroWorld I remember frequenting many conversations with costume characters (Entertainment employees) in the Training Center. Ken and Tiffany, two of the characters at AstroWorld, told me about incident after incident of small children biting, punching and kicking them while in costume. Ken was somewhat brash and he on occasion hit the kids back, much to the parent’s chagrin.\textsuperscript{46} It was their opinion that parents were just as bad; Tiffany once telling me that some of the parents encouraged their children to “Go up and punch Daffy in the face!”

Most of the negative interactions between the two parties of a theme park were not nearly this dramatic. Physical fights did happen and were in some cases instigated by the worker, which might seem ironic. As I characterize later in descriptions of compromised social interactions coupled with surveillance technologies of multiple sorts, many employees of AstroWorld had contempt in
the company need to have to serve patrons, while suppressing their own selves (cf. Leidner 1993:184).

The difference between this guest comment:

I would like you to know how impressed I was with the Sword and Crown Restaurant. Two employees in the Looney Tunes Emporium recommended it, and I'm so glad they did....I had not been to AstroWorld in about 7 years and was expecting to see only menus of hamburgers, hot dogs and nachos. Instead I dined on delicious, tender chicken and vegetables that tasted fresh and not too salty. The food was hot and the food area was clean. You and your staff are to be commended for the hard work and dedication. Sincerely, Kay Chitwood (Stay Tuned 1995:3).

And this one:

Kenny made sexual comments towards a female member of the Damascus Baptist Group [Guest Relations comment, 1994].

...is obvious. One of the responses to a negative tourist experience is to tell someone. In the case of people "returning home," this someone might be a friend or family member where the goal is to gain sympathy or to convince others not to go to that same place. In the theme park, whether or not "Kenny made sexual comments towards a female member of the Damascus Baptist Group" is irrelevant, for what is produced in a Guest Relations moment between a G.R. worker and a patron is a momentary sense of agency on the part of the guest. The visitor feels slighted, for whatever reasons, and reports the incident to a manager, Guest Relations or perhaps a Blue Tag in the park. This moment, what I would term as reactionary and indirect surveillance, is illustrative of my identification of the shared hostility between worker and patron that so makes up the theme park culture. In most situations there would be no negative consequences resulting from a patron's charges or complaints, if directed at an employee, if there was denial on the part of the
attendant or a lack of general evidence to support the patron's claim.

When it comes down to it, the theme park, with all of the commotion, the fighting between anybody and everybody, the level of accusations that fly and the overall bad will between people, one can truly feel like she is in the middle of a Bosch painting or perhaps in a Henry Rollins' war-torn Los Angeles in which every chump on the street wants to take out the other at any cost (Rollins 1996). A recent study in an issue of *Amusement Business* describes the efforts of theme park managers in attempting to control "unruly" patrons. The most general concerns of management quoted in the study were "general breakdown[s] in paying attention to rules and regulations," a social disregard for authority on the part of guests, and even the "tattoos and pierced body parts" of teenagers (O'Brien 1997a:3). In my theme park? Just give them all guns to test out my hypothesis.

**Corporate Biography 1: Bob Pittman**

In January 1992, when Six Flags first became associated with Time Warner, the Park Presidents and other executives met at Disney World in Orlando to start the process of planning for the future. Because Disney has been the gold standard in the theme-park [sic] business, we used Disney as a comparison in our long discussions about Six Flags' strengths and weaknesses. We then developed a long-term plan to fix our weaknesses and communicate our strengths to our potential guests (Pittman 1993:1).

I think that executive development is spiritual development (Vaill 1989:xvi).

Sometime in the 1994 AstroWorld season I spend six hours on the ground with a scraper, working away at dried chewing gum in the Alpine section. Simultaneously, Bob Pittman is boarding a plane in New York, on his way to
Houston to observe his park in the rough. A week prior to the visit, Rides and Grounds Quality teams assemble to work on their respective areas: "Corporate’s coming next week!," the ominous sound of the announcement filters through the park, from the top of management to the bottom-of-the-barrel seventeen year-old.

"I hear Pittman’s a nice guy!" There was a rumor that this CEO of Six Flags Entertainment was once working at Six Flags Great Adventure as a Grounds Quality attendant; apparently, he wanted to see how it was to work as one among the masses. Out there he was, sweeping his broom and pretending to move outside of his classed body; two other grounds gentlemen, the real deal, walk up and begin sweeping with Pittman, unaware who he really was. "Nice day," Pittman speaks with a Rolex smile and filtered breath, unnoticed by the two. "Yeah," one responds. The other seems to be flapping his broom in circles, not really doing much for the trash situation in the park. "This job’s all right!," he says while continuing broom acrobatics, "except for all of this Guest interaction shit we have to do!"
"Did you hear about the time Pittman caught those two GQ guys? They got terminated that very day!" In 1981 Pittman is credited with forming MTV, and it was no surprise to me that he recycled whatever he could out of that period of his life into the theme park business. I hope that he writes a book one day and details it all for me, so that I will appreciate his brilliance. I note that one of the first AstroWorld videos I was shown as a new employee features the CEO in a segment where he compares Six Flags employees to the VJs on MTV; this was his attempt to stress the need for better employee interaction with patrons. He called them Guests, like everyone else, and was counting on the front line to do its part: scrape, scrape, scrape away. The plane’s just landed.50

Pittman suggested that although he was the “keeper of vision, so to speak” (Pittman 1995:3), he encouraged employees to communicate with him, or Larry Cochran, President of Six Flags Theme Parks, on a direct basis: “You can even write to Larry Cochran or me directly. Those of you on the firing line know best what needs work—and we need to hear from you” (Pittman 1993:3). Most employees viewed those words, and the not unrelated suggestions from upper management at AstroWorld to encourage a similar “collegial” relationship inside AstroWorld, as mere lip-service. On the day that Pittman was there with Larry Cochran, President of Six Flags parks, I felt that his visit was shaping up to be a scene not unlike Michael Moore’s quest to meet Roger Smith, former chairman of General Motors Corporation, in his film Roger & Me.

Pittman’s on a motorcycle—glamour-boy CEO for the end of the century. A number of the workers assigned to scrape gum have made little progress, only removing a small portion of the chewing constellation outside the Alpine Astroway Q-house. “I hope he comes to my ride today,” an attendant from Excalibur tells me. “Why’s that? Do you think he cares about what you’re
doing, man? It’s all about the image.”

Motorcycles to America Online. Pittman jumped from company to company, maybe even having worked as CEO at Century 21, though I can’t seem to remember. Now the CEO of America Online, he’s competing with the likes of Bill Gates and the other guys of the motorcycle clan: a Cyber-Chairman for 2000, hoping to connect the world to his on-line doorstep. Too bad about all of those hook-up problems, Bob, but I’m sure they’ll be looked into.

Pittman’s been called “brassy,” whatever that is supposed to mean. In fact, he’s got it all together: America Online? What’s it like to run a new company? “It’s the same as the themepark [sic] business,” says the CEO. He and Cochran pass by the office door near my old desk, and I only get a glimpse of his face; he and Cochran both decked out in overcoats. “Great to meet you,” someone in the Operations office spits out in a phony-ass manner. He was the keeper of vision, all right...and just what vision was that anyway? Cower to the King! Hey Bob, here’s how I’ll write your corporate bio, it’ll begin and end with what we’ve all been doing for the last week: scraping. This one’s for you Bob—some people-stained, one-year-old-scraped-of-the-skin-of-the-earth-gum. Eat up!
I had the opportunity to interview potential workers at the Human Resources office over a period of a few days in 1995. That week HR was understaffed and needed additional interviewers for the mass of persons looking for work prior to the beginning of the main Summer season. The park would attract a variety of persons from different social, ethnic and generational backgrounds. A hiring fair, as was often held during the massive Houston rodeo at the Astrodome, was markedly different than a Disney park screening. Though AstroWorld had full-time recruiters who visited the Houston high schools seeking possible summer employees, this is minimal effort compared to Disney’s high-priced campaign to attract college-aged workers in job fairs held throughout the country.

The presentation of self was a priority for the interviewee, as the screening process was geared towards weeding out employees who had self-esteem problems, did not get along with others, could not function in a public environment, or who were not willing to take and implement orders. Part of the interview consisted in shuffling through papers and getting personal information from the employee; this was followed by the portion of the screening which determined whether or not one was to become a park employee. A series of situational questions were posed: “Describe an achievement in high school or in your community of which you are most proud.” Or, “What would you do if you were working at the park and you had to deal with an unruly Guest?” The following is an excerpt of one of the interviews I conducted at Human Resources.
Lukas: So, describe one achievement or accomplishment you made in high school.

Applicant: Oh, I can’t think of any.

Lukas: No?

Applicant: None come to mind.

Lukas: Ah, what about something you did in your community or—

Applicant: Nothing, really.

Lukas: Is there anything that you are proud of, say—

Applicant: Well, once I was on this date and I really stood my ground then. The guy I went out with expected that...well we went out to the movies and later he thought...you know, that he would get some, but I told him that he was being way too quick about it.

Lukas: O.K.

Following one’s hiring as a Six Flags employee, a series of training and orientation sessions occurred. Human Resource orientation acted as an introduction to Six Flags company policy and it included a detailing of policies, procedures and frequently asked questions. Employees were given a Host/Hostess Handbook and were shown a number of videos, stressing safety and public relations issues. Interesting and significant in this first training seminar is the repetition of “one big family” metaphors in the video and spoken training.\textsuperscript{54} The apparent “family” of AstroWorld was stressed in management’s claims to being available to its workers:

Don’t hesitate to ask any of us or those in management if you have any questions. We are all part of the same team and want to help you.

Also, is the idea that work at the park would be fun and collegial:

You’ll meet many new people working here this summer, many will be your friends even when you leave AstroWorld.
Also, in the kinship established with the Six Flags Entertainment Corporation and Time Warner; as one training video suggested in this regard:

Meet some of your new co-workers: Bugs Bunny, Michael Keaton (Batman), Michelle Pfeifer...

The introduction of the family metaphor is monumental, if only because later in an employee's career, contrary to the celebratory message of HR videos, she is often commenting on the dysfunctional nature of the very "family" of which she is a part.

Departmental training followed the Human Resources Orientation, generally within two weeks of the latter so as to keep information and employee spirit fresh. The experiences I describe of Rides Departmental Training of course differ from those of Entertainment, Food Service, or Security, though similarities existed in all department training classes, like the stressing of safety and the discussion of guest interaction issues. The majority of Rides departmental classes were facilitated by Cindy and me in the 1994 season. Jeff had never expressed much interest in doing the classes, though there was some pressure applied by the Manager of Operations to have him involved in them.

The structure of the department training class had changed over the years with the addition of new information and due to the personalities of individual Training Coordinators. A basic requirement was that we teach new attendants, Rides and Grounds Quality persons with a ratio of 5-7 to 1 respectively in an average class, about safety and about handling patron interactions. From a legal perspective one can see the reason why management stressed these two primary areas. Arguably, one could too see the need for safety and pleasant employees who would be the ones coming in contact with
the greatest number of guests. To emphasize safety we showed the class a series of videos each instructing them on how to properly read hazardous materials labels and to explain their rights in regards to OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. We also emphasized specific procedural issues, like how each employee could pick up a paycheck, where it could be cashed, went over dress code rules and explained how they were to find a replacement for work if they decided to request a day off. It was a heck of a lot of detail to cram into a one hour to one and one half hour class.

A majority of the class time was spent role-playing, that is working through scenarios that the employee might encounter while in the park. For example, "How would you react to an angry parent who insists that his child is tall enough to ride Batman the Escape?" The role-playing activities were popular with our trainees, as they broke down the monotony of talking to them about safety procedures, like the four steps of how to properly use a fire extinguisher. Many of our Training Coordinators seemed satisfied with the class, in whatever basic variation on these themes it was presented. Some of us, however, felt that we could do much more with the class in both pedagogical and stylistic regards. I detail this concern in the section to follow shortly, Corporate Biography 2.

On-the-Job Training, so-called learning *in situ* (Lave and Wenger 1991:31), was considered to be especially important for Rides, Grounds Quality and Security. Departmental orientation prepared the employee for life out in the park, stressing policies as well as ways of achieving positive patron interaction. On-the-job assumed that departmental orientation was successful in this regard, and it emphasized the duties which would make up the worker’s day-to-day life at AstroWorld. In March a mass orientation (a season kick-off), was
followed by on-the-job trainings of numerous employees at the various rides. This was an ideal situation and, arguably, one of the more efficient and effective ways to train Rides workers. The reality of park life, however, dictated a necessary conundrum: one needed to train new workers to operate understaffed rides, yet by so doing one had to juggle ride crews so that the new employees could be given their on-the-job training while the park was open. This was a difficulty that was never really competently managed at AstroWorld.58

Although most trainers were competent and conscientious in their facilitation of On-the-Job, the inherent staffing difficulties left less and less room for effective ride training. Many of the leads I spoke with realized this, and seemingly put up with it: “We can’t even get enough staffing for bathroom breaks and they expect us to train new guys on top of it.” This was a comment I often heard, and besides reflecting a general worker ethos of discontent at AstroWorld, it also suggested that many Rides leads and supervisors were well aware of the problems that existed in the park. Many found it to be strange that the system—moving employees from Human Resources to Division to Departmental to On-the-Job—never really seemed to click.

From the Training department perspective, most of our observations of the training process were at the Departmental level, though our audits allowed us a unique ability to roam the park, often at will, and to observe the On-the-Job training in action. Undoubtedly it must have been a strange sight for the patron: “What’s that paper he’s got in his hands?” The guest was referring to a trainee at a flat ride, just completing his training handout required of all ride attendants. As I describe in an incident in Chapter 4, some legal ramifications here enter the process of employee orientation. In a case of park negligence, say if a patron were hurt due to the actions of a Rides employee, AstroWorld
liability could be tied to the process of training itself. If On-the-Job were
glossed over in such a manner that a worker were ineffectively trained, the
company could be held liable.

A policy that had been in place for at least five years was the use of
"outlines" in the On-the-Job orientation. Basically, a trainee would carry an
outline with her detailing all of the requirements of working at a given ride,
listing all of the ride's components, etc. [See Table 3]. At the end of the outline,
usually the last four or five pages, a series of questions, such as "Does the
attendant understand the policy of Thumbs Up?" were laid out next to two
columns, one for the trainer's signature, the other for the trainee's. The two
parties would sign all of the blanks, indicating that the trainee had understood
the question or objective. After a period of at least three hours, less if the
employee was training on a second or subsequent ride, the trainee brought the
outline to the Training Center where she then took a ride examination,
consisting of a series of multiple-choice, true/false, and (sometimes) short
answer questions related to the ride's operation as well as rider policies. If the
attendant scored 90% or better, she then received certification for that ride.

Following ride certification an employee received a Ride Certification
Card, which detailed the rides at which the employee was qualified to work.
Subsequent rides were indicated by punches in the card. The training outlines
were filed in each employee's file, and were potential legal documents in the
case of any accident-related litigation. Since the outlines, if signed completely
by trainer and trainee, indicated "perfect" knowledge of a ride, they were
seemingly strong evidence in a legal situation. Rides tests, since they were
graded, potentially indicated something less than perfect and as a result, we
tore in half and discarded each employee ride test after its taking. Many of us
thought it to be a strange policy, yet it became clear what management's motivation was: a missed question on an examination could mean big money in a potential lawsuit against AstroWorld.

I close this particular set of reflections on employee training with one anecdote not unrelated to my overall representation of fear, surveillance and paranoia at the theme park. It was a hot summer day, probably in July of 1994, and we were using our old Training Center located next to the Front Gate area. A group of five to seven Rides attendants were in the process of taking their ride certification examinations. That day, due to spatial constraints, Security was also using the very same Training Center to conduct patron body searches. Keep in mind that this room is no more than twenty feet by twenty feet, so it is a relatively small place for training, not to mention the double duty it served on that day. Load after load of young patrons were brought into the center. Suspiciously, they were mainly African-American or Hispanic-American, and one does not have to take a course in Cultural Anthropology to figure out the motif with which these officers were playing. After one of the fellows is searched, an office discovers a 9 millimeter bullet in his pants. The other officers there nearly shit their pants, thinking that they were going to see some action on that day. There was a lot of commotion, shouting and commands of "Spread um!," "Let me see your hands!," and so forth. To my surprise, throughout this strange visual montage of cops, bullets, suspected gang color handkerchiefs and the shuffling and grading of Rides exams, none of the test takers seemed to mind nor budge during the height of the drama. "Doesn't surprise me!" was the response I heard after the commotion died down and the Security guards resumed their chewing of ice from emptied Coke cups. This worker seemed unfazed, and she received a perfect score on the examination to
The Training Staff

Near the end of June, 1994, the Training Coordinators were all given a schedule which detailed a probationary period—a series of stages that each member of the Training Department had to pass through in order to become a full-fledged coordinator. The stated purpose of the probationary training was to learn more about the Operations division, and this was to be achieved by requiring all of the coordinators to work in Rides, Grounds Quality, Front Gate, Season Pass, Guest Relations, Parking Lot, and the Operations office (handling the radio and doing paperwork). In addition, we were each required to facilitate a number of training classes in the subjects we were to eventually train Operations employees in: Safety, Operations (Rides/GQ) orientation and the Cues to Guest Services follow-up class.
The main duties of the Training Department included the facilitation of training classes, as I have described, the administration and grading of ride certification tests, the maintenance of a ride certification log and certification cards for each qualified ride operator, the conducting of park audits, as I shall describe later, the upkeep of the Operations Training Center, relocated from the Front Gate to the V.I.P. Lounge after the 1994 season, and the running of errands and doing of odd jobs during major park events, like for the seasonal visits of the OPCO auditing crew.

In 1994 the department consisted of Jeff, a former Houston mounted police officer who required the use of a wheelchair, Jennifer, a college student and former Rides lead, Stacey, a college student experienced in management and organizational issues, Cindy, one of my principal informants and now a Sociology major at Texas A&M University, and myself. Although all of our training members were assigned relatively equal tasks, like auditing and administering tests, specific members were given duties under the guidance of Emily, an Operations Full-Time Supervisor and the head of Operations training. She has now left the park for a career as a legal assistant at a major Houston investment firm.

Cindy handled the scheduling of Cues to Guest Services classes, entering information on ride certification into a database, and replenishing tests and outlines in the Training Center. Stacey was charged with filing departmental forms, tests and outlines, as well as conducting audits for Area 2 of the park. Jennifer was the assigned "safety coordinator," and she checked all of the ride and GQ areas in the park to make sure that all safety information was posted and current, and that crew members understood safety procedures for their work area. Jeff was the auditor for Area 3 of AstroWorld, as well as the
coordinator who checked all employees for dress code violations at Security Post 2 in the morning of each day.

One of the difficulties that arose in the 1994 season was our department’s inability to manage departmental responsibilities as they related to or were compromised by the personalities of our coordinators. Differences in teaching philosophies related to Rides training, and divergent styles of doing audits created noticeable frictions in the department by mid-season. Emily wanted to give our department its autonomy and she told us that we should solve any personality conflicts or disagreements over procedure as a department. We scheduled meetings both in and out of the park, in the Training Center and in local restaurants, to attempt to break the departmental crisis we were facing.

It became obvious that like any other company office, our department suffered from both the strains imposed the nature of the industry—the environment of the theme park—and the personality differences of coordinators; too, we faced difficulties from other departments. Many of the Rides and Grounds Quality managers saw our work, the audits in particular, as a form of meddling, one once personally telling me how he felt in this regard:

You guys come to our rides looking for things to go wrong. My team works real hard and you guys really don’t see any of that. You’re just obsessed with all of the bad stuff that goes on.

1995’s season saw the leavings of Jennifer and Stacey—Stacey was returning to school, while Jennifer quit after years of frustration in the company. Cindy, Jeff and I continued to work in Training. In addition we acquired three new coordinators that season: Randy, a student and part-time meat processor (butcher), Joseph, a young, rather inexperienced guy who left near the end of
the season to move to South Africa with his family, and Robert, an energetic and friendly computer science major from Oklahoma.

Though tensions in our department were not as great as they were in the previous season, it was still the majority opinion of the coordinators that the difficulties we faced in trying to gain respect and legitimation for our work were still omnipresent. Compromised communication between our department and upper management and the continued lack of respect given us by other departments like Rides and Grounds Quality were attributable causes to our renewed frustrations. I would now like to focus on one of the mainstays of our department, auditing.
In the beginning of my period of work at AstroWorld in 1994, I was first taught how to audit by Jennifer. Essentially this consisted of following her around the park, both of us with pen and paper in hand, and through hands-on observation I learned what constituted an audit. Audits were written up on ride audit forms and eventually they were shown to Rides leads, area supervisors and Operations management [See Table 4]. The categories listed on the form changed from year to year, but the nature of the audit task and its goal was fairly static.64

Audits were of two types: plain clothes, in which the Training Coordinator would attempt to blend in a park area as a patron, and the unmarked audit form, which was simply known as an “audit,” done in one’s park uniform. The training staff seemed to enjoy the plain clothes audits more, as the work connoted something like an investigation in which an auditor would discover a Rides or Grounds Quality member doing something wrong. We were a very independent department, and we were usually able to schedule our own audits, determine if they would be plain clothes or not, and would decide as a department which areas of the park we would audit. Emily gave us great autonomy in this respect and she seemed satisfied so long as all areas of the park were covered.

The style of conducting and writing audits varied between the training staff. Jennifer generally conducted herself as a bureaucrat, approaching ride crews after an audit, whether in uniform or in plain clothes, telling them how to improve on their loading techniques or in their scanning of the ride area during its cycle of operation. Jennifer had always wanted to be a Rides Area
Supervisor and her never having been promoted to that position led her to adopt a "take no prisoners" attitude to her audits. She was very competent in her knowledge of the park's rides, having been a driver at nearly all of the rides, yet the crews did not seem to respect Jennifer's expertise in ride operations. Most crews viewed her suggestions and comments, which were made as the ride team members were actively working with patrons on the rides, as annoying, intrusive and "bitchy."

Stacey, who joined the Training Department after Jennifer, Jeff, me, and Cindy, in that order, had experience in organizational studies and definitely played the part of a task person, one who was interested in learning park policies and effectively making sure of employee compliance out in the park. This would, I suppose, be the desirable mold of a model AstroWorld Training Coordinator, yet like Jennifer, many in the park became annoyed with Stacey's manner of conducting audits. She was prone to verbally quizzing employees on park information and rider policies while doing audits, and hers were generally of the uniformed variety. She also had a technique, which I found to be effective, that involved her asking ride workers to tell her everything about a given ride; it was essentially the asking of each employee of a given ride to train her on that ride. From a functionalist standpoint this certainly would test crews of their knowledge of ride operations. Strangely Stacey's audits would create a storm of controversy for the Training Department by about the mid-summer of the 1994 season. Though it was disputed by Stacey in a meeting of the coordinators and Emily, a few ride members suggested that Stacey had taken over the ride team positions, loading, unloading, even the driving of the ride, during her audits. This would of course be a violation of our own department's policy governing ride operations: only a certified ride employee may work at a
given ride, and certification was possible only through on-the-job training and the passing of the appropriate ride tests administered by our department. Another story was that Stacey had once shutdown a ride for an unspecified reason, again to be denied by her in a department meaning. These stories, like a myriad of others, would become part of the urban myth legacy of AstroWorld. They were never verified.

Jeff, being that he used a wheelchair, was responsible for doing uniform audits. Many of the ride loading and unloading platforms were inaccessible to him, so he audited open-view rides like the Tidal Wave, and many other rides like flat rides where there was a small Q-house. Jeff’s written audits were less detailed than many of the other coordinator’s, yet he seemed to stress positive comments on his forms. As well, he praised crews when they were seen to be doing a good job in his eyes. Some of the training staff believed that Jeff was leaving off some details in the audits, that they were too superficial, and that specific ride worker policies were not being assessed, such as how effectively workers were checking lap bars on various rides. Overall, his work was viewed as being very positive for our department. He kept our negativities in check, if that were possible at AstroWorld.

Cindy and I had similar philosophies to auditing. I think that Cindy approached the audits from the perspective of her having been a former ride captain at Batman the Escape, as well as having worked in most of the park’s ride locations. Cindy stressed the overall nature of the team’s performance: Were the patrons greeted in a happy manner? Were lap bars checked? Did the crew scan the ride area? I had only worked at a few of the park’s rides, and I never did become a driver in my two seasons at AstroWorld, so my perspective was less informed than Cindy’s. I felt that I did bring an important perspective
to the doing of audits, and that is what I would call the "patron's view" or the " patron's perspective." I guess I had always been critical of persons in the service industry who were genuinely unfriendly to me, so I took a bit of practical knowledge and a bigger bit of cynicism with me on my audit trips. Like Cindy, I enjoyed doing plain clothes audits a bit more than uniforms.

Many of the coordinators found that as more follow-up training classes were given throughout the season, uniform audits became ineffective: "They know we're coming! It's not like they can't see our blue and whites [uniforms] from a mile away!," Jeff once told me. Plain clothes audits were very covert, and maybe our liking of them indicated that the park had hired a sneaky group of coordinators prone to surveilling. I was no James Bond, though I can't speak for Cindy or the other coordinators. Anyway, much like Cindy's approach, I was primarily concerned with the performance of the team on three fronts: safety, job operations, and guest interaction. The image of the ride team was important to me, and in having a tenth look back at my own audit forms I found that I gave the highest scores to ride teams whose members checked lap bars, scanned their work area, maintained a clean ride area, and were friendly to patrons. Cleanliness was a major concern of mine as I constantly thought back to my experiences with public amusements as a youth: "The floors in this theater are filthy!" "This park's full of garbage." If I had to be reflexive I would though say that I was as much a bureaucrat in the doing of audits as Jennifer and Stacey.

Jeff once said in a Training Department meeting that we needed to stress more positive things to the crews as opposed to constantly railing at their inadequacies. I agreed with him partially, and for me this issue motivated a deeper conundrum related to employee life in general. As one critical of
capitalism and its manifestations, I could not help but empathize with the crew at Thunder River who worked in 90° plus days for most of the summer under the dreadful sun. Minimum wage was never fair for such a task. On the other hand these were workers who did have a summer job that had some potential rewards and benefits. The difficulty in doing audits was Jeff’s issue: how much can you penalize a hot, tired and unpaid worker on the audit? Would you expect a team member at Thunder River to do any differently? We were not out there working on the ride; we could move about the park freely and decide when we wanted to come back to the air-conditioned Training Center. Park management, of course, varied little in their constant commands to the training department to find workers who were guilty of not following park rules and ride area policies. They made considerably more demands, though they were not likely to be found under the sun at Thunder River either. AstroWorld, unknowingly, may have made many of us closet Marxists.

In the 1995 season our auditing was expanded to include a more holistic scanning of park operations. We still did do Rides and Grounds Quality area audits, using a somewhat modified audit form, but Operations management wanted us to focus more on Guest First Standards, part of the corporate vision for the 1995 season. We did what were called “Quick Strikes”—these were quick audits that assessed each of the new standards. Using “Presentation,” for example, the audit forms checked to see if “10/5” was practiced, if trash was picked up, if dress code was adhered to, and so forth [See Table 6]. The idea behind Quick Strikes was that the Training Department could do audits anywhere in the park at any given notice. Many in our department, Cindy, Jeff, Randy, Robert, Joseph, felt that the audits were too superficial, that they really did not measure anything of substance. I felt that they heralded more suspicion
and lack of trust between management and the working-class population of the park. What these audits signaled was an expansion of park surveillance into deeper realms of everyday life. No longer was the ride area the only legitimate place for conducting audits—now even the breakroom might be the subject of an audit. Constant surveillance was the name of the game throughout the 1995 season. 68

Corporate Biography 2: Charlene Dowes, A Voice from Disney

Charlene Dowes
Director of Training and Development,
Six Flags Theme Parks
400 Interspace Parkway
Building C-Third Floor
Parsippany NJ 07054

Dear Charlene,

I wanted to get back to you and thank you again for the interesting talk we had at breakfast some time ago. I wasn’t much for those eggs, though. I hope that we will continue to talk about how some of your management interests might be merged with the concerns I spoke to you about—taking a training program and merging it with performative and theatrical concerns. 69 As I think I mentioned to you before, I am interested in thinking about new metaphors of training which move beyond purely scientistic and mechanistic tropes which I think only inevitably trivialize the persons they are supposed to inspire. This project would begin with the allegorical issues of the body, sites of writing and issues of communication. I’ve been talking with a number of people about seriously investing energy in developing such new programs,
perhaps along the lines of Boal’s techniques with the Theater of the Oppressed, with which you are perhaps familiar. Given your interests, and the interesting ways you have negotiated and re-envisioned training moving from Disney to Six Flags, I think that we could truly develop an engaging dialogue on the matter.

The last thing I wanted to ask concerns my trip to Disney in May. A friend and I will be going to Disney in Orlando on May 2nd through May 5th. I remember you mentioning the possibility of getting some comp. tickets from a friend at Disney. How would I go about requesting these tickets? Also, I wondered if I could get in touch with your friend while I’m there, perhaps to get some perspectives on Disney? If you could possibly get back to me before my trip, that would be great.

I hope things are going well up there! Things are getting pretty busy here at AstroWorld.

Sincerely,

Scott A. Lukas

...four years later and this letter is never answered...Who knows what happened to most of these people?
Corporate Training

Training is a little bit of art, a bit of science and a bit of magic (Pike 1997a).

In 1994 I attended a training class based on "creative training techniques," a seminar intended to merge creativity and leadership. Like OPCO, though less experiential, Creative Training was viewed as a sound investment by management; it was seen as a way of better teaching leaders to be leaders. That day the attendees were primarily managers, representative of a variety of the park's departments. The facilitator, Cheryl, was the Assistant-Manager of Human Resources. She and a number of the Human Resources management had formerly taken part in the Creative Training Techniques Seminar in Florida. The specific intent of the class conducted at AstroWorld was to introduce other department trainers to what the conference attendees considered "stimulating" training techniques. At this particular class Cheryl introduced us to the techniques of Robert W. Pike, a CSP, a Certified Speaking Professional and the author of The Creative Techniques Training Handbook, a 100,000 copy seller, and a man considered to be a "trainer's trainer" (Pike 1997b).

Pike's training platform introduced concepts like "WII-FM," an acrostic for "What's In It for Me?" and "MMFI-AM," meaning similarly, "Make Me Feel Important About Myself" (Pike 1992:1). The distillation of Pike's Creative Training seminar followed a series of strategies for creating better visuals: "Choose your words carefully...use, but don't overuse color" (ibid:2). From there we were taught about fonts and why we should use various forms of bullets on our charts instead of numbers for nonsequential items (ibid:3). Later we would learn Pike's technique on "How to Motivate Adults," which required
our group to fill-in blanks with the answers to Pike’s (or in this case Cheryl’s) assertions:

1. Create a ______ need ______.

9. See the value of __________ internal motives__________.


The irony of this particular phase of the training was that all of the participants became obsessed with filling-in-the-blanks, to the detriment of the context apparently intended by Pike’s techniques. Someone motions with a pencil to another trainee, “What was number 11?” “Choice,” the other replies.

Somewhat later we are reintroduced to more ways of livening up our training handouts and I hear someone mutter, “Who gives a fuck!?” This seemed to be a sentiment of many of the participants, but we all knew that we had to sit through such classes, at least for show alone.

In 1995 the first nationwide Six Flags Academy of Excellence “Guest First Leadership Summit” was attended by some of the same persons who took part in the Creative Training Techniques Seminar, as well as by other managers from other departments and divisions, including Operations. One of the goals of this particular “in-house” seminar was to “develop coaching skills that will enable you to deliver results with your team.” As was the case with the Pike seminar, a number of trainers took part in a watered-down version of the Academy of Excellence seminar attended by the facilitators. Unlike the visually-based Creative Techniques seminar, the Academy of Excellence training began with a specific capitalist orientation: we must all strive to work for our customer;
“Excellent Service Organizations Stand in Their Customers’ Shoes!!!” (Academy of Excellence 1995:4). A series of quotations from the CEOs of Federal Express, AT&T, and Walt Disney himself (!), led into a discussion of what tools and procedures were needed to focus on service-oriented training, a mission that is summarized in the idea of “Building an Extraordinary Service Culture” (Academy of Excellence 1995:6).

In a partner format, participants then paired off and interviewed the other, culminating in a statement of “one thing you need to know about me...” based on what Looney Tunes character one picked out of a bag (Academy of Excellence 1995:7). Next, in what was to be the most critical and reflexive aspect of the day’s seminar, was an exercise designed to rate the performance of Six Flags employees from the “Guest’s shoes.” Most in the room rated AstroWorld, somewhat favorably, as a 6 or 7 on a 10 being “outstanding service” scale (ibid:8). Like a good deal of contemporary corporate training, the seminar stressed creativity and employee and company flexibility (cf. Lave and Wenger 1991): “in overcoming challenges, Our Blocks Are Our Answers,” read one of the Academy of Excellence’s diagrams (Academy of Excellence 1995:13). A main moral interwoven in this session was that a general responsiveness to creativity and flexibility would efficiently allow the company to maintain the patronage of its guests, as well as produce a positive image in their minds. In fact, one of the final messages from the seminar would seem to support this assertion: “The number one objective of any company should be to attract and keep customers” (ibid:8).

This seminar ends with more charts and graphs, and I begin to feel sick to my stomach, overloaded with sensory data and way too many bread rolls and butter. The real tragedy of these corporate programs was that they never
lived up to the mission they purported to be undertaking. After all, one could wish for and legitimately implement training and pedagogy that would improve the levels of communication between workers, departments and the public, but using what "skills" these trainers imparted as a result of their trips across the country, I was not confident in the viability of a single one of these "Train the Trainer" programs. The key to such seminars may be summarized in the following points of my own meta-seminar:

USE:
- Extraneous information
- Unsupported information
- Diagrams and charts
- Silly words, acrostics, phrases
- Countless lists

MAKE SURE THAT YOU INVOLVE:
- Detachment from the real world
- Passive activities
- Food

AND BY ALL MEANS:
- Design your seminars for one purpose—to keep the company running
- And remember that the bottom line is $$$MONEY$$$
OPCO: When All Else Fails, Call in the Cavalry

Good leaders take a little less than their share of the credit, and a little more than their share of the blame (Academy of Excellence 1995:2).

It was a typical humid, muggy, uneventful Houston morning in 1994 when I was introduced to Dr. Jack and his OPCO team. Sherry, the Operations manager, had suggested that I meet Jack and his team: “You will find them very interesting given your background in Anthropology. They do audits for the park, and I think you will learn a lot by walking around with them, observing what they do and so forth.” “Sounds great,” I said in my eagerness to see how a professional training and auditing team went about its business. It turned out that OPCO had a long association with the park, specifically with WaterWorld and its former manager and then AstroWorld Vice-President Bill Renold. Renold had known Dr. Jack for many years as Jack had conducted group training exercises with WaterWorld lifeguards. The seminars, like the ones I would soon become accustomed to at AstroWorld, stressed team work and survival-mentality games. One in particular was legendary at WaterWorld: it involved each lifeguard carrying Jack on her/his back, which was somewhat of a feat since Dr. Jack was a somewhat rotund man.

At AstroWorld OPCO was assigned similar tasks. Renold wanted the team to do two things: develop leadership skills in the park’s Rides and Grounds Quality teams (this meant working primarily with leads and managers) and conduct independent audits to monitor the performance of the park operations staff. As I believe that OPCO’s presence was a significant measure of park management operations and training philosophy, as well as a harbinger of temporary vitalism, I will describe the leadership seminar conducted by OPCO based on my observations of it on two occasions—once in
1994 and a second time in 1995. The independent audits will also be described in terms of their imbrication in the leadership program itself.

OPCO had a prestigious reputation in the park. Much of it, I would later assess after finding some degree of personal disdain for the team, was mythological and heavily constructed by Renold and other members of park management. OPCO's leader, Dr. Jack, was a Houston college professor of engineering, and his team resembled a *Battlestar Galactica* of the training world—a rag-tag group of engineers, secondary school teachers, company men and physics professors. They were also an eclectic group on a first glance.

Jack, as I have hinted at, was a rotund, Grizzly Adams type of man who brandished a pipe during his seminars and park audits. He relied on everyday metaphors and layperson philosophy. His brother, Don, was also rotund and somewhat more personal, less moody than his sibling. Bert was a high school teacher who was somewhat subdued and had markedly less facial hair than his counterparts. Sherman was a flamboyant, young physics professor who seemed to fit the bill of a nerdy professor. He was also marked by many of the seminar participants as being "homosexual." Molly, a woman present in the 1994 OPCO season, was very stoic, and I suspected that her lack of participation in OPCO events was a sign of Jack's problematic gender politics evident throughout my period of association with this group. Ed rounded out the group; he was an older, thin man who seemed to specialize in boring lectures and an extremely quiet, drier-than-hell style of oratory, completely lacking in rhetorical flair. The team changed somewhat in the 1995 season, but these major players, with the exception of Molly, remained intact throughout the second OPCO season at AstroWorld. I later learned that OPCO had conducted audits for NASA and other firms.75
YOU ARE THE COMPANY (cf. Leidner 1993:68), what was manifested as YOU ARE ASTROWORLD, a management ploy to get better performance out of its workers...this was the backbone of OPCO's work in the two seasons I observed Big Gun, their hallmark leadership program. AstroWorld's park philosophy in part reflected the Six Flags Corporation's desire to make a "deep connection" between its workers and the company. Considered by management as a subtle technique, it is in fact an insidious form of control having its roots in the industrialization of the United States and the spread of worker control techniques from the factory to the service lines of places like McDonalds since the Second World War (cf. Harvey 1989; Leidner 1993; Ritzer 1996).

The principle of modeling and coaching was something that was heavily stressed in the company (cf. Academy of Excellence 1995:63), and the goal of procuring manager or leader types was not so much built on instilling management principles in them, birthing the petite-managerial class, but instead on creating an amount of company loyalty in them sufficient enough to build a link between AstroWorld and the working-class population. It is, in effect, the construction of devotion: "the intent is to impart skills and knowledge, but partly to make deeper sorts of changes that will affect the workers both on and off the job" (Leidner 1993:38). The goal of Big Gun was to create "ownership" in the company on the part of the worker. As we shall see, company goals and high-minded training programs are not always as successful in practice as they are in imagination.

Big Gun begins on a Friday evening. The participants are invited leads, managers, and potential future leads from Operations (Grounds Quality, Rides), as well as other observers, such as Human Resources personnel and an occasional upper-level manager from a given department. For the 1994 seminar
I acted as a food-runner and odd-job person, helping out however I could with the three-day training. This allowed me an observer’s perspective in 1994. In 1995 I was a participant in the seminar, along with Cindy, Randy and Jeff. My descriptions of the Top Gun seminar are amalgamations of both the 1994 and the 1995 seminar, with more of an emphasis on the latter.

The assembled group gets together for a four-hour session on Friday evening. Dr. Jack, Don, Bert, Sherman, Ed and Molly roll into the Training Center a few minutes late. After some introductions the OPCO group divides the room of thirty-five participants into groups of seven or so. These “teams” will make-up operations groups who will, in the words of Dr. Jack, bond and learn to work together throughout the three-day training seminar. Jack gets the groups working by offering a lecture on “Leadership vs. Management.” Ron continues with a “Characteristics of a Good Leader” lecture. The participants are fairly energetic at this point, on the first day, and the lectures, which were not the most captivating seminars I had ever heard, seemed to orient the leaders and managers in a particular direction: “Management/Leadership Skill + Confidence + Ownership = Builds Pride,” this was a slogan which was repeated and repeated throughout the seminar. By emphasizing it early on, Jack and his group began to build on a theme—that of ownership—which would manifest itself in the goal of Big Gun, learning how to lead and how to develop morale and cohesion among a work team in the park through “ownership.”

The experiential component of Big Gun was stressed heavily during the three days. Dr. Jack suggested that by participating in these various exercises, a team could build trust among its members. Trust, he argued, was a key component to building pride in a company. Much like military games, fraternity bonding rituals, and corporate training retreats in the wild, Big Gun’s
mix of canned lectures and bodily activities set a tone of "team work" for the remaining days. The first of these techniques was the Blindfold Game. Outside the Training Center each of the teams was required to perform drill movements while blindfolded. By this point each had developed its own name and had been given colored bandannas (blindfolds) to identify each member with a team. Team members took turns being the leader, who was not blindfolded and attempted to get her/his team to move in various formations in the quickest and most efficient manner. Friday closed with this exercise which was a peak for the night's events: most of the team members I spoke with found the Blindfold Game to be fun. Following a discussion of how it felt to be blindfolded—and many of the participants were, to the delight of Dr. Jack, able to connect the trust issue of being blindfolded with the perceived need of an effective leader who can give competent directions to a "blind" team—Jack assigned each participant a piece of homework for Saturday: "You are to write down a list of the characteristics which define a good leader."

The next morning began with a brief discussion of the homework assignment. Most of the participants look noticeably tired as we began at seven or so. A few stragglers walk in fifteen to thirty minutes late; they are reprimanded by Jack, the drill sergeant of the day. Jack followed up with a variation on the blindfold exercise of the previous night: each team, accompanied by an OPCO member, went out to a ride—a flat ride like Looping Starship, Gunslinger, Wagon Wheel—and attempted to board the ride while blindfolded. Again, leaders were assigned and took turns trying to get her/his comrades safely into the rides. These exercises occurred well before the park opened, and for the casual observer the sight of blindfolded workers getting on rides seemed humorous. Later, teams abandoned the blindfolds and continued
to work at the rides using possible on-the-job scenarios with patrons. Jack and the other OPCO leaders assigned parts for each team member to play: you’ll be the disgruntled guest, you the angry child, you the ride attendant, etc. Then, persons took turns trying to resolve the ride scenarios.

Following a lunch, OPCO members took turns giving lectures on specific issues intended to complement the experiential exercises: motivation theory, communication theory, problem-solving. I look over as Cindy falls over in her chair; her Big Gun binder falls to the ground during Ed’s seminar on motivation theory. Ed was notorious for his ability to bore, and reading off a page of yellowed notes, it was unanimous insight that Ed was doing little to motivate the Big Gun group. Don continues with a discussion of how to be effective communicators and for some reason he breaks out into an exegesis of phrenology theory. Was I missing something? At this point I became frustrated at what I saw as a weak attempt to motivate vis-a-vis outdated theories and
hopeless psycho-babble. Even Bert, the educator among the group, had little of anything creative to offer. Sherman finalized the afternoon’s lectures with a presentation on “How to Make Behaviors Quantifiable.” Jack intended Sherman’s talk, as well as an activity scheduled for Sunday, as a way of introducing measurement, hence surveillance, into the mentalities of Big Gun participants. “As a leader you have to know how to measure something to correct it. Behaviors are measurable and we want to talk about how to do this,” he suggested. Further ride scenarios out in the park and some additional blindfold games with objects closed Saturday’s festivities in the Training Center.

Sunday begins with a review, and by this time I see many more tired faces in the crowd and I wonder myself if I can stay awake through another of Ed’s lectures on whatever: brains, numbers, silly Western movie metaphors. The teams disembark for another on-site set of ride scenario exercises. Safety rules are discussed near the lunch hour, and after another review and reinforcement of OPCO’s lecture theories, the teams are assigned the job of putting “measurement to the test.” Each is told to come up with criteria for measuring ride team performance, and after having discussed these as a group, they were to go out and “test” the standards in the park. By mid-afternoon each group had developed factors to grade four or five rides, and a final session is used to break down the categories. Dr. Jack commends certain groups for their development of quantifiable categories, while others are told to “keep working” on their audit skills. Jack makes a comment in the middle of a lunch period. “You guys can now have your chicken and watermelon!,” which sets off a bunch of us.

Graduation, as it is called, finalizes the Big Gun seminar. In what is the culmination of experiential activities, two parallel lines of persons are created
over which a person, flat on her back, is carried from the front to the back of the line. Jack again intends to suggest that trust in the persons who move you along the line without dropping you is the kind of motive the Big Gun participants must have in their conceptualization of work out in the park. A rite of passage in the mind of Jack—the moving through the line would mark a “rebirth” of pride and leadership in the attendees. Many of us were offended by the activity, especially given the fact that much levity, “She’s a big one!,” occurred when a heavier person was assigned to move atop the line. Like most of what I observed at Big Gun, I concluded that the graduation was nothing more than a superficial attempt to foster group cohesion and devotion in the park. It was a great seminar for management—workers slavishly bought all of the B.S., OPCO got a fat paycheck, and AstroWorld could hope and pray for a remainder of a Summer season that would be productive and without major incident. Oops!

An OPCO Audit

In 1994 my first meeting with OPCO, specifically Dr. Jack, occurred on the idea of Sherry, the Manager of Operations. I was seated with a group of Rides supervisors, as well as Emily and Rich Brader, a Front Gate manager. Sherry was entering into a tirade about some of the “kids” in the park, expressing disdain about the lack of values that many of them had: “Some of the families they come from.” I suppose that early in my career at the park I wouldn’t make much of these comments, perhaps they reflected a way for management types to vent their anger about an industry that relies on temporary, seasonal, sometimes unreliable workers. It would become much clearer later, though, that such
comments were the latent symbols of the reactionary stories and performed attitudes common to theme park culture. Dr. Jack was such a case in point, and his doctorate in engineering aside, he was representative of a social engineering consciousness endemic to such a workplace in constant flux. It was classic labeling theory in practice, I would soon come to understand, and the "them" or "us" in theme park culture were near mirrors of the dichotomies one sees in society, the world outside of theme parks.

Sherry suggested that I participate in one of Dr. Jack's personal audits on a Saturday morning in 1994. I believe that I had met the engineer once before but that morning was our first real extended interaction. He was impressed with my schooling and asked me many questions about my background in Anthropology. As I do so many times, I presented a watered-down version of my research plans, then concerning Berlin. The audits themselves, which I have only hinted at in my description of OPCO's Big Gun program, were conducted by the team over a number of park visits, three or so, with one of the audits sometimes coinciding with the Big Gun training [See Table 6]. Jack, Ron, Bert and the others would venture out into the park, each assigned to different rides. They carried with them their own OPCO audit forms which differed somewhat from the AstroWorld Training Department ride audit forms. Following the audits much emphasis was placed on debriefing, generally occurring as the Operations supervisors and leads went over the audit comments with the appropriate Rides teams. I learned later that much animosity arose as a result of these debriefing sessions.

Prior to the visit of the OPCO auditors, some Area supervisors would have their crews working overtime, scraping gum and cleaning away graffiti from their ride Q-houses. Afterwards, to some disappointment, many of the
hard-working crews discovered that their audit scores were low, leading some to suspect that the NASA-level audit team was not what it was made out to be. Other Rides workers with whom I spoke belittled OPCO’s lack of expertise about the rides and the systems governing the operation of them:

I mean these guys come to my ride [XLR-8] and write down, “Those little blue switches are dirty.” Those aren’t “little blue switches!” Hello, they’re called “proximity switches,” and I’m sure those guys have no idea what they’re there for. And who gives a fuck about them being dirty?! [John, a Rides lead].

Dr. Jack once explained that his team didn’t want to know anything about the specifics of the rides: “We come as outsiders and that is specifically how we are auditing the rides.” Talk about a $30,000 excuse!

At the end of the day the OPCO auditors would reconvene at the Training Center. Sherman was the computer whiz and he would compile all of the numerical data resulting from the audits as well as the written comments accompanying each of the audits. Sometimes Dr. Jack would send a few members of the team back out to the rides, as he said that the “standard deviation was too low.” “Sounds to me like they’re trying to make the data fit,” Karl Jeffes, a Rides supervisor, once confided with me. I, too, was suspicious of the data-crunching of OPCO, and I had little confidence in the audits themselves. The most telling memory I have of Dr. Jack and his group goes back to my initial story—a morning audit one Saturday in 1994.

Jack and I were on our way to the Adventure Rivers of Texas. With notebook in hand he was to show me how he conducted his surveys. For the most part he wrote comments and occasionally talked to some of the Rides persons. At Adventure Rivers, though, we mainly watched from afar as the
station was a significant climb up many flights of stairs. Watching the unloading teams, Jack began to offer his perspective on society and theme park culture. “Now you see there?,” Jack motions to a Hispanic American woman working at the unloading dock of Adventure Rivers. I look over and glance back at the professor. “They’re sneaky.” “Excuse me?,” I respond. “The Mexicans [sic]...they’re sneaky. But now the blacks, them I understand...not the Mexicans though.” I was a bit more than startled by the doctor’s comments. “Where the fuck is this guy coming from?,” I was thinking to myself. Some time passed and we eventually wandered away from Adventure Rivers with the doctor’s “audit” complete. As we walked through the Coney Island section of the park and back to the Training Center for a Coke, I remember Jack following-up on his social observations. “You should be interested in this, being that you’re an anthropologist and all.” I was quiet again, wanting to say what I really desired to say in response to a memorable incident which is less an anthropological lesson than a crash course on the views from afar...and all of this from a person and a group whose participation in our company’s affairs was nothing more than a chimera! Like life, hope unfulfilled.
From Secrecy to Surveillance

Six Flags AstroWorld/WaterWorld has a Public Relations Department which has personnel trained to interact with members of the media. You may not make comments to media personnel. Refer them to the Public Relations Department (AstroWorld 1994:13).

*Five Stabbed at Paramount’s Kings Dominion:* "We came here feeling relaxed," said Dawn Webb, who brought her two children down from Bowie, Maryland, for the afternoon. "Next time, we’ll look over our shoulder’s a little bit" (Anon. 1995).

Now, above, again.

The employee is not to be trusted.

Like in the movie *Casino,* where watching the other becomes an art,79 AstroWorld was a place of endless gazes and listless ears. The park is dependent on the patron, though s/he is not to be trusted; likewise, the employee is expendable and is therefore a potential security risk or antagonist in waiting; she is also the subject of suspicion and surveilling. It is the THREAT that informs: in the Host and Hostess handbook one finds a list of thirty-five actions that are violations of company Rules of Conduct, from the playing of skill games, illegal gambling on park property, to eating or drinking in costume, to possession of weapons or explosives, to insubordination, tardiness or leaving one’s assigned position while on duty, to use of the Company name or logo without prior authorization, to leaving park property while on break, to wearing or possessing a cellular phone or beeper, to "any attitude or action that is not in keeping with the primary duties of a Six Flags Host/Hostess" (AstroWorld 1994:42).80 As trainers we were told by management that "Standards are CAUGHT NOT TAUGHT!" (Academy of Excellence 1995:2).
Seemingly, trust is supplanted by suspicion and the only sense of camaraderie that exists is of the sort that is mandated: "You must work together as a team, for the sake of our Guests." Themeing acted as its own check in many situations, and park workers, by buying into the system and "acting the part" relative to their own themeing in a park land, are subjects of a gaze that when most effective is not even present. There are numerous examples of panopticon-based surveillance in the theme park, but what is more common and overlooked in the service and entertainment industry is the way in which the industry itself is its own form of watching.\textsuperscript{81} Be it from new park efforts to standardize and make the behaviors of workers and patrons "more measurable,"\textsuperscript{82} to controversies over the searching of workers and guests, to the consequences of a negative patron complaint at Guest Relations, the overall effect of everyday "surveillance" is to perpetuate the culture of the theme park. I now set out to describe a number of incidents that illustrate my initial point in this chapter, namely the ways in which fear, loathing and suspicion are manifested in the everyday activities of patrons and workers at AstroWorld.

There was a rumor which passed through AstroWorld concerning the park's highest ride and vertical point of reference—the Astroneedle. Hovering some two hundred and seventy feet above the ground, the ride was popular with families and persons who liked to relax and take in the park slowly rather than partake in the major thrill rides. Rotating on its 360 degree axis, the Astroneedle offers the perfect view of a park in microscopic symmetry below. A story suggested that in the park's early years before corporate ownership, its boss, Roy Hofheinz, had installed spy cameras atop the Astroneedle. It was also said that he could watch and zoom in on park locations from a command post of monitors located in his comfortable house near the front gate. Overhead
"Scanning is the key to being a Rides operator"—this is what we taught our employees. If you were working a flat ride or a coaster you had to be prepared for the stray child who might run into the ride area unexpectedly. Hit the ride stop button. You have to learn how to watch, and report. As surveillance got increasingly contagious, Operations installed a "hush hot-line" which offered a reward for any employee who turned in another worker for committing larceny.

In a typical day of surveillance the morning began with a check of all locations. All the ride operators complete their inspection checks; all show personnel check their staging areas; all games, concessions and retail locations prepare for opening. Grounds Quality persons survey the park for trash while Rides supervisors communicate by phone and foot to speed up the opening of the rides. At the front gate, Security officers patrol the roped-off front mall area which is to be opened at 10:00 a.m. Occasionally, an officer might ask a "suspicious character" to open his or her bag or purse; once a child was accosted by an officer for carrying a knife which actually turned out to be a camera.

As the day unfolds, disaster management begins to click: we're running out of ice here at the Coke stand, or pull one of your crew members from the Astroneedle to the Warp 2000 so we can get the RPG (Rides Per Guest) up a bit. As things move along, it was a common sight to see an Operations manager or assistant manager atop the now-defunct Sky Screamer, a vertical drop ride which is also the second highest location in the park. From this point of view many attendants had been fired for having been observed committing a VOCP
(Violation of Company Policy) below. Even I remember looking up from time to
time to see if I was the object of a gaze.

At midday there are two things one has to know as an Operations
supervisor: how to watch your employees and how to keep an eye on the
patrons. Like the theory of the panopticon, one might intuit the THEME PARK
as a site of universal policing, though the policing here is not that orderly. The
THEME PARK hums and spews out from its gears: each person a distortion of
the other. Catch ten "perps" a day amongst the crowd; throw them out after
scaring them with a pot-bellied rent-a-cop. Fire three employees a day for
VOCP; hire six more the next.

As the day passes on the crowd became more menacing. Operations did
not mind the circular layout of the park. Anyone who knows the histories of
theme park geography understands the significance of shape and flow. Their
thoughts were more practical: search and destroy. Security could only do so
much alone. Essentially park security served as both guide and symbolic
enforcer, mainly with kids and "punks." On weekends local police officers were
brought in (with guns) to add a more deliberate presence—a policy that led to
AstroWorld management initially banning the carrying of guns by off-duty
officers in the park; a policy that was later revoked (cf. Bardwell 1996; Teachey
1996; Teachey & Turner 1996). Especially on weekends, fights would often
break out in one of the Q-houses or elsewhere in the park.

The most elite security force was invisible: known as "Internal" they
were composed of persons who had already worked in Security or had secretly
transferred from another department. Once I saw a former Rides operator at a
meeting for rehire employees. He mentioned that he was now in Security to
which I replied somewhat loudly in the company of other miscellaneous employees, “Good luck with your new job.” Later in the day he pulled me aside and said, “Hey, don’t tell anyone I’m in Security or I’ll get fired. I’m in Internal!” As Internal you had no identity in the park. You instead became the ultimate flâneur strolling from shop to shop in “plain clothes” or working invisibly in a department for any number of dark reasons.

“We can’t catch all of them, maybe ten percent!,” Internal would complain. The idea of the THEME PARK suggests a design of easy and open access—patrons came to move freely and quickly—yet the open-design (two to four unblocked and unmonitored openings in a given retail shop) presented inescapable problems. The Security identification card and a radio was the Internal stock and trade. When they apprehended a wrong-doer, he or she was taken to “Loss Recovery” where merchandise was “recovered” and the perpetrator was processed. Usually, the person was a juvenile so he or she was yelled at by a security officer and then released. Older offenders might be prosecuted, but usually a warning never to return to the park was given. If ever again seen on park property, he or she supposedly could be arrested on sight.

Many employees knew about Internal’s activities as Loss Recovery was located directly adjacent to the employee training facility. Most though were not aware of Internal’s nuanced covert actions. Once a team of two Internals, known so often by their array of AC/DC shirts and baggy shorts, walked by a group of Rides supervisors wearing costumes normally worn by Front Gate auditors. One of the supervisors laughed and said, “I guess someone is dipping their hands in the Front Gate tills!” It turns out that one of the major areas of employee larceny was ticket till theft.
The park was plagued with all sorts of "criminal" employee activities. As "staffing sucks!"—a war-cry of many employees and supervisors—management hired temporary workers to staff some areas of the park. This in turn led to increased theft and difficulties between patrons and temporary employees. More frustrating to some were the "underground" activities occurring among employees throughout the park. Once a roller coaster operator devised a scheme to have his lead operate his ride while he stole the other's park I.D. With this piece of plastic he was able to pick up the lead's check and attempted to cash it. Upon being caught the employee offered a bargain: he said he would provide names and details on an underground drug ring in the park. It was known that such economies existed, and Internal tried in vain to eradicate them. Some employees actually joked about the number of ex-cons working on rides and at other park attractions. One individual was once carted away by the police after it was learned that he had eight arrest warrants. He had been operating the Bamboo Shoot. As he was being taken away he told a Training Coordinator, Jeff, that he was trying to clean up his life. Jeff looked at another worker and made a motion with his finger near his head indicating that the flume operator had the problem of "nobody home." He was one of the ones who had gotten caught.
Safety

Safety is a primary form of social control and creator of suspicion in the park. Management depends on it: each worker was required to pass a series of departmental and state-regulated safety examinations. Throughout one’s tenure as a ride operator, management would monitor the level of operational safety at each work location. As a trainer I would stress this to new employees:

Management will periodically visit your work location to make certain that all crew members are following both operational and safety procedures. We want to emphasize that management is not out to get anyone. If a problem exists at your work location, we will fix it and inform you on how to do your job safely and correctly so that a potential accident or a near-miss doesn’t become a serious accident. And remember, even if you are safe, conscientious and are doing things correctly, if something looks unsafe, it is unsafe. For our guests, perception is reality.

It was inside knowledge that safety was to be stressed heavily in training, but in reality budgeting and personnel problems often dictated otherwise. Fear works at appearance.

“Being safe” meant that you were willing to “be watched.” The numerous policies implemented and altered seasonally did little in terms of curbing the small to moderate number of park accidents; instead, they reinforced the EYE and increased the chasm of suspicion between management and employees. Management was aware of the problems related to safety and its enforcement, yet in their view the block system had less to do with the movement of machines or the operations of employees. For them safety stretched to the public.

“Don’t ever let the guest think that you’re not in control.” The Viper roller coaster seemed to be always “going down.” One incident left the train
stuck at the top of the lift. After being unable to send the train through, Operations management decided to unload patrons on the lift. Management hated the prospect of unloading any ride outside of the station as the task increased the likelihood of further accidents and potential legal liability. The Viper situation forced the individual unloading of some twenty patrons down the lift stairs: each person had to be flanked in front and in back by an Operations supervisor. It was an almost sublime sight: the blue and white uniformed supervisors and motley patrons moving slowly down the stairs. Some patrons actually enjoyed the walk as it proved to be more interesting than the dull ride—a one-looper with few jerks and turns. The ultimate ride might be that which defeats the anticipation of the mundane: get up the lift and stop just before you plunge; then walk down slowly and go away. A conceptual roller coaster is a machine that requires each patron to never make it over the first drop.

Before the unloading could take place, Operations had decided to temporarily stop operation of the Astroway—the overhead gondola ride. It was suggested by some managers that it was bad publicity to have other patrons witness the unloading of a ride which had malfunctioned. Ironically, as the patrons of the Astroway were turned away, they found it attractive to walk to the nearby Viper to watch the rescue operation from the ground. Would it not have been more ideal for management to have left the Astroway running, thus allowing all patrons to see the effectiveness of the rescue mission?

The “accident” at the Viper was uncommon, yet minor incidents were common at this and other rides in the park. As an employee one learned to accept things as they happened. Working in a theme park is akin to a readiness to recognize the disaster when it happens and to bathe in it as it happens, but
did a disaster signify a breakdown in management efforts, team work skills, mechanical corrosion, patron negligence? Management had many statistical analyses on the percentages of each of these factors. As they expressed their thoughts in managerial meetings, they suggested that with competent worker skills, proper mechanical maintenance, and appropriate park leadership, most accidents could be avoided, save those attributed to patron negligence.

The Videos

Toward the end of my stay in the park, management had given me the dubious honor of updating the park audits for the end of the century. They had asked me to scrap paper audits so that I might concentrate on video portrayals of employee activities. The Operations Assistant-Manager, Kevin, had on occasion used video to “trap” employees outside of various park locations. Basically he would place a cup or piece of trash somewhere and then, out of view, he would catch the employee-offender “in the act.”83 I was charged with a similar operation, though I was told to get a picture of the park during an entire working day. In plain clothes I would traverse the park, looking, watching and waiting. Other members of the Operations department, including my supervisor, would participate in the video audits with me. Are they checking that kid for height? Are they grouping riders correctly? Do they make an effort to pick up trash inside the trains? Do they smile at patrons? In the past the paper audits had provided one picture of employee performance, yet management offered that they had no way to “prove” who had under-performed or committed a VOCP. The videos would allow such precise assessment, and it turned out that the camera I was operating had a twenty-four
As the season passed from good staffing to bad at "burnout time" (typically the middle of July), the video documents became more central to Operations philosophy. Originally the undercover assignment was designed to judge only the work of Operations personnel (Rides operators, Grounds Quality workers and Front Gate persons), but as the summer heat beat on, many in the Operations team grew upset with a perceived lack of cooperation between them and other departments. "Get anyone you can," one of my supervisors informed me. It was a tactical mission against everyone in the park. Even patrons learned to be photogenic as once my inadvertent shooting captured three youths firing M-80s in the park. Security loved it. "It's just like COPSI," one officer remarked to me as he hauled the offenders offer to Security base.

As the video campaign spread throughout the park I was assigned to edit the footage for viewing. This second stage of the operation was crucial as it mattered how the footage would be shown and received. Once I remember shooting a Grounds Quality worker running over a "trash trap" previously placed on the ground. After he realized what he had done, he went back and picked it up, but for the final edit I cut the video just after he ran over the trash. It was a scene too good to happily resolve. The Operations team took the tape, watched it, and passed it along to other supervisors and managers throughout the park. I had become infamous and some workers would actually approach me to ask about particular (famous) scenes I had shot. Eventually no one felt safe and at times I took on a "killer's mentality," stalking the fellow employee, waiting for things to happen. Other departments began to feel the wrath of Operations and they quickly involved Human Resources as a third party. In one case a high ranking manager from Food Service was seen failing to pick up
trash. This case prompted Human Resources to call me in to discuss my video work. They suggested that I discontinue the airing of the videos until a clear written policy had been established by their office. Later I was told by Operations to ignore HR's requests and was instructed to keep producing the videos.

It became management's obsession to watch, and the employees learned throughout a season how to watch to themselves avoid being watched. I recall Rides and Grounds Quality supervisors trying to bargain their way out of difficult and often illegal situations: "You have to watch my back, and I'll help you out," a supervisor once stated to me in reference to a project to which I was assigned. The project was demanded by the increasing filthiness of the park and the scarcity of Grounds workers. Often the workers would sit all day in the canteen along with their supervisors, and everybody knew it. I shot more video. Meanwhile, greater numbers of employees learned how to post lookouts at various locations to watch for approaching auditors and managers. Management had given most of the Grounds Quality workers radios in an effort to open better communication and create quicker response times during park crises. The radios were handy as the workers used them to hide from auditors and to "scope out" "babes" or "hunks" in their work areas.

Perhaps the patron really had the best eyes. The strange man or the strange woman was there to personally check his or her child's safety restraint. The stranger watched the Food Service employee to ascertain that he had gotten the right portions. The visitor would watch other patrons and often argue with workers suggesting that her child was unfairly denied riding privileges while another child was allowed them. As I described earlier, other patrons made sure that Guest Relations knew of their experiences at the end of the day. Racist
and sexist in their representations, these patrons shared their own theories of culture and amusement management. It was very obvious that many of AstroWorld’s ten to twenty thousand patrons resented and distrusted both their fellow consumers and the employee producers they came in contact with on a given day.

For all of her or his eccentricities, the theme park worker can only sympathize with the patron. Once in preparation for a plain clothes audit I wore a Motorhead shirt with the word “bastards” emblazoned on the bottom. Unfortunately I had also been assigned to set up equipment in a room during a Park Com meeting. AstroWorld President Phil Clark noticed the shirt and instructed an Operations manager to notify me of my error in judgment: “He wanted me to tell you to get rid of the shirt. We know that you’re doing audits, but we wouldn’t even let one of our guests wear something like that!”
From Resistance to Everyday Life

The common ground that allows cultures to talk to each other, to exchange messages, is not some presupposed shared set of universal values...but rather its opposite, some shared *deadlock*; cultures "communicate" insofar as they can recognize in each other a different answer to the same fundamental "antagonism," deadlock, point of failure (Zizek 1993:31).

One of these days this place is going to explode! [David, a Rides supervisor]

**DOIN' LINES**

a) I really do think of a lot of my co-workers here as family. They treat me really good, and I usually don't have problems at the park like I did in my other jobs.\(^{85}\) b) I'd call it incest!

a) You guys gotta think as a team would. Act like a team! And be team players.
b) Here we go again.

a) Why do I work so damn hard? b) Shut up! You know you like punishment.

a) So anyway, she gets a promotion but it isn't like it's much—thirty cents or something. Give me a break! b) What an irony. Work all that time in the park and that's the reward they give you?!

a) The customers keep us on our feet. b) You mean, they help management keep us "in line!"\(^{86}\)

a) I heard that I got Superstar this month! b) Great, I never did.

a) If you subdivide the company into departments you increase the efficiency by which the worker's body can be surveilled and controlled. b) What?

a) This reminds me of working in McDonalds. Everything on a line. b) I used to work there too.

a) This is a time for conformity and for learning the ropes of capitalism, it isn't a time for revolution or critiquing the company. b) I'm just trying to make a summer buck, and maybe also get a fuck!
a) I fucked him up! b) What did you do? a) I put all kind of shit in his food! The fucker talked smart to me.87

a) All I want for Christmas is happiness, good health, and a safe Christmas for everyone (Susan). b) I need a car (Jerard).

a) [What I want is] a girl with a Wrangler butt, and for everyone to be safe this Christmas (Tony). b) He took me behind the maintenance shed and tried to fondle me.

a) I would like everyone on the crew to get what they want (Michael). b) It’s the same old shit, day after day. Nothing changes around here, except all the new people coming in.

a) [What I want is] a job (Raymond). b) And I don’t really have one here at AstroWorld.

a) All I want is to be a more God-Fearing and patient Christian> Amen!! (Cynthia). b) I know that I’m due for a C.I. this week. My lead hinted at it.

THE BUGS

Saturday...I make it out of the employee canteen having heard a story of bugs...about bugs crawling everywhere, about the smallest of vermin pestering the consciousness of the many. Someone tells me that the other day a number of cockroaches were seen crawling on and around the metallic area directly under the red heat lamps keeping chicken strips warm. I think a lot about bugs that day: someone had just sprayed the old Training Center with pesticide that choked most who entered the place. The next day our crew sweeps up loads of cockroaches, all tipped over on their backs with legs in the air as salutes. The bugs go crazy. I think about chicken strips and bugs, and I think about work.
COMING BACK

Sometime in 1994 I note a poem an anonymous employee has offered:

_A Batman Poem, by Unknown_

Another season slowly slips by,
Another year slowly comes to the end,
As we look back to the days of our youth,
We shall always be reminded of the days
We spent with the ones we care [sic].
The day will come when we shall all go our separate ways.
But we will always hold dearly,
the days and nights spent at Batman the Escape.

This poem is so mundane that it makes me think of AstroWorld, even though I am no longer in the park. I wonder why everyone comes back? Or, come to think of it, many people don't come back. They become faces in the crowds like the rest of us; to never be heard of or from again. I remember very vividly the words of the secretary to the Vice-President of Operations on my final day of employment at the park, “This place keeps you coming back. It leaves something in your blood.” I'm not sure what made people like me come back, season after season.

...everyday life is made of recurrences...repetitions of thoughts, deeds and acts...and most of all, it is created through metaphor, upheld with metaphor and ultimately deconstructed and overturned by metaphor...a light flickers out on another recurrence that _alienation is constant and everyday_ (Lefebvre 1991:167), and this realization soon too fades into the oblivion of once was and what never is....

................Was?...at an edge.....
1. Shortly after I am preparing a final draft of the dissertation I have a dream one night about one of my primary informants. In the dream I had given her a copy of the dissertation to check for accuracy and to provide comments on what had been written about the park. The dream ends with an accusation that my writing is entirely too cynical, that I have left out much of what had happened outside of my filter of loathing, and that the whole text was overly-determined. She then informs me that the draft will never be returned to me. I then wake up and realize that I have been awakened.

2. A short letter from a woman I knew at AstroWorld appears on the back of a pink park flyer as I am shuffling through papers and trying to come up with organizational points for the writing. I had forgotten about its existence.

July 25, 1994

Well Mr. Lukas......

It seems as though I have beat you once again. I know that it must be tough on you.....you know....never quite being capable of outdoing another person. I understand your weaknesses though. I really hope that you have a nice dinner tonight. You'll be O.K.
1 Some portions of this chapter will appear in Lukas (1998).

2 From now on the upper-case referencing of the "theme park" will represent both the specific park discussed in this study as well as the "American theme park"—the extinct and extant histories, events, environments, persons, machines and feelings associated with the author's experiences with theme parks.

3 The earliest roller coasters used mules in the back of the trains to bring the coaster back to the station after the patrons had departed. See Mangels (1952:86).

4 In responding to a few independent readers of this chapter, I would offer that this writing does not attempt to follow the analytic lead of the previous literature on popular amusements and theme parks. Though governed by experiences from the "real world," its form follows the mode of an extended conversation, and its ethnographic component is based more on the mood I attempt to describe and evoke than on the embellishment of anthropological field sensibilities.

5 See Massumi 1993.

6 As George Marcus suggests (1997c), one consideration of this fieldwork is the level to which "fear" resonates throughout as a theoretical construct imposed by my backstage look at AstroWorld, a sort of "ethnography of emotions." This has been a difficult critique for me to answer, but I will attempt to argue that "fear" is both a theoretical construction and an epistemological motivation of the author as well as a real, lived emotion of patrons and workers in the theme park I describe.

7 Leidner (1993) offers an approach to the everyday world of fast food restaurants, while Horwitz (1985) looks at the lives of persons living in a Coralville, Iowa strip. The text Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World (The Project on Disney 1995) does offer chapters on the "everyday," including ones dedicated to families, the use of cameras, and the complexities of public and private spaces in theme parks. The recent Kitchens (Fine 1996) is an ethnography of the restaurant service industry.

8 Six Flags AstroWorld is now commonly called Six Flags Houston, encompassing the fact that the park includes WaterWorld, in addition to the AstroWorld theme park.

9 A drawing point of any theme park is its location and accessibility (cf. Bhatia 1983:37). An important company slogan, and one that graced the airwaves of television and radio ads for a number of years, was the suggestion that "an estimated 85% of all American live within a day's drive of one of the seven parks...Six Flags...a world of fun, not a world away" (Six Flags AstroWorld News Release, 1994).

10 Wynne originally called the park Texas Under Six Flags, but changed the name after the Daughters of the Texas Revolution suggested that "their state was never under anything" (O'Brien and O'Brien 1996:8).

11 As I present in Chapter 2, Vauxhall Gardens was the first "park" having a one-price admission policy in 1661. In modern period, Six Flags is the innovator in this regard. I remember visiting Walt Disney World in the 1970s and recall finding the pay-per-ride admission policy to be confusing, time-consuming and ultimately expensive. Conversely, in 1997 I found the pay-per-ride policy at Kennywood to be conducive to doing research, in which case my goal was not to ride any of the rides. I suppose there are pay-offs to both admission policies.

12 The graphic representation of the Confederate flag has been modified in current Six Flags publications (cf. AstroWorld 1994:9).

13 The pedagogy of the theme park world is what may be described as an obsessive desire for trail & error, for acquisition and adaptation, for seeing, copying and making one's own, for being "flexible" in the face of changing consumer and patron desires. Much of the training philosophy I was familiar with exhibited this concern to "get it right," and getting it right was always a perception rooted in another park's operation. For AstroWorld it was the operation
and success of Disney’s parks that dominated its own corporate vision. This is a theme that perpetuates all aspects of the industry as I have come to know it (cf. The Institute for Research 1995:15).

14 The period of employment in the park ran from March through December.

15 I am here speaking of the classic sense of “alienation” as Marx describes it: a worker’s discontent on the job is a function of the inability to reconcile the nature of one’s work with one’s own value system related to that work.

16 As Kasson says of patrons entering Coney Island, it was as if rude fellows became “hushed, moderate and careful” as they entered the park (1978:15).

17 Nikolas Rose’s Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self (1989) is an excellent source dealing with the encroachment of cultural institutions into the spheres of private life. Thanks to Kathryn Milun for introducing this text to me.

18 The attendant who sets the Astroway car into the “trip,” namely affixing the car to the cable for its journey.

19 Rides are also implicated in public relations campaigns. AstroWorld management attempted to create an image of the park that was competitive with other (non-Six Flags parks) but mainly one which also lessened many patron and worker perceptions of AstroWorld being a “poor person’s park,” one that lacked the new major rides of parks like Six Flags Over Texas, Six Flags Great America and Six Flags Magic Mountain. To this end, management boasted of facts unique to the Houston park: WaterWorld, the only Six Flags water park prior to 1995, Thunder River, the world’s first white-water rapids ride (AstroWorld 1994:10), the Texas Cyclone, a wooden roller coaster rated by aficionado Robert Cartmell as one of the country’s ten best roller coasters (1977), which is referenced by management as having taken over 400,000 board feet of lumber to build (ibid.).

20 See Hanley 1987 for a discussion of Great Adventure’s attempts to regain customers after the tragic fun house accident of 1993 which killed eight. In another light, Vetica (1994) considers how large corporations deal with public crises, like the Tylenol tamperings and deaths of many years back.

21 A number of studies have been recently featured on popular news programs like 20/20 and Primetime Live that illustrate this general hostility that often develops in face-to-face situations of contact in the service world. The broadcast I saw was one that detailed hostile airline passengers. Some were so disruptive that they actually got into shouting matches or even physical brawls with airline employees. Here there is perhaps another level of general tension implicit in the economy of fear and paranoia I have set out to describe.

22 AstroWorld management and Public Relations attempted to create an image of the park as an efficient yet personalized place, something I see as inherently contradictory. Robin Leidner jokes on how no one is likely to walk into a McDonald’s restaurant, or any fast food establishment for that matter, and ask “What’s good today?” (1993:45). The management at AstroWorld was, in contrast to the world of fast food, consciously attempting to integrate personality in its product. In the opinion of many patrons and employees, much of this was simply for show.

23 As Leidner suggests, “almost all interactive service jobs have both an interactive and a noninteractive component” (1993:25).

24 The backstage/front stage metaphor is emphasized by Goffman in his “Regions and Region Behavior” in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959:106-140).

25 For both European-Americans and African-Americans this policy was seen as sometimes oppressive and differently applied. Is it possible to develop a policy that would take into account ethnicity and individual freedom in the decisions made over excessive hairstyles? Too, some of the dress code policies can be understood from a safety perspective. The prohibition of wearing rings in Rides was due to the fear that an employee could get such an object caught in a
moving part of a ride.

26 This was a common training class motif used to impress employees with the need for “positive visual presentation” while in the park.

27 When I speak of workers I am generally referring to entry-level/minimum-wage workers, though similar feelings were expressed by members of management, many of whom were also poorly paid given their relative standing in the company.

28 A common catch-phrase in training classes was “getting around our blocks.” Blocks obviously refer to things that disrupt the continuity and functioning of an organization.

29 “The salary range in the theme park business generally falls on the low side of average. You can’t earn a lot in the theme park business unless you own a piece of the park” (The Institute for Research 1995:19).

30 Of course one of the phenomena of contemporary U.S. work culture is the so-called “going postal.” This is a phrase tied to the increasing prevalence of work-related acts of violence, like shooting, and has led to the reaction by some in law enforcement to develop methods of profiling “postal” employees (cf. De Becker 1997).

31 The control cards were duplicates of employee information forms kept in employee files. They listed absences and dates of corrective interviews.

32 Upper-level management could, however, conduct CIs; they frequently did. It was far more common for the supervisors to do so as they were generally witness to a in-park violation, by their own eyes or from the mouths of their crew.

33 In some circumstances a given job was left unfilled for months, being the political decisions of upper management.


35 In 1995 the company stressed two additional slogans to its employees: LEAD (Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Discuss and Direct) and NICE (Neutralize the Situation, Immediately Empathize, Courteously Explain, Emphasize Your Desire to Help).

36 Questions ranged from “My Leaders and Supervisors are good role models for Guest First” to “Overall, I enjoy working for Six Flags.” Employees were allowed to rank their responses from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Don’t Know” (6).

37 Other miscellaneous issues of employee contention included the inability to make personal calls while on the job, the strict attendance policy, and the lack of decent employee services, such as the poor canteen.

38 The success of such programs is debatable: 1994 saw employee retention from the last season at 31%, while 1995 registered 29%.

39 These include complementary tickets rewarded after hundred hours of company employment, Bugs Bunny Dollars, allowing employees to redeem them for items at the Company Store, and company scholarships and other service-based incentives like AstroWorld’s Service Superstar recognition program.

40 One group named TARP, the Technical Assistance Research Program of Washington, D.C., offered the following statistics of the "costs of an upset Guest." 1) Each upset Guest tells 9-10 people. 2) 13% of upset Guests tell 20 people. 3) The average business never hears from 86% of unhappy Guests. 4) For each complaint received the average company really has 26 more Guests with complaints. 5) 95% of Guests come back if problem is resolved quickly (Academy of Excellence 1995:10). Like much of what is performed at park training seminars, these statistics and their implications must be taken cautiously.

41 My most “creative” story is a time when a German man refused to get off of the Batman the Escape roller coaster when the crew notified him that he would have to remove his earring. After speaking some German with him I determined that the earring was permanently attached to his earlobe, preventing him to safely ride Batman.

42 Thanks to Thad Donovan for his story of line-cheating patrons who feigned disabilities.
One of my favorite complaints of this type reads, “Hamburgers cold when served! I asked to warm up my hamburger and the worker dipped it in fry grease and put new cheese on it!”

One example is registered in a patron complaint at Guest Relations: “At the ticket booth I had a problem and the employee told me, ‘I can’t do anything about it. Now go to Guest Relations!’” Another related the closing of Adventure Rivers of Texas for the day. “The employee told us, ‘This ride is closed, now it’s time to turn your butts around and go home!’”

One such story is related in a dispute between patrons and a manager at Batman the Escape, “Nicole told me that ‘I didn’t look so hurt’ when I tried to ride with my cast on my leg. She was very rude to me!”

One Guest Relations verbal complaint from 1995 described yet another level of hostility between costume characters and patrons: “A young female Guest was made to feel uncomfortable by the actions of a Hostess portraying Daffy Duck. The child was taking a picture with Daffy and was pulled too close to the character’s side...the twelve-year-old felt extremely uncomfortable with the amount and type of physical contact.”

An interesting thing may be said about routinized work and a culture generally based on the service-industry and the nature of the relationships cultivated with people (patrons) in the space of work. It has been argued that work of a routinized nature “works” in two senses: “the workers work on the people who are their raw materials, including themselves, and the organizations work on their employees” (Leidner 1993:2).

For a discussion of how patrons control employees in routinized work environments see Leidner (1993:42). Cuber (1939) also discusses the nature of patrons who visit amusement parks. See http://www.ted.com/tspeaks/pittman.html

For more on Pittman’s work with MTV and associated controversies, like his refusal to air some African-American videos because they didn’t meet his standards of “family entertainment,” see Banks (1996). Cintron (1994) and Goldman (1994) are sources that specifically discuss Pittman’s take-over of the Six Flags job. According to one published source, Pittman left the Six Flags helm after board members refused to award him an equity deal which would be worth a reported $100 million over five years (cf. Landler 1995). See O’Brien (1997e) for details on the CEO successor to Pittman, Larry Bouts, the former Toys R’ Us executive.


The goals of the Training Department were threefold: to facilitate employee training classes, generally for Rides and Grounds Quality personnel, to conduct park audits, which are described in a later section of this chapter, and to administer and grade departmental tests, mainly those required for one’s certification as a ride operator.

Potential AstroWorld employees were screened in a variety of different forums. One full-time member of Human Resources acted as the recruitment coordinator at the local high schools.

See Leidner (1993:66) for a similar use of the metaphor in McDonald’s training. As well, Kunda (1992:9) discusses the family metaphor in a variety of organizational settings.

In the 1995 season, with the introduction of Divisional structure in the company, a new training session was mandated, Division Training.

There was a move by upper management to attempt to standardize department training such that there was a more consistent dissemination of the Six Flags message to its employees. Regardless, based on conversations with other department trainers, I can say that department training continued to vary greatly between different departments regardless of management’s wishes.

An Operations supervisor once said, “I just think that Jeff does such a great service for our park. If these kids could just see what Jeff has been through, they would learn to appreciate life much more.”

I remember my first on-the-job training at XLR-8, and I felt confident that the “system” did produce competent employees. Luis, a driver at the ride, quizzed me heavily on all aspects of
the ride’s operation and even reviewed departmental and Guest interaction policies with me. He, of course, was cognizant that I was a Training Coordinator, and it is possible that his carelessness was also a function of his making sure that I would not report back to management on a potentially faulty on-the-job session.

59 Thumbs Up was a signal given by all members of a ride crew indicating that the ride was ready to dispatch or start. It was a way of using visual cues to assure that all the necessary checks, such as making sure that no patrons were in the ride area, occurred before the beginning of the ride cycle.

60 In many cases employees would sign the first blank in the column, draw a line down to the bottom of the page, and sign the last blank of the column. This was looked down upon by management, and our department would often tell trainees to go back out into the park for training, and to make sure that each and every blank was signed.

61 Years before my arrival at AstroWorld, employees wore certification cards around the neck on a string which also included the worker’s picture. This form was later replaced by non-picture cards, laminated and kept at the worker’s ride location. Though the certification policy was well-intended, our surveys of ride areas found that in many cases workers had lost their cards, had left them at home, or had never been issued one (this last one being our department’s fault, due to the fact that we could never seem to find a laminator to use).

62 Although this was the plan, in actuality busy training schedules and the sometimes need to help staff rides forced the plan to be abandoned.

63 Other managed routinized industries rely heavily on the Biblical nature of their employee texts (cf. Leidner 1993:49). At AstroWorld, though there existed a series of rule texts, training and procedure texts, as well as written texts addressing employee legal rights, there was no one standard “Bible” of AstroWorld life; instead, one may say that the production and consumption of rule and procedural texts at the park was dispersed and without center. Additionally, the linkages of texts to practices in the park, including oral ones (those instructions and charges given to employees in training contexts), were very fragile ones, and their tentativeness created paranoia in the minds of AstroWorld management. It was a “paranoid ethos” (Herdt 1987:26) that necessitated the constant auditing of employees. Like Rides tests, audits were given to supervisors, shown to Rides team members, looked over by Operations management and later destroyed. Though I never learned about the legal issues implicated in keeping audits instead of destroying them, I can assume that a low-rated audit form coupled with a ride accident would potentially make a bad legal cocktail for the park.

64 Categories of Cleaning, Dress Code, Friendliness, Grouping, Height Checking, Loading, Unloading, Rider Policies and Safety in 1994 were changed to Cleanliness of Work Area, Stage Appearance, Guest Interaction, Grouping and Height Checking, Loading, Unloading, Rider Policies and Safety in 1995. The main point is that the functional categories, those related to job duties like height checking and unloading patrons, remained while Stage Appearance and Guest Interaction more clearly reflected the Six Flags corporate goal of crafting a lingo more closely aligned with Disney’s use of “stage” and “guest” metaphors.

65 Inevitably the doing of audits led to internal policing in our department. If Jeff had given a ride team a high audit score, another of our team might give that ride team a low score later in the week. There was much disagreement about what constituted a “good ride team,” and as a result, our audits varied greatly in their rating of worker performance.

66 I had many problems with the militaristic name given to these quick audits.

67 As we were told, if you see a Guest, make eye contact within ten feet of him/her; and strike up a conversation, such as a “hello,” when you are within five feet of the Guest.

68 I have not spoken much more about the 1995 training season in terms of the audits. Our department did do as many, if not more, audits in the second season, but much of what I have to say about these 1995 audits would repeat what I have mentioned in my detailing of the 1994 season.
This is a synopsis of this class I designed though it was never implemented in the park: The proposed Rides/Grounds Quality class would focus attention on context-specific information at various work locations; the class would also involve increased role-playing, and a minimum of lecturing and overhead use. The class would constitute:

1. a conceptual mapping of the materials needed for an Operations orientation;
2. additionally, this mapping would serve as a scheme for the orientation (it would give it direction and continuity, as opposed to the sometimes haphazard direction the class often takes);
3. a potential map of the territory (the class will cover common occurrences new hires may encounter in a workday);
4. finally, the class progresses through a park map with various locations being the sites of the Operations orientation class materials.

As of 1997, the per-person fee for the seminar is $645 dollars (Pike 1997b). This is money that could definitely be better spent!

The most sinister of these slogans was CIA, “Control, Inclusion, Affection” (Pike 1992:5).

Unfortunately, I do not have any indication of whom had facilitated this seminar at AstroWorld. It may have been members of Human Resources, Operations, or a combination of members of each Division.

One of the sticky issues that maintained tension between departments, and in my opinion the tension was the greatest between Human Resources and Operations, was the sending of management staff to out-of-state seminars. In 1995, a program named QIG (Quality, Innovation and Growth) had twenty-one members of management traveling to New York for a series of seminars as well as complementary Broadway shows. According to company CEO Bob Pittman, these employees were “recognized and rewarded for their contribution to Guest First service and innovative thinking” (Pittman 1995:3). Many park employees, in both management and entry-level positions, resented what appeared to be selective perks for certain of the park’s workers. Additionally, it was felt by many in the Training Department that the techniques derived from these expensive trips offered most of the park employees nothing in return. One Operations supervisor once told me, “Those programs are a joke. HR has a totally different idea of what training is supposed to be. For them it’s a lot of bells and whistles. I think that the training we do is much more grounded.” It was thus felt that the training conducted in departments, as opposed to Human Resource programs, was much more “organic” in its grounding in the contexts of everyday park life, as opposed to training whose concern was the appearance of a given chart or poster diagram. For some the training programs done by Human Resources illustrated a further division of departments: “I don’t think that HR ever gets out in the park! How are they supposed to know anything about training when they don’t even know what goes on out in the park?” Charles, a Rides manager and later Human Resources manager once mentioned to me in a light conversation.

In 1995 the Guest First Standards were touted. These standards were to be memorized by all of the employees. 1) Presentation: Present an inviting, engaging and exciting fantasy experience. 2) Responsiveness: Anticipate and exceed Guests’ needs and expectations. 3) Reassurance: Provide reassurance through professionalism, competency, and dedication. 4) Reliability: Deliver a safe, fun, and quality product. 5) Empathy: Demonstrate a positive, emotional connection to all. 6) Entertainment: Entertain by creating interactive experiences with friendliness, enthusiasm, and energy (Academy of Excellence 1995:18-20).

This certainly added to the over-hyping of the group. I was unable to locate a web page of the group, nor could I find any outside documentation for them. All my information is thus based on first-hand experience. I did discover in a 1997 trip to Houston that OPCO was paid some $30,000 for the seminar they conducted. When I found this out, I told a park confidant, “I am definitely in the wrong business!”
I take this concept of company “devotion” from Leidner (1993:38).

In addition to the planned exercises like the Blanket Game and the Blindfold Game, participants were asked to often complete spontaneous challenges like having two persons sit on the ground, back to back with arms interlocked, while trying to come to an upright standing position.

I learned later that many of the ride workers who were audited by their peers on that Sunday, and hence those who were not invited to participate in Big Gun, were offended by the fact that they were being audited by their peers. This would be a theme that would mark OPCO’s activity as sinister by many in the park.

To quote the movie: the players watch other players, the dealers watch the players, the box men watch the dealers, the floor men watch the box men, the pit bosses watch the box men, the shift bosses watch the pit bosses, the casino manager watches the shift bosses, the owner watches the casino manager, and the eye in the sky (cameras) watches everyone.

In the 1995 Host and Hostess Handbook a thirty-sixth item was added to the list of inappropriate rules of conduct: “cashing insufficient or post dated checks at Six Flags AstroWorld/WaterWorld” (AstroWorld 1995:32).

Interestingly, many of the modes of controlling worker rebellion, and of standardizing the product for consumption at AstroWorld, are present in non-entertainment sectors of the service industry. These are summarized by Robin Leidner in a study of the routinization of work at McDonald’s fast-food franchises: “Employers may try to specify exactly how workers look, exactly what they say, their demeanor, their gestures, their moods, even their thoughts. The means available for standardizing interactions include scripting; uniforms or detailed dress codes; rules and guidelines for dealing with service-recipients and sometimes with co-workers; instruction in how best to think about the work, the service-recipients, and oneself; and manipulation of values and attitudes through consciously constructed corporate cultures and through training programs that provide indoctrination. Surveillance and a range of incentives and disincentives can be used to encourage or reinforce compliance” (Leidner 1993:8-9).

At AstroWorld it was a major goal of management assessment to “make the behaviors measurable” (Academy of Excellence 1995:7). As one facilitator stated in a training program, “this [measurement] is the key to the entire program. If we tell someone to do it, we must know if he [sic] did it and what to do if he [sic] didn’t.”

In fact, Human Resources served as the mediators and investigators of any employee situation which resulted in employee dismissal.

See Leidner (1993:136) for more on the imbrication of youth culture and the “familial” service industries.

Many of these statements are derived from park sources, including a “Christmas Wish List” from the December, 1994 Area One News.

Leidner (1993:41) discusses everyday resistance in the fast food business and other service-related industries. The concept here is “getting back at the customer” by somehow screwing up the product or disrupting the flow of service at the place of work.
CHAPTER 4

THE MACHINES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

For concepts treated only in their general significance, examples should be given; if, for example, machines are mentioned, all the different kinds of machines should be enumerated (Benjamin 1986:79).

All they had was desire—a very strong desire to touch the machine (in Boigon 1993:240).

Everyday life is made of recurrences: gestures of labor and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic (Lefebvre 1971:18).

Switch

THEME PARK RIDE: Any device, mechanical or otherwise, which projects the human body in space for the purpose of pleasure. Being a rider is taking part in behavior which harnesses the body for pleasure, releasing it from work. Psychologically, riding is a state mediated by the simulated tensions of safety—danger (cf. Bennett 1995:238).

The switch is flipped on...following is a release of latent energy so profound that the very act of flipping switches will make it all possible. This act is only metaphorical, in some cases, as the “switch” could be a hard drive booting up at Universal Studios or a key being turned at Knoetels. During the peak summer seasons at many theme parks, the engines, devices, machines, implements and automata are given only eight hours rest. The next day: another thousand cycles are completed. People wash their hands using
automated sinks beckoning one hundred year old world’s fair
tantasies...someone dries her hands off with a device that in a primitive way
knows when its user has left. What a queer eight hours that is—mechanical lag-
time one might call it. Everything is still, maybe with the exception of motors
pumping recycled water through fountains just to pass the time.

Primitive knowing...a hallmark of amusement machines, from Disney’s
audioanimatronic creatures to Knoebel’s card-reading carousel organs. There is
no such thing as a theme park without machines. Even Sea World of Texas, a
place built on “nature,” has recently added The Great White, an inverted loop
coaster hardly reminiscent of the sort of “nature” the park is accustomed to
exhibiting in its killer whales and dolphins. The spaces of museums and
shopping malls have too learned of the power of machines lying in state—in the
former, an interactive display that people can touch “to go places far,” in the
latter, a new motion-based simulator that fits between the Structure store and

I am walking quickly through Kennywood trying to video-document all
that I see—the myriad of pleasure machines moving to and fro, up and down,
avay and back. Near the back edge of the park I spot a machine more sublime
than the rest, an automaton of extreme primitivism. I flip it through the lens
and eventually take it through all of the possible effects on my camera. My
amusement with the device leads a small child and his father to speculate on its
programmed movements: a sprinkler man wagging back and forth without
apparent purpose. Looking at the machine I think, “Who’s he been in?”
(mechanico-erotics). The child and father continue to watch the device, perhaps
hoping of some moments of programmed variation. The child impatiently asks
the father, “Dad, who’s making him work?” The father, surprised, responds
gliably, "Nobody." No longer amused by the sight I walk by the two and catch a
glimpse of some people staring at the exposed red light on my camcorder and
exclaim, "Exactly!"

**Mechanical Medium: Early Humans to Theme Parks**

While a human historian might try to understand the way people
assembled clockworks, motors and other physical contraptions, a robot
historian would likely place a stronger emphasis on the way these
machines affected human evolution (De Landa 1991:3).

De Landa's functionalist suggestion emphasizes one of the many important
dimensions of cybernetic relations conjoined between humans and machines.
Though an evolutionary approach to theme park machines might also chart the
significant channels (discursive and otherwise) through which amusements,
humans and parallel devices have traveled, it may become increasingly
important to focus the topic at the level of the existential. By "existential" I
mean to suggest an approach geared at the ontological status of theme park
machines as they are mutually felt by those working them and those worked by
them.

The study of theme park machines has emphasized the histories of given machines, the lauding of great designers, or accounts of enthusiasts riding their favorite rides, such as roller coasters. What is decisively needed, I suggest, is the equivalent of a theme park ride accident in narrative and analysis. Only through a deconstructively dissident account can one gain an appreciation of "the ghosts" outside of the machine, a place beyond spectacle and illusion. To understand and cope with a thing so queer as the theme park machine, one must first divorce the "ride" and its populated spaces from imagination: the magical technology of Disney's WED People Mover, as it shoves people through technology, is put on-hold. After the imagined ghosts have left the machine, the theme park is figuratively transformed into a dark, anonymous obelisk—a memorial to spaces mechanical.

The approach I forward follows three multi-track layers of discourse as I have seen them develop in my understanding of the American theme park world. These are defined as: (1) The relationship of bodies and machines (cf. Seltzer 1992), specifically in terms of cybernetics. From early human uses of tool technologies as "life tactics," to the current fascination with the computer, the World Wide Web and prosthetic technologies, there is pronounced emphasis placed on the machine as something which could move the human beyond its own mass, beyond itself (cf. Canguilhem 1992:61, 62). Some questions one may pose here include, what is the nature of the relationship between humans and machines, and which is inside/outside the other? What do humans think of machines? What do machines think of humans? (2) The ecological development and inhabitation of spaces by the union of humans and machines. Ecological anthropologists used equations (cf. White 1996) and understandings of
indigenous cosmology to explain the ability of environments to sustain and develop a people and its fauna. My use of ecology in this paper is decisively less deterministic, and I instead propose an understanding of space and ecology more in terms of how things in spaces and those spaces themselves co-evolve in often divergent yet parallel ways. The ecology of theme park machines draws more precisely on metaphorical connections to the work of Situationist geography, land art and the “happening” (cf. Tomas 1992). I should say too that it isn’t a singular question of the “machine in the garden.” (3) The everyday character of machines as understood by humans. Much of the previous work on humans and technology has followed the rules of functionalism in attempting to understand the orientations of humans and machines in spaces. The literature on theme parks and technology, especially accounts of Walt Disney theme parks, has likewise stood in awe of the theme park machine; it is characterized by the fascination of theme park visitors and the secondary fascination of theme park analysts with the former. As Baudrillard suggests, such attention neglects,

Questions as how objects are experienced, what needs other than functional ones they answer, what mental structures are interwoven with—and contradict—their functional structures, or what cultural, infracultural or transcultural system underpins their directly experienced everydayness (Baudrillard 1996c:4).

In this respect I hope that the everyday character of theme parks as comprised in the economy of humans and machines can emerge in the interwoven drifts that “understanding” implies.

Thinking about the status of the machine and its pervasiveness in everyday life, I can only surmise that its mythology will continue to grow and mutate. Only later, perhaps after it is too late, will we learn about the
connections between a roller coaster and NASA, or a motion-based simulator and the movie industry. *Machines invade then evade*...to be followed by machine-envy groups riding the same rides over and over: Ezra Pound, the Futurists, and undoubtedly others who make the same mistake—an error in judgment that cites the evolutionary endpoint of the tool-kit in the machine shop and the roller coaster:

No machine has ever interfered with a man's personality or damaged his liberty. Machines were made to eliminate work and produce leisure....modern man can live and should live in his cities and machine shops with the same kind of swing and exuberance that the savage is supposed to have in his forest (Pound 1996:78, 79).

![Image](image_url)

**Magnetism/Movement**

The need for pleasure dominates; the middle zone develops its own magnetism, attracting a range of special facilities to provide entertainment on a scale commensurate with the demand of the masses (Koolhaas 1994:24).

Movement is a crucial site in the contemporary emergence of theme parks and their rides. The invocation of movement is twofold: machines undertake movement, generally predetermined in space and time, and humans are principal actors and acted-upons of movement, they are moved inside rides and they move around the park often to board rides. The “public” itself, as it is
constituted in a park, is an element adding both fear—you scream louder on a ride when others scream too (cf. Bennett 1995:238)—and order: the designers of Coney Island era parks hoped that the presence of a large number of people of good behavior might instill the same in rowdy visitors (cf. Kasson 1978).

Movement is itself also referential and reflexive:

As the pleasure-seeker moves from ride to ride, he or she is always caught in a web of references to other rides and, ultimately, to the [theme park] as a whole (Bennett 1995:238).

Fjellman effectively discusses the production of movement at Walt Disney World. Most interesting is his relating of this metaphor as it is realized in rides, especially in those like General Motors' World of Motion (Fjellman 1992:91), and in the production and maintenance of social space in the park (ibid:199-219). Although the majority of theme park rides do not explicitly call attention to the movement of machines, it can be said that all theme park rides owe their success to the human desire to move, whether that desire be need-based, sexual, etc. Humans have been duped to believe in machines, to ride them as arms of their own lacked efficiency of movement, or as products of unattained identity and the want of agency. As Fjellman reminds us with the same G.E. ride, the machines of everyday life are sardonic in character: "when it comes to transportation, it's always fun to be free" (Fjellman 1992:91).

One can take a more lackluster machine, like the generic Round-Up, and come to similar conclusions with regards to the ride. As a child I remember riding a Round-Up at a small, now defunct theme park in Indiana, Enchanted Forest. The ride spins at an incredible pace and then the machine raises on an axle to propel the riders in a vertical position. Like the other factors causing sustained relationships between humans and machines, the Round-Up allowed
me to totally lose sight of my own being; I became a spinning mass like the others and soon found that memory and perception were lost. The only thing that mattered then was the machine: the spinning provided a sensation of a new nervous system, it literally became a life support system built on movement alone. One gets inside the machine or one becomes a machine....the metaphors are many and are often reversed, but the associations are few: humans are reduced to simple equations of movement. Is this not the same trap one finds oneself in when in Las Vegas? One loses track of the pocketbook and focuses on the spinning of one-armed bandit wheels, the flashing of lights, the motion cues provided by squelches and squeaks. Machines beg to be worshiped, for they move. And we move towards them...

Magnetism: implying connection, the establishment of nodes or points of attraction towards which things congregate or move. Magnetism, though, is only the initiator of movement, not movement itself; that is left to humans and the machines to be ridden. There have been many stories told about the use of especially tall machines to attract people to a park. Build them high and they
will come. In fact the pure aesthetics of a machine and its mythology—the word of mouth detailing that can often make or break a ride ("It sucks! Don’t ride it! It’s not fast enough!)—have somewhat deferred the functionality of the machine away from its movement-only status in the days of amusement parks past. Now movement is dependent on the magnetism derived through themeing. A rocket ship ride alone is just a rocket ship, but with the proper facade and series of movie references it becomes something more: it moves and it is wholly magnetic.

Tower (Machine)

With this amusement ride, the operator has an attraction at his [sic] disposal which draws attention to itself by its height, by its unusual decoration and by the fantastic floating sensation. Whenever this ride is erected, it becomes the local landmark (Web ad for the Condor in Huss 1997).

As Tuan (1974) indicates, the tower structure is a significant symbol of human existence. It metaphorically marks two levels of cybernetics: the relation of humans to the land—in the case of theme parks the tower machine signifies the question, how is it that this theme park became a place of dwelling and how does it persist as such?—and the relation of humans to one another, which might be answered by the question, what does it mean to look down on another human? The Tower (Machine) answers both.

Tower (Machine) is stated with the machine in parenthetical marks for a tower (machine) may be of several varieties. We find the perspective of height being introduced to the theme park with the Ferris Wheel as there the importance of verticality was merged with movement, thus providing variety
with the height. The Eiffel and other monumental towers certainly do predate the Ferris Wheel, and as much as such structures say about human dwelling, they do not do so within an amusement venue; thus the effect is much different. In the case of the evolution of tower (machines), the contemporary emphasis has been on four types.

(1) *Traditional tower (machines)*, these include various reproductions, such as the Oil Derrick Tower at Six Flags Over Texas and the Eiffel Tower at Paramount's Kings Dominion and Kings Island. The emphasis here is on the mechanical propulsion of humans up an elevator to the top. The elevator is typically slow and allows people the chance to concentrate on the climb. The point is to get to the top, where there one can stay as long as one likes to look at the landscape below. Being above, one is aloof and introspective.

(2) *Rotating tower (machines)*, such as the Astroneedle at Six Flags AstroWorld. The point of such a tower (machine) is not, unlike the previous form, to get to the top. The top or highest point, which is generally announced by a spiker on the ride—"We are now rotating two hundred fifty feet above the park"—is only an intermediary between the ground and the rotating axis of the ride. Rides such as these typically move very slowly (a few feet per second) and allow the patron the sense of reflection by coupling verticality with motion, like the Ferris wheel though the axis is reversed from a vertical to a horizontal one. The emphasis in the rotating tower structure is one of observation only through pronounced movement. The spiker on such a ride also has a key role in clearly indicating what the patron is to see: "to the east is the Ultratwister and beyond that..." A spiker on a rotating tower (machine) is instructed to use the ride as an opportunity to "talk up" the rest of the park to patrons. Of course, a more existential and unspoken goal is the spiker acting as a visual engineer,
indicating the right sequence and visual experience of rides and attractions below.

(3) Hybrid tower (machines), include a variety of tall rides, like the Condor of Six Flags Great America. The Condor differs from the first two categories of rides as it is perceived by patrons and management as not being a tower at all. It moves quickly and allows less opportunity for the rider to observe what is happening below. The landscape becomes significantly blurred.

(4) Free fall tower (machines): the last in the variety of such machines, and now the most popular. This tower takes the rider up (sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly) and then quickly drops her back to the ground at amazing speeds. Elaborate themeing may accompany this ride, such as at Disney MGM’s Twilight Zone: Tower of Terror, or may be diminished in order to stress the pure functionality of the ride, like AstroWorld’s new Dungeon Drop, a ride with minimal themeing. Regardless, the emphasis is on the negativity of Gs and on a particular visual metaphor: you’ve gotten to the top, but there is nothing to see.
In summary, then, it may be said that the evolution of tower (machines) traces a particular parallel human progression of consciousness as it relates to and emerges from the theme park world. The movement is from lengthy reflection on the landscape (the Victorian tourist project) in the first to engineered and guided observation governed by movement in the second to less vision and more movement in the third to the final point of the denial of verticity in favor of its escape in the fourth tower. We might then say that such a track is of decreasing visuality and observation and of increasing emphasis on movement and escape. Tower (machines) are about escape in multiple ways.

The above typology illustrates the cybernetic issue of how humans use tower (machines) to relate to the geography of the theme park, to its dwelling. What can then be said about the second topic, that of the use of such machines to affect human-human relations? It is too often assumed that the tower (machine) is a theme park’s most passive structure or ride. The fact that people assume such machines to be structures only and not machines indicates such passivity. Also, consider the idea of creating an enthusiasts club for rotating observation machines to parallel ACE, the American Coaster Enthusiasts. There would be little interest in such a club as a tower (ride) is dull. Everyone forgets about the tower (machine) though everyone seems to end up on/at one. As I do not have time to delve fully into the issue of tower (machines) as they relate to the interactions of humans at theme parks, I will instead provide the reader with two anecdotes. I leave it to the reader to surmise the metaphors arrested in both.

1. I am working at the Gunslinger one morning at AstroWorld and I look up to the Sky Screamer, a type four tower (machine), to notice a woman standing on the top of the structure. She was clearly watching what was going
on below. Though then the second tallest structure in the park, the climb up the many, many flights of stairs was rewarded with an incredible view of the entire park. Upon later talking to the individual, the Manager of Operations, I discovered that the purpose of the climb was to watch for anything that was going on with the employees below, both good and bad—to assess the quality of park operations.

2. I am at Paramount’s Kings Dominion on an explicit research visit. I ride the Eiffel Tower and upon reaching the top I take the opportunity to use my new digital video camera. With the 100-1 zoom I quickly learn that I am able to zoom in on the shirt lettering of individuals below as I walk around the four sides of the three hundred foot machine. I am able to do like the military-intelligence complex of the nation I am in: they zoom using satellites, I using a consumer camera and an amusement park ride. Height prevails.

**Litigation**

A few days ago I realized that I had nearly forgotten about the Ark\(^1\) and the rotting boxes of litigation papers. In the second year of my tenure at AstroWorld, I had been assigned the task of uncovering "cases" from decaying boxes of paper. A few weeks earlier another member of the training staff and I had transported fifty or so banker boxes full of papers to a new location behind the Gunslinger. The boxes were quite heavy, and each was organized and placed on top of a series of shelves in the Gunslinger closet. The task assigned weeks later involved getting familiar with the contents of each box. I knew about the level of paperwork involved in training employees to work on rides; that is what I did, trained people and handled reams of paperwork. I wasn’t
though aware of the "preservation" effort going on in the park. I was given a sheet of paper with the following information: "Ultratwister, March 15, 1993.......Antique Taxis, February 3, 1995......." The list went on with other such entries.

Litigation. Theme parks get sued all the time: from stiff necks to broken bones resulting from patron claims of worker or park negligence (cf. O'Brien 1998a:20). Given the information I was provided, I was charged with recovering any piece of paper related to the ride and the date listed. The park had saved all training certification papers and tests from all rides for a period of years; I think it was seven years, based on the statute of limitations. Going through the boxes I was able to locate some of the papers, while others were inevitably lost forever. I passed the papers on to my manager and promptly sealed up the boxes. What indelibly stuck in my mind was the number of rotting boxes, broken away by rain, water damage and numbers of termites. One box had a colony of the pests eating through the mounds of unorganized papers. One of them reading: "Ultratwister............." The rest of the information was missing as some of the bugs had eaten the paper away. Each cycle of the ride is figuratively transposed to paper. We never exterminated the bugs and to this day I am sure that they continue to decimate the litigation papers of the park. They, metaphorically, are the eaters-away of memory: the ride on the Taxis from the third day of February, 1995. Did anyone remember that day? Perhaps a date-stamped Kodak photo provided a glimpse from the past, but the days themselves had become numbered only by the papers in the boxes. Now, even that permanence is food for the bugs.
Carousel

Machines make history in some sense (Heilbroner 1972:28).

The carousel is an extremely queer theme device. It is popular with families and persons who wish to sit for an “easy ride.” It is often regarded as the most regal of theme machines in parks, its horses sit proudly, sneering or smiling at the millions of kids who ride the machines in a given year. What makes them odd is their status as “antique machines,” something which is feigned in the “antique taxis,” often due to name alone, and in the wooden roller coaster, with its feeling of antiquity, which sometimes is due to the ride’s age. The carousel, though, is never doubted for its authenticity. There is the double-decker carousel at Six Flags Great America, with its two levels of assorted horses, or the carousel at Knoebels which features a brass ring dispenser for its patrons to grab, reminiscent of the carousels of old. Perhaps the eerie mysticism of the carousel adds to its status as an “authentic theme device.” Horses that move up and down yet move by pole and motor alone seem sinister in their amusement-fulfillment: the animals are the only rides that stare back at the patron with painted eyes. Such animals are inherently ironic, by their stagnation that defeats the mythological association of animals and speed (cf. Canetti 1962:282-
Even the menacing sight of the roller-coaster lacks the visual stamina of the carousel horses. The device in its sum total is an architectural machine: its circularity is highlighted by the animals, their vertical movements up and down the device, the bright colors of animals and superstructure alike and the calliope music which is its own machine within a machine, providing another anachronistic look at the theme parks of old. Many films have used the carousel as both symbol of innocence and evil: consider the carousel in Disney’s *Something Wicked This Way Comes*—it is a device that harbors the greatest of evil; and how many movie chase scenes try (miserably) to use the irony of the carousel as its subject?

In the summer of 1997 I toured the Carousel Museum at Knoebels in Elysburg, Pennsylvania. Knoebels is a park known for its history, and the only park with such a museum. History personified in the wooden horse: where else can one find the remnants of rides, now devoid of function, sitting hopelessly as the markers of past journeypersons atop the country’s many carousels? David Wynn, Knoebel’s carousel curator, is quoted as feeling “anxious to educate children [through the museum] on the importance of the disappearing carousels” (Anon. 1992:24). What is unclear is exactly what purpose an unattached carousel animal would serve a theme park. Legitimation of lore and park history? Spectacle for the youth or those uninterested in riding fast, scary rides? The forgotten years of Coney Island are often anointed by reference to historic rides, now long gone and maintained only by pictures or the occasional lone coaster train turned into a museum piece. If authenticity still shares a spot in the annals of theme park history, perhaps the carousel is the lone purveyor of history and authenticity of the past. Me, I was always a bit spooked by those horses and all that awful music, as happy and authentic as it might all be.
Nevertheless, the carousel holds it own, garnishing its status as a mechanical maker of history in the American theme park.

**Shoot-the-Chutes**

Water holds a special fascination for all of us (Arrow 1997).

One great shocking plunge, a leap in the air, a heaving and a tossing, and the boat glided into the waters of the lake, to be brought to a safe landing (Kasson 1978:79).

On visiting a theme park one might have the occasion to ask, what is it about WATER that gives such a strange fascination to the theme park patron? Why get wet at all?

The water ride is a particularly unique device as it actively uses a specific element for its dispersal of pleasure and thrills. Certainly, other rides use air to raise the hair on one’s head. The roller coaster, for example, offers the earth as a way of creating themed rides that fit into the landscape, such as the Beast roller coaster at Paramount’s Kings Island, or even through the use of fire as a means of tactually stimulating the skin on a person’s body, as is the case of Escape from Pompeii at Busch Gardens Williamsburg. Yet the shoot-the-chute stands alone as a machine that depends on water for its successful operation.

Though it is difficult to fathom whether water is the symbol or the symptom of the pleasure generated in the shoot-the-chutes, it is clear that its enacted dimension is both primal and practical. One, *water is a source of propulsion*. In the case of a log flume ride like the Bamboo Shoot, a lift mechanism takes the container up a lift and then releases it on a sluiceway
which, with the help of wheels underneath the vehicle, guides the device to its eventual plummet down a chute to more water below. Water thus gives the appearance of fluidity, and suggests that travel or movement is likewise fluid, frictionless and unencumbered. Track rides may seem more determinate in their movement to contrast. In reality, the water could be eliminated while still allowing similar vehicles to traverse the same type of superstructure as the Log Flume. An example of such a ride is a Bobsled ride which uses wheeled toboggan cars to travel down unwatered chutes.

Two, *water is peaceful then violent*. One of my recollections of having traveled on log flumes as a child is the moment before you fall over the edge. Up fifty feet or so I remembered the sound of the flume car as it was rocked peacefully by water back and forth on the canals. The trip up top leaves one thinking about the trees, often designed into the ride structure, the quiet water and the eventual plunge which will occur. Water then is a feared element like darkness in a dark ride: it takes you places because of the expectation and contrast it provides. When the plunge into the bath occurs, all serenity is lost.

Three, *water is a reactionary force*. The superstructure of a ride is never to touch a patron, for doing so could be fatal. Though Coney Islandesque fun houses are possible exceptions—here I am thinking of blow holes that were used to raise women’s skirts or distorting mirrors which made each patron’s face anew—the shoot-the-chutes is unique in that it is the only theme machine that touches and reacts (cybernetically) to its rider. Water is used as an intimate element of this theme park ride. Getting into the vehicle one often attempts to avoid the wetness of certain seats; one’s feet squeak on the water-soaked floors of the car. Inevitably, one knows that getting on this device will lead to some interaction with water, and usually one gets thoroughly soaked. Small trickles
of water hit patrons walking below the ride superstructure, while on the ride itself one occasionally gets splashed by water here and there before the final plunge. As the drop comes up, anticipation leads to the primal sense of getting soaked. Screams are heard, followed by laughs and motions with the arms and hands to fling the water off of the body. Water thus invades the intimacy of the patron and she is likewise thrown into the captivity this element provides. Getting off of the ride one has the chance of further interaction. As is often the case with down and out chute rides, like the Tidal Wave, many young patrons wait on the bridge near the end of the plunge to get soaked by an oncoming car. That is an almost parasitic experience of pleasure, the use of another’s pleasure vehicle for hedonistic purposes.

Dark rides also take some inspiration from the use of water in the form of the canal. Canals (Venice) symbolically represent the simultaneity of tranquility and movement. It is said that Walt Disney, upon seeing the first drainage runway at Walt Disney World, immediately told his engineers to make the earth devices look less like a straight path and more like a canal (Fjellman 1992). Canals put people at ease and can allow a developer to theme in multiple ways even with those certain elements that are not part of the canal proper, such as the incorporation of architecture, pathways and canals at San Antonio’s Riverwalk. A dark water ride plays on the same principles. Take for example EPCOT’s El Rio del Tiempo ride. Passengers travel slowly down a canal in a boat witnessing the different sights and sounds of “Mexican” history. The history lesson is shabby, but the assumption behind the ride design may be the more so. What’s so great about slow boat rides down canals?

Water parks are a subject in their own right. Given the right demographic background research, a water park can generate huge profits, run
under significantly lower operating costs than theme parks, and require less set-up capital. Ontologically, the water park does not appear to be in competition with the theme park. In fact, theme parks have begun to incorporate water parks and their elements as part of their own park’s environment of fun. Water parks are separated from the pleasurable illusions afforded by moving parts and gears. The slides, chutes and “lazy rivers” of these places operate on water’s mystery alone. Propulsion, water as a variable mover of people, takes on the unique status of theme rides by eliminating the need for gears, wheels and electricity. In the water park a ride operates on a principle of *purified movement*.

![Dark Ride](image)

**Dark Ride**

The history of the dark ride goes back to 1901 where at the Pan American Exposition “A Trip to the Moon” gave people the thrill of travel without traveling. Using a rocking mechanism persons were tricked into believing that they had traveled to the moon, complete with souvenir cheese and moon tour guides (Fun House 1997). The “terror” of the indoor ride is built not on the disorientation of being spun around or being thrown back and forth, like troikas and “ship” rides, nor does it rely on the violence of speed alone, as in the roller coaster, it instead uses darkness and all that it symbolically entails to create its
thrills. An interesting sight is to see a dark ride stripped of its darkness, with lights on, exposing exactly what the ride lacks: space opens up and the viewer realizes that she has been duped. There isn’t much to such a ride as it’s contained in a small space, usually on a circular track; the elements have been exposed and the truth be told, though this negative exposure does not seem to matter to the patron. As Douglas Trumbull suggested, “no one cares about the technology, but about the experience” (Fun House 1997). “People want to be scared,” I hear that everywhere I go in my search for an understanding of the mechanical varieties of theme park thrills.

The dark ride may be considered the most liminal of rides in the park; it is also the most psychological. The experience of going through the ride is heightened by the separation that occurs shortly after boarding: one is removed by the darkness from the space of the living, symbolized by light. The darkness takes hold of the rider, around each turn of the car an unexpected occurrence. Such a ride attempts to build on both expectation and surprise, capturing the rider in a simulated space of terror. As Allen Ambrosini says,

> It’s kind of like a survival journey. Images of death, despair, destruction, of fright are being thrown at you, but you survive it. It’s a very positive experience in the end because you have escaped that terror (Fun House 1997).

The Haunted Mansion ride at Knoebels has been called the greatest of all dark rides (cf. Fun House 1997). As I board some attendant there questions my motivations, “He’s riding alone!” Apparently dark rides are meant for lovers. That day, though, I had my camera rolling, hoping to catch sight of the terror as it unrolled in the dark. The premise was simple, built on the idea that people don’t like things popping out at them, though the effect is muted by cardboard mannequins and plaster coffins. Some months back I am thrown into the world
of Escape from Pompeii at Busch Gardens Williamsburg. Riding a shoot-the-chutes ride in the dark suggested hybridity to me, and later I review a documentary film detailing the ride’s computerized operation. I have a memory then of the pillars, the mock fires roaring as I relate the stripped video tape images to the memory of the ride experience.

The Myth in the Machine(s)

The special skill of each individual machine operator, who has now been deprived of all signficance, vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labor embodied in the system of machinery, which, together with these three forces, constitutes the power of the ‘master’ (Marx reprinted in MacKenzie 1996:35).

What is it that characterizes the nature of machines, especially those requiring human riders? Is a race car a race car because of its mechanical structure, its combination of moving parts, wheels, engine, or is it such because of its human driver who reacts to change and uses the race car as an extension of her/his body (cf. Leary 1996; Santiago-Lucerna 1996)? Everything mythic in and out of the machine...I remember seeing faces of glee on the numerous ride attendants I trained to work the big rides. That was myth brewing in a body.

In terms of the theme park ride, an additional element is added, the operator. Riders come to theme parks to enjoy bumper cars, troikas, roller coasters, and they are dependent on the technology inherent in a ride’s design coupled with the maintenance skills of ride operators. I say “maintenance” as there is little of a creative element in being a ride operator, though operators are taught to interact with park guests. One of the most popular forms of interaction is the “spieler” ride operator who adds life and character to the ride
by interjecting commentary, comedy and asides in the ride experience. 

"Welcome to the Greezed Lightnin', the fastest ride in the park. It'll take you from zero to sixty...." Commonly the spieler will add fake accents or other voice alterations in conjunction with the themeing of the ride. A western themed ride may involve a spieler using a "cowboy" form of address. Another technique is to wish the guests well as they leave the station or to even "hope that you all make it back." Spiels and such interactions with guests are most common at large rides, especially roller coasters as they have the greatest notoriety of all rides in the theme park, among guests and workers.

The question remains, how is the myth of the theme park machine translated into the bodies and minds of theme park patrons? Does the machine extend its experiential energy through the actions of ride operators? Does the ride machine express itself through physics and structure alone? Is the rider a complete automaton, devoid of agency during a ride experience? To look at an expression of such a myth, I would only have to draw on the numerous coaster stories and experiences I have collected. They, though, are problematic as they are also implicated in the myth. Countless tales have been heard listing the heroic status of the roller coaster; narrations of a ride "kicking one's ass" or details of rides being as good as sex, extend the myth to include the ride's role in experience beyond the body or experience of the body mediated by the machine.² Like the elements of darkness used effectively in a variety of indoor ride contexts, the establishment of a ride's persona can lend much to its popularity among patrons and its subsequent ability to frighten them.

What is perhaps more insightful in deconstructing the myth of the theme park machine is the efficacy of demystification that occurs in the circumstances surrounding "bad rides." A bad ride may be one prone to accidents, one voted
unpopular by the crowd, or one that simply doesn't live up to its hype ("It isn't fast enough," etc.). Such rides defile themselves and suggest a fleeting moment of resistance in the human population so prone to the worshipping of machines.³

**Accidental Movements**

It has been reported by numerous sources that riding theme park rides is an incredibly safe activity, with one source citing only .0000259% of park visitors being injured in accidents (Costanza 1997d). The same source suggests that the following activities are more dangerous than riding theme park rides: drinking out of a glass, mowing the lawn, and playing billiards (ibid.). Perhaps media reports are partially responsible for "the general trend in popular risk assessment to telescope risk perception" (Walsh 1996:133). Others suggest that risk and fear are part and parcel of capitalist living; the accident and its avoidance are "the objectivity of the subjective order under late capitalism" (Massumi 1993:12).

When machines fail. I remember having to lie to some trainees who were curious about the point of theme park deaths during one of my park training classes. "Have a lot of people died in the park?" "No," I responded, "the park prides itself on safety." There was the story of the employee getting slammed by the Texas Cyclone ten years ago at an employee party, and the girl getting ground up in a motor of a now defunct Tilt-a-Whirl ride, or the child who was thrown and killed by the rotating cars of the Joust-a-Bout, a troika which was then enclosed indoors in the dark. What did it really matter? There is that fascination, which many of us had coming to theme parks, of wondering if
something could go wrong.

Accidents: the coupling-joint of fear. The proliferation of pleasure devices, transportation machines and other electronic-technical objects has led to a seemingly proportionate number of accidents, fatalities and injuries. People are obsessed with mechanically-based accidents; is this not the reason why in-flight airline films do not include disaster movies, especially those involving airplanes? We have all had that personal moment of reflection while riding an airplane of, what if this plane goes down? It is the thinking out of impending doom that is enacted as one contemplates the smashing of metal, the crashing procured by speed and trajectory and the trashing of the fleshy body.

Theme parks have generally had a good record in regards to the most serious ride accidents. The industry has endured some problem periods, like the 1980s which saw a significant number of deaths occurring on fallen cable car and sky rides. Most theme parks have detailed safety procedures and have attempted to inform riders, as well as modify any unsafe behaviors, of the dangers of not following posted ride rules.4
Movies such as *Rollercoaster* and *Thill* take the accidental movements of rides to new dimensions, offering the sabotage of the terrorist or delusional ride worker as a rebuttal of amusement pleasure. The accidents attributed to theme parks, whether rider-related, mechanical error or operator-caused, are irrecoverably etched in the U.S. populace. Even those uninterested in visiting theme parks cannot help but gawk at the news reports of a ride mishap at the local park. Consider the following incidents:

1. Three people were killed at Six Flags Mid-America amusement park in Eureka, Missouri, after their gondola car fell from the park’s “Skyway” ride. Another person, also riding in the car, was seriously injured. The ride was shutdown immediately, leaving nearly one hundred people stranded in the twenty-seven remaining cars, some of which had stopped at heights of up to two hundred feet. Firefighters were called to the park to rescue the occupants of these cars. A park spokesman claimed that the car simply “dropped off” its cable (Theme Park Ride Accidents 1997).

2. Eight teenagers burned to death in the “Haunted Castle” attraction at Six Flags amusement park in Jackson Township, New Jersey. A light bulb had burned out in one of the rooms of the attraction, causing a fourteen year old boy to light a cigarette lighter to find his way through the darkness. He accidentally ignited foam rubber padding, which was used to protect people from bumping into a wall. A fire resulted, which quickly spread throughout the seventeen-trailer structure with the help of the extremely flammable building materials which were used to make the “Haunted Castle.” The fire eventually engulfed and totally destroyed the attraction. Fourteen people, four of them employees, managed to escape after the fire had started. Seven people were treated for smoke inhalation at an area hospital. Firefighters from eleven towns were called to the scene. The families of those who were killed later sued Great Adventure, Inc., and its parent company, Six Flags Corporation, charging them with manslaughter and aggravated manslaughter. The prosecution held that the park disregarded safety precautions, and that the disaster occurred due to the combustibility of the building, lack of sufficient emergency exits, and the lack of fire alarms and sprinkler systems. The defense cited a 1993 report by fire inspectors, which concluded that the attraction was safe for operation. Great Adventure, Inc. and Six Flags Corporation faced maximum combined fines of $1.2 million. It was reported that they spent $6 million for their defense. The companies were acquitted on all charges by a Superior Court jury on July 20, 1985, in Tom’s River, New Jersey (ibid.).
Centrifugal Pleasure Railway

We sometimes deliberately deceive our automatic control system, as in aiming beyond a target in order to deliver a heavy blow (Bell 1962:24).

One of the first loops tested in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century was loaded with eggs, flowers, monkeys and sandbags before humans were even allowed to board the loop (IAAPA 1997). On such a ride one is taken upside down; this is the only purpose of the centrifugal pleasure railway, what we today call the loop-the-loop, the corkscrew, the looping roller coaster. The CPR stands alone as a ride emblematic of the personification of architecture, geometry, form and motion. Though wooden roller coasters often enjoy more popularity with park patrons, the CPR is a unique creature of the midway. It challenges the passive observer to believe that its cars will stay on the vertical loop without falling. In fact, in the early days of CPRs at Coney Island, the sight of the ride alone was reason enough to charge admission (cf. Mangels 1952:102). The Loop-the-Loop seemed to deny reason:

Roller coaster loops always attracted observers who would stare in the air, oblivious to the goings-on around them while the car was defying gravity (Throgmorton 1994:17).

The CPR is the emissary of change as it is understood in the theme park world. "Woodies" cannot go upside down, and although wooden coasters like the Texas Giant at Six Flags Over Texas inspire the imaginations of riders through speed and ferocity, the CPR is of the steel family of roller coasters. Not all steel coasters are loopers, some exceptions being the Arrow Dynamics Magnum XL-200 at Cedar Point, though steel coasters have traditionally offered their steel tracks to the service of looping. New innovations in steel loopers, from multiple looping corkscrew coasters to inverted looping coasters to new
variations in the element of looping itself—such as diving loops reminiscent of airplane maneuvers—have led to a new interest in steel coasters rivaling the popularity of traditional wooden ones. Existentially, the Centrifugal Pleasure Railway also allows unique opportunities for riders wishing to escape the hard lateral Gs of a woodie like the Texas Giant.

I am riding the Shock Wave at Six Flags Over Texas, experiencing near five Gs. As I enter the first of two consecutive loops I witness the landscape zooming by my body. The Gs from the second loop push down on my soul and I momentarily lose consciousness, for only a second or two. As I wake I am reinvigorated: the landscape is restored and I am left to consider the further excitement of the theme park. I think about spinning in the loop and the metaphors of being spun—vision is temporarily lost in the black-out, in Washington, words and images are thrown about to produce certain public effects by the “doctors,” one feels out of control in life as everything is moving so quickly and without purpose. It all comes back to rest, in the station and in the mind, for the absolute end of the loop and of being spun is the station, the stationary and the contemplation of ideas and worlds.
Ferris Wheel

Chicago, 1893. A two hundred and sixty-four foot, 2,807,498 pound, dual-steel-tower-supported wheel dominated the Midway vista at the Columbian Exposition. No other architectural production could have come as close. A year prior to the exposition’s opening, an unknown speaker at an organizational banquet decried that the Columbian Exposition would have failed to produce an architectural triumph for the event. The speaker referred to the Eiffel Tower of Paris (Mangels 1952:107), to which engineer George Washington Gales Ferris responded by designing the massive wheel. Two 1,000 horsepower engines powered the Ferris Wheel and allowed it to be operated in any combination of loaded/unloaded cars (ibid: 108-9). The wheel, though an architectural marvel for its towering size, is one of the first archetypes in a line that progresses from the earliest uses of pulleys and swings to contemporary computer-enhanced virtual reality simulators. The Ferris Wheel is entirely significant: “many experienced a sense of awe on first seeing the great circle start moving, and its cars appear smaller and smaller as they rose to the height of the structure” (Mangels 1952:105). This awe is still felt....

Movement becomes its own cabinet of mechanical curiosities as humans are propelled atop the wheel. To them, the marvel of the city below is visualized as the wheel slowly completes its one revolution in twenty minutes. To those on the ground, they are left to contemplate the engines’ ability to send the wheel spinning. Like all rides, the wheel ends its revolution where it began and the passengers gleefully depart to remember the part they played in such a movement: “Movement is ‘the cry of the being to be,’ the I AM of the human organism” (Alice Corbin Sies in Schwartz 1992:87). Human desire and uninhibited agency is left in the cars, to be only picked up years later in the
evolution of pleasure wheels: the Wonderwheel at Astroland park—lateral vector movement is added as humans are thrown side to side during revolution—the marvelous triple wheel at Great America which completes three micro-revolutions as each of three arms comprises a larger revolution of the entire structure—or the few unfortunate people who have fallen from wheels; some even captured dangling from the ride superstructure on home video. The wheel completes its cycle and we come back down two hundred years prior to Ferris to see the wheel spinning again, this time powered by men walking in circles, moving pulleys and sweating as a wooden wheel spins on its axis. What a remarkable ride...it marks a moment in which the stagnation of the statue as human maker of allegory becomes a machine (cf. Kasson 1978:26). They raise the axle.

Antique Taxis

Dad Can I Have The Car Keys?
Interactive Car-O-Cel Lets The Little Ones Drive

Nothing excites kids more than actually driving on their own.... wonderful sound effects enhance the excitement for the children. As they get in the car they hear the roaring sound of starting engines. As their anticipation builds, the Car-O-Cel starts running and every car is forced unexpectedly to the right or left. The drivers have to steer the other direction immediately or they will hear a crashing and breaking sound. If this happens, the driver will get a penalty point, which will be displayed on an odometer type counter in the dash of the car. The performance of the leading car is shown on a scoreboard and there is a winner at the end of every ride cycle (Vekoma 1994).

The Antique Taxis begin their running for the day. A crew of seven or so tune the cars up for their twelve-hour tour of duty. As was the standard opening inspection procedure, the crew members take delight in running the taxis
around the track. Each attendant has her own car, and with it she recalls the first day she drove in a big person’s auto, on the open highway. All fifteen of the taxis make their way around the track, held there with guide wheels, propelled by small diesel engines, no more powerful than those in lawnmowers.

Steering. A woman and man sit in the back seat of the taxi, each is strapped in securely. A young child in the front feels in control. Is that not the mind of the machine: to make the human feel in control, when in reality there is none? We learn of two points of significance: metaphor of the family—it is no surprise that the taxis is a family ride!—and metaphor of the “pilot” (cf. Leary 1996) who wishes to navigate and steer her ship in a direction. As the taxi goes along its predetermined track, steering itself becomes obsolete; the ride runs itself, as an analog precursor to digital auto-pilot in airplanes and in future automobiles. The guide wheels do all of the work, while the child is left feigning navigation. “Mommy, look I’m driving the car!” “That’s great Johnny!” The taxis are prologue to a further evolutionary sequence of theme park rides. The simulator ride, most importantly, makes its mark as the premier vehicle of feigning navigation. No wheels are needed in a ride which is (not ironically) also an automobile: Universal Studios’ Back to the Future ride. The car there doesn’t even leave the station, though it moves like it does through a computerized hydraulic system and a detailed virtual landscape. Again, steering becomes obsolete as human agency is sacrificed for the technical manifestations of the machine.

A male child rams the front of the taxi into the next car. A sign clearly prohibits this, “Absolutely No Bumping Allowed!” It leads to encouragement: just as the great race drivers strive every year to attain higher and higher qualifying speeds in their rigs, the male child uses the opportunity of the taxi to
let loose his frustrations and his urges to be erect. The phallic metaphor of the
taxi emerges in the diesel fuels of these cheap cars: the cars are taxis only in that
they carry desires, like all theme park rides, with the added element of the
reality of the phallus. Men love their automobiles, and it is no surprise that the
parallel processor of the real-world automobile is the theme park antique taxi.

Children aggress and parents watch; that would be a theme of substantial
dimensions outside of the park, but the machine simply allows the myth to be
weaned. The car crashes into the next and the scene at the park comes to
resemble the industrial-sexual landscape of Ballard’s Crash (1973) as the two
cars come together. The parents in the front car shout some expletives and one is
talking of suing over the traffic violation, while the child in the aggressor car is
laughing hysterically. Would that crash of two simulated automobiles be any
less fatal or less sexualized than those of the world outside the park? The
automobile is the most dangerous of our forms of transportation, yet everyone
fixates on theme park ride accidents or airplane crashes. Meanwhile, in the
parking lot, the exodus of cars leaving the theme park back to the real world has
a resemblance to the linearity of early automobile driving games like Pole
Position: line after line of cars leave, headlights on, with quiet humans inside,
beat and irritated at the end of their day. Surely the automobile is a theme park
ride of incredible proportions. It is a machine both marking and further
projecting the decline of human potentiality on the planet.
The Railroad

As the tower (machine) acts as a theme park's purveyor of verticality, the railroad serves as a park's arbiter of the horizontal axis. The park railroad is often considered the "most authentic" of the ride machines in an amusement place; this is due to the fact that in many cases the railroad is a working train, no different than the sorts of trains, electric and steam-powered, that populate the tracks outside of theme worlds. A second fact of the railroad is its idyllic status. The railroad has come to be known as the most peaceful of rides in a park. Though it is not necessarily the slowest, it offers the most pedestrian of park views. It also has a high status because of the lack of associated fear it evokes: people do not ride the train to be thrilled, to feel their bodies fall upon themselves or to be surprised; rather, the train is the ride of the logician and the tourist. At once ornate and purposeful, the railroad's strict purpose is to allow relaxation and information to emerge from the person-filled cabins behind the engine. One is pulled along as a passenger, and as such the body is a passive player on this ride; there is nothing, neither G-force nor seat restraint, which places a burden on the human on the train. Safety is certainly a factor in its symbolic mark on us.

There have been persons killed on theme park trains, the most brutal incident involving a kiddie train whose engine overrode its governor and in the process killed a woman, paralyzed a young girl and forced Old Indiana theme park into bankruptcy. As well the railroad has a turbulent history outside the theme park. In the days of expansion in the United States, immigrant Chinese-Americans and other non-European-Americans were forced to toil on the railroad's tracks to no reward. Native-Americans did not see the train as an emancipatory symbol as did European-Americans; and in the contemporary
period of the United States, one is frequently drawn to stories of failing crossing guards, ensuing trains hitting cars or even young adults who deliberately take their lives on such machines. These issues aside, the status of the railroad in the theme park is paramount and not likely to significantly change.

In my memories of the railroad at AstroWorld, I was struck by the mythology it maintained among ride operators. Most still did wish to end up working at a roller coaster, so I would not suggest that it has displaced the status of all rides, but many operators trained diligently to work on one of the two types of engines (steam, electric). The train was considered the most difficult of the rides to operate, again because it was “real,” not simply a device that started and stopped; it had real speed and one could dictate how fast it would go and exactly where it would stop on the track. Immediately, then, one is reminded of the multifaceted dimensions of this ride. Operators I knew marveled at the idea of working the engine, and so great was its majesty that many of these operators never chose to leave the engine for another ride in the park.

When I say that the railroad is a tourist machine I mean it. There may be only three scenarios for riding the train and a history of theme park train riders would be a definitively short one. Here is what such a story might include: a couple rides the train as their kids go on all of the “thrill” rides; one rides the train to pass time. A family new to the park uses the train to familiarize itself with the layout and attractions there; the train is used to map out and understand a possible route. A number of persons get on the train to relax and catch the mild breeze in the face; the train is finally used to be lazy and introspective. My negative, stereotypical view of the “American tourist” is that s/he plans routes, passes times and gets lazy while a tourist; thus, I have to
conclude that the park train is an ultimate sort of tourist machine, minus the ability to consume as a tourist so often does. One might say, though, that the horizontal path of the train allows one to “consume” the landscape, one that is already predisposed to consumption. I would leave the train alone for a while, in all of its dispositions.

Bumper Cars

Already I knew that I was designing the elements of my own car-crash (Ballard 1973:224).

It was May, 1997 and I was standing outside of the blandly named “Bumper Cars” at Paramount’s Carowinds in Charlotte, North Carolina. For some reason my attention had been drawn to this generic ride there at that park. What more could one say about such a ride, an electric-powered car device whose purpose was collision? There appears to be a family to the left of my view inside the ride area proper and I notice some kids in two of the cars looking excited in anticipation of the ride starting. A man, perhaps their father, is however looking solemn and glum; he appears as if he has absolutely no interest in being there. Surprisingly, the ride kicks in and he is called to action: his frown turns to immediate smile, his lifeless body takes control of the wheel as he finds himself spinning the car around the ride square, looking for his prey.

Even the most stoic of theme park patrons rediscovers her primal urges in a machine that kicks in and wildly sparks from above. The bumper car is the only such machine in the park: acting as an extension of acts of aggression, as in the case of Crash, as an embodiment of the techno-pagan-erotic. Whereas other rides avoid contact with metal at all costs, the bumpers of the cars allow crashes
to occur without resulting injuries. Crash after crash occurs and pandemonium builds as screams and shouts can be heard in the covered space of the ride. It is commonplace to hear swearing and boastful claims made by the participants. Unlike some of the characters of Ballard’s novel, each bumper car fanatic walks away unscathed, with at worst a stiff neck, and at best a few “kills” to brag about.

The bumper car leaves many marks on the perpetual landscape of the theme park, most notably one notices the enigma of the family, playing out and challenging its structure there in the cars. Even complete strangers are smashed into bumper car communitas. Who is innocent, who is guilty? In the bumper car world everyone is at once aggressor and victim, stranger and friend. And unlike the roller coaster which paints its face as a communal ride in which all endure, the bumper car is the vehicle of the individual wanting to prove her or his worth. Competitive American individualism has its apogee there, below the flying sparks of innocent bumper cars. All I can remember of my last ride on such a vehicle is getting stuck, as a child, in a perpetual spin near the edge of the ride, away and abandoned from the rest of the riders. Perhaps there is peace in simulated crash.
Holding Them In

Being constrained or being restrained. The American theme park ride is notorious for its need to hold in. A theme park ride constitutes movement on a constrained field, a track, pavement or geometric outline which guarantees a safe return to the station or the original point of departure. The majority of rides involve the loading and unloading of people by ride attendants. The (un)stated goal of most ride attendants, as directed by management, is to get people into the rides as quickly and as safely as possible. A machine is only effective in its use, so if a theme park ride is shutdown, it cannot deliver pleasure. A slowly cycling ride or one that is continually shutdown for repairs is also a doomed machine.

There is something obscene about the whole activity of being held in a theme ride. At AstroWorld we were instructed to follow a push down, pull up sequence. After the riders were seated, one pushed down on the lap restraints and then pulled up. It was a double-check to assure that the person was securely fastened. Many of us in Rides experienced the discomfort of parents in the park reacting to our rider policies. Their hang-up was the perception that a suspicious attendant was strapping their child in. “I’ll do that myself,” a parent motions to a ride attendant. “Ma’am [or Sir], I have to do this check myself. I don’t want your child getting hurt.” The parent would usually comply, sometimes followed by, “OK, but I’m checking my son [daughter] after you do.”

Obscenity: at the Excalibur roller coaster at Six Flags AstroWorld a crew is setting the lap bars on an individual weighing perhaps two hundred fifty pounds or more. One of the attendants jumps up and down on the restraint to attempt to get it to close, while others laugh. Eventually the gentleman is told that he is unable to ride the Excalibur.
Rides are ergonomically designed; ergonomics being the specific environmental relationship between humans and machines, the step before cybernetic interludes (cf. Bell 1962:39). Major theme parks have stipulations for the rides which specifically relate to the rider's body. 54", 48", 42", 36": all the indications of the height required of each rider for a particular ride. This mostly affected children, but fully-grown adults under 54", for example, are unable to ride Batman the Escape or the Texas Cyclone at AstroWorld because they will not be safely held in the ride. There is the story of the young child who was allowed to ride an amusement ride in Belleville, Illinois which had a stipulation of 52 inches. The child was some two inches shorter than the requirement, which contributed to the child being thrown from the ride (Costanza 1997e). Height checking becomes legally important in the case of a ride accident.

Other stipulations also require the conforming of the body to the hard spaces of theme park rides. Signs accompany every ride in the park: "Not recommended for pregnant woman, persons with a heart condition, etc."
Humans are meat in the grinder. They fit in the ride, and they are forced to conform to being held in and in being taken away as the ride begins its journey. Cyberpunks have traditionally rebelled against "cold media" (cf. McLuhan 1964:22-32) and have opted for cybernetic situations in which the human is perceived as "leaving the meat behind," the meat being the body. Of course, one need not look far to see that the "interactivity" and "meatlessness" of now-famous simulator rides like Universal Studio's Back to the Future is pure hype. In that particular ride, one finds oneself strapped in (still!) and not being taken anywhere. One is held, only to be held.
The irony of the ride lap bar or seatbelt is its failure. For an overwhelming percent of the time, there is no irony. In other words, the safety restraints rarely fail on theme park rides. Mythology prevails though. There is the perception of danger, of being flung from a roller coaster and being impaled on a pole or having one’s head split open up against a wooden support beam. In the words of some, this is what makes rides like roller coasters attractive: they function in the realms of pure psychology and risk (cf. The Terror Technicians 1995). “Danger,” though, is a purely middle/upper-class phenomenon.

**Measuring the Time of a Cycle: the Ride Line**

The entire breathtaking experience takes just 125 seconds, including loading and unloading (Vekoma 1994:15).

Rides do differ from the transportation devices we use on a regular basis. Most notably, one doesn’t wait in line to use an automobile and, with the exception of those who hold considerable passion for their real world cars, one finds pleasure in riding the ride, the payoff for all the waiting. Rides serve as nodes in the economy of theme parks, and getting on them requires one buying into their system of governance. Not only is the patron forced to pay upwards of thirty dollars to enter a park, but she then spends her time waiting, and waiting and waiting to ride a machine whose pleasure may last only a few minutes, or seconds.

Fjellman has commented on the use of Q-lines in parks like Walt Disney World and how they aid in further establishing the utopian order of the designer. The ride line may be hidden, snaked, themed or laid out in a variety
of different ways, each representative of values parallel in the theme park and U.S. society: individualism, democracy—first come, first serve in line (cf. Fjellman 1992:205)—community and solidarity—"based on the shared experience of queuing up, social solidarity is formed" (cf. Fjellman 1992:207), efficiency and progress—lines go somewhere. With the "obstacles" of lines, people develop strategies that are shared with one another in the theme park (cf. Sehlinger 1995). "The best time to ride is in the morning when the lines are short." "I heard that you should go left in line if you come up to two lines, one right and one left." People are easily deceived by ride lines and their queuing areas.

After two or three hours in line, the exhilaration of a ride often seems great, even beyond the mechanical pleasures of the device itself. Young children are notorious for jumping off rides, running down exit ramps and quickly getting back in line when the occasion presents itself—at the end of a day when lines may be shorter, for example. The line, the line, the line: we walk past one another every time we go around the bend to simply remain in the same Q-line, now somewhat closer to the ride station. Waiting and walking in line is pure exhilaration of the highest order. Remember each face you pass in line. On the next pass familiarity gives way to other emotions: amusement, desire, laughter, repulsion. Everyone sizes everyone else up and one is left reflecting on the absolute absurdity of standing in line. As one of my informants wrote, "it's like we're all cattle, waiting in line to go to slaughter."

The cycle itself is of prime importance to the successful theme park operator. Lines may only be shortened if cycle time—equal to ride time plus loading time (cf. Fjellman 1992:211)—is reduced. Some theme parks, like Walt Disney World, have responded to the problem of long lines by creating
continuous loader rides, such as the Haunted Mansion ride—queer-looking as each car is smack next to the other resulting in a load time close to zero. Other parks lacking capital to create such rides resort to adding more attendants to a given ride. The strangest recollection I have of cycle time relates to a rock maze at AstroWorld. With no moving components, this kiddie attraction in Bugs Bunny Land can barely qualify as a ride. Yet management announced one season that a new attendant stationed outside would be responsible for counting each entering patron. The result was increased RPG (Rides Per Guest), a figure indicating the number of rides given as derived from the total number of daily cycles divided by patron entrance numbers indicated on ride turnstiles. The counting of persons at the rock maze had significantly helped the overall numbers of ride productivity in the rest of the park [See Table 7].

Picturing the Movement

Does vanity have its birth in the machine? Is the machine phallically connected to the human as a micro-institution of power? Are theme park rides a symbolization of earthly social relations and human modes of cognition? One cannot help but sit and marvel at the sight of two of Busch Gardens Williamsburg’s major roller coasters, The Loch Ness Monster and the Alpengeist, near the river that is nestled between the many hamlets in the park. In total: a deformed figuration that ropes itself through the trees and hilly landscape around. What human would design such a creation? There are people gawking everywhere in the THEME PARK. Many hold cameras, SLRs, 8 mm video cameras, disposable ones, and with them they make another link from machine to machines. As Julian Stallabrass indicates, “for the snapper, the
inscription of presence on to [sic] tourist sites is a mechanical, mass-produced form of identification..." (Stallabrass 1996:26). Walter Benjamin scoffed at the ways in which a photographer’s camera could transform an abject representation of poverty or unhappiness into an object of enjoyment (in ibid:22). Tourism and photography are inextricably linked in multiple ways; certainly, they are mutually oriented against work (cf. ibid:26) in that each presumes or assists in journey away from, a travel to somewhere beyond the waning and clanking of factory machine presses and rotating cylinders. Yet each shows its charlatan’s mask: travel is a primary means of covering up or of searching for something, with the knowing that one wishes to escape certain realities of the everyday. Theme parks allow for efficient travel: they mask by means of geography and the reduction of expectation. They are fit for the tourist as they mimetically dispose of social remainders humans wish to avoid: at Disney, it is absolute attention to the elimination of trash and park cleanliness, at Dollywood it is the racial sanitization of the park as non-European Americans are kept away.
It is no surprise that movement and the photograph are linked, likewise are the machines of everyday life to the strolling eye of the photographer-tourist. There are multiple levels of the filmic process going on in each theme park one may visit. The entrance: see yourself later with a friend as a friendly greeter takes a shot of you. You are then given a ticket and told to pick up your photo an hour or two later at a booth. I walk up to one such booth at Paramount's Kings Dominion in Doswell, Virginia. There are two or three individuals there fascinated with their photos which appear as negatives on a small key chain. The device is very simple, you place it up to your eye and look into the light: an instant memory. What about all of the lost memories? I ask the booth worker about unclaimed photos, and he tells me, "We throw them out but we save the key chain." The apparatus remains as the memories fade.

In some parks you may be monitored on a ride. At Disney, for example, as a means of protection one is warned when boarding the WED Peoplemover that cameras are rolling (cf. Fjellman 1992:358), just in case you try to jump off or assault another rider. What is exemplary about the ontological status of the theme park camera is the universality of its use. As David Michael Levin suggests in regards to visuality,

What principally moves our eyes is the desire to know, and that knowledge is mastery and control (in Burnett 1995:127).

The tourist wielding the camera, and the monitors of prying camera eyes in the park, even the cameras used to spy on employees I know so well,⁷ are all used in accord with Levin's notion: the camera is a device of mastery, recording people, machines and landscapes brought to assimilated life in an atmosphere of premeditation and predetermination. Perhaps the most stereotypical of theme park camera poses is the still ride camera, placed in a key location of a
ride. When developed, the riders get to see themselves with hair flung or mouths open in fear or joy. Perhaps as I have found, one can avoid the five or six dollar cost of this picture by simply taking a snap shot or a video recording of the sample images as they roll on monitors in the ride's picture booth. But can you then escape the ride's gift shop?

Functional Machines: Monorail

The first time I am sitting there, three years old on my first monorail. The machine moves on the magnetic track along to the Contemporary Resort. It begins to start up and stop, unexpectedly. It had departed from its normal mode of operation. I had begun to cry, but I was assured by my mother that nothing was wrong with the machine. I had a terrible fear of moving machines when I was young. I feared escalators, especially, as I had numerous experience the sensation of being pulled under the contraption. My father bolted over the seats in the cabin and began to pound on the door of the controller's cabin. It turned out that a pair of operators were unaware that anyone was aboard and that night they had planned to have some fun with the monorail.

The second time is almost twenty-five years later. I find myself not again at Disney, instead I am riding the monorail connecting the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino to Bally's Casino for the tenth time in a period of two years. My consciousness had been transformed, and I had then been duped by THE MACHINE again. I had no observation of the machine itself; I had not even realized its running, nor did I perceive any danger in its operation. Such was my fall, in not being able to intuit the machine's potential for disaster. What I
instead reflected on was my own body. As we traveled along the short distance from one casino to the next I allowed the lights reflecting here and there to mark multiple mimetic trajectories. Love, loss, hope, dreaming, all parallel processors in the monorail’s cabin; others had done it too. The prerecorded announcement comes through the speaker, “As we approach the station....” I didn’t even hear that. It took twenty-five years and a monorail later for me to realize the memories I had were constituents of the machine. Functionality is such a drag, especially at ten miles per hour.

Adding Life to a Machine: Automata

Farm machines have been for the most part ugly; this ugliness is common to most assemblages of machinery (Pound 1996:58).

To take the talking machine to the jungle is to emphasize and embellish the genuine mystery and accomplishment of mechanical reproduction in an age when technology itself, after the flurry of excitement at a new breakthrough, is seen not as mystique or poetry but as routine...[to take the talking machine to the jungle] to reinstall the mimetic faculty as mystery in the art of mechanical reproduction, reinvigorating the primitivism implicit in technology’s wildest dreams, therewith creating a surfeit of mimetic power (Taussig 1993:208).

What future, then, for the automaton, as we have come to know it? The familiarity of machines to the theme park visitor is now a well-established fact. As will be presented in the next section, the mechanical mark of address between the mechanisms of pleasure and the patron has only been superseded by the demand for the ultimate machine—a push driven by the growth of theme park conglomerations and public pressure to create bigger, more spectacular, more novel machines.
There was, though, what might be called the Golden Age of Automata—an era of verisimilitude in which the new abundance of machines both functional (the computer and the gear box), and leisurely (the roller coaster) had been momentarily dissolved by a special type of theme park automaton. We are most familiar with this age through the proliferation of audioanimatronic technology by the Disney corporation.

Walt Disney's first successful use of audioanimatronics was at the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair with the now dated Carousel of Progress. Other Disney creations like Pirates of the Caribbean, the Hall of Presidents and many EPCOT attractions spawned a micro-community of robots in the theme park industry. Other parks picked up on the idea and invested in similar technology, though with significantly less money than Disney, these second-generation automata often took on a kitsch-dimension.

Descriptions of the nature of such automata rides and museums are available in sources such as Fjellman (1992), which describe these rides as they develop along specific narrative lines. An example is the Carousel of Progress which creates a moralistic message hegemonically linking the American family to the progressive nature of electricity and small household appliances (Fjellman 1992:80). What is even more interesting to consider is the place to which the automaton has been assigned in the theme park.

It is not enough that the automaton looks like a human. Realism can only go so far, especially in the amusement business. As Beaune suggests, "an automaton is a machine that contains its own principle of motion" (1989:431). It does not simply move, like the spinning troika, nor does it simply spiel, like the guess-your-weight games worker; it does both and offers an entirely unique
persona as a result of the combinatory principles of machine-human hybridity. The "talking machine" is neither human nor machine. It is something other.

An introductory principle of theme park automata is the look. Some theme park robots in fact only rely on this principle, as due to budgetary reasons if they don't move at all. Such is an "automaton" made on look alone. Primitive creations that have simple movement, consider those Christmas displays in shopping malls that move in a simple back and forth motion, are often dismissed for not being lifelike. Some brochures from a company named Creative Presentations, Inc. offer a glimpse at the evolutionary progress of automata in the 1970s and 1980s. The look of one of the company's creations, The Animated Head, is, as I said, only partially significant. This particular hybrid creation appears as a head on a pedestal. As such it is not an automaton fashioned in the face of realism. A brochure for another of the company's devices offers the following advice for installation and use of automata: "at your next show dominate, don't just participate" (Creative Presentations No Date). The faculty to dominate is achieved by the look—the ability to draw people to the machine, initially, then to later keep their attention via the second and third principles of these machines. The look is always initiatory: in the Pirates of the
Caribbean consider what the ride would be like with live actors. Aside from being potentially more expensive, it would also be less decidedly attractive to the patron; it really wouldn’t work. It is the mythological principle of general mechanical technology on which such devices draw. We want to see the Pirates of the Caribbean exactly because the pirates have simulated lives and looks. We want to be moved by machines that don’t really look like us, yet there is a bit of us in them...and that is reassurance (cf. Dery 1996:143-145).

A second glimpse at this device is suggested in the movement. The most successful theme park automata move, significantly; that is they present patrons with the amusement of movement in something, a machine, that should be stationary. “Automata represent the dream, the ideal form, the utopia of the machine” (Beaune 1989:432), and they offer spectators the ontological question of “what if?” in the themed space—a place of hurried and varied movement, human and machine.\(^{10}\) Consider the significance of the movement of automata in an ad for Creative Presentations’ Animated Head:

The Head is not a movie projection technique, but true animation...the most effective and realistic display of animation this side of Disneyland...So real it’s frightening....The spectators will be spellbound as they watch a three dimensional, disembodied Head, turn, nod, blink his eyes, and look around as he converses with the audience and delivers your product presentation (Creative Presentations No Date).

Being “lifelike” is indeed a strange concept, especially in the realm of the theme park. Many parks have parlayed success even at the expense of non-complex audioanimatronics, so the idea of being “lifelike” is not necessarily paramount; but in a successful merging of the two principles (look and movement), the result can be illuminating and seemingly originary. It is to the final principle of theme park automata that such a scenario speaks, the voice.
The voice is an offering of the persuasive possibilities of the attractive, moving automaton. As rhetoricians know so well, the “message” is a by-product of content, concept, context, coupled with delivery. As a Creative Presentations ad for The Amazing Hand Machine illustrates, the voice of the device is “the pitch,” whether sales-oriented or epistemologically-oriented:

The Hands can actually demonstrate your product as they explain important sales points....to add entertainment value, the Hands can take on the voice and personality of a well known T.V. or movie star, such as W.C. Fields, Jack Benny, Archie Bunker, Graucho Marx, etc....Is it science, mechanics, electronics or magic? Customers are fascinated as they watch two disembodied hands deftly demonstrate your product while delivering a coordinated sales message (Creative Presentations No Date).

The complex relationship of look, movement and voice creates the possibility of the robot—its potential for life as well as its ambiguous existence in human society. As is often the case with many theme park machines, the automaton puts forth

[a] sort of fatal necessity that allows man [sic] to escape from thinking about his [sic] contingency, individuality, and, in the end, his [sic] freedom. Fate is thereby deliberately invested with the attributes of a factitious autonomy (Beaune 1989:433).

And although the current status of theme park automata is obscurity, each machine of the theme park is invested in the metaphor of the robot. As Beaune states, “an automaton is not just a machine, it is also the language that makes it possible to explicate [the world]” (1989:435).
Simulators: The Creation of the Editing Myth

These [mechanized rides] marked the culmination of a desire, evident throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, not simply to view technology in utilitarian terms but to value it as spectacle. Generations of Americans had thriled in viewing huge steam engines, thundering locomotives, and other powerful machinery as sublime creatures harnessed to do their bidding. Mechanical amusement rides allowed them to cultivate the delight, awe, and fear of the technological sublime still more intensely (Kasson 1978:73-4).

Technologically possible manipulations determine what in fact can become a discourse (Kittler 1990:232).

I [Walt Disney] saw that if I was ever going to have my park...here...was a way to tell millions of people about it—with TV (Marling 1994:122).

Fjellman discusses the ways in which elements of theme park discourse, such as the re-presentation and sanitation of U.S. history at Walt Disney venues, are linked to other public forms of popular culture representation, such as movies and television (Fjellman 1992:59). It is difficult to trace the specificity of the kinship between the movie industry and theme parks, but the precedents set forth by Walt Disney certainly offer much insight on the effects of this affinity.

Disney’s weekly television series on ABC in the 1950s offered dual promotional value: the filmic medium was highlighted and through film Disney created what was called “the first 60-minute commercial in the history of TV” (Marling 1994:122); that is, Disney used television and (animated) film to promote his park. Likewise, by establishing a familiarity between two distinct amusement media, Disney assured the popularity of his Disneyland park: guests coming to the park would be cued to interpret rides, landscape and visual representations in a manner associated with television viewing. Even more specific to this union is the direct linking of films with rides, such as was evident in the similarity of Disneyland’s Jungle Cruise to the film The African
Queen (ibid:92).

The post eighties era, a time of growth for theme parks, is a period in which the film-park association is even more pronounced and prolific. Six Flags parks, for example, use the trappings of Time-Warner corporate ownership of the parks to produce "instant themeing." Variations on Batman rides, such as Batman the Escape, Batman the Ride, Mr. Freeze, Batman and Robin and The Riddler's Revenge, have fashioned an effect in which the park roller coaster takes on the persona of the movies. Another indication of the move towards the movies is exemplified in the corporate literature in non-Western theme park markets. A Vekoma ride brochure discusses the abandonment of "fairy tale" themes at international parks in favor of "highly themed attractions with roots originating from animated [and feature] films" (Vekoma 1993).

The relationship between corporate sponsorship, the movie industry, filmic effects, theme parks and their constituent rides is a complex one; indeed, more complex than I can illustrate in the space I have allotted for this topic. Most significant in this discussion, though, is the personification of this union in what I term movie effects or the editing myth. Howard Rheingold, among many other cyberculture theorists, offers a suggestion, one that relates to the Kittler quotation at the beginning of this segment, that the technologies of virtual reality and telepresence put in the hands of the consumer a "reality engine" (in Virilio 1995:133). It is possible to mimic the world using technology conducive to realism, perhaps we might say "photo realism." But this is not the end of this new technological glacial flow, and I would argue that an important constituent element is often neglected in such discussions of virtual reality technologies. And that is post-production.
Post-production is the use of technological implements, often called "filters," to alter the organic content of an original. The use of "plug-ins" in computer programs like Adobe's Photoshop allows the user to modify an image in thousands of possible dimensions. In the world of consumer electronics new camcorders allow for on-the-fly effect processing, such as recording a scene in "poster mode" or "old-time movie mode," or sophisticated post-production editing, such as allowing "random assemble editing," a technique that speeds up and organizes the pasting together of video scenes. The combination of the movie industry's growth, the development of virtual technologies and the implementation of significant post-production technologies has given birth to a new mode of human consciousness not limited only to theme parks. It is what may be called the movie effect.

To describe the ramifications of "the movie effect" in the theme park world, I offer the following three preliminary theses. 1) Both theme parks and the American film industry create specific and familiar spaces for the consumer. There are many possible corollaries, the most important being the spatial creation of the American family. "Togetherness," which Karal Ann Marling discusses in relation to Walt Disney's success in the movie and theme park industries (1994:96), is a concept related to the family. In the 1950s the culture of couch families and TV dinners was built on the symbiotic relationship of television and humans: families watched television for entertainment and later supported the medium by buying advertised products. The automobile was a big factor in the decline of theme park popularity before Disney; now, with renewed vigor Walt Disney used the medium to bring the family back into the fold. In order to create a more perfect union, Disney and later theme park corporations like Six Flags had to establish familiarity within the distinct spaces of television and the
theme park.

2) The theme park begins to resemble filmic experience; film begins to look like a theme park. In order to enact a precise relationship that would draw families and even singles to theme parks and movies, designers looked to the landscapes of both media for an answer. Films resemble theme parks: though less of a clear resemblance to the reverse, the theme park has certainly affected both the perception and experiential expectations of American feature films and television. A tragic product\textsuperscript{11} of the 1990s is the film industry's impact on human consciousness. We expect to be thrilled, instantly and efficiently. We watch feature films with the expectation of quick edits and the illusion of the primacy of speed, which as Virilio has shown (1986), could be its own thesis on my list in terms of its existential significance. Films are described as "roller coaster rides" for good reasons. The more dramatic part of this thesis is the founding of theme parks in the image of the movie industry and the filmic process itself. As Marling illustrates,

Disney's theme park planners always used the older, cinematic analogy to describe the way in which the tourist was to be gently nudged from one scene to scene (by a "wienie" [sic] or attractive object at the end of a vista) in a narrative sequence of edited takes...Disneyland...is a kind of TV set (1994:125-6).

Parks resemble movies and the visitor is compelled to walk through them as if they were movie sets, and to interact and be entertained by rides that are constructed on the analogy of the movie experience.

3) Finally, theme park attractions are being designed to incorporate the order of movie-based rides or motion-based simulators. Douglas Trumbull, who many acknowledge as the "king of movie simulator rides," is best known for his work as the special effects wizard of films like 2001: A Space Odyssey. He now owns
his own simulator ride company and has designed and directed many of the most popular of the new breed of simulator rides (cf. Greenwald 1997). He has offered the following description of the goal of this new technology:

In our business of simulation, the ability to immerse you in a movie, we think, is much, much more powerful than just a roller coaster, which you know what it is. You know what a roller coaster is, you’re not in a magical environment, things can’t hit you in the face, you can’t go through things, you can’t have characters come out, you can’t have drama, suspense and action....we’re designing some amazing rides that are gonna make you feel like you’re really, not just in a ride or going someplace, but that you’re there with somebody and you have a direct tactile and physical and emotional relationship with that person. It’s quite revolutionary (Wild Rides 1997).

Trumbull’s most popular simulator is Universal Studios’ Back to the Future ride. As a way of closing this section, I offer the following recollection of my cinematic experience with this ride.

I enter the ride area after witnessing a number of promos for the ride displayed on television monitors outside the structure of Back to the Future. They give us, the riders, descriptions on what we will see, as well as safety and rider requirements; they act as trailers for the ride itself. Next I walk into the elaborate queuing area and I note the architecture of the inside of the building. It is made to resemble a movie set, or I should say more precisely it is made to resemble the fictional landscape of a film created via the movie set? Multi-referentiality is obvious here. I approach a series of doors, corridors to the ride proper, and I am led by a crew of ride attendants who instruct me to go to a specific door denoted by a number. After leaving the waiting area, our group is herded to our escape vehicle, the mock-up of the DeLorean automobile from the film to which the ride owes its legacy. We get inside the “cars” and are again bombarded with multiple sensory stimulations: flashing lights followed by
darkness, horns and sirens, narration, smoke and the movement of the car starting up. The lights in the cabin of the vehicle flash and we are told that we have been cleared for take-off; "that's our cue...hold on to your hats," says the doctor character who appeared in the film, *Back to the Future*. The launch occurs and we are teleported through a time eddy on the screen. At that point we watch the film intently and forget that we are in a staged area; this reminds me of watching a film in the theater and forgetting that I am in a theater...is that the illusion of "being there?" Darkness occurs on the screen and we see a simulated town which will comprise the majority of the ride. Through quick jerking turns and the illusion created by acceleration and the fear of hitting things, we are given a first person identification with the various characters whose voices act as narration throughout the...I could say "film" or "ride" here...but I guess that's my point. "Watch for traffic," we are told as we bop up and down on the screen. Meanwhile, the car in which we are riding is violently shaking around in order to mimic the visual experience on the screen. The experience is itself predictable, and from having ridden many of Trumbull's simulators, and others as well, I offer the following plot summary: we are thrown into a foreign or unfamiliar land...we run into problems and are confronted with often near-fatal experiences...through wisdom and a little luck we emerge from the experience unscathed and victorious...just like a roller coaster or a good movie! The car escapes the adventure and lands safely back through the eddy. The chaos is over as we crash through a logo with the words "Back to the Future." This is the first time I ever crashed through a logo, I think to myself. We depart the vehicle after being thrown around, physically and mentally, to the words of a recorded voice and some music symbolizing the end of the ride. I wipe the sweat off of my forehead.
A Tourist Machine

"I knew Vekoma could produce anything we wanted." A quotation included in a story of the Dutch government’s assistance in building a theme park in Uzbekistan. It was an action that involved some 70 trucks carrying a Boomerang, Giant Wheel, Polyp, Sky Flyer, Waikiki Wave and Swing Boat. "The people of Uzbekistan have never seen such rides and they will be amazed and delighted," said Eckart Schulz, Vekoma's Export Manager (Vekoma 1994).

When I stepped off the ride the first thing I wanted to do was get in line to ride it again [Bethany, an informant].

The significance of the machine to travel is epic. As I have suggested the very structure of theme park landscapes and rides is mechanical, but the experience of going to theme parks or more importantly of experiencing them is the result of a complex, figurative yet enacted machine—a tourist machine.

Humans travel via car, plane and mass transportation to theme parks. As history indicates, the earlier parks of the East were built after the introduction of transportation technologies, such as the trolley (Kasson 1978:7), and contemporary parks like those of Disney stress transportation as a marker of liminality into the new world as transportation technologies, both traditional and futuristic, populate the inside of Disney parks. The "tourist machine," or the metaphor of travel as self-fulfillment, knowledge-seeking, etc., will be more specifically indicated and analyzed in Chapter 8, but here I offer this interpretation of a metaphoric device in the post-Disney era: The theme park patron may visit the theme park on the premise that s/he can travel without traveling.

At an uncle's funeral a few years back I recall the reaction of one person who upon seeing a picture of the uncle, his son and a "Chinese" woman in a frame near the casket, said to the son: "When did you go to China?" "We never
went to China. That was taken at Splendid China in Orlando.” We never went there, but we were there: poster board words for the new era of theme parks and associative simulated travel, just like a description of the ride experience of *A Trip to the Moon* at Coney Island one hundred years ago:

...said one voyager, “The great wings lifted and fell, the aerodrome heaved, the earth dropped down from sight, and we felt that we were soaring far above on our lunar journey...thunder rolled and crashed, and there was fierce rain on the awning overhead.” “We are passing through a storm,” the captain would shout. “We are quite safe” (Snow 1984:82).

The implications of simulated travel in the theme park world are numerous; as well, one may find “simulated travel” in other tourist sites and popular culture arenas: museums and popular collections of material culture present the illusion of travel in many of the same ways as the theme park. Opposed to “EPCOT travel,” that is the metaphor of how the lands of the world are accessible to the EPCOT visitor in mere hours, is symbolic travel without purpose. As I will show elsewhere, the techniques of Situationism and other performance-based movements give the possibility of resistive travel in such locales. I think too of another form of symbolic travel; it occurs in the Werner Herzog film *Stroszek*. In the film, an alienated traveler from Germany finds identification in a Midwestern tourist trap. This protagonist, Bruno Stroszek, ends the film and his life by aimlessly riding a tourist sky lift located on a strip among countless other nameless stores and amusement spots. The lift comes back to the station and Stroszek continually returns with the ride as it makes its cycle.
The Mechanics of the Park

The description of the system of objects cannot be divorced from a critique of that system's practical ideology (Baudrillard 1996:10).

When a ride malfunctions it's going to become a danger unless there's a mechanic to fix it. Fail to have enough mechanics and your park soon gets a reputation for unreliability, damaging visitor numbers and gate receipts. Mechanics can be difficult to motivate into responding quickly and are often at the center of any industrial dispute, but they're essential to the smooth running of your Theme Park (Bullfrog Software 1995:27).

There are a number of ways in which the "machine" is a motivational force in theme park worlds, simultaneously as device, metaphor and spiritual theme. The obsession with machines and the begetting of them as "friends" of humans through the evolution of ever more sophisticated cybernetic systems is well documented, and may be linked to a number of general existential topics: the frontier expansion (cf. Turner 1996), the birth of cities, the intensification of machine complexes (big industry and the military), concern with travel and discovery, novelty, the growth of a techno-scientific cosmology. Dependency on
machines has led to aphasia when it comes to reflecting on them. Does one think for even a minute, for example, about the nature of the machine as it relates to one's public or personal life? Eliminate all of your household machines for a day and ask, are you still a person on that day, or do you feel completely alone without them?

One can certainly feel alone in the company of the machine. Karl Marx's conception of alienation as related to industrial machines and production might look something like this when transferred to the machines of everyday life found in the theme park: an individual watches the Gunslinger as it makes its cycle. Children and adults scream and holler as the ride spins around for its two-minute or so cycle. The attendant gets less and less interested in the machine of pleasure as the Houston sun beats on the attendant's back, which is cloaked in a nonbreathable fabric, too warm for Houston's climate. The Gunslinger continues to please the crowds riding it throughout the day, though the attendant gets more and more frustrated with the $4.85 an hour pay. The process is repeated again on the next day, perhaps with a different attendant, perhaps not.

Feeling alone without the machine is a much different evocation of the "machine in the park." It is a result of the entropic fall of the ride, the breaking down of the machine of pleasure, something inaffectionately referred to as a "shutdown." Rides may be shutdown (10-7, radio code) for three main reasons: patron problems (a disorderly person or someone in an unauthorized ride area), weather (rain, lightning, high winds, etc.) or a mechanical problem (when it simply breaks—the most common problem). Such shutdowns are listed on maintenance sheets and at the close of each day many theme parks add up the "down time" for all rides amounting to something akin to a marker of efficiency.
The operation of rides is then tied directly to management’s definition of theme park success: it is all about keeping the rides afloat. The metaphor of a functioning machine is carried to the domain of management with the life-force of the Operations division being the totality of all working rides. Of course, theme parks are not simply constructed on rides; there are concessions, entertainment, games, grounds control, but come rain or other problems, the first panic one sees is the patron filing a complaint at Guest Relations related to the rides: “We came to the park and none of the rides are working!” What is then relevant is the patron’s perception that the lifeblood of a theme park is to be found in its rides, specifically working ones.

The breakdown of rides is counteracted through prevention—management teaches its workers to do inspection checks and other techniques to prevent major ride shutdowns—and maintenance—the park’s mechanics get the rides back up and working as soon as possible if they go down.\(^\text{12}\)

Other “mechanical” aspects of the theme park are not necessarily unique to that environment: these include mechanical solidarity (“this is all working like a machine”), the Megamachine (cf. Mumford in Lyotard 1990:112), and associative metaphors derived from industrial production in a capitalist society. As the game Theme Park accurately depicts, a park’s financial success often rests on its ability to avert disaster and to maintain relative order; success is solved by the borrowing of management theory and operations strategy from other business sources, thus I say that the “mechanical” nature of theme park operations is not unique to this venue alone. “Operation” is another mechanical metaphor I am familiar with; it was the name of the department (“Operations”) in which I worked. We worked to preserve the machine: to make sure that our employees knew how to keep the actual machines running.
Exposed Inside: On Seeing the Parts Move

A machine, whenever exposed, speaks for itself (Chernikov 1974:156).

Just as a human subject is secured in a theme ride, the machine contains its own potentiality within its gear boxes. Without the motor, the machine will not run; it supplies the latency and the concentrated energy to the rest of the ride (cf. Pound 1996:17). Even years beyond the rise of "The Mechanical Age" we seem frightened by the potentiality of the motor. Consider the scenes which foreshadow the sabotage and crash of a roller coaster in the film *Rollercoaster*: we are shown a motor, it cranks up; we see it a few more times intercut with quick edits of the doomed roller coaster running on its tracks loaded with guests. Though the physicality of the disaster is realized through the tracks and trains of steel, it is the motor that provides both the personality and schizophrenia of the machine. The suggestion is clear: like artist Alan Rath's "exposed machines" (cf. Pomeroy 1991:278), the most authentic machines or the ones that seem the safest to us, are also the ones that run mysteriously, hidden from our
eyes, on motors that protract the greatest differences. Not understanding the workings of the machine, a fact common in the home computer user world, or visualizing spectacular machines, such as perpetual motion machines (cf. Anon. No Date a), has led to even greater distance between the human and the machine, again a Marxist theme. Even the most spectacular machines, like the conceptual devices in Raymond Roussel’s Impressions of Africa (cf. Cherniack-Tzuriel 1976), leave the user/rider without agency as the machine is further pushed to mythological levels. It is no wonder that the mechanics are of the few workers allowed in the machine rooms of major theme park rides. Seeing the parts move is definitely disturbing.

One Last Ride

Rides are the most constrictive attractions. We are strapped into a conveyance and sent passively through a story. The cars or boats move past tableaux that often surround us. We face forward or look to the side. Many cars have high backs and eye-restricting sides. They spin and turn, pointing us toward the next scene and away from anything that might spoil the illusion. They frame our view as we ride past in the dark. Exits to vehicle storage areas are camouflaged. Only with a glitch in the ride is our attention drawn to escape routes and the possibility of leaving the ride. Yet leaving a stalled ride leads to disappointment, not the exhilaration of escape (Fjellman 1992:258).

Escape? On June 2, 1997 a group of high school students experienced what was destined to be “one last ride.” As part of a high school outing, the students wanted to enjoy a final trip on the Bonzai Pipeline Slide located in the Waterworld USA water park in Concord, California. The students were told that it was time to go home, but instead of getting back on school buses, they all, in the words of a Waterworld USA spokesperson, “rushed the lifeguard” and continued to board the waterslide. They had hoped to break a school
record for total number on the waterslide. Well over thirty students went down the slide like a human chain when the support beams broke and forced a rip to open up in one of the slides. One student was killed while thirty-two others were injured as they plummeted thirty-five feet onto concrete and fencing. Afterwards, one student described the event saying, “We heard a loud crash, kind of like a roller coaster starting up.” Another woman witnessing the event commented on the mayhem, “The water coming out of the slide was blood. The kids were covered in dirt and blood. There was no water at all. It was mud and blood.” Is the only escape from a theme ride the possibility of death? The waterslide was dismantled on June 6, 1997. Published reports did not indicate any structural abnormalities in the slide itself (Dateline 1997).

Machines that Function

Today’s modern and sophisticated amusement rides and devices are designed to delight adults as well as children. They are becoming an indispensable feature of playgrounds, department stores, shopping centers and even hotels and motels (Sansei No Date).

What is the extension of the theme park ride as it travels, vicissitude to vicissitude, eventually landing in the even more familiar spaces of the “machines of everyday life?” How is a roller coaster like/not like an ATM?

The rides I have looked at are certainly not a representative majority of all of the machines present in theme park worlds. Perhaps some individuals would argue that the most quotidian machines there are not roller coasters and water rides but the ATMs, automatic souvenir machines, speakers simulated to look like rocks, surveillance cameras, automatic sinks and self-stopping hand dryers...an exhaustive list which details the many themes a park relates:
commercialism, efficiency, order, individualism, patriotism, simulation, vanity, excess.

I am at Paramount’s Carowinds and I happen to be thinking about machines that day too. I see a paddle wheel contraption providing a simulated waterfall in a retention pond flooded with spectators feeding ducks...to my left is a John Deere display, a couple of tractors I never expected to see in this place (machines as ads for other machines?)...I peruse the screens of a virtual reality game and capture the reflections of patron faces as they walk past the game. I walk out of the park thinking about all of the devices I had come in contact with on that day. I had avoided all of the rides, but I couldn’t seem to get past the others. As I continue to walk I zoom in on a simulated rock speaker piping out Carmina Burana. The automatic focus on the camera begins to fall out of focus just as the small holes in the device begin to fill up the viewfinder. I’d had it with the machine.

Pitch Machine

"Guess the speed of your pitch" [theme park signage].

I have seen numerous such devices in the parks: "I guess your weight, you step on the scale," or "Throw the ball and try and guess the speed of your pitch. If you get close enough, you win a prize." These machines, and there are others of this sort, are there for the building of spectacle. The emphasis is not on the speed of a pitch or the dimensions of one’s person, be it height or weight, per se, but on the “scene” enacted by the meaningless numbers: after all, what is more useless than the knowing of a pitcher’s speed? Significance is attached to
the person in the picture, and others gather round in a social drama to judge the worth of the patron (a pitcher) or the guess (in the case of age and weight contests), or to simply be amused at the proceedings. Each such game, from the “strong man” hammer game to the horse race game (one in which a group of four or more people spray water in holes to make miniature horses run to a finish line) to virtual reality shooting games, has a definitive goal: that is winning in a social setting. One either loses a game or one wins. The epicenter of such machines is not the fetish for the prize, stuffed dogs seem hardly worth it, but the act of competition itself. Competition takes its place alongside the rampant individualism so common to the machines of everyday life. Only the roller coaster with its screaming commune makes a claim to community in the theme park. “Your throw: 68 m.p.h. Take a prize!” Applause.

The Architecture of the Machine

The Mayan Mind Bender, a ride installed at AstroWorld near the end of my tenure there, is an example of the contemporary transformation of the status of the theme park machine: from mechanical functionality to aesthetic sensibility. The Mayan Mind Bender was billed as the only indoor roller coaster in Texas; its themeing was strictly “Mayan” (?), at least that’s what the promotional commercials and advertisements said. Complete with a temple-like structure, the ride promised thrills of a traditional roller coaster coupled with the unpredictable and fear-laden structure of a dark ride. What is indicative about the Mind Bender and the evolution of theme park rides in general, is illustrated in the ride’s kinship. With the closing of Boblo Island in Detroit, Michigan, Six Flags AstroWorld took the opportunity of purchasing the park’s Nightmare ride,
a Vekoma roller coaster which like its successor was a dark ride (cf. Throgmorton 1994:85). After the ride was shipped to Houston, all that was left to do was to re-theme “The Nightmare” as the “Mayan Mind Bender.” The transformation was complete, though some patrons complained that the new ride was a joke, a “kiddie ride,” while employees grumbled that AstroWorld never got a new ride like some of the other Six Flags parks, instead it got stuck “with someone else’s used trash.”

Roller Coaster: Design

Buying a coaster for the first time? Your choices are limited only by your imagination (Vekoma 1994:2).

Choosing the coaster that will become your park’s signature ride is a major marketing and financial decision (Vekoma 1994:4).

I have many memories from my childhood experiences with machines and theme parks. What first fascinated me about the theme park was the roller coaster. To no surprise this ride is the one most closely associated with theme parks in the popular imagination. My interest was in part spawned by the 1976 film Rollercoaster, which dealt with an extortionist-bomber bent on blowing up the country’s famous coasters. Before I rode my first coaster, which I think was the Gemini at Cedar Point, I designed one. It was 1980 or so and I was on a family vacation at Walt Disney World. I remember then being fascinated with an amusing device at EPCOT center; it was a do-it-yourself roller coaster design game. It allowed one to create a roller coaster from scratch, using real physics which in some cases negated your design if the ride was deemed dangerous or impossible. After the track is laid out you have the option of then riding your creation along the track in first person perspective. Though it is not every kid’s
This is the word of the design artist, the engineer who proceeds by mythological steps to create the rides which terrify and amuse the millions. Designers and engineers dwell in unapproachable light (I Timothy 6:16 Psalm 104:2), as they attempt to one-up the competition from other parks. Many sources have detailed what has been dubbed a “coaster arms races” (Coastermania 1996), which is the result of increased public need for greater novelty in its rides. Vekoma (1994:5) describes the process by which a major roller coaster is designed, installed and successfully operated in a park. The process of design follows many steps similar to industry research and development, but a crucial component not present in other realms is the aesthetic dimension, something especially accentuated in roller coasters.

Roller coasters are often the greatest landmarks in the theme park, or in some cases they are the most notable pieces of moving architecture and thus draw crowds due to some special feature—the most loops, the highest, the fastest, the strangest. New innovations in theme park technology appear first in the roller coaster: from wooden coasters to tubular steel to inverted loop coasters, each design element is a marker of the changing face of the contemporary theme park.14 Claims to park superiority are very often a result of such innovation: this is the case with Cedar Point, since it has the largest number of coasters of any park in the world, or with Six Flags Magic Mountain, boasting the Superman roller coaster, the world’s highest which I profile in a following section. “It all comes down to design,” said an AstroWorld employee and roller coaster buff who built working models of coasters in his spare time.15 Unfortunately, the imaginative ideas of buffs and enthusiasts have little impact on roller coaster design. They can only dream.
Roller Coaster: Exclusive Ride Time

I'll never stop riding roller coasters. I started when I was eight years old and I'll ride until the day I die. I'll travel wherever it takes to ride a new one. When I run out in the United States, I'll go to another country to ride [A member of ACE in Wild Rides 1997].

There are no monstrous machines (Canguilhem 1992:58).

That the roller coaster or any other ride is a monstrous machine is subjective commentary. What characteristics define a monster anyway? And can one be sure that the elements behind the design of a given coaster are also constitutive of the psychology of the rider? Groups like ACE, the American Coaster Enthusiasts, and numerous popular documentaries that promote the roller coaster over other theme park rides lend to the status of the roller coaster as the premier of all theme park rides.

Aside from its symbolic status, one of the most dominant topics associated with the ride is the psychology of its rider. For some riders the roller coaster represents an escape, a giving up of autonomy: "You don't know what's gonna happen; you're just letting the coaster take control of you." Other riders liken the sensation of riding a roller coaster to that of having sex, to death, or to taking drugs:

In various ways all these rides were designed to throw people off balance, literally and imaginatively, to sweep patrons up in their grasp and momentarily overwhelm them before allowing order to be restored at the end. Such rides served in effect as powerful hallucinogens, altering visitors' perceptions and transforming their consciousness, dispelling everyday concerns in the intense sensations of the present moment. They allowed customers the exhilaration of whirlwind activity without physical exertion, of thrilling drama without imaginative effort (Kasson 1978:81-2).
Coaster fanatics have their own opinions as to which elements make the greatest coaster: some offer speed, surprises, G-forces, air-time, themeing, or a variety of other elements such as pacing (cf. Wild Rides 1997). Many persons, such as ACE members, place emphasis on riding as many as possible roller coasters in a given year. They travel the country and the world often in groups, hoping to get that perfect ride on a given roller coaster. Like those who design the machines, ACE members are often able to “describe their favorite rides in every detail...[such that a] truly great wild ride is measured in those details” (Wild Rides 1997). The eternal return manifested as a design number?

The Highest Machine: Superman the Escape

Closure in technology involves the stabilization of an artifact and the ‘disappearance’ of problems. To close a technological ‘controversy,’ one need not solve the problems in the common sense of that word. The key point is whether the relevant social groups see the problem as being solved (Pinch & Bijker 1997:44).

Like every perpetuum mobile, Absolute Knowledge must stop at some point...and like every perpetuum mobile, it cannot run by itself (Plotnitsky 1993:324).
The fastest, the biggest, the longest, the highest, the best themed: all of these qualities describe the labels that are attached to the newest rides opening each year in theme parks across the world. "The Highest," which I will use to explain the phenomenon shared by the other labels, is a quest of sorts for the Absolute. The new Superman the Escape roller coaster at Six Flags Magic Mountain is the subject of much anticipation and hype. At 415 feet it is listed as the tallest and fastest of all roller coasters, delivering 6.5 seconds of weightlessness, 4.5 Gs and is the first ride to break the 100 mph barrier (Magic Mountain 1997)—a surprise to many theme park aficionados who thought that day would be long off.

After the ride opened in the 1997 season, a number of Internet postings offered praise for Superman:

The acceleration is incredible. You are off to a flying speed in just a second. It is really hard to explain the initial sensation that you feel. The acceleration is so intense for the first two to three seconds it is really hard to concentrate on anything (Anon. 1997a).

Superman uses new advanced LSM technology (Linear Synchronous Motors)\textsuperscript{17} to propel the train from 0-100 in seven seconds. Magic Mountain has been quick to capitalize on the record-breaking ride, even to include the words of the first pilot to fly the B2 Stealth airplane in a park press-kit:

Until now, I have never duplicated anywhere else the kind of awesome acceleration I feel from inside a jet fighter cockpit...SUPERMAN THE ESCAPE will allow the average person to experience this extraordinary sensation. And believe me, they won't soon forget it! (Magic Mountain 1997).

...undoubtedly newer, faster rides will emerge on the landscape of the THEME PARK.
Crystal Beach Cyclone

By 1946 the Crystal Beach Cyclone was no more. Designed by Harry G. Traver, called by some the avant-garde designer of roller coasters (Munch 1982.ix), the Cyclone is perhaps the greatest monument to the theme park ride ever built. As a roller coaster it was a monster, having a full-time nurse posted at its gates; the architecture of its drops, banked turns and oddly-raised tracks made the Cyclone a sight like no other. Yet the “falling short” (cf. Blanchot 1986) of the Cyclone is the one feature of the machine that most greatly allegorizes its presence-absence. The Cyclone was not preserved, and even though some have talked of rebuilding it to specifications,\(^{18}\) most of the theme park public, save enthusiasts like ACErs, have never heard of the ride, nor would find it particularly remarkable given the lust for new simulator and movie-based rides. The razing of the Cyclone has left the Traver’s ride as a permanent mythological point of orientation for those who would dare to ride it yet cannot since its specifications would likely not meet the safety requirements of contemporary theme parks. It is then the greatest ride-machine of absence ever (dis)assembled. The later Traver was too an object of absence: a maker of Navy weapons systems, he never published his anthropological text, *Earth, Life and Man* (Munch 1982:3). Though he dabbled in the philosophical realm of life, his thoughts seemingly came back to his rides, philosophical in their own way:
People are exactly alike when they ride amusements—they react the same way, get the same thrills and the same pleasure (Traver in Munch 1982:137).

Final Machine

"Machine:" device, means, allied to "make" (Skeat 1993:263).

It's almost comical sometimes when you sit back and watch people being drawn to certain rides at a theme park [John D., an informant].

The places I write about are all about machines; they are run on and maintained by machines, both human, industrial-technical and metaphorical. My research at Carowinds park in North Carolina in the summer of 1997 was the first such visit in which I rode none of the rides in a theme park. What would it mean to write theme parks in light of resistance to the motor and the machine? Resistance? Had it been done there, in theme parks? What would it look like and would it begin with the toppling of the mechanical structures I have set out to describe? Most significantly, perhaps, is what autobiography would resemble in such a world of collapsing machines?

The dream. I am in a theme park I have never before seen. I hear in the distance two incredible booms, rhythmic and in distinct succession of one another. As I walk closer to the sound, I see the two gigantic obelisks, each the length of two Eiffel Towers, each painted in a kitschy color, one bright red the other blue. As I approach I see that two monster structures are moving in the rhythm I described with sound. Each flips 360 degrees on its vertical axis two or three times at a speed unmatched by any theme ride I have ever seen, well in excess of three hundred miles an hour. After the flipping has occurred, the obelisk falls violently to the ground, crashing and shaking the park as it then
rests on the ground from end to end. After the first obelisk had made its cycle, the second took up the same movement. As I walked closer to the ride I noticed that there were no supporting towers present to make the movements of the obelisk-machines possible. They were somehow running on magnetic fields that allowed the two structures to move so quickly and so fluidly. As I walked even closer, I felt an incredible sense of dread and horror as I thought about the riders in the two structures. I have to surmise that the riders line the sides of the two obelisks in seats of some sorts. I cannot recall if the two towers had windows or not, but I find it impossible that any human could withstand the G-forces produced nor could any human ever survive the violent crash to the ground undertaken at the end of the ride cycle.

*I feel like ralphing as I get off of the ride.*
1I am here interested in the metaphor of a box that gives life, or a box that is other-worldly; this is the case with the Ark of the Covenant. Is it not the case that rumors have surfaced of persons trying to rebuild the Ark: a box that is full of god(s); and could one say that such rumors are fueled by the very magic that says a mechanical, non-human yet living box could be endowed to do without gears, levers, switches or energy itself? I think what is really inside the Ark is a stack of papers.

2This sort of description is offered by an informant, Emily K., in regards to one of the country’s tallest steel coasters: “[On Cedar Point’s Magnum XL-200] I embrace the strange physical and psychological sensations that I experience before, during, and after the ride itself. I perceive each individual roller coaster as a challenge to be overcome, a goal to be achieved. There was a time when I thought that I could conquer any roller coaster in the world…. [On the hill of the Magnum] it was then that I realized that I had finally met my match. All of a sudden I became utterly frightened. Although a few of my friends did confront this beast, I refused to ride the Magnum…I finally mustered up the courage to ride the Magnum when my friends and I went to Cedar Point during prom weekend. I felt as though my heart would burst with nervous anticipation as we climbed that first hill. Truthfully, after that I was not that scared. I actually became very excited. What a rush! I was so thrilled that I had conquered this coaster that I rode it more throughout the day. Although I did overcome my fears, I will always remember the Magnum XL-200 as the one roller coaster that truly intimidated me.”

3As Jean-Claude Beune suggests, machines, specifically automata, have evolved from aestheticized roots, what might be called the *techno-mythological idea* of the primacy of the object (1989:431), to a state of functionality: “it was how the machines worked that mattered, their function, machines working en masse in industry and later in computing” (ibid.). It is not entirely accurate to compare automata, though, to the mechanics of roller coasters or troikas, as their personification and aestheticization, though often anthropomorphized, is unlike the mythology of the piano-playing automaton where the relationship between humans and machines is simulated and primal. This point will be addressed in regards to Disney audioanimatronics later, but it is interesting to think of a mythological comparative point of theme park machines. I speak here of a reversal in the evolution of mechanical technology addressed by Beune. In the case of machines like the roller coaster, the specificity of that device has led to a movement back to aestheticization and myth: the roller coaster evolved in industrial contexts, such as from the switchback railway—essentially a converted coal mine train used for pleasure. Though other machines have become more functional in orientation, the roller coaster maintains its symbolic association with humans: it is there to serve, and though functional, its real-world uses seem minimal.

4A number of states like Pennsylvania have incorporated new legislation in their efforts to maintain the safety of their state’s amusement park rides (cf. Futrell 1997:26-28).

5Disney’s EPCOT has recently opened the ride Test Track, a driving simulator ride that attempts to reproduce the effect of a fast car racing on a test track. It is also created as a pedagogical experience as the audience learns about what goes on in the making and testing of automobiles.

6This is the *Fin del Capo*, or “end of the head.” It refers to a portion of the track that “quickly ducks under an overhead support in such a way as to give the rider the sense of imminent decapitation” (Roller Coaster FAQ 1994).

7One of my job duties in the park was to collect video documenting poor employee performance.

8In many ways the automaton, like the general machine, replaces or supplants human agency, or perhaps acts as a filter of it. As Jean Epstein suggested, “all these instruments, telephone,
microscope, magnifying glass, cinematograph, lens, microphone, gramophone, automobile, kodak, aeroplane, are not merely dead objects. At certain moments these machines become part of ourselves, interposing themselves between the world and us, filtering reality as the screen filters radium emanations” (Orwell 1997).

9A company from Schaumburg, Illinois which I believed existed sometime in the 1970s, though I do not have a date indicated in the company literature.

10“What if?” has been recently tested with the chess match between Kasparov and the computer Deep Blue (Cook & Kroker 1997).

11Many of my friends get tired of hearing me complain about what I consider a sinister effect of the movie industry. I have labeled it the “Jurassic Park Mode” of American film. It consists of the following: (1) get a lot of money and spend it all on technology, like the rendering of dinosaurs in Jurassic Park, and forget about story, content and characterization; (2) use fast-paced editing to create an illusion of “being there” and the feeling of high emotion. Just compare a film from the 1970s or even the early 1980s to one made in the late 1990s and you will definitely see both of these points at work. High-tech films are dubbed as “monuments to the disappearance of cinema into special effects” by the Krokers (1996:133). Too little attention has focused on the sorts of connections I maintain exist; the result being new, invisible forms of mechanically-inspired hegemony. The American tradition in the Machine Age differs greatly from the Futurists’ obsessed desires for that which was mechanical. As one source suggests, the American response to the age was polite and well-mannered, “it was significantly tempered by an effort to connect the new age of the machine with some cultural tradition that would give it sanction” (Orwell 1997). Intentions die quickly, and in some cases this affinity was never realized. It was, however, fully realized in the Disney cinematic tradition. Enough said!

12Mechanics are often one of the highest paid groups of park employees.

13I discuss another related story, one involving the themeing of the Mayan Mind Bender, in Chapter 5.

14The public’s need for constant ride innovation seems to only center around roller coasters; there is no demand for new troikas or spinning rides as their design perhaps leaves the rider feeling inadequate. New simulator rides, which are confined to small spaces, have however spawned some interest in innovation beyond the roller coaster.

15Another Rides manager with whom I was acquainted had an extensive database of roller coasters on his computer. We had many such ride buffs who worked in Operations and other park departments at AstroWorld.

16Denise Larrick, Custom Coasters President in Wild Rides (1997).

17I had even heard on Access Hollywood sometime this summer that NASA was considering the technology for its own craft. However, I was unable to confirm this rumor with Six Flags Magic Mountain representatives. Such a real-world use of theme park ride technology is almost unprecedented; almost, as the Disney WED Peoplemover design has serviced the International Terminal of Houston’s Intercontinental Airport for many years.

18Hersheypark’s Wildcat roller coaster has many similar design elements of the Traver’s cyclone. On look it alone it also resembles the beasts built by Traver.
CHAPTER 5

SLAUGHTERHOUSE MAP

There is no carnival without loss. No Luna Park without a slaughterhouse (Hollier 1992:xxiii).

The concept of space is not in space (Lefebvre 1991:299).

The Gate

When I think of going in “the gate” I think of Disney’s Main Street [Joe, an informant].

It is a Saturday morning at AstroWorld. The Security detail has roped off the area surrounding the three pathways that will lead patrons around the park in circular momentum. The space is just about to open, and soon the crowds will overpower the guards’ ropes as they will run feverishly to the first ride of the day. This space is initiatory, for what it defines are thresholds: country, time, setting, population (Real 1977:53) are all implicated by the paths that fork out from the front. I am watching the patrons that morning with Jeff; he is greeting people and reacting to the general excitement that has built in the anticipation to enter. Everyone wants to get in, I think momentarily. Some little kid shouts out, “Mommy, can we stay all day?” I never hear the answer but I rest assured
that the kid will get what she wants. Why would anyone want to stay here all
day?, I ask myself with each turn of the front gate turnstiles. Another one
enters, and then another. This gate is built on repetition, though for them it's all
about pilgrimage (cf. Moore 1980). A family gathers around me to figure out
what to do that day. There's a lot of noise and Jeff has gone off to talk to other
groups near the ticket booths. “Huh?,” I pause for a bit. Then I refocus on the
family: two European-American parents and two boys. They're all decked out
in theme park gear: shorts, hats, sunglasses, baggy clothes with lots of logos.
“What’s good to do?,” the boy persists. “Well, we have a lot of great rides!”
“Where are they?,” the other boy asks. “Just around the bend....ah, the corner,”
I point towards Oriental Village. “Everything looks so neat and well-kept,” the
woman narrates. They run off after thanking me for my service. I really then
want to shout back at them, Forget Main Street, fuckers! Don’t go in! We’re
deceiving you and you us! There’s no mediation other than the power of the
landscape you are about to enter, and it is at worst a facade, at best hyperreal
Medical Kit

Three people are caught in Medical Services. One is trying to get a bee-sting attended to, the other is tired from heat and walking, just about to pass out, while the third is asking for some water, probably in the best shape of the three. The person with the bee-sting gets the first attention from the two medical personnel in the office; it is located near Gabby's in the Western Junction section of the park. The shoulder of the woman has begun to flare up—bright red and growing. The doctor applies some solvent that will stop the pain and the itch that will follow. The woman looks to the side and down on the shoulder as this is all happening: "You can see the puncture." The male doctor seems to miss her comment; he is too wrapped up in the circularity of the sting and the elevated plateau that the bee poison has produced around the center. The second person has just passed out from exhaustion on one of the many beds in the back room of Medical Services. He begins to drift off, eventually falling into R.E.M. sleep. He imagines that he has just walked over a bridge during the dark of night. He walks for what seems in dreamtime to be hours, until finally reaching a deserted street. He, seized with the fear of this unfamiliar place, begins to run: each sound, every storefront on the street, the entirety of his whole being as it relates to the street is confronted in the minuteness of details. A pebble takes on enormous proportions and it alone strikes more terror in his mind than the poltergeist of the street; but the street is the poltergeist and the pebble, and his consciousness is itself a traveler in its spaces. He screams and wakes up to the concern of the second medical person. The woman assures him that it was only a dream. "Hey, remember where you are. We don't allow bad dreams here, mister!," she replies in a jocular tone. The third person gets her drink of water and exits the building.
Two Vietnam veterans are conversing under the faux-front gate at Knoebels in Elysburg, Pennsylvania. Unlike many patrons of other parks, they are able to forego the *front gate experience* that has so commonly characterized the beginnings and endings of theme park days. They have just walked from the muddy parking lot of grass with their families; each having dropped off his family to take in the park’s rides and minor attractions. There isn’t much said between these two on that day, but this space seems to really suit them. Knoebels’ groves and meandering paths display a contentment with a space that simply is: its rides and buildings seem to lie in nonthemed proximity next to one another; people seem at ease and willing to reflect. When they do talk their commentary fixates on current events, family stories, tales from the office, and each bit of conversation is rooted in some historical discourse about the past. They felt used by their country. Each was living the American Dream in his own sense, and each was at home at Knoebels; it was a place that relaxed
those who entered under the arch that forgoes front gate experiences.

The Imaging Satellite


Twenty thousand miles above the Earth, a multi-million dollar satellite is capturing images of the landscape below. It is an operation being conducted telepresently, a guy with a joystick and keyboard commands a remote device to do his bidding. The collective experience of the world is what this guy determines: with one twist of a stick he can zoom in and out, approximate and distort. Many have talked about the spatial rendering of modernity, not simply as an architectural project, but as a consciousness-raising moment (cf. Berman 1982; Soja 1989), where designers, tenement inhabitants, and stock broker homes meet on the operating table, they all angles and pans of an uncanny vision of all that has ever been lived in, moved in, moved on or through. Forget limen—for above the Earth one can see the connections, even if they are not intentional. Strip malls run left, and to the right the blue dots are cars at night rushing the exit ramps in Los Angeles, ersatz stretches on highway to highway, and high-rise monsters dot the sides of road after road. Watching the ebb and flow of the Earth from above, the operator has the luxury of looking to the left, off of the computer screen, to a real window looking below to the courtyard in a top-secret government installation. There was a movement under way by the United States government to assess the possibility of social uprising and disruption in the streets following the aftermath of the last great riot in Los Angeles. A communiqué had detailed the need to further explore and
understand the nature of dwelling and its relationship to things like human personality, political protest, and the dichotomy of work and play. If the operator did a more careful analysis of his images he might realize the utter impossibility of his task: he’s not going to find any bit of difference between the ersatz and the purely functional. Imaging rules.

**Ramus’ Markers**

A living being can subsist only *outside itself* (Georges Bataille in Ronell 1994:2).

Boy: Grandpa, grandpa wake up! Wake up!
Grandfather: What? What’s that?
Boy: Wake up grandpa!
Grandfather: Oh Billy, what are you so excited about?
Boy: Dad say’s we’re all going to Cedar Point soon.
Grandfather: Well...that’s worth getting excited about.
Boy: Yeah, but I wish we could go today.
Grandfather: Why don’t we?
Boy: Right now?
Grandfather: Certainly.
Boy: But how will we get there?
Grandfather: You’ll make believe. Cedar Point fun is an adventure of the mind too. We just close our eyes, think of all the fun we’ve had there. Imagine ourselves at Cedar Point.
Boy: Can we really do that?
Grandfather: Just believe in what fun can do, Billy
(Cedar Point Memories 1995).

A woman makes the statement, "In our memories, there are no lines to stand in" (Cedar Point Memories 1995). Her friend that day, another European-American woman in her sixties, seems to miss the first's philosophical reflection. "I remember coming here thirty years ago. It's like the whole place is again opening up to me. I can remember the time Tom and I came here after prom. We rode the Blue Streak and then went to get french fries...just right over here." She points to the second woman to an area near Cedar Point's inverted coaster the Raptor. "Of course it's not here anymore," the second identifies. "Well, things change." "But we don't," the second says before they both laugh. They walk down the midway space. "Wouldn't it be great if we could relive the past?" the second asks. "I suppose that if I could go back I would. The country wasn't then as it is now. But I don't know if I would want to see Tommy again." The two pause near a gift shop, the first looking up at the sky. "What's wrong?" "Oh, nothing I guess, I just had a sense that something happened...or that something is about to happen." The two continue to walk the Midway, now almost at its end. "Yeah, you're right about the memories," the second woman says looking down at a poster that reminds her of a group of young kids who ran past her twenty-five years ago at Cedar Point. Unfortunately, they were a bit too vivid images this time as they revisited her in memory. Each place, smell, event, Q-house and trashy game shop was a marker for the two, and it became clear that their mutual realities were no longer governed by the present; it was the space of the past that had begun to consume them.

"Something wrong?," the first asks. "No, I just had a funny feeling too...looking at this poster." Before the two could react further, the Midway at Cedar Point
took on the appearance of a scene out of Millennium: the street begins to fill up with apparitions. Glenn Curtis, whose flight from now-closed Euclid Beach park occurred eighty-eight years ago, a man and a woman who stood atop the park’s observation tower in 1888, George Arthur Boeckling, who had built the hotels here, numerous politicians, including six deceased U.S. presidents, three trombone players from a park band of the 1930s, and hundreds of ballroom dancers. The figures begin to move in and out of the park’s buildings, some sitting atop the coaster tracks of the Blue Streak, another spinning in the air aboard the Raptor as it makes its uncanny turns and inverted dives. Shops lose their solidity, and the ghosts try on make-believe park hats derived from their ability to mold the space of memory like it was a mound of clay. The two women are remarkably composed given the unreality of what was happening. The second squints a bit. “What?,” asks the first. “Is that Stalin next to the antique taxis?”

Midway

Everywhere there is going on the process of oblivion (Anon 1893:n.p.).

I write here of a Midway that does not exist; it never has. It is a midway that I describe of minds and souls, of subjectivities and processes of objectification. It is the midway that runs straight through America from sea to dog-eating Igorot. And it is a midway that connects race and psychology, gender and perversion, Hilary Putnam and Dollywood. Do not be fooled into thinking that it is a space of the past: Watch out for worlds behind you (Gibson in Dery 1996:92). And I have seen the midway and it has taken me further into the depths of oblivion. Here are some of the many pictures—the subjects are here transformed in the frozen
spaces of cameras, videos and scanners; their faces telling what words on the page cannot. Do we have any agency in light of the typologies that have been given birth to on the Midway? I smile to the camera of both the midway professional and the ethnographer. We are fully objects...and all of us.

Space One

An anonymous writer in the Daily Inter Ocean wrote in 1893, “as the whole of Greek life was symbolized in the Acropolis, so in the drama at Jackson Park yesterday the whole life of America and of other civilized nations was portrayed” (Badger 1979:xi).

Space Two

For many Americans the fair provided a sense of harmony and the ability to attribute meaning to one’s personal life (Badger 1979:97). Walking through the many spaces of the Midway and the other buildings and pathways of the Columbian Exposition, the gazer finds that her needs are fulfilled: life is bad outside, yet here one sees that things are possible. A corollary to this message is found in many contemporary theme parks. The message today, though, has less to do with the potential of new spaces transforming the individual; rather the theme park patron uses such spaces to realize momentary happiness or excitement; optimistically, one can carry such memories (good times with friends or family) to the other spaces of everyday life such as work and the
home.

Space Three

In the words of Timothy Mitchell, what midways and expositions signal is a peculiar change in the orientation of humans to the world; philosophically, one can say that "being" has been reconstrued as a representational marker from having once been indexical to a sense of discovery or, as Mitchell suggests, being, specifically as it is realized through the gaze of the observer, has moved from a complex of the "exhibition of the world...to the world conceived as though it were an exhibition" (Mitchell 1988:13). The act of discovery has been supplanted by the representation of it—in the ethnological displays of Putnam and the variety of sounds and smells emerging from the hybridity of the Midway Plaisance of the Columbian.
In terms of midway places, Neil Harris posits that "gregariousness was at the heart of such areas. But it was not a gregariousness in search of learning or enlightenment; rather it took pleasure in pleasure itself, unashamedly pursuing the relaxed nonimproving attractions that eager entrepreneurs could gather" (1990:123).

Unfortunately, for Olmstead, the carefully planned civility and unfolding discoveries offered in a natural park were quickly trammelled by the corruption of local politicians and the unwillingness of citizens to conform to the ordered paths of Central Park (cf. Kasson 1978:15-17). Vandalism and disrespect for the landscape of the park led to a clash between the designer’s vision for planned recreation and the citizen’s attitude towards it.
Like a city, the exposition stressed comprehensiveness: displays were complete as they ranged from new technologies to animal shows, while the architecture competed with that of the city in both beauty and scale. As a lesson, the imbrication of space and people at the Columbian Exposition of 1893 sought not to diminish the spirit of urbanism which was the project of natural locales like Central Park, rather it heightened urbanism through architecture, scale and intention (cf. Kasson 1978:19).

Space Seven

As a vision the exposition’s influence on amusement and theme parks is paramount: not only was the fair “a world in which everything was man-made” (Benedict 1983:5), not only did the fair come to symbolize, through prestige display, entire communities (cf. Benedict 1983:7; Mauss 1990), not only did the fair come to realize, appreciate and intensify the experiences of mass humanity, as for instance exemplified in recreations of human disasters (Benedict 1983:56), but the fair and exposition, more than any other extinct or extant amusement space, came to identify the most significant element of amusement and theme parks—the promulgation of a whole view of life and a whole way of life (ibid:5). The Columbian Exposition, as the harbinger of the MIDWAY, represents a total vision of culture in a space unencumbered by the outside world.
Space Eight

Students in anthropology seeking extra credits can add to their grades at Darkest Africa where primitive Africans disport themselves for the edification of World’s Fair visitors. Amid the beat, beat, beat of the tom-toms and awesome African ceremonies, one can hob-nob with Nigerian royalty, quench his thirst watching the leather-mouthed fire eaters and forget his weary feet as black men and women shuffle nonchalantly in boxes of cracked glass.....Ili and [the] Zambezi...appear to have the intelligence of eight-year-old children, but they are cordial and answer questions as best they can in what they call English [Description of the San Francisco 1915 Exposition in Benedict 1983:51-2]. Here, in 1997 in a gift shop at Dollywood.

Space Nine

In 1891 a commission representing the Columbian Exposition was sent to the far reaches of the earth to look for racial specimens for the fair and to encourage foreign government investment in pavilions (Findling 1994:26). In 1998 an Asian-American child asks his parents why there are only whites in the Magic Kingdom’s panoramas and shows like the Hall of the Presidents.
I see nothing but the becoming (Nietzsche in Virilio 1987:167).

Eye of the Needle

Two little old ladies were walking past the [Disney] Matterhorn and one said, “Isn’t it wonderful how they found a mountain to build an amusement park around” (Koenig 1994:120).

The horizon once more becomes the ideal of conquest (Virilio 1987:163).

Topophilia is an affective bond between people and place. It is often characterized by surprise, or by an intense aesthetic experience with nature, like the Grand Canyon and its role as a space for appreciation and personal reflection in the film Grand Canyon (cf. Tuan 1974:4, 94).²

VANDALS DESTROY LANDMARK...The Eye of the Needle, a natural landmark on the Missouri River, was destroyed by vandals over Memorial Day weekend. The top 4 feet of the once 10- to 11-foot tall structure was destroyed, leaving two 6-foot pillars that once formed the arch’s sides. The structure has been photographed by thousands of people along the national wild and scenic river and is featured on the cover of the state highway map.³

Two workers in EPCOT’s The Land are musing over the meaning of life as it relates to the identifications made between visitors to the attractions and the metanarrative of “the land.” One of the two men is about to commence his work as the operator of the attraction’s fourteen minute boat ride, Living with the Land, a Nestle-sponsored ride that takes patrons through a history of the agriculture industry in the United States (cf. Sehlinger 1995:440). Fifteen boats run in cycle around tropic swamps, farmer’s worlds and a futuristic greenhouse that features “real plants” growing with the use of experimental agricultural
technologies. Just before the two resume their work at the Land they talk about "how much bullshit" the ride really is, and question why the visitors so identify with now outdated technologies. "Look Pops, a bean!" "Right, and 'Thank you for coming! Please remember to visit the Food Rocks after exiting the ride!'"4

The Land: What You Remember About Your Organic Past, an attraction we are all familiar with. From canyon walls, to natural rocks to simulated plant rides: we’ve got a real grasp on it all. Remember...when the canyon walls were parted by the apical flood. Remember...when a thunder bolt struck the face of the rock. Remember...when you were a plant, a protozoan swimming in an ocean at the beginning of time. And I’d skip the Food Rocks today.

Overpriced Liquor Store

Look, I’ll get some fuckin’ booze. Just calm your shit down! No, I don’t give a shit if it’s expensive there. I need my fuckin’ fix....anyway, this place is built for people like us. You know, Walt Disney was a freakin’ boozers; yeah, he knew how to handle the bottle! Huh, huh. They couldn’t build Disney or any theme
park for that matter if it weren’t for the overpriced liquor stores. What do you mean you don’t get it? It’s about money, man. They build these places within driving distance of everybody. Well, I mean not everyone can make it to Orlando, but once they’re here they’re totally hooked. It ain’t the fuckin’ rides...and satisfaction this way comes. Vegas is the shit, people go there to lose their hearts and their pocketbooks, but Disney’s playing the same metaphor. They get you at the door and back at your hotel. I was at Dollywood...right, the place in Tennessee, and I mean it was a couple of miles of this strip that...it was just the most unbelievable sight of row after row of gift shops, Elvis museums, tarot-card readers, lawn ornaments, fun houses, Baptist churches and liquor stores. Right man, that’s the key—get um’ while their consciousness is flying down their throats. It’s no longer, grab um’ by the throat, but slide it down the throat. Fuck. What a total waste of American plans and visions. Oh, you used to take your kids there? Yeah, the Dells, Wisconsin Dells. That’s another one of those secondary amusement zones I was at...think it was a couple of years ago. I bought a bottle of Baileys there for something like thirty bucks, but it was a big bottle. No, they know what they’re doing...well, no it’s not like Disney approves of the pleasure zones, but the families have to have something to do after all the kids fall asleep in the hotel room. Look, let me get to this place before it closes. Yeah, I know, I just wish that they’d build a bridge across the highway...way too fucking busy if you ask me.

The phone is put down.

I have sinned, and it is ever so glorious, I say to myself.
The Temple

Take an exciting journey to nations of the world, past and present, in seven themed lands at Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston, next to the world-famous Astrodome. Management was constantly attempting to update park locations with more effective themeing, and I can surmise that this desire was an effect of the patron comments and complaints that attacked AstroWorld's lack of themeing. 1995's Mayan Mind Bender, the history of which I describe in Chapter 4, was one attempt at offering a new theme ride coupled with what management thought was to be exciting new themeing. This vision is reflected in a description of the ride taken from a Public Relations account:

Because of Houston's close location to Mexico, where there are actual Mayan ruins, the design team thought it appropriate to draw on the Mayan, Aztec and Inca tradition [sic] for the ride. All items which are part of the Mayan Mindbender theme are keeping in spirit with the culture [sic] though only a couple of the items are based on actual designs from real temples.

The Mayan Mind Bender was to be the [Disney] Space Mountain of Mexico: a dark, indoor ride complete with temple, sound effects and themed workers in costume. I observed much of the construction of the ride and recall once talking to one of the Rides supervisors who had watched the construction of the ride with careful attention: "Kind of a joke! The hieroglyphs aren't even authentic! They're a mixture of five different cultures....not all are Mayan." To kick off the opening of the ride, the Public Relations staff had created a bombardment of flyers and hoopla: from "Mayan" bamboo tubes with flyers inside, down to cocktails, seemingly Polynesian, and a lavish buffet in front of the Mind Bender for the members of the press. Talking to some employees watching the whole drama I felt like we were all collectively making a themed
version of *Roger & Me*; one of the assembled employees says, “I wish they’d treat us as good as they do them [the press].” Like the best of plans, all the elaborate themeing did not seem to abate patron complaints. During the ride’s opening week I lent a hand in cleaning near the ride area as well as assisting in patron queuing in two hour or longer lines. Some guests exiting the ride told me, “This ride sucks!” “Make it go faster!” Or, “Mayan Mind Bender? Try Mayan Mind Duller!” Themeing’s a drag, no matter if they got the hieroglyphs right or not.

**The Curb**

6 a.m....many are very tired. Walking down [Disney’s] Main Street, we see people sleeping on the curbs [Tiffany, an informant].

Two occurrences of sitting on the curb: I am reading a student paper on Walt Disney World, “Everywhere you look, all you see is Disney.” I take a double-take, thinking that it reads, “Everywhere you look, all you see is Dismay.” The second event occurs when I spin this writing through the spell cycle of the computer: “Disney,” Not in Dictionary. Change to: “Dissent.” Suggestions: “Dissent.”

The third time I am writing about the use of landscape in theme park worlds:

Landscaping is an often unnoticed yet important aspect of the theme park space. While working at Six Flags AstroWorld I remember hearing many of the park’s management speaking of their satisfaction with the park’s textured pathways, its gardens, plants and shade trees. It was recognized that the integration of the land and its “human-made” features was a crucial factor in guest satisfaction. Of course, very few parks maintain the natural setting of the space that has been occupied through amusement. As I describe in my walk-
through of a Virginia park loaded with gullies, water and huge canopy trees, some parks have successfully worked their attractions into or inside the occupied territory. Most, like AstroWorld, have planted trees in hopes of erasing the destruction needed to build a major ride. My understanding of the use of the land as a feature of amusement is threefold: (1) as a product of a Western world view, the proprietors of theme parks maintain a consciousness detached from the land. The common cultural criticism of Western theological and existential detachment from the land is rooted in a tradition which unlike other cosmological systems, such as many Native American environmental beliefs, does not stress the stewardship of the land. Instead, the land is seen as a product of a larger conquest; it is to be raped, dug out, built upon, etc. (2) As a corollary to this first issue, one may assert that the use of the land in the theme park world is an entirely commodified use. A tree can increase profits if it offers shade to a hot and tired customer. A series of trees and a fountain can better theme a ride or theme area. In the case of Pigeon Forge’s Dollywood, the land’s integration in the amusement space, much of which is preserved as the park’s paths glide through mountains and trees, legitimates the authenticity of the park’s soap makers, train engineers and craftspeople. Dolly Parton’s childhood cabin is reproduced in the park and what better feature to theme and authenticate such a figure as the trees and hills which surround it? (3) A final understanding of land use in the theme park is the inclination offered by cybernetics. Specifically, the movement of people through a park, as I detail later, is accomplished only by the success and popularity of attractions and their integration into the whole, the “face” of the park itself. Cybernetics is a concept rooted in the idea of “navigation” (cf. Leary 1996), and it suggests that people move from things or people to other things and people. The method of movement is varied, yet it is completely dependent on stimulation—the need to move. As a device of practicality, a planted tree offers shade to the park patron, yet more importantly it gives the patron an aesthetic appreciation of life and activity in the park, “these trees are so nice!,” and it pushes people in particular directions. The trees, plants, pathways and features, natural or otherwise, are in fact as much a part of the cybernetic inspiration behind theme park life as the building, facade or amusement ride. Remember too that a tree is not necessarily a tree, depending on it use, and that the original opening of Walt Disney World would not have been possible without the draining of Florida’s swamp water, the bulldozing of thousands of acres of land and the digging into the earth for the construction of complicated irrigation and sewage systems.

The fourth time I am walking past people seated on curbs just before the late afternoon Main Street parade was about to begin at the Magic Kingdom. These people are really stupid and gullible, I was thinking. I try waving to
them in what was my own parade moment before the parade. No one notices
what I am doing. There are a series of scenes in Godfrey Reggio’s film
Koyannisqatsi which in their whole are named “the grid.” It is striking visual
imagery as the screen fills with images of movement: lights, cars, traffic signals,
all rhythmically moving at right angles, in perpendicular and parallel manner.
Too, this image of the grid is fitting for similar geometric manifestations of the
theme park. Exploration and conquer: it is the goal of both patron and manager
to carve up the park, metaphorically and literally. It is the grid that informs the
patron waiting on the curb—be it for the moment of rest, or for thinking about
how to map one’s strategy for the remainder of the day. It’s all about planning
and the orchestration of movement. Hybrid maps fill the space of the patron’s
brain by day’s end: out to the parking lot, and recall where the automobile is,
try to outwit the other cars and drivers to be the first one out of the gates and
onto the next grid of the side road and the highway.

**Car Seat Leather**

Connections are made and dissolved daily. “The concept of space is not in
space,” (Lefebvre 1991:299) it is built around and through and by...the car seat,
the monorail track, the steam of the engine, the paddle wheel on a boat-
simulacrum. The utilitarian vehicle delivers people and products to specific
places in the park, and without it the park could not make its deliveries nor
meet a customer’s needs. As I suggest in Chapter 4, functional machines also
serve the patron in bringing her *deliverance*—she is transported around to see,
appreciate and to be finally dropped off somewhere for further travel on foot.
The scene of transportation in smaller parks, those lacking the capital to build
elaborate monorails and peoplemovers, is an even stranger scene. As is any
back stage experience of a park, the sight of old trucks and poorly-maintained carts cannot be missed for its significance and its humor.

As Wylson & Wylson suggest in their survey of theme park design and architecture, certain decisions beyond form alone are important considerations in the construction and maintenance of what is considered a successful theme park. It is no irony that the makers of the video game Theme Park have placed such emphasis on movement—the making of connections and the assistance in creating flows of persons between areas. Part of theme park culture is based on the patron’s desire to move and the park’s management needs to control that desire. The width of paths, the nature of intersections, the placement of Q-lines and their area of extension into other park spaces (cf. Wylson & Wylson 1994:152, 153) all form a sort of “invisible city” feature (Mumford 1961:563) of the theme park.

**Airstream**

Physical space has no ‘reality’ without the energy that is deployed in it (Lefebvre 1991:13).

The themeing enterprise, be it manufactured and socially maintained in theme park venues, shopping malls, museums or other places where experience is represented in a partnership with hyper, simulated spaces and architectural features, is endemic to contemporary topophilia. It has been asserted that the architectural functions of themeing are endemic to the contemporary reemergence of the American theme park. Themeing is a cul-de-sac for form and ideology. Architecturally it is often the desire of a given park’s management to create a “seamless” atmosphere, and the use of themed buildings allows such a dream its fulfillment. It is to the cost and detriment of
the patron who participates in such spaces and their gimmicks: be it an Applebee's themed restaurant or an Alien Encounter ride at a theme park. We are mistaken because it feels so good to be so.

Themeing itself is presented as geographic limitation that mimics choice and self-determination for the patron. Specifically the creation of theme lands presents the patron with a limited number of choices, and she is led through such lands much like the viewer of a film is led through a cinematic experience. Themeing allows for the stabilization of movement as theme park visitors are led from one land to the next with the semiotic cues of architecture, themed landscape and attractions as the main impetus behind movement. These spaces of the theme, now ever more “everyday” and widespread in this world, do have an impact on our everyday lives, our perceptions of being, our understanding of others and our sense of negotiating relationships with them, our ability to connect to political issues or engage in discussions that are now disconnected from the experiential and ideological components of such worlds (cf. Olalquiaga 1992).

Cultural geographers have commented on the fact that the senses serve to establish or characterize the “essential character” of a building, place or tourist site (Tuan 1974:11). The “theme park experience” is built on an empirical premise. No matter how limited and confined the senses find the theme park, they hone in on what is offered there. Cultural amusement traditions have evolved from genteel climates where spaces were limited in their presentation of multi-sensory experience. The notion of the Midway made famous at the Columbian Exposition oriented the masses to a new level of the felt-quotidian: from polite and subdued streets to ones rolling with people,
smells pleasant and repulsive, noisy encounters, flashing lights, the spray of water, a burst of air. The senses of the amusement park goer have been assaulted.

Today the situation has reached a sort of middle ground in terms of the levels of experiential exposure offered in the American theme park. As the industry has moved towards “family entertainment,” theme park management has stressed less the assaultive aspects of earlier amusement eras; instead, the direction is the stimulation of the senses in hidden, unobtrusive ways. No more the blow hole theaters of Coney Island, it is the contemporary American theme park whose patron has come to expect the simulation of experience (cf. Baudrillard 1983). As one informant told me:

I mean that was one of the best rides I’ve ever been on. You’re in the dark when all of a sudden everything starts! The cage shakes and you feel this breath of air on your shoulder. It’s like the alien is actually right behind you; and I thought it was! It was so spooky. You also feel one of its tentacles slither on your legs. They have really designed a great ride. One that assaults your senses. I will definitely ride it again [Carole, an informant].

Audio speakers designed to appear as rocks in the grass...

...cool mist stations housing soda machines...

Who do they think they’re kidding?!
You can't theorize something as the 'accursed share'...without yourself being part of that curse. (Baudrillard 1990b:78).

Some sick fuck's written all over the bathroom wall of the Hardee's I'm in: I want suck or fuck. Someone else writes below that one: Get a Date. Isn't that what life's all about? It's worse than a Henry Rollin's novel; it's like the entire combined weight, vector and momentum of every fucking atomic particle on the planet wakes you up in the morning just to happily say, Get a Date. And all you can come up with is, I want suck or fuck. You're playing pool with reality and reality's got the meanest stroke you've ever seen. I'm just then feeling existential and sorry as I finish up my business and create my own placard on the wall near the suck & fuck...come to think of it, there's probably a franchise waiting to be named that. I write on the wall, Doom is no longer a distant horizon, a telos, an ultimate limit; it is all around us, it is the very air we breathe. I'm hoping I'll have a chance today. Today, like the last day, is running into the next. I've got Hardee's on my mind. There's a burger behind every idea and just maybe I'll impose my own sense of assembly-line mentality on their sorry asses. What am I complaining about? Doesn't the proletariat have the right to invest the appropriate narratives in their revolution? Revolution was revolting that day, as was the food. A line of customers waiting for the same bullshit BURGER & FRIES as the next line of customers.

Welcome to Hardee's, may I take your order? Yeah, I'll have one Situationist Mind-Bomb to go. Make that extra rant...and hold the manifesto. Clever fuck you were, thinking that you were going to pull off another SI heist in the middle of a Hardee's. The only problem on that Des Moines summer day was that someone had beaten you to it; you got sucker-punched in the face by
your own dérive. I remember that when he walked in I could feel the angst peeling off of his face. He was no one-burger guy. He was all fucking business and his business was ruin. This guy was pure fucking living allegory: his face read of the free-market, his chest bulged with buying and selling, his hand speculation, he flexed his muscles speaking of flexible capitalism, and he had the rest of a torso looking like a multinational corporation. His story was a one-act play; his actors were his burger-victims. I had just sat down to mull over the personality of the chicken I was about to devour. He had just begun the play. A group of postal workers sat down to enjoy their Hardee’s sandwiches. I immediately knew the set-up. An Ethnodemon is a master of capitalist mise en scène: never a stage too small nor a place too mundane. E was shining through that guy on that summer day and all of us in there had it coming. I’m gonna remind you of one thing—the allegorical mode of capitalism is a never-ending one. All your life you’re learned how to work, spend, desire and consume. What I’ll teach you now is something entirely beyond your soul. I imagine that is what e would want us to know, if we could communicate with em. The postal workers were telling stories of lost mail while an enormous and amorphous group of miscellaneous family units, reject Pentecostals and hopeless elementary education teachers spread their portions out on the table. BURGER & FRIES was just about to get Situationist on everyone’s ass! He walks up to the postal workers and shouts, I’m not afraid of you guys! Isn’t everyone afraid of the postal worker?! They look collectively dumbfounded and pretend that he doesn’t exist. It was beginning to look a lot like a capitalist sweeping-under-the-rug-job. He continues, You guys made me what I am! I’m not afraid. He had all of the spunk of an evangelical cleric. Just then he got tired and decided to meet some new victims. Postal guys look worried and quickly finish up their food.
The act shifts to an older woman who just wants to live a life of being left alone. Don’t bother me, she retorts before BURGER & FRIES gets a chance to start the next act. I’m a monster lady! You afraid of me? She looks startled and begins to finish up her food. Was it just me or was BURGER & FRIES the epitome of venture capitalism? He shifts his attention to me and some others scattered around the dining hall. Hardee’s was picking up business and everyone caught wind of the commotion. WEEEEEEEEEEH!

WEEEEEEEEEEHHHHH! He looks at my chicken platter and begins squealing like a pig. It got louder and louder and I begin to think, this chicken isn’t so bad after all. He runs over to another guy reading the newspaper, and says, I can’t read. You made me that way too. Excess personified. BURGER & FRIES was all business just like the Hardee’s manager who walked over and threatened the guy with eviction. Imagine that, you work all of your life, get laid off, decide to become a fast-food Situationist and then the best you can reap is getting threatened by some high school punk who wants to evict you from his Hardee’s! If I could have graffitied Hardee’s on that Des Moines summer day I would have written BURGER & FRIES’ words under the restaurant placard; that would have been the new motto of adventurous capitalism: You made me that way, too.
Mall Testimony

In the interruption something makes itself heard, namely, what remains after the interruption has taken place. (Jean-Luc Nancy in Ronell 1994:33-4).

...the World’s Exposition has fallen... into a shopping mall. 

I am in the mall. It doesn’t matter really which one, you have all been to malls. Shopping centers, consumerist venues, places where you can buy anything and everything. I have been to many malls, even once venturing to the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, another time traveling to San Antonio to the Riverwalk. That place is really interesting, and though it’s not a “mall” as we would know one to be, it has much to see and do—restaurants and the whole deal. I read these stories about how the midways of the past, like in the world’s expositions and at Coney Island, attempted to assault the visitor’s senses, and how we as a society owe much to these places as far as the general evolution of consumer spaces is concerned. I do not find the mall, however, to be a place where I am subject to sensory overload; I feel at ease. I was never one to become hypnotized by the carnival atmosphere, and I have never seen the reason for the artificial excitement that people have at these places. I am here to shop, as functional as that sounds. I think that it is a generally good thing that malls are “toned down” environments. —STOP— Oh, and I forgot to mention that shopping malls made me who I am today. Yes, I am insane; I am a paranoid schizophrenic and I am very proud of it. They made me. Two days ago I shouted at a group of people arguing about which one was a better deal. I told them that they were hopeless dregs and that they were doomed to be consumed by the machine. They said that I was nuts, to which I replied, “At least I know it! I know what I’m made of. Any paranoia I’ve got built up in me
is a product of folks like you and the entirety of *variety entertainment* that you so desire!” They ran off claiming that I was even a madder fool than before. I might be. I have even begun to write about these places now. Every chance I get—from the sidewalk sales, to special car shows to the Christmas displays that we have always loved as a society—I go off to the mall to make myself anew once again. “I assemble materials and I draw from them. I treat the reality I inhabit as if it were fiction—I treat the whole of existence as if it were a huge invention.”¹⁶ Someone even once told me that I couldn’t take pictures in the mall I often frequent. I told him to go to hell, and proceeded to shoot off a round of snapshots. I hope to publish the photos someday as my own *Warren Commission Report* of the newest and greatest of all conspiracies on the planet: the Shopping Mall! I am doomed to perish within my own delusions, but at least I will go out without being a function.

...the shopping mall has fallen into the void of a theme park....

**Blindfold**

**Woman:** They look like they’re having fun.

**Man:** Sure do.

**Woman:** What time did you say that we would go?

**Man:** I told the kids eight at the latest.

**Woman:** Oh.

**Man:** They have really done a number here with the landscaping.

**Woman:** Yes, I’ve never quite seen anything like it. It reminds me of old
Maryland when I was small.

Man: Times have changed...so do people and nature, too.

Woman: Um huh.

Possessed Tweety: Wouldn't it be great to détourn?

Man: What was that?

Woman: I don't know, but it sounded like a bird.

Man: ...and a cartoon one at that!

Possessed Tweety: Too bad for you humars. You've got no idea that everything that you see here has been totally created for you. Explore your senses, understand your environment and maybe you will be able to break out.

Man: None of this makes any sense. Who's behind all of this?

Woman: I don't know.
Possessed Tweety: The psychogeographer knows. The psychogeographer understands the connections of environment and mind, of the body and the land, of emotion and spaces. You guys should really look past the phony bridges, the masses of steel and crap, and the faux-everything. You might come to not only comprehend the detrimental effects this theme park has on your minds and souls, but you might also begin to find ways to détourn, distort and disturb it.

Woman: I don’t understand...what’s it saying?

Man: I haven’t a clue, and I still don’t know where this voice is coming from. I think we might split early. Let me round up the kids [He walks away].

Possessed Tweety: Look at him go! Past the waterfalls and paddle boats, past the roller coasters and peanut stands. He’s a fool for even walking here, and so are you.

Woman: Oh shit! It’s you Tweety [She looks at her lap].

Possessed Tweety: That’s right! In the flesh. Fuck yeah! I’m a bad ass bird—a product of Guy Debord’s spirit and late capitalism. I just got off the ship from Taiwan where I was made. There I was instilled with anti-capitalist, anti-amusement spirits by a mage. And I have one mission.

Woman: You are a foul-mouthed bird. And you looked so sweet when Fred won you today at the—

Possessed Tweety: Enough! It is pain enough that I had to sit on that stand for the last two weeks before your lamefuck son got lucky throwing a ball! Now I am forced to spend my eternity with your family. Bad enough that you guys
got a season pass to this wretched place.

Woman: What makes you think that we would bring you along the next time?

Possessed Tweety: Oh I see, so now I ain’t part of your family!

Woman: Listen Tweety...

Possessed Tweety: No, you listen! If I could walk I would get the hell out of here now. But unfortunately the mage gave me the choice of either legs or voice and I chose the latter. Wouldn’t you?

Woman: I wish you had legs, actually. And I wish that you would shut your trap!

Possessed Tweety: Getting nasty, aren’t we. If I had legs I would walk right out of here, passing through the spaces of my dreams, walking wherever I choose, subverting the planned spaces of this place through my own dérivation. To drift is sublime.

Woman: And then I suppose you would just hop in your car and drive somewhere.

Possessed Tweety: Who needs a car? In fact I might just hide out in this wretched place, stalking unsuspecting people just as they are about to get on a ride or take up a skill game. And anytime I would hear, “Isn’t this a beautiful place,” or “How lovely the paths and trees are,” or “Isn’t this romantic?,” I would pop up and bust the offenders in the chops with my beak, amplified and strengthened by scrap metal I would have picked up behind park restaurants and drink stands. People would fear me. Get ready for CyberTweety. And I’d kick um’ in the shins too!
Woman: You really make me sick! [Fred is returning with his three children].

Child 1: Tweety! [Just as she is running towards the bridge the Grandmother picks up Tweety and tosses him in the river below the bridge].

Child 2: Noooooooooo!

Possessed Tweety: Long live the revolution! Remember those who fought space, too!

Man: Mom, what have you come down with?

Woman: I figured it out. That voice was coming from Tweety. I took care of that!

Man: What? [He looks down in the river where Possessed Tweety is face down in the water].

Possessed Tweety: Drown in culture...bastards...[gulp]...Guy Debord is not dead...[gulp]...me?, just a temporary hiatus...[gulp]...but I'll be back!

Man: What a waste!

Woman: Looks like you'll have to win the kids another bird!

Man: Yeah.

Woman: Hopefully one with manners this time. [Possessed Tweety dies].
NOTES

1As Richard Francaviglia’s recent study *Main Street Revisited* suggests, American main streets have, even in the era of economic crises and the flourishing of Wal-Marts, come to represent a community’s health and viability (1996:xviii).

2Indeed, one of the most reactionary and misconstrued films on the subject of race in America since *Birth of a Nation*.


4Other reflections on or representations of the “land” occur at numerous United States theme parks, like the “culturalization of nature” at Sea World parks (Davis 1998; Desmond 1996).

5Metallica, Attitude, on *Reload*, 1998, Elektra Records.


8The amusing Bullfrog game *Theme Park* requires the player to place elements like trees and fountains to assure the happiness of the guests.

9Successful theme parks are those that make money. Making money is often predicated on a notion that a given park is fun and entertaining and that the overall experience and atmosphere of the place is agreeable to the patrons, those who pay to be amused.

10As Lash and Urry suggest, flows of persons and things definitely affect the nature of spaces themselves (1994:325).

11This was often stated by AstroWorld management. It was an explicit goal that they indicated was a Disney influence.

12Anthropologists have commented on the need to incorporate the senses in the anthropological study of culture (cf. Stoller 1989). I would certainly agree that our understandings of senses beyond spoken and oral communication have been neglected in social science research. The theme park again presents another challenge to such suggested methodology. The simulated nature of theme park experience necessitates a powerful critique of the ideology of the senses as it is produced in amusement arenas. The idea of walking in the theme park to gather up the senses, to “smell roasted corn and hot dogs,” to “see the flashing lights,” to “hear the arcade machines run” is a dangerous endeavor for the researcher and the everyday patron.


14Although this is “my narrative,” I base it on one tourism survey I received from a theme park out East. I should say that the second half of the testimony is more my own doing and is less inspired by the survey. The line, “I was never one to become hypnotized by the carnival atmosphere, and I have never seen the reason for the artifical excitement that people have at these places” is from a narrative of Chad, an informant.

15“The idea of the world’s fair continues but its meaning seems confused. With Disneylands and Epcots, shopping centers and video cassettes, experiences that fairs once monopolized can be duplicated outside their boundaries. Why have a world’s fair at all” (Harris 1990:131)?

VOLUME II

SIGNAL 3: ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCES IN THE AMERICAN THEME PARK INDUSTRY

by

SCOTT A. LUKAS
CHAPTER 6

THEME CYCLE: DRIVING THEME PARKS TILL THE END OF TIME¹

A Week from Monday

The ability to deceive ourselves and to be sincere...is the defining characteristic of what it means to be American (Shaviro 1997:22).

The real irony is past the midway near Orlando’s Highway 192; and it is neither a theme park nor an American tourist trap, it is simply an ambiguous white American, staring off into space trying to assess the nature of the day, as the sun beats down, and down.

This is the end of time, and I whimper to write its story...I find myself pursuing something inescapable in a theme park, a number of them in the summer of 1997.² This is the end of a research experience, now well over two years long, and I now face the task of attempting to situate the object of my attention, the theme park, in the cultural context from which it has emerged. And that is the United States, a place where a mostly hate-love relationship has kept me—away from realism, away from sanity, and away from being able to any longer speak.

These are the days of daydreams which do not wake.
Somewhere past Houston I am sitting at a rest stop looking at people who are too unexotic for their own good. A couple pulls up in a motor-camper contraption, eager about seeing the United States. They had traveled from California and their final destination was Niagara Falls, Canada, where they would see the rushing of water, reflect on their thirty-year relationship, and consider the meaning of life beside a souvenir stand offering ten-inch plastic replicas of one of the sides of the falls. They look down at the replica, the woman rubbing the plastic sutures of water running down the cliffs with her right forefinger, pulling it back slightly, twitching it to and fro on her palm, offering a moment of exercise as she looks off beyond the kitsch-strip.

I had just finished reading a review of a piece I had written on theme park rides, just after the couple pulls off in their wanna-be-Winnebago. Some frosted donuts would go well now, I thought, and I just began to shuffle my theme park papers for the xth time, hoping that something new would pop from out of the pages. How long can I put off writing the piece to end all pieces—the ethnography of the American theme park industry, and the writing that would legitimate me as a professional anthropologist? And all of this while being an American. The question, “So what’s your dissertation about?,” swishes in my head next to all of the shuffling papers not seeming to make a clear mark, and with that question comes the uncertainty of what being an American could really mean.

A car-full of punks pulls up to the rest stop just as I am about to get on and get going. The music on their stereo is testing overworked woofers, it being “More Human Than Human” by the group White Zombie. “I’m glad my stay here is short,” I pipe out of the window, pulling down the on-ramp leading back
to the freeway. One of them says something like “What remains?” totally
disconnected from my presence. There appears to be something like a middle
finger in the rear view mirror of my car as I speed off.

Landscape Drive-By

Not surprisingly, actually attending as many theme parks as you possibly
can is not an unpleasant way in which to perform research. What could
be easier than patronizing the theme park business as often as possible
(The Institute for Research 1995:3)?

This day’ll begin with a bang. I just might have enough cash to get the car to
enough parks this month. I was getting tired of pumping gas every five hours,
and I grew equally disinterested in going to more parks: how many would be
enough? I thought momentarily about the review of “The Machines of
Everyday Life,” which will have been written a year later by a student in my
American Spaces course at Valparaiso University. Magic and reenchantment
with the world: people strive to find meaning in the everyday, to imbue reality
with a sense of sense—that rope that holds people on the precipice overlooking
death, loss, terror. What writing is magic?
I drift off into space...the car makes it out of the bayous of Louisiana, and I begin to reflect on the narratives that would guide the writing. What functions do theme parks really fulfill? Could one make sense out of them, and if so, what would the usefulness of conclusions on American amusements be? I am distracted by a sign reading “Baptist Pumpkin Patch” during a series of glances down at the passenger-side seat. A number of maps and miscellaneous notes are there thrice-stained by overflowing and knocked-over coffee. I spend the night in an anonymous chain motel in Hammond, Louisiana, like many others I had known that summer. Some guy in the parking lot there causes me to look back at *Easy Rider*: he seems threatening at first, pulling around the motel with his buddy in a beat-up down and out car, mumbling something at me on the first pass. “What’s that?” I glimmer at him in a nonchalant manner, thinking about the importance of the data in my computer, then on my shoulder in a bag. “I’m trying to be honest and trying to make a living.” I was about twenty-five feet from the room. “And my car is stalled ten miles out of town. This guy here gave me a ride and I have to get to work in the morning. Can you give me maybe ten bucks?” Bewildered, I pull five bucks out of my wallet, telling him that I only had ten on me, which I think was true. His buddy was still in the car. “God bless you! Let me pay you back.” “That’s all right,” I contend. “What time will you be leaving in the morning?” “That’s still undetermined. But don’t worry about it.” I toss and turn that night, glance out of the window a couple of times, and wake up in the morning thinking about ethics and travel.

I’m just trying to keep my thing honest."
The Escape

Overpriced in America: cable television, roadside motels, breakfast cereal, rental cars, rental car insurance, theme park entrance fees. Hit the road for another fix on America; I had had many of them lately. The goal was to make it to Atlanta, to one of the Six Flags parks I had never visited, just having completed the latest committee meeting in Houston. Freedom means that I can go into a Mobile gas station near Montgomery, Alabama and complain to a woman who tries to charge me for a Styrofoam cup I had wanted to apply to a bag of sunflower seeds I had just purchased. “I’ll skip the cup, then,” said menacingly as I stumble back to the car whose driver had already done himself in by the road ten times ago. The seeds end up spilling, getting thoroughly inundated by the sticky spilled coffee from a few days ago.

In an Indiana coffee shop two people are discussing their friend’s “blues,” speaking about how the friend had been laid off just before Christmas. Just isn’t fair, if you ask me. I hoped that I would find what I was looking for in Atlanta. I had been there once before for an anthropology conference where, after giving a paper and having had made no impact on the stoic audience, I did not end up going to the Coca-Cola museum. Every time I pull off of the highway I realize the middle-class difficulty of having to navigate the roads: is this what is left of ethnographic travel near the end of the millennium? God save the late eighties! I’m sitting in the library and read a passage somewhere about “just dropping the novice off from a helicopter with a pad of paper, clean underwear and toiletries.” That was someone’s idea of “going to the field.”
And I had scanned the Six Flags Over Georgia brochure a day ago, looking at pictures of the same, or only slightly different rides and attractions. I remember some of my friends at Astroworld having talked of pleasant visits to the park, of course; they weren’t going there to write theme parks. The sign on the side of the road leads me to the park, and I mutter, “Is this what makes difference?” I make a wrong turn and have to spin back around near what is a trucking company or a manufacturing plant. The Georgia park is nestled in the trees, surrounded by homes and a few businesses. It was near ten o’clock and the place had not yet opened. I saw the dead surface of a wooden roller coaster, and it wasn’t only then when I was overcome by the feeling of “not wanting to be” or “not wanting to be here.”

I decide that there is nothing to be gained by paying the forty some dollars for the entrance fee to the park, nor by seeing the same sorts of sights I would see elsewhere that summer, and I ultimately decide to pull back on the highway without ever passing through those gates.

America is fictive...and I write fiction from its folds.

The Tale

And it begins with...“a tale of mediocrity,” or “riding through American theme park,” or perhaps “The American theme park, a life worth telling”...the whole gambit of writing caught up with me on 5/18/97, just outside of Carowinds, a Paramount park near Charlotte, North Carolina. I was desperately trying to come up with an appropriate beginning with which to tell the tale. The “tale,” the capstone of a series of ethnographic moments, is what gets published by the
major publishers and in prestigious journals like the *American Anthropologist* or *American Ethnologist*. I am speaking of anthropological work here, and of the two sorts with which I am most familiar—the analytical narrative and the personal journey tale. I can generally say that I knew a long time ago that this work would not (wholly) resemble either of the two. It is entirely possible to write an ethnography of the theme park industry, or of specific theme parks, in the model of the concrete, the holistic, the empirical. I have not taken that travel.

I reconsider my fascination with numbers and learn from a security guard that the average attendance at Carowinds can run well into 25,000 people. I suppose he considers me to be an overly inquisitive patron. The south gate of the park screams like an authentic American: monetary concerns are everywhere; people running back and forth asking questions to the first available person, patron or worker, about the cost of admission. “Do you have any special discounts today?” I pull out the camera and begin capturing some moments for later use, drawing immediate suspicion and glances from my fellow comrades. A man, woman and child walk past the ticket booths when they are immediately confronted with the anxious jeers of others in line: “You gotta’ have your tickets first to go ahead!” The family explains that they do indeed have their tickets and quickly move out of the roasting pot of people. Americans seem to be detail oriented, and they certainly have been conditioned to wait and move orderly in lines (cf. Leidner 1993:31).

I purchase my ticket but am distracted by the seller who is fussing with her pocket beeper. She scrolls through the device, checking what are considered to be important numbers, all the while I am thinking about the lack of center to
this place. The ticket zips out of the machine and I am teleported to another
scene waiting to perform for me. A small child is playing in a tree outside the
south gate and after getting his foot stuck, an unrelated woman approaches the
boy to help him out. The child cries, noticeably shaken from his momentary
shackling to the plant, and is reunited with his mother. Apparently the
biological mother did not appreciate the work of the surrogate “good
Samaritan” as she shouts, “Stay the fuck away from my child!”

The mundane seeps in...slowly. A feeling of absolute terror and panic is
overcoming someone in the park. E is wondering how long e can possibly
stand this place. The point of eir attention is every other person who walks by
em. Some guy is bellowing on to his friend about how he just bought his
girlfriend the Jerry Springer: Too Hot for TV video; he claims too that he had once
been on the talk show. American fascination with the mundane leads em to
other points of contact and conflict in Carowinds: “We’re only going on one
more ride. We can’t do this all day!” A man lectures his small child, looking
back at him on his shoulder. The child is incorrigible and idly gleams at the
rides from his perch.

The Rollback

I had decided sometime ago that the use of a camera would be an appropriate
research tool in the theme park, since they are a common patron item of
convenience. Most people, though, are accustomed to seeing the camera in the
vicinity of groups of people, couples, families, friends, etc. The single
individual with camera seems suspicious, on the surface, for what does he have
to gain from preserving memories of a place in the company of no one?
Ethnographers are of course accustomed to playing the role of the voyeur, the detached observer, yet much of contemporary ethnography is written in the context of contact, specifically contact that is often instructive and simultaneously pleasurable. The narrative of learning of and through the other has been a hallmark since Malinowski’s days. Brandishing the camera in the summer of 1997 I realized that the nature of this sort of work was markedly different than the tradition of informant attachment, which I am familiar with through the literature. Although as a worker at AstroWorld for two seasons I made close contact and sustained friendships, professional and personal, with individuals in that “field,” I began to feel self-imposed suspicion with what I was doing in May of 97.6

A few couples in the park asked me to take their picture with MY CAMERA, leaving a strange question to ponder, what was the point of my taking their picture, one which they would never see? Another older couple found my camera to be technologically fascinating, the man asking me questions about the camera, even asking to hold it and look through the viewfinder. “That’s some device!” This conversation lasted for some five to ten minutes as the three of us queued through the season pass processing center at Carowinds. I used the
interaction as an opportunity to give the couple one of my infamous surveys, which they of course never returned. Are these the fascinated natives glaring at the Leahy’s turntable in First Contact?

“I find the shallow nature of interactions in these places to be thoroughly disgusting,” I write in my journal sometime later that day. For the most part I had given up on dictating notes in my palm tape recorder as I received many strange looks. I conclude that I need to take as much video as possible, focusing in on the minute actions of the patrons and workers, like a Raymond Roussel hooked on symbolic interactionism. One woman near the park’s Wayne’s World section looks at me with some displeasure, and I knew that she assumed that I had bad intentions, perhaps thinking that I was video-taping her children playing near an ersatz fire hydrant leaking water by the Sky Coaster. I determine that suspicion, fear and loathing follow the theme park wherever it goes, and I walk out of the section not before taping a Southeast Asian family getting off of a troika. At the time they seemed exotic and sublime in what was a predominantly white park, not unlike the many others I had visited.
Some months later I am going back through the videos, looking closely at the scenes, determining which stills I would manufacture for the text I was writing, and thought back to a text on the Columbian Exposition (Anon. 1893a, 1894) which portrays the ethnographic midway of others in an overtly exotic context. The people on the video likewise seem exotic to me as the pixels capsule, one image rolling into the next, to offer me a glimpse at a scene of my partial construction. I roll the tape back as I notice two individuals, a bearded male with a Harley Davidson shirt and a woman in shorts and tank top, smoking, looking directly at the lens. It was a scene I had inadvertently shot when I was taking video of a trash can that had caught my eye at the front gate. From the corner of my eye I noticed this couple looking at me with the same feeling of suspicion I was coming to know through my travels. I look back at them, pointing the camera, and offer “howdy” as a way of mediating the awkward situation. They look away, unconcerned.

The Pound of Shit

This is the anti-Ark (Baudrillard 1986:18).

I had become so used to the service industry, having worked in it for two years and now visiting it on a daily basis, as academic and as servant to the U.S. consumerism machine. I mistake two bus drivers with name tags for being employees of Carowinds: “We don’t work here.” I bumble away feeling like the person in a department store who mistakes a customer for an employee...thinking too about the demarcation of workers and patrons, a relationship that was coming to define the ethnographic project. Moments like these “mistakes” were beginning to feel good, not in an informative way, but just in a sense of “keeping me awake” while I took video and asked questions in
the park. My interest waned almost every day, and I looked for ways of turning the performance into a symphony of acts with me as the director. Past John Deere tractor displays, manufactured rivers and paddle wheels, people throwing twenty-five cent carp food in fountain after fountain, I realize that everything has begun to resemble everything else: every person the mirror image of the other, the landscape an environment of verisimilitude like the abstractions of Baudrillard’s words being enacted in an immediate performance piece that would never die.

Everything, too, begins to resemble a pile of shit, and shit, though ubiquitous in this world, has its noticeable variations. In Bataille’s sense shit is a descriptive term for the unseen, the sacrificial of everyday life, and in many respects the visual culture I observed at Carowinds brought this immediate connotation to my mind. In another distinct sense shit has a connotation in the mundane realm of the everyday, a sort of resemblance to the idea of culture as a completely hegemonic construct. In between changing batteries and tapes in my camera, I notice ten or so patrons sitting in shade near what resembles an old blacksmith’s shop in the park. They no longer appear to be human, and I offer to myself that they are creatures, complete monstrosities gorging themselves on anything inanimate: nachos, beef nachos, tater tots billed as “world famous,” greasy French fries, potato entities, chicken wings, ketchup-covered things, elephant ears, tacos and rolled-up ethnic foods. What an absolute monstrous group of individuals, and they even seem to be enjoying themselves! I feel like vomiting and knew that I was stirring through shit. I satisfactorily abandoned lengthy meditations on the issue of the back/front stage dichotomy (cf. Goffman 1959) and how the momentary glimpse of insider status afforded one the opportunity to see the “shit” beneath the surface of the
theme park. What interested me now was how this connection strangely resonated with a growing sense of urgency about American culture and how I had begun to associate everything about this culture, real or metaphoric, with shit.

The Glance Back

A young, teenage couple wanders through Carowinds with much anticipation about the future. Like many Americans they bring their optimism and desire to have fun and to be entertained by others to the park; unlike others, though, they would later find themselves mixed up in a bizarre murder plot in their Illinois hometown. Their mundane adventure on roller coasters and in eating junk food was to be transformed two years later beyond the park, and these current memories would fade, like all others, in what will have resembled a twisted admixture of fate and chance—the familiars in a cultural trend of the "gothic" side of American social reality. The X-Files comes to the fore as social being.
My desire was to continue my study of the natures of interpersonal relationships in the theme park environment. Previous studies in this regard suggest that places of public amusement are crucial sites of both the affective and developmental realms of the interpersonal (cf. The Project on Disney 1995).\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, it was obvious in my work at AstroWorld that patrons did actively negotiate and develop familial relations and other kinship forms in the theme park space. In fact, many of the interactions I observed with patrons and workers at AstroWorld were not antagonistic or necessarily aggressive in nature. As a "tourist," though, I soon felt a different sensibility about the object of my research. I think that I had long passed the day when I felt personal passion for theme parks, their rides, and so forth, and my summer trip left a terrible taste in my mouth in terms of the "American dimension" of theme parks.\textsuperscript{11}

One example comes to mind along this theme. On a May day at Carowinds I approached the members of the Guest Relations department to request information about the park. This had become a standard mode of my ethnographic operation at most of the parks during this trip, and as I learned by the end of the summer, it was not an entirely rewarding one. That day I presented the members of the G.R. booth with a number of my surveys; this immediately drew one of the managers to the front of the park. Her name was Emily and that day she was the "person in-charge," what was refereed to as "100" or "200" at AstroWorld, depending on the staffing situation. Emily was carrying a placard and at first seemed to be worried about her summoning to the front gate area. I assured her that I only had a few questions. I found that she was predominantly evasive in her answers; this was a rhetorical mode I would grow accustomed to in my interactions with theme park management across the country. What was the park mission? To have fun. Did she
experience any problems with the predominantly young worker population? None she knew of. How would she address the current domination of the industry by major corporations, like Paramount, Disney, Six Flags and Premier parks, as well as the flooding of parks with ride and attraction sponsorship like (at Carowinds) Little Ceasars and Kodak? The only sponsor we have is Paramount and our relationship, as such, allows us to create the best possible world of fun and entertainment for all of our guests.

The manner of the meeting with Emily was typical in my research for rhetorically she offered me the safe answers, and further, she refused to be in any way reflexive about her work: for many of those in the business, I believe, the day-to-day toll of operational procedures, recalcitrant patrons, and low incomes led to self-denial and the de-emphasizing of the importance of one's work as a theme park provider. Despite this, I would not expect someone like Emily to publicly answer the mildly probing questions I posed, nor would I suspect that she would answer my research overtures with trustworthy responses (she, after all, had no idea who "I really was"), but I would expect her to present herself—and her articulation of self, other, park—in a manner other than the superficial, happy theme park worker. Perhaps my research expectations were too high, but I had hoped that representatives like Emily would offer insights on the industry from an intuitive, personal and professional dimension. The goal of finding the ethnographic "big man" or "big woman" has passed to the current state of doing fieldwork among the elites, in or outside of industry, who are often willing and "able" to articulate their own personal reflections to the anthropologist (cf. Marcus 1983). Unfortunately, much of ethnography reliant on the perspective of the elite fails to convey a sense of lived reality as it were, in the case of industry or service sectors, on "the
line.” And what is one to do when the non-elites keep quiet?

As my first park visit without a personal trip on a theme ride, I leave Carowinds, disappointed and dejected, feeling that the only reflexivity I could rely on was my own...and what could I really say about myself?

The Collection

I feel that Walt Disney World is the happiest place in the world. It is one of the few places where you can go and never fight with your parents or your siblings...When I go there I feel as if I’m entering a new world where there are no problems...I think WD symbolizes many things. It shows all of Walt Disney’s dreams of what the world should be like. It gives people hope about a better tomorrow, and it is extremely entertaining to visit. I visit there very often because my grandmother lives in Orlando. I’ve been there three times in the last two years [Emily S., an informant].

Identity is instant, like the photo booth offering permanent memories of the theme park visit in under five minutes. I had wandered into Kings Dominion on the same day of my retreat from Carowinds, both being Paramount parks. It was nighttime and I took advantage of a two-day pass to get a preliminary view of this place. I glimpse at a young woman near the front gate: she appears to be waiting for someone, occasionally standing up, waving to someone who never arrives. The overdone colored lights shine below the Eiffel Tower reproduction. The woman persists in her search for another, and I use the moment to spin a metaphor about the simulation of collective social relationships in the United States.
The extinct theme park had its birth in community. Coney Island era parks like Steeplechase and Dreamland were the constituents of the emerged masses of popular culture in the United States before the emergence of popular automobile-aided travel. The “amused million” would gather on the beaches and in the funhouses, mingling as a hodgepodge crowd of mixed classes and occupations (cf. Kasson 1978). The tradition of community also flourished since the early 1900s in regional amusement park traditions, like the trolley parks of Pennsylvania or the picnic groves parks across Ohio (cf. Bush & Hershey 1992; Bush et. al. 1977, 1979; Jacques 1982). The glory days of the amusement park were supplanted by the expansion of the personal travel industry, and the movement of public amusements into the shopping mall, the cinema and the like, where the quality of amusement was less eclectic and much more subdued than the Dionysian atmosphere of places like Coney Island.

Today the shopping mall and theme park are in competition for the wooing of the “new consumer,” one who has a thing for programmatic entertainment and the perceived safety of confined public spaces (cf. Davis 1992a, 1992b). While the theme park has always been a place of given sociality, I would argue that since the Disney corporation’s dominance of the industry,
theme parks have followed a strict model in terms of the types of attractions in their environs; as well, they continue to govern their image, corporate or regional, with the rhetoric of the family. A number of my informants suggest that as patrons in theme parks they were able to use time there in "quality, family ways." Some, such as the next informant, see the tiresome act of waiting in line as a semiotic marker for fond family memories:

While waiting in line [at Disneyland], my aunt and uncle told me stories from their childhood. They talked about ditching school and my uncle's fascination with funerals [Tiffany, an informant].

Others take a decidedly different view, as did Thad, a recent visitor to Universal Studios Florida and Walt Disney World:

[At] Universal [a] friendly photo guy took our picture, wide pathways keep the effective crowd to a minimum, parking easy to find, lines usually a little shorter than stated, actors do good job....[at the] Magic Kingdom: confusing and humiliating cattle mentality to dispatching of guests (via ferry, tram, monorail or bus). We were smashed onto a ferry boat after waiting twenty minutes in line and floated back to the tram pickup area like a bunch of sheep....People with strollers and wheel chairs kept trying to force the issue, but nobody was going anywhere. The line for the water ride was insanely long. Witnessed a verbal assault when two people bumped into each other and started blaming the other. I was like, "There's a billion people here, it's not possible to keep from running into people, so shut the fuck up and move on!"....There was to be no interacting with others. The general rule of thumb for theme park socializing is to pretend that nobody else exists. If people are rude just ignore them. If you do not follow these rules, you will go insane and kill someone....Actually there was one good interaction when this one guy let Susan and I go ahead of him when the wide part of the line converged (Magic Kingdom Haunted House)....Later, we met again at the water ride, so I let him go ahead of us there.
What is further interesting about theme park sociality is how theme park attractions and rides have moved from an inherently social direction to one that privileges individualistic experiences. The theme of rampant individualism is certainly one of the hallmarks of this country's contemporary social organization (cf. Bellah et. al. 1985), and the theme park, like other public amusements venues in the shopping mall and the cinema, has increasingly geared itself towards the individual, even though its rhetoric is focused on families or groups, such as many parks whose managers target church, work or school groups for park outings (cf. O'Brien 1997c, d).

The cinematic experiences of the IMAX sensation, midway skill games, or rides like the roller coaster privilege a phenomenological experienced grounded in the crowd—one screams, gasps or cheers as a group—when in reality the psychological experience of a park visit is grounded in competition: one hurries to get ahead of the next person in line, for example. In some cases, as Thad presented, good will, like letting someone go ahead of you in a line, is rewarded by reciprocity later in the day. For the majority of my informants, this was not the case and their attitudes about other patrons and workers were grounded in hostility and suspicion. That one may strike up a friendly conversation with a number of strangers in line on a given visit to a park is likely; however, that is truly the end of the social, for after the ride is over, so is that interaction. One moves along to the next ride or the next restaurant, in the typical, American style of rugged individualism (cf. Simon & Henderson 1997:93). Friendliness, informality and egalitarianism (cf. Tocqueville 1898)?

14
American Dream

"Alligator Farm and Petting Zoo" may be small, but it is also something that you can realistically hope to own and operate someday (The Institute for Research 1995:12).

I have said that a major goal of my research is to consider the imbrication of theme park representations, seen in rides, attractions, popular symbols and everyday interactions themselves, and United States ideological constructs, specifically those arising in consumerist, capitalist and media-based frames. The volumes of accounts on Walt Disney World and Disneyland stress many of these important issues; as well, Disney's self-constructed corporate image displays a rather obvious insight on the strategy of the corporation to continuously invade American space with its imbrication of commodity, fantasy and ideology. Consider the following words of Walt Disney. I argue that they resonate today, even beyond the theme park world of Disney:

To all who come to this happy place: Welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past...and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. "Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and the hard facts which have created America...with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world." 16

I don't want the public to see the world they live in while they're in Disneyland. I want them to feel they're in another world (Walt Disney Productions 1985:7).

The important thing is the family. If you can keep the family together—and that's the backbone of our whole business, catering to families—that's what we hope to do (Walt Disney Productions 1985:115).

What is evident in the landscapes made popular by Walt Disney, and the corporation that has outlived him, is the deceptive power of the theme park to make fantasy appear natural and to continue to maintain the commodity spaces
of the park via a metanarrative of progress and unitarian inclusionism. Disney's grasp on America has been steadily transformed in its ability to maintain connections with other media, such as the movie and television industry (cf. Marling 1994); as such, the narratives of America presented in its flagship parks seem ever more natural to a populace bombarded by simplified, happy messages on the television (cf. Chomsky 1994).

In sum the identity of Americans is mediated less by social concerns, such as reducing poverty and eliminating social stratification, than by pure entertainment and lobotomy living. The anxiety of being an American (cf. Wald 1995:4, 7) is produced in the theme park moment of deciding about the realism of a simulator ride or the quality of food or service at a park restaurant. Important social issues are white-washed or completely eliminated in theme park landscapes, so that potential conflict, such as real racial or gender issues of a national or local (theme park) nature, is let into thin air.17 America, and I would assert the America evident in the theme park world, is less a place than a goal, project or making (cf. Dolan 1994:21).18
Politically I have decided to dedicate much less attention to the Disney corporation’s stranglehold on the theme park industry than one might expect. It is my opinion that much of the literature on the subject does little to challenge the hegemony of Disney’s vision of the United States.\(^{19}\) Perhaps it is just free publicity for the park? This issue is raised by Greil Marcus in a recent publication that suggests that in terms of Disney criticism, “the parks have a forty-year head start” (Greil Marcus 1997:207). The irony of my organizational decision is that so much of the theme park industry beyond Disney is in fact referenced by Disney. As I indicate in Chapter 3, the financial success of Disney parks has prompted a frenzy of other industry chains, like Six Flags, to follow the operational and ideological leads of this the number one theme park chain in the world. I am confident that a general lack of exorbitant capital is the only factor preventing most of the other theme park conglomerates from becoming entirely like Disney.\(^{20}\) Disney-wanna-be-parks’ reproductions of Disney attractions are at times laughable in their outdoing of what is in the original kitsch.\(^{21}\) Thank you America, for making the theme park what it is!\(^{22}\)

**Dollywood: White Supremacy in the Making**

A national narrative must make the concept of a “home” for “a people” appear intrinsic and natural rather than contingent and, ultimately, fictive (Wald 1995:299).

The American theme park industry was founded on and has been maintained through the tradition of white supremacy. This I write on my way through West Virginia and Tennessee. These travels have taken me through a number of screens—ritualistic, semiotic, consumerist—and at this time I do not reflect, at all, on the industry or the experiences I am studying. The nothingness of midway spaces I have traversed has no effect on my person: the static shapes of
persons and objects there remain trapped as digital images on my camera tape; perhaps later I would recall them for a secondary performance. Is "home" elastic? Is being permeable? These two questions are remainders of the research which will not be meaningful, nor answerable, in the writing hours which will occur as I strive to make sense of what I have done, and what has been done to me...in America...and in theme parks.

The car I am driving presses thoughts in my windshield-mediated consciousness. "Acts 2:38" flashes by the window on some improvised sign near a small house on the road, and I ponder that my desires to act the role of the analytic ethnographer have been surpassed by my concerns with style and the performance...of the word and of the act. Certainly when I write of my field experiences I will make the textual choices I find to be appropriate, but I think that acts too may be received, interpreted and ultimately rechanneled as performance. The wooden cross, some four feet long in one of its dimensions, appears in my rear-view on the grate of a semi-truck. American Christianity makes its performative appearance in a mirror, and I was there to witness. And
the object of desire, in the end, makes all appearances known: what we mill in
the head and later place on the page are moments which must be governed by
indeterminacy and loss, and this is why sacrifice speaks out at me as I shut off
the engine in Dollywood country.

I have spoken earlier of the project of America and the discovery of
unreflexive informants, and now I will introduce the concept of cultural
maintenance and the performative utterance of “America” as a means of
personal sustenance at Dollywood, a place to which I will never return. I had
decided to travel there as it logically fit on my route from Houston to the East
and back to Indiana, and I had also been amused at having once heard that the
park was a “White Trash Disneyland.” It seemed that Dollywood would be the
exotic place that Knoebels and Kennywood were not. Like my trips to Walt
Disney World and Wisconsin Dells, I find a consumerist entrance to the park
vis-à-vis an enormous strip of highway, perhaps two to four miles long, which
is cluttered with symbolic indicators of this part of the United States: Baptist
churches, confederate flags, tarot-card reading venues and black-face lawn
ornaments. You have reached the end, I thought.

Dollywood is located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee and is nestled in the
foothills of the Smokey Mountains. As a space it relies on its geography much
like the successful Busch Gardens Williamsburg. Though owned by Silver
Dollar City Incorporated, the movie star and singer Dolly Parton (who never
interested me in any respect), owns a percentage of the stocks and makes four
annual appearances there. It differs from other theme parks in its layout as a
large “L,” as opposed to the circular patterns of most others. Its regionalism
and its grounding in a lived-authenticity, much like the spirit of Colonial
Williamsburg (cf. Handler & Gable 1997), also mark Dollywood as a different variation on the theme park theme. The rides and attractions are themed appropriate to the region: train and mine rides, river themes and stores reflective of a "down home" feel.

On the morning of my arrival I spend some time mucking through the various stores, each of which has a Dolly theme or beckons of the "good country" in pottery, wood crafts or paintings. I wouldn't buy any of that crap, though I find it interesting that others will. I walked into a candle-making shop and asked a woman working there if she could explain to me where the craftspeople come from. "What do you mean?" "Are these authentic candle-makers or are they trained at Dollywood to make candles?" A blank stare occurs. "Do you know what I am saying?," I shout somewhat loudly. At the end of the forced conversation I somehow learn that most of the craftspeople do indeed come from the general region around Dollywood and are proficient in their work. This striving for authenticity also explains the predominance of workers over the age of forty in the park, another anomaly as compared to the rest of the industry.23

The park's quest for appropriate narratives of authenticity is to be found in Dolly's Tennessee Mountain Home and the Dolly Parton museum; the first a tribute to Dolly's mountain heritage, the second a celebration of the cabin simulacrum containing 2,000 items, videos and memorabilia referencing Dolly Parton's rise to stardom. I come across a male worker outside the first of these park landmarks as I am taping the insides of the cabin. This fellow was curious about the sleek silver camera, a reaction to which I had gotten accustomed. When he learned of my research efforts at the park he was quite happy to spill
his guts, as it were, explaining the history of the park, the quality of the food, the details about the authentic craftspeople, the types of live entertainment offered, and so forth. Matthew tells me that he had worked at Dollywood for two seasons, and that it was his favorite theme park. He asked me if I had been to others like Kennywood or the Paramount parks in the East, and upon hearing my response he gave me his opinion on what these competitor parks lacked: "Dollywood is just the cleanest, most wholesome park there is around!"

After wishing Matthew a good day, I find amusement in a replica of a mountain school in which children are being taught spelling by a dressed-up schoolteacher. Beyond the schoolroom is the Robert F. Thomas chapel where Dollywood's park chaplain performs a service twice during each operating day. I think about how easy it must be to be a Dollywood Christian. That day I also note a number of signs and posters mentioning the "Season of the Family," and I consider how the theme sounds like the title of a Stephen King novel. When I go to ask a worker about this theme, she refuses to answer on camera. I assure that the "red light" is dimmed, and that the camera is off, which encouraged her
response to my question: "This is a general park theme for this year and beyond." I pass the park chaplain decked out in his "uniform" outside of a larger-than-life craft gallery. He walks by more black-face figurines, a number of wooden crosses and a few confederate flags. I have to say that I was truly surprised to have seen so many of these icons in Dollywood's confines. With this regionalism, the park's shops also played off of national themes, selling American flags and POW-MIA patches and buttons. The end...indeed.

Counselor...It has been confirmed. Just before I left the park I observed an interaction between two shop workers and a South-East Asian couple. The park is predominately composed of European Americans, and they were the first non-whites I saw that day. As they approached the first of the two workers at the shop, a woman, it was obvious to me that the Christian, doing-good-onto-others narratives of the park, its workers and European American patrons was of limited intent. The woman sarcastically tells the couple how to get to Craftsman's Valley, and as they are walking away the male worker laughs to the other: "Haven't seen them kinds around here in a while!" She responds, "Yeah, and you know what's the point of telling them how to get there? They'll get lost there anyway!" The two began to laugh at that point. I suppose that assaulting two workers at Dollywood is against the law and also against the tenets of doing good ethnography. I probably should say farewell to both, though. Best wishes to you, counselor.
Still Life

In some ways, Disneyland was too successful (The Institute for Research 1995:6).

*Everyday life functions within certain appearances* which are not so much the products of mystifying ideologies, as contributions to the conditions needed for any mystifying ideology to operate (Lefebvre 1991:165).

Jump-cut from meaning to a woman in the information center at Colonial Williamsburg who is pointing out a spot on a scale model of the tourist attraction: "Honey, this is exactly where we were today." "Oh, O.K.," he responds. Later I talk to a woman in charge of the educational office at the park/museum; she tells me that what separates Colonial Williamsburg from other places like theme parks, is the educational aspect of teaching the public about an important period in American history.

Fade to criticism and a man at Busch Gardens Williamsburg telling his family as they are about to split up and see the park separately, "We’ll meet at 1:00 in Germany." The family goes off along different paths, carrying sacks that are emblazoned with the Busch Gardens logo; eventually, they will all converge in the same spot. A member of the family walks off saying, "It took me a year to figure out that this place is just one big circle!"

Segue to remembrance of a colleague at Valparaiso University as he tells me the story of his youth, having then gone to the now-closed Palisades park in New Jersey. Some months later a book dedicated to the park details a number of persons who found that the park etched meaningful marks on their life-histories (Gargiulo 1995:ix). The park was integral.
Pan to *The Lonely Crowd* (Reisman et. al. 1950) and a slew of texts on the issue of freedom and agency in popular culture and mass entertainment. Introduce a cynical director-anthropologist whose disdain for the subject leaves the audience stupefied.

Synch sound to meaningless commodity fictions and focus on a couple at Busch Gardens Williamsburg arguing about the purchase of an old-time photo with the two in the picture: “I’m not gonna’ pay $100 for a black and white photo!” The woman of the couple shows her disdain to the man by turning the other way. They both fall out of my video viewfinder.

Montage to the Name of the Father where I find a couple outside of a themed amphitheater at the same park. They are drawn to my filmic presence, or perhaps more to the fact that I am holding the camera, so depicting their lives and determining the order of the shots that day. They begin to speak of the values of the park—relaxation, education, stimulation, entertainment. They ask me if I work as a theme park consultant, and I tell them that I had considered so doing after I finish the dissertation. They request a business card, which I provide, and ask if they can later write me about the best theme parks in the United States: “Then you could tell us where to go based on your experiences.” I agree, shake their hands, offer two surveys, and never again hear from the two in the next year.

Pixelate on the tens of waves and “candid camera!” shouts as my JVC video camera rolls through a sixty minute tape in the Congo section of Kings Dominion.
Relax on the couch to a reading of *The McDonaldization of Society*, specifically in the pages detailing the avoidance of daily routine and to the suggestions of taking a meaningful trip in which one gets to know all of the local inhabitants of a place (cf. Ritzer 1996:199-201). Then, add film of any theme park to the mix.

Fade to black on a textual analysis of culture, hegemony and the theme park industry and later bring in a shot of everyday life. After the final roll has been taken off the reel, look out on the landscape of what is deemed American culture—from theme parks to shopping malls, to dime paperback bookstores, to high-rise buildings, to major feature films, and back to images of European Americans, mostly men, enjoying themselves in public and private. Then sit back and return a rental at the local Blockbuster video outlet.

**Theme Park Slum**

[While at Disney] I did really get a grasp on how society and culture mixed. We also visited EPCOT Center where we saw the Chinese buildings, the Japanese building and other parts of the world all collected in one giant metropolis of sights. [Walt Disney] wanted to see everyone live and strive together and wanted them to be able to look [at] and feel things and know what they stood for [Matt, an informant].

Fantasy, if it’s really convincing, can’t become dated, for the simple reason that it represents a flight into a dimension that lies beyond the reach of time (Walt Disney Productions 1985:113).

There are tales of customers of shopping malls who have reportedly gotten sick by their mere fact of being in a shopping mall environment (Kowinski 1985:337-342). As to how many such cases of “mallaise” (ibid.) have been verified is unknown, but there is an architectural and development movement afoot that finds more and more people accustomed to being in the new, now standard,
public spaces of the themed mall, restaurant, theme park, even home subdivision. M. Gottdiener's cultural study of the themeing phenomenon in the United States, *The Theming of America* (1997), looks at the rise of themeing in consumer society as more and more people become attached to a "daily life that occurs within a material environment that is dependent on and organized around overarching symbols, many of which are clearly tied to commercial enterprises" (Gottdiener 1997:4). According to the same author, a themed environment is one in which space is socially constructed to serve as a container for human interaction and one which conveys meaning to its inhabitants through specific symbols (ibid:4-5). Themes, be they the Wild West, a Tropical Paradise, an Ancient Civilization or an Arthurian Hamlet, become "direct marketing appeals," essentially disguising and naturalizing the relationship of commodity, quotidian behavior and spending (Gottdiener 1997:74).

At one level it is the familiarity of theme park themeing that makes these environments palatable for the masses. A concrete urban space of rides and steel-sheds for restaurants would not likely be a successful space for the realization of consumer dreams. As well familiarity lends itself to easy
consumption or ease of entertainment as a theme park goer can use park themes as a way of minimizing the difficulty of travel in a given park (cf. Gottdiener 1997:130). Theme parks, like their partial counterparts in universal exhibitions and fairs, use theming as first an indicator of cultural significance—the consumer is told, for example, that a pavilion at Walt Disney’s EPCOT is sponsored by General Electric corporation, legitimating the attraction as well as the sponsor corporation—and second as an explanation of how to move, use and consume within the themed space (cf. Gottdiener 1997:38). Theme parks, as totalities, become self-referential in their theming: Batman rides spring up at nearly all of the Six Flags parks, leading the park goer to make a connection between the park and its owner Time-Warner, as well as to expect much of the same when the consumer hops from one Six Flags park to the other.27

For patrons and workers of theme park worlds, theming is often nothing more than a barely noticeable gloss on the landscape. New attractions at major theme parks are either self-themed as a whole or are integrated, sometimes loosely, into the theming of an existing territory or section of the environment. When fights break out between costumed workers and visitors or when a themed ride goes unnoticed by the rider who is generally unimpressed with the physical sensation offered by the device, a strange sense of realism, a “return of the real,” emerges as theming is lessened to less than ersatz.28 For many children and older adults, though, I would suggest that theming still serves a significant phenomenological role in the theme park world. Many of those in each group have suggested to me that theming, the narrative that creates fantasy in a fantasy world, is what makes the theme park an enjoyable place to visit.
To contrast the world of the theme park and that of the shopping mall, or the relatively new concept of themed restaurants like Planet Hollywood or the Hard Rock Cafe, one would need only lessen the magnitude of the themeing to produce a similar consumer-effect in those places of business. The themeing of such a restaurant, or a giant mall like the Mall of America (where theme park meets shopping mall), is only smaller in scale than that of the "mega" theme park. The semiotic intentions and the faux-reality effects are of similar intent and deployment. People seem to enjoy eating a bland hamburger at an Applebee's while seated beneath a kitsch-collection of Old West memorabilia and meaningless pictures of celebrities.

As a hegemonic aspect of American life, the role of themeing is immense, especially as signs circulate and maintain the spectacle of the everyday, that which is entirely arbitrary and meaningless (cf. Debord 1977, 1988). That it is the only aspect maintaining the capitalist metanarrative in this land, or any other, would be a misnomer. One cannot however deny the contemporary significance of the themed environment in this U.S. "society of the spectacle."

A closing question on this topic relates to the issue of consumer resistance and the themed environment. In some cases humans have actually failed to embrace certain themed environments (cf. Gottdiener 1997:94), as was the case in 1976 at the World of Sid and Marty Krofft where the essential theme element was the world's largest escalator (cf. Onosko 1978:23), at Chicago's defunct Old Chicago indoor themed amusement park, and at Autoworld, Flint's disastrous attempt to bring in tourist dollars through auto themeing. A cynic might suggest that such failures were not the results of active, combative consumers protesting the specificity of themeing, but simply consumers who
became overly bored by the nature of such attractions. Although some possibilities of anti-themed environments or alternative themed environments are theoretically provocative (cf. Ball 1993), the difficulty of resistance, and meaningful reflection on the everyday so as to strip reality of its illusion—the noble Situationist goal exemplified in throwing an object through a store display window (cf. Knabb 1989)—is that the essence of themeing “lies in the priority of the image over the lived, phenomenological experience of space” (Ball 1993:31).

Epilogue: Nevada Gambling Town

To disappear there, in the depths of some motel, in some Nevada gambling town. How long would it take for someone to react, to get anxious, to find me?...This would be fantastic. The temptation of not existing for anyone, of demonstrating that you don’t exist for anyone (Baudrillard 1996a:42-3).

The minute you disturb the normal flow of tourism is when you enter the crucible (Lukas 1997a:31).

...I want you to know that we’re on our way to Las Vegas to find the American Dream....Las Vegas is a society of armed masturbators (Thompson 1971:6, 41).

You are cold and yet you fire the hearts of men. Wrap yourself in your despot’s furs (Sacher-Masoch 1991:154).

Vegas. What a place of death.....so one day I’m paging through Learning from Las Vegas from 72’ (Venturi, Brown and Izenour 1994). If they only knew what was coming! Why not go to Vegas? The disappearing-point of all American culture. Perhaps there in the desert I would finally understand the meaning of life as a consumer. Perhaps there I would become the ultimate cannibal. I could participate in the frenzy of being an American there; maybe I could dig up some bodies like they did in Casino, or I could call the whole thing off and drink
myself to literal death with hard liquor, like Nicholas Cage in *Leaving Las Vegas*, or figurative death for that matter by writing about Vegas to such excess that I completely cease to be. Would any of this be possible?

Before you go to Vegas, you have to get your package. There are, indeed, many options to choose from. Would you like to stay at the MGM Grand, the Excalibur, the Mirage? I don’t know, I tell the agent. Which do you recommend? The MGM is the world’s largest hotel with 4,004 rooms. That one sounds good, I reply, because in America you have to go for the biggest. Here are a few brochures to look at. Thank you, I respond. After the transaction is said and done, I’ve thrown away about four hundred bucks for the airfare and the hotel room. There is an exorbitant amount of paperwork, but the agent makes all the time pass with his tales from Vegas. Go to Vegas, and make sure that you seek out the great bargains there. Bargains?, I, dumfounded, ask. Sure. Just find the hotels with the $1 shrimp cocktails, or the $0.99 footlong hot-dogs, and a good way to get the insider’s tips is to find a bellman at a hotel. As I am being schooled, my head is bobbing up and down like a frisky dog. I wish I could have salivated on the travel agent’s desk. When you find the bellman, just tip him some and he’ll tell you where to go for all of the discounts. There’s an idea!, I thought. A tip for a tip. Listen, if I come across any bellpersons I’ll let you know, but more than likely I’ll slap the first one I see in the face. Then I’ll pile my rental car full of amphetamines, run out to the desert and look for buried Mafia-men corpses. What?, the agent asks bewildered. Haven’t you read any Hunter S. Thompson? Ah...... Thanks for the ticket, guy, but I’ve got to split. I’ve got a date with a shrimp cocktail and a footlong hot-dog!
I've got the camcorder on now. It's been on the blink lately, but it seems to work during the times I need it most, and this was one of them. I walk past the empty Valuejet terminal. People giggle. The walls of Midway look like something out of a 70s high school slasher movie. The airport is just what God called for: an assortment of rednecks, K-Mart squatters and other social sundry. I enjoy a pleasant breakfast in the stucco-decorated cafe. Cafe Shit, I think it was called. Cold eggs, burnt toast and fake OJ, all served simultaneously on Styrofoam. I would have really felt at home were I sitting in a Stuckey's. Just about now the camcorder has a hard-on to get rolling. There's a 120 minute inside, and there are people to be seen, social contexts to be obliterated. Enough eggs!

The plane we were all supposed to ride gets switched at the last minute. All the dweebs there are looking out of the terminal window. Mommy, what's the man doing to the plane? It turned out to be engine work, so they put us on another. Before all of this, of course, an exodus of people and persons heave from one end of the airport to the next. Look at that! They're all trying to squeeze through the metal detector at once! Talk about a crowd. Performance
idea: in a crowded airport scream, “Is Elias Canetti here?” then leave.

Hell has many names and many faces. The first is a family with a small child. The kid’s screaming like its limbs have been torn off, and everyone is getting a little perturbed with the situation. Nuclear family book mark #1. Then there is Brian and his family. There are at least ten of them and they love to play Blackjack. Get ready for the real thing by playing a few hands in the Illinois airport. One of the chaps would deal out hands to the remaining nine. Occasionally he would jump up and down and mutter something. Though inaudible, I think he was saying, “I’m a total asshole and this is my extended family! Everyone look at us! We’re playing Blackjack!” Soon enough they begin to settle down when a new conversation is struck. Where’s Brian?, one asks. I don’t know. The limmo was supposed to pick him up, but he may’ve overslept. Hum. The conversation stops and I am immediately reminded of 12:00 flashing on a VCR. Then, Brian comes barreling through the terminal: it’s me! Just as he gets near the extended family he trips and falls to the ground. Everyone seems to be looking at his shoes. Nice Reeboks, I shout. Then the baby starts to cackle again. Evidently Brian’s family hadn’t asked the young one if she knew how to play 21.

....but this place is getting to me. I think I’m getting the Fear. The plane is just now getting up in the air. I’m wondering then if it might crash, but everyone on board seem too banal for that to happen. There are three males sitting in front of me. I can remember the exchange as if it were going on today:

*Hey Pops! What’ya think of Vegas, Pops?  
Can’t wait to get to Vegas!  
How bout you Jackie? You’re an entertainer and all. What’ya think of Vegas?*
Can’t wait to get to Vegas!
[After five minutes]
Hey, Pops! The Beatles are on! Check out channel 4.

So these guys go on back and forth, and I’m trying to catch some sleep to prepare for the onslaught of Vegas, yet I abandon that idea after two seconds. I speculate, who are these fucks? I look out the window for a while. Look, below is the Grand Canyon. Hey Pops! The Grand Canyon. I think a bit, then we flew some more in the airplane. I decided to check out the plane’s entertainment system. It consisted of a television screen and plastic headphones. We had the *Odd Couple* on one channel and *Taxi* on another. Dumb with astonishment and amazement which bordered on stupefaction, I focused my attention off of the entertainment network and onto the rolling food carts now being handled in the aisles. I thought about leaving my psyche right there on the cart, under an airplane meal.

No need to look for insignificant scenery any longer. The crest of Vegas is creeping in below in the desert. To be reborn again in Vegas! An etude for the masses waits below as the plane screeches down the runway. The assembled passengers cheer and clap as we land. Do they cheer for Vegas’ lights, its inviting structures, its nude dancers and hookers? Or is their admiration for the airplane itself, as it has brought them safely to their destination?

Our plane unloads at the airport. Like flies we scurry for the baggage area. I apparently was the only soul to have noticed the cased remains of Liberace just near the center of the airport. I think everyone else was too busy with their details (which show do we see tonight? And then dinner?) They also
had to contend with the numerous airport slots which were the initial signs of Vegas' cannibalism. I stop for a minute to catch a glimpse of the Luxor. The pyramid stood a ways from the airport in the 115° sand steaming with vapors. I would be there soon, but first things first.

A group of gamblers and I run with our bags to the ground transportation center. I hear someone mumbling something about a strap-on dildo. There's a guy behind me arguing with his wife over whether or not they turned off their lights back in their Emporia, Kansas home. I turn around and notify them that there is nothing to worry about. If you both happen to crash on your return flight, then the bulbs will burn themselves out. They seem reassured and proceeded to ask me about my stay in Vegas. Here on business? Yes. What sort of work you in? I'm a practicing Dadaist. Dadaist? No, Dada. It was an art movement back in.....listen, I perform art. OK? Performance! What sorts of things do you do? I'm here to perform Vegas. How does one do that? Perform Vegas? Yeah. Well, my business is to dismantle the consumerist-capitalist infrastructure here in Nevada's hometown. That's only the beginning though. What is it that you will do? The first step is simple: I plan to map out the city by attempting to understand its psychogeography. I will drift aimlessly until I am satisfied that I have discovered the mythic origins of Vegas. The rest is somewhat easier. I will stage a series of performance pieces at selected mythic nodes in the city. Eventually I will amass a number of followers whom, through literature and pedagogy, I will gradually influence into joining my performance movement. The Dadaism thing? Right. Then the rest is all politics. You're in politics too? Sort of. I have my own political party, or I should say that I have begun to form it since I got on the plane today. Democrat? Republican? No. This political party is composed of the flora and
fauna indigenous to this part of Nevada. If you want to transform a place, you first must have the support of its citizens. And who, after all, are the mythic primogenitors of Vegas? The animals. The only thing now is to determine my constituency. Any idea about the sorts of animals one might find out here? I think they have little boars or—collared peccary? Could be. Oh, here’s the bus now. Listen, will you gamble at all? Yes. And, aren’t we all gambling with OUR LIVES!

I grab a ticket book from the grand transportation manager and throw my bag on the bus. Grab a coupon book. Get on the bus. Snort a tourist line now. To my chagrin I notice that three seats ahead of me is the group from the airplane. We drive by the many billboards announcing the now historic performances of previous Vegas acts. I think to myself that I could perhaps conduct art sabotage on the billboard faces. Gallagher with a cock in his mouth. David Coperfield with the word “occult” written across his face. Frank Sinatra with a .357 to his head. It would be easy to do. I am momentarily interrupted by one of the bozos in front of me, “Hey Pops! Gallagher is awesome!” The three laugh. I then wonder how I could involve them in my scheme. Perhaps I could work them in as unknowing accomplices in my artistic manifesto for Vegas.

The bus driver rambles off facts about how many rooms are available in each hotel complex. I was staying at the biggest, and I say this now as the bus rolls into the MGM parking lot. We actually depart at the side entrance, which is something like a service entrance at the MGM, though it could easily be the entrance to the Taj Mahal at any other worldly hotel. There is a check-in desk, yet it isn’t the real check-in desk. That one is located a mile around the corner.
After you check into your Vegas hotel you are set. You are almost complete. All that remains for you to do is to go out and discover the pleasure, excess and mystery of the various casinos which populate the main strip and the outlying areas. Baudrillard was right when he commented on the majesty of this place: electronics in the middle of a desert. This was truly the final resting point for the cyber-inclined. Even the airport gets you in the mood for gambling your life away. There were some sociobiologists who years back said that being human, or being a biological organism for that matter, was a game of gambler’s ruin: you either win or you lose, but mostly you lose. That would be a great name for a new Las Vegas casino I could build, Gambler’s Ruin: Home of the Slots that Never Pay. Let’s try to see those travel guide people come up with a strategy to crack my machines!

I had just passed through the check-in terminal of the MGM. The facility there could accommodate hundreds of ready and willing guests, having thirty or so desk clerks. Las Vegas rule: efficiency of the operation. We don’t sweat here, even though it’s 115° outside. I pass through a series of epistemological portals that transform my thought patterns and my abilities into fashion allegories. Even the air, as it flows through gigantic air conditioners, has a most seductive smell to it. I want to be there breathing that air!, I tell myself as I approach the main portal near the front.....Front?, there is no front to a place as big as MGM. There is a giant replica of Dorthy and her other friends from Oz. Above is a giant balloon and an emerald-green shimmering sky. Green was the color of things at MGM, for obvious reasons. A series of restaurants line the corridors and hallways of this place. Somewhat opposite to the orderliness of theme parks, which seek to draw consumers around and around until they “do
it all,” this place tried to deliberately get you lost. Getting lost is the whole key to understanding Vegas and gambling, the extreme-most figure of American capitalism and themed vacation lands.

I can’t remember what I did on the first night of my jaunt in Vegas. Did I spend it downstairs gambling in the slots? Did I look up the numbers of the “exotic dancers” in the Vegas phone book? I think I did throw a few coins into the slots. I didn’t win a thing. All I can remember is the number of old men and women throwing coin after coin into those one-armed bandits. That was social security as they had come to know it.

After a day or two you forget that you are even in Vegas. You forget about your gambling addiction. You forget about the condoms you might need to have night sex with Vegas prostitutes. Want to forget it all? Go to Vegas and meet a new memory there. In the early part of the morning I decide to take the underground route from the MGM. You get thrown through a shopping mall which takes you to Bally’s Casino. Bally’s is a strictly-business gambling place, none of the glitz or fancy themeing of the other places. I hear coins falling as I zoom through Bally’s. That sound is an audible memory I cannot forget. I run out onto the strip and I find that I am immediately surrounded by thousands of people rushing around like somnambulists. Where could they be going? Cars zip by me, and for a moment I feel dizzy. I feel almost that some sick parable is approaching me, but I never got it just then. I walk past the hordes of non-whites who have become part of the slave trade in Vegas. They pass out brochures of “dancers” complete with dimensions, nick-names and pleasures they will be happy to perform. The traders throw the flyers at you, and even families are not immune to receiving and reading those scraps of paper.
I go to Caesars Palace, the whole time using my Sony camcorder to document the crimes I was witnessing. A short motorized people-mover takes you inside the doors of the place. As you glide down the track you get short glimpses of all of the monuments of Vegas there on the strip; they last only for a moments though, as the huge columns of the Palace quickly obstruct the view of them. I walk by some messed-up centurion in the Palace and quickly make a beeline for the Palace's shopping mall. In the gutters of Caesars you come across the remnants of Rome: Caesar himself glares at you, majestic fountains roar at nearby Gucci and the other pompous stains of American shopping. I gotta get out of this place, before I puke, I think to myself. I elbow a number of consumer dreadnoughts as I flee the casino, only to be thrown into another.

Lunch at Treasure Island! I note some swashbucklers as I enter. This place caters to the family, which is a strange metaphorical construct for Vegas. There's a new Bally's video game in the basement shopping mall. Two geeks are sitting in a life-size racing car. They drive through a poorly-rendered screen of a cityscape. To bad that thing can't simulate a drive out of the city! I saw a tram which apparently connected Treasure Island to the adjacent casino, The Mirage. I knew I had to visit the Mirage; it was Michael Jackson's favorite hotel in the city. They also had those cool-ass tigers and Siegfried and Roy. The tram was packed so I took off on foot visiting the Mirage's outdoor dolphin exhibit.

The Mirage indoors is the Garden of Eden. Plants everywhere and simulated bird and fauna sounds. I decide to go up to the desk and inquire, Where is Fuckin' Adam & Eve?, but I didn't. Instead I make my tour of the casino area and discover that I am again lost in the world of dropping coins and
homogenous slots. I feel compelled to go outside. It’s getting dark out. Time to
go and witness the allure of Vegas at night. The casino lights begin to roll.
Everyone on the streets picks up their pace, now appearing as faster
somnambulists. They probably begin to feel good, as androids typically draw
off of the current of both lights and crowd. I am reminded of the burning Maria
droid in Metropolis. What is more sublime, a burning android in Vegas or a
burning casino? I had an idea for a new performance piece. It’ll be called The
Critique of Vegas and it will involve the setting of fire to all of the monumental
hotel-casinos in the city. Don’t let the history of amusement places fool you.
This city was built on mob money anyways. I pass by the fire-like running
neons of The Flamingo, and I think immediately of the whole place going up in
smoke; I think also of the same thing having happened to Coney Island a
hundred years ago—the only other site of spectacular monumental
consumption in this country before we got Vegas.

I pass on to the Luxor. What an amazing place, funded entirely
through the profits Bally’s made off its other casinos. We were now witnessing
the Disneyification of Vegas, if that were possible! This casino is as well-themed
as any other in the city. You walk past a reproduction of the Sphinx and a huge
granite obelisk outside the giant pyramid Luxor. The Krokers talks about how
the Luxor acts as a reading light for astronauts above the earth (Kroker &
Kroker 1996:103). I thought a lot about reading (and writing) as I walked into
the casino area. Luxor was somehow different. Their margaritas sucked, but
you got the feeling that the Luxor knew that it was a big deal. Even the workers
and patrons there passed out the illusion of monumentality. I wander by a
horde of miscellaneous souvenir shops and museum-like places. There is a
mock-up of what appears to be a techno-ghetto. Above I see folks walking out
of their rooms, awakening to the obelisk and the spirit of Ra who summons
them to capitalist duty. Awaken, spirits! Summon your energies to complete
this day anew. Go out, feel the energies around you.....purchase them.

I hadn’t figured to spend all day at the Luxor, but I got hooked on the
idea of surveying their virtual reality rides. Douglas Trumbull has made a huge
fortune off of them. It is the simulator ride that represents the future of
American themed amusements. The inside of the hotel is themed around an
Egyptian Babel and three “interactive” rides. One is a vaudeville adventure in
which one sits as an audience member watching a simulated John Carson-like
talk show. The show is projected on a curved screen which gives the illusion of
“being there” for the audience. As we were literally hoarded into the
auditorium, one of the workers temporarily loses the Luxor spirit of Ra. “Keep
on moving people! Fill up the seats next to you! Miss, please move down the
row!” He was a no-nonsense kind of Set minion. The show starts and the
audience is forced to participate in utter nonsense. Signs light up when the
prerecorded talk show host tells a joke: LAUGH! BOO! What a life!? You
come all the way to Vegas and all you take back is the memory of your
interactions with a prerecorded talk show host! Talk about simulacra. I spend
the rest of the afternoon finishing up the Luxor trilogy.

“In Search of the Obelisk” was the second of the rides. I board a
simulator theater with the rest of the participants. It was a large space with
horizontally-aligned seats and metal bars that reclined to hold the passengers in
their places. The projection screen was touted as one of the tallest screens in the
world. It was curved and offered the illusion of immediacy as another
Trumbull film plot unraveled. The last simulator ride was the most popular,
another “obelisk ride.” It was related to the others as each played off a theme of adventure, time travel, white archaeology. A bunch of Americans are involved in unraveling the mysteries of the universe. The plot of discovery never ceased to amaze me. I get off of the last simulator ride and meander around the museum shops. America is one big museum shop, where consumer-orientation becomes museography, and where representation has already taken on a museum-like appearance. We can no longer imagine the world, society, and everyday life without being sustained by a ‘museal’ distance...lifestyles appear as predetermined or determinative totalities (Jeudy 1994:22).

I get a load of a twelve-inch obelisk with extremely fake symbols painted on it. Hieroglyphs. Vegas was a city of them. They had now though lost their communicative potential. I knew then that it was a short walk back to the MGM, to the people mover, to Bally’s mall and the rest of the strip. I could have visited many other places and talked to many other people, but I fell in my own tracks, near the Stratosphere tower casino and hotel. A real landmark, taller than the Toronto and Tokyo towers, complete with the highest roller coaster and gravity accelerator ride. I decide today to write of one last place. Nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian (Catlin 1973:1). Vegas has left me with allegory fresh on my mind. I can reread the semiotic, existential resistive texts again and appreciate 99-cent hotdogs.

Barbary Coast is the least spectacular of all the Vegas attractions. That’s why it is so sublime. Many of the joints on the strip sold 99-cent hot dogs and shrimp cocktails, but there was some hidden quality about the shrimp sold at the Coast. I grab two or three after asking a video-poker-playing woman next
to me about the quality of the grub. They ain't bad. I munch on them after a 
staff person pulls them from a glass cage...something like a scientific experiment 
set-up in a Frank Zappa film. I take a margarita too. Some guy shouts from 
down the bar, "Those are the strongest ritas in town—three gallons of vodka, 
they put in the machine." I lift my plastic glass up and wish him the best. He 
was all Vegas. He chugs down another rita and wipes his beard off. He then 
shouts to the woman, a shrimp for me too!

Oh yeah, did I mention that Vegas has really come to resemble the 
THEME PARK? Or is it the other way around?
1 This chapter moves between two stylistic modes: one is more of a novelistic character, reflecting ethnographic vignettes presented as ethnographic “facts,” the other a more analytic tone.

2 The difficulty I continue to articulate in my work is twofold: (1) the constitution of the ethnographic field project, what is labeled as being “in the field,” and a concept that is properly problematized by George Marcus in recent articles (1995a, 1997b); (2) the realization of the field in the ethnographic text. Personally I have been dismayed at the lack of critical attention given to these two areas of inquiry in light of the late eighties critiques of the ethnographic act of writing. Although I do not wish to play with such rigid textual dichotomies like “fictive” and “non-fiction” writing, I would suggest the convergence of a number of strains of contemporary work, ethnographic and otherwise. Steven Shaviro offers the term “theoretical fiction” as a style of treating discursive events and arguments in a way analogous to how a novelist treats characters and events in a text (1997a). It is this trend, as well as many others, to which I orient the two problematics of constitution and realization. I do not however imply that they have, or ever will, be resolved.

3 “The Machines of Everyday Life,” which is chapter four of this dissertation.

4 Said by the character “Billy” in the film Easy Rider.

5 Although there have been fewer ethnographic studies of theme parks than one might expect, current examples, like Fjellman’s Vinyl Leaves, take the traditional ethnographic method of approaching the subject from a descriptive and exhaustive angle. As I suggest throughout the dissertation, few ethnographic or other general academic sources consider the theme park from the perspective of everyday life.

6 Clifford’s articulation of the role of personal displacement in the construction of the ethnographic field situation would suggest that there is nothing particularly novel about these feelings I describe. His discussion specifically relates to the work of Conrad and Malinowski (1986:95).

7 Another use of such photos is offered by Kasson: “As one looks closely at turn-of-the-century photographs, they shed their quaint aspect to disclose the meaning they held for [Coney Island] participants” (1978:8).

8 A recent episode of Nightline, American Gothic, analyzed this trend in a representational and enacted “dark side” of social reality in the United States.

9 And in good time, since Americans do not have developed political parties or forms of political entertainment in social protest like the Europeans.

10 Unfortunately this work is an anomaly in the literature as too much writing has focused on the macro-concern of citizenship as opposed to the micro-issue of interpersonal relationship development.

11 Again, I wish to distance my work from studies which take a similar view, a sort of distanced cultural critique of theme parks, and which situate themselves at an overly macro-level of observation. I would resolutely state that the “American dimension,” the double articulation of theme parks and American culture, is manifested in the emic-world of the everyday.

12 This is a theme relevant to Gergen’s discussion of the saturated self and the disintegration of “meaning” in American public and private life (1991).

13 I do not suggest here that non-elites are unable to articulate personal or professional positions. However, the backgrounds of some elites, as well as their security after the ethnographic interview (it’s tough to fire a CEO in this respect), leads me to intuit a difficulty of doing fieldwork among the non-elite and non-exotic. I think that ethnography in home countries (cf. Okely 1996) differs in many respects from ethnography of the “willing other” eager to describe
her or his position or life-history to the anthropologist. Anthropologists of the United States often find that a general unwillingness of the non-elite to reflect on her or his standing to be a tenet of American life, and, ultimately, a reflection of the ingrained nature of hegemony and class identification in this country.

14 That the public sphere has been decimated is illustrated in popular amusements and their constitutive narratives. The real irony of theme parks, like their consumer counterparts in shopping malls, is that there are inherently public spaces, yet they are ones in which people cannot relate to one another (cf. Kowinski 1985:39).

15 Fjellman, as one of these sources, concludes that Walt Disney World operates as a money-maker, as a generator of symbolic capital for the rest of its enterprises, as a distiller of cinematic and mythic views of the United States and the world, as a muse of corporate America, as a naturalizer of the commodity form and a popular pedagogue, and as a creator of utopian visions (1992:397-403). Sorkin offers a number of musings on the relationship of Disney’s commodification of America and the control of public space (1992).

16 Inscription a on plaque dedicated July 17, 1955, Town Square, Main Street, U.S.A. (Walt Disney Productions 1985:3).

17 This is the reason why, for example, that major social issues or historical events like the Vietnam War are not referenced in theme park attractions (cf. Fjellman 1992).

18 As Dolan suggests, the problematics of U.S. nationalistic ideology must be analyzed “by situating it in the context of discursive events organized by actual political conflicts, tasks, and judgments” (1994:3).

19 It is interesting to note that recent hearings on Disney’s proposed Manassas Civil War park ended with the company’s decision not to build such an “educational” theme park as so much public outrage had occurred (cf. Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate 1994).

20 See Farazmand for a discussion on how organizations in the same field become homogenous in operation and vision (1994:32).

21 My visit to Knoebels park this summer confirms this. Though they do not strive to consciously reproduce Disney rides, as they do not have the money to do so, they rely on outdated regional social themes, like the history of coal-mining in a museum, as well as a carousel museum.

22 A piece inspired by Burroughs “A Thanksgiving Day Prayer” (1992), originally appears in my Ethnodemon (Lukas 1997a).

23 According to an informant Matthew, though, Dollywood is also the only park that hires fourteen and fifteen year old workers in the summer.

24 As Wald suggests, “‘Home’ must be sufficiently elastic to incorporate the local into the national: it must, in effect, be unhomelike” (1995:299).

25 Ritzer further states, “People should avoid the routine and systematic use of McDonaldized systems. To avoid the iron cage, they must seek out nonrationalized alternatives whenever possible...avoiding McDonaldization requires hard work and vigilance” (1996:199).

26 This interesting term is derived from Rugoff’s Circus Americanus (1995). A chapter in the text looks at theme venues that are “slums,” in the sense that they are run-down or so cheaply made that they are laughable.

27 The classic expression of themeing as self-referentiality is in the Las Vegas casino (Gottdiener 1997:101) in which a specific architectural theme designates the nature of entertainment inside the complex. Ironically, as Ralph Rugoff considers, some of the major Vegas casinos celebrate a faux-fradulence of their resort’s construction. In the case of the Excalibur Hotel and Casino, the “castle” is ultimately fake-looking, even from a distance, as it appears as a giant model of a castle, without apparent regard for scale and dimensions (Rugoff 1995:5, 6).

28 Indeed, with all of the hype over “real life chase” shows on the television, is there a need for
elaborate themeing in this country?

29In fact, when taken to its extreme, themeing becomes so routinized and mundane that people begin to move through themed spaces as zombies, exactly in a manner of George Romero’s somnambulists listlessly moving through a shopping mall in his film *Dawn of the Dead*.

30Autoworld is profiled in Michael Moore’s excellent documentary, *Roger & Me*.

31“People today who still have time for boredom and yet are not bored are certainly just as boring as those who never get around to being bored” (Kracauer 1995:331).

32Ball’s article “Disneyification Without Guilt” argues for a themeing that is non-elite, non-nostalgic, non-escapist. An example included in the article is a park made of discarded commodities, like sneakers or parts of old automobiles (Ball 19993:36).


34Ten months later, when I returned to MGM, I discovered that the MGM OZ diorama had been replaced by hundreds of new slots.

35See also Cass & Dennis (1996) for more on the fantasy of Luxor.
CHAPTER 7

PERFORMING FIELD

End of the Millennium Ethnography

This ethnography is written in the context of change—personal, political, epistemological and cultural—and it is change and its accompanying uncertainty that delimits and maintains the edges of this writing. Specifically, my work as a field researcher and writer of ethnography is a product of the energy generated in the late eighties following the numerous critiques of anthropology produced at Rice University, as well as at a few other programs. Most contemporary anthropologists are familiar with the series of discussions, debates and replies created by the publication of Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Clifford and Marcus 1986), Anthropology as Cultural Critique (Marcus and Fisher 1986), The Predicament of Culture (Clifford 1988) and The Unspeakable (Tyler 1987a). These texts, though not the only ones in that decade to follow a critical approach to the doing and writing of ethnography, were certainly significant in their questioning of held disciplinary assumptions in cultural anthropology.
While working as a Master’s student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Iowa I became interested in these particular texts, as well as some of the feminist critiques of them. There, there were noticeable differences in philosophy—some saw the relevance of the critiques, others scoffed at the books, calling them “postmodern,” and ultimately argued that they were not worthy of reading in any graduate seminar in cultural anthropology.¹ Coming from a previous four field anthropology program at Indiana University I was cognizant of these texts, though then unaware of the impact they would have on my own unique thoughts and doings in anthropology. I distinctly remember seeing The Predicament of Culture sitting on the shelf of the university bookstore in 1988, though I didn’t purchase the book that year.

As it were, I read much more of what had been (is) labeled as “traditional” anthropology: undergraduate seminars focused on symbolic and economic anthropology, and thinkers like Lévi-Strauss and Victor Turner. The graduate seminars at the University of Iowa were certainly more expansive than my undergraduate education, though I found the common aversion to critical anthropology to be odd. Essentially, I thought, what was all the fuss? I was beginning to realize that anthropologists were a closeted lot: they didn’t want anyone messing with their sacred texts and they certainly did not want anyone suggesting new pathways, especially ones seeming too quirky or strange. Save that for art! Michael Jackson (1989), and the hoop-dee-do about “radical empiricism,” was viewed as being cutting edge yet was still safe for many of the ethnographers I crossed paths with in the early stages of my career in anthropology, while Stephen Tyler, and his work, was ultimately too subversive and controversial for classroom discussion...and it certainly was not relevant for considerations in “the field.” Everyone knew what the field was!
In my Master's thesis, *[sic]* (Lukas 1993), I dealt with the relevance of late eighties critical anthropology and suggested two arenas of contestation in which these debates and dialogues were occurring: (1) within the discipline of anthropology, specifically between reactionaries in the field, like Marvin Harris who saw it as a personal mission to boldly attack the propositions of texts like *Writing Culture* (cf. Harris 1994; Marcus 1994a, 1995, 1996), the members or disciples of critical anthropology, from departments like Rice as well as the History of Consciousness Program at the University of California-Santa Cruz, and other critical circles generated in various U.S. anthropology programs by anthropologists committed to the critical endeavor from other dimensions, such as theories of race and gender (cf. Wolf 1992). (2) Around the margins of anthropology. Following the disciplinary turmoil of the late eighties, interest was opened in fields outside of anthropology in the acceptance of these criticisms in other disciplinary pursuits, be they textual or practice-oriented. An example of this second arena is the growing legitimation of ethnography as a methodological device (Marcus 1994c), such as in the performing arts, in which ethnography is interestingly born as a late eighties creation, often without regard to the earlier origins of the practice of ethnography as fieldwork.²

It is not my intention to re-delve into the nature of the critiques to which I am referring, so I shall not cast the stakes so much as I shall move around them, to come to a different point of departure and arrival in a plane inhabited by sympathetic colleagues, professors and fellow graduate students in my department.³ Much of the discussion remaining from the late 1980s perpetuates itself on purely mundane grounds, offering apologetics for the past, positing returns to "real ethnography" (cf. Fox 1991), or claiming to be treading new grounds, such as is suggested in some anthropological propositions for
"experimental ethnography." In fact much of this "new" work offers no new insight—methodological, theoretical or epistemological—or even a shred of stylistic innovation. As George Marcus offers in a recent review of this topic:

Rather than "many flowers blooming," I have found ethnography after the critique of the 1980s dominated by an ethos of redemption in a rather narrow moral economy, where every ethnographic work is obliged to tell a certain kind of critical truth about alterity in the world, that is built on deconstruction, that liberates by freeing fixed identities....since experimentation is about risk, I have been disappointed that the "writing culture" critiques of the 1980s, which opened up far more opportunities than have been explored, did not lead to more diverse experiments with ethnography, experiments that risked more in terms of the traditional assumptions and practices of fieldwork (Marcus 1997a:3, 7).

In this chapter I will consider this quotation in specific reference to the problematics of the doing of ethnography in my personal instance, what is called the process and product of anthropology; that is, the fieldwork and the subsequent ethnographic writing. As an edge piece I seek to suggest a dialogue between my own understandings of contemporary critical anthropology, the foundations with which I am fighting, my passions for cross-disciplinary work, specifically my interests in performance as it relates to the text and practice of anthropology, and a general interest in experimental writing.
Reflexivity, What Kind of Word?

What a proper ethnographer ought properly to be doing is going out to places, coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in practical form, not lounging about in libraries reflecting on literary questions (Geertz 1988:1).

"How do I make my dissertation reflexive?" (revealingly naive question I have received more than once in my talks at various anthropology departments. I answer by critiquing the question) (Marcus 1992c:113).

Throughout the dissertation I wish to develop a series of discursive channels which will hopefully seek to inform and to dissuade, to insinuate and instantiate, to evoke and to bring into being. By dramatic illustration and performative conventions, I wish to show the reader how my ethnography is as much about theme parks as it is not; the proving of this assertion will though require both sympathy and creativity on the part of the reader. I wish to also suggest that reflexivity, what is now a buzzword to many anthropologists, continues to be one of the most significant epistemological issues facing contemporary anthropology. Yet, I offer an important rejoinder to that statement, namely, that although reflexivity is a theoretical and praxis-oriented issue of extreme importance to contemporary anthropology, it has been severely misunderstood and misused as both a conceptual/analytical tool and as a narrative/ethnographic device.

The trope of reflexivity has become something of a benchmark in anthropology since the days of Franz Boas and Paul Radin. In terms of the evolution of the discipline, we see that early explanatory anthropological theories, such as the evolutionary frameworks proposed by Lewis Henry Morgan and E.B. Tylor, had in common the desire for all-encompassing, "value-
free," scientific theories of human understanding. The success of approaches like the paradigms of cultural evolutionism may be attributed to their erasure of subjects, with their interjections that the only thing that mattered was the explanatory power of method, be it historical, ethnological or other. Boas and Radin seriously questioned such assumptions, on both scientific and ethical grounds, and offered approaches that focused on particulars, such as the development of art and ritual styles (Boas), and on individuals as the unique and important originators of custom and the human lifeworld (Radin). However, reflexivity, in these early days, is still not of disciplinary importance as it relates to the acts of doing and writing the field. It is only with the exuberance of Malinowski, in his heralding of participant-observation, that we begin to see a focus on the interplays of text—field, informant—anthropologist.

That the trope of reflexivity has been a ubiquitous one in the contemporary period of anthropology (since the 1970s or so) is illustrated in the number of journal articles and monographs published within and without the discipline dedicated to the dynamics of this trope. As I hope to exemplify in my writing, the prevalence of this trope in anthropology cannot be attributed to mere disciplinary critique alone, nor can one say that reflexivity has always allowed greater insight on the practices of the anthropologist in the field or questions governing informant—anthropologist relationships. Like so many other issues of contemporary anthropology, reflexivity became a rallying call for ethnographic liberals and conservatives alike. New tropes beget specific company. Take, for instance, Graham Watson’s piece "Make Me Reflexive-But Not Yet" (1987), which takes for its inspiration the question of reflexivity and claims to offer the reader strategies for “managing” it. Watson’s piece falls into a reactionary rhetorical mode shortly into its pages by implicating certain
anthropologists who have undertaken "reflexive ploys" to undermine the various (realist) modes of writing ethnography; such is his critique of Marcus and Cushman's "Ethnographies as Texts" (1982). Watson politically uses reflexivity as a rallying cry for maintaining disciplinary demarcations and the boundaries between specific textual modes, such as fiction—ethnography (Watson 1987:37).

We can also find a number of other sources, original ethnographies, reviews and critical commentaries, which attempt to "manage" reflexivity by understanding the trope's usefulness in the creation of "better ethnography"—a markedly disciplinary-preserving use which, though not blatantly politically motivated like articles in the vein of Watson's, nonetheless maintain a watchful eye on the ethnographic credibility of the anthropological text. Consider for example Clifford Geertz's Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author. Geertz considers a number of aspects of ethnographic authorship, including an extended analysis of Paul Rabinow's Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco (1977), Vincent Crapanzano's Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan (1980), and Kevin Dwyer's Moroccan Dialogues (1987), three texts considered by some to be the exemplars of contemporary reflexive ethnography. Geertz's text though follows the mode of a "gentleman's critique" of ethnographic sensibility, a mode to which I would parallel the disciplinary musings of a Michael Herzfeld, and offers little but further meta-commentary on the subject.5

Reflexivity in anthropology was the subject of at least one collected text, A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Approaches in Anthropology (Ruby 1982). Ruby's edited volume offers a series of commentaries on the role of reflexive approaches in the discipline, from ethnographic text to poetic forms to drama.
Further collections like *Fieldnotes* (Sanjek 1990), though not explicitly a text on reflexivity, connect the theme to other anthropological concerns and most notably cement a connection between reflexivity and the processual aspect of doing ethnography. As such, one is persuaded by such works to see reflexivity as a literary construct insofar as it is related to one’s reflections of the field: less acceptable is reflexivity constructed *apart from the field*, something which I attempt in my ethnography.

Feminist approaches to reflexivity have in many ways been successful in reopening and reviewing the question from a variety of previously unexamined angles. Much of feminist anthropological scholarship, such as the recent *Women Writing Culture* (Behar and Gordon 1995), describes the contemporary debates of the discipline as fitting between two poles, feminist commitment and textual innovation (Behar and Gordon 1995:14; Stacey 1988). Indeed the many feminist critiques of contemporary ethnography have offered insightful looks at the question of reflexivity as it is integrated with and emerges from other questions: voice, perspective, ethics, politics.

In some situations, reflexivity can arguably lead to the not doing of ethnography, as in the case of the self-realization of the anthropologist who finds harm (political or physical) may come to one’s informants (cf. Stacey 1988). Other texts outside the discipline, such as *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa 1983), have continued a feminist and general anthropological concern with the status of reflexivity as it relates to persons of different backgrounds, as it affects the status of field informants and field dynamics, and as it comments on the production of ethnography in general. Such work, I believe, is the most challenging work on the topic of reflexivity
and positioning to date; however, as I will contend many times throughout this writing, the fatal flaw of this and other work is its maintenance of certain orders, both textual and disciplinary.

My way of summarizing the efforts of reflexive anthropology is to suggest that reflexivity has served to reproduce and maintain the status quo of much of anthropological writing, namely the concern with producing "better representations" of the world, or perhaps ones that claim to be open and ethical. I further argue that the use of reflexivity in ethnography has often strengthened specific assertions, such as the premises of "I was there," leading to continued support of the realist mode of writing ethnography under the guise of the "new." It is a continuation of a specific, well-established pattern. As Stephen Tyler explains:

One could say that an ethnography is a textual practice intended to obscure its textual practices in order to present a factual description of "the way things are" as if they had not been written and as if ethnography really were a "picture" of another way of life (1987a:90).

My point is, to go back to Marcus' assertions, that the critique of ethnographic authority, both in the sense of being in the field and of writing of it, as well as the problematizing of voice and positioning, should not have been merely received as a call to further standardize the methodological foundations of cultural anthropology. Instead, the opening that was continued in the eighties by anthropologists, feminists, critical cultural theorists and aesthetic practitioners should be understood in its possibility of producing a new line, an off-breed of writing, being, doing, performing in the field. Make me an experimental ethnography but not just yet!
Five Pieces

To close this discussion and to open the next, I present five “pieces” or modes of inspiration that inform my understandings of critical anthropology and further project my inhabitation of text—field into another abyss...a productive abyss, as it were.⁷

(1) Literature on science and technology. A number of recent collections and monographs, from inside and outside of anthropology, have begun to tackle the complex socio-cultural issues in the area of science and technology studies. Bruno Latour’s study ARAMIS (1996) is interesting understanding of a failed French transportation system, written so as an experimental interplay of voice, text, published report, and interview in which the multiple nodes of discourse, metaphorical of the project’s outline and subsequent impossibility,⁸ meet in a textual union lacking an apparent center. Sharon Traweek’s study of high-energy physics communities (1988) and Georgina Born’s book on IRCAM (1995) are two other important examples of critical anthropological approaches to STS, though they are not necessarily experimental in form. George Marcus’ edited collections in the Late Editions series and other edited volumes like The Cyborg Handbook (Hables Gray, Figueroa-Sarriera & Mentor 1995) also tackle the question of the constitution of ethnographic objects in light of social and technological changes. In more explicit philosophical and existential ways, Donna Haraway’s well-known “cyborg manifesto” (1991a:149-181) and Allucquère Stone’s text on writing and technology (1995) present manifested possibilities of movement and the reshaping of subjectivity under the conditions generated by emerging technology, both personal and public.⁹
(2) Internet resources and writing projects. The growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the last ten years or so has generated interest in the contemporary figurations of classic anthropological and sociological issues, such as the public sphere, the construction of (virtual) communities, and communicative topics. The new communities instantiated in MUDs and MOOs, in which on-line users work together, insult and even battle one another, and the possibilities of virtual technologies and telepresence offer a wealth of possibilities for the writing and doing of ethnographies in and of such communities. Perhaps as intriguing are the issues such communities and technologies bring to the fold of age-old questions governing communicative competence, public and private information rights and the writing of texts. Hypertext (cf. Landow 1992) is the most commonly cited example of the growth of new communicative and textual models. Most interesting, I believe, is the impact of this and other forms of Internet/Web writing—forms which challenge the assumptions and possibilities of who gets to write and who gets to read. Some of my dissertation research relies on the use of personal Web pages and sources previously unavailable in any form, and one could indeed tie the research potentials of the Web to issues of public communication and power (access to information). Explicitly in terms of my interest in contemporary field and writing practices, I would point to the work of a number of writers, poets and cultural critics who have established news groups and Web pages dedicated to the exploration of experimental forms of writing and cultural critique. Arthur Kroger’s C-Theory was an early example of Web cultural criticism, though much of its current contributions have grown predictable, overstated and fall into their own traps of textual monotony. Mark Amerika, a professor at Brown University’s experimental writing collective, has recently used his ALT-X Web page and the GRAMMATRON hypermedia project to challenge the
boundaries of experimental writing and criticism, Web-based or otherwise. I believe that his work, though cutting-edge and glossy on the surface, does address the difficulties and promises of new media, their impacts on narrative decisions and questions of authorship, as well as offers a forum for a "public" discussion of related issues.

(3) Underground publication traditions. Before the spread of the Web, the creation of underground publications, zines, and other "anti-art" popular culture forms, such as home-grown cassettes (James 1992), mail art (Home 1988) and photocopy art (Klown 1997; Lovejoy 1989), allowed a number of disenfranchised persons to use both popular culture and (the deconstruction of) art codes to create personal, political and, through distribution, eventually public forms of self-representation and cultural critique. An examination of such works, such as Dishwasher (Dishwasher Pete No Date)—a commentary by an individual whose goal is to be a dishwasher in all of the fifty states of the U.S.—suggests that cultural critique and experimental writing generated in the aftermath of institutional hegemony and violence does not have to emerge from the circles of academics and avant-gardists; instead such blue-collar approaches use the very forms of popular and public culture left to one's disposal as the system's own dérive. In particular, I have been greatly influenced by some of the suggestions of an historical example of these forms in the Situationist International (cf. Knabb 1989) and its diaspora.10

textual possibility and remediated notions of authorship unbound by the conventions of traditional realist modes of writing. Such works are exemplary not in their perversions of form alone, for they too stand as reflexive works of cultural criticism; and on examining these texts, one is immediately drawn to the provocations they lend to contemporary understandings of subjectivity under late-capitalism (with the exception of *Glas* which takes a much more classical philosophical approach to subjectivity). Doubly interesting are a series of texts which build their “writing machines” on the rubble created in the wake of earlier inspirational writings. Brian Massumi’s dictionary of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1993a), Luce Irigaray’s interpretation of Nietzsche in *Marine Lover* (1991a), Dennis Hollier’s treatise on Bataille in *Against Architecture* (1992), and Gloria Anzaldúa’s examination and reconfigurations of transcultural text and myth in *Borderlands* (1987), all significantly play with the idea of what criticism and experimental writing might look like in the wake, or the AFTER (cf. Lukas 1994), of prior texts, histories, genres. To write restively is often to betray (cf. Cixous 1991), and the provocative familiarity of such modes of writing-AFTER is of importance to the anthropological community. The wave of criticism generated in response to the controversies of *Writing Culture* and other texts in the late eighties is representative of the disciplinary trend of provocation-criticism-reinterpretation (cf. Kuhn 1970). The difference in the case of the writing-AFTER texts I have illustrated, is that the accepted modes of hermeneutic investigation and textual criticism have been subverted. The emphasis is not on “getting things right,” but on “getting things after.” In the case of *Writing Culture*, hermeneutics has often been the only end of a series of critiques which were aimed beyond the merely interpretive.
(5) Performance art projects. An interesting observation I have from participating in performance studies conferences is the sign of the emergence of ethnography as a trans-disciplinary legitimating force (cf. Marcus 1994c). Many of the panels I have witnessed have actively addressed the question of ethnography from outside of anthropology. I remember a panelist at one such conference addressing the other participants at a plenary session by making the remarks, “We’re doing ethnography now too.” Consider Sally Bane’s Writing Dancing (1994) or Joseph Kosuth’s “The Artist as Anthropologist” (1993:108-128) in which both artists, working outside of anthropology, use, revamp and critically apply the concepts of ethnography and performance/aesthetics in other ways.13 Contributors to a recent collection have also commented on the difficulty of establishing a dialogue between artists, performers and anthropological ethnographers (Marcus and Myers 1995). Ethnography is an emergent genre, and as I have found in attempting to challenge its bounds through my own performative endeavors, anthropologists are seemingly unwilling to let loose their sacred cows.14 Much of my ethnography will explicitly focus on this problematic syncretism with a specific emphasis on the difficult union of text and field in light of the connections between anthropology and performance to which I am speaking.

What all of this literature has in common is desire; desire to maintain an aggressive hold on institutional analysis and cultural critique, but desire that is improper, illegitimate and unforgiving. It is writing desire that is in process. Stephen Tyler and others have criticized the contemporary strains of cultural criticism and experimentalism as being insufficient by their very fact of seeming to be attractive possibilities (Lukas 1996a). Such examples, one could say, are texts which lull the reader into forgetting one’s textuality: they use vision, the
ethnographer’s or the critic’s eye, as a way of organizing the writing into specific sites of criticism, to which the critic has the first and only dibs. By identifying five pieces of influential critical writing, I do not wish to imply to the reader that such forms are attractive for their potential of creating new schools or methods of cultural criticism; to the contrary, they are attractive exactly because they avoid method, at least explicitly, and they leave “work” or criticism open (cf. Eco 1989) to the possibility of connection, dialogue and disruption with and through other works, persons and spaces in the future.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Critical Apparatus: From Writing Machine to Wandering Eye/I}

We had lost confidence in our “culture.” Everything had to be demolished (Marcel Janco in Plant 1992:30).

For the situationists, the prospect of either revolution or theory representing the working class was quite unthinkable. Since such representation is precisely the ground of alienation against which the revolution is effected, ‘the revolutionary organization must learn that it can no longer \textit{combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle}.’ It cannot ‘represent the revolutionary class, but must ‘simply recognize itself as radically separated from the \textit{world of separation}.’ (Plant 1992:18).

Critique is lipoxenous; it becomes its own object and displaces the text (Tyler 1993a:15).

There is a rich tradition of the use and development of counter-discourse and culture critique paradigms in many of this country’s intellectual circles (Marcus 1992d; Marcus and Fischer 1986). Anthropology has been witness to its own political development as a progressive discipline as well as having seen its own setbacks.\textsuperscript{16} Intellectually, anthropology’s critical voice has swelled and deflated with the uncertain and bumpy road of American politics and intellectual critique. The critical apparatus, as I have understood it and as I have applied it in my research, has focused on the criticism of Enlightenment faith in reason
and progress, an inherently epistemological grounding, as well as the direct
analysis of social institutions, cultural manifestations, frames of everyday life
often coupled with an ideology-critique of a "system's" inner workings (cf.
Marcus & Fischer 1986).

My awareness of cultural critique emerging from an anthropological
tradition partially situates itself in contemporary political concerns, such as race
and gender politics, and represents itself in practical and theoretical
understandings of the United States and its social institutions, be these written
critiques or performance workshops which I frequently conduct. In recent years
the critical apparatus of cultural anthropology has been challenged, and though
the musings on the subject drift from "surrealist ethnography"17 to "women
writing culture" (cf. Behar & Gordon 1995), contemporary anthropology has
been afraid to engage in the "politics of the day" that have become the subjects
of talk show discourse (Munson 1993) and muted public sphere discussions.
Sections of specific publications, like the Anthropology Newsletter published by
the American Anthropological Association, feature an "Anthropology in the
News Watch" and often publish segments dedicated to further moving
anthropological discourse into the public sector. There are two problems with
this move: (1) Anthropological criticism is not applicable to these frames, either
due to incommensurability between the two discursive worlds or a lack of
interest in anthropology by the public. (2) Anthropological criticism is not
critical—its guise as a "reformer's science" is limited by its inability to enact or
physically change the landscape on which it has placed its watchful eye.

In writing this chapter it is my assertion that much of the problem with
anthropological criticism, and its public applicability, is an amalgamation of the
two suggestions I have offered. Anthropology, with consistent moves between various levels of the analytic, is consumed by its own desires to be a legitimate science and a creative art at the same time. Like any academic discourse it is constrained by the limitations imposed by the university structure and its politics, funding concerns, and general academic community issues, like publishing mores. The critical moves of late eighties anthropology, be those having originated in writing culture circles or feminist schools of thought, extend the critical endeavors of earlier academic, political and artistic movements to the domain of anthropological writing and fieldwork. The effect is both monumental and muted: research, as my own, is stimulated by these productive discussions and debates, though at another personal level I find much skepticism.

In my own mind criticism involves the investigation of practices, cultural objects and psycho-social situations so as to separate and later connect them, discursively, “in order to call them into crisis...so as to transform them” (Foster 1985:2-3). Criticism implies reimagination and transformation of a thing, be it a text, a social situation or a society. In this respect, my detailing of my background as a performer and anthropologist in Chapter 1 would here relate to the use of criticism as a (primarily) textual/analytical device in anthropological work and the parallel yet distinct use of criticism as a (primarily) performative/experiential tool in aesthetics and performance circles. Both, in the words of Gregory Ulmer, employ a sort of “post-criticism” in each’s application of modernist principles of theory and aesthetics to the critical endeavor (1983:83).

The problem of doing anthropological criticism in the wake of disciplinary upheaval\textsuperscript{18} is that status of critique has changed; though it could be
in a revitalized study of the subject, it is no longer an operation of addressing the monolithic nature of capitalism, as in the work of Frankfurt School theorists, and detailing its impacts on the lifeworld of consumer-citizens. Rather, criticism, like a form of drifting (Lyotard 1984:13), loses it grasp on immanence: it, intangible, can only speak from a podium of gasses in which authenticity, transcendental truths and absolute cultural standards are themselves the subjects of criticism (cf. Plant 1992:30). Much like the overused narrative of "postmodernism," contemporary cultural criticism—in the aftermath of varied disciplinary reorganizations and alterations in the very fabric of them, as well as irreversible shifts in society, such as those brought out by the influence of new technology and general cultural aesthetics (cf. Harvey 1989)—is itself a trope in question. How can one do cultural criticism of the very objects (or the society) which have themselves fueled and legitimated the critical apparatuses utilized in academe? What might end of the millennium capitalist-induced criticism come to resemble? Who is doctor, and who is patient?

The second issue is commonly understood as that of cooption, especially in terms of the avant-gardes of the early part of the twentieth century. It is suggested that Surrealism and Dadaism, as two examples, did less to transform society than to act as pedagogical preludes to MTV and the montage effects of everyday consumer life. Thomas Crow suggests that in this instance the avant-gardes became "a kind of academic research development arm of the culture industry" (Sayre 1989:10). As well, I believe one can extend this problem to ethnographic knowledge and the debates of the late eighties: ethnography is problematized, a series of research camps develop, and in the end ethnographers go about their business of being producers. Culturally and personally the use of criticism in this writing is paramount, yet it is not
employed without stumbling over a major reflexive conundrum I faced, due, in part, to my object of study, my personal understanding of criticism, and the course of the work itself: that is, how to study popular culture (U.S. theme parks) and not end up being either an elitist, an absolutist or a nihilist? This chapter seeks to answer this question, and in so doing I will travel around the sides of a number of disproportionate globes of odd shapes, ultimately coming to rest in the series of gaps that inform my own transgressions and traverses while in the field (cf. Taylor 1990). It is my assumption that counter-models and the development of counter-discourse is still relevant and manageable without falling into the pits of no return that so characterize much of contemporary ethnography and cultural criticism. As Hal Foster writes:

It may even be, as Theodor Adorno once remarked, that late-capitalist society is so irrational as to make any theory of its culture difficult. Yet rather than reject theory...or refuse history...one may argue the necessity of counter models and alternative narratives (1985:1-2).

As I have stated, my concern is not that the reader accept the legitimacy of my "models," scenes or narratives simply because of their analytic or descriptive character. Rather, I hope to emphasize that the doing of ethnography, the doing of society, and the various ways in which society does us have radically changed. And in this period of uncertainty we are left contemplating the spaces that have reopened. Gaps inform, as much as they destroy.
Experimental Ethnography

We have loaded the word with strengths and energies that helped us to rediscover the evangelical concept of the ‘word’...as a magical complex image....I let the vowels fool around. I let the vowels quite simply occur, as a cat miaows...Words emerge, shoulders of words, legs, arms, hands of words. Au, oi, uh [Hugo Ball on some earlier Dada performances, in Watts (1988:123, 124)].

Chapter 1 gives some indications as to my background as a performer and how knowledge that develops in performance spaces, what Richard Schechner calls “performance knowledge”—a kind of knowledge that forms out of accumulation and repetition in the performance process and performance space (Schechner 1985:21, 11)—can inform the writing of ethnographic texts, the doing of fieldwork and the negotiation of everyday life in interpersonal interactions with people, spaces, events that do and do not make-up my life as an
ethnographer-performer. Near the end of that same chapter I forward an approach that privileges the fragmentation of everyday life experience as it emerges in my writing of ethnography: it is a textual/performative ideology rooted in multiple channels, techniques, theories and examples, yet it shares a common status with a myth that never takes shape, mysticism that is never realized as such, evocation that privileges no one way of doing things.\textsuperscript{20} The writing I envision and embark on a journey to produce is—like the connotations of Hugo Ball’s sound events and Kurt Schwitters’ ability to reinvest language in occult practices—a sort of reenchantment of the written through a realization of the hidden potentials of language in the unsaid, in allegory and in practices of textual evocation. Here I explain the sense that there is more to language than the text, specifically the realist text,\textsuperscript{21} and that the critiques of anthropological rhetoric and authority (cf. Clifford 1988; Crapanzano 1986; Marcus 1982; Marcus & Cushman 1982) did not necessarily establish powerfully lasting directions in the writing of ethnographic texts which were committed to non-realist forms or were contextually-driven by epistemological concerns that strayed from traditional analytical grounds of fieldwork.\textsuperscript{22}

What sustains me is the commitments of the avant-gardes, what dissipates me is their application, specifically as they are written and as they are (only) thought of. To explain this statement I will contend that one needs to understand a very bold fact relevant to the anthropological fetishes with the late eighties text: namely, experimental ethnography does not exist, and it may never given the conditions responsible for the governance of textual authority in the circles of anthropology and in other related disciplines. As I have said, I shall not completely extrapolate the nature of this question as it references the more salient and felt contributions of eighties critiques;\textsuperscript{23} instead, I will point to
the politics of the suggested hybridity of "experimental ethnography" as a way of expressing the dual impossibility of the realization of this genre as well as its eventual acceptance as a normatively sound frame of writing.

In recent years the move towards nonrealist ethnography has included the open use of certain modernist textual techniques (such as montage and collage); plays on voice and polyvocality, and the employment of critical juxtapositions within ethnography; the experimentation with devices intended to disrupt the traditional ethnographic narrative, such as dialogism and nonlinear plot; the remapping of writerly-readerly relationships, such as through the use of reflexivity, positioning, and the incorporation of indigenous discourse or style; the reproblematizing of accepted textual tropes related to the spatial and the temporal (cf. Marcus 1993).24

Ethnographic reorientation is not the condition of not being able to any longer conduct anthropological work; it is instead the realization, referencing Lyotard and his notion of the differend, that "culture" and its containment in anthropology has been a concept predicated on the notion that "the difference of others can be fully consumed" (Marcus 1994b:388). The move towards experimentalism in ethnography is a stylistic strategy of coping with an understanding and appreciation of the mystical component of difference: it is you as the social scientist saying, it is I who, not being able to ever fully comprehend difference, is none the less caught up in the great play of its mystery; I have not come to conquer what it represents and through my inability to fully understand it, I have ironically found myself in a dialogue with difference and the world itself.25
Marcus cites the ethnography that is disposed to such textual liberties as a "messy text," a term which I think is pedagogical and methodologically useful in many respects (1994c:567). Wrestling with a loss of holism, it displays an open-endedness in contrast to the realist ethnography, incomplete due to its author's/informant's struggle to represent without falling back in the pits of totalistic, absolutist textualism. Messy texts may be the "testing ground" of qualitative social science "being remade in the absence of authoritative models, paradigms, or methods" (Marcus 1994c:573).

Besides writing "messy texts," another option for the experimental ethnographer is to follow specific critical models of construction.26 These might include Haraway's "cyborg" (1991a), Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome" (1987), Appadurai's "scapes" (1990), Strathern's "chaos theories" (1991a), Derrida's "dissemination" (1981). This is not a complete list, but it highlights the popularity of such models in creative, albeit limited, use in ethnography. Another related trend in the move against holistic ethnographic style is the concept of "following" (Marcus 1995a). An ethnographer, often becoming a sort of "circumstantial activist" during the process of fieldwork and during various stages of writing (ibid:113),27 might use a group of people, a specific metaphor or series of tropes, an allegory or a life-history, or a conflict or controversy as a means of establishing ethnographic priority in the work (Marcus 1995a:106-9).28

Stylistically, one could also choose to incorporate any number of other textual devices, such as less common ones like chance operations (Brecht 1989), automatic writing (Gooding 1993), or numerous other techniques (cf. Kostelanetz 1989, 1995) that aim to graphically or methodologically disrupt linear plot or form; however, such incorporations, and I would argue that this is
the trouble with the purported experimentalism of some contemporary ethnography, is necessarily limited. This is illustrated by Tyler:

Culture critique, and its interest in ‘experimental writing,’ is an expression of a purely modernist interest in the ideology of language reform....the critique of writing and the call for experimentation will not have enhanced representation as much as it will have discredited it by drawing attention to its artifice, and the more so as it recommendations for repair, such as ‘collage,’ ‘dialogism,’ ‘polyphony,’ and ‘reflexivity,’ will have been already understood as rhetorical artifices (Tyler 1995a:84, 86).

Ideologically, the connections between critical ethnography and avant-gardist or experimental writing practices might be thought of along the lines of a less modernist sensibility where the interest is not in discursive reform or pure analysis. Perhaps governed more by the idea of a *diaphora* [*dia* meaning “in between,” and *phora* meaning “bring across” or “bear” (Carravetta 1991:xi)], the practice of non-realist writing could better achieve a synthesis of person and world without necessarily privileging one, the other or their union. As Peter Carravetta explains in his *Prefaces to the Diaphora*,

[A *diaphora* would] signify a movement akin to a dialogue between and among forms of discourse that, though typically exclusive of one another, are...made to relate and transfer signification from one semantic/hermeneutic position to another (1991:xi).

As I suggest in a section on practice and the field in this chapter, it is my contention that the critical connections offered in the revisioning of the ethnographic project are overly oriented to the question of the text without addressing the situations and interactions *prior to the text*: the interaction of ethnographer, informants, spaces and events. From a performative standpoint, which is what I am essentially forwarding, the connection of the text and the field—which like the theories of ethnographic rhetoric becomes its own
experimental site in my vision—is no longer unrecognized or unproblematized. From a praxis-orientation we might begin to speak of experimental exemplars of the field in the same voice as we have discussed ethnographic (textual) notables.

**Interlude: Mystery**

In teletheory pedagogy is thought of as a sampling of cultural history, which may also suggest a difference between this approach to meaning and the approach formulated by semiotics: the Sine as an alternative to the sign (Ulmer 1989:14).

Throughout the course of this writing, I hope that the reader will begin to develop a familiarity with and an appreciation of a variety of tropes, theories, methodological inquiries and forms of persuasion which seriously push the limits of anthropological ethnography. In my varied extirpation of conventional ethnographic theory and writing, a portion of my work will concern itself with the elucidation of ethnographic detail through an experimentation with form, voice or approach to context; however, in many other cases I intend to simply "evolve" without apparent commentary or academic explanation. Through language-reborn and experience-remediated we move from the authority of "I was there" or "I will attempt to prove" to the ephemeral and happenstance of "I intend to show," "I intend to move," or "The voice of a ghost is speaking through me." By relying on evocation rather than on analysis and proof, we may intentionally move against text, against its grain. As Stephen Tyler suggests, "we can only overcome language by a means of writing that is not analytic" (1987a:26).

In my Fall 1997 course "American Spaces" at Valparaiso University, I experimented with a number of contemporary and traditional narrative techniques in having my students ask the question, "What does a theme park
mean to me?” In conjunction with field research at Six Flags Great America in Gurnee, Illinois we embarked on the study of theme parks by committing them to memory, specifically memory that is arrived at through the writing of autobiography and other narrative modes. One of the assignments in this project was the creation of student “mystories,” a term derived from Gregory Ulmer’s Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video (1989). Ulmer’s text, like his Applied Grammatology (1985), is provocative in its challenging of accepted modes of narrative and the standards of producing texts, specifically as they relate to autobiographical issues. I wish to allocate some space to a presentation of Ulmer’s concept of the “mystery.” For beyond my pedagogical exercise with my students, the concept has a direct bearing on this ethnography.

Mystery begins with an epistemological and narrative premise based, in part, on doubt: “to approach knowledge from the side of not knowing what it is, from the side of one who is learning, not from that of the one who already knows, is to do mystery” (Ulmer 1989:106). As a literary genre mystery derives its form from a variety of conceptions of the text, including, “history, herstory, maistrie, mystery, my story, paganism” (ibid:89). It could be genre-blurred (cf. Geertz 1983), multi-tracked (cf. Lukas 1996c; Ulmer 1989:vii), a product of a possible number of approaches to writing, such as montage and “the edit,” yet none of these techniques is allowed to dominate or predetermine the possibility of the scene of writing. Ulmer posits:

Theory as mystery is written with the apostrophe of self-address inherited from the essay tradition. A mysterical essay is not scholarship, not the communication of a prior sense, but the discovery of a direction by means of writing. It includes an assertion of comprehension that has more in common with the manifesto than with the essay (Ulmer 1989:90).
The mystery brings together zones of lived and written experience, such as oral-based folk traditions and literate-based schooling (ibid:39), in often uncanny ways, as in the blending of fiction and non-fiction (ibid:57), or in the abandonment of hermeneutics in favor of experimentation (ibid:140). Invention, perhaps in lieu of the cartographic metaphor of discovery, lends this form an inherently autobiographical level, a narrative strategy of poesis rather than mimesis—a battle-cry common to artists and writers in favor of non-realist representation (cf. Conquergood 1995). One’s personal strategies for composing a text, likened by Ulmer to the opening up of an individual’s “intensive reserve” (1989:vii), are made possible and tangible in a form that begins with a premise, namely that an individual should have the autonomy to write, the way she wishes, and that she, as a mover-in and -of culture, should write in a manner making her personal images accessible, whenever or whatever their sources (cf. Cixous 1991; Ulmer 1989:39). Mystery is the new “autobiography,” and it could very well contribute to a new ethnography in the wake of greater confusion over its form and politics.

For me the most provocative aspect of Ulmer’s concept of mystery is his suggested reintegration of writing and performance. In two key passages from his text, the author elaborates on the evolution and outcomes of alphabetic discourse:

...whatever a Medieval student was thinking about...it was done by a walk through the childhood home, or along the streets of a hometown, or a great public building, finding in each room or next to each familiar location an image...the information to be learned was fixed and recalled...by association with these places and images...the mnemonic pedagogy was replaced after the coming of print by a memorization based on dialectical order perfected in the tree diagrams of Peter Ramus and retained today in the use of outlining....in mystery...a disciplinary discourse is mapped onto the personal and popular registers in the
associational mode of mnemotechniques, not for memorization, but to bring the dimensions of experience, imagination, and phantasy to bear on problem-solving and disciplinary discovery (Ulmer 1989:136, 196).

The problem with (all) writing and even performance practice is in the closure applied to experience in the aftermath of movement, be it the "movement" of research, everyday life or otherwise. What is the force of theory?, Ulmer asks (ibid:2); and to answer one could look, as he does in his understanding of performance artist Joseph Beuys (Ulmer 1985), to various techniques of performers and avant-garde artists and the mediation of their craft with and through writing (cf. Kosuth 1993; Marcus 1995c; Prinz 1991; Wallis 1987).

The cybernetics of the text—author (artist) have been manifestly demonstrated and reflected upon by artists and performers long before anthropologists conceived and applied their own versions of reflexivity to ethnography. Yet like ethnography, a simplification of inner and outer experiences, the performance/art piece is inevitably tied to systems of closure, be they the art market, the art class or the art history text. Experience is simplified to be codified and later commodified. Ulmer’s key application of the poesis of art and performance, though, suggests a possible fortunate outcome of the inner-outer experience dichotomy in capitalist society. In fact, though here I do not elaborate on the topic, Ulmer actively endorses the use of electronic modes of experience-presentation, such as video and television, as a possible outcome of the crisis of (personal) representation. Performance, art, even television and video-editing are no longer the objects of interpretation of the cultural critic, rather, in the hands of a writer of mystery, they become sources of method, subjects in the union of text-writer in the hands of willing writers (cf. Ulmer 1989:20). Again we see criticism (of the media) overlapping with doing
the media and being done (in) by the media.

It is important to distinguish between writing-performance projects like Ulmer's and others which advocate new textual methodology for the purpose of model-making. The problem with the suggestions for "experimental ethnography" is that they are presented as models to be followed or as novelties to accompany the all-seeing eye of the writer-ethnographer (cf. Ulmer 1989:170). Michael Taussig’s work (1987, 1997) is often cited as exemplary of the experimental mode of ethnographic writing, which in my mind is an example of a formalist and ideological cloud nine of contemporary ethnographers who want to be writers or artists.31 Although I will not explicitly make the claim that any portion of my work displays the conscious signs of being a mystery or any other genre, I see Ulmer’s provocative approach being at least metaphorically inspirational to the conceptualization and writing of this ethnography. It is a narrative form perhaps apt to tourist realms, acting as a compass provoking movement to and from places, functioning as allegory, and giving post-meaning to places seen, unseen and to be seen (cf. Ulmer 1989:185, 94).32 That is the beginning of evocation.

What the Field Brings: Outline of a Theory of Performance Practice

INTRODUCTION

As directed activities, both performance practice and fieldwork involve a constitution of an object (a frame of inquiry, a space of presentation, an organization of materials, a questioning of informants, a conceptual ordering of inanimates), a text, be it realist or experimental, an observer (one who may act as a mere interpreter, a detached watcher, a reflexive journalist, an auteur of
spaces), a *process* (be it a dramaturgical event, a Balinese cockfight or an afternoon tea), a moment of *theory* and *governance* (the application of principles to the foregone material, such as psychoanalytical analysis), and an act of *criticism* (the disciplinary community, public or private, which engages the work on a hermeneutic level). These shared elements, though, do not necessarily establish the priority of a dialogue between these two disciplines.

In terms of further relations of performance practice and ethnographic activity, one may conclude that (1) there is a mediated relationship between some performance practice and the doing of fieldwork, partially historically evident in the avant-gardes (cf. Clifford 1988). (2) Both have a transformational period of field to text or performance act to text, sometimes enacted by artists, whereas the anthropologist strives to produce only a text. (3) Both have been legitimated by institutional forces, be they the art market or publishing houses. (4) Both have waffled on the relationship of their objects to the everyday, often being unable to explain or defend the constitution of their units as they relate to the process of cultural critique and social transformation. (5) Both have privileged the author/creator, often as the maker or interpreter of expert knowledge or as the purveyor of skill. (6) Both have been mediated by or have applied a use of the analytic—be it a canvas, a stage, a video or a text. (7) Both “know their objects well” (cf. Sayre 1989:44), in that each imputes a personal attachment to them, be they people, spaces, things or ideas. Whether reflexive or not, there is commitment to that which is studied or worked upon. With these introductory principles aside, let me move on to some specific commitments and applications of the performance-ethnography link I am forwarding.
In thinking about the varied relationships between performance and anthropology, those disciplinary and personal, I begin with two crossroads that converge yet often lead me nowhere; these are "performance anthropology" and performance as embedded in ethnographic texts. The first covers a general area of scholarly activity that works within and without a text, while the second more specific instantiation of performance practice is represented by the attempt to integrate performativity in writing.

Performance anthropology, like aspects of performance art or avant-garde practices, recognizes the importance of experience outside the text. Though ethnographers admit, in part, to the fallibility of ethnographic experience as it is translated into text (cf. Clifford & Marcus 1986), they have been unable to accept the use of other media, like video, as a representation of another's reality. Much of what is owed to performance anthropology is attributable to early historians of ritual performance, such as in the work of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. For Turner and others the assumption of the primacy of the text is foreshadowed by a larger concern with processes of culture as they are lived, specifically through ritual and symbolism. Representation is seen as a "bringing forth," where spectators as well as actors are implied in an overall process of representation (cf. Gadamer 1975:115). Acting in line with a philosophical reaction to the modern age and the overall emphasis on producing pictures of the world, as opposed to acting like the world (Heidegger 1977:134), Turner and others created dramatic texts of ethnographic rituals and reperformed them using objects and symbols meant to approximate their counterparts in Ndembu or other societies (Turner 1982, 1986). As a process of "pragmatic reflexivity," as Turner called it (1982:100), the coming into being of performance experience
played with the dynamics of *mimesis* and *poesis*, ultimately coming out on the side of the latter in what amounted to the performers' "making, not faking" (Turner ibid:93).

The second point of consideration is discussed throughout the dissertation under the rubric of "experimental ethnography" or "performative ethnography." As I argue earlier in this chapter, the playing out of the performative in or as a text is exemplified by a number of anthropological works whose authors attempt to test the limits of textual form (cf. Taylor 1998). Though there are numerous political and epistemological conundrums to be raised in analyzing the performed ethnography, as an emergent and loose genre the benefits of a more performative approach to language and ethnography is further deposition on the issue of field translation. The "performing field" is to be realized not simply as a transcription of indigenous life experiences, but as an expression of the anthropologist-author's relation to people, places, events and ideas.

An interesting critique is raised by artist-critic-ethnographer David Tomas who makes the point that experimentation and re-worked texts that only privilege form are illustrations of work whose authors lose sight of the embeddedness of their writing and their field practices in larger cultural practices and politics. He argues:

> Why should surrealist methodology serve as the *modus operandi* for this activity [ethnography] as opposed to other contemporary modernist and postmodernist artistic practices, such as performance art with its highlighting of the body and its anti-object politics, or installation art forms with their critically situated dialogues with institutional, urban, or rural spaces? What role is there in a surrealist ethnography for the cultural methodologies of other peoples (Tomas 1992:17)?
The resurgence of the performance trope as a general academic or a practical concern is important in many respects. These include: the breakdown of boundaries and genres (art and life, subject and object, etc.), a move towards the obsolescence of the object, or the "work"; an acceptance of process over finality (of text, object, etc.); the movement of the audience into the frames of performance itself; and a blurring of the temporal and the spatial (Rothenberg 1977:12-16). It is certainly acceptable to muse on the possible imaginary and real connections of anthropologies, avant-gardes and the like, but I would ask the reader to consider the limitations of these examples of experimentalism in anthropology, an experimentalism that though in line with the historical techniques and attitudes of, for example, the Surrealists is limited by its commitment to being a text alone. In the following sections I present a selected list of the possible connections of anthropological fieldwork and performance practice, not as a way of stating how to better get things right, but as a means of understanding a more general process of mediating being and experience. There is much more in a text than a text.

USE

In discussing the impact of Dada, Tristan Tzara once asked an interviewer, "Why do you professors always want to destroy legends" (Sanouillet 1979:17)? Tzara's question and its implications pose significant considerations for the historical understanding of avant-gardes as well as their applications as exemplars for contemporary cultural critique. Some critics of avant-gardes and their legacies suggest that the immanent critique of society developed in such movements, as well as their resultant poetic and discursive forms, were the ultimate source of the downfalls of Dadaism, Surrealism, etc. (Mann 1991). Besides this unfortunate flow of many avant-garde principles and techniques
into various realms of popular culture, another disappointment in the "use" of avant-garde practices and performance practices in contemporary critique has been the relative lack of dialogue between associated interlocutors. The forms of capitalist enterprise, which are more often than not seen as infiltrators in the world of academe, do in fact have an impact on the ways in which "business" is conducted in academic spheres. The idea of exchanging ideas freely or sharing them within or without a community is essentially an image, an illusion, one that is maintained by copyright laws, standards of academic operation, funding decisions and turf maintenance. I illustrate this with a brief case in point.

A few years back, prior to a trip to Berlin, I met with art historian Stephen C. Foster of the University of Iowa to discuss my interests in contemporary German avant-gardes and possible links between the Dadaists and performative field practice. Foster is one of the world's experts in Dadaism, he the editor of Crisis and the Arts: A History of Dada in thirteen volumes (Foster 1996), a frequent speaker on avant-gardes as well as an organizer of many exhibitions of associated artists. He seemed bemused by my attempts to dialogically link Dada and anthropology; at one point suggesting the need to understand the historical and social contexts of the movement. I am not suggesting that one does not need to have such an historical understanding of this or any other movement were one to critically incorporate its discourse in one's own work; certainly, the historical legacy of Dada might still be used in an inspired fight against state politics and corporatism in this country. Academic gate-keeping is not only reserved to the old boys hoarding the analytic, and the lack of interest and passion that is reflected by any of these experts seems to me to diminish the legacy of such movements, hence Tzara's quote on cooption. To move performance into dialogical relation with anthropological field practice
may seem to be a spurious operation to both the historian of art and the
anthropologist, and that is exactly my point. The seeming spuriousness of the
connection is established in the critic/historian’s assumption of the organic
nature of objects—discursive, historical, material, spatial. The metaphor of
punk, or of numerous other “low-tech” movements like mail art circles, is much
an apt illustration of the trend in widely distributed, populist performance—
what is often called a “revolution from below” (Andrew Ross in Dery 1996:111).

CONCEPTUAL

The world begins with a concept. Years back performance artist Techching
Hsieh began a piece in which he was tied to the body of performer Linda
Montano with an eight-foot rope for the period of one year. In his career he
conducts a series of pieces which challenge the artist’s own constitution, such as
living in a cage without speaking, reading, watching television, etc. for one year,
or his year-long punching of a time clock every hour on the hour every day for
that year (Carr 1993:5). His pieces, like the danger works of Chris Burden
(1975), offer an alternative take on the fusion of everyday life frames with the
experiential world of the performer. The fieldworker, like the performance
artist, travels in space to follow concepts, things, traces, events, people (cf.
Marcus 1995a). An idea, perhaps even an obsession, or a series of them drawn
together in specific ways, becomes the organizing focus for the worker of ideas,
spaces, discourse, be she an ethnographer or a performance artist. The
performance artist becomes a conduit, a vessel through which ideas, places,
people and stories flow (cf. Breton 1990). A multi-sitedness develops from the
concept of the flow (cf. Marcus 1995a), and the ethnographer-performer creates a
field space of experience where doing-ethnography is supplanted by evoking
it.38
The ethnographer, like the performer in space, realizes the difficulty of the challenge posed by the *initial concept*; even as an obsession and a realization that flows through the body-mind of the performer-ethnography, she is concerned of the auteur-effect that plagued anthropology in the contemporary period, from Geertz to Taussig: tell me about your site, but convince me that you are the channel for "ghosts" and not merely the revived corporeality of them. The ethnographer-performer understands that any search for truth in a performative field is ludicrous and that the consideration of effects, how "ghosts" impinge on subjects, objects and spaces, is to be the primary concern of the remediated field effort (cf. Barthes in Ulmer 1983:96). Oh, and this is not to say that the task of the performance-ethnographer is to simply act as a translator, of experience to text, of native to the non-native, of academic to nonacademic, of high-priestess of evocation to practitioners; rather, possession is initiatory and unspecified.

**EVENT ART FOR ETHNOGRAPHY**

Go to the field.
Stay there.
Come back.
Write a text.

**PERFORMING FIELDS**

The field has sunk. What has come to fruition in the illicit and illegal relationship of performance and field practice is the idea of the field as a nonmodernist space. For too long the ethnographer has falsely assumed a connection to the field that appears unmediated and unabashedly given. For a new direction in field practice to occur, one would necessarily need to rethink both the "givenness" of the field as a space, and the actions and interactions of
the ethnographer within that space; specifically this would constitute a realization that neither the "field" as an envisioned whole nor the perceived quality and importance of the interactions and observations of the ethnographer there are paramount. Anything other than this is resultant in what is still the modernist, hegemonic field. A number of performance artists have seen around the transparency of their "fields," and have taken a stance that appreciates the complexity of the spaces they inhabit, rather than assuming the subordination of such spaces to the whims of the visitor, be they textual, field-based, or personal. Earlier interlocutors of the field moved in performance as a generator of reflexive field conditions as is shown in the work of theatrical experiments in Africa, known as "provocation anthropology" in which different groups of people barter ideas through performance (Bovin 1988). There are also other suggestions for the enactment of "performed scholarship" (Conquergood 1995:15) as alternatives to the conference paper or the public presentation of the field.

Most notable in the performing field are the multi-media concepts and creations of Cuban artist Abdel Hernandez. Over the last few years Hernandez set into motion an interesting dialogue at Rice University through a series of public performances, discussions with anthropologists and community members, and a number of installations and video works which shadowed the field operations of the ethnographer in veils of mysticism and spaces of intensive public activity, like the marketplace. As Marcus writes of such performances and installations, they opened up discussion about the nature of the doing and the re-presenting of fieldwork, including, to cite only one interesting example, Hernandez's application of performative techniques to elicit field responses from drug addicts, often through nonverbal means (Marcus
Like the early Dadaists preceding Abdel Hernandez's multiply-mediated field, what emerges in the "alternative field" is a heightened sense of the reflexivity of the ethnographer-performer who understands the monumentality of such a space and the task of transforming that field to other sensory realms, be they paper, video or other (cf. Watts 1988). The performing field represents the execution or decapitation of the duck-blind or verandah anthropologist, or even the Geertzian invader ethnographer; it is a place made for the sacrificial mad-child of the overloaded ethnographer-performer—e who is a flâneur, a drifter of places seen and unseen.

IMPINGEMENT

The space is Zurich, 1916, the "peaceful dead-center of the war" (Melzer 1994:11). This is the place of what has now become emblematized as Dada. It is where Tzara, Janco, Ball, Hennings and Huelsenbeck all hang out. Between February and July of 1916, a number of soirées were held at the Cabaret Voltaire. Cabaret, then, given the "diverse artistic preoccupations of the Zurich group-artists, poets, writers, theatre-people" (ibid:12), was seen as the appropriate mode of the Dadaist operation. The cabaret became the mise en scène of the student, the revolutionary, the reformer, the tourist, the crook, the spy, the irritated; it was a becoming-space. Here is one such descriptive scene, quoting Richard Huelsenbeck in his Memoirs of a Dada Drummer:

Hugo [Ball] was sitting at the piano, playing classical music, Brahms and Bach. Then he switched over to dance music. The drunken students pushed their chairs aside and began spinning around. There were almost no women in the cabaret. It was too wild, too way out....Hugo had written a poem against war and murderous insanity. Emmy [Hennings] recited it, Hugo accompanied her on the piano and the audience chimed in, with a growl, murdering the poem (1974:9-10).
The Dadaists make the spectators "roar," and then culture critique is brought into contact with the instantiation of shock, guerrilla tactics, and the obscene. Hordes of art movements, lunatics and anarchists have sought to broadside culture, be they working from the perspective of an invisible theater (cf. Boal 1979), a shock art tactic (Melzer 1994:5), an anti-art or anti-culture status, or a détourning of a public space or image. I would label art like that of Krzysztof Wodiczko, whose projections on or atop some of the world's major architectural buildings and features are stunning visual and political images (cf. Wodiczko 1992), as "impingement art." It is work, installation art, happenings or anything else that is public by the nature of the event or a later effect. It seeks to challenge the lived spaces of everyday life in a unapologetic way. To impinge suggests an immediate denial of all that is given, theoretical, practiced and lived. To impinge in the field means to deny the naturalness of any object, environment, discursive or other moment, to instead convey what has been lent to the same (cf. Ulmer 1983:97) or to survey how to reprocess or rerun the object-environment-moment through parody, irony and recombination. Working in the ethnographic field means to be able to act as a playback artist of perverse proportions, aware that the ultimate goal of any act in the ethnographic space is to transform it. Here the cabaret is a bygone space, but a very valid metaphor for understanding space, which the field is, and for considering how to doubly move in and represent it.

HAPPENING

Models of contemporary art and performance have often come from everyday life. As aesthetic and critical texts, they allow one to extend the critical apparatus of performance and of the art "object" itself to realms outside of society (Kaprow 1989:417). These models include situational ones, where an
artist might conduct a happening or performance piece in the presence of others in a specific, often public space; operational models, where, for example, George Brecht staged a sundown event for cars, activating parts of the cars with pre-planned time-counts; structural models where anything from a computer, a series of Coca-Cola bottles or a typewriter with a faulty print wheel is used to produce specific aesthetic effects; self-referring models, which take the reflexive dimension of art to a new level, such as the use of video in a personal, performative context; learning models, where John Cage's 4'33'' stands as an important pedagogical piece on the nature of concert hall performance and cultural aesthetics (Cage 1961).

The happening occurs; it is a momentary union of ethnography, the use of space to convey, and ethnomethodology, the use of semiotics as cannonballs. It is post-criticism (Ulmer 1983:94), or perhaps pre-criticism in that the happening prepares the ground for the revolution of everyday life that the ethnographer-performer wishes to augur (cf. Plant 1992:63). The happening offers to the "everything included package" and the occupation of the quotidian that has occurred under capitalism a major strike event, of what Debord metaphorically calls the revelation of a chair smashing a store display window (cf. Plant 1992:65; Knabb 1989). Allan Kaprow sees the happening as a means of stripping away the hegemony of art and culture critique in which, like Joseph Beuys' vision, everyone becomes an artist (Kaprow 1983:100, 1989; Beuys 1990).

It would be possible to transform the field into a space of the Happening, involving ethnographer and persons there in a new mediated space. Again, the difficulty of applying Kaprow's suggestions for transforming ordinary social
spaces is the idea that the Happening would come to resemble a method or a means of soliciting social interactions. Of course the ethnographic interview and the camera lens themselves are imposed “methods” of the field. As an ethnographer one could perhaps more loosely apply the Happening in an alternate way, as a means towards a new ethnographic sensibility. No longer is the field innocent, and by adapting to a new approach to the field—as a space, as a place of interactions, as a way to the text—the ethnographer may begin to appreciate the possibility of post-hegemonic fieldwork.

INTERMEDIA: MULTI-SITES

The ready-made or found object, in a sense an intermedium since it was not intended to conform to the pure media, usually suggests [in-betweenness] and therefore suggests a location in the field between the general area of art media and those of life media (Higgins 1989:174).

Moholy-Nagy’s montages were works of incredible contrast and depth, characterized less by their aesthetic claims than by their attempts to forget about the convention of media, the presuppositions of construction that have led both the ethnographer and the performer astray (Kaplan 1995). The Dadaists were content with simultaneity as it emerged in mixed-media spaces and performances (Melzer 1994:33-8), from poems, theater, music, ranting, tableau-manifestoes and poem drawings (ibid:38, 200). Were intermedia to seriously join the performance-ethnographer, field sites could take on the texture of montages brought alive from the paper. Montage events might describe the state of doing and realizing fieldwork at the end of the millennium, a tribute to an enacted multi-sitedness. The metaphor to a many-sided field is significant:
Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography (Marcus 1995a:105).44

To apply intermedia to the visitation of fields and to the writing of texts, in both philosophical and practical ways, one would challenge the tenets of ethnography and social science in general. Realizing the rhetorical implications of the field—text—reader is not enough; for what is needed is a conscious reflection on the possibilities of generating new spaces in the field and (through) the ethnographic text. Not simply fictive but hyperfictive is the intermediated field where the ethnographer is a client to dreams and channels whose origins are as unpredictable as the ends. To do field research has meant to load up on data like interviews, tape recordings or pictures and films to the end of creating perfect vistas from which to reflect on the field and peoples there. As I have approached in this project, the use of numerous media in the field and in the performance of the research following the field immersion would return inquiry to the domain of process and continual interpretation.
From Ritual to Therapy and Back to Fire

The shaman as shaman produces no objects...but like the artist [s]he works through the abandonment of self, through a sacrifice to society. By committing [her]self, [s]he activates healing patterns of behavior in others. Seen in this light, the Happening is the logical consequence of modern shamanism (Stachelhaus 1991:73).

The “field” is expansive. What I hope I have touched on in this chapter only skims the surface of what the future may look like in the case of anthropology and ethnographic writing. Perhaps it is no surprise, as one theorist has offered, that mystics seem to pop up at the end of a millennium, and it is perhaps even less of a surprise that many have tried to rethink anthropology through the trope of mystery. As Stephen A. Tyler states,

The idea of mystery itself is absolutely necessary to the postmodern...mystery in a positive sense. It’s not mystery in the negative sense of not knowing; it’s mystery...that informs. It informs you not by giving you a kind of discursive knowledge. It’s a mystery that informs you by enabling you to think in-between things (Lukas 1996a).

Mystery, also related to therapy as once captured in the sense of Proto-Indo-European *ar-, way of being, from which have come English “art,” “rite,” and “ritual,” “that family of concepts so closely connected with the idea of restorative harmony, of ‘therapy’ in its original sense of ‘ritual substitute’...with the poet as therapon, ‘attendant of the Muse’” (Tyler 1987a:211).

Tyler continues, suggesting that as a sort of fantasy-performance, ethnography can be theorized through reference to “occult practices” whereby ethnographer and informant are mutually effected in an alternative context:

A postmodern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect (1987a:202).
Tyler’s assertions and recommendations have been widely felt. Most commonly the reaction has been negative, thus underlining cultural anthropology’s conservative political, epistemological and representational politics. Though Tyler has continued to develop his suggestions from The Unspeakable, such as in his recent work on the “middle voice” (1995a), there has been surprisingly less discussion of the applicability of his arguments to the ethnographic context. Most read “Postmodern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document” as a playful or performative piece that does not offer direct mediation on the doing or writing of ethnography. Though I would disagree with this interpretation of his work, I also think that this effect of the writing in The Unspeakable and elsewhere has been intentional on the author’s part. As he suggests in this same piece, “evocation is nonrepresentational,” a statement which though true is nevertheless difficult to swallow for the anthropology student trained in a conservative upbringing of American academic anthropology.

Tyler’s prolegomenon for cultural anthropology does more than argue for the adoption of a new field or writing method—that is hardly the direction of his critique—rather it jumps right to the heart of the problem, anthropology’s implication in a discursive network of alphabetic writing, realist narrative and absolutist hermeneutics. Like a burrowing worm seeking out the nervous system of its victim, Tyler’s “postmodern ethnography” is to cultural anthropology what Joseph Beuy’s “How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare” (Beuys 1990; Stachelhaus 1991) is to aesthetics. Tyler’s work philosophically challenges the assumptions of cultural anthropology as a field and writing “science.” Misunderstood as it has been, this critique of anthropology, as well as the other associated texts of the eighties, has continued relevance in an era in
which the tide seems to be turning back to renewed interest in realism and uncritical politics in the project of ethnography (cf. Fox 1991). I think that as sites of inspiration, the provocations of The Unspeakable do more than challenge or performatively critique ethnographic practice; they do in fact, as markers of the ethnographic fabulous, present the possibility of moving otherwise in an academic discipline which is incredibly conservative and so doomed to repeat its sins of the past. As Tyler concludes in his piece on postmodern ethnography, the impetus in thinking AFTER realist ethnography is in the ethnographer’s recognition to move beyond and to begin a conversation with worlds, peoples, places and ideas previously left in their own insane asylums:

[An ethnography] is not a record of experience at all; it is the means of experience....I call ethnography a meditative vehicle because we come to it not as a map of knowledge nor as a guide to action, nor even for entertainment. We come to it as the start of a different kind of journey (Tyler 1987a:216).

I close this chapter with one last meditation on experimental ethnography—a performance piece on ethnography and theme parks that has not occurred.
Interruption and Transformation: The Stage Piece

The Theater of Cruelty would be the art of difference and of expenditure without economy, without reserve, without return, without history...its acts must be forgotten, actively forgotten (Derrida 1978:247).

What do you mean “will I grow out of it?” This isn’t a matter of maturity or academic pride I am speaking of. Look, the very simple fact is that this piece is the shit. I mean, it does exactly what were talking about—it’s a sort of pure response to growing up and living in hyperreality (cf. Carr 1993:240). What it is...is a reflection on the absurd, an absurd which we have forgotten is absurd...No, it’s not Nietzschean, necessarily....I’m thinking more of say a David Leslie, you know, the guy who was covered in bubble wrap and white Christmas lights. Right, he jumped off a building while so dressed (ibid.). The point there is that one must be delusional to understand...don’t mean to say “understand,” I will say one must be delusional to “inhabit” hyperreality.

So...yeah, the layout of the stage will be pretty simple. A couple of sets that will be walled off and connected by a small roller coaster train that will pass through holes in the walls of each space. I plan to have mules pull the trains...I’ve been trying to incorporate animals in my pieces more and more since I have really taken up Joseph Beuys this year. And of course mules were used to bring trains back to the station in the early years of the switchback railroad. I’ve taken it a step further, and I think that I like the idea of people boarding a ride that subverts the cultural obsession with speed, the body, vertigo and so forth. Motion sickness is passé, you know.

Well, that is a minor point anyway. Forget about the mules and the trains—those will be transition pieces for the actors. The sets are the shit though! Yeah, there’s one that’s supposed to be Disney...No, we can’t use their
logos or we'll get our asses sued, but rest assured that everyone will know whom we're talking about. There's going to be a Bill Gates-type figure who gets slammed and bloodied up on a roller coaster; just as he's going out he'll shout something like, "I didn't know it was true!" A Disney Mouse will then arrive on the scene to violate his corpse, followed by a gathering of uncertain tourists singing a chorus of "Was it true? Did he build this place, or was he its victim?" The scene will close with a group of custodians cleaning up the mess and scraping Disney Mouse off of Gates....am I losing you yet?

I've thought about throwing in a scene about nature, maybe in tribute or in imputed wreckage on the Sea World parks—it might be called Shamu: Death of a Sucker from Nature...but that doesn't matter. I think that Shamu will talk, maybe fly around and taunt people with statements of "Hey suckers! Who's laughing now," just before Shamu knocks them up on their asses....I know it'll be hard to stage, but we can come up with wires or something. And another scene will feature a battle staged at a Six Flags-type park between social revolutionaries and members of the Montana militia. It'll get the audience thinking about social protest and theme parks...Politics for the masses, I tell you.

There's also going to be a lot of scenes that will be inherently ambiguous in their intent. This isn't realism on stage, you know! I thought of one stage that will have a group of unrelated people getting lost on a midway that is transformed by lights and smoke. When they emerge from the void they'll look like the characters in Herzog's Heart of Glass, starry-eyed and confused, bewildered and mumbling something about their fascination with cheese spray and Ferris wheels. The trick is that they will leave the park on a mission of transforming the country through the metaphor of the theme park...What do I mean? I mean that they will start a theme park cult that will, through social
protest, negotiations with city-planning commissions and politicians, and social actions, petition to have America "changed" so that it all resembles a theme park. They will change the structure of the White House into an odd mill that will teeter back and forth. They will transform the Washington Monument into a drop ride. They'll make sure that all suspension bridges have propulsion systems that will send bridge-goers on short roller coaster rides instead of their boring daily commutes to work. And every department store will have carnival elements like games of skill and wandering clowns....Well, it's really a simple idea. The theme park is possessing them to act in these ways—they are the supplements of this population's desire to amuse itself to death.

There will be more death too. Much more than what I have described. So if that's your concern then...What? Why is that an issue?...No, I...I'll tell you what I think! Remember what Artaud said about poetry—reading it once and then destroying it (1958:78)? Well, I have to say the same about theme parks—let's visit them only once and then destroy them! No, I'm not mad. I'm simply transforming my own understanding of theme parks...I used to work in one, you know...I'm taking that and transforming the cultural model of the "theme park" into a play for the stage. It'll be a piece for the ages and I hope that the viewers will better appreciate the need I see for embellishing decay and embodying wreckage. It isn't just about parks, if you're worried about content. I'm talking about A-M-E-R-I-C-A! Man...Have you ever seen a rotting piece of meat?

That's what I'm talking about. It's so easy for us to ignore rotting flesh or the process that leads us as a society from a live cow to a butchered cow to meat in a Styrofoam package to the table and to excrement. Most people want to think of this as a cycle of life, or some kind of system. I call it violence pure and
simple. I'm just throwing back expenditure in the face of the system, this
country...Sure, dissociation is a way of life in this land of ours, but it doesn't
mean that I'm going to write a happy play about theme parks. Think about
what science fiction would look like if you're brains were in your lap. It's not a
pretty picture...Huh? Well maybe in the end the system will win and I'll be
back in my office writing a sequel to my Disney Mouse Violator, that's what I've
called it. But you know what?, I'm confident that the audience will get what
I'm saying...Oh, the corporate theme park guys? They've got their parks;
they've got all the workers; they know the system; they've got their economies
in their pockets. But I've got something none of them do—a Mouse that
Violates! Mice have a real tendency to fuck up places...am I losing you?
NOTES

1For more on the vitriolic reaction to these texts see the discussion by Marcus (1996).
2Or to offer Sally Banes’ understanding of this disciplinary borrowing: “no wonder we are
attracted to ethnography. As the boundaries between genres of criticism as well as art blur, and
as a diversity of cultures presents its dances to us, we are tempted to view ourselves as
ethnographers of sorts...Anthropology...seems to offer techniques more solid, more objective,
more credible than our own highly personalized, rarely articulated systems...in the wake of
sixties political consciousness, anthropology seems more capable of conceptualizing and
embracing social context, especially the challenge of American multiculturalism” (Banes
3As well, the impacts of contemporary critical anthropology are to be felt in the classroom and
in the research endeavors of students—those who attempt to put the theories, in many respects,
4Of course, in the context of Geertz’s chapter this is not as prescriptive a statement as it reads.
5Something which is taken to further extremes in the review of Geertz’s text about texts (cf.
Carrithers 1988).
6What I have summarized as the general concern with reflexivity and the text.
7These pieces are offered as inspirational suggestions that have resonated with my particular
ethnography. I do not mean to present them here as dogmatic models.
8Here I would suggest that the “project” that remains necessarily unfinished is the
transportation system as well as the text itself.
9The edited collections Rethinking Technologies (Conley 1993) and Incorporations (Crary & Kwinter
1992) are other fine examples of an emerging trend in interdisciplinary philosophical approaches
to technology.
10To this list I would add a series of other texts which although have secured publication at
small presses, maintain a critical edge, often paranoid-delusional (cf. Dali in Gooding 1993:70) in
their approach (cf. Acker 1988, 1990; McCaffery 1993; Rollins 1996). Such works have been often
labeled as “rants.”
11As Lyotard writes, “after philosophy comes philosophy. But it is altered by the after”
12I have used the term “critical dictionary” to denote a hybrid category of texts which defy
labeling or disciplinary placement. The recently translated Encyclopedia Acephalica (Bataille et. al.
1995) is an example of a “dictionary” that uses the “entry” as a method of subversion. The
entry, by nature of its having been stereotyped as an “entry,” or “category,” creates unmediated
tension as the content of the entry itself eludes its own givenness. What is created in the spaces
between entries in this dictionary is a completely hybrid and subjective form of cultural
criticism. The recent alt.culture (Daly & Wice 1995) is another example.
13See also Marcus (1996:14-16) for a discussion of the influence of many of the ideas regarding
ethnography in Writing Culture among Cuban artists.
14See also Foster (1995) for a discussion of art and ethnography.
15Such is the idea of “radical hermeneutics” (cf. Caputo 1987) or the “diaphora” (cf. Caravetta
16As is the case of anthropology’s historical conspiracy with colonial administrations (cf. Gough
1968).
17The subject of a seminar organized by Michael Taussig at Columbia University a few years
ago.
18And this implies the emergence of three venues in critical anthropology, in performance
studies, and in general cultural criticism which either strives to link these two, like James
Clifford’s historical connecting of Surrealism and French ethnography (Clifford 1988:117-151), or an approach that forges an entirely new ground, such as Arthur Kroger’s attempt to admix cultural studies and performance art in textual/audio publishing projects (cf. Kroger 1993; Kroger & Kroger 1996).

Derrida (1989) has an interesting discussion related to my question. How does one write texts that predispose themselves to the negative experience of culture? In other words, why begin to write at all if the result is mainly to be a representation of negativity itself?

Generally, Hans Arp points to the “Dada spirit” as a point of sustenance that maintains the mystical importance of his performer’s actions (Sanouillet 1979:24, 25; Sheppard 1979).

A text that accurately seeks to represent a world or form of life (Marcus & Cushman 1982).

This is the point I raise in reference to Marcus’ suggestion regarding the ironic homogeneity of ethnographic writing since the eighties (1997a).

I do believe that the lasting impact of writing culture texts and feminist anthropological texts has been in the area of rhetoric and in key disciplinary issues, such as authority, reflexivity and collaboration between anthropologists and informants, not in the area of producing “experimental” ethnographies or research texts.

Though Marcus suggests that such usages are new, “[what is new (and perhaps shocking) is the open use of modernist sensibilities and techniques having to do with reflexivity, collage, montage, and dialogism in an empiricist genre with a strong scientific claim to constructing reliable knowledge about other ways of life” (1994b:386)], arguably they have become more commonplace and accepted in recent years.

Marcus and others have considered a number of ways in which the critiques of ethnography, and associated experimentalism, have broken with the ethnographic realist text. Some “samples” of this tradition may include: Michael Taussig’s Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man (1987) and The Magic of the State (1997), Fischer and Abedi’s Debating Muslims (1990), Anna Tsing’s In the Realm of the Diamond Queen (1993), Dorinne Kondo’s Crafting Selves (1990), Kathleen Stewart’s A Space on the Side of the Road (1996), Georgina Born’s Rationalizing Culture (1995), Bruno Latour’s ARAMIS, or The Love of Technology (1996), Johannes Fabian’s Power and Performance (1990), Julie Taylor’s Paper Tangos (1998), Marta Savigliano’s Tango and the Political Economy of Passion (1995), James Boon’s Affinities and Extremes (1990), and John Hutnyk’s The Rumor of Calcutta (1996). This is by no means an exhaustive list!

This list is found in Marcus (1995:102, 105-6).

Marcus’ example of the circumstantial activist is Emily Martin in her text Flexible Bodies (1994).

Like the messy text, “the postmodern object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated, so any ethnography of such an object will have a comparative dimension that is integral to it, in the form of juxtapositions of seeming incommensurables or phenomena that might conventionally have appeared to be ‘worlds apart’” (Marcus 1994b:389).

This was an opportunity to pedagogically challenge and comment on a question that is often limited to my personal musings.

Or as Ulmer says, “teletheory calls for a text capable of bringing into relationship three levels of culture that contribute equally to the cycle of invention: personal, popular, and disciplinary discourse (1989:115).

Indeed in a recent editorial meeting at Rice University on the topic of “ficto-criticism,” Michael Taussig commented on the topic of experimental writing by making the statement, “writing is a magic.” Taussig, when pressed to explain this and other assertions, was unable to escape his own modernism.

There are many potential texts which exhibit the characteristics of mystery. One example may be Alexander Kluge’s recently translated Learning Processes with a Deadly Outcome (1996). I would also suggest that Klaus Theweleit’s two-volume study of the Freikorps, Male Fantasies (1987), displays some similar characteristics, especially in its careful use of photography and
modes of autobiography.

This is exemplified in part by reaction against certain artistic practices or specific artists, such as Jeff Koons, whose irreverence and lack of commitment to "serious" art has led many to challenge the aesthetic qualities of such art activity (cf. Becker 1996:100). In cultural anthropology the reaction to work such as the provocations of The Unspeakable (Tyler 1987a) would illustrate the tradition of anthropology as analysis as opposed to anthropology as evocation.

As is the case in the work of Michael Taussig.

Again I will point to Carravetta’s propositions regarding the “diaphora” as a potential way of fostering dialogue between opposing fields such as contemporary culture critique and historical or extant performance movements (1991).

Foster displays this attitude in some gate-keeping on his suggested motives of the Dadaists: “[the Dadaist’s critique] naturally required their asking how art, as a social phenomenon, actually worked” (Foster 1979:32).

Or as Beuys understood in the analysis of myth, it is the anthropologist who seeks to approach myth only to analyze and understand it, whereas the artist-mystic, approaches myth to become a part of it (1990:173). It is the same case with the avant-gardes: anthropologists seek to understand them only through analysis and modernist application. The real point is to “miss” the avant-gardes (cf. Hollier 1992:23-27), so as one enters their spaces in the mode of an acolyte.

There is a parallel here to Acconci’s idea of a gallery as a place for experiencing art rather than doing art (Sayre 1989:6).

Strangely, Marcus’ paper fluctuates to levels of an apologia in which he suggests that Hernandez’s work was not simply marveled at, and that for some observers “his collaborations went too far in that the disciplinary pride and authority of anthropology—became too compromised and diminished in its associations with ethnographic-like inquiry in other spaces of practice (like scenography)” (Marcus 1997a:13). What is the value of preserving pride and authority anyway?

Consider also the suggestions of David Tomas in his understandings of “environments” and installations (1992), for they too, spatially, remediate our idea of how one moves through and interprets physical and discursive spaces. The total environments of Ed Kienholz (Henri 1974:44-57) are other operative models, as too are the landscape works of Robert Smithson (cf. Shapiro 1997).

Describing a Cabaret Voltaire performance, Marcel Janko wrote, “We made our good fellow citizens roar like lions” (Melzer 1994:44).

Prinz writes, “Parody is itself a kind of playback technique, one that ‘reruns’ or ‘reprocesses’ another’s speech with ironic and mocking distortions” (1991:142).

To quote Guy Debord, “To study everyday life would be a completely absurd undertaking unable even to grasp anything of its object, if this study was not explicitly for the purpose of transforming everyday life” (Knabb 1989:68).

Emily Martin’s book Flexible Bodies, which traces the emergence of a post-Darwinist subjectivity of flexibility through various locations in American society including mass media, on the street, in the treatment of AIDS, among alternative practitioners, and among scientists (Martin 1994), is one such multi-sited approach in which Martin the ethnographer becomes a sort of circumstantial activist: an AIDS volunteer, a medical student, a corporate trainer. As the landscapes (the sites) of her ethnography change, she as the anthropologist renegotiates her own identity (Marcus 1995a:112), her own reason for “being there.”
CHAPTER 8

AN AMERICAN FACE: TRAVELING TO...COMING BACK NOWHERE

The Tourist Papers

It is 1997 and I am queuing out of Paramount's Carowinds. From the front gate to the car, I reflect on a series of encounters I had observed on that day. I pass out of the park with the other cars, single file beyond the colorful entrance sign. A couple in a mini-van next to me looks through their tinted windows with apprehension and some malevolence. These are my informants! Some lousy members of the United States with whom I felt no allegiance. Do not get me wrong here; I am not suggesting that such feelings are in any way abnormal for the cultural anthropologist. Malinowski's Diary would suggest that these are facets of the fieldwork experience. Yet what I felt was not a momentary feeling—it was not an indication of my psychological state at that time, nor was it a suggestive bookmark for some future rumination on the field. It was no realization, or it was the idea, then, that there was no possibility of realization. Every idea, these days, seems to have passed its critical phase (Aragon 1994:5).

What I felt then was something like "the end of ideas." That is a time when all time stops. All ideas pass into meaningless circumstance, memory loses its clue; ambition, desire and longing are thrown out like old socks. It is
clear that humans live their lives for or to some purpose: the making of money, the academic pursuit of knowledge, the search for love, the ambition to build families, a home, a community. So it is not surprising to me that my informants seem so distant from me. They could be any informants—in Berlin, in Africa, in the United States—and I would feel the same. I have walked to and from a number of theme park front gates over the last four years and I ponder each time anew what Meaning has meant for me. We write great works to spread information, to help others, to understand the world, and yet no matter how cosmopolitan we think we are, we realize that in the end there are no great works...and that those who write them haven’t really worked at all. I run my fingers across the minutely risen words on this page, feeling for something else to emerge...

Sophistication passes into organic matter. A choral symphony of learned ideas and hermeneutic paths is eviscerated by the *idea of no ideas*. There is a motel up ahead on the road. I might stay there: there is a light on inside, but no one is there. Motels speak of empty stories and waiting that is entirely circular. There is a forked path past the motel with three distinct spokes: one leads to tourism, another to academe, and a final to pleasure. Each is slightly dusted.

If I were to write the tourist papers I suppose that I would reflect on the reasons behind travel, why travel is its own experience, perhaps why travel has been coopted as mere touring—a state of tourism in which each experience in a place is a “ready-made” one. But this chapter is about none of this and it is about all of it. When I speak of the vicissitudes of travel—from personal experiences of movement in the anthropological field, to the collected recollections of informants, students and friends who tell of their own journeys
to concrete and steel citadels, to collected letters, reviews and studies of those who travel to theme parks, to the myriad of analyses of tourist behavior in general—I do not wish to imply to the reader that I am positively speaking of transformation: anthropologists and travelers have both spoken of the desirability of travel as “the paradigmatic ‘experience,’ the model of a direct and genuine experience, which transforms the person having it” (Leed 1991:5).

Experience, as it is etymologically related to travel, has connoted passage, crossing space, reaching a goal (ibid.), and in this sense of the understanding of travel experiences, it is no wonder that so much of travel writing and ethnography has at its base the idea of discovery or the quest (cf. Crick 1985). By posing an anti-account of travel I hope to indicate that travel is neither unique—statistics suggest that some three billion people are “on the move in a given year” (Nicholson-Lord 1997:12)—nor initiatory, for travel and ethnographic adventure is often planned in advance “in great detail often both to avoid the awkwardness and embarrassment that comes [with] adventure”
Van Den Abbeele 1980:9-10). Indeed John Hutnyk’s ethnography of budget travel and charity in Calcutta, The Rumor of Calcutta, suggests that travel and tourist repositories or gathering places may themselves be rethought for the “multiple and confused meanings that circulate among visitors trying to make sense of the [place]” (1996:5). No travel is spontaneous, though we travel to be among others, regardless of our motivations to move.

Sex on the Beach

In every parting there is a latent germ of madness (Goethe in Leed 1991:25)

He is the epitome of bourgeois masculinity, and simultaneously he is the sign of travel inasmuch as travel is phallic. I forget what his name was, but he was there with his wife, and I don’t remember her name either. They were on a “beach,” a resort beach so you couldn’t really call it a natural beach, and I think they were thinking about sex, or so I saw it in their eyes. Thought about sex lately? I have a lightning flashback to the pyramids and sphinx of Las Vegas where I stood thinking about sex: I am downstairs, alone for a moment, asking
the bartender for a glass of Bailey’s on the rocks. I am then sipping it thinking about many things...and that moment gives itself over like a slave to the next which would follow. What is loneliness and how does pleasure follow it, precede it, negate it or make it more pronounced? My thoughts of pleasure are thrown aside as a subtle picture of alienation is torn by brush through the canvas. I am astonished at how alien these people seem to me, and I wonder what brought me back to Vegas again. What was I looking for? Did you enjoy your drink?

I can only hold a given thought for a second it seems. The couple hasn’t moved from their spot on the beach, and I keep my vigilance and my ethnographic sensibility, hoping for a disaster story and my subsequent election as its narrator. This wasn’t shaping up to be the Doomsday Book, but I had a suspicion that something was up; come to think of it, I have that suspicion all the time. In any case, the couple seems uncertain as to the planning of the remainder of their day. It was three o’clock and the sun was beating down on their sun worshipper’s back. “Damn we look good,” I bet they were thinking. “I’m just glad that we got off that goddamn plane!,” the woman looks up from her towel to her husband. “Yeah, that sucked...big time! And all of those screaming kids!” “Kids aren’t so bad,” she retorts. “Look, let’s not get started on that again...I mean...” He is interrupted as the woman spreads lotion on his exposed back. “Umm...that feels great.” Her fingers start to dig into his skin and he, uncertain if to grimace or to moan in ecstasy, lifts his head from the beach towel and rubs his hand across her face.

By this time I hadn’t expected anything grand to happen, and I began to feel anxious and bored. I have found that through a summer of travels to
pleasure resorts and amusement parks that I have lost all sense for the social, or at least for its redeemability, but I had it in my mind...that day...to concentrate on my ethnography. Maybe the strike of this event would reinvigorate my sense of belonging, my passion to write it all down on the page, or perhaps I would run away loathing and fearing again. What would it be like to go mad in a resort or in the theme park proper? "Honey," oops they're back!, "what if we went to Pleasure Island tonight?" "That'd be cool. Is that supposed to be the place for us grown-ups?!" "The video said that they've grown up, and so have we!"¹ "We should check it out at least. Grab a beer," the man recites his lines like a character from a bad novel as he retracts his sunglasses down below his eyes. They're looking in each other's eyes again, I begin to feel the part of the voyeur. She looks over my way and I quickly make as if I were looking in their direction but past them. "What's wrong?," the guys asks. "I just thought that guy over there was looking at us." "Just some creep. Hey, if he fucks with us, I'll fuck him up real good," he exclaims in a really bad Sylvester Stallone accent. And then, time passes......

A small girl walks by the three of us saying to her mother, "I like the magic because anything is possible here," or something like that though not as articulate.² "Look at her!," the woman motions for her husband to notice the happy girl with family. "Yeah," he seems disinterested. "Kids are such a challenge, but they sure make one's life worth it." "Yeah, the guys at work tell me stuff like that all the time. I mean, wow, imagine if we had kids to deal with this week!" He makes a whistling shape with his mouth. She rests back down on the towel with her back to the sand. She can smell the saturation of other smells on the sand, and next to it the profusion of something like bleach on the towel. "It would be a lot of trouble," she says. "Yeah, and we wouldn't be able
to stay here to...what did that video say?...to enjoy the special privileges!”

“Yeah, they don’t let you forget that at Disney,” she replies. “What time is it?”

“Ten after four or so.....why, are you getting hungry?” “Yeah, but not for food,” he says looking over at her on the towel. “Dreams do come true, no matter who you are,” the guy sings in a dull pitch. “What’s that for?” “Oh, I was just thinking about that video for Delta and that stupid song....” “Give me the damn ball,” some young teens montage across the beach near the three of us.

“And what did you see, Charlie?” “I saw Dick Tracy and the Muppets all on the tour thingee!” Another family has invaded the space on the beach. I had a number of subjects to choose from that day. Raymond, where did it go? “All those travel tips!” I am reinterrupted by the woman who has reapplied her own lotion to her burnt back, but she can’t quite seem to get the spot just in the center. “Yeah, they can’t let anything die here! And to think that we could have gone to the Bahamas.” “Like we could afford that!” “Next year,” he assures her, “or so I always say.” “Well this will be cool. I haven’t been to Disney since I was a kid.” “Everything’ll look a lot different, I bet,” he suggests. “Probably.” She looks over at the resort hotel and seems introspective. His mind is on sex, or so I assume. What was she thinking about? I bet there is a snag in their relationship...that’s always it. This is paradise!  

“Paradise?,” she says under her breath. “Huh?” he, looking confused, pops his head up from the towel. “Nothing. Just thinking about nothing.” “OK.” “Do you want to go to one of the parks tonight?” “Ahh...sure, maybe after we eat?” “Or, we could eat in the park,” he suggests as he tries to look in her eyes. He wants her, I think to myself.

“Stay as long as you can!” she retorts in a tourism representative voice.

“And, ‘be prepared to not wanna go back home cuz things are so great here, it’s
tough to leave!,” he similarly mocks. “Isn’t it pathetic?,” “What?,” he preps.
“You know, how we as humans run around every day of the week: work, work, work, and then we come to a place like Disney and we work, work, work. I mean, is any of this really relaxing?” “Aren’t you relaxing now?” “Yeah, but I don’t know...I mean, you have to plan to go away somewhere and when you get there you have to keep planning or you’ll fall apart. I know this woman at work who said that her trip to the Grand Canyon was a total flop. I mean,” “But, ” he interrupts, “we’re not at the Grand Canyon. This is Disney, where everything is planned ahead of time. We don’t have to even think about it.” “I’m not so sure about that.”

There is some considerable silence as the two consider the thoughts and their company. She begins again, “we travelers are in very hard circumstances” (Leed 1991:107). “Huh?,” he looks stupefied. “Something I read once. I am just trying to suggest that there’s nothing really fun about vacations. We go to escape our problems,” “What problems?,” he looks up, dazzled with her comment. “No, I mean we as in everybody, not us.” He shakes his head, somewhat uncertainly. “I just get tired of moving. Sometimes I just want to sit and think and just soak in all that there is.” “I think we both need a drink,” he says haphazardly. “Yeah...maybe.” “Sex on the beach!,” is said somewhere in the distance. “Did you hear that?” “What?” “I thought I heard someone say...” He sits back down on the towel. She looks ready to collect her things. “Hey, let’s stay in tonight.” “And do what?,” she grins. “Well, I can think of something that we can do without a guidebook!” The couple walks off into the distance, and I knew that I would never see them again. I would go and flip on the computer, and write everything up to my satisfaction. Every deed, word, act and premonition there on the beach was to be committed to my own
electronic asylum. *Travel is pure eroticism*, and here is the guidebook.

Sometime later I wrote a letter:

And I just had this idea for a book. It will be about "sex on the beach," and it will be this great pornographic novel about all sorts of people on a resort beach. And it will be like one of those *angst-filled* German novels, where everyone gets all hyped-up for the party, but the reader is left bemused as the partygoers run off into the distance. And the big irony is that you never get to see the party for yourself. It's just an idea, but I think I'll give it a try. P.S.—The dissertation is coming along slowly and I would much rather write a sex novel!

Scott

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**Seminar 6**

It is in relation to himself that the tourist orders his repertoire of attractions (Van Den Abbeele 1980:6).

The following is my transcript of a panel convened last year at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association. The panel, "Anthropologists, Tourists, Travelers: What It Means to Move," explicitly dealt with a number of questions which I had been studying as of late. I have only transcribed the comments in the discussion period of the session, as I hope to later request the papers from the participants.

**General Travel Scholar (Chair and panel organizer):** We should now open up the discussion with a consideration, I think, of a topic that Activist spoke of earlier in his paper, namely that of the consequences of the tourist endeavor. As anthropologists, as social scientists, and dedicated scholars in the field of mass
culture and tourism, we must be diligent in our attention to this question. The question that Activist raises is certainly of prime importance to this panel, and today we must reflect on the actions of those, the travelers, in the lands of the other, those bound to the various homes of tourism.

Activist: And some are bound to their "homes" more so than others!

General Travel Scholar: Of course, and what you have suggested today is that we ought to consider not only the economic aspects of tourism—and you have cited a case of a group of indigenes being paid only ten cents per person for a performance in which a group of tourists shells out some $250 (Nicholson-Lord 1997:14)—but the emotional aspects as well. And perhaps Misplaced Humanist Geographer could comment on this issue.

Misplaced Humanist Geographer: Yes, I think that one of the over-looked aspects of tourist studies in general is this question of the effect of tourism. It is so easy to get caught up in the economic issues alone as they are so significant. One study I think attributes tourism to being a 3.5 trillion dollar a year industry (Nation 1997:1), yet it is mistaken to assume that people are not affected in non-economic ways. Consider Dennis O'Rourke's film Cannibal Tours: one does remember the instances there in which tourists manhandle the villagers along the Sepik through "third prices" and the like, but I remember much the faces of the bewildered children and the general scene. What we are witnessing is a tragedy of mass proportions. Those tourists in the film have no connection to the, or a land, and they have no sense of who they are nor of who the villagers in question are. It is much akin to the "contact zone" hypothesis, where contact is asymmetrical and has impacts that reach beyond the confines of the tourist

Anthropologist of Tourism: But would you not say that we are being unrealistic in some regards today? I would suggest that there are other ways of thinking about agency and hegemony as they relate to the questions we have posed. Tourism has always been conceived as a getting away from, in which a person leaves behind his or her home and comes to terms with something new, something extraordinary or today, perhaps mundane, and he or she then negotiates the vicissitudes of that new sacred and self-fulfilling space (cf. Graburn 1977:18, 23).

Activist: That sounds pretty dismal to me. What don’t we just call it “the alienation of the masses” under a different name?

Anthropologist of Tourism: I am simply suggesting that the tourist mentality...or I should say the tourist activity is neither passive nor fully hegemonic in intent or practice. What troubles us, and what seems to locate our discussion back in the terms of the colonial and the colonized, is the idea of recreation—the notion of pleasure and the idea that one would travel away from one’s home to achieve pleasure.

Literary Critic Type: But we’ve been thinking about these questions since Gilgamesh, especially in terms of how travel and intelligence—knowing how to travel or knowing as a result of a completed trip—are interrelated in the mind of the traveler (cf. Leed 1991:68). So we are somehow suspicious of the knowledge, or lack thereof, that travelers bring with them on the journey. Travel, as being connected to “travail” (Mieczkowski 1990:30) also implies that
people differently experience the world and that the travails of the tourist are minor in comparison to the millions of people who are forcibly expelled from their homelands on a daily basis. So the issues we are addressing today do not simply revolve around a concept of alienation or confusion over agency, rather I think that we are talking about travel as a condition of experience and that the pejorative meanings for tourism have developed in the context of travel as migrancy and travel as forced migration. We're not talking about some family running off to Disney...necessarily.

Theme Park Specialist: I'm glad that you bring up Disney!

[Laughs].

Theme Park Specialist: I have a somewhat more specific agenda in the discussion today. As I have indicated in my paper, the trouble I have with travel or tourism—

Misplaced Humanist Geographer: Yes, we haven't really specified a difference between the two terms, but I think we commonly believe today that tourism has a negative connotation, etymologically suggesting "turning (round)" and still having some roots in the concept of the Grand Tour and all of its class implications (Mieczkowski 1990:20, 32), whereas "travel," and we can I guess thank Daniel Boorstin for this, seems to imply a "working at something" (Boorstin 1977:85). The tourist, as opposed to the traveler, looks into a mirror rather than a window (ibid:117).
Theme Park Specialist: Yes, I think that explanation is quite accurate. Now let me continue. As I have argued today, my issue concerns a very specific instance of travel. Really, two types of travel: one goes by plane, car or other form of transportation, this is secondary travel, to attain the experience of a primary travel or tourist experience, one that is necessarily constrained by space and content. It is a space, intentionally mundane yet purposefully thrilling, that limits understanding to that which is directly related to themeing itself (Nicholson-Lord 1997:16). The irony of theme park travel—and here I would argue that the metaphysics of the journey to the theme park are markedly different than those of the traveler who "journeys" to another continent for an adventure of a lifetime—is to be found in the nature of the experience there, in situ, at the theme park. It is the "getting there" "without the experience of having gone" (Boorstin 1977:94).

Misplaced Humanist Geographer: So you would say that as a condition of travel, the theme park has very little to do with the type of travel we speak of?

Theme Park Specialist: Not entirely. I mean one of the main marketing efforts of the major theme park chains, and specifically Six Flags, Disney, Paramount and so forth, one of their major needs as a money-making enterprise is to assure that paying customers will come through their gates. Specific campaigns have been launched stressing the availability or accessibility of a given park. For example, there was a series of television ads a few years back that stressed the closeness of Six Flags parks, something like "A World of Fun, Not a World Away." So the nature of travel, if it is easy, cheap and of low-maintenance such as by car, is something which the major theme park chains have picked up on in their battle with Disney. Disney is still is place of pilgrimage (Dart 1989; Graburn 1977;
Moore 1980) even though it is a place where have to work to get to, unless you are from Florida.

Activist: But even those living in Florida, to take your example of Disney, have expressed huge discomfort over the sort of cultural homogenization that the company has created in the state. Or at least in the Orlando area.

Anthropologist of Tourism: But again, I think that we are being too selective in our condemnations of the various locales we have discussed today. We can scoff at Disney, but for many people, as Theme Park Specialist suggests, Disney is a place in which the sacred is to be found.

Activist: I do not think that I am being selective at all. I have maintained throughout the course of the discussion today that tourism as a global activity is exactly the problem. Disney and its parks are mere symptoms of this larger concern.

Theme Park Specialist: Well, I would go back to my idea, and we can leave Disney out of it if we wish [laughs], and provide a rejoinder to this discussion. The primary experience of travel I have spoken of in regards to theme parks is one that is built on the limit—the limit of experience, the limit of tolerance, the limiting of understanding and so forth. When you go to a theme park you do not have the option of going off the beaten path. That is, you can’t decide to skip the Eiffel Tower and check out the slums if you don’t got no slums [laughs]. In the theme park, authenticity is a marked commodity. What we discover there is a proliferation of signs—some tourist-focused like the purchasing of Mickey Mouse hats, while others are poking at the everyday like the things you might
see as consumption at Dollywood, and so this proliferation of signs becomes its
own point of reference, and like other tourist places the theme park becomes a
sign of itself (cf. Culler 1981:155), for itself; and the theme park patron becomes
another sign in a very circular sort of travel.

General Travel Scholar: To pick up on both Anthropologist of Tourism’s and
Activist’s point, I think we might move our deliberations to this issue of travel
and resistance. Is there any agency left to the “honest traveler” or “honest
tourist” and where is agency in the case of a Disney worker or a person trying
to make a living off of the tourist industry in Cannibal Tours? Would anyone
want to pick up on this point?

Literary Critic Type: This is quite an issue to tackle in such a short time, but I
feel as if we need consider the nature of the tourist experience as I have said
earlier. I don’t know if it matters much as to whether or not we are talking
about a theme park, a natural tourist site or a so-called instance of eco tourism,
what some have labeled even “ego tourism,” but I would contend that—and I
agree with Theme Park Specialist in this regard—I would contend that much of
tourism, regardless of place or intent, is built on a tension between the strange
and the familiar, or in the contemporary world we may say between the
mundane and the fabulous. As a place of happening, a tourist locale is
notoriously built, that is it is constructed in reference to a narrative, or a series of
narratives, which necessarily limit the levels of possible experience at the place.
A tourist place disposes of travel as a relevant form of resistance as the on-site
travel leads you in circles, or to another series of signs or narratives similar to
the previous. What matters is getting there, not what you do when you are
there because that has been pre-staged. And while on-site you are bombarded
with markers, brochures, maps, guides, and miscellaneous signs which have the
ultimate effect of reproliferating, if that’s a word, the place itself (cf. Culler
1981:159, 160). It is enframing regardless of travel itself: a sort of insulation
occurring at one’s destination (cf. Boorstin 1977:97).

Anthropologist of Tourism: I certainly understand Literary Critic Type’s point
here, and I would add that dwelling itself, as a precursor or follow-up to travel,
is something that is deserving of some attention today. I know that James
Clifford’s new book makes a point of this (1997:44); I think he is in our audience
today, and I hope that we can work this into our discussion at some point.

General Travel Scholar: I am sure that you and Dr. Clifford can take up this
matter in the period following our allotted one, so I would at least ask us to
come back to or perhaps finalize our understanding of this original question of
agency and travel, or as Literary Critic Type would have it, of the experience of
tavel and on-site arrival.

Activist: What travel shows is the limits of inheritance (Chambers 1994:115).
Travel is as misplaced as a coal-miner on Wall Street.

Misplaced Humanist Geographer: What is that supposed to mean?

Anthropologist of Tourism: Look, studies have shown that some people are
dependent on travel and it is their own or only way of making a living.

Activist: Exactly my point, and right there we have said all that we need to ever say about dwelling!
Anthropologist of Tourism: Other studies have shown that tourists themselves can be knowledgeable and do involve themselves in activities other than those that lead to misunderstanding or rape and pillaging of the other’s land. There are still those who travel in our modern world to learn, and they aren’t exactly in the class of the Grand Tourist!

Activist: I am quite aware of the fact that tourism is becoming the biggest industry in the world and I am equally conscious of the fact that mass tourism has become a middle-class phenomenon, but that doesn’t make it right, and it certainly doesn’t mean that an experience widely conducted or even one that is seen as pleasurable by many, this doesn’t mean that the experience is valuable. What tourist travel has become, as Literary Critic Type suggested earlier, is a traveling in circles. Masturbation for the masses?

[Someone in the audience walks out of the hall].

Theme Park Specialist: I recall reading one study of agency at Disney which offered the theme park goer a “way out” of the narratives so governed by the Disney corporation, so I can see Anthropologist of Tourism’s point, but I have to agree with Activist also in my wanting to ask as to whether or not such attempts at subversion aren’t simply examples of the enlightened false consciousness syndrome?

General Travel Scholar: And so we are back to the beginning again, and in the context of traveling in circles, we have seemingly done so today [laughs]. And with this final travel narrative we bring this question to a temporary close, but
let me encourage all of you to “continue your travels” into the issues posed by our panelists today. I would like to thank everyone for attending—

Gender-Ambiguous Demon: “What gives value to travel is fear” (Camus 1963:13).

General Travel Scholar: Oh yes, we didn’t get the opportunity to hear from Gender-Ambiguous Demon, so perhaps there will be an opportunity afterwards to talk—

Gender-Ambiguous Demon: We are seized by a vague fear, and the instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits. This is the most obvious benefit of travel. At that moment we are feverish but also porous, so that the slightest touch makes us quiver to the depths of our being....This is why we should not say that we travel for pleasure (ibid.).

General Travel Scholar: So we might continue this discussion in the hall so that the next panel on “Revisiting Ecological Anthropology 90s-Style” might—

Gender-Ambiguous Demon: Rubbish! Arrival stories! Resistance and agency! Walt Disney World! You are all a pathetic lot! The tourist, the anthropologist, the critic: you all predispose yourself to the same thing. What is an articulation of some world here is a label there; what calls itself “reliable” information here is unreliable there (cf. Culler 1981:164-5). And all you can do is pump yourselves up with important questions. I declare you all to be academic tourists, having created your own circular site markers and literary tourist brochures. And the audience here is not any better. Look at you all sit, as you
listen to this “esteemed” group of scholars blow their wind to no end. You, the audience, the low-paid lackeys of the academic tourist industry. If you all only knew where you were walking. Exiles, indeed!

Ecological Anthropologist: [Approaches the podium] Um...Excuse me...uh...We would like to start our panel now on ecological anthropology.

Gender-Ambiguous Demon: Fuck! And travel too!

Guidebook

The inclusions and exclusions of a travel guide are more coherent (in a stream-of-consciousness way) than academic texts (with all their careful intentionally) can now ever be (Hutnyk 1996:52).

This guidebook owes an enormous debt to the special people who manage and run Walt Disney World. Despite the designation “Official Guide,” we want to stress that the Walt Disney World staff members have exercised no veto power whatsoever over the contents of this book (Birnbaum 1997:6).

Travel narratives and tourist guidebooks are a minor literature (Deleuze & Guattari 1986; Hutnyk 1996:82). People delight in the reading of travel guidebooks as they constitute a sort of sinister ethnography—as texts they do not imply complete or holistic knowledge of a place, and certainly they do not make a claim to effectively representing a given people or peoples at a tourist designation, yet they suggest, by their just the facts structure, a cognitive and practical knowing of a given place—an expert knowledge of a strange sort. Travel guides suggest by their very nature that a place can be known and that any person “can know” that place. Guidebooks are written from the
perspective of the expert, one who has traveled, one who knows the pitfalls of certain activities or decisions "in the field," and by one whose goal is to provide the reader with a painless set of operations that the tourist/traveler can follow when on holiday. In this one important sense, one can identify the suggested repeatability of the travel described in guidebooks. After all, ethnographies are not traditionally written in the implied context of follow-up travel or future travel on the part of the reader. Guidebooks are unique in this respect.

As I have suggested in Chapter 5 in my opposition of planned spatial travel and the aleatoric manners of the dérive—what de Certeau cites as a migrational versus a planned and readable space (1988:93)—the nature of theme park spaces does not readily lend itself to oppositional touring, no matter the intent of the traveler. Ironically, many guidebooks, including those specifically dedicated to theme parks,7 are written in the perspective of "walk throughs"—a telling of a particular path or series of journeys the traveler may take in order to better understand a place, perhaps historically, or to experience some aspect of a locale’s ambiance or "special charm." In the case of the theme park guide there is little irony to this selection of narrative choice. As the popularity of the theme park industry has risen, so too have the expectations of the industry’s patrons. One obvious expectation, as reflected in my ethnographic findings and the literature, is the desire to make the visit to the theme park a fun yet efficient one.

The Birnbaum guide8 to Walt Disney World is recognized as one of the most popular of any travel guide, and certainly as the most popular of guides dedicated to the Disney resort in Orlando. The authors cite their own expertise as knowers of Disney for over fifteen years. Further, they offer the reader an
important exegesis of their own tourist encounters and experiences at the resort.

This advice is presented on the first page of the text:

> On some occasions, we’ve encountered sweltering weather and swelling crowds, times when even the happiest of families or best of friends turn into arch-enemies for the day. At times the lines seemed endless and, in a triumph of bad planning, we managed to take in just a few attractions before dinnertime. Had we known then what we knew now, we could have spared ourselves some trying experiences (Birnbaum 1997:5).

Here the reader and budding tourist may gather two lessons from this guidebook’s introduction: travel is difficult and a potentially adversarial experience and, secondly, it takes planning and knowledge to make the journey less painful and more enjoyable. As travel experts of the Disney worlds, the Birnbaums further tell their readers, in a manner reminiscent of guilty colonial anthropologists trying to disavow their relationship to the colonizer, that the decisions they have made in the text are completely their own, not under the influences of Disney.

There is nothing particularly ironic about the authority of the writers of theme park guidebooks, nor is it surprising that the authors would want to bill their text as an “unofficial” guide; after all, such books sell and people buy them because of their social conditioning to first have the desire to visit a theme park and then to secondly consume the park in a manner-of-fact or populist way. What does surprise me is that so many theme park tourists extend the preparation and work of the vacation beyond the trip itself. This is emphasized in many of the so-called unofficial guides to Walt Disney World (cf. Sehlinger 1995). In addition to providing a questionnaire and soliciting questions from readers, Bob Sehlinger’s *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World* asks for additional contributions from its readers:
Many of those who use *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World* write to us asking, making comments, or sharing their own strategies for visiting Walt Disney World. We appreciate all such input, both positive and critical, and encourage our readers to continue writing (Sehlinger 1995:8).

Unofficial theme park guides thus highlight the author's need for input from other travelers who have visited and who have reflected upon their journey to theme parks. As a selective sort of ethnographic text, the *Unofficial Guide* intermixes patron complaints, "This ride is terrible!," with suggestions for park travel, "See this ride after dinner." The guise of such counter-guides is to provide the reader with an outlet for her understandings, knowledge of and experiences with Disney—a sort of quasi-ethnographic space for a theme park *Rashomon*. The informed theme park patron, as the person who writes back to Sehlinger and other willing editors, is necessarily attempting to make a situation as mundane and uncreative as going to Walt Disney World into a meaningful and recollective experience. By incorporating guides, mouth-to-mouth recommendations and critiques of park attractions, and in some cases family and friend’s knowledge of theme parks, the theme park patron attempts to appear informed, understanding, critical and efficient; this sort of tourist self-construction is opposed to the stereotype of the tourist and theme park patron as "an anonymous consuming cultural machine, buying, eating, looking, writing, filming" (Hutnyk 1996:150).

From my own ethnographic experiences in theme parks, I will add a final note to the topic of the theme park guidebook and suggest that they serve as important initial points of insight for the park novice and aficionado alike. A novice or first-time visitor looks to a guide as an initial source of information while an aficionado may collect guides to theme parks or specific books
dedicated to a theme park aspect, such as a roller coaster guide (Throgmorton 1994). However, what is a more significant aspect of the collection of on-going information about a park and successful travel practices therein is the word-of-mouth detailing I have previously mentioned. There is a certain level of social trust that is developed in the many common situations in which one patron asks another for directions or for advice in a specific aspect of park touring.

Control Path

What, indeed, is left of the notion of service when you are automatically controlled (Virilio 1997:18)?

“Yeah, we went up to Fiesta Texas last weekend. Their park is so clean, the workers are a lot friendlier than ours and the shows are great!” These are the words of Chuck, a former Rides supervisor and later turned Grounds Quality supervisor, who in sitting down with me for a gossip session one morning before park opening was relating a common aspect of theme park culture—disappointment with one’s place of work, or perhaps one’s position and status at work, and how that frustration is tempered by other places of work within the industry. Chuck’s experience was not unique—many workers were
unhappy with their job duties or the pay rates at AstroWorld—and his telling of “how things were done better” at another park was a standard fare of discussion among entry-level workers and management. In writing the thesis I found it necessary to reflect on a very specific example of the travel narrative informed by this chapter’s topic. The narrative I speak of is described in my first example, and it involves the current employees of a given park journeying to another park, either within or without the home park’s corporation. It is a narrative I will term other park travel.

In Chapter 3, I offer the reader an analysis of the nature of the everyday life of a theme park, from its patrons to its workers to the operation of the park and all the complexities that these elements entail for a given park and for my understanding of them. Here I will present a brief meditation on a topic related to that chapter’s material. To clarify, by discussing other park travel I am referring to the situation in which an employee or group of employees travel to other parks for the purpose of comparing and contrasting personal, relational and spatial dimensions of home and away parks. Their experiences en route in these short jaunts, generally they are no more than a weekend long, as well as the activities shared and reflected upon by the travelers on-site, suggest a number of themes which, though developing in the context of traveling to, necessarily take the traveler back to her home (park). I will reconstruct one example of other park travel in which I participated in the 1994 season at AstroWorld. In relating this trip I will not reiterate specific themes of park organization and culture as I feel that these are sufficiently studied in the third chapter.
It was a Saturday morning and Cindy, one of my best friends from the park and a fellow Training Coordinator, along with Megan, a good friend of Cindy's who worked as a Rides lead in the park, and I decided that we would travel to Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington, Texas. Our supervisor in Operations, Emily, whom I consider to be another of my closest friends from the park, was to be in Arlington that weekend for a training seminar led by the head of the Six Flags training department from the Parsippany corporate office. Like many park employees, Cindy, Megan and I were (are) theme park buffs. We enjoyed the rides and part of our fascination with theme parks was that no matter how similar they seemed, you could inevitably find some level of difference between parks, even those under the same corporate name. So going to Arlington that weekend was to prove to be a trip for pleasure, for critical insight, and for developing commentary on one of the Six Flags kin parks.

Before we almost got plastered by a large truck on I45, we used the time in the car to reflect on work at AstroWorld. Much of the talk centered on "gossip" items: "Who is s/he sleeping with?" "You're kidding!" "Would you do (soandso)?" It is pretty meaningless conversation on the surface, but much of this talk related innocent topics of babble, like whom one is sleeping with or with whom one wants to sleep, to the larger context of park operation. Commentary about the sex life of a powerful manager from Operations or any other department provided us with an opportunity to criticize the operation of the park as well as to reflect on the different personalities of the workers and management. So "Who is sleeping with whom?" was meaningful, and I should say that it was also a vital aspect of the discourse amongst workers back at AstroWorld. Our conversation shifted from sex-talk to how things were going at the park. Megan related a recent incident in which her authority was
challenged by one of the workers at her ride. Cindy and I mucked it up about problems in the Training department and how we couldn’t get park management and Rides supervisors to take our training programs seriously. There was some expectation as we neared the front gate of Six Flags Over Texas (SFOT), and I recall our having some difficulty with gaining free parking using our park identifications and the parking sticker on my vehicle.

Emily intended our visit to be a combination of pleasure and work. In the ride over, Cindy, Megan and I moaned about the fact that we would have to attend training seminars and actually do work on our day off. Our first order of business was to meet some of the individuals from the park’s Human Resource office. I have never been good about feigning conviviality nor with making small-talk, but I think that our group was fairly well-received by the staff from HR. Our group, along with Emily and some of the SFOT HR staff take advantage of some downtime between seminars and discuss aspects of park operations. Emily, Cindy and I express some discontent about some of the contemporary decisions made by management that park season. The HR staff seems empathetic and they offer similar instances to back up one of our contentions that “management never listened nor understood us!”

At this time the Training staff at SFOT was implementing a new program designed to train its employees in a more timely and friendly manner. After a number of these sessions, which I think that Cindy, Megan and I received in a positive manner, our group met Emily for lunch. The other lunch guests were two SFOT managers, I believe from Publicity and Marketing. Like many of my experiences with corporate culture, I find myself then unable to engage in a meaningful discussion with the two guests. In the lunch line I hear Cindy
saying to me, "I'm so tired of hearing about their jobs and 'park operations!'" I agreed and suggested that we would soon be on the rides. The lunch conversation shifted from topics: park problems at SFAW and SFOT to personality differences among employees to problems in the organizational structure of each park's departments. Ironically, I found that I gained much more insight into the workings of theme park culture in my walks around the park than I did in my participation in the seminars and lunch meetings.

Cindy, Megan and I split with Emily, who was to attend more seminars that day, and we spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening traveling throughout the park. Now we had arrived! Let's get to work! We go on a number of rides, enjoying the Texas Giant, one of the premier wooden roller coasters, the most. Cindy and Megan take a ride on the Spinnaker, to which I pass, and I stand near the ride's perimeter waiting for their ride to finish; I spend a good deal of time thinking about the summer's job. This day was to be a day of reflection, for all of us. We ride countless other rides, eat more greasy food and even catch the Batman Stunt Spectacular show which we all thought was "shit." It seemed that we were there to ride the rides and take in all of the sights at the park, but I think that our other park travel spoke of purposes beyond the park's ability to please us.

At the very least I have thought about this experience of traveling to the park with friends and co-workers and how it differed from my research exploits of the Summer of 1997 at which time I traveled alone. We had traveled, granted, only a few hundred miles within the state of Texas, but we had essentially traveled for the purpose of criticism, of self and other, even though we stood there in the park under the guise of work (attending seminars) and
pleasure (riding rides and eating lousy, greasy food). Like the relationality inscribed in the discourse of park patrons—while working in the park, it is common to hear comments like “your park sucks!,” or, “I’m never coming back here again!”—we were in another space in order to understand it and in order to take it back to our own park, to use it to help us make sense of our lives, the lives of others and our mutual life courses. Other park travel is fully existential. I close this particular section with a short relating of how this form of travel discourse established itself in our group’s visit to Six Flags Over Texas.

*Control follows you.* The question of control and agency is related to the status of the theme park as an icon of and participant in popular culture, the “culture industry” question (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno 1989), as well as to the issue of organizational culture and the problematics of employee agency within hierarchical office structures. In being so blunt with respects to my first theme, I want to suggest a serious concern I have for theme park culture, and this is the issue of the control of employees. I remember Cindy, Megan and I walking through SFOT and stopping on several occasions to pick up trash off of the ground. This is not a strange occurrence as many Six Flags employees related to me their own instances of picking up trash, sometimes even at non-Six Flags parks! Besides persons having strange affinities with trash, there are two explanations for this action: as loyal Six Flags employees we wanted to help the company out by giving a helping hand to fellow employees at SFOT, or we had been duped by the system itself! We had been trained so effectively at AstroWorld that it became instinctual—this act of picking up someone else’s trash. It becomes an imponderable act.
Space is personal, reflection is critical. Chapter 5 develops a specific approach to the concept of the theme park as a lived, constructed and represented social space. Here I present an important element of the travel narrative I am describing, namely the use of the short travel jaunt as a means of self-reflection and as a way of making critical commentary on the home and the away-space. Our group at SFOT used the day’s adventures on rides, in shops, restaurants and in shows to offer advice to one another. “This is done a lot better here,” was a way of our saying something negative about our own park and reflected a recognition of some optimism in changing things. Six Flags Over Texas became a possible model. Much of the worker’s existence at AstroWorld was inherently downbeat, and the ways of talking about such a life were limited (there are only a few ways to describe the smell of rotting garbage). Going to other parks gave one the experience of something new, yet not so new that it was unfamiliar, and this mixture of the familiar and the recognition of a possible model of SFOT gave the employee a sense of agency, even if despair seemed to loom on the horizon. Criticism was a major facet of daily life at AstroWorld, and I now think that getting away from the park and traveling to Six Flags Over Texas allowed for a much more personal and optimistic approach to park criticism.

Personal relationships are functional and relational. I have also found that the relationships developed in the course of one working at a theme park are truly significant and are as extensive as those in other corporate, hence higher wage, situations. When Cindy, Megan and I traveled through the SFOT park that day, we recognized certain people at the rides. We didn’t actually know them, but maybe the guy working at the Texas Giant reminded us of the person working at the Texas Cyclone at AstroWorld, or maybe the mere presence of a
ride allowed us to think about the people we liked and disliked at our own park. In other cases we found ourselves thinking about the geography of the park at SFOT in a relational way to the layout of AstroWorld: "Their landscaping is a hundred times better than AstroWorld's," I remember telling our group that day. Situations of place were functional, and they reminded us of our own park: "Look at that kid throwing stuff off of the sky ride. He'd be thrown out at AstroWorld," Megan motions to us. We were then using the environment, employees and functioning of the park itself as a way of trying to relate our own personal (park) situations to the travel narrative of SFOT. Six Flags Over Texas became our own sort of tabletop war room game in which we counted up our own pieces and scenarios to again place our misgivings and the various park controversies in check.

*Other park travel either takes you up the ladder or forces you to come crashing back down.* As I have said, one of the reasons behind our travel to Six Flags Over Texas that day was to brush up on and observe new employee training techniques. Some of us planned to stay in the amusement business longer than others. I was in it for only two years, while Cindy has continued to work her summers away from college at the park. There is the unspoken understanding that attending such seminars and workshops, such as the SFOT ones, places one in a favorable light with management, but this was hardly our group's motivation for going. As diligent employees—and as cynical as I am about many of the incidents I have related in the dissertation, I can truly say that our group was an ambitious and hard-working lot—we of course wanted to use any sort of insight from other parks as a way of improving our own training and Rides operations; but there is another level of *other park travel* that beckons one to either stay in the business or to move on. One could say that this is a
suggestion which applies to many occupations in which career decisions and
career changes are motivated by one’s personal feelings of reward and worth at
a company, the possibility of advancement there, and the multiple personal and
public circumstances leading to career change. With the risk of sounding overly
functional, I contend that the theme park employee, though reflexive of her life
and career courses like many other employees in various United States service
industries, openly and privately plays with the concept of making her life career
in the theme park industry. A majority of employees in theme parks will of
course go on to college or trade school and will never return to a theme park as
an employee; however, many employees at least have the thought of coming
back. The idea of seasonal employment in fact suggests the need to continually
bring back the workforce for successful operation of the park. For some, myself
included, the experience of traveling to other parks may actually water the
contempt for the industry one may already have. Perhaps it was not the park
(SFOT) so much, but those lunch guests who made me the cynical creature that I
am today.

*The experience of the rides is its own commentary.* I have truly beaten rides
into the ground, so let me be rather brief here. Through all of the misfortunes
that were related on the trip by Cindy, Emily, Megan, and me, we found a
certain pleasure in the rides after attending seminars all day. Were the rides
venues for the expression of further criticism or self-reflection that is served by
other aspects of other park travel? Sometimes we would disembark a ride with
exclamations of "Why can’t AstroWorld buy a Boomerang roller coaster?," so
obviously criticism presents itself at every door, but I think that the rides
themselves brought us back to the initial reason behind most of the traveling to
other parks taken by theme park industry employees—the pleasure of the ride
experience itself. Going down the hill, as we did many times that Saturday, allowed one to take the edge off of the work experience back at AstroWorld. We knew that the problems would still exist when we went back to work on Sunday or Monday, but the pleasure of the ride offered a break with the mundane and oppressive aspects of everyday park life. To the uncautious reader beware, for to not return to my original theme of the control path I would indeed be the greatest of ethnographic charlatans (and there have been many among us). *Rides never go out of control.*

**A Distant Signal**

The paradoxes of acceleration are indeed numerous and disconcerting, in particular, the foremost among them: getting closer to the 'distant' takes you away proportionally from the ‘near’ (and dear) — the friend, the relative, the neighbor — thus making strangers, if not actual enemies, of all who are close at hand, whether they be family, workmates or neighborhood acquaintances (Virilio 1997:20).

WHAT MAKES ME SICK

...is the fact that your communication has broken up. We are no longer in touch and I can only surmise that something has befallen you. Be advised that
danger is on the horizon: “on January 16, 2011, a half-destroyed spaceship from
the Earth forces appeared to the west of Mars. The occupants had been shot to
pieces” (Kluge 1996:4). It is thus on my advisement that you reconsider any
planetary travel in the near future. Travel wisely, my good friend.

DISTANCE IS WHAT MAKE ME

...who you are? This is a question that continues to haunt me. I have
stopped what I am doing; I can no longer even keep a journal. What I see now
is much waste, and the whole is coming apart at the seams. The state of the
world now is completely dismal, yet all I can think of is the fun we had in that
theme park, but how long ago that was. The entirety is now whole, and I feel
that the insanity that has grown unmatched lately may only succeed in my
continued movement. And wherever that might take me? “The space between
you and me”...I think I read that in a novel somewhere, at sometime. What I
ask you today, is whether or not that space was greater...was a greater distance
than the one we know today?
LEAVING AN AFTERTASTE OF ASHES, OF DEMENTIA (Bataille 1991a:109)

...is what’s on my mind...Get it down! Look, we don’t have the luxury of waiting around for the evidence...the evidence! Fuck the evidence! The evidence is spinning here, running off there...I don’t give a rat’s ass about any of it! Just make the fuckin’ case and be done with it...we’ve got other people to think about. The evidence! The evidence spins me up and down like some blasted roller coaster...

AND I HAVE ALWAYS HATED THEM

...because after the fact I found that the people there distrusted me...entirely. A tourist, usually, is somebody else (Nicholson-Lord 1997:11), or so they always say. I find myself to be in the most uncomfortable of positions. I sit awake at the screen all night, without a shred of hope that I will finish this mess: I am so tired that I dream of a total dissolution (Bataille 1991a:109). These words are cheap: throw a clause up there, bargain for a verb or a noun, and hope that someone will trust you. Have you watched the news lately? There’s a lot of words running around, and they’re as fast and deadly as smart bombs!
...I make this report on the fifth day, 2013. The interplanetary wars have completed obliterated any sense of humanity left in this part of the universe. My crew and I have been dispatched to Luna for purposes of reconnaissance. I do not know what use any information can be to us or anyone at this point. Everything is blown to hell, and the crew has lost morale; they are now too without regard for one another. I can surmise that our mission will be a failure, but I continue on, for now only the sake of continuing on remains with me. The only thing they can think about is their families and friends, some of whom are now dispersed as atoms across the galaxies. I try to keep them in line and to offer them perspective, for the “good of the order,” but my words have failed them. Their only opium, their only sense of outreach to what we know...or used to know as humanity, is a wretched Simulator: Eddie’s on the beach yesterday, and the other day Malcom is riding a Gravitron in of all things...an amusement park. What an irony all of this simulation is! As if pleasure means anything any more. Write it out of the books I say!...but the biggest irony of all is why the hell they can’t just simulate a bloody war and let the computers battle it out?! When you have an answer to that, I won’t have to call myself “captain” any longer. In the meantime, you can reach me up here, somewhere in space. I will be thinking of all of you. Adieu.

THE REMAINS ARE INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE REMAINS

...one cleanup person said to me earlier; and so the cleanup begins. A major explosion has leveled most of the structure of the New York, New York Hotel and Casino. Reportedly it was the work of disgruntled casino employees whose demands for wage increases were refused by management. Within the last two years most of the resorts in Vegas have either closed or have been
condemned by the state. Another sign of the growing rupture between the worker and the amusement industry? We have to wait and see. Reporting live from the Las Vegas Sector, I'm Jack Baudrillard.

RELAYOR

...that's what I think it's called. The idea is that we use the physical mass and gravitational fields of the planets themselves to encode the messages we send. With any luck the enemy won't even be able to get hold of the dispatched signal. The end result...is that we communicate what we want, to whom we want. No mix-ups!

THE SPACE THAT I KNEW AS LITERATURE

...I wanted to describe it, yet now I find myself writing without pen or verse. The fact that writing itself has become so automated, the subject of super computers, makes me think twice about calling myself an author. What even happened to the great author—the one who could write without abandon, of places distant yet near, of people gone yet not forgotten? All I have left to write about is this space I once knew to be literature, and now it's just a space, a gap in a database that never gets filled. Let me try that today, see what the Machine spits out when I type in "literature+gap." I've got the answer, and it has
nothing to do with my institutionalization! The Machine would spit out
NOTHING! Ah, ha, ha, ha, ahhhh!

THIS IS A NEW MACHINE

Yes, it is entirely new, and novel. And it could very well be the key to
this now gone, yet soon-to-be burgeoning industry we call entertainment. No
one gives a fuck about entertainment any more. Haven’t you heard the war’s
going on? No need to be sarcastic with me...ah, I’m just trying to suggest to you
that people need pleasure in times of war...ah, not to forget about the war, it’s
terrible and all, but think about the service that we provide for those in need.
People need their HDTV, ah, to be anachronistic! So this new device is? It’s
what we call a Virtual Accelerator. People sit in the capsule, which takes little
space in the living room I should add, and they have over a million choices of
different adventures. Adventures, I might say, both literary and more, ah, pulp-
based. The walls simulate depth as well as verticality and horizontal
perception, but what makes this machine is the one million choices...Pleasure
Disks we call them. After a disk is chosen, and dependent of course on the nature of the adventure, the rider is manipulated inside the capsule in accord with the themed disk. It is a property of particle acceleration in which we minutely move a person in order to completely simulate the experience contained there. Care to try it out for yourself? Well, what about motion sickness? Ah, do people still get that?

...THE SKY ABOVE THE PORT WAS THE COLOR OF TELEVISION, TUNED TO A DEAD CHANNEL (Gibson 1984:3)

...and that is the only way I can possibly describe the landscape here in California. Everything has gone dead. From my vantage point all I see is rubble...the rubble of the greater city structures, of bridges and huge concrete and steel masses, even I can note the appearance of an over-turned pleasure wheel, an homage to the misfortune that befell Disneyland in the great cataclysm of two years back. I speculate about the future, but I am left thinking about the ghosts and a past whose fortune I cannot foretell. My biggest curiosity is why they ever built all this to begin with; my biggest fear is that it will all come back, someday in a mass reconstruction of the whole Los Angeles Seaboard. If they only knew what would have become of that Wheel seventy years ago.

AND ALL THE SOCIAL THEORISTS WONDER WHY THE REVOLUTION CAN'T START WITH THE MASSES

...I only mention this as I have had the opportunity to recently think back to the years before all of the great wars, when the amusement business was still making great strides. As a planet we had gotten to the point where national boundaries had broken down...we saw this to be promising as the major corporations acted as local governments for the people. In fact, there was no need for government as people came to be regulated by the media. I do not
wish to suggest that people were living under draconian rule; quite the contrary, people were free to pick among a number of lifestyle choices, all governed by the free market and its electronic incorporation into the NET. By 2010 everyone was a part of it. Of course we had our social critics, and to some extent they were correct in their assessment of the impending crises. Corporations, when unregulated, tend to operate under their own rules. Well, no need to explain any further as we know where we’re at now. The industry may never get back on track; as you know, it is extremely dependent on the social state of things.

WE HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN CUT INTO PIECES
...when we have made an effort to have our voices heard. The big businesses on this planet have continued to thrive on the sanctions of a stratified society. As a woman I can say that I have made the sorts of career decisions I have desired, to some extent, but I feel that the effects of legislation have been limited given the system of planetary governance. Some of my colleagues have made the choice to go off-world, but I have decided to stay. I cannot offer any useful testimonials about the entertainment industry, as it left me cynical just before the major war. I am now a defense subcontractor, selling my technical knowledge to the highest bidder. My knowledge of media
manipulation was extremely useful for the transition from entertainment simulation to war simulation. We aren’t playing video games any more...I’m talking about massive extra-planetary defensive shields, virtual decoy fleets and high-powered electrical plane batteries. War’s a tough business, you know. From time to time some of us do engage in mock simulations, just to pass the time and also to sharpen our skills.

TURNING AN OLD AMUSEMENT PARK

...into a military installation. The bunker-like structures at the former Disney and Universal parks are optimal sites for the conducting of specific classified operations. I recommend that such a plan be considered, as the security of the Southwest Coast may depend on it. As a perk, we may even be able to tap into the already existing electrical and computer systems at the abandoned parks. Military operations may proceed accordingly with little needed alterations.
OBSERVING ABOVE FROM A ROTATING TOWER

twenty-five years ago. Then I was just a kid working on a pleasure deck, helping people understand the landscape below as it swiveled beneath their eyes. They wanted to appreciate it. Now I am alone and alienated in a military tower, watching for the movements of enemy forces. Sometimes they are invisible and I have to rely on a perception that is beyond me, in remote detectors and panel indicators flashing before my telepresent eyes. "Report any suspicious travelers when they come"...was a slogan in our company's training manual. Travel had become too militaristic, in my opinion. I guess that it had always been so.

THE DISTANT STAR

...below. I imagine the rotation of the earth through space, not in some abstract or schematic fashion, the axis of the poles and the equator made tangible, but rather as it really is. The rumpled face of the earth (Leiris 1987:25). I see a GRID and I know that in Outer Space, death makes no sound.
THE SIGNAL IS NEAR

...the density of the universe has today collapsed leaving nothing but the incredible energy that has forced everything back in on itself. Only a virtual simulation, driven by this infinite energy, could possibly replicate the entirety of existence as it was known. I did not write this transmission, for that would be impossible....the third signal?

THE AMUSEMENT SHIP

...has left....
NOTES

1Walt Disney World! It's Not Just for Kids! video, 1995
2Walt Disney World Vacation Planner video, 1993.
4Walt Disney World Vacation Planner video, 1993.
5Walt Disney World Vacation Planner video, 1993.

I have never written a play, but a few years back I wrote a short experimental piece for James Faubion’s History of Anthropological Theory course. The writing was a “multilogue” between anthropologists who at a large public forum were assembled to discuss the question of anthropology, its relation to the other, to exotic customs and their inscription, and to the political question of the field. What I produced was a “fabulous” (in the sense of unbelievable, not in the sense of my thinking that it was stellar writing) piece whose speakers’ lines were entirely concocted by me to make my points. This is a genre that has made only a minor impact in the academic field [cf. “Educational Birds” (Richardson 1997:197-208), “A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer” (Heidegger 1982:1-54), “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking” (Heidegger 1969:58-90), Paul Feyerabend’s Three Dialogues on Knowledge (1991), and “Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes” by Ihab Hassan (1980:187-207), which is the inspiration of my original drama piece for Faubion’s course].

The majority of guidebooks one finds on the shelves of major bookstores are those written to satisfy the general tourist. They typically describe the attractions of a particular state or region. Exceptions to this rule are the many guides to the Walt Disney World area in Orlando and other major entertainment areas, such as Las Vegas, Nevada.

8 The Birnbaum guide is particularly curious to me for two reasons. One, the authors make an effort to distance themselves from the Disney Corporation in their forward to the text, yet what follows in the guide is a completely “factual” representation of the attractions in Disney with an emphasis on the historical contexts of the attractions: what is their history and how do they relate to the history of the United States as told by Disney? Nowhere do we find a critical take on the park, and the narrative itself is so contrived that it serves to be one of the grand legitimators of Disney’s world. Second, the guide has gained attention in the academic world of theme park studies. Fjeliman’s (1992) study of Walt Disney World draws heavily on the Birnbaum guide for historical background on the park as well as for the providing of Disney trivia, such as how many garbage cans appear in the parks, on more than a few pages.

What is created is a strange sort of everyday palimpsest of theme park experiences.

10I discuss some aspects of the different employee training philosophies at AstroWorld in Chapter 3.

11This was one of the reasons behind the holding of employee “section parties” in which workers let off their park steam by enjoying rides after park closing. Park perks, like free admission to all of the Six Flags parks while employed at AstroWorld, played on a similar assumption that employees would put up with on-the-job troubles as long as there were “rewards” for their work.

12The form, or at least the inspiration behind the conception of this section, owes much to Alexander Kluge’s fascinating “novel/theory text Learning Processes with a Deadly Outcome (1996). I am writing it as a concluding statement in the chapter for the “distant signal” connotes three things: the distance in one running to an emergency signal happening somewhere in the theme park (hence the allusion to the dissertation title), the distance between the planet earth and other bodies, and finally the distance between the present and the implications of the future. Each is a signal or each is signaled by another—a concealed appearance beyond human agency (cf. Baudrillard 1990a). Although I am not as avid a reader of fiction or science fiction as
I wish I could be—I seem to find myself stuck between the pages of academic texts—I would cite the work of novelist Michael Moorcock as another point of convergence (cf. Moorcock 1977).
CHAPTER 9

SIGNAL 3: DEATH CYCLE

Disappearance and Anthropological Madness

...called...

Will I allow myself to fall in my turn?  
In the long run, writing muddles me.  
I am so tired that I dream of a total dissolution.¹

Haunted by
the unexpected splinter
of an incision made into map

Evocation is the cinema
that haunts me at night
I fall into a word
that takes my breath

A flickering nears
a plastic roller coaster
And I am to tell
a story of spinning
and stasis

I approach ethnography:
but only to miss it.²

...away...
The writing of the disaster...and then it is not written. I live in that culture in which pain, fear and death are transcended by all that is plastic and illusionary: the false-front wall, the submarine that goes under water yet never moves an inch, the dark ride with piped-in simulated sounds, the combination of venues, rides and people in a landscape that promises optimism and cheerful psychological states in the patron.

To begin and end such a project as this one is terrible: the realization occurs as all that is purported to be true—for me, truth is navigated through the Scylla of academic anthropological theory and method and the Charbidis of United States citizenry and everyday life—comes to be seen as being the result of another guise, a face made to be an apparition after the blurred ride comes to a stop.

Then the haunting...³
One morning I walk out into the landscape of the theme park, expecting to find some capitalist reification of myself out there. I look back out towards the sun as it tried to get itself up over a Houston hang-over. I felt metaphor-fucked that morning, meaning that the world knew it was imposing its corny mediocrity on me. It was before seven, and I was then in the process of snapping a series of pictures...of the roaring fountains, the unattended trains, trams, boats, the commercial effigy-mounds of cartooned animal toys. I then notice a light in the distance. A flickering fluorescent light takes on new meaning for me at that point. There was a semblance of the sublime in that device as it approached its own conclusion. Someone could change its bulb, but it would never quite be the same. It flickered once, twice, intermittently blinking more than less, sometimes waiting a minute or so until it roared up, powered by its soon to be dormant latency. Fluorescence...had its way...with me.

Then the madness...

I approach the theme park once more, trying to reconcile its hold on me for the last time...trying to put to word what is impossible and at the same time comprehend the path of the writing, from infancy to latency to death. Like trying to rid my body of some sort of pain, the American theme park bursts itself asunder, dispensing its multitudes into the imaginary, where it began the journey. The picture-taking has stopped, as have the interviews with informants and the looks from strangers whom I have never met. What remains is the cinema of all the forms the theme park has taken in its explosion through me, for the last twenty-some years.
I am standing again at turn-of-the-century Coney Island, and a number of animals begin to rampage towards me attempting to escape the fire; one, a lion, has a fiery mane, but seems unconcerned with my presence. I continue to watch until the lion is caught along Surf Avenue, the victim of his trainer’s rifle. Death, definitely, “still holds a foremost place in popular amusements” (Le Gallienne 1905:240). The park was running its course in a history that was already written, many times over. To the left of me is a group of mobsters, cutting the other up on park rides, using exposed wires on a water ride to electrocute the other; to my right a disgruntled employee sabotages the park’s electrical system causing unexpected horrors here. These disasters would forever mark these places, I then thought, as theme parks, like much of American popular culture, have been relegated to the back of the back of most people’s psychological-cultural inventory. Many people go to theme parks, but few like to consider them, on the park’s own terms, except of course when disaster strikes.

Standing there, as I had, I was overcome by the realization that my theorization and conceptualization of American theme parks was itself the product of a special curse, one that I could only glimpse through the wavering flames of all these theme park “fires” of past and present. The burning theme park, the ride out of control or the failure of entire computer or operational systems like plumbing and electricity all suggest a metamorphosis of both the potentiality of the environment of fear and the ability of its creators to control its energy. The helpless amusement worker and patron are possessed; their fears and repressed thoughts are recycled in what is less a democratization of their trembling than a complete reversal of the pleasure economy they had helped to create. I soon knew that the whole of the project, my coming to terms with
theme parks, had been founded and finished on a lack.

The ashes cool and I observe what is now no longer. It is to this disappearance that I direct my writing of the THEME PARK, and I know that only through the recreation of a mirage of what was can this object escape itself, and I it.\textsuperscript{10}

\begin{center}
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\end{center}

\textbf{What It Lacks}

Since the world is on a delusional course, we must adopt a delusional standpoint towards the world. Better to die from extremes than starting from the extremities (Baudrillard 1993:1).

We have to apologize for not having answered earlier. Unfortunately, we had a staff-narrow path in our team. But we hope, that we are still in time with our todays\textsuperscript{[sic]} reply [Letter sent to me from HansaPark, 1997].

Chapter 7 considered the relationship of my understanding of the American theme park industry to the theory and practice of contemporary ethnography and fieldwork. Specifically, my concern in that chapter was to suggest a connection between ethnography, field practices and performance art. In writing a dissertation on theme parks I had a number of organizational issues to
confront.\textsuperscript{11} I have been forwarding a general manner of performatively linking theme parks, the ethnography, my authorship, and the acts constitutive of the "field" by undertaking a \textit{partial writing}. My point is to develop a possible project, one that would transform and move ideas, pictures of places, sensory events and informants' voices into middle terrains—as opposed to merely committing these channels to paper—in Gadamer’s sense of keeping interpretation moving (1975). Like all research and authorship, this work has limitations; unlike the conceptualization and realization of others, I contend that these limitations inform and keep in process the ambiguity, uncertainty and flux of both the everyday worlds of the living—the life of the theme park, the lifeworlds of people and informants in theme parks, my life and existence—and of life that is transformed into ethnography—the anthropologist’s attempt to live among the living, which, is a necessarily impossible project. There are then six such issues I will consider in this regard:

(1) \textit{The nature of the fieldwork process}. The research process began in 1994 and though at the time I was not planning to produce a thesis on theme parks, I was able to effectively integrate my emic-knowledge of the industry through my extensive documentation of two-years work at Six Flags AstroWorld. Over the summers of 1996 and 1997, I had the opportunity to visit a number of theme parks outside of the Six Flags corporation. This phase of the research proved to be valuable as I was able to add a comparative dimension to the fieldwork. I would not place myself in the category of the trained, professional fieldworker—the sort of obsessive-compulsive type who struggles to find each and every bit of detail for the sake of detail itself. Certainly the characteristics of the anthropologist will affect and often jeopardize the outcome of the fieldwork and the eventual text\textsuperscript{12} (cf. Heider 1988), and my field sensibilities
stray more towards performative means and ends as opposed to analytic ones. The figure of the flâneur or the Situationist, perhaps the creator of invisible theater—these are my personal anecdotes on "being in the field," and I hold that anthropology ought to orient itself to a more open worldview, where "field" and "home" have disintegrated, where text and informant have become admixtures for being here or was there.13

(2) Voice and representation. Presence, writing the other, composing the self, these are all concerns of a project which blurs distinctions made evident in the history of anthropological writing since Malinowski. My initial considerations of the project located much more significance in what I would classify as "traditional ethnography"—the sort of research and writing project that finds wholes, meaningful ones at that, based on the prevalence of the voices of informants, extensive descriptive passages of places, heavy amounts of organizational and situational details, such as "how the place works," in the case of AstroWorld (cf. Marcus & Cushman 1982). As the project began to emerge, I felt that it took its own course, though still guided by my authorial hand.14 Retrospective glances suggest that the core of the ethnography, as I know of this "traditional type" described here, is to be found in the third chapter, with pieces of ethnographic details and interviews found in numerous other chapters. Critically one could contend that the overall presence of the work has more of the tone of the anthropologist than the perspectives of the informants. I argue that this criticism itself is motivated by a modernist worldview and that ethnography ought to move into other dimensions of expression and experimentation.15 For example, the work of a performance artist might indeed draw on texts, interviews, objects (conceptual or physical) found in the world. In the end these may be composed and combined in such a
way that the artist produces a work, like an ethnography. Later, a criticism might arise that the work is too ego-centric: it really doesn’t present a picture from any view other than that of the artist’s.\textsuperscript{16} This criticism, as the one leveled against the sort of ethnography I have produced, fails to consider the embeddedness of all language and all textual “moments” in hegemonic systems and intentions of power.

(3) \textit{The writing of the ethnography}. How to write it up is an originary concern of the anthropological endeavor, and as the influential critiques of ethnographic rhetoric in the late eighties posit (cf. Clifford 1988; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Marcus & Cushman 1982; Marcus & Fischer 1986; Tyler 1987), ignorance of the rhetorical implications of ethnographies led to anthropological self-denial when it came to considering what amounted to the final form of authority in the text. Much of the overtly experimental ethnography of the late eighties and the nineties, thought to be “experimental” in the sense of exploring new textual formations and authorial positions, has as its guide the rubric of “getting things right,” or of suggesting new pathways towards a clearing.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Signal 3} approaches the fictional account as much as it purports to be an ethnography—a first-hand description of people and places. The text involves mixed genres and frames of writing that sway between fiction, culture critique and traditional analytic ethnography. Perhaps it may be called an “ethnographic fiction” (cf. Richardson 1994) or “social science fiction” (cf. Pfohl 1992), though I find such terms to be problematic for their privileging of new modes of writing.\textsuperscript{18} Personally, I began to feel as if the ethnography was more of a reflection of an obsession or a series of delusions which came to focus and fruition in the THEME PARK, rather than a documentation of the nature of theme park worlds and their inhabitants.
J.G. Ballard suggests two important facets of his fiction writing, ones that resonate with my understanding of theme parks as ethnographic objects. First, he suggests that obsessions, like the characters driven by sex and car crashes in his novel *Crash* (1973), may be guiding forces behind writing projects (Ballard 1984:19). Ethnography has consistently followed a mode of writing that acts as a conduit for information about a people, things, places, and ethnographers often portray themselves and their places as "orderly." Ballard's first suggestion would require a rethinking of the psychological motivations and dispositions of the anthropologist in the field and in the text. Secondly, this author's ability to refract characters and environments on one another—as in *Crash* where a thing, the car, becomes a character, not simply a device in a story which characters use to travel (cf. Ballard 1984:36)—would further posit a connection between obsessive desires, be they of the anthropologist or the informant, and the environments in which people travel. Theme parks therefore began to represent horrific, sometimes sublime environments, in which people moved, myself included, though they themselves were not always the focus of "the action" of the writing. This is a point I further explore in the section "A Later Destiny" later in this chapter.

(4) *Theoretical concerns and frames of legitimation.* While writing the dissertation I began to feel dread, not just for my object of study, but for the discipline in which I was/am moving. Was it possible to construct an "oppositional writing" or reading of theme parks (cf. Reinharz 1992:149), or would the ultimate subject of my writing constrain my preoccupations with experimentalism and ethnographic subversion? Literature reviews on the subject of theme parks and popular culture left me with a dry feeling in my
mouth, and I knew that cultural studies techniques and theories, though productive in their understanding of systems of meaning and production and the impacts of users on those systems (cf. Fiske 1994:195), have generally left much to be desired, for they privilege interpretation over experience. In the world of these sorts of approaches, a theme park may be represented as a sublime object, one chock full of meaning, yet the academic result is that the theme park is constructed as a place where people do not interact, or at least we are never told of such interactions in these texts. So experimentalism aside, I do find myself privileging a certain mode of ethnographic inquiry, one that places me in the middle of things not for the mere sake of being there to interpret but to simply “be,” and although I have used multiple theoretical voices and approaches in this text, I desire to leave the reader in a state mentioned by Ballard and others (cf. Baudrillard 1990; Caputo 1987; Gadamer 1975; Taylor 1990), which I find summarized in the following interview quotation:

I offer an *extreme hypothesis*, for the reader to decide whether the hypothesis I advance (this extreme metaphor to deal with an extreme situation) is proven (Ballard 1984:42).

(5) *Scale.* Early in the formulative stages of producing *Signal 3*, I located some affinities to some extinct moments of anthropological theory and inquiry. Specifically I found personal connections to the work of ethnologists who seemed unencumbered by the scale of their research; too, early researchers like George Catlin traveled across entire countrysides to gain snapshots and recordings of massive numbers of people, places, “data.” The tradition of modern anthropology has been to move away from these endeavors, as they are considered too generalized, detached and removed to be worthy of consideration as qualified anthropology. My use of multiple narrative forms and liberties with voice, person and place in the text satisfies an overall scale of
the dissertation which resonates with these earlier anthropological efforts. The challenge to produce ethnographies of such magnitude, ones that offer reflections on an entire industry or country like the United States, is not to “get them right” or to write wholes that convince readers of the legitimacy of particular theoretical positions, but is for me to return to a major source of theoretical inspiration for this text, *The Unspeakable* (Tyler 1987). It is my point that the scale of this ethnography is necessitated in both the formulation and the execution of the writing: it is the “outer flow” (Tyler 1987a:197) of ethnography that is sought in my creation of the research parameters of this text. The scale of writing was limited not by time, place, person, or intent, and its only limitation was the act of writing itself. The “outer flow” of ethnography and theme parks is a meeting place of the mind, discourse, person and place; it is a “myth” constructed out of bits and pieces that are constituents of a larger whole—the United States, the theme park industry—yet it is “myth” that is contingent and dependent upon, of what it does not know and what is not known. Like the writings of Ballard, Bataille, Baudrillard, Anzaldúa and Tyler, the point of the construction of myth is to forever escape myth, an impossibility that is forever told (cf. Tyler 1987a:205).

(6) *The Lack.* It is academically timely to point to the pieces, the fragments and residues of bombed-out shells of ethnographies and texts that know what they are lacking from the beginning. The “limit,” the “lack,” the “disaster” (cf. Blanchot 1986), the “tear” (cf. Taylor 1990) are all words or metaphors attempting to simultaneously describe and resolve a fundamental tension of being and a move to voice being in various representational moments (cf. Heidegger 1962), be they textual, verbal, filmic or other. What I here identify as a general lack, a void that haunts the spaces of all of these research
dimensions discussed above, is one that many researchers undoubtedly feel, personally, but do not necessarily highlight or even address in their research. The reverse of this denial of reflexivity and existential consideration is the overly nihilistic approach, which has been critiqued for its political limitations (cf. Sloterdijk 1987). The irony of ethnography, or any research, is that the final outcome of research is necessarily lacking. The goal of research and writing ethnography is to somehow come to terms with the voids and gaps that fill the spaces in between the written and the empirical. I would contend that it is the gap and the lack that, in Bataille's sense, inform us of the everyday as well as allow us to move towards a more non-hegemonic space of evocation and allegory.

**The Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park**

What's the worst trip you ever took? Vietnam.
Why was it such a bad experience? People shot at me.25

Myth and the possibility of myth become impossible: only an immense void remains, cherished yet wretched. Perhaps the absence of myth is the ground that seems so stable beneath my feet, yet gives way without warning....'Night is also a sun,' and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the only true myth (Bataille 1994:48).

In an original version of an article written in 1995 (Lukas 1998), I presented a fabulous conceptualization of a theme park, what I call the “Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park.” The purpose of the piece was to reflect on the “lack” I have described, most notably the lack or limitation inherent in the THEME PARK; that is, the necessity for the theme park to be realized not as a fabulous space, but as a predictable, safe and homogenous one. The Sacrificial Economy was written towards desire: it portended what things might look if the limitations
imposed by theme park corporations and unimaginative planners did not have to be. Later in 1997, I asked my class to give presentations on what I called “anti-spaces,” places that included things, people, devices or representations that were otherwise left out of the lived archaeology of urbanism and popular culture. What they derived was truly fabulous: malls, theme parks and natural preserves that did not resemble anything any of us had seen. One produced a theme park dedicated to corruption and white-collar crime in America; another found inspiration in the urban legends of Chicago and used them to construct placards of “Chicagoland” (which I have included here in the text alongside my Sacrificial Economy). I here reproduce this exercise with these spaces in mind.

To: Laurie Anderson, laurie_anderson@voyagerco.com
From: Scott A. Lukas, slukas@exodus.valpo.edu
RE: Real World Theme Park Project and Sacrifice

I am writing in regards to the project you, Peter Gabriel and Brian Eno have conceptualized. Finding your paper on the Web was somewhat accidental, and after reading the details of Real World I realized a point of convergence in my
own life and work.

*The Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park* is a park I actually have designed in concept. I have drawn out maps and planned various venues, rides and events of the park. What the park would represent is a theme park unlike any other, a theme park which doesn’t hide its own secrets, its repressions, its own Oedipal complexes. I might call this place a sort of “middle voice” of theme parks: a location where thought and picture, event and consequence, action and effect, worker and patron, memory and performative invention, the worker, patron and society, are all mutually-determined and intertwined in such a way that each is an actor and an acted-on of the other. The point of reference of the Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park is not the Disneyesque Hall of Presidents in which the consumer is transformed into a good citizen. It is, instead, a point of contention, a point of mutual affirmation and happening. The Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park wants to be like Fluxus, yet it knows it has to assert its own physicality in its themed lands, attractions and fast rides before it could ever be *flux*.

As I envision the park, it draws on many of my own interests. Having worked in performance and performance studies (I once developed a performance based training class for the Texas theme park), I attempt to apply the salience of the performance situation to the architecture of the Sacrificial park. In other words, not just thinking of the park as X space inhabited by X# of patrons, but what are the performative, physical and emotive qualities of the interactions between persons mediated by the time-space of the park? There should then be certain innate qualities of the park which draw on the conceptual properties of things like Fluxus events and the Happening. I will
now describe some of the preliminary aspects of the park's layout. Although the design is not complete, I include here most of the elements which thematically capture the essence of the theme park.

The Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park is a physical territory in that its boundaries will be delimited. It will not, however, mark itself through fences or barbed-wire devices, as these only impose on the patron and the outside population the mentality and way of imprisoning and force. Instead, there will be natural landmarks and geographic "signs" which suggest that the boundaries of the park have been crossed. However, much is left to chance. For example, once past one of the many themed areas in the park, one encounters a series of monuments and effigy-stones. These, drawing on the mystical associations of earthworks (both in early society and avant-garde art), will suggest the contingency of our natural and physical boundaries. The park is suggested to end as one nears the earthworks, yet the ambiguity continues as an expansive field grows out seemingly into nothingness; at another end of the park, a natural or made lake will signify another opportunity to contemplate the entrance and exits of the park. As you suggest in the Real World design, it would be important for a park to integrate itself with nature; this being unlike Disney and the corporate groups who have mangled precious territory for the concrete and steel impositions of their parks. I also appreciated the design of some Real World rides (like the wheel that would go under water) and the way you suggest they might use their technological interventions as ways of reconnecting human beings and nature. This aspect is terribly lost and/or misunderstood in contemporary theme parks. And those new simulator rides...pretty redundant! (cf. The Journal of Ride Theory 1996)
I also believe the location of the park is a key criterion. Your attention to this in the *Real World* plan is important. As yet, I have not considered the geographic location of the Sacrificial Economy park. I do believe, though, that it would have to be located in a spot in the world where there is an abundance of extremely diverse flora, fauna and physical/earthly appearances. The site would also have to be near a multicultural population, as I don’t believe it could work in, say, Indiana.

The entrance of the park is not unlike other traditional parks, in that it would be a place where guests enter and exit. Unfortunately, there would have to be admission prices, as it would be impossible to operate a park otherwise. My original idea was to have an admissions policy set on the principle of *soul-deposit*. In other words, each visitor would have to deposit a “valuable” item which best represents his/her soul or personality. The rows of deposited items would then line the front gate area near the bathrooms. The spirit here is that of one’s personal self-representation, imbedded in memory, time and place. Working in a theme park, I learned of the importance that management and patrons placed in the park’s entrance: as a patron, it is the first and last place you see during the day. It is your cognitive-emotional site of orientation. Since the Sacrificial Park will stress the performative and emotive realms of living, there will be a collection of performer-greeters: a Musikdada Preiss figure, a King Ubu, guerrilla girls, cubist dancers, a coyote and some assorted cyborg camera operators. The front mall area will then resemble a sort of nuked-out hell. Perhaps there could also be a series of abstract structures lining the front gate. I enjoyed your suggestion of two sixty-foot tornadoes flanking the entrance of the *Real World*. 
Beyond the front mall there will be a Sound-Video-Scape, a technoscientific monument of might projecting and sounding on one hundred miniature screens and speakers, a randomly composed portrait of park activities made possible by the myriad of visible and concealed video cameras and microphones located at nearly every location in the park. This event-site will stress the randomness, indeterminancy yet humanly-determined dimensions of the park. Leading to many of the theme areas are a series of shops, restaurants and mini-venues which reflect the overall attitude and mood of the park. The shop Simply Bankrupt! features memorabilia from defunct inventions, defeated cultural ideas and movements, corporate collapses, etc. White Trash features appropriate cooking, cultural activities and items for sale. Other shops and attractions may include The S&M Store, A History of Shamanism and Gay and Lesbian America.

The first theme area past the shops is Noise. A plaque announcing one’s entrance to the land reads, “Here lies the elegy for NOISE: a requiem for sensory bombardment, auditory overkill, psycho-babble and meaningless political rhetorics.” The first ride is The Art of Noise, featuring intonarumori, (noise-devices) and a historical account of the use of noise and loudness in cultural activities and movements. Nearby is another attraction, Silence, that bases its pedagogy on anechoic chambers. Sample This! and The Sound of Food are two places which respectively offer the production of one’s very own audio plagiarism of copyrighted music and audio sources and the eating of food and disassociation: one eats a hamburger and hears the sound of a slaughterhouse, screaming cows and so on.
The next themed area is called Unrest; it is an historical and thematic look at social and existential unrest. The first ride is Your Fetus or My Fetus?, and one may basically describe it is an action-packed ride through the history of American abortion politics. First, riders embark on peoplemovers and move through a fast-paced multi-media trip through a variety of social scenes. Then, the riders depart into a civic area and, having gathered information in the previous part of the ride, they split up into "choice" and "life" camps to debate the issue. A moderator decides the victor, yet if the debate is too close to call, there is a third stage in the ride: two womb goals open up on opposite ends of the civic hall. There both camps are required to throw plastic fetuses into opposing goals to determine the debate winner. Past this attraction will be the L.A., City of Quartz tram ride, which is an apocalyptic journey through the city of Los Angeles, from Watts to Rodney King. Dawn of the Dead, The Ride! and Kitsch Carnival, a combination pastry shop, novelty store and B-movie theater, indicate a shift to themes of consumerism within Unrest. The Proto-Situationist dancers form a lively, yet controversial entertainment group inhabiting this portion of the park. The Boom then follows as one of the most exciting rides in the park. Riders board vehicles which resemble wrecking booms. The ride begins as the patrons soon discover that the booms radically move back and forth, up and down; this is because they are about to crush a series of housing projects. Rest assured, it is just a high-tech simulation, but still riders are allowed to symbolically reflect on the nature of human development and destruction. Honey, I Killed the Kids closes the section with a scripted playland for kids acting out their aggressions on one another as famous serial killers.

Patrons will then have the opportunity to visit Ground Zero, a theme land which reflects on the nihilist ends of human society and their relationships to
nature. Forget the Disney imagineers with their outlandish claims of humanizing entertainment with stale narratives of progress and democracy! “The only thing human about humanity is its capacity for mayhem, death, destruction and conspiracy,” is rattled off by a group of actors near the entrance to *Ground Zero*. This group is composed of real life religious zealots, ranters, conspiracy theorists, militia members, burnt-out Dadaists and cultists. Their job is basically to annoy the patrons, follow them around the theme area, and have lunch and social conversation with them. *Fin-de-millennium-A-Go-Go* is a novelty store selling end-of-the-world toys and gag items just near the entrance of the land. Then one may notice a series of rides, *The Exxon Valdez, The Tunguska Event*, which all relate stories of the land and its mutations. These rides would be the absolute opposite of Disney’s happy-go-lucky “land” rides which celebrate the human rape of the planet. *The Crucible* is the main attraction in *Ground Zero*. It is staged as a monorail tour through a variety of earthworks and installation art sites. Not unlike your discussion of clouds triggering trees and rain, I believe this ride could build on the principles of human-environment interactions, stressing the necessity of a union.

On the way to the *Machinonation* area, people will notice the *Memorial Tower*, which is a constantly-changing black monolith listing all of the victims of theme park accidents across the world. Guests can even ride to the top of the tower aboard an observation cabin and perhaps there reflect on the purposes and desires that all theme parks fulfill for human beings.

Inside *Machinonation* are a variety of rides, shops and attractions which reflect on cybernetic issues: what is the relationship between the growth of the technical-military-industrial complex and human interactions, for example? *You*
Say Tomato, I Say Cyborg, a great simulator ride which features "Tiny" a mystical cyborg creation trying to adjust to urban America, rounds out the many attractions, along with Le Minimal: patrons board the ride in the station and proceed up the lift. Then, they immediately exit the ride. It then continues through fifteen loops reaching speeds of sixty miles per hour—unloaded! It will be the world's largest looping coaster and also the world's first and only conceptual roller coaster.

Finally is Flames. This theme land is a retrospective of sorts: a remembrance of theme park designs just as the Memorial Tower recognizes its victims. This remembering is again contrasted to the sort made popular by places such as Disney; it is memory as interdiction—not the selective cooption of "American history" for corporate gain (Disney), but the recognition of the multiple sites of memory and contestation realized in theme parks past and present (Sacrificial Economy). Just beyond the land's reproductions of blowholes and the midgets with canes in the themed Steeplechase restaurant is a sign bearing the words of famed Coney Island man George Tilyou, "I had troubles yesterday that I have not today. I have troubles today that I had not yesterday. On this site will be erected a bigger, better Steeplechase Park. Admission to the Burning Ruins—10 cents."27 The actual perimeter of the land will be surrounded by thirty-foot high burning effigies of Coney Island buildings and roller coasters. The patrons may then walk over an abandoned midway, with lights and whistles still roaring, until they reach From Another Era's collection of three classic rides—the Human Roulette Wheel, the Whirlpool and the Human Pool Table. A ways down is the reconstruction of Harry G. Traver's legendary Crystal Beach Cyclone. It is a working monument to the memory of the most dangerous and surreal roller coaster ever built. Then, one may notice the fifty-
foot tall *Incident Board*. It allows all visitors to see printouts of park problems, employee-management negotiations and accident and safety incidents for the given week. Finishing off the area is *Elegy*. Guests will ride trams through bombed and burned remnants of all the great theme parks: Steeplechase Park, Sea Lion Park, Dreamland, Luna Park and Walt Disney World. And beyond this rubble is yet another ride. It will appear as a plot of dirt complete with earth movers. There patrons will have the opportunity to contemplate what the next theme park may actually look like. They will get to break the ground and also write comments, suggestions, produce designs and drawings for this third "undiscovered" theme park.

So I don't really know how to close this letter other than to say that the *Real World*, like the *Sacrificial Economy*, would provide an interesting opportunity and challenge for designers and patrons alike. I think a theme park in this tradition is possible. As you say, the *Real World* would be "a park about allowing people to invent and discover things for themselves...a free zone" (Anderson 1996). This is how I had conceived of *The Sacrificial Economy*; it wouldn't be a place where people went to escape reality to further participate in simulations and mundane environments. Rather, it would be a site of ongoing development, fluctuation, reflexivity and collected consciousness. I think your concept of *The River of Life* ride offers an appropriate metaphor in its ending, that of reincarnation. The carnate, the human patron-worker embodied in flesh, is reunited with his/her past, present, future through the technological-themed interventions of the THEME PARK. Not, the THEME PARK as a concrete historical given which takes for granted its own existence (that is the problem with conspiracy), but the THEME PARK as a temporary autonomous zone (Bey 1991), a place of happening which forgets its own origins, its very purposes
Radio Silence

I saw a body hurtle through the air but at first thought it was just an overcoat. Then I heard piercing screams. [Eyewitness account of the first death on the Crystal Beach Cyclone, Nov. 30, 1939 described in Munch (1994:81)].

When the call came in...

MAIL>

#1 7-NOV-1997 10:00:07.94  NEWMAIL

Well, I’m not sure if I have exactly everything you need, but I’ll try to the best of my knowledge. First of all the differences in radio signals. A 21-1 is a major illness and a 21-2 is a major injury (something like a broken bone or where there is a massive amount of bleeding). The RUSH added onto those is just that the victim is unconscious. A Signal 3 is much more serious. It’s a major ride shutdown due to multiple, major injuries and possible fatalities. I guess the only real Signal 3 I’ve been through in my years there was Roger’s death. I was in the office by myself, and it had been a relatively slow day. Excalibur was shutdown because they were working on it. The park was open. Then all of a sudden across the radio I hear, “900 to all units I need Medical Services.” I wasn’t sure that I heard it correctly so I radioed 900 to get him to repeat what he said, but he didn’t answer. About a minute later all the full-time staff went running out of the office towards Excalibur, and Sherry told me to call all the high rides and tell them to shutdown. It was mass chaos. I had to manage all five phone lines, call all the rides to tell them to shutdown, and keep the radio
clear. I then understood why we needed two people in the office at all times.
The Signal 3 was never called over the Operations base, but rather it was called out over Security radio (Medical Services is on Security). It was chaos all at once and then there was this eerie silence. It was definitely not a pleasant situation. It was also my responsibility to keep the radio clear and stifle the questions from the park without telling them what happened. That’s pretty much the radio perspective. I can thankfully say that I’ve never been through it from a ride perspective. We were trained on what to do by going through a crisis management workshop, but I never saw a Signal 3 firsthand. Hopefully that helped you some. If you need any other base stuff just lemme know....Cindy

...and is that destiny?

And Response

The striking features that fatality leaves on a landscape...these are the marks that mystify us all. From the questions of Operations trainees at AstroWorld who wish to know who died and how, to the number of films and novels dealing with death and the theme park, like Amusement Park, Slayground, Rollercoaster and Thrill, there is a cultural fascination with death and the scars that it leaves on a place and on a people. In the case of so-called “black spots” (Rojek 1993:136)—the junction of Highways 466 and 41 near Cholame, California where James Dean died, the house of the Manson murders, or the cafeteria where a gunman went on a shooting rampage—the emphasis is on the past and the horror of what has gone before. Combine this “horror” in the theme park and one has an entirely new and novel dimension of fear. The fact that people had died at AstroWorld, most recently in August, 1997, left the casual patron and somewhat more-informed worker alike musing about the
possibilities of danger in a theme park. This general cultural ethos of fear (cf. Massumi 1993b) has its manifestations in the panic that spreads, rightly or not, in the aftermath of disasters, as rare as they may be in the theme park.

As I discuss in Chapter 4 in relation to ride disasters and accidents, the theme park visitor is confident yet weary of the pleasures in which she partakes. For patron and worker, it is clear that the amusement with death and injury—either in worrying about the accident that could happen or reflecting on the accident that did happen—is not simply a fact of the past; it is not that my Operations trainees only cared about the park's prior disasters. What their minds fixated on was the immanence of death as it ran a course throughout the park: the waiting to be (cf. Zizek 1991, 1993) became a rationality and a symptom in a simultaneous moment of ecstasy and terror. The overturning of the symbolic order of the park, and of everyday life beyond it, was exemplified in the general fascination with death that masked itself with a seemingly practical focus on the nature—the hows and whys—of park death. People do not expect to be killed in theme parks, yet people like to think about that possibility perhaps for the very fact of its near impossibility.

I have written of the incidences of death, disaster and accidents that though not necessarily frequent in the everyday life of a theme park like AstroWorld, do populate the imaginations of patrons and workers. In many ways that meditation, though culturally sound as a psycho-social indicator, is an academic construction, surveyed for the purpose of my writing and the decisions governed by my textual and field sensibilities. When reality does strike true, like in the unfortunate incident related to me by Cindy, the reflection on the simulacrum of death—the death in waiting, in premonition, and in anxiety—seems insignificant and potentially self-serving and insensitive. I do
not wish to diminish the death of the maintenance worker at AstroWorld; nor do I desire to include this particular story or issues related to it to shock or exacerbate an “edge” writing that is multiply-represented in other ways in this text.

When I learned of the story from Emily and Cindy at a dinner in Houston this last summer, I was shocked and surprised that it happened. At AstroWorld? Surely not. It did happen. Cindy relates to me then the emotional difficulties faced by the driver of the Excalibur: it was she who had dispatched the train that day. She had to deal with it. Emily tells me about the activities of the Public Relations department at the park following the tragic incident. Apparently, many people felt that the department’s chief spokesperson had attempted to minimize any suggestions that placed blame on the park or its operational procedures. Of course the threat of litigation was on the spokesperson’s mind, but many felt that the newspaper release that followed the Excalibur accident did little service to the memory of the maintenance worker and to his surviving family. As Cindy expressed in her radio tale from that day, there was such a sense of dread that passed through the park following the accident. AstroWorld management decided not to close the park following the fatality as they reputedly felt that such an action would cause greater panic and perhaps suspicion in the public. That seems thoroughly strange to me, but I was never in on things at the level of management, so perhaps my “outside” reading of the incident and the aftermath is resultant from my feelings of being on the outside, while on the surface being an insider in two years of AstroWorld employment.

The whole thing makes me sick—as a former employee, as one who really did enjoy theme parks, and as an ethnographer. And yet, I cannot
conclude why I feel this way. Is it because it is difficult to attribute causality to such a horrible accident? Or because I perceive some level of guilt in the acts of management and Public Relations personnel? Did I have other misgivings about the park, my former employment there, and my own uncertainties in life and work? The questions abound and they all lead to limits and absolutely dead spaces beyond our comprehension and apprehension. When I started writing the dissertation I thought much about the theoretical focus and the structural divisions of the material into their specific units. I began with sections on Disney and representational issues related to theme parks, like the construction of historical narratives in them (cf. Wallace 1981, 1985, 1996). It soon occurred to me that what I was doing, in trying to “structure things right,” was completely contrary to my own perceptions and politics as an ethnographer and performer. Most significantly, those originary decisions made little sense in light of what had been communicated to and through me by theme parks.

After restructuring significant parts of the thesis, I quickly learned that what I would write was to resemble “fiction” more so than journalism or realist reporting of “the facts.” I felt fictive, and feel like a writer of fiction, not because the world is “untrue,” but because the spaces, events, people and ideas that have informed my fiction are themselves the results of unreal processes. This is why, perhaps, the events following the Excalibur death seem so difficult to handle: the lack of understanding, the inability to fill in the gaps, the raw emotion that generates more anger and paranoia following the situation. We hope to attribute meaning in such times, yet we know that there is none, except for the simulated meaning offered by fictive events and processes which are entirely incomprehensible. The only meaning that was left was limited meaning, meaning cumulating in blackness. And to this I chose the title Signal 3
to describe a personal inability to grasp the nature of this specific incident as well as every other happening related or not to the world of theme parks. And we ethnographers think we write...the only thing we write are stories about death. Put it to rest man...

And Killing Off

Every good pulp novel, television movie and academic work has got that going. I suppose that I would be more cognizant of the "killing off" part if I were truly writing or working within the realm of one of those, but after all, I'm just writing....I'm just being a consumer—of ethnography and of theme parks. The end of analysis and the ends of consumerism are one and the same: treat the world and the object as you want to be treated; give it all a good back rub; walk around and smile to each and every person you meet as if that person were a reflection of yourself in the mirror. Our image in the mirror is not innocent, then. Behind every reflection, every semblance, every representation, a defeated enemy lies concealed. Analytical consumption? Is that what I did? Think about the theme park before you enter it; and think of it as you leave.

What was left to do? I'm sitting at my computer running up against the boss of the current level of the video game I'm playing. Beat that boss and you'll get to take it to the next level. Beat that level and you'll get to go up against an even bigger and tougher boss. Verisimilitude. The video game persons I meet are no different than the souls who populate my earthly existence outside of the computer. I go back to the computer a second time to shuffle more pictures in the text: just one more theme park photo! Who needs entertainment when the outcomes of entertainment and reality are the same? Cinematic effects are right there in your home without you having to even turn
on the television set. Channeling is inherently mysterious and dangerous, but I wouldn’t necessarily be forced to kill off anything or anyone. That had already been accomplished in every place—real, discursive, mythic—I had visited. My words are like ads on the backs of cereal boxes—they are meant to be consumed and forgotten about, and that’s the end of organized consumption in a word. Killing Off is a daily occurrence in this world. The secret of the other is that it is never given to me to be myself, and that I exist only thanks to a fatal declination of something coming from elsewhere.\textsuperscript{31}

...and that's where it took me!
A Later Destiny

This is where the rest of life begins. But the rest is what is given to you as something extra, and there is a charm and a particular freedom about letting just anything come along, with the grace...of a later destiny (Baudrillard 1990b:3).

Imagine a world of mobile, sexed objects, surrounded by a human world that was unsexed and immobile. Objects would have a name, humans would not. We wouldn’t be able to stand it. What makes us think they can? Animals, stones, objects are constantly overturning the human order. And we ourselves are hardly out of hell yet (Baudrillard 1990b:67).

The artificial energy of human actions perpetuated by their self-made pleasure wheels and odd mills gives way each night as all but a few lights in the park go dim. At seven in the morning, just past sunrise, one can truly appreciate the latent energy of the machines and landscapes of the THEME PARK. Before the mechanics arrived one morning, I happily snapped seven to ten pictures of the roaring fountains, the unattended trains, trams and boats and the commercial effigy-mounds of cartooned animal toys. The glory of the nonhuman, in its simple pleasures. Realizing its own insular agency, the THEME PARK spins around on its planned circular orbit to see itself no longer as the sign of human pleasure-enacted but the arbiter of human fate.32

It is no mistake or coincidence that for at least one year a fortune cookie verse sat taped to the Operations base radio bearing the slogan, “Enjoy what you have; hope for what you lack.” The only thing we have to gain, as the end of the millennium THEME PARK patrons and ride operators, is the acceptance of the destiny assigned by the silence of unattended trams and empty troikas. As many in the THEME PARK had discovered, the reliance on the old forms of existential retribution and explanation had produced tragedies greater than those previously experienced. The only way to confront themed fear was
through the realization that the source of the fear was you and only you. We made the theme parks; we are their sources; we realize their fears in our fears; we get off the ride, feeling like we have to "ralph."

Each day the greater apocalypse of the former. Each worker a symptom of the longing to build heroic monuments and amazing machines: from the Elephant Hotel of Coney Island to the prolific contemporary inverted-loop roller coaster. The destiny of the individuals with whom I worked was an eternal frustration with the world around them. When you terminated someone you were supposed to have a stiff lip as you walked the worker around to be processed out of the park. This was the environment of fear, yet really it was one of anesthesia.

At times banal and nihilistic, working and riding out one's paranoia in the THEME PARK was neither fulfilling nor unique. All the uniqueness and the delight lay in the possibility unrealized: to take a bath in the surf's wake with the rest—patron, worker, machine—and to completely fall victim to the sheer potential of the THEME PARK's hidden nature. The end of the millennium THEME PARK worker begins to resemble more the flâneur as performance artist, the great maker of myth and mystery, than the analyst, great communicator or public relations specialist. The patron, likewise, is attracted to the possibility of having to do nothing but wade in the surf.

"It's nothing like the stuff they tell you about in theme park guide books! This place has a much darker side to it." I vividly recall these words coming from a worker one night before I had agreed to work as the rest room custodian at a park concert. The concerts at the park typically got out of control, and this
night was no exception. The bathrooms began to overflow with drunks who pissed in any utilitarian device they could find. Defecating smells raised the consciousness of the place. The crowd began to take over and soon all purpose was lost; this came before the mob trampled its way out of the park.

A second memory here is only a prelude to a million more. This one was the case of “vomit boy,” a name seemingly saying it all. One of the workers, the son of an influential electrician in the park, had some mental difficulties and was frequently reprimanded for making sexual remarks to many of the female workers. On the occasion of the monthly park party, when employees got to ride two to three rides and enjoy free food after the park had closed, a group of administrators from various departments was about to board the XLR-8 roller coaster. One entry-level worker noted the developing situation and quickly asked “vomit boy” to get in the front seat with the other administrators. Sure enough to form, a row of four bosses was covered with vomit as the coaster returned to the station. Vomit Boy had taken out the “enemies.” Everyone knew that he always vomited on rides. The bosses’ evening had been spoiled, but every knowledgeable theme park worker knows that vomit is a way of life in the THEME PARK.

There is no amusement without loss (cf. Hollier 1992:xxiii), and reading these words I cannot help but think of what is ultimately left of the THEME PARK, of what has been left out, of what remains, of what has come to pass there, and what is yet to come. The remnants of the THEME PARK, the accidental moments and the unforeseen in what I have described as a Sacrificial Economy of a Theme Park, have been purposefully or unintentionally deleted from the record of theme parks, academic and actual. Perhaps what is needed is
one final, sacrificial, commentary on this site of popular amusement—a realization of the THEME PARK as a temporary autonomous zone (cf. Bey 1991), a place of happening which forgets its own origins, its very purposes from the beginning. And like the great amusement parks of Coney Island, all of these memories ultimately go up in flames, and with those cinders stays the loathing, the fear, suspicion and dread that reverberated for two seasons in the theme park, and, yet, “I would like to linger with the first glance. I would like to regain or rediscover my first glance”33 of the THEME PARK in which I worked and of which I knew.

**Signal 3**

One day the day will come when the day won’t come (Virilio 1997).

**OH! “horribile visu—et mirabile dictu!”** Thank God, it is over, that I have seen it, and am able to tell it to the world (Catlin 1973:155).

The landscape has opened up, and I am drawn in. It is the end of the summer, and as I am committing memory to paper, theory to text, I find myself opening up an envelope: I recognize the postmark from a city whose park I had visited a month ago. On the inside I discover a survey—one of the many I had passed out in my travels that summer. The survey was blank...not a word of writing was to be found anywhere on its pages. I think about the research ramifications of a blank survey, and I find myself back at the beginning again.

The tale has spun, and words make no additional marks. I return to the THEME PARK, this time as a protozoan, as a thing without consciousness, without real body or soul; my corporeality is a thing of the past, and I begin to wish that I could advance through memory that which I have not yet
experienced, that which is still in an infantile stage—the amusement industry and the THEME PARK may not exist depending on how the protozoa, prehuman gasses and prehistoric bits of carbon move and develop. I begin to wonder what it would be like to see myself as a protozoan: would I have any recollection then, and what would reflexivity come to mean as I spin in the earth's antediluvian cesspool?

I read 1,000 more texts, articles and pamphlets, spin tape after tape into the VCR, and jam fingers down on the keyboard looking through Web page after Web page. This is all now being worked out to attempt to come to terms with what has been done—in my writing, my fieldwork, my personal life. Distant glossy photos stream across my mind; dreams awaken to a reality that seems as jumbled as the dreams. In the meantime the books and sundry do little to make the pain caused by a poltergeist of field research and ethnographic writing go away. The poltergeist says something to me like, "Don't leave...but leave anyway. There isn't anything left to see or tell." I am leaving the field and I am reentering it, constantly—altering its face and mine in a reshaping of image, time, memory, conversation and landscape. I have left the field and I am in it, and that is ethnography...at the end. One...at end...

One last hasty signal to give meaning to madness; one last breath of the wretched to make amends for the sins; one final step off of the ledge to give birth to flight; one momentary lapse of the mind to bring pleasure back into its brief cocoon; one wave of the hand across the lens of the eye to temporarily go blind; one additional page of verse to turn what is decay into a fortune of life; one last whisper in the ear giving further instructions on how to make the fictive look real; one other turn of the wrench to defossilize a machine that went
dead ten years ago; one truckload of 7,000 oaks more to plant and then pillage; one further stage piece with actors who want to emote with the audience; one additional panel of academics whose members live for the crusades and the code of the knights; one more contract whose never-coming is a sign of the words that spill out of my mouth and my page; one more disgruntled worker whose rampage is left unnoticed in a sea of stoicism; one or more blowhards whose passion for "truth and the American way" fixates in on the world like a laser; one box of batteries to charge me up for the next day and the next; one more news report on the end of the millennium details of which cult or organization is best-suited to my personality; one other Vegas casino or resort beach where we can go and be lonely together; one fascinating look from a stranger in the street, whom we have never and will never meet; one satchel of metal opened and strewn on the highway as a metaphor and as an impediment to getting or going somewhere; one second place on the list of things to do while we are still awake; one more scraping of the chalkboard as someone falls asleep in the back of the room; one last pan of the camera to document a world whose everyday nature gives new meaning to the phrase "no pain, no gain"; one or three hundred more pencils either broken in half or electrically sharpened to the end because of their ironic incommensurability with paper as the two meet for a sexual encounter; one hopeful glimpse into the void that turns out to be a wormhole leading us back to where we already are; one burgeoning larva trying to make it to the next stage before it gets crushed; one group of twisted fools telling you where to go and what to see; one last end-of-the-millennium shout-out to the dullest and most analytic of the new schools of anthropology; one more addiction on trying to find the "social" in the "organization," and the "organization of the social"; one other morality play to be consumed like popcorn; one final can of caffeine to drink to save my mind while driving; one
archetypal bag of popcorn being devoured by alien predators of amusement spaces; and one last theme park to visit—and one last of those would be enough for any century; and one more word to make me really puke; and one more piece of poetics that goes nowhere; and one last raving person saying, "and what does it mean to be writing at the end anyway?"

One signal? What signal?

Sent? From where? To whom?

In deepest space, the signal makes no sense if you don't have the code or if you don't speak the language.

Remember the signal.
And remember how to signal when you're at the end,
or else you may end up not signaling,
or giving a false signal.

Remember the end.
And remember how to end when you've started signaling,
or else you may never stop signaling,
or else you may signal the end.

Remember the signal of the end;
when it comes, and know how to signal it to others,
or else you may all signal to no end.
Remember the end of the signal;
and how it means
nothing but a signal of
things at an end.

And remember.
An end?
A signal?
NOTES

3“Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it” (Gordon 1997:7).
4As in Werner Herzog’s statement, “[My films] all come out of some sort of pain...I make films to rid myself of them, like ridding myself of a nightmare” (Anon. 1997d).
5An actual story described in Kyriazi (1976:170).
6This is the theme of Richard Stark’s novel Slayground (1969), where a group of mobsters duke it out in an abandoned New York amusement park.
7This is the subject of Robert Stuart Nathan’s novel Amusement Park (1977), where a series of disasters unfold in a theme park. As well, the film Rollercoaster (1977) and Thrill, a 1996 NBC television movie, consider the impacts that a terrorist or saboteur might have on the rides in an amusement/theme park.
8As Baudrillard states, “you can’t theorize something as the ‘accursed share’...without yourself being part of that curse” (1990:78).
9Consider Koolhaas’ quote, “the campaign to step up the production of pleasure generates its own instruments” (1978:24).
10As Baudrillard inspires me, “cinema is more concerned with the imaginary of a society, the way a society escapes, dispenses itself or bursts asunder, the way in which it disappears rather than the way in which it creates itself” (1993:68).
11I have adapted Norman Denzin’s discussion of qualitative research in which he characterizes the process in sense-making, representation, legitimation and desire (1994:503-4).
12The so-called Rashomon effect, drawn from the Kurosawa film of the same name in which a crime is witnessed, interpreted and differently-told by a number of witnesses.
13Adler and Adler (1994) consider the multiple ways in which observational processes vary according to the characteristic situations of the observation. I do not suggest that taking the approach I have is the only one, nor that my approach is justified due to its apparent “openness.” For more on the “open” worldview or work see Eco (1989).
14After all, I wasn’t planning to throw out all conventions and do an “automatic writing” dissertation, though someone else probably should try such a monster, provided, of course, that it could make it past a committee.
15The research itself, from the first moment of field contact to the final stages of ethnographic writing, has for too long followed the model of modernist inquiry. Doing “anthropology,” has and still does mean “doing science,” at least a field science, or “doing texts,” which is manifested in the proliferation of realist ethnography evident in the major anthropological journals and presses. As Janesick argues, one may begin to see the qualitative research process as more of a dance or a performance rather than conceptualizing the endeavor of field-to-text as a vision-quest or a hero’s tale (1994).
16This has been a criticism of “reflexive anthropology,” such as the claims that Jean-Paul Dumont’s self-told text. The Headman and I (1978), is indicative of the anthropologist’s psychological states, not those of the Panare, his informants.
17As Richardson intuits, “one reason that our texts are boring is that our sense of self is diminished as we are homogenized through professional socialization, through rewards and punishments” (1994:517).
18This is the major difficulty with the automatic writing technique of the Surrealists, its
positioning as a “technique” or method—a problem that Bataille rightly attacks in numerous writings.

19To further illustrate, Ballard states, “I deliberately use my obsessions because I can trust my obsessions, or rather, I can rely on them—they’re strong enough to provide the main imaginative impetus” (Ballard 1984:44).

20See Neumann (1997:88-105) for a discussion of the nature of literature reviews and their effect on the outcome of qualitative research.

21In a previous writing project, Ethnodeemon (Lukas 1997a), I used writing as a way of self-encirclement, as a channel to other worlds more desirable than the present one (the United States), as a moment of resistive realization. Its purpose was to reach for a point of no return in ethnographic writing and then to stay there, forever.

22There are noticeable movements back to large-scale projects in contemporary anthropology. Emily Martin’s Flexible Bodies (1994) is one example of a broad approach to scale in the research process. As well, Marcus considers multi-sited ethnography, such as Martin’s work, as a potential source for the type of research I am describing (1995a).

23Indeed, a strange company here.

24Or, as Baudrillard suggests, “we continue to manufacture meaning, even though we know there is none” (1996b:17).

25Response I received on a survey the summer of 1997 from a male. The form was passed out at Colonial Williamsburg.

26Thanks to Chad Dalrymple and Jim Foley respectively for their creativity in devising these hypothetical parks.

27Quoted in Kyriazi (1976:82).

28My line of thinking was based on the following passage: “Fiction? That’s what I do already. My characters are a number of crazy hypotheses which maltreat reality in various ways and which I kill off at the end when they have done their work. The only way to treat ideas: murder...but the crime has to be perfect” (Baudrillard 1996a:21-2).

29Baudrillard (1996b:149).

30This is why Steve Shaviro and the Krokes have been so successful at “feeling reality.” For centuries, the profundity of reality has been represented in analytical fancy and paradigmatic hoopla. Social science, if it ceases to be, will be transformed into social immanence. Analysis has failed: people still get reality-fucked on a daily basis. Social critique has failed: people still get social-fucked on a daily basis. High time it is for a new orientation to the world around us.


32“But the comet is no longer looked upon as the sign, but the agent of destruction” (Mackay 1995:258).

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_______. 1997c Roller Coaster Yellow Pages. Source: http://home.earthlink.net/~egieszl/urc.html


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_______. No Date c Walt Disney World: The First Decade. Walt Disney Corporation.
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TABLE 1

THEME PARK ATTENDANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walt Disney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo Disneyland</td>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
<td>16.98 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro Disneyland</td>
<td>Paris, France</td>
<td>11.7 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disneyland</td>
<td></td>
<td>15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic Kingdom</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td>13.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disney MGM Studios</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td>10 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPCOT Center</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td>11.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typhoon Lagoon</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td>1.16 million^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premier Parks, Inc. (Oklahoma City, OK)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure World Theme Park</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darien Lake Theme Park</td>
<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td>1.25 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Elitich Gardens</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>0.99 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geauga Lake Amusement Park</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>1.2 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Escape</td>
<td>Lake George, NY</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splashwater Kingdom</td>
<td>Lake George, NY</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside Amusement Park</td>
<td>Agawam, MA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterworld USA</td>
<td>Concord, CA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterworld USA</td>
<td>Sacramento, CA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyandot Lake</td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
<td>0.36 million^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontier City</td>
<td>Oklahoma City, OK</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Water Bay</td>
<td>Oklahoma City, OK</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine World Africa USA</td>
<td>Vallejo, CA</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky Kingdom</td>
<td>Louisville, KY</td>
<td>1.4 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six Flags Corporation (Formerly, Division of Time Warner, now Premier owned)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Over Texas</td>
<td>Arlington, TX</td>
<td>3.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Harbor</td>
<td>Arlington, TX</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Over Georgia</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags AstroWorld</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>2.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags WaterWorld</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Great Adventure</td>
<td>Jackson, NJ</td>
<td>4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Wild Animal Safari</td>
<td>Jackson, NJ</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Fiesta Texas</td>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td>2.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Great America</td>
<td>Gurnee, IL</td>
<td>3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags St. Louis</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>1.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Magic Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags Hurricane Harbor</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Flags New England</td>
<td>N. Stonington, CT</td>
<td>2-3 million***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Projected attendance of park that is scheduled to open in 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paramount Parks Inc. (Division of Viacom Inc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings Island</td>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Works</td>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carowinds</td>
<td>Charlotte, NC</td>
<td>1.78 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Works</td>
<td>Charlotte, NC</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great America</td>
<td>Santa Clara, CA</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raging Waters</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>0.31 million^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings Dominion</td>
<td>Doswell, VA</td>
<td>2.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada's Wonderland</td>
<td>Vaughan, Ontario</td>
<td>2.8 million</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal (MCA and Rank Organization of London)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Studios Florida</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td>8.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Studios California</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Studios Islands of Adventure</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(scheduled to open in 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Fair L.P.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorney Park</td>
<td>Allentown, PA</td>
<td>1.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildwater Kingdom</td>
<td>Allentown, PA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Point</td>
<td>Sandusky, OH</td>
<td>3.5 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soak City</td>
<td>Sandusky, OH</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worlds of Fun</td>
<td>Kansas City, MO</td>
<td>1.0 million*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceans of Fun</td>
<td>Kansas City, MO</td>
<td>0.39 million^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ValleyFair</td>
<td>Shakopee, MN</td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitewater Country Waterpark</td>
<td>Shakopee, MN</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knott's Berry Farm*</td>
<td>Buena Park, CA</td>
<td>3.55 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knott's Camp Snoopy*</td>
<td>Mall of America</td>
<td>2.55 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Bloomington, MN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kennywood</td>
<td>West Mifflin, PA</td>
<td>1.35 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idlewild Park</td>
<td>Ligonier, PA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandcastle (Waterpark)</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Compounce</td>
<td>Bristol, CT</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Dollar City Inc.</td>
<td>Pigeon Forge, TN 1.94 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollywood</td>
<td>Branson, MO 1.79 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Dollar City</td>
<td>Branson, MO 0.23 million^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Water Park</td>
<td>Marietta, GA 0.72 million^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Adventures</td>
<td>Marietta, GA 0.28 million^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anheuser-Busch</td>
<td>Langhorne, PA 0.85 million^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasoame Place</td>
<td>Orlando, FL 5.1 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea World Florida</td>
<td>San Diego, CA 3.9 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea World California</td>
<td>San Antonio, TX 1.4 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea World Texas</td>
<td>Aurora, OH 1.44 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea World Ohio</td>
<td>Tampa Bay, FL 0.5 million^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Island</td>
<td>Tampa Bay, FL 4.2 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busch Gardens Tampa Bay</td>
<td>Williamsburg, VA 2.2 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush Gardens Williamsburg</td>
<td>Williamsburg, VA 0.48 million^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Country USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Notables**
- **Hersheypark**
  - Hershey, PA 2.1 million
- **Santa Cruz Boardwalk**
  - Santa Cruz, CA 3.2 million
- **Grand Slam Canyon**
  - Las Vegas, NV 2.6 million
- **Opryland**
  - Nashville, TN 2 million
- **Knoebels**
  - Elysburg, PA 0.99 million
- **Geauga Lake**
  - Aurora, OH 1.2 million
- **Elitch Gardens**
  - Denver, CO 1.2
- **Blackpool Pleasure Beach**
  - England 7.5 million*

Unless otherwise indicated, attendance figures are taken from *Amusement Business* (May 5, 1997, page 40) and are indicative of 1996 statistics. * denotes a 1995 statistic, while ^ indicates a figure from 1994.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>78-80% patrons</td>
<td>in 0-50 mile radius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>from 300+ mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-83%</td>
<td>from Houston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-94%</td>
<td>from Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4%</td>
<td>from Louisiana (next largest state of visit)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patron Age</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>in 12-15 age range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>in 16-17 age range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>in 18-24 age range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>in each age range of 25-29, 30-34, 35-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>in 50-64 age range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patron Race</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58%</td>
<td>European American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80-85%</td>
<td>repeat visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45%</td>
<td>come with family alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-38%</td>
<td>come with friends alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-27%</td>
<td>come with both friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-46%</td>
<td>are season pass visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3
SAMPLE RIDE OUTLINE

TRAINING OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION
   A. Lead’s work history at AstroWorld
   B. General information about the ride
      1. who built it
      2. when
      3. how does it operate

II. GENERAL INFORMATION
   A. Use of phone
      1. Ride phone numbers
      2. Operations number
      3. Operations Emergency
      4. Fire
      5. Security
      6. First Aid
   B. Organizational Structure
      1. General Manager
      2. Vice President of Operations
      3. Manager of Operations
      4. Assistant Manager of Operations
      5. Operations Supervisor
      6. Seasonal Supervisor Class A and B
      7. Supervisor in Training
      8. Lead
      9. Assistant Lead - Black Tag

EVACUATIONS
1. Does the attendant know the proper procedures for evacuating the ride? _______ _______
2. Does the attendant know how to clear the Queue house? _______ _______
**TABLE 4**

SAMPLE OPERATIONS RIDE AUDIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date &amp; Time:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cast Members/Positions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Characteristics:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1) Cleanliness:

2) Stage Appearance:

3) Interactions with Guests:

4) Loading/Unloading:

5) Rider Policy Enforcement:

6) General Safety of Work Area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments and Recommendations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standards Observed: RESPONSIVENESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactively approach and assist Guests looking at park maps.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Date: ___________________________ |
| Observer: ________________________ |

| Park Map Location: ____________________ |
| Number Observed: ________________________ |
| Number of H/H Who Helped the Guest: ____________________ |

| Comments: _________________________________ |
TABLE 6
SAMPLE BIG GUN AUDIT

Area: ____________________
Team: ____________________
Date: ____________________

Ride Duties: ________ ________ ________

Professionalism: (follows procedures, etc.)
Scanning: (watches the ride cycle at all times)
Guest Interaction: (friendly appearance, smiles, talks to patrons)
Cleanliness: (general work area and the ride area proper)
Stage Appearance: (how does the employee appear to the patron?)
Posture: (does the employee stand up straight or does s/he slouch?)

Totals:

Comments:
### TABLE 7

**OPERATIONS RIDE CYCLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ride</th>
<th>TPUT</th>
<th>RPG</th>
<th>AVG/HR.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas Cyclone</td>
<td>8219</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looping Starship</td>
<td>4038</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antique Taxis</td>
<td>6240</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayan Mindbender</td>
<td>6001</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Rivers</td>
<td>2255</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batcave</td>
<td>10286</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Maze</td>
<td>6782</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skycreamer</td>
<td>5459</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>