

Mass Consumption and the Disneyfication of Society

Jack King

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Dr Barry O'Halpin

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## Declaration of Originality

This thesis is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Hons) Television Production DL844 It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Jack King [Signature here]

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## Abstract

This thesis sets out to investigate, mass consumption and the Disneyfication of society, using Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, Fordism and Disneyfication. The thesis argues that mass consumption has led to a change in our leisure activities, and to our cities at large which are now starting to be modelled on theme parks. Starting in Chapter 1 with *Star Wars* merchandise we see as mass production evolves into all forms of children's entertainment with a case study on *The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*, and how merchandising reaches its ultimate form in nostalgia and rebranding, as they use a familiar and recognisable brand to attract old fans but at the same time, they reboot themselves to attract new fans.

In Chapter 2, there is a case study on *Toy Story 2* which showed its toy merchandising within the actual movie, this leads to *Harry Potter* which takes what *Toy Story* did and makes it integral to the plot, where Harry must buy school supplies (merchandise) for the plot to advance. This is highlighted in a segment on The Wizarding World of Harry Potter where it is made apparent that fans feel the need to buy merch to play *Harry Potter*. Then there is Disneyland which takes real life streets and makes them watered down and sanitised. Mass consumption is at centre stage in these theme parks, as everything is placed strategically to make the theme park goer want to consume more. In chapter 3 there is a shift to the outside world, and how our cities and places of historical importance are having their meanings taken away from them as they become more Disneyfied, and the wider meaning of what this means for our culture.

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## Introduction

“In the hyperreality described by Baudrillard, semiotic signs or rhetorical signifiers (visual images and linguistic discourse) become increasingly independent from the signified (facts and “referents”) of which they were previously the representations. Simulation supersedes representation.”<sup>1</sup>

Jean Baudrillard was a sociologist and a philosopher who specialised in cultural studies. Baudrillard coined the term “hyperreal” to refer to simulations or recreations of real things (places, paintings, movies, even real people), and how when the simulation grows in popularity it replaces the original meaning of that which it was simulating.

The society we live in is changing, as everyday life and leisure activities are becoming more and more like a theme park. Restaurants, bars and hotels are either becoming chains or adopting a theme to appeal to as wide a demographic as possible. History is being watered down to something that sells (because nobody wants to buy the bad, only the good) and art is starting to lose its meaning, as everything has now become hyperreal. This current cultural reliance on consumption has led to a term that has been labelled as “Disneyfication”.

“Disneyland, mega shopping malls, television sports spectacles are all examples of the better, the more intense than ‘everyday life’ that constitute the domain of the hyperreal. Hyperreality is complicit in the disappearance of reality or, put another way, reality is displaced by the hyperreal.”<sup>2</sup>The places and events listed above are as said “more intense than ‘everyday life’”, yet they have all become a part of everyday life. They have all become the blueprint for modern society. Shopping malls (like Disneyland) are built on the ideas of mass consumption, and in order for products to be bought and sold on masse, they must also be generated in mass.

“Mass production, which took raw materials and processed them by rational means into sophisticated industrial products that vastly improved the material conditions of

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<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, Alan N.. *Decoding Digital Culture with Science Fiction : Hyper-Modernism, Hyperreality, and Posthumanism*, transcript Verlag, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=31465788..>

<sup>2</sup> Kline, Kip, and Kristopher Holland. *Jean Baudrillard and Radical Education Theory: Turning Right to Go Left*, BRILL, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6402772..>

existence for everyone, because these items could be bought and enjoyed by everyone, including the workers who made them, for the very first time.”<sup>3</sup>

Places of significance and high culture begin to lose their place and original meanings as everything starts to be muddled into a “Disneyfied” or Kitsch version of itself, “kitsch has come to the fore: namely, the idea that, on the one hand, particularly since the advent of postmodernism, the sharp divide once upheld between fine art and popular culture can no longer be realistically maintained, and that, on the other hand, both high art and popular culture do no more than reflect the taste preferences of particular subcultures – subcultures which, as was just mentioned, can no longer be so easily kept apart.”<sup>4</sup>

Using Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality, Fordism and Disneyfication, this thesis sets out to investigate, mass consumption and Disneyfication of society. Starting in Chapter 1 with the release of *Star Wars* and the mass production of merchandise for the film, the thesis then follows as mass production evolves into all forms of children’s entertainment. This is highlighted with a case study on *The Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers*, and how merchandising reaches its ultimate form in nostalgia and rebranding, as they use a familiar and recognisable brand to attract old fans but at the same time, they reboot themselves to attract new fans.

In Chapter 2, there is a case study on *Toy Story 2* which showed its toy merchandising within the actual movie, this leads to *Harry Potter* which takes what *Toy Story* did and makes it integral to the plot, where Harry must buy school supplies (which is recreated as merchandise you can buy) for the plot to advance. This is highlighted in a segment on The Wizarding World of Harry Potter where it is made apparent that fans feel the need to buy merch to play *Harry Potter*. Then there is Disneyland which takes real life streets and makes them watered down and sanitised. Mass consumption is at centre

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<sup>3</sup> Curcio, Vincent. *Henry Ford*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1164139>.

<sup>4</sup> *Redefining Kitsch and Camp in Literature and Culture*, edited by Justyna Stępień, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1800469>.

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stage in these theme parks, as everything is placed strategically to make the theme park goer want to consume more.

In chapter 3 there is a shift to the outside world, and how our cities and places of historical importance are having their meanings taken away from them as they become more Disneyfied, and the wider meaning of what this means for our culture. The thesis argues that mass consumption has led to a change in our leisure activities, and to our cities at large which are now starting to be modelled on theme parks.

## Chapter 1: The Origins of Commercialised Children's Media.

Henry Ford's model of mass production was known as Fordism. Fordism was a way of producing the same car on a mass scale, and so over time the car became instantly recognisable as a Ford car, this led to people having the assumption that Ford were a reliable brand. This is a business model copied by corporations across the world. Companies like Disney or McDonalds have perfected it. McDonalds want you to know you're eating a Mc Donald's burger; Disney want you to know you're watching a Disney movie and Ford want you to know you're driving a Ford car.

"The notion of Fordism calls attention to the historical forms of capitalist dynamics, structures, functions, and resulting tendencies or cyclical movements. It attempts a deeper theoretical understanding of historical forms which the capitalist system realizes in the course of its accumulation dynamics and of the efforts of the bourgeoisie to preserve social and political hegemony."<sup>5</sup>

The introduction of mass-produced cars to America, changed the trajectory of human history. This introduction not only changed how cars are made, but it also shaped how art, entertainment, food, clothes, technology and even leisure would be created, generated and perceived by the public. We live in a time where anything can be accessed at the click of a button. There has never been more access to entertainment and leisure than there is right now, but with this access leisure has changed, it has become a commodity "with the advent of postmodernity, capitalism becomes so pervasive that there is nothing left that is not commodifiable. Inevitably science (like leisure) becomes merely another commodity and in turn truth is now determined, not by its ability to tell the Truth, but by its exchange value".<sup>6</sup>

The movie's that studios want to make are either sequels or based on recognisable intellectual properties, merchandise is being sold at a rate never seen before, artists like Taylor Swift are making more money on merchandise sales than other artists she shares the billboard with.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development, edited by Allen J. Scott, and Michael Storper, Taylor & Francis Group, 1992. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=7244818>.

<sup>6</sup> Blackshaw, Tony. Leisure, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=484753>.

<sup>7</sup> McIntyre, Hugh. "Taylor Swift's The Era's Tour Merchandise Sales Are Astronomically high" *Forbes*. 13 Dec 2023.

“Licensing merchandise conveys the right to manufacture products with theme elements based on movies (and can include the creation of movie-themed services for companies that do not make durable goods). The movie and movie-character– themed products can be key chains, caps, toys, wall posters, bedsheets, video games, candy, and much more”.<sup>8</sup> In 1977 when *Star Wars* was releasing nobody expected it to become the cultural phenomenon that it was. Robert Marich discusses how *Star Wars* was the first block buster film to not only do well at the box office, but to also sell significantly high levels of merchandising. “Movie merchandising, which exploded as a significant source of revenue beginning with *Star Wars* in 1977, is mostly the domain of major studios”.<sup>9</sup>

*Star Wars* was such a surprise hit, that when it first released, they did not expect it to cause the demand in toy sales that it did, and so Kenner (the company producing *Star Wars* toys) did not make enough toys for the demand. This led to children in 1977 waking up to this underneath their Christmas trees.

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2023/12/13/taylor-swifts-the-eras-tour-merchandise-sales-are-astronomically-high/>

<sup>8</sup> Marich, Robert. *Marketing to Moviegoers : A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Third Edition, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1354521>.

<sup>9</sup> Marich, Robert. *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Third Edition, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1354521..>



This “certificate package” was sold to parents as a way to ensure their children that when more toys were produced, they would be first in line to receive them.<sup>10</sup>

“Blockbuster family films can be milked for one thousand products. Outsized merchandise blockbusters, such as Disney’s *Toy Story* and *Cars* family-film franchises, can generate over an estimated \$100 million a year in annual company revenue. Disney Consumer Products would only say *Cars* licensed merchandise amounted to a staggering \$10 billion at the consumer-spend level in the initial five years”.<sup>11</sup>

Studios are picking less and less original films and are instead deciding to milk already and established properties, as that allows for more and more sales of merchandise. Movies like *Toy Story* and *Cars* have become franchises known worldwide, generating multiple sequels and even multiple of their own spinoff tv series’.

<sup>10</sup>“Star Wars” 2019 *The Toys That Made Us*, created by Brian Volk-Weis. Season 1 Episode 1, The Nacelle Company/Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/browse?bjv=80161497>

<sup>11</sup> Marich, Robert. *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Third Edition, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1354521>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2025-01-23 15:57:43.



When *Avatar* came out in 2009, it went on to become the highest grossing movie of all time, however, it did not sell merchandise very well “Box-office success is no automatic indicator of riches from licensed merchandise. Twentieth Century Fox’s *Avatar* became the all-time box-office champ with \$760.5 million in domestic box office after its 2009 release, but its merchandise tie-ins proved to be only so-so sellers. The sci-fi epic generated about 125 different items though its merchandise, which is a middling-size licensing effort”.<sup>12</sup> Experts believe the reason it could not generate much merchandise is because of the film’s rating of 12A, the rating prevented younger children from seeing the movie, and so it struggled to generate merchandise for a younger demographic. This is an issue that film studios are often faced with, the question of how to appeal to as many demographics as possible? Appealing to everyone will allow you to generate the highest possible income, however, that is not always possible, and so it is often children who are the targets of this, as they buy the most merchandise. “In the 1930s, Disney established Mickey Mouse Clubs for children with the aim of building brand identity and loyalty but also with the intention of selling merchandise related to its films. This it did successfully, using the foyers of cinemas as extensions of the department store to display and sell the products. Indeed, Disney continues to excel at merchandising and each new children’s film is heavily promoted via a whole range of activities”.<sup>13</sup> This is a practice that has been around for decades and has no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

In the 1990s tv studios came under fire as they were accused of creating children’s television programs with the intent of selling merchandise instead of creating actual worth while entertainment for children. “Many critics have labelled the animations as program-length commercials, unrecognized as such by regulatory bodies or by children.”<sup>14</sup> This change in children’s television programming came from a law

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<sup>12</sup> Marich, Robert. *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Third Edition, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1354521>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2025-01-23 16:07:46.

<sup>13</sup> Gunter, Barrie, et al. *Advertising to Children on TV : Content, Impact, and Regulation*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=234268>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2025-01-23 16:13:56.

<sup>14</sup> Gunter, Barrie, et al. *Advertising to Children on TV : Content, Impact, and Regulation*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=234268>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2025-01-23 16:20:58

change in America during the Ronald Reagan presidency, these changes were called “market deregulation”, this deregulation was brought in “to help enhance the free market”.<sup>15</sup> This is what enabled children’s television programs to become “lengthy commercials”. Due to Market deregulation children’s media changed across the board.

*The Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers* is an example of one of these, children’s programs that was created as a commercial for children’s toys.

Haim Saban is an Israeli American businessman and musician. In the earlier 1990s Saban was known for writing the theme songs for many popular children’s programs including *Inspector Gadget*. While on holiday in Japan, Saban stumbled upon a tv show named *Jyū Renjā*. Saban was impressed with the show’s mixture of live action and over the top cartoonish fight scenes and he felt it could be translated into English cheaply. Saban purchased the rights to broadcast the show in the USA from Tōei Studios in 1987.<sup>16</sup> Along with acquiring the rights to the show, Saban also acquired the worldwide toy rights (outside of Japan). When he went to America with his idea for a show, he was shot down by multiple television studios. The television studios believed that American children were “too intelligent” for this kind of program. Saban spent the next 8 years pitching the idea, he was continually met with no’s until he met with Margret Loesch who was a producer for Fox.

Loesch was a fan of the show *Jyū Renjā* as she had spent some time in the decade previous attempting to pitch the idea of the show in America with Stan Lee of Marvel Comics. Loesch came up with the idea to rename the show and reshoot the scenes using when the “Rangers” are outside of their costumes using American actors. By “splicing together” scenes that were shot in Japan with scenes that they themselves shot in America, Saban and Fox only spent “\$150,00” per episode, this was more the 3 times lower than the average studio program was made for.<sup>17</sup> “Haim Saban had a

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<sup>15</sup> Samli, A. Coskun. *Empowering the American Consumer : Corporate Responsiveness and Market Profitability*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3000194>.

<sup>16</sup> *Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers* 2019 *The Toys That Made Us*, created by Brian Volk-Weis. Season 3 Episode 2, The Nacelle Company/Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/browse?bjv=80161497>

<sup>17</sup> Allison, Anne. *Millennial Monsters : Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, University of California Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt->

singular goal in promoting the broadcast of *Jyū Renjā* on American TV. By reducing costs in producing children's programming, he hoped to build a global entertainment empire that would eventually out-distance Disney".<sup>18</sup>

Loesch worked closely with the "Bandi" corporation to come up with the name *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. The team wanted something that felt like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* but was also different enough to be its on stand-alone program and not just rip off.<sup>19</sup>

Bandi America was the company in charge of distributing of the *Power Rangers* action figures in all countries outside of Japan. The props used to shoot *Jyū Renjā* were the toys created by Bandi because they didn't have a budget for props, and so they would shoot scenes where the actors used the toys exact toys that children were buying. This worked out in favour of Saban and the studio as the toys that they wanted the children to buy were visible within the program. As Eric Phan, a former Marketing Manager at Bandi America tells us "Bandi had such a strong relationship with the show in Japan that it became a half an hour commercial for the toy line, because they would help work in the actual props" The shows props, costumes, and robots all had been created in conjunction with the toy line that was producing the merchandise "Bandi."<sup>20</sup>

*Power Rangers* became an almost "overnight success". Within its first 5 weeks *Power Rangers* was the highest watched children's program in the US. *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* made Bandi America "almost a billion dollars" in merchandise sales in its first year. Saban knew that this would not last forever. As Christopher Byrne says in his book *A Profile of the United States Toy Industry: Serious Fun, children's tastes over time change*, "Kids multibillionaire. Haim Saban now has a net worth of

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<sup>18</sup> Allison, Anne. *Millennial Monsters : Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, University of California Press, 2006. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=257075>.

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<sup>19</sup> "Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers" 2019 *The Toys That Made Us*, created by Brian Volk-Weis. Season 3 Episode 2, The Nacelle Company/Netflix  
<https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80161497>

<sup>20</sup> "Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers" 2019 *The Toys That Made Us*, created by Brian Volk-Weis. Season 3 Episode 2, The Nacelle Company/Netflix  
<https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80161497>

over 3 billion and according to “Forbes” he is ranked 1125 in their list of the world’s richest people.

Saban and Bandi understood how to keep both children and adults hooked. As Christopher Byrne says, children and adults or as he puts them “collectors” alike need a “hook” they need something that keeps them interested in the show that they are watching so they feel the need to buy these toys. While talking about the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* Christopher says “*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in their unending battles with the character Shredder and the Foot Clan provide ongoing fodder for kids’ active imagination and play. It’s not enough merely to have a plastic representation of a character; kids must also be able to project themselves into their version of the narrative”.<sup>21</sup> Children need to have something they themselves can feel a part of and *Power Rangers* fits this perfectly. From watching the opening segment of an episode of *Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers* we see the villain “Rita Repulsa” escape from her prison, she then calls to her minions claiming she is going to “conquer Earth”, there is already an immediate sense of danger, and the show started ten seconds ago. We then go to “Zordon” the hero who summons the Power Rangers by asking for “a team of teenagers with attitude”.<sup>22</sup> In this example we see the villain who Christopher calls “ongoing fodder for kids’ active imagination”, and we also see something the children can relate to and see themselves in, the “teenagers with attitude”. The team consists of teenagers from different ethnic backgrounds, it features both boys and girls in prominent roles within the team. In this sense everybody can play *Power Rangers*, just once you have the toys of course.

*Power Rangers* is a money-making phenomenon and to this day is watched by children and is still watched by some of the adults who grew up with the show. Christopher Byrne states that to create a good toy line for your tv show you need to prove you have “staying power”, “In the case of a television show, for instance, the challenge is to

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<sup>21</sup> Byrne, Christopher. *A Profile of the United States Toy Industry, Second Edition : Serious Fun*, Business Expert Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4790762>.

<sup>22</sup> “High five” *Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers*” created by Haim Saban. Season 1 Episode 2, Fox Kids <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=70184128>

show the potential for staying power, which is the rational for trying to build a character franchise with different versions of the same category”.<sup>23</sup>

After 3 years of success Saban had to come up with an idea to revamp the toy line. Saban decided to follow the Japanese approach and to reboot the show every year. This way he could use footage from different shows and sell new toys. So, *Power Rangers Zeo* premiered in 1996, and by then Power Rangers was top of the US ratings and broadcasting in 80 countries. Fox then decided to buy Saban’s Entertainment company, but they kept Saban attached. In 2013 to make money off adults Bandi introduced a “Legacy Line” which was repackaged versions of the original run of toys. Nostalgia is one of the factors that drives these older fans to keep coming back to the *Power Rangers*. They associate buying toys with fun and happy memories of their childhood, and so they go back as adults to find that happiness they once had. This idea of marketing nostalgia to make adults feel better in uncertain times is another element of Fordism, “both Disney and McDonald’s speak to a broader revival of Fordism in the twentieth century and a resurgence of fondness for order and predictability in anxious times.”<sup>24</sup>

These fans rely on the familiar to give them their happiness now. As Jyotsna Kapur says in her book *Coining for Capital: Movies, Marketing, and the Transformation of Childhood*, “nostalgia is a specific reaction to the temporal and spatial mobility of modernity. Nostalgia... in the seventeenth century was a technical term for homesickness: It described longing for a space.”<sup>25</sup> This here is how the marketing to these adults works, they use the nostalgia of their fans, they try to persuade the fans that buying their merch will make them feel as happy as they once were. The companies disguise this advertising, they don’t blatantly state they are advertising to adults but instead as Kapur says using the example of the re-release of an old Shirley Temple Film they “...come with the promise of appealing to today’s children just as

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<sup>23</sup> Byrne, Christopher. *A Profile of the United States Toy Industry, Second Edition: Serious Fun*, Business Expert Press, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4790762>.

<sup>24</sup> Wills, John. *Disney Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4789890..>

<sup>25</sup> Kapur, Jyotsna. *Coining for Capital: Movies, Marketing, and the Transformation of Childhood*, Rutgers University Press, 2005. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=977455..>

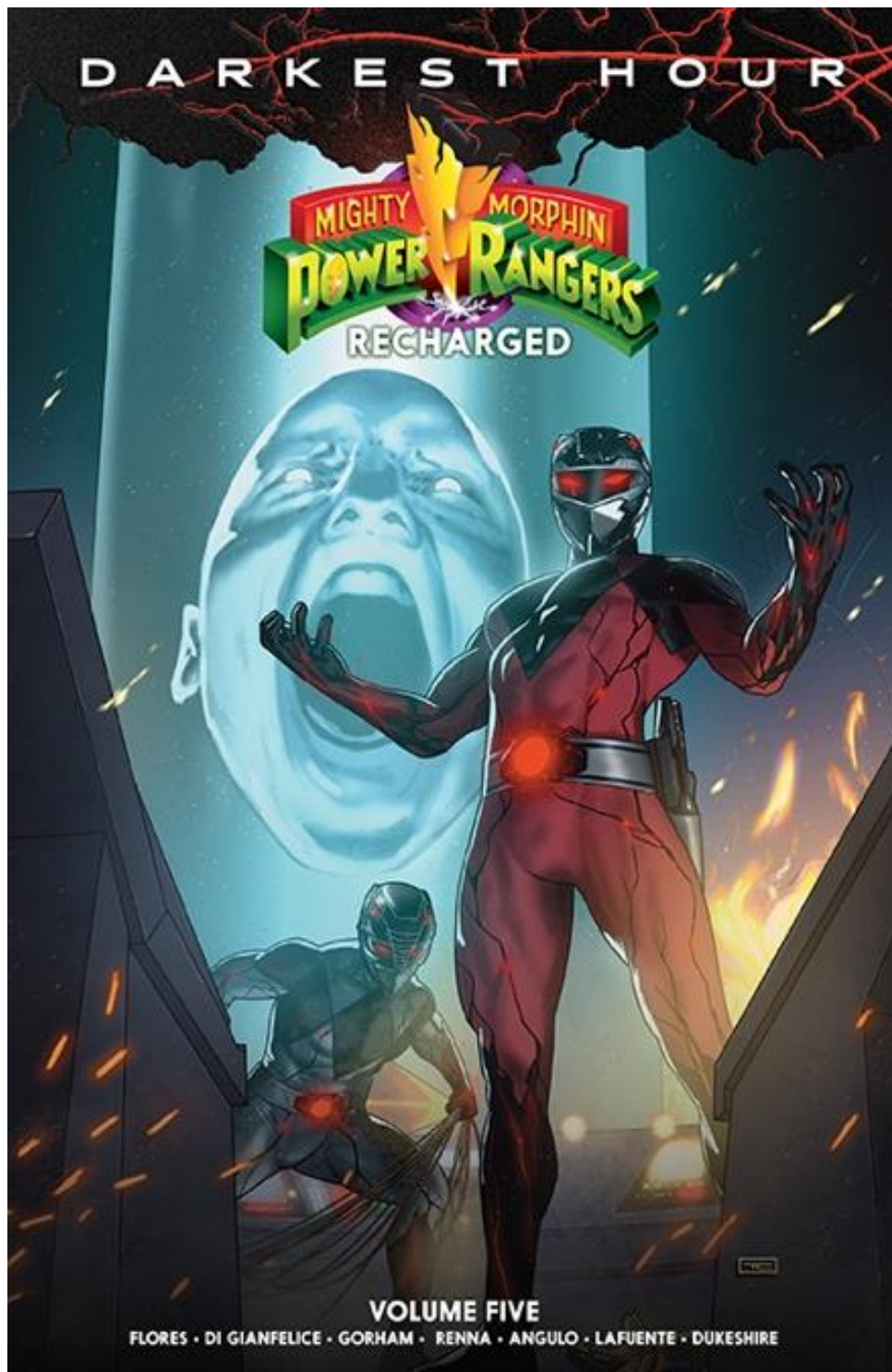
they had to an earlier generation. These packaged promises of happy childhood memories are directed to adult consumers, relying upon their nostalgia for a time past.”<sup>26</sup> The companies want to attract the new younger generation while also keeping the older generation which has stayed with them from the start.

Nostalgia is not the only way to keep older fans from buying your merchandise. Christopher Byrne uses *Transformers* to look at these methods. “Over time, the stories became more sophisticated, and an entire mythology around the characters developed. This had the effect of aging up the property for kids who wanted a more sophisticated storyline, ... constant introduction of new themes (a strategy *the Power Rangers* have used to good advantage as well) kept the storylines fresh as new children grew into the property.”<sup>27</sup> To keep their fans hooked Bandi started creating *Power Rangers* comics that were targeted to an older demographic.

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<sup>26</sup> Kapur, Jyotsna. *Coining for Capital: Movies, Marketing, and the Transformation of Childhood*, Rutgers University Press, 2005. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=977455..>

<sup>27</sup> Byrne, Christopher. *A Profile of the United States Toy Industry, Second Edition : Serious Fun*, Business Expert Press, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4790762.>  
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In the year 2017 a *Power Rangers* block buster film came out in cinemas. The movie appeared to be an obvious attempt at catching the success of the *Transformers* movie

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<sup>28</sup> Flores, Melissa, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers Recharged: Darkest Hour*, vol. 5, issue 115-118, Boom Studios, 2024, 112 pages <https://rangercommand.com/comics-preview-power-rangers-solicitations-for-june-2024/>

franchise. Like with the *Transformers* movie and *Avatar* the *Power Rangers* movie was rated 12A meaning a certain portion of the *Power Rangers* fan base might not be able to attend the movie, however, Bandi does not need the children to attend, like Hasbro didn't when they released the *Transformers* movie "with the movies rated PG-13, there are many kids at the younger end of the *Transformers* audience who won't see it, and yet they are engaged in the property through the TV show and some of the toys and so are engaged in the cultural excitement that surrounds a blockbuster movie".<sup>29</sup> The movie was made for an older audience but some of the merchandise was made for children who would still buy the toys even without watching the movie because they want to be part of the fun involved with the *Power Rangers* movie. This is partly why *Avatar* failed to generate money from the younger demography, as there was no preestablished media for them to enjoy instead of the movie.

So, with a reboot every year, a legacy line, comic book and even movies, more and more toys are released each year both marketed to adults and children, the fans will always have new merchandise to purchase, but as said before *Power Rangers* is not the only offender. There have been movies/shows before and since that have tapped into what *Power Rangers* did. The trend was started it became normal to advertise to children using their entertainment. Children had seen their toys on screen before in *Power Rangers*, but that was outside of the packaging, it would be more worthwhile to show children how their future toy looked inside the box and where they can get it, and that is just what *Toy Story 2* did.

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<sup>29</sup> Byrne, Christopher. *A Profile of the United States Toy Industry, Second Edition : Serious Fun*, Business Expert Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4790762>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-10-13 11:58:41.



## Chapter 2: The Commercialisation of Leisure

While *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* stuck to television and followed the marketing tools used by Television programs, films were a bit behind (in the sense that they never explicitly used the merchandise for props). That was until 1997 with the release of Disney Pixar's *Toy Story 2*.

*Toy Story 2* follows Buzz Lightyear and the rest of the toys as they try to rescue Woody who was been accidentally sold to a toy collector. In the second act of the film Buzz Lightyear and the rest of the toys end up inside "Al's Toy Barn" a toyshop where they believe they will find Woody. Since the scene takes place inside of a toyshop, Disney seize on this opportunity to do some advertising. We follow Buzz Lightyear as he travels through the shop eventually stumbling upon an aisle that is made up of Buzz Light year Toys.<sup>30</sup>

The toys are seen in their packaging front and centre. Making them instantly recognisable to children. This was never done in a movie before, and it worked.

"The *Toy Story* films did something that no other previous animated movies had in the film, the toys were depicted in their original packaging, as they would be found on store shelves. Then, real kids went to toy stores and saw the toys in the same packages in which they had been seen in the movie. There really had been no precedent for licensed merchandise being featured so prominently in the very cartoons from which it was being licensed".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lasseter, John, Director. *Toy Story 2*. Screenplay by John Lasseter, Disney Pixar 1999. *Disney Plus* <https://www.disneyplus.com/browse/entity-55bb8618-baac-449e-9f63-f402f41371a2>

<sup>31</sup> Hollis, Tim. *Toons in Toyland: The Story of Cartoon Character Merchandise*, University Press of Mississippi, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3039965>.



32

The two images show the packaging of the Buzz Light Year toy from the movie, and one taken from a BBC article. The version from the BBC article is a picture of a real Buzz Lightyear toy box, it has the same as packaging from the movie. As Tim Hollis says this was “unprecedented at the time”<sup>33</sup>. The movie at the 42<sup>nd</sup> minute mark takes a stop to show us these boxes, it treats it as a spectacle to behold with grand music. We see the Toy box in a close up shot and then we zoom out to a wide shot of the

<sup>32</sup> Treanor, Jill “How Buzz Lightyear keeps making millions”. *BBC*, 20 June. 2019  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48691854>

<sup>33</sup> Hollis, Tim. *Toons in Toyland : The Story of Cartoon Character Merchandise*, University Press of Mississippi, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3039965>.

whole aisle filled with Buzz Lightyear's. As the scene goes on, more and more toys are advertised.

At one point Buzz Lightyear runs past an aisle and we can see the logo of the Disney Pixar Film *A Bug's Life*, accompanying the logo is a shelf filled with merchandise and toys from said film.

While Buzz is off searching for Woody the rest of toys attend a pool party in “Barbies Dream House”. In the dream house the colours are all pink and Barbies are showcased inside and out of their packaging. The *Barbie* logo is prominent in the scene, we see it on all the boxes perfectly positioned to catch our eyeline.



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The toys then get a tour of the shop from “Tour Guide Barbie” where Barbie goes on to point out and state where the “Hot Wheels” toy isle is. This type of advertising that Disney had introduced only grew in popularity with the release of *the Harry Potter* film franchise and the subsequent theme park that opened in response to the film's success.

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<sup>34</sup> Lasseter, John, Director. *Toy Story 2*. Screenplay by John Lasseter, Disney Pixar 1999. Disney Plus <https://www.disneyplus.com/browse/entity-55bb8618-baac-449e-9f63-f402f41371a2>

*Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone*, released in 2001 after the success of the book series. The film follows Harry Potter a young boy who learns that he is a wizard with magical abilities who attends Hogwarts a fictional school for magic users. In one scene Harry goes shopping as he needs to buy his school supplies. Harry visits Diagon Alley, a magical street hidden in central London that is only accessible to wizards.

The street is filled with shops that sell broom sticks, uniforms, cauldrons and wands. The scene is accompanied by a triumphant and awe-inspiring score. The camera follows Harry down the street as he gazes into shop windows. In one of the shop windows the camera comes to a stop, and we stay with a group of kids who stand staring at the “Nimbus 2000” a broom stick that was recreated as a toy. The highlight of the scene is when Harry goes into “Ollivanders” the wand shop, where Harry gets his wand.





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Later in the film Harry is on the Hogwarts Express the train that can get him to school. A lady with a cart full of sweets pulls up to the carriage Harry is in, and to impress his new friend Ron Weasley, Harry decides to buy the whole cart.<sup>36</sup>

The stories reliance on the purchasing of items, has an impact on how children and the older fans play Harry Potter, Harry buying his school supplies is like us buying our merchandise. Fans of the *Harry Potter* films can attend a recreation of Diagon Alley in 3 locations, one in London and two in the United States at Universal Studios in California and Florida in their Wizarding World of Harry Potter Theme Parks.

<sup>35</sup> Allen, Joshua. "The Harry Potter Nimbus 2000". *The Morning News*, 11 Sept. 2002, <https://themorningnews.org/article/behind-the-scenes-the-harry-potter-nimbus-2000>

<sup>36</sup> Columbus, Chris, director. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Screenplay by JK Rowling and Steve Kloves, Warner Bros, 2001. *Netflix*  
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/60004478?trackId=255824129&tctx=0%2C0%2Cf56df708-3962-4c08-a5b4-cfb722e1c022-236788289%2Cf56df708-3962-4c08-a5b4-cfb722e1c022-236788289%7C2%2Cunknown%2C%2C%2CtitlesResults%2C%2CVideo%3A60004478%2CminiDpPlayButton>





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Abby Waysdorf a lecturer at Uterich University conducted a survey amongst *Harry Potter* fans who had attended the Wizarding World of Harry Potter (WWHOP), the survey set out to analyse the visitor emperice of the theme park. One of these theme park visitors is a *Harry Potter* fan known in the survey as Hannah.

<sup>37</sup>Columbus, Chris, director. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Screenplay by JK Rowling and Steve Kloves, Warner Bros, 2001. *Netflix*  
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/60004478?trackId=255824129&tctx=0%2C0%2Cf56df708-3962-4c08-a5b4-cfb722e1c022-236788289%2Cf56df708-3962-4c08-a5b4-cfb722e1c022-236788289%7C2%2Cunknown%2C%2C%2CtitlesResults%2C%2CVideo%3A60004478%2CminiDpPlayButton>

<sup>38</sup> Gilmore, Allen. "Beyond the Bricks: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley Turns One". *Discover Universal*. 8 July 2015 <https://blog.discoveruniversal.com/behind-the-scenes/diagon-alley-first-year/>

When discussing the theme park Hannah said “It is presented as a complete reconstruction of locations from the *Harry Potter* series, rather than an environment that uses elements from it to create a general sense of fantasy. Specifically, it reproduces these locations... as they appear in the *Harry Potter* film series.”

“Much of this embodied experience is built around consumption, but consumption filtered through the idea of ‘as if’. The shops and products available frequently play important roles in the series. Being ‘able’ to shop in WWOHP therefore also contributes to the illusion of ‘actually being there.’”

“Shopping is an immersive, imaginative act, one that connects Hanna to the story-world”.<sup>39</sup> For Hannah to feel connected to the “story world” that she loves, she feels she must take part in this consumption, which is marketed as a must do for all *Harry Potter* Fans.

So essentially *Harry Potter* land recreates a space that is not real, in order to fake it as real for the fans who attend the theme park. Jean Baudrillard referred to something similar when discussing Hyperreality. “In hyperreality, the “original” version of an object has no real significance since it belongs to a different realm and therefore loses its referential value”.<sup>40</sup> So the problem here is that Diagon Alley was never real, there was never a Diagon Alley outside of the *Harry Potter* books or films and so instead we have a simulation of an interpretation of JK Rowlings original book. Jean Baudrillard referred to simulations as Simulacrum which means “an inferior image lacking the quality of the original”.<sup>41</sup>

“Reality is often established and becomes replaced for some individuals and cultures through hyperreal media such as photography, film and other media; hence, simulacrum refers to the image, representation or reproduction of a concrete other in which the very idea of the real is no longer the signified of which the simulacrum is

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<sup>39</sup> Waysdorf, A., & Reijnders, S. (2018). Immersion, authenticity and the theme park as social space: Experiencing the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21(2), 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877916674751>

<sup>40</sup> Wolny, Ryszard W. "Hyperreality and simulacrum: Jean Baudrillard and European postmodernism." *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 3.3 (2017): 75-79.

<sup>41</sup> Wolny, Ryszard W. "Hyperreality and simulacrum: Jean Baudrillard and European postmodernism." *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 3.3 (2017): 75-79.



the signified”.<sup>42</sup> The film is the hyperreal media and the theme park in this case is simulacrum, it’s a simulation of something that was never real in the first place. Essentially the fans of *Harry Potter* are experiencing life and memories through the visage of something that was never real to begin with.

Once again nostalgia is referred to as a key cause of this happening “When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning”.<sup>43</sup>

These simulacrams happen in theme parks all over the world. The most dominant of which being the Disney group of theme Parks. Disney opened their first theme park in 1955 in California. The idea for the park was to have a recreation of Walt’s vision of America, and so one of the first attractions in the theme park was Mainstreet USA. “Disneyland also functioned as a celebration of America of time gone by. It provided an interactive realm steeped in nostalgia, history, and romance”.<sup>44</sup> Walt, when recreating Mainstreet USA used the town he grew up in for inspiration, and so he modelled the attraction on his own memories and nostalgia.

“Walt’s own park mimicked traditional fairgrounds. When Disneyland opened, it featured a range of arcades, penny machines, and carousel horses (the horses from Coney itself). A planned Lilliputian land resembled Coney Island’s Lilliputian village of the 1900s”.<sup>45</sup> While Disney recreated America in a cute Nostalgic package they left out some key parts of their history, particularly all the bad parts.

“The Walt Disney Company turned history into interactive entertainment that helped Americans feel good about themselves... Perpetually producing positive images of

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<sup>42</sup> Wolny, Ryszard W. "Hyperreality and simulacrum: Jean Baudrillard and European postmodernism." *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 3.3 (2017): 75-79.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318535157\\_Hyperreality\\_and\\_Simulacrum\\_Jean\\_Baudrillard\\_and\\_European\\_Postmodernism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318535157_Hyperreality_and_Simulacrum_Jean_Baudrillard_and_European_Postmodernism)

<sup>43</sup> Wolny, Ryszard W. "Hyperreality and simulacrum: Jean Baudrillard and European postmodernism." *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 3.3 (2017): 75-79.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318535157\\_Hyperreality\\_and\\_Simulacrum\\_Jean\\_Baudrillard\\_and\\_European\\_Postmodernism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318535157_Hyperreality_and_Simulacrum_Jean_Baudrillard_and_European_Postmodernism)

<sup>44</sup> Wills, John. *Disney Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4789890>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-11-11 16:53:30.

<sup>45</sup> Wills, John. *Disney Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4789890>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-11-11 16:55:48.

where the nation had come from, the park thus operated as a timely propaganda machine... with difficult topics such as slavery kept outside the berms”.<sup>46</sup> Once again we are faced with a recreation, however, this recreation was of something real it just decided to leave out the parts that didn’t market or sell very well, and of course that has worked for them, with families always coming back to buy more and more merchandise from Disneyland.

This idea of whitewashing real history with a watered-down sanitised version to make it more palatable isn’t something Disney only do in their theme parks, they also do it in their movies. Take *Pocahontas* for example “*Pocahontas* has been berated for its colonialist narrative, which they suggest legitimates ‘a cultural framework rooted in racism, anti-miscegenation, patriarchy, and capitalism’”.<sup>47</sup> The history of *Pocahontas* was changed to a musical romance story, because hiding the themes of colonialism sells more toys than openly admitting and challenging them.

“On a basic level, people buy Disney products to keep their children (or themselves) happy. The company cleverly ties consumption with its own “happiness” ethos... People buy because the products are American and tell good old-fashioned American stories. They buy out of compulsion, addiction, and as dutiful servants of an ever-expanding consumer culture. Fans immerse themselves in the world of Disneyana”.<sup>48</sup>

The stories are good American stories and that keeps coming people back again and again, and if they keep coming back, they buy more and more products, nobody wants to buy products of something ugly and evil especially not in Disneyland.

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<sup>46</sup> Wills, John. *Disney Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4789890>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-11-11 17:05:47

<sup>47</sup> Bryman, Alan. *The Disneyization of Society*, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=254754>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-12-28 13:41:29

<sup>48</sup> Wills, John. *Disney Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4789890>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-09-18 08:14:31.



49

In the picture above we see Mainstreet USA. A street full of shops and attractions as well as Cast Members (Disney Staff) all playing their part to keep up the theme. “The studio coupled rides with stores selling mementos of the experience. Seamless transition blurred the divides between recreation and commerce. Visitors came to comprehend the theme park in consumer-based terms: navigating pathways by what they could eat and what they could purchase. The park experience rested on buying goods rather than on enjoying thrill rides”.<sup>50</sup>

The Park as we see above blends the idea of reaction and commerce, adding to the idea that spending money equals having a good time. “Theme parks are cultural creations that offer an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which leisure and entertainment are becoming a fundamental factor of economic, social and territorial development in contemporary societies... they integrate commercial areas, hotels and entertainment

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<sup>49</sup> Starr Dewey, Pamela. *The Real Mainstreet USA*. 2013. *Ameripics*.

<https://ameripics.wordpress.com/2013/08/31/the-real-main-street-usa/>

<sup>50</sup> Wills, John. *Disney Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4789890>.

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areas into their corporate complexes as a strategy to increase their business opportunities... Theme parks are, in fact, one of the clearest spatial manifestations of contemporary corporate capitalism”.<sup>51</sup>

What happens when this idea leaves the theme park? This question is being asked by scholars across the world. Lance Freeman attempts to answer the question in his book “There Goes the Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up. “Gentrification transforms public spaces into privatized consumption spaces. Urban leaders, developers and economic elites provide a package of shopping, dining, and entertainment within a themed and controlled environment which some scholars call “Disneyfication”... This commodification of culture is perhaps most jarring in Harlem, where recent redevelopers have packaged race as culture and art, using frontier motifs to “tame” the neighbourhood while keeping it exotic enough to attract consumers.”.<sup>52</sup> The world outside of theme parks is slowly being inspired by theme parks.

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<sup>51</sup> Clave, S. Anton. *Global Theme Park Industry*, CABI, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=312875>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-09-24 11:21:31.

<sup>52</sup> Freeman, Lance. *There Goes the Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up*, Temple University Press, 2005. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=535529>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-10-26 19:35:23.

### Chapter 3: The Disneyfication of Society

In the late 50s and the early 60s scholars started to discuss the idea of the leisure and its importance in life. Joffre Dumazedier and Guy Debord were outspoken in their beliefs in the importance of leisure, and they both warned about the commercialisation of leisure. Before Disney Land Paris opened, theme parks in Europe were not based around an intellectual property, but instead they were just spaces for people to go and enjoy themselves but “Disneyland Paris brought about the thematic conversion of European amusement parks”.<sup>53</sup> With this thematic conversion there was a clear change in European theme parks and their approach to leisure. “Theme parks are cultural creations that offer an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which leisure and entertainment are becoming a fundamental factor of economic, social and territorial development in contemporary societies... they integrate commercial areas, hotels and entertainment areas into their corporate complexes as a strategy to increase their business opportunities... Theme parks are, in fact, one of the clearest spatial manifestations of contemporary corporate capitalism”.<sup>54</sup>

These worries that Dumazedier and Debord wrote about in the 60s are now being reflected on today as we see modern scholars address what they refer to as the “Disneyfication” and the “Disneyization” of modern society. “The emergence of ‘industrial’ leisure is based on the exploitation of the current crisis of individual and collective identities brought about by capitalism. This crisis translates into the gradual subjection of all spheres of human life to the domain of things commercial: in short, to the commodification of the experience of life, which is on the way to being acquirable just like any other good or service”.<sup>55</sup> In modern life it is becoming apparent that enjoyment is being made something you have to pay for, leisure is a commodity. The next step of this is a change to the cities we live in, which over time lose their cultures and their heritage as they become designed like theme parks.

Disneyfication as put by Sean J. Harrington in *The Disney Fetish* is “: the simplification of texts, concepts and images in order to make them mass consumable

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<sup>53</sup> Clave, S. Anton. *Global Theme Park Industry*, CABI, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=312875>.

<sup>54</sup> Clave, S. Anton. *Global Theme Park Industry*, CABI, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=312875>.

<sup>55</sup> Clave, S. Anton. *Global Theme Park Industry*, CABI, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=312875>.

to a wide family-friendly audience”.<sup>56</sup> When this happens to our cities, the cities start to lose what they once originally represented “With Disneyfication, local traditions, famous buildings and landmarks, and other heritage sights and events become “hyperreal,” causing people to lose the ability to distinguish between the “real” and the “illusion””.<sup>57</sup>

There is an example of this happening on Skellig Michael recently with the release of the latest trilogy of films in the *Star Wars* franchise. The island was used as a location where Luke Skywalker has gone into hiding. While filming the crew were unable to remove the puffins from the background of scenes creating a continuity issue this was resolved with the creation of the “Porgs”, “the eponymous Porg toy stands out within the mise-en-scene of Irish Hollywood films – designed simply to mimic puffins and serve as a piece of explicit franchising for the film”.<sup>58</sup>



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<sup>56</sup> Harrington, Seán J., and Seán J. Harrington. *The Disney Fetish*, Indiana University Press, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2027046>.

<sup>57</sup> Low, Jacqueline, and Gary Bowden. *The Chicago School Diaspora: Epistemology and Substance*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3332670>.

<sup>58</sup> Brereton, Pat. *Essential Concepts of Environmental Communication : An a-Z Guide*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6887842>.

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<sup>59</sup> Von Wright, Wilhelm. *Porg illustration*. 2020. *Star Wars: The Last Jedi The Visual Dictionary*. <https://www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/bird-photography/puffin-porg-star-wars/>



The “Porg” is more than just a Puffin, it is an amalgamation of a Puffin mixed with a Seal and a dog. This caused some upset in certain environmental groups “there was much environmental criticism of the film’s crude commodification of the simulated birds as a technical continuity solution, which in turn could be more easily visualised to fit into the diegesis of the fantasy world-view.”<sup>60</sup> It was even said by a crew member that the Porg was only created to deal with frustrations Rain Johnson the director of the film felt when Puffins kept getting inside his shot. This idea of a “crude commodification” or recreation in what some feel is in bad taste relates to an idea referred to as Kitsch, “Kitsch is something readily accessible in everyday life— a condensation symbol or referent that draws on a given history and culture and carries both information and emotional significance... Manufacturers of Kitsch are aware of a given audience’s cultural biases and deliberately exploit them, engaging the emotions and deliberately ignoring the intellect. As such, it is a form of cultural anaesthesia. This ability to build and exploit cultural myths— and to easily manipulate conflicted history— makes Kitsch a powerful political construction”.<sup>61</sup>

Along with the “Porgs” we have an issue that has faced the tour guide workers who work at Skellig Michael, one tour guide worker spoke out on the fact that people who attend the island now seem to be more interested in *Star Wars* over the real history of the UNESCO heritage site.<sup>62</sup>

While one cannot blame only Disney and theme parks for this, there are numerous factors that indicate to Disney and theme parks being the largest contributor. “However, it is also likely that the high profile of the parks and the frequency with which they are held up as models in a variety of areas – for theming, for their architecture, for their transformation of shopping into play, for their smiling ever-helpful employees, and so on – have contributed greatly to the circulation of the

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<sup>60</sup> Brereton, Pat. *Essential Concepts of Environmental Communication : An a-Z Guide*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6887842>.

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<sup>61</sup> Lugg, Catherine A.. *Kitsch: From Education to Public Policy*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1999. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=170326>.

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<sup>62</sup> Baker, Noel “Wrong to film *Star Wars* at Skellig Michael”. *The Irish Examiner*. 4 Feb. 2020, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30979599.html>



underlying principles”.<sup>63</sup> In his book *The Disneyization of Society* Alan Bryman sets establishes what he refers to as the 5 dimensions of Disneyization the 5 are “Theming, Theming , Hybrid Consumption, Merchandising and Performative labour”.<sup>64</sup> These dimensions are visible in many places in society today and it is possible to apply them when discussing restaurants and bars in the heart of Dublin.

Locations like Temple Bar, Smithfield, Camden Street or even the Liberties, once held cultural hubs that included spaces where locals, tourists and even artists could express themselves. These spaces have now been replaced by “Vintage Clothes stores”, food chains and “Instagram pubs” which on the surface appear like authentic Irish bars but are just a simulacrum of authenticity. A fake feeding off a dying part of real culture, similar to the so called authentic Irish pubs you get on holiday in Spain. “Like other Irish commodities exported during the Celtic Tiger boom of the 1990s— the now-ubiquitous Irish pub and the pulsating strains of Riverdance are two examples— these films simultaneously market Irishness for global consumption and express a host of social, economic, and political anxieties”.<sup>65</sup> Diane Negra is referring to the Barrytown trilogy of films, based on the Roddy Doyle books. Diane feels that this trilogy of films presents a version of Ireland that is made to market Ireland globally. Like the Irish pubs that were opening all over the world during the Celtic tiger. The difference today is now those “Irish commodities”, like for the tacky “authentic” Irish pub in Spain is being opened and placed in Dublin city centre, as well as being exported abroad.

In an Interview on the Website Vinepair we get an insight into the details involved in opening and running one of these modern “authentic” Irish pubs.

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<sup>63</sup> Bryman, Alan. *The Disneyization of Society*, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=254754>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-11-28 13:14:47.

<sup>64</sup> <sup>64</sup> Bryman, Alan. *The Disneyization of Society*, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=254754>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2024-11-28 13:14:47.

<sup>65</sup> *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, edited by Diane Negra, Duke University Press, 2006. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1169347>.



## Your Local Irish Pub, From Dublin to Dubai, Proves You Can Prefab Authenticity

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According to their website Vinepair is “the world’s largest digital media company delivering accessible, entertaining and inspiring content about drinks culture.”

The article is made up of interviews with pub owners and the co – founder of Slane Irish Whiskey, Alex Conyngham. Conyngham discusses his experience in an Irish pub that appears to be “an authentic Irish pub you would typically find in rural Ireland”. But the twist is that the pub only recently debuted this “authentic look”.<sup>67</sup>

The article describes drinking in these pubs as “Drinking in these retrofitted spaces is oddly comforting, akin to visiting Colonial Williamsburg or MGM Studios in Orlando. Fake-real pubs have unusual, undeniable appeal: They are grounded in something tangible and knowable, yet they exist apart from reality, and free from chaos and uncertainty”.<sup>68</sup>

These pubs are said to exist outside of reality, yet they feel authentic, just like with Mainstreet USA, or Harry Potter land before. “Simulation plays an important part in trying to defend a vanishing sense of what is real. Specifically, sites such as

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<sup>66</sup> Heil, Meredith. “Your Local Irish Pub, From Dublin to Dubai, Proves You Can Prefab Authenticity”. *Vinepair*, March 2019 <https://vinepair.com/articles/fake-irish-pub/>

<sup>67</sup> Heil, Meredith. “Your Local Irish Pub, From Dublin to Dubai, Proves You Can Prefab Authenticity”. *Vinepair*, March 2019 <https://vinepair.com/articles/fake-irish-pub/>

<sup>68</sup> Heil, Meredith. “Your Local Irish Pub, From Dublin to Dubai, Proves You Can Prefab Authenticity”. *Vinepair*, March 2019 <https://vinepair.com/articles/fake-irish-pub/>

Disneyland offer such obvious and simple simulations of the world that we think that actual cities are real by comparison”.<sup>69</sup>

These fake authentic Irish pubs have become so prominent they have started to replace what we assume of what an Irish bar is or should be. In the Vinepair article, “Darren Fagan, contracts manager and business developer for The Irish Pub Company” states that “Once we’ve figured that their location is right and they’re serious about it, then we talk about the story. ‘What is the story, the backstory for the pub?’ They may have generations of family from Ireland, there might be another connection to a town, and so on. We create the backstory for the pub, and then we build a bespoke design around that”.<sup>70</sup> The stories behind the pub are made up, made to feel authentic so the person drinking in the pub can feel like they are having as “real” as an experience as possible, but by now all of the actual authentic pub decor has ran out, and so now even what makes up the inside of the pub is a fake recreation.

“The rise of the Irish theme bar has paralleled the rapid expansion of tourism in Ireland and the two processes are, in many ways, interwoven. The initial impetus for the spread of the ‘theme bar’ was, in large part, dependent upon an opportunity identified through tourism. In turn, the increased global profile of the Irish bar that the theme pubs have given rise to has helped feed tourist expectations in a very specific way. The impact of the Irish theme bar upon tourism and upon the commodification of Irish identity must therefore be examined before the role of Irish pub culture in contemporary Irish tourism can be assessed”.<sup>71</sup>

The themed pub rather we like it or not has become a very part of our society, we rely and then thrive on the themed pub because tourism is an essential source of income to Irish society. “Tourism is concerned with consumption of place and the consumption of goods and services in that place. The economic context of both Irish pub culture

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<sup>69</sup> Harris, David E.. *Key Concepts in Leisure Studies*, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=254775>.

<sup>70</sup> Heil, Meredith. “Your Local Irish Pub, From Dublin to Dubai, Proves You Can Prefab Authenticity”. *Vinepair*, March 2019 <https://vinepair.com/articles/fake-irish-pub/>

<sup>71</sup> *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity*, edited by Michael Cronin, and Barbara O'Connor, Channel View Publications, Limited, 2003. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=204114>.

and the Irish drinks industry is also therefore of critical importance in assessing the importance of both for tourist development. Both pubs and Irish alcohol production are important areas of economic activity, and this material dimension is far from negligible in their relationship to tourist promotion”.<sup>72</sup>

It is openly accepted now, like it was in Disneyland, that we just change elements of our history to generate more income. It doesn't matter if the pub isn't from the 1950s to tourists, once it fits into their idea of what an Irish pub is and should be they are happy to go. It isn't only tourists who are going to these pubs, and so they are not the only ones to blame for this happening, that cannot be the case since Ireland is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world “for pubs per person”.<sup>73</sup>

Another thing to add to this increase in artificially traditional Irish pubs is that they are no longer owned by just the one landlord but have recently been owned by conglomerates. Large companies have been established in Ireland, or have come to Ireland to take over actual traditional pubs. These pubs have been renamed and refurbished to appear more traditional. These companies like “The Press Up Group”, The Irish Pub company and Ól Irish Pubs LTD., own pubs and restaurants across inner-city Dublin.

Where Temple Bar and even Skellig Michael were once originally seen as places of culture and of importance to Ireland they have now been Disneyfied and turned into attractions, and what they once originally represented has been shifted and changed into something else.

This change in culture has been happening for decades with nothing being done about it. Each year more and more movies release, more toys are produced, more theme park attractions open and more of our culture gets replaced with a simulacrum of something that once had a strong and powerful meaning.

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<sup>72</sup> *Irish Tourism : Image, Culture and Identity*, edited by Michael Cronin, and Barbara O'Connor, Channel View Publications, Limited, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=204114>.

<sup>73</sup> O'Donnell Dimitri. “Ireland ‘third in world for pubs per person, says HRB’, RTE, 17 April. 2024. <https://www.rte.ie/news/2024/0417/1443978-alcohol-ireland/>

The Disneyfication has moved past Disneyland, it has infiltrated our cities and has changed our lives. Cities are built around shopping centres, pubs have themes, and more events are starting to become larger than life, all in a bid to get us to spend as much money as possible.

## Conclusion

“Commodifying the ‘craic’, it will be suggested, represents a form of cultural tourism. Given the great emphasis placed upon the social actions and identity of Irish people in the commodified ‘craic’ there is a sense in which they, too, are being consumed by the tourist. This may have significant ramifications not only for the way that Irish people will be seen by the tourist but also for that richly diverse and almost indefinable explosion of human interaction which the concept of ‘craic’ attempts to encapsulate”.<sup>74</sup> This idea of “commodifying the craic” relates back to commercializing play to child. Making it seem like the best way to play *Power Rangers* was to buy all the toys they show you in the program, or when in *Toy Story*, they show you where you can find Buzz Lightyear and what he looks like once you do. They make it seem like best way to experience Irish culture is to drink overpriced pints in Temple Bar, to buy expensive t-shirts in Carrolls and you can visit the Guinness Store House or “the increasing... brewery and distillery visitor centres” which are “profitable tourist attractions in their own right”.<sup>75</sup>

When you leave Dublin, you can decide to visit Skellig Michael, not because you are interested in Irish culture, but because Luke Skywalker was there. “We are simply used to reality appearing to us in a conventional way, with intelligible sound, conventionally framed images, unobtrusive editing, and guidance provided by narratives, in the form of commentary, witnesses, or the reconstruction of events on camera”.<sup>76</sup> With social media, theme parks, advertisements, movies, television and streaming, we are faced with more and more media, and the media that we consume is shaping the very way that we perceive the world around us. With this we have lost the true meaning of our cities, or history and even our art.

What started off to mass produce a car, has led to consumption becoming integral to our leisure. This change in leisure changed our society. The rapid expansion of theme

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<sup>74</sup> *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity*, edited by Michael Cronin, and Barbara O'Connor, Channel View Publications, Limited, 2003. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=204114>. Created from iadt-ebooks on 2025-01-28 13:21:43.

<sup>75</sup> *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity*, edited by Michael Cronin, and Barbara O'Connor, Channel View Publications, Limited, 2003. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=204114>.

<sup>76</sup> Harris, David E.. *Key Concepts in Leisure Studies*, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iadt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=254775>.

parks, and the film landscape stagnating for decades into a never-ending repeat of remakes and sequels has led to a world that relies on nostalgia, all because it is what sells. Nothing is authentic anymore, gentrification has taken over all “artist spaces”, historic locations no longer have meaning and restaurants/pubs are starting to copy each other, in a bid to become the most “authentic experience”, but they are just cheap simulacra’s emulating something that was often never even there to begin with, just like Diagon Alley in Universal Studios.



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