JOSEPH ZORNADO

Disney
and the
dialectic *of*
Desire

Fantasy as Social Practice

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To Lori

Preface

The assumption of this book is that there is no such thing as neutral media. Media in the form of entertainment—especially entertainment targeted towards children and families—either functions as an instrument used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into, as Richard Shaull describes it, "the logic of the present system, and bring about conformity to it", or it offers subversive possibilities that advance towards a practice of intellectual and emotional freedom. While it is assumed in the following pages that fantasy is rich with subversive possibilities for the individual subject as well as for social practice writ large, *fantasy* as *Disney* has come to purvey it over the past four generations functions largely as a tool of Capital; that is, as the dream of "the capitalist unconscious." This study is an attempt to offer a way of understanding *Disney fantasy* as an inexorable (though not inevitable) expression of Capital's will to power over the Imaginary.

Ongoing social change has transformed the nature of academic disciplines. Media and cultural studies—and the study of Disney—was once the province of aficionados and nostalgics, but has since developed into an academic field of inquiry that continues to grow. Scholarly and popular publications proliferate at a steady pace. Over the same period, Disney as a corporation has expanded its already vast entertainment empire with acquisitions of properties such as Pixar Animation, Marvel Studios, and Lucasfilm, not to mention the opening of a new Disney theme park in Shanghai, China, in 2016. Disney ended 2016 with a record-shattering $7 billion in box office returns, a record that seems

sure to fall in the years that follow. Disney's ongoing deployment of fantasy seems to know no bounds, and this alone makes it a topic worthy of continued study. Its success has made Disney one of the largest and most successful multi-media/entertainment corporations in the world. What does it mean that one corporation has taken responsibility for shaping so much popular mythology, for purveying fantasies that serve to script a child's primal Symbolic language?

This book is designed for students of media, children's culture, fantasy, film, and especially Disney. While my approach draws on fundamental ideas rooted in Lacanian psychoanalysis, my goal has been to reduce and adapt (without betraying or weakening) Lacan's key theoretical ideas as a way of understanding *Disney fantasy* as a function of ideology understood in terms of history, technology, and desire.

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Introduction: What Is Fantasy?

Understanding Fantasy

In an interview in the *New York Times*, David Sandstrom asked Philip Roth about American culture's influence on Europe, especially in regard to Europe's reception of American literary fiction. Roth broadly speaks to the problem of Disney culture as a globalized presence in popular culture. According to him,

> The power in any society is with those who get to impose the fantasy. It is no longer, as it was for centuries throughout Europe, the church that imposes its fantasy on the populace, nor is it the totalitarian superstate that imposes the fantasy, as it did for 12 years in Nazi Germany and for 69 years in the Soviet Union. Now the fantasy that prevails is the all-consuming, voraciously consumed popular culture, seemingly spawned by, of all things, freedom. The young especially live according to beliefs that are thought up for them by the society's most unthinking people and by the businesses least impeded by innocent ends. Ingeniously as their parents and teachers may attempt to protect the young from being drawn, to their detriment, into the moronic amusement park that is now universal, the preponderance of the power is not with them. (Sandstrom 2014)

How things came to be the way they are has a beginning, or at least a historical tipping point that signifies a kind of beginning. I am referring here to 1937 and not only the release of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, but also to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, another fantasy

released in 1937 concerning "dwarves." Neoliberalism also saw its first organized gathering at Mont Pelerin in 1938, the beginning of the Mont Pelerin Society, in response to the ongoing economic crisis under FDR and his New Deal policies. "Perhaps the most dangerous impact of neo-liberalism," writes Monbiot, "is not the economic crises it has caused, but the political crisis. As the domain of the state is reduced, our ability to change the course of our lives through voting also contracts. Instead, neoliberal theory asserts, people can exercise choice through spending" (2016).

In 1937 Walt Disney bet his entire career on a film fairy tale production that had never been accomplished. He was in the singular position to achieve such a goal, though some believed it to be a folly. Others, including his creditors, believed in his vision. Perhaps his bankers understood the need for a fantasy to take the audience's collective mind off the breakdown of first-order fantasy going on through the 1930s. Disney reassured. He offered restorative hope in the fundamental building blocks of western civilization, built as it was on monarchy, and a social order modeled after the kingdom of heaven, yours for the price of admission. Chapter 2 takes up the rise of third-order Disney fantasy as a phenomenon of one man and his passion for fantasy, fairy tale, and the storytelling potential of new media.

Perhaps the most difficult thing about understanding fantasy is that the most common and frequently invoked meanings of the word almost always capture only a fraction of the metonymical functions of the word, one facet of a many sided way of understanding the world. The binary nature of the signifying chain assumes for the subject that to understand "fantasy" one must set it up against its obvious opposite, "reality," and thereby know the difference between the two. What is fantasy? That which is not reality. And the problem is solved. Mark Twain suggests the problem is not so easily solved, that Tom Sawyer's dream—his fantasy of adventure—and his position of privilege allowed him to subject Jim to the collateral damage of a dream made real. Yet Twain reveals that there is no difference between fantasy and reality. Reality is a fantasy, and we know this, but still have faith that in our common way of seeing the world, we have the advantage of evolutionary history on our side. According to Donald Hoffman, however, evolutionary cognitive science maintains the world presented to us by our perceptions is nothing like reality (Gefter 2016), yet evolutionary science helps to explain, quite

literally, the difference between Lacan's Real, and the overwriting, over-reaching, always incomplete but desperate to cover the gap, Symbolic order, the order of language, discourse, ideology, and desire—the order of the bit Other, the unconscious of the culture, and for Althusser, the source and model for the basic structure of the state and its many "ideological state apparatuses." The internet and social networking practices represent the perfect example of how the big Other functions, the never ending search for recognition, the desire to be seen, the longing for a following to shore up the insecurity and instability of a subject's experience as an ego in the world, always at risk, always on the march, or in retreat, but sure of its own importance.

Evolutionary cognitive science bears acknowledgment, if only because it serves as a kind of anecdote to the ongoing importance of understanding the nature of ideology and how it functions as part and parcel of the human psyche. Hoffman explains the misrecognition, the misunderstanding of the ego's ability to "know itself," as based on what he calls a "classic argument" (Gefter 2016). We believe we see the world accurately because, Hoffman argues, we believe

> our ancestors who saw more accurately had a competitive advantage over those who saw less accurately and thus were more likely to pass on their genes that coded for those more accurate perceptions, so after thousands of generations we can be quite confident that we're the offspring of those who saw accurately, and so we see accurately. That sounds very plausible. But I think it is utterly false. It misunderstands the fundamental fact about evolution, which is that it's about fitness functions…. According to evolution by natural selection, an organism that sees reality as it is will never be more fit than an organism of equal complexity that sees none of reality but is just tuned to fitness. Never. (Gefter 2016)

Fitness and the truth of the real are not co-dependent or correlative. The sense the organism makes of its sensations is a grand reduction of reality into arbitrary and approximate representative codes, that is, language, an assemblage of signs that stand for the world, but only as a substitute for the Real, but never the real thing. "And yet the desktop is useful," Hoffman explains. "That blue rectangular icon guides my behavior, and it hides a complex reality that I don't need to know. That's the key idea … you can have whole networks of arbitrary complexity. And that's the world" (Gefter 2016).

The first problem then with understanding fantasy is to believe the "classic argument" of human evolution. The teleological ghost of human exceptionalism makes it difficult to accede to the possibility that, as Žižek writes, the "four riders of the apocalypse" are on the horizon, "comprised by the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself (problems with intellectual property; forthcoming struggles over raw materials, food and water), and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions" (Žižek *Living in the End Times* 2011, p. x). The four horsemen are four devastating bullets shot from the same singular dream; neoliberal capitalism allowed, even encouraged, to run amok in the form of globalized amoral corporate greed parading itself as progress and opportunity, and a latter-day iteration of the dream that shot Tom Sawyer.[1]

Understanding fantasy is a problem. That capitalism depends upon an overarching fantasy of disavowal makes capitalism a perverse system, with fantasy operating on every level and at every scale of social practice. Fantasy might refer to dreams, or dreaming, a reverie or a child's pretending, to wishes and wishing, to the art of making-up and to psychotic hallucination; it includes (and Freud reduces it to) sexual fantasy, but it also lies at the heart of creative potential, a literary genre, or an element that transcends genre in literature and film and seems to transport the subject away from reality; fantasy may subvert ideology and it may reinforce it. At its root, fantasy manifests desire itself by virtue of the signifying practices of the Symbolic order. Fantasy is as old as thinking and as a social practice; "Its association with imagination and with desire has made it an area difficult to articulate or to define," according to Rosemary Jackson (1988). In *A Short History of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn and James attempt to offer a schematic of fantasy, and do an admirable job of defining it as literature and art and "the presence of the impossible and the unexplainable" (2012, 3), that they then locate in literature from earlier historical periods down into fairy tale, myth, legend, and saga—though, as for that, they note that it is difficult to find so-called realist narratives that are not in one way or another adopting or adapting elements of fantasy. They note that fantasy, the sort they identify in the literary tradition, has been relatively neglected by scholars, even as publishers and booksellers—along with loyal audiences—have codified a certain popular form of fantasy in spite of literary critics's dismissive attitudes towards "fantasy" by virtue of its association with children and childhood, and, as such, unworthy of serious study (Mendlesohn 2012).

The dismissive critical attitudes literary critics have held towards fantasy echo the establishment's dismissal of the, so-called, sentimental fiction of writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe. While Stowe—and other writers once marginalized—have received critical reappraisal, still fantasy not so much. The relative accomplishments of Tolkien, Le Guin, or Rowling remain hampered by what amounts to an ideological fantasy about the nature of fantasy as *just* fantasy. That fantasy in the form of narrative continues to dominate bestseller lists and worldwide box offices (Mendlesohn 2012).[2]

Rather than representing serious storytelling's childish cousin, fantasy is coeval with storytelling itself. As a cultural product, fantasy has taken many shapes and has changed over the centuries to meet the needs of the tribe, polis, city, or state, though as for that its purpose remains unusually (though perhaps unconsciously) similar; the chief effect of fantasy remains inextricably wound together with the desire to reproduce the experience of the senses and to pass them on to the future as well as invoke the past. The linguistic code is an abstract version of the experiences of the senses, one step removed, and as such is an approximation, a version, an iteration, a provisional model of "reality" that begins and ends in the mind and, like the icons on a computer desktop, offer a simplified interface with the unseen and unsymbolizable—the uncodeable—complexities of the Real that the signs try and fail to adequately represent.

This first step, the cut or gap between the Real and the symbols used to encode human experience, might explain why fantasy has long been the province of a certain kind of desire that may be correlative with desire itself: *nostalgia*.

From ancient Greek mythology (and the Greek language where the word fantasy first emerges in the historical record) to the Judeo/Islamic/Christian tradition of "the book," to *Sir Gawain*, Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Brothers Grimm, and from *Wonderland* to *Oz* to Middle Earth, from Hogwarts to *Game of Thrones*, broadly conceived the meta-language of fantasy takes the form of epic mythologies. "Fantasy," Le Guin maintains, "is at least as immense as realism and much older — essentially coeval with literature itself." Why then was fantasy "relegated to the nursery," as she contends, or dismissed as unwelcome offspring emerging *from* the nursery, as Edmund Wilson does of Tolkien's work when he describes it as "overgrown fairy stories"? Proponents of literary fantasy like Ursula Le Guin maintain that fantasy offers access to insights to the human condition more effectively than any realism could possibly achieve. Le Guin calls writers of fantasy "the realists of a larger reality"

(2014),[3] while its detractors dismiss it as juvenile and unworthy. Yet, if fantasy is coeval with literature itself, as Le Guin contends, then perhaps the dismissal of fantasy by "serious" scholars should be understood as an attempt to repress that which stands for the essentially fantastical nature of reality. Fantasy is the scapegoat by which defenders of realism deny and disavow an anxiety of influence and a fear of recognition.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the signifier "fantasy" has its roots in late Greek in the form of three variant definitions that emerged: φαντασία, a making visible; φαντάζειν, to make visible; and φαίνειν, to show. Fantasy as "a making visible" refers to a thing, specifically, a "spectral apparition, as in a phantom, the source for the alternate spelling of fantasy as *phantasy*." The second variation, "to make visible" links fantasy to mental process and refers to the faculties of sensuous perception; the third variation, "to show" links fantasy to the imagination. From Old French into English, authors have used fantasy to denote "delusive fancy," to refer to a "false or unfounded notion," and also fantasy as "caprice." Sometimes fantasy is understood as a *faculty* of the mind, as if it were a separate mode of cognition. Chaucer uses the word to signify the mind's ability to delude itself "by imaginary perceptions, or reminiscences."[4] Twenty-six years after Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published, G. Coster wrote in an attempt to clarify how "the term *phantasy* is much used in analytical psychology, and the fact that its technical meaning differs subtly from its colloquial one leads to some confusion. A phantasy is a day-dream in which desire, unfulfilled in the world of reality, finds an imaginary fulfillment or satisfaction."

Various related definitions and uses abound: fantasy is a "mental image," or "a product of imagination, a fiction, figment." The term might also be used to denote "an ingenious, tasteful, or fantastic invention or design." For centuries, authors might have used the term fantasy to signify a negative quality, as in "a supposition resting on no solid grounds," or a potentially affirmative quality, as in "a whimsical or visionary notion or speculation." It may be used to refer to music, as in a *fantasia*, a musical composition, free in form and improvisational in structure.[5]

While denoting various forms of artistic or literary activity as part of an imaginative process or creative product, fantasy, or *phantasy*, has had a long and seemingly discrete existence as a way of referring to and understanding the mental phenomenon of the conscious and unconscious mind. "Among psychoanalytic writers," Susan Isaacs writes,

the term [fantasy] sometimes referred (in line with everyday language) only to conscious "fantasies", of the nature of day-dreams. But Freud's discoveries soon led him to recognize the existence of unconscious phantasies. This reference of the word is indispensable. The English translators of Freud adopted a special spelling of the word "phantasy", with the ph, in order to differentiate the psycho-analytical significance of the term, i.e. predominantly or entirely unconscious phantasies, from the popular word "fantasy", meaning conscious day-dreams, fictions, and so on. The psycho-analytical term "phantasy" essentially connotes unconscious mental content, which may or may not become conscious. (1948, 97)

According to Melanie Klein *phantasy* refers to "unconscious fantasy," separate and apart from daydreams or conscious fantasies of playtime. As such, *phantasy* represents a fundamental aspect of the psyche, especially the unconscious, for it serves as a defensive structure in the mind to protect itself from perceived threats. Meanwhile, the child-subject learns to habitually perceive reality through a screen of unconscious fantasy that itself obscures the trauma inflicted by the Symbolic order. Here the two sides of fantasy appear as inextricably linked: *phantasy* as a mental phenomenon and fantasy as narrative share a common origin.

Though narrative fantasy emerged first—*phantasy* as a mental phenomenon at work within fantasy could be identified—who can know if *phantasy* as a mental process is the mother of narrative fantasy, if desire is the mother of religion, if the unconscious is the cauldron from which the fairy tale emerged? Or perhaps *phantasy* and fantasy arose simultaneously from a homologous origin, two hemispheres of one brain born of consciousness, desire, the imaginary, and language? While "*phantasy* represents the particular content of the urges or feelings … dominating the mind at the moment," the psychoanalytic world of *phantasy* and the narrative world of fantasy show the "same protean and kaleidoscopic changes as the contents of a dream" (Isaacs 1948, 13).[6]

Like a dream, narrative fantasy organizes the mind's experience into a network of formal signifying elements structured as relationships of cause and effect within a larger symbolic network of language and cultural discourse. Understood as a "screening fiction," fantasy "conceals something quite primary, something determinate" for the author, and for the reader who identifies with the author's fantasy (Evans 1996, 60). For Lacan, fantasy "is a defense which veils castration," and "a way of defending oneself against the lack in the Other," that is, against the realization in the subject that the Other itself is castrated, incomplete, unable to serve

the role it demands to serve as authority, Law, and exemplar for life and behavior. Fantasy defends against the individual ego-subject's recognition that the Other cannot satisfy the subject's desire (Evans 1996, 60). According to Lacan, "any attempt to reduce [fantasy] to the imagination … is a permanent misconception." Fantasy must be understood as a function of the Symbolic, and as such, part of the structure of language as a function of the unconscious (2002, 272).

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the fear of castration is a symbolic experience in which the ego defends against its own impotence, and the threatening realization of the fundamental "lack" in the Other. Lacan formalized fantasy on his graph of desire as an algebraic matheme: $\mathsf{S} \lozenge a$. The S is the "barred S," the barred, or divided, subject barred from having a self-same relationship with itself because the signifying system constitutes the subject as a divided, alienated structure. Only fantasy can bridge the primordial divide, but even then it is as if fantasy is aware of its own inadequacy. According to Žižek,

> the gap between the S and S, between the void of the subject and the signifying feature which represents him, means that … there is no connection whatsoever between the (phantasmic) real of the subject and his symbolic identity: the two are thoroughly incommensurable. Fantasy thus creates a multitude of "subject positions" among which the subject is free to float, to shift his identification from one to another … with the proviso that these subject positions are to be strictly distinguished from the void that is the subject. (2008, 7)

The symbol $\lozenge$ represents the complicated relationship between the barred Subject and the object of its desire, "the *objet á*." The *objet petit a* stands in metonymically for the lost object, the breast, the feces, the gaze, the voice of the m(Other), all of which are themselves imaginary substitutions for something other, something more, something lost. "To understand fantasy, one should try to determine the logical status of *objet á*." In a 1966–1967 seminar on the Logic of Fantasy, Lacan searched for the origin of fantasy and the desire for the *objet á*: is it born out of the original separation from the mother's placenta, or as a result of the division from oneself at the level of the signifier, the barred subject? For Lacan, the *objet á* represents a primal possibility of return and recovery, *if only,* and so is the cause *as well as* the object of desire. As such, the *objet* has a distinctly nostalgic function, for it exists always in retrospect and

as the result of traumatic separation from a plenum of pure, undifferentiated fullness. The experience remains as an unconscious trace, not a memory as such, but as a bio-energetic experience that (dis)connects the subject-as-body to the Real as an impossibility. The resulting loss of the Real informs the subject's desire in a self-perpetuating cycle of desire-as-nostalgia for the impossible Real in terms of the lost home, the primordial origin, but always in terms of the Symbolic order and its imperatives to join and enjoy. Desire, then, motivates both narrative fantasy and *phantasy*-as-mental-phenomenon, for they are two sides of the same coin of the realm.

We live in a world plagued by fantasies, Žižek argues, and are kept in a constant "state of collective fetishistic disavowal." The subject's fantasies are not her own, for though they emerge from the subject's Imaginary, the Imaginary has already been programed by language, the Other, and the social practices of the Symbolic as a collective strategy in which the subject willingly colludes with the Other in concealing behind the fantasy "the horror of the real, yet at the same time it creates what it purports to conceal," the traumatic kernel of lack, loss, and death (2008, 6).

Notes Towards the Orders of Fantasy

Phantasy begets fantasy in terms of language, story, and image across time, appearing in iterative forms according to the material and technological capabilities of culture. Language precedes the procession of Fantasy. The following list presents a conceptual hierarchy of fantasy broken down into four constituent but interdependent and interrelated parts, or *orders* of fantasy:

- first-order fantasy: language and the oral tradition
- second-order fantasy: the literary tradition of myth, religion, folk, and fairy tale
- third-order fantasy: filmic adaptations of second-order fantasy
- fourth-order fantasy: virtual experiences and adaptations of third-order fantasy.

First-Order Fantasy

The first-order of fantasy denotes the primordial fantasy of language itself. The arbitrary link between signifier and signified informs the premise of conceptualizing language as a first-order fantasy.[7] Saussure

inspired both Lacan and Derrida, though Derrida's signifier is not, precisely, Lacan's signifier. Even so, for both Lacan and Derrida, "the signifier is first of all a meaningless material element in a closed differential system" (Evans 1996, 186). Whether the signifier assembles the subject or the subject assembles the signifier, the "self" that is assembled via the subject can only include the signifying chains available via primary language acquisition and the developmental—as well as ongoing—moment of the Lacanian "mirror stage." The logic of the signifier subsumes all language, all thought under its domain. The consequences of the signifier's reign are manifold. The signifier as language, discourse, and social practice—as the Symbolic, the Other, and the unconscious—has nearly inextensible power to inform and so determine the subject's sense of self.

When the infant meets itself for the first time in the mirror, Lacan says this moment is marked by a cut, a loss, and that human existence is marked by a permanent loss. We are born into the world hopelessly dependent, *prematurely* he says. Our entrance into culture via the Symbolic during the mirror stage is marked by misrecognition—from the beginning the process by which the infant becomes a subject (it must become a subject) is marked by a profound sense of loss—of the mother, of the Real. Desire is born in the loss of the real, the separation from the mother, the alienating and confusing distance of the Other and its demands. Anxiety is born along with the desire to escape, or to solve, or to cure, or to complete, the otherwise tragic nature of the subject's existence. The mirror stage, then, is the birth of fantasy, for the maintenance of the ego is done with signifiers that are empty and arbitrary, that function within a linguistic structure itself which is empty and arbitrary, all of it together forming systems of signification that arise from difference and absence. Fantasy embodies the ghostly emptiness of the signifier.

As a psychic register is comprised of signifiers, and as signifying chains comprise language and Law, it follows then that because the signifier triggers meaning as a result of difference, and negation rather than essence and presence, the Symbolic order is also the psychic register of death, absence, and lack, because the Other is driven by difference, by a lack of presence, the Symbolic reminds and represents to the subject the fact that the subject is also a thing of death, absences, and lack. We are all Shrek—layers of onion leaves that, once peeled, reveal the truth of existence; the signifier screens the loss of the Real, the absence of the seed at the center. While the Symbolic order is not strictly ideological, it provides for a rich and robust ideological function because "the symbolic

order is completely autonomous: it is not a superstructure determined by biology or genetics. It is completely contingent with respect to the real" (Evans 1996, 202). Lacan described it early on in his second seminar: "there is no biological reason, and in particular no genetic one, to account for exogamy. In the human order we are dealing with the complete emergence of a new function, encompassing the whole order in its entirety" (Lacan 1991, 29). The power of the Symbolic order, like ideology, is to impress itself into the mind so that it appears natural, obvious, as a pre-existing condition and as such close to the heart of things, to the Real, and working on behalf of human nostalgia for the Real. But this, Lacanian psychoanalysis warns us, is a dangerous illusion, and Lacan warns specifically that "one shouldn't think that symbols actually have come from the real" (Evans 1996, 202).

Baudrillard's analysis of the procession of simulacra unmasks the system of symbolic signification as a closed system that can only refer to itself, built as it is upon the desire (or nostalgia) for what cannot be symbolized or recovered. "The whole system of signification is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (1983, 10–11). Such an all-encompassing and enervating conclusion leaves little room for individual agency, the liberation of the subject, or the hope of escape (or return) promised by some modes of fantasy.

No matter how entertaining, signifying systems are subject to change. Baudrillard argues it this way:

> All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. So it is with simulation as it is opposed to representation. (1983, 10–11)

While Baudrillard sometimes seems nostalgic for the lost Real, such a nostalgia for the Real should not be understood as a reference to a primordial past when the subject walked with the Real, unencumbered by

the signifying mediation of the Symbolic. However seductive such an idea, this was never the case, for the arbitrary, differential nature of the signifier has always been a linguistic simulation. In other words, there never was a primordial original, only the first attempt at a representation, and this is how it has always been, and why language has always been a code that exists one step removed from the thing it attempts to encode. As such, language functions as fantasy's ground floor, its beginning and its end, for all the orders of fantasy circulate back to and depend on language and its symbolizing powers.

First-order fantasy refers to and recognizes language as a structure of difference and differences, of negation, as an arbitrary and closed linguistic structure, and takes the logic of the arbitrary nature of the sign to its fullest. When the Other imposes itself on the child-subject's Imaginary during the developmental ages of language acquisition, it imposes first-order fantasy as a mediating code for the child-subject to employ via social practice. Language is the map that assumes and then simulates the real terrain so effectively that the subject mistakes the menu for the meal, the Symbolic for the Real. The oral tradition of storytelling is also a form of first-order fantasy, though it could be argued that fairy tale, myth, and religion are organized linguistic structures and use language, but that they come to mean more than the sum of their parts, which suggests a formation of first-order language materials into a more highly organized structure, like the oral folk tale tradition. But though it cannot be definitively proved, I would argue that storytelling and the advent of language and the symbolic are precisely homologous. Even so, it can be observed that working inside any discrete fantasy—a fairy tale, for instance, told around the fire—is always the primordial system of language itself. From a Lacanian perspective, first-order fantasy as I have described it comprises the fundamental building blocks of the Symbolic order, that is, the cultural and ideological field of discourses that comprise the totality of social practices and are available to speaking subjects.

If language-as-signifier informs the Symbolic order as a fundamental fantasy structure approximating, but not delivering, the world as it is in its ontic, material reality; and if the subject comes into existence as a product of the mirror stage, ego-interpellation by the Other, and the reign of the Law in the Symbolic order; and if the Real is unsymbolizable; and if the Imaginary is wholly colonized at the mirror stage by the Symbolic order, what hope is there for the subject, or for the possibility of liberation?

SECOND-ORDER FANTASY

Second-order fantasy represents the transformation of first-order fantasy materials from the oral tradition into the literary, codified, even canonized rule of the signifier. *The Bible*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, the *Quran*, and the *Tora*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Rig Veda*, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm—second-order fantasy is comprised of myth, religion, fairy tale, and the social function these genres served, and still serve. Second-order fantasy is one step removed from first-order fantasy because, like taxidermy, it takes the lived thing and transforms it into a fixed object symbolized in written language; it repurposes the oral into the literary and, as Roland Barthes says, "transforms history into nature."

"Most folklorists and literary critics have … largely agreed that the fairy tale emanated from oral traditions," writes Jack Zipes (2012, xi). In both first- and second-orders of fantasy, myth and fairy tale offer ways of organizing around the existential fears perceived to be at the heart of human civilization. Second-order fantasy serves as a codifying, symbolic principle that organizes culture and offers an approximation in story form of human knowledge about the world, the gods, and the individual's place in the cosmogonic circle of life. As influential as the fairy tale has been as a storytelling genre, Zipes notes that its origins recede into an unrecoverable past. On this point, Zipes writes, "the historical evolution of storytelling reflects struggles of human beings worldwide to adapt to their changing natural and social environments. The cultural evolution of the fairy tale is closely bound historically to all kinds of storytelling and different civilizing processes that have undergirded the formation of nation-states" (xi). Fairy tales have "staked out a privileged place in the cultural and civilizing processes of societies throughout the world" (xv) because, perhaps "telling effective, relevant stories became a vital quality for anyone who wanted power to determine and influence social practices" (6). Fairy tales teach lessons about power, who has access to it, and who does not. They model conceptualizations of the world for the subject and often speak in "metaphoric codes" that can either liberate or subjugate. Fairy tales are stories "related to basic human needs, rituals, customs, and the resolution of problems in human adaptation to changing environments" (37).

The relationship between myth and religion, religion and the fairy tale, and the fairy tale and mythology is a topic that goes far beyond the

scope of this introductory schematic. Suffice to say here that religion, myth, folk and fairy tales use language to "map reality," or at least an approximation of it, in order to tame it, perhaps understand it, and so traverse it by way of the information gained from the second-order fantasy material.[8] Joseph Campbell is far more sanguine about myth than, say, Barthes. For Campbell—as well as Disney—the central core mythological journey is circular and so *restorative*. Progress is made, according to the classic hero's journey as the hero passes through threshold challenges in order to return home via the "cosmogonic cycle." "Though many myths might have disappeared," Flotman observes, their structures continue on in "different forms and today find expression in popular tales" (2013, 40). In other words, third-order fantasy reworks and repurposes second-order fantasy in the form of "new media" technology made possible by twentieth-century developments in film and television. First- and second-order fantasy are the orders of the word. Third- and fourth-order fantasy are the orders of the signifier.

THIRD-ORDER FANTASY

Third-order fantasy is caught up in and entangled by the individual and communal processes and effects of second-order fantasy, even while it reworks and reassembles second-order fantasy materials (so-called originals) via new media and new technology, specifically film and animation respectively. Literary fantasy, children's literature, and high fantasy, among other sub-genres, are also third-order fantasy because these fantasy narratives largely rework and represent second-order myth, religion, and fairy tale material in new yet familiar ways, chief among them is the "hero's journey," as a defining trope of the home-away-home cycle of children's literature, from *Alice in Wonderland* to *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Today Walt Disney's legacy company has come to define dominant third-order fantasy, though there are forms fantasy takes other than Disney. Notable examples of early third-order fantasy arise simultaneously with Disney, including the forerunner to high fantasy, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937), MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and later, the "high fantasy" *par excellence* of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1950), Rowling's *Harry Potter,* Martin's *Game of Thrones* (2011) and so on. Third-order fantasy reworks and represents not only second-order fantasy materials, but also first-order fantasy materials, especially in its use and deployment of *language* as narrative

strategy, not simply the obvious fact that narrative depends upon language, but that first-order fantasy associates language with magic and "faerie power," as in Tolkien's world-building around the languages spoken by elves, dwarves, and men of Middle Earth. First-order fantasy impacts Rowling's wizarding world in its depiction and deployment of the "magic" of language to cast spells and channel power.[9]

Third-order fantasy emerges in space and time as a response to the industrial age and its discontents. Regarding literary fantasy inspired by Tolkien, Laetz and Johnston offer a succinct set of rules for identifying one aspect of third-order fantasy in an article from *Philosophy and Literature*:

> On our view, fantastic narratives are fictional action stories with prominent supernatural content that is inspired by myth, legends, or folklore. Further, this content is believed by few or no audience members and is believed by audiences to have been believed by another culture. Moreover, it is not naturalized, solely allegorical, merely parodic, simply absurd, or primarily meant to frighten audiences. These are all important elements for a definition of fantasy, though the relations they bear to one another might be debatable. (2008, 161)

"It behooves us to ask," writes another critic, "why the tremendous success of fantasy literature shows few signs of abating. Tolkien, who was asked this question many times, claimed that fantasy literature has three major objectives: recovery, escape, and consolation" (Gurevitch 2013, 17).

Tolkien's ultimately conservative understanding regarding the purposes of fantasy threaten to undo it, collapse it into a heap of contradiction. Conservative third-order fantasy depends upon a cosmology overseen by the gods themselves, who take an interest in the behavior of their subjects. Third-order fantasy functions as ideology to the degree to which the subject fails to question the source of his desire for recovery, escape, and consolation, and so fails to see that it comes from the Symbolic order itself. Even the high fantasy of Tolkien represents the Symbolic order as Tolkien consciously understood it—as a Catholic—and, as such, the unconscious of *Lord of the Rings* is structured by the language of Catholicism and, like *Disney fantasy*, is imbued by what Nina Boym describes in her work as *restorative* nostalgia, an iteration of desire-as-nostalgia employed as an instrument of Capital and reactionary ideology.

Capital and the injunction to enjoy are strongly opposed to the subject's liberation, which is why *Disney fantasy* trades in a form of fantasy designed to, as Roy Disney once said "keep people Mickey minded." Here is but a small yet telling instance of the command from the Symbolic to enjoy not as *little* as possible, but as *much* as possible. "Driving" the circuit of nostalgia-as-desire towards the fetish *objet á* (as *Wall-E* fitfully reminds us) is destructive.

Unleashed as private capital and consumer lifestyle, *Disney fantasy* first assuaged the fears of cultural and social collapse during the years of the Great Depression, and then offered fantasy as a respite from the self-destructive logic of the Cold War, not as a challenge to the political or ideological status quo, but as its champion. Once the subject has committed fully to desire in the form of a drive to happiness, there waits *Disney fantasy*, as if the corporation were a public service existing solely for the happiness of families everywhere.

FOURTH-ORDER FANTASY

Just as Walt Disney cast the spell that codified third-order fantasy first as the fairy tale film, fourth-order fantasy appeared for the first time in 1955 as an extended creation of a virtual reality designed as a way to allow the subject to step inside third-order fantasy. Just as third-order fantasy reworks second-order materials, so does fourth-order fantasy rework third-order materials precisely in the way that Disneyland strove to represent it.

For my analysis, there are two types of fourth-order fantasy: that which adapts third-order fantasy into virtual reality experiences, like Disneyland; and fantasy narratives, like the later *Harry Potter* volumes and the latest iterations of *Star Wars*. In this latter type, fourth-order fantasy earnestly attempts to document its own unreal reality and self-importance as it appropriates its third-order antecedents and reworks and represents them. Consider how *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) stands in relation to the original film, *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977). Disney's version of the Star Wars mythology stands as a perfect example of fourth-order fantasy *par excellence*. *Rogue One*'s almost desperate effort to bring historical, political, and "gritty realism" to the look and feel of the film—in contrast to the highly romanticized tone of the original film—is a difference that signifies one key aspect of fourth-order fantasy. Not just a MacGuffin that serves the purpose

of, what Lucas called "a dumb film," nor is it a writing mistake in the tortured 1977 script, rather, the exhaust port, according to Disney's fourth-order fantasy film, serves as the entire premise for *Rogue One*. It interprets the original film's elisions and errors as if they were themselves part of a sacrosanct, inerrant mythology. Like the original film, *Rogue One* trades in nostalgia, but a nostalgia mediated by third-order fantasy source materials.

Disneyland is another type of fourth-order fantasy. It too appropriates and redeploys third-order fantasy narrative, as fourth-order fantasy, as virtual reality. In similar fashion Baudrillard maintains that "Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real" (1983, 25). In this case the fiction of the real corresponds to what I am calling first-order fantasy. Though all fantasy can properly be said to serve the reproduction of the ideological status quo, fourth-order fantasy is an example of what Baudrillard calls the hyper-real. As a result, in fourth-order fantasy it is no longer a question of a representation of reality in terms of fantasy, but rather, it is a method of concealing the fact that "the real is no longer real" and it never was.[10]

Consider the "Autopia" in Disneyland. The attraction represents a form of fourth-order fantasy because it allows children to climb inside the Symbolic order's fantasy and drive it themselves in the form of miniature automobiles on a rail that travel around a looping track by virtue of the "miracle" of internal combustion. Designed to predict a future automobile utopia, over the years the attraction has been sponsored by Richfield, Chevron, and Honda—that is, oil and car companies. "Autopia" symbolizes a fantasy version of a specific social practice that exists in concert within a field of a larger social practice, that of "going to Disneyland" to have fun and to be happy.

Meanwhile, "Autopia" represents a perfect metonymy for the Lacanian drive circuit, as well as a prescient prediction of the suffering brought about by the burgeoning Los Angeles freeway system since the mid-twentieth century. The miniature cars offer very little control or freedom, other than the opportunity for the driver to push on the accelerator pedal, which has the effect of running the small internal combustion engine producing noise, noxious exhaust gasses, but very little speed. Like so many other attractions, the ride takes subjects for a ride and deposits them right where they began. "Autopia" is a material reality made of fantasy disguising ideology and social practice as exercises in

American freedom and know-how. On any given summer day, however, the fleet of miniature automobiles belch toxic wafts of carbon dioxide all day long, while on the other side of the eastern edge of the park the interstate runs, often slowly, jammed as it is like "Autopia," with cars running their engines hard but going nowhere. The long, meandering queue of would-be riders—most of whom are children—stew in an atmosphere that would rival the very worst on earth. The irony, of course, is that "Autopia" is in Tomorrowland.

Ideology circulates within fourth-order fantasy discourse in its most brazen, paradoxical forms. Divorced from the real, fourth-order fantasy is the order of "post-fact," and "post-truth" cultural discourse. Fourth-order fantasy may be pure ideology, for like the simulacrum, "it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard).

And yet, as fantasy of the signifier the fourth-order, as in all the other orders, offers the possibility of a transgressive unmasking of the Symbolic by virtue of its lack and contradictory nature, thereby releasing a spontaneous though provisional experience of the Real. But more often than not fourth-order fantasy-as-ideology informs the imaginary relationship between the subject and the social practice in terms of the big Other, the Symbolic order, and it governs the subject's ego-identifications available to subjects in the social order.

Nostalgia and Fantasy

The term nostalgia was coined by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688. According to Hofer, nostalgia was a medical problem that beset those far from home. Symptoms included "erroneous representations" that caused "the afflicted to lose touch with the present. Longing for their native land became their single-minded obsession … confusing past and present, real and imaginary events" (Boym 2001, 3).[11] Nostalgia was "the disease of an afflicted imagination" (4). "Nostalgia was akin to paranoia, only instead of a persecution mania, the nostalgic was possessed by a mania of longing" (4). Sensuous experience often triggered nostalgia while also relieving some of its worst symptoms. "The music of home," Boym writes, "whether a rustic cantina or a pop song, is the permanent accompaniment of nostalgia—its ineffable charm that makes the nostalgic teary-eyed and tongue-tied often clouds critical reflection on the subject" (4).

The history of nostalgia begins as a medical problem brought on by a severe kind of homesickness known to soldiers and displaced persons far from home. By the nineteenth century an American military doctor, Theodore Calhoun, redefined nostalgia as the disease of a weak mind" (7). The birth of the nostalgic element was linked to cultural crisis, including war. "In the twentieth century, with its world wars and catastrophes, outburst of mass nostalgia often occurred following such disasters" (Boym).

Today, "modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values" (8); in other words, it is a longing for the absolute, a desire for a return to the Real. Walt Disney's film fantasy, what I am calling third-order fantasy, and the rise and dominance of *Disney fantasy* can best be understood as a fantasy designed to represent both the cause of nostalgia and its cure, for in the film narrative and the elements that comprise the film narrative are pat-objects the subject takes into itself as part of Lacan's Imaginary register to help foster and defend ego development.

Disney fantasy is shot through by, and depends upon in a way the literary fairy tale does not, what Svetlana Boym describes as *restorative* nostalgia. Boym argues that there are two fundamental types of nostalgia, the first, *restorative* and the second, *reflective*. Because *restorative* is set against and resists reflection, this mode typifies the interpolation of the subject into a culture structured around power relations that reify and celebrate ideological hegemony. "Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home." On the one hand, "Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately." The pre-war years of Walt Disney studio animation is all but fantasy as a representation of childhood, fairy tale, and innocence of a lost past, a lost pastoral, a lost home, a lost harmony, a lost Eden, a lost m(Other)—but Boym argues at the same time that *restorative* nostalgia serves ideological effects because "restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition." *Reflective* nostalgia, on the other hand, "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. *Restorative* nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt" (Boym 2001, xviii).