CINEMATOGRAPHY IN THE LANDSCAPE: TRANSITIONAL ZONES IN THEMED ENVIRONMENTS

George, Benjamin
Utah State University, Logan, UT, benjamin.george@usu.edu

Gottwald, Dave
University of Idaho, Moscow, ID, dgottwald@uidaho.edu

1 ABSTRACT

While landscape architects are adept at transitioning between the indoor and outdoor and blurring the threshold between, less attention has been paid to the liminal space between landscapes and how built landscapes interact with each other. Transitions in constructed environments can be critical spaces and key to the success of adjoining landscapes. However, built landscapes often have stark adjacencies, making the construction of successful transition zones a challenging problem

Thematic design—the multidisciplinary practice of creating themed environments—is a language that evolved from filmic grammar. In cinematography, transitions between scenes establish continuity and narrative flow; cuts, wipes, and dissolves are common techniques that lead viewers through disparate settings with minimal disruption. These same techniques are employed in the spatial design of theme parks, moving guests between narrative elements of a themed space, and between distinctly different themes.

This paper suggests that many of the cinematographic techniques used to create thematic transitions can provide valuable principles for enhancing placemaking within and between built landscapes. Such themed environments are worthy of serious examination as they mediate multiple levels of content complexity and identity-laden forms across all the senses; seamless negotiations at once visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory. Such filmic grammar may have wider application for landscape architects and other placemakers concerned with crafting environments which are simultaneously congruous experiences yet harmoniously diverse.

1.1 Keywords

Thematic design, theme parks, cinematography, filmic grammar, transitional zones.

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2 INTRODUCTION

"Disney's Magic Kingdoms are expressive landscapes with the power to move people….It is easy to praise Disneyland and Disney World, and easy to condemn them, but no matter whether one is an admirer or a critic, both are models of rhetorical expression. To know landscape poetics is to understand how such settings are fashioned and how they achieve their effects." — Anne Whiston Spirn (1998, pp. 238–239)

When Spirn was crafting *The Language of Landscape*, the first real decade of rigorous scholarly dialog around theme park environments was beginning to wind down. Ironically, fellow critics before her had practically inaugurated the period, devoting the entire May 1990 issue of *Landscape Architecture Magazine (LAM)* to Disney's landscapes (Ellis et al., 1990). When EuroDisney opened in 1992, it was declared a "cultural Chernobyl" by leading French academics (Lainsbury, 2000). Both the *LAM* special issue and the vast body of critical literature produced in the years following were similarly socio-political in nature, confronting issues of authenticity and illusion, power and control, and consumerism and entertainment. This discourse spanned sociology (Gottdiener, 1997; Hannigan, 1998, Zukin, 1993), anthropology (Fjellman, 1992), and art history (Marling, 1991; 1994). During this time—in which Disney began massive expansion around the world—historians began to wrestle with the faux cultural representations and sanitized political narratives of its theme parks (Findlay, 1992; Francaviglia, 1996; Wallace, 1996), as had theorists and philosophers been troubled earlier by their simulacra and surrealism (Baudrillard, 1994; Eco, 1986). The nineties ended with Alda Louis Huxtable decrying the establishment of an "unreal america" which had become overrun with theming (Huxtable, 1999). Conversely, there is a relative dearth of site-specific theme park documentation from a design perspective. Architecture critics are primarily concerned with privatization, loss of public space, surveillance, and aesthetic homogeneity rather than form and mechanics (Knight, 2014; Sorkin, 1992). Relatively few texts elaborate on theme parks' design merits, though interest has grown in more recent years (Klingmann, 2007; Lonsway, 2009; Mitrasinovic, 2006). Yet Spirn's point is well taken; theme park landscapes deserve design critique *apart* from dissecting them as societal organisms.

Because the design of themed spaces is derived from the cinema (Marling, 1997), it is natural to critique theme parks as media constructs. However, it is the visual grammar and metaphors of their constructed landscapes which we focus on. Transitional zones are of interest to landscape architects, especially the interaction between architecture and landscape (Waite, 1998). However, transitions between disparate landscapes are equally important. In this paper we discuss such zones as they appear in the contemporary theme park model, which emerged with the development of Disneyland, and how they were informed by filmic grammar. We first discuss the role of media in landscape design, as it evolved from painterly to theatrical representations. Next we briefly recount the origins and development of Disneyland park from a landscape architecture perspective before we outline the broader praxis of thematic design and the contours of its language to place those principles in context. Lastly, we provide a taxonomy and examples of transition types at a number of Disney's parks. We intend that this brief history and taxonomy of cinematography in themed landscapes will spur other researchers to take a closer look at these spaces, provoke new dialog around thematic design, and prompt site evaluation of their spaces beyond social critique.

3 METHODS

This is a qualitative research paper; part contextual history and part analysis of built sites. In order to parse a taxonomy of filmic grammar, we have focused on Disneyland, as it is the sui generis contemporary theme park (Adams 1991; Lukas, 2008; Marling, 1997). Its design was executed by filmmakers; the vision for all Disney parks is a cinematic one. Naturally, there are many other large-scale practitioners of theming in landscape design around the world who have flourished in the decades since using similar means; Universal Studios, Cedar Fair, casino operators et al., (Gottdiener, 1997; Hannigan, 1998). To include site surveys of all of these here is not practical. We have, however, augmented and punctuated our discussion by noting transitional spaces in other Disney theme parks, whose multidisciplinary designers inherited the thematic praxis from their predecessors at Disneyland.

An on-site observation method was used to catalog transitional spaces at Disney parks according to their application of filmic grammar. Such an approach was deemed crucial because these landscapes are, by their very definition, experiential; they must be experienced to be understood. This documentation

included walking through transitional zones multiple times from all directions, as well as capturing the transit through spaces via video, photographs, and hand sketches. Further analysis was also conducted using Google Street View and a virtual reality headset in order to re-visit the sites in as close to an experiential manner as possible from a distance. Use of Google includes instances when we did not have the appropriate photo ourselves from a prior site visit to present here. Design elements in each transition zone were identified, cataloged and then compared to the filmic grammar to classify each type of transitional space.

4 BACKGROUND: PRE-THEME PARK REPRESENTATIONAL LANDSCAPES

Although the contemporary theme park model is relatively new, there is a tradition of constructed, mediated environments which incorporate experiential landscapes designed to entertain. Representational media has been interwoven with the design of environments for centuries. Painting played an important role in both documenting and inspiring garden designs from the Renaissance into the 19th century. The development in painting of precise perspective provided artists with a technique to accurately recreate real three-dimensional scenes. Using vanishing points, such scenes achieved a visual depth that seemingly projected to the horizon. The use of the vanishing point quickly became a common motif for landscape designers, who created long linear vistas that would project the visitor out into the landscape. This was often paired with forced perspective to elongate and amplify the apparent distance of the vista, creating landscapes that applied the painter's visual lexicon to the landscape (Manca, 2015; Moore, Mitchell, & Turnbull, 1993). Vaux-le-Vicomte provides the exemplary demonstration of this technique through the gradual narrowing of the axis boundaries, combined with a masterfully subtle manipulation of elevation in order to create a powerful feeling of projection across the entirety of the site (Hazlehurst, 1980).

Similar cross-pollination is visible in Japanese and Chinese garden traditions. These landscapes mimicked local painting styles and aesthetic values, where the foreground was painted with fine details, yet backgrounds rendered with broad strokes and looser forms (Moore, et al., 1993). In the landscape, these painterly approaches were recreated with more finely textured plantings in the foreground and clear definition between plants, contrasting large massings of more roughly textured plants in the background. The Japanese in particular employed *shakkei*, which is the use of distant borrowed natural scenery from beyond the formal landscape.

Narrative-derived landscapes became prominent during the Italian Renaissance with the proliferation of books and 'rediscovery' of classical stories and texts. The deliberate creation of stories within the landscape would become more complex through the marriage of narrative with design principles; inspired first by painting, then opera, and finally cinema. Through statuary, fountains, and its ever-increasing complexity of structure, Villa Lante is meant to celebrate its patron, Cardinal Gamberaia, through telling a story of order, progress, and prosperity emerging from chaos (Lazzaro-Bruno, 1977). At Villa Bomarzo, a convoluted and brooding tale inspired by the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and *Orlando Furioso* is told through a collection of larger-than-life statuary (Bosch, 1982; Darnall & Weil,1984). While not leveraging a specific narrative, Capability Brown relied on literary composition to describe the structure of his landscapes, referring to visual breaks as comas, colons, and periods (Willis, 1981).

In England, landscape designers combined narratives with the medium, moving beyond just borrowing formal principles to actually recreate painterly compositions. The painterly movement of Claude Lorrain, featuring images of rugged landscapes from heroic epics of the past became particularly popular amongst the English elite. Landscape designers of the era were commissioned to create picturesque landscapes populated by classical ruins and statuary in the same vein as Lorrain's painting subjects (Hunt, 1992; Manca, 2015). The painterly circuit gardens of England married picturesque landscape depictions with storytelling to guide the visitor through a series of scenes, conceived in the same way as a painting might be, as they progressed around a predefined path through the garden (Spirn, 1998). Most notable of these gardens is Stourhead, which many researchers believe borrows themes from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Here the visitor is presented with a series of vistas of picturesque landscapes, classical temples, and architectural follies that suggest that they are traveling through an Arcadian paradise (Duclos, 1996; Manca 2015; Moore, et al., 1993). While direct links to the *Aeneid* at Stourhead have been challenged by some scholars, it is clear that the garden still presents the visitor with a narrative constructed of established views on a prescribed path, similar to a gallery of paintings (Cox, 2012; Hunt, 1992). Predetermining and controlling views for the visitor is one of the primary structural differences between pleasure gardens—such as

Stourhead or Stowe—and traditional gardens that leave exploration and experience up to the visitor to discover (Moore, et al. 1993).

The *ferme ornée* was also derived from painterly traditions in England, though it represents a rustic, as opposed to classical, footprint in the landscape. Most relevant to our discussion is the *ferme ornée* once located at Versailles, which was a detailed creation of an idealized village and farm. Here nobility could act as peasants in a safe and controlled manner. The contemporary visitor would have experienced a reenactment similar to a theme park or a cultural site such as Colonial Williamsburg, inhabiting an exquisitely detailed environment in which they could participate and play a role in a fantasy landscape with cultural underpinnings (Mitrasinovic, 2006; Spirn, 1998; Young, 2002).

While Stourhead represents a controlled experience structured and themed around the painting and literature of the time, other landscapes drew upon theatrics and opera. It was common to create garden theaters for holding operas and plays, with examples at the Tuileries, Versailles, Villa Reale, and Herrenhausen sites (Deguen & Thuillier, 2015; Gollwitzer, 1976). In many instances, theater influenced landscape design beyond the simple creation of a performance space in the garden. The presentation of theatrical elements in gardens, especially as a means of visitor interaction, was popular from the 16th–18th centuries. Hellbrunn Palace featured water-powered special effects in the form of fountains, comedic tricks, and even a walkway of moving dioramas reminiscent of the now common storybook cruise trope introduced at Disneyland (Adams 1991; Shakerin, 2005). Trick fountains were designed to transform visitors from a traditionally passive, observer role into an active and choreographed role as actor on the stage. Even if such participation may not have been entirely willing, these water features were very popular from the Renaissance through to the 19th century (Thacker, 1970).

An equally proto-themed built environment was the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. Under the guidance of Daniel Burnham and Fredrick Law Olmsted, theatrical environments there were meant to tell stories of modern progress and triumph. This was all cast in classical facades which evoked a nostalgia and yearning for something greater and grander in the public (Mitrasinovic, 2006) and later found further architectural expression through the City Beautiful movement (Steiner, 2011). Most of the structures themselves were conceived of as ephemeral; an inhabited built environment embodying the praxis of theater, a stage set built on the grandest scale conceivable (Hines, 1988).

Noted opera set designer Luigi Manini designed a theatrical garden masterpiece at the Quinta da Regaleira. The garden is constructed of a series of set pieces in the landscape, built around an esoteric story of ritual initiation drawn from elements of Christian, Templar, Kabbalah, and Rosicrucian traditions (Anes, 2010). At its core, the garden relates an archetypal descent—whether it be that of death itself or Dante's journey through the circles of hell—via a series of tunnels carved into the mountainside, complete with subtle bestial outcroppings in the tunnel walls to create a discomfiting passage through darkness (Anes, Pereira, & Pereira, 1998). Where the tunnels terminate, an ornamental initiation well provides an ascent into the light and a return to the surface. Elsewhere in the garden, secret passages, caves, towers, bridges, fountains, and statuary create an immense garden stage in which the visitor participates in acting out the story.

These examples are not meant to explicitly argue or suggest that landscapes are a literal interpretation of an era's popular media. There is no known instance of a Chinese or Japanese painting being recreated in exact detail as a garden, and Hunt (1992) persuasively demonstrates that while Stourhead borrows design cues from the iconography of landscape painting traditions popular at the time, none of the garden's scenes have attempted to fully realize the painting in built form. Villa Orsini was inspired by—but does not faithfully retell—*Orlando Furioso*. The Quinta da Regaleira is theatrical in nature but bears little connection to any contemporary play or theatrical set. These spaces are not simulacra. Rather, such gardens demonstrate how designers were influenced by the visual and performing arts and explored their application within the landscape, borrowing their composition, stylistic tendencies, and visual grammar. Similarly, we argue that the contemporary theme park model draws heavily on the dominant visual medium of the 20th century, motion pictures, and that this is especially true of the transitional zones between its various areas or "lands."

5 FOREGROUND: THEMATIC LANDSCAPES

5.1 From Backyard Railroad to Theme Park

Given this longer tradition of narrative gardens conceived to entertain and delight, it seems only natural that Disneyland began as essentially a landscape project. One might suggest Tivoli Gardens as a primary inspiration for what Walt Disney was trying to accomplish. From an outside perspective, it indeed borrows cues from earlier such parks (Clavé, 2007; Lukas, 2008; Mitrasinovic, 2006). However, Disney's personal interest in Tivoli appears to have been operational rather than design (Marling, 1997). Though he had visited with his family repeatedly and the park did leave a strong impression on him when he returned in the summer of 1951 for research purposes (Nichols, 2018), his comments to his staff were praising how remarkably well-kept and clean the grounds were (Thomas, 1994). Tellingly, when Disney sought the consultation of Tivoli's manager three years later, it was with regards only to crowd flow (Mitrasinovic, 2006). Less known is the seminal influence of the animation magnate's five-acre backyard railroad (Barrier, 2007; Bright, 1987; Marling, 1991). Walt Disney built a one-eighth scale steam locomotive in the early 1950s and named the railroad the *Carolwood Pacific* after his home's address (Pierce, 2016). The site plan was established by Eddie Sargeant with drafting by John V. Cowles, Jr., a Disney set designer with architectural training (ibid). There was a total of 2,615 feet of track on the property managed through eleven switches, including a dramatic forty-foot timber trestle (Marling, 1991).

Disney had to look beyond his studio for planning the grounds. Brothers Jack and Morgan "Bill" Evans were tasked with the job of landscaping the site (Marling, 1997). At the suggestion of studio construction supervisor Jack Rorex, Disney had a 90-foot tunnel dug underneath part of the property so that his wife Lillian would neither see nor hear the train (Thomas, 1994). Rorex also recommended that the passage be designed with a dramatic double curved 'S' so that passengers couldn't see the end as they entered; in essence, this was the forerunner of the Disneyland "dark ride" experience (Marling, 1991). It was for this underpass installation and the elaborate flower beds above it that the Evanses subsequently became deeply involved with the project (Broggie, 1997; Kurtti, 2008).[1] Landscaping was clearly essential to Walt Disney; all this took half his total budget (Snow, 2019).[2] In designing the *Carolwood* project, Walt developed an *integrated environment* of both structures and landscape which served as an experiential prototype for his theme park (Marling, 1991). Transitions were at the heart of the project, and his railroad was a "system so carefully landscaped that it gave his guests an experience—a narrative, really—of shifting scenes, one blending smoothly into the next" (Snow, 2019, p. 43). This sequential, staged landscape—not unlike the Quinta da Regaleira—led directly to the Disneyland concept. As the park's primary planner recalled years later, "[Walt] used his...railroad as an example of what he wanted to do next. There was a definite link between Walt's train at his home and what he went on to do" (Janzen & Janzen, 1997, p. 10).[3] A train circles the park atop an earthen berm to isolate Disneyland from the outside world, as was employed to shield neighbors from Walt Disney's backyard railroad and provide privacy for his guests (Marling, 1997). All that had changed was the scale; quite literally, Disneyland was where Walt Disney "could extend his miniature set within a framework of realistic landscape" (Bukatman, 1991, p. 55). The Evans brothers themselves, neither of whom held landscape architecture degrees,[4] were imported to the Disneyland site along with the train, tunnel, and berm concepts (Koenig, 2019).

5.2 Landscape Design in the Thematic Mode: Six Roles

Bill Evans retired from Disney in 1975 and by the early 1990s, Evans had had nearly four decades to think over his approach to landscaping in a thematic context. In a lengthy interview (Janzen & Janzen, 1996) he reflected on the uses of landscaping at Disneyland, since ported to all Disney theme parks. We have derived six primary roles from Evans' remarks, all familiar to landscape architects. First, thematic landscaping provides **enclosure** by hiding the outside world from guests inside the park. Walt Disney is often quoted in company literature as having mused that "I don't want the public to see the world they live in while they're in the Park" (Sklar, 1969, p. 19). At Disneyland, this was accomplished with an earthen berm—a device borrowed from his backyard railroad—in concert with dense tree plantings about the perimeter. Second, such landscaping must also provide **ambiance** and set an overall tone throughout the park. Evans called this "visual mood music" (Janzen & Janzen, 1996, p. 8) and it includes the kinetics of

breezes blowing through foliage along with bird activity. Third, this landscaping must provide **comfort**, which in the context of the bright sun of Southern California or Central Florida means shade (or in the inclement weather of Tokyo or Paris, often shelter). Fourth—and this is landscaping's narrative role—all plantings and hardscape designs provide a **visual palette** establishing the environment for each themed area or "land." As Evans noted on another occasion, this is a subtle art, as his focus is on "growing things to look as if you had sort of stumbled across them and found them there naturally." (Bright, 1987, p. 73). Fifth, landscaping in the thematic mode must provide **separation** and establish harmonious visual barriers between each visual narrative. This was particularly important at Disneyland, which differs from earlier parks as it has more than one theme, each with their own setting of time and place, unified by the Plaza Hub. For this integration to work, landscaping must clearly and harmoniously delineate each area. Lastly, just as the landscape must exclude outer distractions, it must obviate inner workings. Thematic landscaping provides **concealment** by keeping park operations hidden from guests, the intrusion of which would diminish the otherwise immersive qualities of these environments. Yet all six properties are equally invested in protecting fantasy and illusion, for thematic design requires "an atmosphere that encourages the guests' suspension of disbelief" (Hench & Van Pelt, 2003, p. 124).

5.3 Landscape Design in the Thematic Mode: Cohesion and Transition

There are two additional principles which Bill Evans did not mention, and these arise from the first six elements operating in toto: **cohesion** and **transition**. While the Evanses were skilled in procurement and plantings, it soon became evident that the brothers simply had no training in planning and design (Pierce, 2016). Thus, it fell to landscape architect Ruth Shellhorn, educated at Cornell, to introduce these aspects to the Disneyland project.[5] She is noteworthy for not only being the only woman on the site, but also a licensed practitioner and the only designer who was not hired from a Hollywood studio (Comras, 2016). Shellhorn's diaries, available for study in the Charles E. Young Research library at UCLA, confirm the project was very taxing for her. She faced impossible deadlines and male colleagues who did not take her seriously (Comras, 2012). Her grading corrections were met with disbelief and resistance, and she was ostracized as a result (Pierce, 2016). Nor was she given credit. Disney management later had approval over a piece Shellhorn wrote for *LAM* in which Jack Evans insisted to the company that Shellhorn be "billed as his assistant" (Shellhorn, 1956; Snow, 2019). Despite all this, she was the one trained landscape architect of the entire site, and her top priority at Disneyland was **cohesion**. Having the park "hang together" was foremost on Disney's mind, and Shellhorn proffered that a thorough landscape plan would address problems of visual disparity, crowd dispersal and flow, and site organization (Comras, 2016). Because each area or "land" had its own art director, and each theme establishes its own setting of time and place, landscaping at Disneyland serves as the single binding agent for the park. Over the years this philosophy of cohesion has become a core principle of Disney park design (Ellis, 1990).

Figure 1: Disneyland Paris (2008). Left: *Adventureland*, with a tropical, exotic jungle motif. Right: English portion of *Fantasyland*, which is styled with formal gardens. Photos by Gottwald.

In a survey of Disneyland park, Charles W. Moore noted the "remarkable use of propinquity, the close juxtaposition of very disparate places" (Moore, Becker, & Cambell, 1984, p. 38). This is, in part, due to the

application of cohesion. Perhaps even more crucial is **transition**. In her 1956 article, it is the single topic which Ruth Shellhorn is most concerned with. Bill Evans was clear about the role of separation, but because Disneyland's visual realms are presented *cohesively*, the transitions between each are paramount in both blending the internally cohesive spaces together and in managing the movement and flow between each space (Figure 1). Shellhorn noted the challenges she faced, where often buildings were split depending on which theme they faced (Shellhorn, 1956). Moore praised the transition work of Shellhorn, noting that the park is actively "choreographing our walk through changing spaces….between the lands...appropriate landscaping and changes in architecture ease you from one to the other" (Moore, Becker, & Cambell, 1984, p. 38). This was not required, for example, at a primary antecedent to the theme park model, the aforementioned 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Lukas, 2008). Delineation between content zones on the *Midway Plaisance* was based on a grid plan (Adams, 1991). Exotic visual flavors as expressed in re-created villages from around the world were compartmentalized, and other exhibitions were presented completely indoors, isolated in large halls (Lucas, 2008; Silverman, 2019). Exteriors were unified via Beaux-Arts architecture, thus various styles and motifs did not require negotiation (Mitrasinovic, 2006). So while the 1893 Fair and others like it did indeed present *themes*, they were not yet as such designed *thematically*. These environments lacked a praxis which did not yet exist.

5.4 The Thematic Praxis

Before looking at types of spatial transitions in the theme park model, we need to contextualize their cinematic roots. *Thematic design* refers to an interdisciplinary practice inclusive of planning and executing projects within the built environment; it is an environmental language employing architecture and landscape architecture yet distinctly independent of either (Klingmann, 2007; Lonsway, 2009). This vocabulary originated in filmic grammar, first fully expressed as noted above with Disneyland in the mid-1950s (Lukas, 2008). Disneyland is the sui generis source for the thematic praxis: a whole suite of visual, spatial, tactile, and olfactory techniques which are aimed at providing immersion in which "authenticity is created as a feeling" (Lukas, 2007, p. 6). We underscore that *thematic* connotes the working discipline itself—its philosophies, methodologies, and processes—whereas *themed* describes the resultant spaces (Gottwald & Turner-Rahman, 2019; Lukas, 2007). This praxis is antithetical to traditional architectural planning (Klingmann, 2007). Instead thematic design is a coalescence of film sets and the storyboard planning process within the built environment.

Set design is a natural extension of scenic design for the theater. Yet as cinematography advanced during the 1920s, adding dolly work and cranes, viewing a film became an *active* experience inseparable from the camera's point of view (POV) (Affron & Affron, 1995). This shift necessitated new approaches to the design of sets. As the camera, and by extension the audience, could now navigate and penetrate the 'stage', sets had to evolve beyond crudely constructed flats. They became augmented with interior decor, furnishings, and props (Affron & Affron, 1995; Ramírez, 2004). Soon after, production designers trained in the theater arts were performing more architectural roles in both planning and construction, and many architects were employed by studios (Macfarland, 1920). Thus, what was once merely scenic was transformed into something environmental; these new sets became worlds for actors to *inhabit* (Affron & Affron, 1995). There are six properties of this new discipline which establish set design for early film as independent from traditional architecture: sets are ephemeral, fragmentary, hyperbolic, flexible and mobile, inconsistent in proportion, and only orthogonal when structurally required (Ramírez, 2004). Thematic design employs a hybrid form of this: permanent, fixed, and less fragmented (like architecture), yet still proportionally disparate and often wildly hyperbolic (like film sets). So while the structures of World's Fairs and expositions prior were indeed exaggerated and temporary, they pre-dated motion pictures and were thus not influenced by set design (Silverman, 2019). The planning of these new cinematic environments is derived from the practice of storyboarding. In the late 1920s at the Disney Studios, storyboards were formalized as a sequential planning tool (Barrier, 2003; Finch, 2011). Such boards provide geography (backgrounds and settings), continuity (sequential action and motion), diagram (acts, scenes, transitions), and cohesion (a comprehensive plan) (ibid). The vital element which storyboarding contributes to thematic design is the notion of planning spaces sequentially as a series of interconnected scenes, rendering the built environment as a setting, edifice as façade, and interiors as vignettes. Spatially, this is a shift "from composition to choreography" (Klingmann, 2007, p. 206) and a radical departure from traditional architecture.

In summation, the thematic praxis favors the filmic over the architectonic; a set of linear, narrative sequences over a program; the emotional organization of space over the rational. Theme parks are cinematic landscapes. And unlike at the fairs of the 19th century, the immersivity and "total theater"[6] makes transitions between each individual themed environment—each set of scenes—crucial. Like cohesion, transition is a core principle for Disney as "landscapes must smoothly guide guests from one stage to the next" (Markey 2006, p. 21). And those transitions come directly from film.

6 FILMIC GRAMMAR IN THE LANDSCAPE

6.1 Filmic Punctuation: Six Types

Cinema has long been described as a particular medium due to its sequencing. In 1936, French filmmaker and critic Roger Leenhardt declared that "continuity is experienced as rhythm" (Abel, 1993, p. 203) and noted "the unusual significance of transitions in the cinema, what could be called punctuation" (ibid). Leenhardt thus established a basic grammar for these transitions which have since been widely adopted and expanded upon by other commentators. Thus, we find a similar grammar being applied as was adopted by Brown in describing his landscape designs (Willis, 1981). In themed environments, transitional zones are a form of editing between spatial sequences (Hench & Van Pelt, 2003). This transference is not altogether surprising. For example, the editor of *The Godfather* (1972) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), among many other films, once described editing as "not so much a *putting together* as it is a *discovery of a path* [emphasis original]" (Murch, 2001, p. 4). Similarly, the theme park model relies on such edits to form a path; to facilitate the negotiation of content visually, spatially, and cognitively. Just as with cinema, this "punctuation" in Leenhardt's words is what manages the thematic experience, paces it, and allows its navigation and comprehension. The effect is a transformation of one's relationship with the landscape from aesthetic to experiential (Truniger, 2013).

Figure 2. Left: Disneyland, architectural cut between lands (2007). Center: Disneyland Paris, hardscape cut between lands (2008). Photos by Gottwald. Right: Magic Kingdom, ellipsis between lands. (2016). Street view image ©2020 Google.

The **cut** is the crudest form of film editing. One shot is replaced by another, with no attempt at transition. Lacking duration, a cut is essentially timeless, and derives its meaning from juxtaposition, rather than interaction (Spottiswoode, 1962). In thematic design, such cuts are a common feature of less sophisticated environments such as those of Cedar Fair or Six Flags parks, as they are inexpensive and require less consideration. Yet cuts are also featured in the more refined designs of Disney and Universal. Typically these stark divisions between themed zones employ a blunt shift in the hardscape, and/or changes to adjacent accents such as railings, fences, lighting fixtures, and wayfinding. Sometimes the motif of façades are split directly down the middle, with care also given to the rooflines, as can be seen between *Adventureland* and *Main Street U.S.A.* at Disneyland park (Figure 2, left). Such a hardscape transition is implemented between *Frontierland* and *Fantasyland* at Disneyland Paris park (Figure 2, center), where materials transform curtly and without warning, creating a visible divide in the landscape and clear differentiation for the guest. This sort of abruptness is not unfamiliar to us, for it is seen constantly in urban environments. One site is designed without consideration for its neighbors and the edges between are defined by disregard for continuity. In a thematic context, such breaks are simply planned carefully and executed with greater attention to detail; abrupt, yet contiguous, paced, and sequential.

If the cut is the crudest, the **fade** is perhaps the plainest; an efficient transition which is softer than a cut yet lacks visual interest. Although an image can be faded into any dominant color, the most typical is a fade out—or "fade to black"—and a white-out—or "fade to white" (Arijon, 1991). The translation of fades into environments could be interpreted as instances where light levels are shifted, as when guests move into darkness or are compelled into bright areas; the time it takes eyesight to adjust is essentially the duration of the fade. A common example is when guests emerge from an interior or deeply shaded area into a space which is intentionally staged in direct sunlight. At theme parks, many attractions and experiences are indoors in either partial or full darkness, so in the course of their visit guests will encounter far more "fades" than they would in a typical landscape.

Related to the fade is "the essence of the cinema" (Abel, 1993, p. 203), the **ellipsis**. Roger Leenhardt noted that a fade "leaves a void but creates a bridge" (ibid) and that its duration controls pace and rhythm in film, perhaps allowing the audience some respite after a tense moment. Although Leenhardt considered an ellipsis a moment which could be fulfilled by either a fade or a wipe, as expressed in environments, ellipses are elongated pauses. By moving guests through a neutral area devoid of theming, they experience a refreshed visual palette. These zones allow for sensory modulation, preparing guests to cognitively adjust from one content focus to another.

Such an approach is used at the Magic Kingdom park at Walt Disney World in multiple locations. The most salient example is the transition between *Tomorrowland* to *Fantasyland* (Figure 2, right). In this instance, guests leave behind the bright concrete walls and playful neon lighting of the comic book retro-futurism of *Tomorrowland* and enter a meandering path that traverses an expansive lawn alongside the park's railroad tracks. The black metal railings are nondescript and suggests no particular motif. Other hardscape elements are equally bland and purely functional. This space, especially combined with the subtle grade changes and mature trees, acts as a prolonged visual reset for guests before they arrive at the quite different Medieval European fairytale theme of *Fantasyland*. The drastic visual contrast between the two themes, as well as their physical distance from each other, makes an ellipsis the best choice in this instance. Transitions like this are effective but require more space than may be available to achieve the right duration.

In the case of a **wipe**, cinema appears to have borrowed a technique long practiced in constructed environments—a reveal. There are two kinds of wipes in film. The first is when a new scene appears from the left or right (or even above) and seems to "push" the current one out. In the second, a thin line travels across the screen, and the effect is that of a new scene being revealed "beneath" the departing one (Arijon, 1991). The critique leveled against wipes—which quite possibly led to their disuse—is their obvious self-awareness, by "drawing attention to the reality of the screen" (Spottiswoode, 1962, p. 121). Yet in architecture, this kind of reveal is timeless, and such transitions pose no experiential problems as we immediately interpret their constructed form and purpose (Ching, 1996). Reveals as one moves around an object is also a classic practice utilized by landscape designers. Mannerist gardens shifted the visitor on and off a main axis to repeatedly reveal the view of said axis; Le Notre revealed the gardens at Vaux-le-Vicomte through subtle grade change, and Olmsted used sinuous curves through the plantings of Central Park to reveal spaces and vistas (Hazlehurst, 1980). Constructed environments are replete with horizontal wipes; they essentially function every time a corner is turned, a wall ends, or a threshold passed.

The **iris** is perhaps the most common transition in themed spaces. In film it was first used as a shrinking circle to draw attention to an isolated element. Later it was overused as a transition and then only appeared to close cartoon shorts (Arijon, 1991). Today the iris is only a prop; like the wipe, it is employed either for nostalgia purposes or to self-reflexively establish a period setting. In thematic design, its translation lives on in the extensive use of tunnels and bridge underpasses to stage emerging viewpoints. Texts in landscape architecture admire space modulation as expressed by the compression and release afforded by tunnels; "one may, by planned intent, be so compressed into a low, tight, dark space, that release into a lofty, dazzling, free space is startling and dramatic" (Simonds, 1961, p. 152).

Figure 3. Left: Disneyland, east entry tunnel iris, exit view (2007).
Right: Magic Kingdom, gateway iris between lands (2007). Photos by Gottwald.

It is uncertain whether Walt Disney knew this formally, but he certainly understood the concept instinctually. Two entry tunnels form the very first transitional zone at Disneyland park (Figure 3, left). Upon entering either the left or right tunnel from this plaza, the momentary darkness created by the passage heightens the feeling of anticipation of entering the park which is enhanced by the berm and railroad above. Although the tunnel is the most effective way to accomplish compression and release, theme park landscapes are also replete with bridges to walk under and or gateways to pass through which facilitate similar sensations (Figure 3, right).

Lastly, the **dissolve** is the most sophisticated transition in the thematic context. In film, the effect is particularly valuable for creating visual continuity between unrelated sequences when juxtaposition would be disorienting (Dmytrk, 1984). Two scenes are overlaid atop one another; the first fades out while the second fades in simultaneously. Dissolves are so effective because their lengths are variable, making a shift between disparate scenes as gradual as the editor desires. In the thematic context, once again, John Hench gives Walt Disney himself credit for this innovation, calling the technique the “three dimensional cross-dissolve” (Haas, 1978). Ruth Shellhorn began this practice in the landscape with her plantings at Disneyland (Comras, 2016). Yet for Hench, a successful dissolve is a completely *multisensory* technique, and when achieved, “there is no confusion for guests—the soles of their feet tell them where they are. Their hands feel it; their eyes and ears know it, too” (Hench & Van Pelt, 2003, p. 79).[7] Thus a dissolve is complex, requiring a smooth interlock of *all* the various thematic elements—spatial, visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory.

Figure 4. Left: Disneyland, successful dissolve into *Adventureland* (2019). Street view image ©2020 Google. Right: Disneyland, unsuccessful dissolve into *Frontierland* (2019). Photo by George.

In *Adventureland*, such a dissolve is masterfully applied through the careful balance and shifting of all the environmental elements (Figure 4, left). Adjacent to the Plaza Hub, planting design immediately shifts to a palette of tropical understory plants. As guests progress, the ground plane transitions to warm flagstone with an irregular edge, shortly after the first fixtures with a jungle/tropical setting can be found. Next, the

railing changes to a bamboo fence. It is at this point that towering tropical plantings emerge in the form of a dense stand of bamboo. Lastly, architectural elements are encountered as guests are now fully immersed in the theme. Yet dissolves can also deliver a jarring experience when executed poorly. For example, the transition between *Adventureland* and *Frontierland* works well when walking from the Old West setting, as the stockade wall of that area's fort extends into the jungle area and the plantings blend seamlessly. However, when approached from the opposite direction, the scene is starkly different, as the stockade wall is not readily visible from this direction and the lush tropical plantings overpower the mountain plantings of *Frontierland* (Figure 4, right). The result is a transition that inadvertently feels like an abrupt cut. Here we note that although the filmic grammar of Disney parks is well considered, it is not always applied successfully.

6.2 Filmic Ecotones: The Multi-Modal Approach

We suggest that the most effective thematic transitions are multi-modal; that is, they employ more than one type of filmic grammar. These more complex transitions provide greater subtlety and duration, especially when plantings are considered in concert with structural accents. At this level, filmic punctuation evolves beyond a form of mere editing to something of an environmental feature—what we term a *filmic ecotone*. This metaphor is sure to be provocative to ecologists, who employ *ecotone* to describe natural transitions, alternately called *edge conditions* or *edge effects*. Yet as Anne Whiston Spirn (1998) argues in *The Language of Landscape*, human environments are constructed of a grammar employing multiple metaphors, some of which connect directly to our experiences in the natural world. Though the translations are not literal, the affectations are authentic (ibid). Ecotones are where vegetation and animal life commingle in a single community or series of communities (Thomas, Maser, & Rodiek, 1979). An ecotone is thus less a juncture and more a collage, and it is common to find greater diversity of populations and of ecological complexity within an ecotone than in the bordering communities (Odum, 1990). The diversity of such an environment thus contributes to its vibrancy. Again, we stress our approach is metaphorical. In considering this complexity—structured, layered, and rich—*experientially,* we find that the multi-modal approach to transitions creates spaces which are also vibrant. The diversity of filmic grammar employed results in a transition between themed areas which feels uncannily natural and unplanned to the theme park guest. As in the natural world, intermixing often equals richness.

For a pronounced example of the filmic ecotone, we point to a pair of entries into the most recent addition to Disneyland park, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge.* This new fourteen-acre themed land is connected to two far older and elaborately realized existing landscapes—*Frontierland* (the Old West) and *Critter Country* (the Antebellum Deep South). Both areas are lushly planted and establish not only Earth-bound motifs, but very specific American notions of time and place. The eastern transition between *Galaxy's Edge* and *Frontierland* utilizes an iris, dissolve, and cut (Figure 5, top row). A tunnel under the railroad tracks serves as an iris transition. However, it is markedly different from other iris transitions in the park because of the wall treatments, ground plane, and fixtures which establish the cut and dissolve effects. Here repetition and overlay are employed to gradually shift guests from one land to the other. Leaving *Galaxy's Edge,* the tunnel walls are composed of carved stone with horizontal striation. This abruptly cuts to railroad timber halfway through, including the ceiling, in keeping with the Old West setting of *Frontierland*. Both sides of the passage are flanked with appropriate sconces; somewhat otherworldly on the *Star Wars* side, with flickering hurricane lamps along the Western half. There is a distinct edge between, yet the overlaying dissolves—through the use of repetition and alignment—blur the shift with added complexity and subtlety. The transition is further enhanced by the smooth, gray-toned concrete ground plane of *Galaxy's Edge* extending two-thirds of the way through the tunnel, before changing to the warm tones of *Frontierland*. Likewise, the riprap at the base of the walls from *Galaxy's Edge* extends by the same ratio. This mismatch between the reach of hardscape and the tunnel contours is deliberate and well considered, for the variety of cuts creates a gradual blend, what John Hench called "a flow of relations" (Haas, 1978, p. 16).

Unlike the transition into *Frontierland* for which a tunnel passage is the nexus, the connection to *Critter Country* is drawn out and primarily occurs in either direction prior to an open-air railroad bridge (Figure 5, center and bottom rows). When walking from *Galaxy's Edge*, the first element to emerge is a dark, free-standing wall of stacked railroad ties on the south side of the path. The wall's color tones match the bridge as seen further down, drawing attention onward. Past this initial wall, there is one last *Star Wars* lighting fixture before the lanterns of *Critter Country* begin. The hardscape cuts here as well, with the

exception of a rock curbing which continues all the way under the bridge. Plantings are well-blended, shifting from an exotic palette in *Galaxy's Edge* to the varied forest of *Critter Country*. On the south side, a split rail fence from *Critter Country* extends to a point nearly opposite the wall on the north side, but a large standing rock in *Galaxy's Edge* conceals this fence until the path turns to reveal it, creating a wipe transition. The seemingly incongruous dissolves on either side of the path make the most sense when considered from both directions. The "S" curve of the hardscape—a reveal that Walt Disney introduced in his backyard—combines wipes with various dissolves. This shifts sensory focus from left to right when entering *Galaxy's Edge*, and the reverse when entering *Critter Country*. From an experiential, emotive perspective, this multi-modal transition is perhaps the most realized in Disneyland park. The iris serves as the anchor (certainty), the curve of the path forms a concealment and revealment from either direction (anticipation), and all supporting cuts and dissolves are multisensory, varied, and graduated.

Figure 5: Disneyland, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* multi-modal transitions (2019). Top row: east entry from *Frontierland*. Center and bottom rows: west entry from *Critter Country*. Photos by George.

7 CONCLUSION

As noted above, with the exception of Ruth Shellhorn, neither licensed design practitioners of landscapes nor the built environment was involved with designing Disneyland park. When Walt Disney was still alive, he acted as creative director to a handpicked staff of mostly animators, painters, writers, and production designers (Pierce, 2016). WED (as the shop was called in the earlier years)[8] was run as an adjunct of the Disney Studios (Barrier, 2007). Yet in the decades since, the renamed Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI) has reorganized itself into more professional departments comprising some 140 fields from electrical engineering to psychology and became completely independent from the film and animation arms of the company (Bright, 1987). By the late 2000s, WDI had a permanent staff of at least a dozen landscape architects, with another dozen or so providing ongoing, embedded consultation; all licensed,

ASLA members (Jost, 2009). Today WDI's design process is about as far from the ad-hoc Evans nursery days as it has ever been.

Despite this formalization, the company's filmic approach to spatial design remains paramount. Multisensory stories, conceived in sequence, are the desired product, and the architecture disciplines are employed to support that goal. "The stories [Disney's designers] tell are not fine literature, but they add a richness not found in most landscapes….Everything must tie back to this story, from the plants to the garbage cans" (ibid, p. 54, 56).

One might suppose that, although arrived at via filmic grammar, the transitions at work in the theme park model are simply the same techniques which landscape architects have used for centuries; an iris is compression and expansion, a cut is juxtaposition, and so on. Yet it goes beyond vocabulary. What makes the spatial design of Disney's themed environments unique (and powerful, and profitable, and yes, problematic) is the filmic *approach*, the focus on the *emotional organization* of space rather than the rational (Klingmann, 2007). Disney treats the visitors of their parks like "guests" which is to say, as an *experiential audience* (Marling, 1997). To that end they always design from a first-person perspective, from the POV of the movie camera (Hench & Van Pelt, 2003). This makes their parks highly immersive, stimulating, and above all, entertaining, where the story reigns supreme.[9] Most of the company's landscape architects do not participate in the writing process, but are called upon during the conceptual or schematic phase when the spatial narrative has already been fleshed out (Jost, 2009). And they are always called in the service of spatial experiences organized with filmic grammar. As Paul Comstock, lead landscape architect for Disney's Animal Kingdom park, once put it quite literally, "Landscape *is* the set; it *is* the show" (Malmberg, 1998 p. 86).

The experiential power of filmic transition zones need not be limited to the theme park model. Thematic landscapes ought to be of special interest to designers because the adjacencies are often dramatic and conflicting, as is common to many urban settings, so negotiating diverse environmental motifs successfully is a challenging problem. In addition, thematic design places emphasis on an element which is often overlooked by designers of constructed environments: *time*. As the theme park model is a fusion of cinema and space, it is also an amalgam of *time* and *place*; a four-dimensional, temporal experience. Yet unlike film, where only a single transition is typically applied per sequence, the landscape has the capacity to simultaneously support multiple transitions. As we argue, such a multi-modal approach leads to richer, more naturalistic, and more experientially coherent results.

Designers of constructed environments, whether landscape or architectonic, may find many elements adaptable to a variety of projects by considering all the techniques outlined here. The concept of the filmic ecotone, in which a multi-modal approach of ellipsis, iris, and various wipes and dissolves are combined, provides the most seamless transition through a rich experience of passage through a shifting space. Often the edges between landscapes are not considered zones, but rather mere lines; firm, sharp edges which abruptly signal the passage from one to the next. As natural ecotones (as well as our metaphorical filmic ones) demonstrate, there is much more to interaction than boundaries; there is an undeniable vibrancy which contributes to flow and cohesion. Still, while the theme park exemplifies both filmic grammar and transitional spaces, both are of value outside the thematic context. Whyte notes that the success or failure of a plaza starts with the seamless transition from the street where "it's hard to tell where one ends and the other begins" (Whyte, 1980, p. 57). As noted earlier, this is precisely what Charles W. Moore noted was so successfully executed at Disneyland. Designers of a public park might consider how the application of filmic grammar in a transitional space could heighten the sense of arrival and help transport the user to an experience of respite from urban life. In such ways, transitional zones in themed environments can inform the practice of landscape architecture in designing plans that more cohesively fit the gestalt of the surrounding landscape, both at a site and macro level. Furthermore, thematic design demonstrates that creating cross-site cohesion need not be dependent upon materials and plantings, but rather can be achieved by carefully staging filmic transitions that reflect and respect the adjoining sites. In this respect, when well-executed, these zones provide evidence of how successful innovative design can be in shaping identity and experience in the landscape. Despite this potential, future research is needed into the use of filmic grammar in landscapes outside of a theme park setting to better establish what impact such an approach may have and what modifications may be necessary.

8 ENDNOTES

[1] Often the only reliable direct quotes and biographical profiles for Disney designers come from works published in one form or another by the company. References to these sources are limited to where it is most appropriate. See: Hench & Van Pelt, 2003; Kurtti, 2008 et al.

[2] ~$250,000 in 2019.

[3] This and similar quotes are taken from *The "E" Ticket* magazine, published 1986–2009. The title remains an invaluable independent primary source due to the number of interviews with Disney designers, and the issues are archived at the Walt Disney Family Museum.

[4] When California enacted state licensing for landscape architects in 1954, both Evans brothers were "grandfathered in." See: Comras, 2016, p. 217.

[5] Shellhorn left Cornell in 1933 without a degree, believing herself to be four units short. The fact that she had actually completed the full units for both a degree in architecture *and* landscape architecture was finally corrected by the university in 2005, a year and a half before she died. See: Comras, 2016.

[6] When Italian philosopher Umberto Eco visited Disneyland in the early 1970s, he described the immersive qualities of the theme park as being "total theater" See: Eco 1986, 45–46.

[7] Hench is widely cited as the most articulate Disney designer to describe the lexicon of thematic design and its close connections to filmic grammar. See: Haas, 1978; Hench & Van Pelt, 2003.

[8] "**W**alter **E**lias **D**isney." The man's full name, to distinguish the company from the Disney Studios.

[9] "...our primary goal is to entertain." Jeff Morosky, ASLA, director of landscape architecture at WDI, quoted in Jost, 2009, p. 54.

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