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On 13 March 2020, in light of the rapidly spreading COVID-19 pandemic, the Walt Disney Company announced that it would temporarily suspend operations in its United States theme parks. Even the most optimistic timeline predicted a closure of unprecedented length. Visitors that were directly affected ranged from those with upcoming once-in-a-lifetime trips to Walt Disney World in Orlando, FL, to the annual passholders who visit the Anaheim, CA, parks weekly. Perhaps more surprisingly, the news also indirectly affected an extensive fan community who engage with the parks from home by watching YouTube livestreams or following the Instagram accounts of regular visitors, and who converse about the parks regularly on social media. Suddenly, the “inhabitable text” (Telotte 2008, p. 117) of the park was neither physically nor remotely accessible. Disney fans—who were already conditioned to perform creative labor on social media outside of the park (Williams 2020, p. 69)—spent the next few months finding new ways to inhabit the parks: playing the game *Planet Coaster* (Frontier Developments 2016), building Disneyland in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (Nintendo EPD 2020), and re-creating their favorite park snacks at home (Moulton 2020).

On social media, the most visible of these efforts was the #homemadeDisney (or, similarly #homemadeUniversal or #homemadeThemePark) trend in which fans made videos that used everyday objects to re-create rides in their houses and backyards. These mimetic videos were prime examples of “multimodal texts that facilitate participation by reappropriation, by balancing a fixed premise with novel expression” (Milner 2018, p. 15). In these videos, individuals, families, and friends performed the ‘fun’ of the parks in a way that showed how “playfulness is being used as a recognised coping strategy” to mitigate the “fear and anxiety generated by the coronavirus pandemic” (Tonkin and Whitaker 2021, n.pag.). The #homemadeDisney viral trend proliferated because of “a common tongue allowing geographically dispersed participants to connect and share” (Milner 2018, p. 7) their fandom while Disney’s theme parks remained closed. Building on Milner’s analysis of mimetic logics, the act of making #homemadeDisney videos can be viewed through the lens of philosopher Kendall Walton’s (1990, pp. 59–60) conceptualizations of make-believe, in which everyday objects and existing works of narrative function as props to play in shared, fictional worlds. Against this background, I will examine a complex intangible prop: the *experience* of the theme park as “a total-sensory-engaging environmental art form built to express a coherent but multi-layered message” (King 2002, p. 3). Moreover, as a particular expression of the theme park experience, Telotte’s concept of a *ride aesthetic* (2008, p. 175) is explored in more detail by looking through the extensive collection of #homemadeDisney videos to identify which subjects and techniques resonated with the trend’s many participants.

The Origins of #homemadeDisney

The social media phenomenon began inauspiciously when Disney fan Jess Siswick's trip to Walt Disney World for a social media marketing and branding conference was abruptly cancelled. The event continued with virtual participation and Siswick used those days to creatively combine her career in content and video production with her Disney Fandom. Siswick began the morning of 11 March using her @radiologydraws Twitter account to tweet and tag a series of photos taken from her home pretending to pack her suitcase and going to the airport. Later that evening, she posted: "Living my best #RaganDisney conference life. What #TravelBan? What a Great evening at 'Magic Kingdom'!" (@radiologydraws 2020, n.pag.), attaching a 27-second video that went largely unnoticed at the time. After the conference concluded, however, Siswick returned to her more public @tinymallet Twitter account to repost the video and other she had created (see Figure 1).

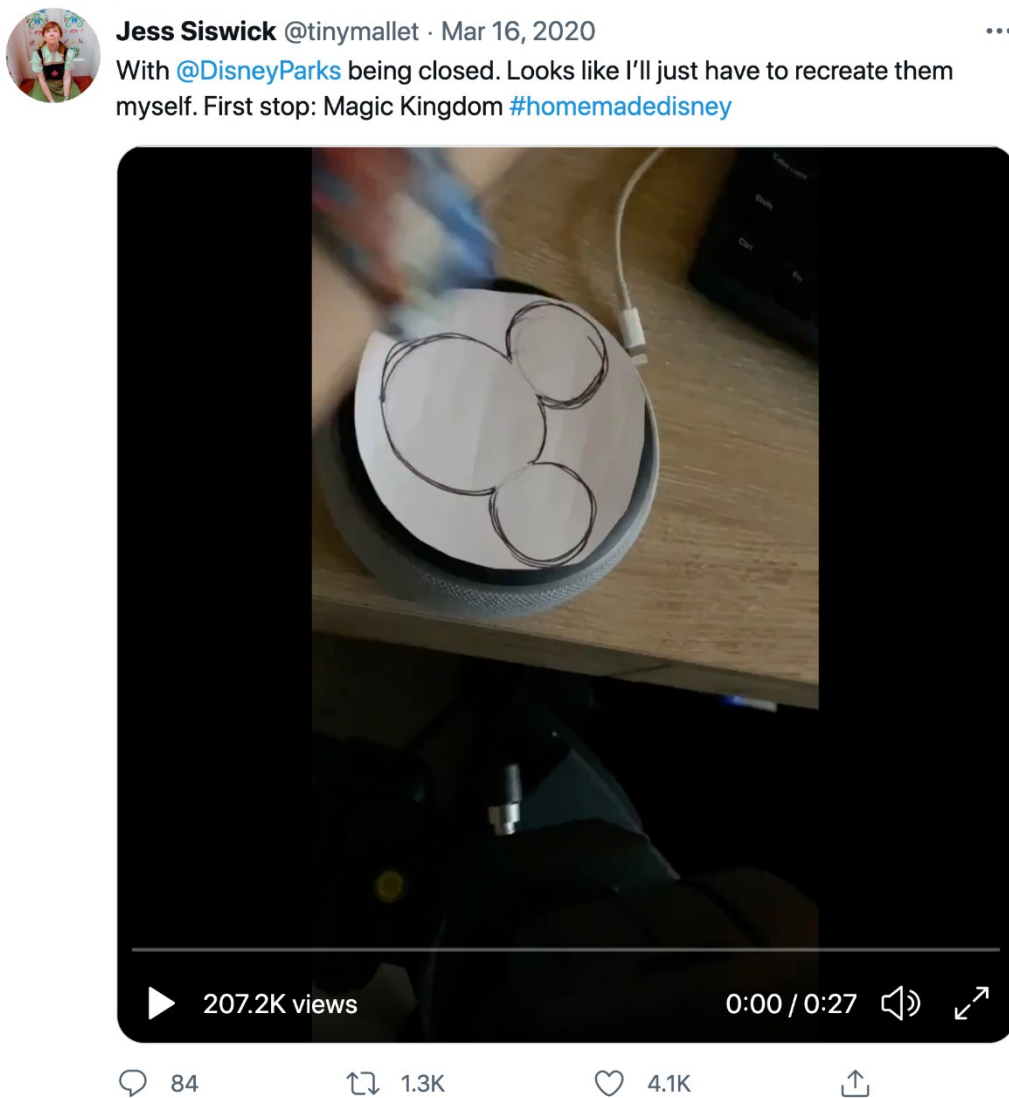


Figure 1: On 16 March 2020, Siswick's tweeted this video again on her primary account (@tinymallet 2020a).

The many #homemadeDisney contributions in the months after this post followed the “multimodal grammar” (Milner 2018, p. 49) that Siswick had unintentionally established. Her video, which is worth describing for posterity, used quick cuts to create a montage of Magic Kingdom events. It began with her tapping a Magic Band (the RFID-enabled wristband Walt Disney World in Florida uses to store ticketing and other information) with a handmade paper Mickey Mouse logo adhered to the top of an Amazon Echo Dot. The glowing blue ring of the Dot—accompanied by an unmistakable ‘ding!’—mimicked the interactive Disney ticket scanning interface. The video quickly cut to a point-of-view shot of her ‘walking’ beneath a plastic model of the “Here You Leave Today and Enter the World of Yesterday, Tomorrow and Fantasy” sign that adorns the arches into the Magic Kingdom park. This was followed by a camera shot of a painting in which a girl is enthusiastically pointing to Cinderella’s Castle, Siswick spinning like a teacup in an office chair while listening to the “Unbirthday Song” from *Alice in Wonderland* (Geronimi et al. 1951), and a Beefeater Bear standing in front of an illustration of the Tower Bridge while “It’s a Small World” played in the background. The video concludes with Siswick ‘visiting’ the Haunted Mansion—an effect accomplished by turning her lights green, playing an audio clip from Séance Room, and cleverly recreating the ‘floating crystal ball’ by holding a glass bulb in front of a video of the spiritualist Madam Leota playing on an iPad. In each of these short scenes, Siswick demonstrates her ingenuity: collectibles and objects found around her home were edited with music, while Siswick herself performs as the theme parkgoer.

The subject matter and the context of the pandemic connecting people on social media inspired “iteration after iteration from a fixed premise” (Milner 2018, p. 29) as Siswick’s original video and the subsequent videos resonated with participants. Theme park fans produced similar videos that were (to draw from Deborah Tannen’s [2007] linguistic concept of conversation) *prepatterned* to express ideas using a template (Milner 2018, p. 85). In addition to the unifying concept of re-creating a ride experience, Siswick established the expectation that performances were expected to be ‘low budget’ and personal. The trend also reinforced Milner’s observation that mimetic media replicates because of low barriers to entry; the *bricoleur* #homemadeDisney producer is quite literally “making do” with “whatever’s at hand” because they were stuck in their homes (Milner 2018, p. 61). Rallying around this viral trend, a subset of Disney theme park fans (some of whom engage with one another but many who might not) formed a temporary “buzzing collective” (Milner 2018, p. 33) of creativity. Extensive previous work on Disney fandom validates the concept of productive engagement in-person and online with this media conglomerate (Baker 2016; Kiriakou 2018; Koren-Kuik 2013; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018; Williams 2020; Williams-Turkowski 2020). The Disney parks thus appear as “texts [that] carry personal meaning and importance” which “motivates the creation, circulation, and transformation essential to memetic media” (Milner 2018, p. 29). The way theme parks *resonate* with their visitors evidently also helped drive virality—and it was especially resonant because of the circumstances of the pandemic in which people were seeking solace in the familiar. This sort of playfulness was encouraged by the New Economics Foundation’s “Five Ways to Wellbeing” project (Tonkin and Whitaker 2021, n.pag.). Online, participants (1) *connected* through the social media hashtag and comments, (2) were *active* in their creation of their own videos, (3) *took notice* of their immediate surroundings to make the best of a bad situation, (4) learned by watching others, and (5) gave back to the collective good “as people from

all walks of life have come together to offer support, encouragement and hope to one another in a time of national crisis” (Tonkin and Whitaker 2021, n.pag.). #homemadeDisney participants found each other on social media, appreciated the work each other were making, and looked around their homes to figure out how to get involved.

The typically short (usually 30–90 seconds) videos from #homemadeDisney and other related hashtags turned ‘guests’ into ‘cast members’ (staff) and smartphone owners into living room ‘imagineering’ ride designers. Siswick established the techniques used by subsequent #homemadeDisney creators: household objects, official souvenirs, YouTube videos, and photos as props, sound effects and music, and a combination of rider perspectives. A range of variations evolved from these unofficial grammars, but the subject of concern here are those videos that involve portrayals of ride and attraction experiences. (This then excludes demonstrations of homemade props, showcases of park merchandise or collectibles, and food and craft instructional videos.) The ride videos were akin to the ‘cultish appreciation’ of the *swede* amateur movie re-creation style (Mathijs and Sexton 2012; Moulton 2020).

This article emerges from a survey of 150 English-language videos collected from Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. They primarily feature members of the same household because they were created when much of the United States was under stay-at-home orders for the pandemic. Some received tens of thousands of views and were shared widely, while others remained in obscurity. Some were created by notable theme park influencers, while many others emerged from people who just wanted to play along. This study specifically focuses on videos that depicted ‘attractions’ (a catch-all term for rides and shows), which allows for an in-depth examination of how fans interpret specific qualities of the *ride aesthetic* (Telotte 2008, p. 176). As a result, it excludes other #DIYDisney efforts such as re-creating theme park snacks at home. And it exclusively refers to Disney-related videos, though #homemadeUniversal emerged for Universal Studios and #homemadeThemePark broadened the trend’s appeal. The videos catalogued primarily come from Twitter (whether in real time or via scraping the public search API during the summer of 2020), though many were duplicated across social networks. TikTok videos were popular, but more difficult to collect after-the-fact because of the way the service limits its hashtag browsing interface. YouTube videos tended to be longer with higher production value, while Instagram proved the least fruitful because videos and photos are mixed in the feed. These types of videos trended from mid-March through the end of April and slowed drastically after May 2020. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, #homemadeDisney videos revealed how fans interpreted their own personal relationship to the parks through playful performance and make-believe.

Playing Along with a Social Media Trend

Looking at the ‘retweet’ (RT) and ‘like’ counts for Siswick’s initial run of #homemadeDisney tweets (even a year later) paints a picture of the trend. Her first video on 16 March totaled about 1,190 retweets and 4,150 likes, likely because it was indeed the first and was featured in a few articles highlighting the #homemadeDisney trend. It was admired by a handful of notable Disney Park fans including Sarah Sterling and Tiffany Minkus. After a simple (and relatively low-

retweeted/liked) tweet from later that day, “[t]hinking of park hopping this evening #homeMadeDisney” (@tinymallet 2020b, n.pag.), Siswick followed up the initial video with a photo of a soccer ball illuminated with colored lighting to emulate the geodesic dome Spaceship Earth with the caption: “Guys. EPCOT is so beautiful in the evening. #HomemadeDisney” (@tinymallet 2020c, n.pag.). This photo gained reasonable traction (33 RT/212 likes), as did a joke video about trying to snag a ‘virtual queue’ reservation for Disney’s newest and most popular ride Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance (@tinymallet 2020d). For the first day or so, Siswick’s less elaborate #homemadeDisney media were only seen by a small number of people. On 18 March, however, she really went viral when posting a video based on the ride Soarin’ Over California. 5,226 people retweeted and over 21,000 liked the ride recreation of Siswick in her desk chair, ‘feet dangling’ over her computer monitor playing the ride video, and the fan-favorite detail of bottle of room spray being atomized during the ride’s ‘orange grove scent’ scene (@tinymallet 2020e). By this point, Siswick’s tweets had gone viral, with comments and replies appreciating the video pouring in over the subsequent days. It was the sort of fun, feel-good story people welcomed in the early days of the pandemic.

The impulse that Jess Siswick harnessed was not an isolated event. During the same week that Jess Siswick was creating the first #homemadeDisney videos on Twitter, TikTok user @greatvaluevintage also posted a video with the caption: “If I can’t go to Disney, then I’ll bring Disney to my house” (@greatvaluevintage 2020, n.pag.), using similar techniques and events, including her dad performing a security bag check, a Magic Band tap-stile on an iPad, and a ride on Splash Mountain complete with poncho and a spray of water from the faucet. @fairy_drawsdb (2020) was the first to respond to on Twitter @tinymallet with a video montage recreating several rides in front of her TV and a ‘drop tower’ recreation of Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout that used Groot and Rocket Tsum-Tsums (stuffed animals). The videos quickly expanded to become family affairs. When *Attractions Magazine* highlighted Andy Guinigundo’s It’s a Small World, he responded on Twitter that “I can’t take much credit for this. They [my children] spent hours on this inspired by the home Pirates video” (@attractionsootl 2020). As the viral trend grew, Twitter users replied to one another and shared their favorite videos widely.

As these examples illustrate, the #homemadeDisney trend was both self-aware and earnest in its performance of joy. Because illusion is a central tenet of the theme park, people of all ages adopted a playful attitude toward their participation (Lukas 2008, p. 28). Thus, it should not come as a surprise that park fans were willing to play a collective game of make-believe. The founding of Disneyland traded on “the evocation of childhood wonder and the nostalgic longings of the ‘child within’” (Cross and Walton 2005, p. 169). This childhood wonder extends into adulthood and the Disney parks adult fans in particular “form a dedicated and complex participatory culture around the places that they love and often develop deep emotional and affective ties to them” (Williams 2019, p. 16). Fans socialize, form communities, establish new traditions and creative practices, and are constantly sharing (Williams-Turkowski 2020, p. 6). Though some of this happens in physical space, it is the theme park’s dual nature as both concrete site and imagined experience allows visitors to “establish personal narratives that reaffirm who they are in relation to the momentary experience of immersion” (Koren-Kuik 2013, p. 152).

The playfulness exhibited in #homemadeDisney is a particular type of ‘imagining’ that philosopher Kendall Walton formulated in his oft-cited foundational work *Mimesis and Make-Believe* (1990). According to Walton, make-believe involves the “use of (external props) in imaginative activities” (1990, p. 67) and is a nuanced social and inter-personal process. As Walton further notes, the act of make-believe is a form of social imagining in which *prompters* (such as verbal suggestions and props) are used to figure the *imagined object*. Within #homemadeDisney, we immediately see the importance of props. Household objects are reconfigured in relation to their theme park referents. Desk chairs become ride vehicles, toys and dolls are recruited as animatronics, and souvenirs establish authenticity. Considering this further, we can see numerous vectors for becoming people involved in make-believe: watching one #homemadeDisney video may inspire us think of our own; our memories of the Maelstrom at Epcot may prompt us to gather props to make it a reality; seeing a laundry basket may remind us of a Matterhorn bobsled ride vehicle. The act of performing for either their own household or for others online transformed solitary daydreaming about being in a theme park into videos that enact make-believe. But props alone are only a part of the story.

The practice we have as children playing pretend extends into adulthood as we continue to engage with imagined fictions. Despite articulating how the operations of make-believe define “how we should think about the metaphysical status of fictional entities” (Silcox 2012, p. 22), Walton passed little judgement on make-believe as a valuable act itself. Walton instead used these observations about make-believe to propose a broader theory of media: *representational works of art* are also props (Walton 1990, p. 12). Just as physical props prompt imagining a fictional world, so too does a page in a comic book or a scene in a movie. Thus, it is not just that #homemadeDisney depicted attractions but also that those attractions themselves served as props for individuals, friends, and families to play together. Walton describes this form of make-believe involving other narrative works as creating a *game world* (1990, p. 59–61). Producing a #homemadeDisney video thus can be understood in terms of the creators “collaborating with the props” (Bateman 2011, p. 140) (both tangible and narrative) to build a make-believe world.

Expanding on this further into games, Bateman (2011, p. 94) suggests that *virtual props* are as vivid as physical props even if the way we can use them differs. For the young adults and adults who made most of the #homemadeDisney videos, then, the make-believe is most often an act of media consumption. This is even true of the playful spaces of the theme parks: we take pleasure in suspending our disbelief to engage with their attractions, rides, and shows (Nye 1981, p. 69). The Magic Kingdom (which was first used as a nickname for Disneyland and which soon after became the name of the castle park in Florida) vaunts its position as an “absolute fake” place that “not only produce(s) illusion, but—in confessing it—stimulates the desire for it” (Eco 1986, p. 44). As early as 1901, Julia Hawthorne observed that part of the pleasure of theme parkgoing is playing-along and it was the amusement park showman’s job to promote “active cooperation of the spectator in his own entertainment” (Harris 1997, p. 27). Against this background, Walton’s conceptualization of make-believe can be used to explain how theme parkgoers remain aware of the shared illusion of collective imagining: “Not only do the various participants imagine many of the same things, each of them realizes that the others are imagining what he is, and each realizes that the others realize this” (1990, p. 18).

The social experience of visiting a theme park slowly shifted from “a place to ‘play’ together to become something more, a kind of [film] set on which—or in which—we might collectively participate in various ways in the filmic experience” (Telotte 2011, p. 171). Parkgoers who ascribe to this are all making-believing together, even if they don’t directly exchange ideas. And they are all using the theme park as a prop.

Sebastian Deterding (2016, p. 108) builds on Walton’s theory of make-believe by suggesting that Caillois’s category of mimicry is both *paidic* (referring to exploratory play) and *ludic* (referring to rule-based play) because pretending teeters between freedom and guidelines. When children role-play, they assign actors and objects “alternative functions and meanings” (Deterding 2016, p. 106) and subsequently act jointly to constitute negotiable rules. As with all memes and viral trends, the grammar of #homemadeDisney evolved over time, but contributions were recognizably a part of the same collective creative output, and the hashtag was a challenge to subscribe to these rules. When a Twitter user engages with the hashtag trend, they’re prompted to make-believe they’re participating in a theme park by creating a *parkgoing experience* that is specific to theme park attractions as a work of art. Participatory ‘trends’ on social media—for example, choreography trends on TikTok—can be playfully mimetic, but what set the #homemadeDisney trend apart is that its participants were generating *fictional truths* in their theme park portrayals (Walton 1990, pp. 35–43). These fictional truths became a part of the mimetic grammars of the trend, aiding the creativity of creators who could intuit the sort of make-believe that was occurring.

Becoming ‘Cast Members’ and ‘Imagineers’

Nearly two-thirds of the #homemadeDisney videos examined featured people on-camera (with another portion of the remaining assuming a first-person point-of-view). These performances mapped closely to the three broad categories of roles within the parks: the ‘guest’ attendees, the ‘cast member’ staff, and the ‘imagineers’ who design the attractions, spaces, and other guest experiences. This is an oversimplification, of course, but it reflects the labor that is visible to the public while on vacation. Clever creators functioned as their own ‘imagineers’ by finding and assembling props. For example, a rolling desk chair was turned into an Omnimover ride vehicle rolling through show scenes of Epcot’s Journey into Imagination populated by Figment (the purple dragon) plushies that performed parts of the ride’s script (@famacmarques 2020). Except for a handful of hobbyist home creators who constructed elaborate scenes and special effects, the ‘imagineering’ domain that creators like @famacmarques played in proved decidedly low-tech: her desk chair was being pushed or pulled by someone off camera, signs were written in Sharpie, a blast of skunk’s ‘scent’ emanated from a plastic spray bottle, and her sets were different configurations of the same pieces of furniture. This dedicated Figment fan identified parts of the ride she found meaningful and feasible for use in her own attraction.

The visible act of making-believe is crucial to understanding the playful exchange of #homemadeDisney because acting the part reinforces fiction. Here, we can see varied (and often simultaneous) postures: ‘I am pretending I am on the ride because I want to be on the ride’; ‘I am pretending I am on the ride in service of the fiction of making a video’; ‘I am pretending for the sake of supporting the illusion for my friends

or family'; 'We as a collective hashtag are all pretending we are in the parks.' The fiction is enhanced by expected behavior: creators acted excited, scared, thrilled, and spooked. They exhibited wonder in front of rows of toys, were frightened of plastic dinosaurs, and reacted with shock when they got doused on water rides. Creators pretend to be audio-animatronics, as in @brookie_disney's (2020) *Pirates of the Caribbean* video that used iconic figures from the ride including the prisoners trying to retrieve their cell key from a dog and the fan-favorite Dirty Foot Pirate. Similarly, @minnie_erin (2020b) took on the roles of the animatronic cars of Radiator Spring Racers, acting out the ride's script for her audience as riders. Some video creators even adopted the role of the ride operators, who are significant members of the attraction experience. Having considered the performances as facilitators of imagination, we can return to Walton's notion of make-believe and to the playful processes described by Bateman, Silcox, and Deterding that help us understand how #homemadeDisney generates the imagined worlds of the theme park.

Capturing the Ride Aesthetic

J. P. Telotte (2008, p. 175) puts forward the 'ride aesthetic' as a set of conventions born out of established traditions and audience expectations. Narrative techniques such as "broadly drawn" (Telotte 2008, p. 176) caricatures and numerous plot through-lines reflect the vignettted nature of many attraction stories. 'Open-ended stories' are employed in dark rides such as *The Haunted Mansion* or themed coasters like *Expedition Everest* to convey a sense of time and place in situations where an elaborate plot would likely be missed or ignored and, appropriately, attractions in #homemadeDisney were not expected to have coherent narratives or story arcs. (Siswicks's series of videos illustrating an on-going trip was a rarity for the trend which, instead, more commonly saw participants making one or two contributions.) Another immediately apparent aspect of the ride aesthetic is the motion of theme park attractions. The video nature of #homemadeDisney recalls similar sequences in screen media such as motion simulator illusions (King 2000), action sequences of 3-D spectacle cinema (Moulton 2012, pp. 8–9), flight sequences throughout film history (Ross 2012, pp. 217–219), videogame storytelling techniques like the Black Mesa tram in the opening scene of *Half-Life* (Valve 1998) (Nitsche 2008, p. 106), and theme parks adapted into videogames (Schweizer 2016, n.pag.).

The ride aesthetic makes itself apparent particularly when attractions are translated to other media, such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films and games in which theme park enthusiasts who hold the source material in high regard are on the lookout for connections between the adaptation of the original (Jess-Cooke 2012; Schweizer and Pearce 2016). Indexical references act as a symbol of expertise and authenticity to connect the fictional truths of the two media. This can be seen across #homemadeDisney: props and simulated movement dominated connections to the ride aesthetic. Of lesser importance was the dimensionality of attraction spaces that were originally defined by WED Enterprises and 'imagineering' through the language of cinema and the studio's own innovations in multi-plane camera animation (Gottwald and Turner-Rahman 2019, n.pag.). This is not surprising, however. Not only would this depth be difficult to accomplish in our houses, empty space also sparks our imaginations when we are prompted to fill them. So long as the props

trigger shared imagination, the audience can make-believe the rest. Building from loose premises and simulated motion, tangible props such as vehicles and household objects and intangible props such as media and depictions of specialized knowledge proved to be the defining characteristics of what contributors interpreted as the ride aesthetic.

Vehicles

The most visibly present and common props were ride vehicles (e.g., dark ride boats, Omnimover seats, coaster cars) that served as the interface into attraction worlds. Except for wealthy collectors, very few people have anything but toy models of ride vehicles in their home. Yet, nearly everybody owns something akin to one. Imagined vehicles were among the most popular #homemadeDisney prop. These vehicles accomplished two things: they provided a quick method of establishing the fictional truth of the fictional theme park, and they let creators have *ilinx*-type fun while making their videos. Looking around their homes, creators identified traditional and untraditional modes of conveyance and considered how they could be mapped to the ride aesthetic. Desk chairs were popular because their wheels enabled participants to be pushed around the Haunted Mansion (Ghost Stop 2020) or quickly swivel in the shooting ride Buzz Lightyear Astroblasters (UtahParents 2020). #homemadeDisney Trend originator @tinymallet (2020f) re-created the Guardians of the Galaxy: Mission Breakout's thrilling atmosphere by using a fan to blow her hair around as she moved her desk chair's hydraulic mechanism up and down to simulate the ride's elevator dropping and launching. Immobile seated furniture was used in other creative ways. Recliners were used for rides that lift riders into the air with their feet dangling or coasters with a lift hill that tip us on our back. And rocking chairs of all kinds enabled bumpy rides (whether because of the rider thrashing about or ducked behind the chair rocking it off-camera).

Children's wagons were pulled around through the waterways of Epcot's Living with the Land (Shepeck 2020) and a backyard Jungle Cruise (@jaustinbrown 2020). Similarly, the snow sleds used in @brookie_disney's (2020) Pirates of the Caribbean and @AttractionsOOTL's (2020) It's a Small World proved easy to pull around both indoors and outdoors. Laundry baskets and cardboard boxes—staples of kid's vehicular imaginations—were made to fit even adults. Some were pushed or pulled, others rocked side-to-side in front of a television, and one even took a harrowing trip down a staircase.

In some cases, stationary props were used to emulate vehicles without motion, such as when a dad helmed an oversized bathtub using a cardboard steering wheel (@mattalup 2020) to convert it into the Jungle Cruise for his kids (complete with shoes squishing on the wet 'deck' of the boat). The TikTok account of Gigi the English Bulldog showed her being held up in the air a distance away from the camera and rotated back and forth while a coffee mug in the foreground emulated one of the spinning teacups (@gigitheenglishbulldog 2020)—an illusion seen early in a video by @seantaclaus (2020). And even @itsateam's baby Kai got to experience the twists of the teacups when his mom sat him on top of a rotating Roomba (@itsateam 2020). Surprisingly, personal recreational vehicles such as bicycles and scooters were not used as ride vehicles in any of the videos I collected. Except for a few skateboards, such vehicles did not work sufficiently well as props for the seated experience of most attractions.

Automobiles were also used surprisingly infrequently, though they were adapted in interesting ways. The Carter family posted a video to Facebook that depicts themselves buckling into their parked minivan before they act out Space Mountain in a darkened garage (Carter 2020). @minnie_erin_ (2020a) used her front passenger seat (because there is no steering wheel to interfere with the illusion) to replicate the cars of Radiator Springs Racers. Allison Legg (2020) made use of a car's seatbelt as a prop to recreate the Soarin' pre-ride safety video that is beloved by park fans. Automobiles seemed to prove a challenge for make-believe because though it is a verisimilitudinous prop, it would have to remain immobile for shooting video. Thus, it was best used when cutting back and forth between shots of the rider and the show scenes. (None of the videos collected for this study included automobiles in motion.) In addition to people and their pets, about a quarter of the videos implied a vehicle by the moving the phone's camera through space. The_LA_Mama (2020) brought her phone into the pool and 'cruised' it along the deck's edge to display a Jungle Cruise built out of toys and decorations. Similarly, an iPhone soared over London and Neverland in RobertsVideoMachine's portrayal of Peter Pan's Flight (2020). Returning to the human scale, Natalie shot a first-person perspective while on backyard garden tour of her friends performing Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Pedroza 2020).

The motion of theme park rides—whether directly depicted or inferred—were shown to be the most recurrent props in the catalogued videos. The only videos that did not feature vehicles were those depicting extracted elements such as a pre-show video and the attractions that do not employ vehicles.

Tangible Prop Objects

All prompters are props in the game of make-believe, but certain objects read more clearly to us as the kinds of 'props' we would see staged for a performance. In the world of pretend, these are the household objects to which we can hold and assign meaning. Within #homemadeDisney there are everyday objects imagined with new roles, Disney-related props that are readymade references, and virtual props that appear on iPads or television screens. Common everyday objects included handwritten paper signs, houseplants, stuffed animals and toys, and candles. @KissedAwake (2020) used American Girl Dolls as the passengers aboard Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance. Madison convinced her family to re-create Toy Story Midway Mania with Nerf guns, paper plate targets, and a living room ring toss (Flynt 2020). Bedsheets were used for quick backdrops or convenient cover-ups of home spaces (@gwoodcam 2020). And colored LED lighting, string lights, and flashlights conveniently created new moods in ordinary places. @alexshannon (2020) made extensive use of colored lighting to establish the launch bay of Space Mountain. Even a family's pet guineapig was co-opted as a prop, standing in for Sven the Reindeer in a Frozen Ever After re-creation (@bwalker 2020).

Not only are souvenirs a common theme park experience, but over the past twenty years Disney has come to look for merchandising opportunities everywhere. Plush characters and dolls could take up residence in their own rides (or made cameos in others) such as Elissa George's (2020) It's a Small World layout featuring some one-hundred different Disney plushies. These sorts of props could be framed, shot, and edited to work at different scales. For example, kids aboard Frozen Ever After pointed at Anna and Elsa dolls in their room acting as stand-ins for what would be

life-sized animatronics. YouTube creators East2West Coasters (2020) created a series of ride recreations scaled down to toy size with Vinylmation, Funko Pop, and Park Stars figures as characters puppeteered through scenes. And official and unofficial LEGO kits let creators build sets and add characters and were edited to appear like they were room-scale scenes. Other paratextual props were used to quickly build the fictional theme park reality. For example, typical ‘tourist’ apparel such as Mickey Mouse ears, souvenir buttons and pins, and Disney t-shirts functioned as costumes for #homemadeDisney creators. Paper park tickets and Magic Bands, like the one @tinymallet used in the very first video, were also featured as either a visual reference or as a prop that could be used to interact with other props. Disney’s merchandising has manifested a plethora of collectibles, housewares, and artwork and many of the Disney parks fans. Many of these are what Victoria L. Godwin (2018, n.pag.) described as *liminal merchandise* which use objects from fictional storyworlds and as items for everyday use. Godwin extends the category of liminal merchandise beyond official channels to also include crafted, DIY, and other avenues of mass-produced wares. Many of the creators who were inclined to contribute to #homemadeDisney had plenty of readymade props like these on hand.

Small details matter to the ride aesthetic. For example, the meaning of a theme park vehicle is more than just its function as a mode of conveyance: riders engage in other rituals and additional props concretized the ride imaginings. @theyjustlikeus (2020) used a pool cue laying across a swivel chair as a safety bar for the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh. And numerous videos referred to the ‘yellow strap’ that riders are asked to pull on so the ride attendant can ensure their seat belt is securely buckled. @Jordan.Leigh.Richard96 (2020) dressed her family in ponchos and sat them in a row between two big log to emulate Splash Mountain. The video ends with a ‘ride photo’ they recreated by taking a frame from the video and photoshopping it into a Splash Mountain collectible ride photo frame. Riders of Soarin’ Over California will immediately recognize the significance of the barbie doll feet that dangle at the top of the frame (much like those of the other riders in the theater) as utilized in Allison Legg’s first-person flight over toy landscape (Legg 2020). It was not only the obvious props but also those details used in service of the ride experience that made the #homemadeDisney make-believe *game world* a special form of imagining.

Intangible Depictions (Virtual Props, Sound/Dialogue, and Shared Knowledge)

Intangible props enabled by media and technology expand on the significance of symbols of meaning-making in the social world of #homemadeDisney. *Virtual props* provide mediated access to meanings that are otherwise not immediately at-hand (Bateman 2011). The virtual props of #homemadeDisney have a physical component—the iPad or the laptop or the TV—but “it is the distinctive imagery that appears upon them that is of interest to us” (Bateman 2011, p. 94). As viewers, we look past the device to make sense of the depiction. For creators, devices provide direct access to props that would be otherwise elusive. Televisions were frequently used to project point-of-view ride videos as the backdrop for the other props and performances. @dlpnext (2020) is filmed as a behind-the-head shot looking at a TV displaying a YouTube video of a Big Thunder Mountain Railroad train dispatching from its station at Disneyland Paris. Akin to both virtual sets and the many simulator

rides that populate theme parks, HD displays presented Tower of Terror drops, Soarin' sights, and the Star Tours flight sequence. Surprisingly, Phones and iPads were infrequently used as virtual props which suggests that creators valued physical objects when possible. Though handwritten signage was a common part of the #homemadeDisney aesthetic, images of attraction entrances could still be edited directly into the video or displayed as a virtual prop in the physical space. Cleverly, AttractionsOOTL (2020) staged four laptops to replicate the finale tunnel of It's a Small World that is filled with signs saying Goodbye in different languages. On TikTok, the green screen effect was frequently used to place the performer on a Disney backdrop, but most of these videos were short, and favored making theme park references over depicting rides with props (thus excluding them from this analysis). Zoom video conferencing 'virtual background' videos were also uncommon, suggesting creators were typically shooting videos with their phones and not editing two camera sources together.

Walton's concept of make-believe permits non-visual "sensory depictions" (1990, p. 292) as props as well, which Bateman (2011, pp. 109–120) discusses at length with regards to games. Music, sound effects, and audio elements are evocative prompts—especially the authentic audio that can easily be found online. When @itsateam (2020) 'tapped' her ticket to her staircase railing post, the trademark 'ding' sound effect did the work of providing narrative closure. Most every ride from the past twenty years has been documented with ridethroughs on YouTube and collections of park soundtracks are available on Spotify. Thus, ride audio was an accessible part of make-believing in #homemadeDisney. Soundtracks structured narrative, sound effects served as prompts for playing pretend in the moment which added authenticity to the imaginings. Depending on the level of sophistication of the video's editor, sound effects were either played in the room during filming or edited in later. TikTok's sophisticated editing tools, extensive library of music, and 'original sound' clips meant overdubbed soundtracks were common. Indeed, these TikTok audio clips are foundational to how trends are spread on the social network: when a creator uses an audio clip, their video gets added to a collection alongside other users.

Whereas physical objects clearly can be used as props, intangibles illustrate how *representational works of art* function as props by generating fictional truths that can be played with (Walton 1990, p. 35). There are aspects of the ride aesthetic that are not related to the ride itself but rather the experience of the whole attraction. These intangibles include experiences such as waiting in line, visiting the gift shop, inside-jokes shared amongst Disney fans, and how particular rides are perceived by their visitors. They also require that the audience engaged in make-believe possess a certain level of sophistication and expertise to share in the prop's meaning. #homemadeDisney creations like YouTube's Thejuicejohnson's (2020) Space Mountain video poked fun at the monotony of length queues, @tinymallet (2020f) posted about the difficulty of reserving a 'boarding group' for the newest *Star Wars* attraction, and @theyjustlikeus (2020) included a reference to tired kids and adults who awkwardly try to sit on the chain rope that connects queue stanchions. @itsjuliemoo (2020) found a comfortable spot for napping during Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln, while @zimmru joked about his kids using the Enchanted Tiki Room as either a chance to sleep or to eat one of the treats sold by attraction sponsor Dole Pineapple (2020). Notable social media influencer @SarahSterling_ (2020) recreated the often-imitated performance of the character Dr. Stevens in Avatar Flight of

Passage by lip-synching along with his original audio instructions on how riders will be able to fly on the back of the mighty Ikran banshees from the film.

Telotte's observation that theme park visitors are "perhaps becoming in the postmodern tradition all the more cinematized" (2010, p. 171) thus proves prescient for the modern era of social media video and in-park recording from fans who have become performers of the parks themselves. Park walk-around videos are livestreamed on YouTube and social media daily, TikTokers perform dances in courtyards, and Instagrammers labor over the perfect photo. This phenomenon was referenced but not a major part of #homemadeDisney. For example, Ella pretended to have "special permission to enter the parks today" (@ellabobellafeefifofella1 2020) and emulated the mannerisms of ever-present Disneyland vloggers and influencers. When she shot her mostly selfie perspective ride of Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage, she exclaimed "we're going deeper! Look at all the bubbles! Look at all the fishies!" (@ellabobellafeefifofella1 2020) to both her actual TikTok viewers and the imagined audience of her fictional subscribers. In this instance, the performer thus became a prop herself in a particularly pronounced way, and the *performance* was what made the fiction real.

Conclusion: From Home to Home

The lifecycle of #homemadeDisney clearly suggests a form of mimetic participation. The initial viral burst paved the way to sustained (though reduced) activity in a "long tail" (Milner 2016, p. 38); the 'bricolage' nature of amateurism that defined the first month of the movement gave way to craftspeople's elaborate constructions (Milner 2016, 61–62); and the fan-driven performances of make-believe were later co-opted by corporate entities (Milner 2016, p. 202). Given its low barrier to entry, participants ranged from well-known theme-park influencers backed by large audiences to families with only a handful of social media followers who wanted to be a part of the trend. Accordingly, the mimetic grammar established by the trend not only encouraged people to imaginatively transform household objects into props to depict rides, but treated rides (representational works of art *sensu* Walton) as props for playful performances. However, videos by craftspeople and the Disney company relegated playfulness in favor of other motives.

Of all the many attractions addressed, it were the Haunted Mansion aficionados that most elaborately displayed their dedicated fandom (Williams 2020, p. 107). Low-budget haunted mansions were of course popular (Gavin 2020), but in the same collection we can see the other end of the aesthetic spectrum of the #homemadeDisney production values. Jenny Lorenzo and David Gallegos's "Homemade Disney: Haunted Mansion" (2020) and SwiftHaus Adventures' "SwiftHaus Haunted Mansion" (2020) exhibited high production values video: the creators made use of costumes and acted as animatronics, deployed copious *liminal merchandise*, and seemingly had special lighting on hand. Though technically 'homemade,' these contributions don't feel as if they are participating in the same trend. Though the physical space and ride vehicles are fully imagined, the props themselves require less work to pretend that they are what they are not. Surely, they are engaged in some form of shared make-believe (the *work world* generated by the

fictional truths of the props), but not within the same *game world* being played by other creators (Walton 1990, pp. 215–216).

A similar situation happened when the success of these fan-produced (and sometimes even furloughed-employee produced) videos caught the attention of the corporations whose properties they were using. Unsurprisingly, the Walt Disney Company subsumed the trend through corporate appropriation to drive online engagement (Milner 2018, p. 204). The company's official Instagram account posted a video created by Kilimanjaro Safari tour guide Katelyn, in which she is driving a remote-controlled Mickey Mouse safari vehicle around her living room while stopping at stuffed animals to deliver her guide spiel (@WaltDisneyWorld 2020). The official *Disney Parks Blog* started posting their own 'at home' videos by first adopting #homemadeDisney-style videos, but then quickly moving to behind-the-scenes tours and 'authentic' content like a Zoom performance by the Dapper Dans barbershop quartet. Disney quickly realized the importance of satisfying the masses of fans who were craving the reassurance they experience from the normalcy of the Disney parks while ensuring the Disney brand was top of mind. By the time Walt Disney World reopened that summer, however, the #homemadeDisney trend waned. Though Disneyland in California remained closed, vloggers, podcasters, and Instagrammers returned to the Florida parks to provide new content about returning to the place like call their second home. The initial wave of 'free time' experienced by people 'stuck at home' was supplanted by the continuing reality of living and working during a pandemic and consuming content once again supplanted producing it. #homemadeDisney was in many ways ephemeral—spread across a variety of networks with video that disappeared into the depths of social media timelines—but the efforts of participants and engagement of observers marked it as a significant event of social imagining. As an example of multimodal mimetic media, the make-believe theme-park world constructed by #homemadeDisney sustained the playful experience of parkgoing, while revealing what people see as the defining characteristics of rides and attractions. It also demonstrates the usefulness of playfulness scholars' continued engagement with Kendall Walton's philosophy of make-believe, particularly with regard to Walton's notion of representational works of art as props that not only children but also adults engage with.

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