The Wonderful (Natural) World of Disney: Dilemmas of Authenticity in Visual Culture About Nature

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The Wonderful (Natural) World of Disney: 
Dilemmas of Authenticity in Visual Culture About Nature

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Senior Honors Thesis 
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................................. 2

Chapter One .............................................................................................................................................................. 3
  Introduction

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................................................................... 18
  Media and Constructing a Sense of Authenticity: A Review of the Literature

Chapter Three ........................................................................................................................................................... 50
  Searching for Depth Beyond the Images: Nature on Display in Disneynature's Oceans

Chapter Four ............................................................................................................................................................. 85
  Safari Mickey and Putting "Ears" on Nature: Constructing Nature at Disney's Animal Kingdom

Chapter Five ............................................................................................................................................................ 116
  Conclusion

Works Cited ............................................................................................................................................................. 128

Appendix .................................................................................................................................................................. 133
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Chapter One:  
Introduction

One evening, during a stay at the Animal Kingdom Lodge, I decided to explore the hotel's savannah overlooks. I wandered around the space, straining to catch glimpses of animals on the minimally lit savannah. While standing on the Arusha Overlook, a section partially hidden from view of the hotel lobby by large manmade rocks, I saw a strange figure in the middle distance. It appeared to be a giraffe, but with legs folded up underneath its body as if in a yoga pose, head still high in the air. A savannah guide stood nearby, so I pointed at the figure and asked, "Is that a giraffe lying down?" She nodded and explained that the Animal Kingdom Lodge savannah has a small giraffe family, and the one I saw was the granny, who needed to lie down because she grew tired.

The following evening, I walked to the overlook once again, this time with my camera, hoping to photograph a recumbent giraffe. Although I saw the giraffe, my camera flash could not illuminate the figure enough to take a photograph. I began talking with the savannah guide, a different woman than the previous night. She told me that giraffes learn to lie down when raised in captivity. A different savannah guide the following night, when I brought a companion with me to see the giraffe, offered a similar explanation. "Do they do that in the wild?" my companion asked. The guide said giraffes do occasionally lie down but that they have a hard time standing back up, so it is uncommon to see. Since the giraffe knew she was safe on the savannah with no predators, he explained, she felt comfortable lying down.

In each encounter, the savannah guides tried to emphasize in a different way that the behavior I observed was natural. One explained the giraffe's behavior in terms of age
while the others focused on how captivity influences a behavior the giraffe might exhibit more reluctantly. Having never seen a giraffe lying down before, I just appreciated the new perspective. Even so, each guide seemed concerned with ensuring that I did not walk away from the overlook feeling as if I had viewed a performance, but seen an African animal behaving naturally in the grasslands behind my Florida hotel.

In trying to assure me that I had seen an animal behaving naturally, the savannah guides were, effectively, trying to make my experience seem as authentic as possible. In terms of experiences such as the one I encountered at the Lodge, "authentic" can be difficult to define. I found the most compelling explanation one from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett who stated, "Live displays, whether recreations of daily activities or staged as formal performances, also create the illusion that the activities one watches are being done rather than represented, a practice that creates the illusion of authenticity, or realness. The impression is one of unmediated encounter" (quoted in Desmond 1999: xx). I use this as the basis for my discussion of authenticity. An individual experiences something as authentic when the experience resembles something "real." This reality may be an idealized form, as Desmond explains occurs with ecotourism: "The natural is privileged as a 'truer' real, one to which we have lost access in daily life yet can regain in these special pilgrimages to sacred sites" (1999: 190). Additionally, this reality is contextual, operating within the confines of the experience. This is especially true in the context of a space such as Disney World, a clearly constructed environment with a different definition of reality. Reality in a Disney park relates strongly to its theme, such as magic and princesses in Magic Kingdom's Fantasyland or turn of the century Americana at Main Street, U.S.A.
Animal Kingdom Lodge, with its savannah situated behind the hotel and visible from many hotel rooms, seeks to simulate an experience tourists might encounter on safari in Africa while staying in a hotel located in one of the national parks. The savannah guides come to Disney World on cultural exchanges from several different African countries, many as part of university programs on conservation or ecotourism. The Lodge takes cues from the Animal Kingdom Park’s Kilimanjaro Safari ride, which attempts to mimic a safari in Africa. To successfully simulate a tourist experience in Africa, these Disney experiences must feel as "authentic" as possible. Creation of a sense of authenticity presents a common dilemma for zoos such as Animal Kingdom, but more than just zoos encounter this issue.

Just as Disney tries to simulate a real place to ensure visitors feel as if they are having an authentic experience, nature documentaries strive to expose audiences to footage of animals behaving naturally. Early nature films faced criticism for the filmmakers' staging of animal interactions, so filmmakers now work to ensure that audiences feel as if they are watching real events unfold on the screen before them, events the cameramen worked diligently to capture on film. For many viewers, it is unlikely they will ever see these animals up close, and many films use that as a selling point. On April 10th, 2014, Disneynature released the first trailer for their 2015 film *Monkey Kingdom*. During the trailer, text on the screen informs us that the film will show us a world that "few humans have ever seen." Viewers, however, have an expectation of authenticity unconnected to their ability to see these events unfold in person. Based on their consumption of media and scientific content about nature, viewers enter the experience of watching a nature film with expectations of what they should see in a film. They use these to create a standard the content must meet for them to consider it "authentic."
How Disney creates a sense of authenticity differs between these two distinct forms of media, as films and theme parks offer different experiences and thus require different tools. Messages and ideas may be consistent across the platforms, but the techniques may not always transfer between the two media. For example, to attract animals to a camera in underwater filming, filmmakers can use a light, which attracts smaller animals. These small animals, in turn, attract larger animals, which may trigger a feeding frenzy. This feeding frenzy makes for the sort of dramatic film content filmmakers want to make, presumably because audiences want to see it. Filmmakers can edit the film to appear as if it occurred spontaneously. The animals engage in entirely natural behavior, but filmmakers took steps to ensure audiences could watch this behavior. In contrast, in-person experiences such as those found at zoos do not allow for selective editing. Visitors can often see staff members feed animals or see remnants of that feeding, even when the park or zoo takes steps to conceal feeder bins. Watching a film also offers viewers the ability to watch predators hunt their prey while, in most instances, parks or zoos would seek to avoid showing such behaviors to visitors, hence why lions are kept separate and away from prey animals like zebras. While viewers often find these scenes exciting on film, many might find them shocking and horrifying in person.

While conducting this project, I tried to answer several questions to deduce how Disney creates a sense of authenticity about nature in their films and Animal Kingdom. How do different forms of media convey a sense of authenticity? This question establishes a baseline for the rest of my research, a set of standards to use in evaluating the responses and reactions of people interviewed later in the study. I survey the literature on four areas: nature films, tourism, zoos, and theme parks. I am interested in the production techniques
employed in these different genres to create a sense of authenticity for the consumers engaged in them. Films focus on showing examples of animals behaving naturally that appear unstaged, while modern zoos try to replicate natural habitats as fully as possible. Few modern zoos have metal bars and cages for their animals, preferring "natural" exhibits separated from zoo visitors by moats and ditches, allowing visitors to feel as though they are watching animals in their natural habitats. In tourism, experiences utilize a "destination image," or the image that tourists have of a place, created both through tourist action and a location's marketing. Theme parks, meanwhile, rely on internal consistency and detailed immersive experiences to convey a sense of authenticity. In each case, the producer tries, through use of visual practices, to shape an experience consistent with what a broad range of consumers finds "authentic," while consumers bring their experiences and ideas, comparing the experience to their expectations.

After determining the techniques of visual production and influence used by different forms of media in the attempt to create a sense of authenticity, I apply the ideas and concepts to Disney’s products focused on nature and the environment. In addition to Animal Kingdom, I focus on Disneynature, Disney's nature film division created in 2008, which has released six films so far with a seventh entering theatres in April 2014. What ideas about nature does Disney present through their products and are these ideas consistent across their media platforms? The determination of what ideas Disney presents in their content stands central to my analysis in this paper. If those ideas are consistent, it suggests intent on the part of Disney producers, as it is less likely for consistent ideas to emerge spontaneously. Once the ideas conveyed are established, why did Disney choose these ideas and concepts? As a for-profit company, Disney attempts to convey ideas they
believe the public will receive well, and thus answering this question allows for an exploration of why Disney chose these ideas over others. How does Disney "imagineer" (imagine + engineer, a central piece of the Disney vocabulary) this vision of nature for audiences to consume? The answer to this question allows me to establish how Disney conveys their ideas to audiences, an important part of the analysis of the company's techniques. While examining these issues from the Disney side was helpful, it is an angle limited by the well-established fact that people do not always consume images in the manner producers expect (see, for example, Hahn 2002: 258-269, Kulick and Willson 2002: 270-285), so I also conducted research to determine how film viewers and park visitors react to the presentation. I am interested in how viewers engage with and evaluate the ideas presented in the films and park, which I deduced based on the observations and criticisms they made while watching the film or exploring the park. My final question focused on establishing the applicability of this study: what are the implications of the form of environmentalism and human-nature relationships that Disney presents?

Disney seems particularly adept at creating experiences that both shape and match consumer expectations. From the earliest days, Disney’s films succeeded in capturing the American imagination. Watts (1997: 452) explains that

"Disney demonstrated a remarkable capacity to grasp the essence of American attitudes about work, family, social life, and success and yet to interpret them in light and evolving historical circumstances. Largely unintentionally, he achieved this by melding emerging values and institutions, which were attractive yet frightening, with soothing, residual images and commitments from an earlier age."

Part of Disney’s success stems from how their products were able to tap into something deeper about American values and self-definition, a sense of nostalgia but without shrinking from hope of a brighter future. While not every project
accomplished this, broadly speaking, Disney achieved success by incorporating familiar elements and using their films to speak to deeply held American values, such as in the case of their Davy Crockett television series and subsequent films. In the case of their 1950s True Life Adventures series, Disney's first experience with making nature films, Disney created stories that were "allegories of progress, paean to the official cult of exploration, industrial development, and an ever rising standard of living" (Wilson 1991: 118). The True Life Adventures "spoke to us of a living and intelligible world beyond the fence of civilization, a world we could enter at will and experience in something like human time" (ibid.). In the wake of the mass migration in the 20th century of Americans from rural to urban and suburban living, films served as a replacement for personal experiences. Wilson explains, "Most North Americans see wildlife on TV or at the movies before they see it 'live' at the farm or the zoo, animal park, or campground" (1991: 122). He argues, however, that looking at wildlife through a camera further separates us from nature because of the "separation of the visual from the other senses" in that the camera "exaggerates the eye's tendency to fragment, objectify, and estrange" (ibid.).

The True Life Adventures never mention people, nor do they show any on screen. Many other nature films follow this trend, showing only "pure" nature independent of creation or action by humans. This echoes a tradition of separating people from nature, such as preserving national parks and wilderness areas so humans do not harm the environment. While many nature films promote this idea solely by leaving people out of their stories, some of the newer Disney products strongly suggest – through imagery and narration – that people are intruders in
nature and that we hurt the environment, so we must work to conserve it. Though they encourage conservation, Disney presents a non-confrontational form of environmentalism, one that avoids controversy and requests few lifestyle changes. It is a form of environmentalism designed to appeal to broad audiences, similar to the "edutainment" style of the True Life Adventures. This vision of nature is reflected in many of their products, including their nature films and Animal Kingdom. Disney’s stories of nature focus on learning about the environment so we can protect it, rather than learning how to live within it.

Disney presents a very specific view of how people should interact with the environment, one that seems to speak to American values and American history. This vision raises interesting questions for anthropologists about human-nature relationships in American culture, because Disney’s ideas seem to appeal to many. It raises interesting questions about the relationship between environmentalism and capitalist enterprises, specifically about attempts to portray a more palatable version of environmentalism to continue to make a profit (ideally, both off of environmentally conscious consumers and environmentally ambivalent ones). In examining Disney’s presentation of environmentalism and human-nature relationships and the reactions of American audiences to that presentation, it may be possible to determine broader trends in American environmentalism and how such movements intersect with corporations and American capitalism.

With a long history of appealing to children and adults alike, and fostering a lifelong love of their productions, Disney potentially wields sizeable influence in how consumers perceive and interact with nature. Millions of people visit Animal Kingdom every year and
their nature films released by the new Disneynature division have been some of the highest grossing nature films in history. In Disney's 2013 Citizenship Performance Survey, they stated that they seek to foster a connection between children and nature "by providing a variety of immersive experiences at our Parks and Resorts, as well as through our Disneynature films, that help kids discover, appreciate, and learn about the importance of protecting nature" (The Walt Disney Company 2013: 43). In light of their stated goals and potential influence, it is critically important to analyze not only the messages Disney conveys through their parks and films, but also how they convey those messages as well as how and why audiences respond to them, especially when visitors and viewers respond positively and seem to want to take action based upon these ideas. Another important aspect of Disney's potential influence lies in the perceived authenticity of a Disney experience. If authenticity tries to simulate something "real," then determining which aspects lead viewers or visitors to perceive an experience as authentic can help with explorations of what that "real" entails. Determining what "real" an authentic experience attempts to simulate has important implications when examining products and experiences that do seek to represent real places, such as the ocean or an African safari. If the Disney messages indeed spur consumers on to action, then it becomes even more important to determine the kind of action Disney encourages through their presentation of a vision of nature and its problems.

Within Animal Kingdom, Disney promotes donations to their Worldwide Conservation Fund with every purchase made in the park. Staffers offer guests the opportunity to donate, often suggesting they donate the difference between their total and the next dollar amount (i.e. if a purchase totals $25.40, they suggest donating the last $0.60
to the Fund). Meanwhile, Disneynature partners with conservation organizations to donate a portion of the proceeds from opening weekend movie ticket sales. Each film partners with a related organization, such as the partnership between the National Park Foundation and Bears, Disneynature’s April 2014 release. Additionally, the films encourage viewers to understand and protect the animals shown. In each example, however, Disney offers consumers little chance to be directly involved in conservation efforts, encouraging "feel good" action rather than in-person opportunities.

In 2009, Disney launched Friends for Change, primarily on the Disney Channel, which used some of their biggest stars to encourage viewers to take everyday action to help improve the environment. A song called "Send It On" epitomized the approach of the Friends for Change, advocating: "With one little action/The chain reaction will never stop/Make it strong, shine a light and send it on." An early campaign involved short segments with stars Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, and the Jonas Brothers encouraging Disney viewers to take shorter showers to conserve water. After a few weeks, new segments congratulated everyone on taking this step and offered a new way they could help make a change. While such actions can make a difference, they also ignore some of the broader, more complicated environmental realities. For example, while taking a shorter shower may help conserve your water locally, it ignores larger issues of water shortages, such as those caused by the massive amount of irrigation required in the industrial agricultural system, and never fully explains why conserving water is so important. The emphasis is on minimizing inconvenience to the consumer, an ideal manifested throughout Disney products. In the parks most of all, Disney seeks to make visitor experience as easy and stress-free as possible. Watts (1997: 395) quotes a New
Yorker writer as calling this an "engineering of ease," where Disney staff "figure out what could worry anybody, and then remove it." In a similar vein, Disney seeks to make it easy for park visitors to feel as if they have helped the environment, calling them "Conservation Heroes" for donating even a few cents to Disney’s Worldwide Conservation Fund.

To explore the visual techniques Disney uses in films to convey specific ideas about nature, I analyze Disneynature’s film Oceans. Released in 2010, the story presented in Oceans differs from other films released by the division. While most films focus on one or two species of animals, following them over a year to tell a specifically tailored story, Oceans sweeps across the planet, diving into the oceans and offering viewers an overview of the animals "under the sea." It occasionally addresses conservation, mentioning overfishing and pollution, including showing animals swimming in discolored water and around trash such as shopping carts. Pierce Brosnan narrates the film, explaining to viewers that the point of the film is to gain appreciation for nature through experiencing it during Oceans’ eighty minutes. In this chapter, I analyze how the film’s structure and style work to convey the ideas presented in Oceans. In my analysis, I utilize a model presented by Hamel (2012), focusing on the film’s structure, techniques employed, use of techniques through the film, and the messages conveyed by the film’s techniques and patterns (Hamel 2012: 39, 39-49). In addition to my own analysis, I screened Oceans both for university students and for science teachers at a private school in New York City, asking questions of them both before and after. (These questions can be found in the appendix.) Broadly speaking, viewers fell into two categories based on their level of engagement with the film’s ideas and visual techniques. The first group spoke excitedly about the film and its content, remarking especially on how it encouraged them to be more environmentally conscious.
The second group criticized the narration for failing to offer any context to the visuals or for what they perceived as a lack of depth of detail in the commentary. Some members of this latter group also found the conservation elements of *Oceans* light on information.

While both groups seemed to enter into the experience of watching the film with expectations of being shown authentic content, only the first group felt satisfied with the authenticity of the content they watched. From their comments, it seemed that their sense of authenticity in a film rested on the film showing them something new and conveying a sense of authority – specifically, in their case, about environmental issues such as pollution. When the film did not match with previously held ideas, then the viewers felt as if the film were not authentic.

In the third chapter, I turn my attention to Animal Kingdom, first utilizing literature produced by Disney to examine how they "imagineered" the park. The goal of this section is to determine the ideas being conveyed in Animal Kingdom’s storylines, which provide context to the following research. I also hope to provide a sense of the park’s layout and overall theme to situate the reader in the park environment to both offer context and to show how that structure conveys a message, as well as the message conveyed. In conducting research in Animal Kingdom, I took two trips to the park. Most of my data come from the first trip, on which I brought four companions to assist in interpreting and understanding Animal Kingdom. Their comments and reactions form the bulk of my research, though in some instances, I use comments overheard from other park guests. Through several focused anecdotes, I examine specific aspects of the park (such as the Kilimanjaro Safari ride and the Tree of Life) and how my companions interpreted them. Here again I combine experience in the park with literature produced by Disney to gain a
sense of what the Imagineers intended to convey in order to compare that with actual personal experiences of visitors. While my companions initially responded quite positively to the park and its overarching themes, continued time spent there and further discussions led them to evaluate their experience more critically. They found instances where their expectations of the park experience did not coincide with what they encountered, including times when the clash between experience and expectation led them to question major thematic elements and Disney’s commitment to its conservation message.

In attempting to present authentic content about nature in their films and at Animal Kingdom, Disney encounters two dilemmas. These dilemmas are not unique to Disney, but the Disney example provides a case study for exploring these issues. The first dilemma relates to creating an authentic experience. Based on my work with the literature about nature films, zoos, tourism, and theme parks, all of these areas rely on creating a sense of authenticity for consumers engaged in the experience. In each area, experience consumers and producers have worked to create meaning and define the meaning of an "authentic" experience. The dilemma comes from the flexibility of the consumer definition of "authentic." Based on my research, it seems clear that a sense of authenticity depends on an experience coinciding with a consumers’ expectations, which have been crafted through previous experiences. Consumers may not even be fully aware of what their standards for an authentic experience entail, meaning producers must work from a set of general ideas and guidelines. Creating experiences that convey a sense of authenticity seems to present one way producers attract consumers to their products, be they films, zoos, tourism experiences, or theme parks. Another manner in which companies try to attract consumers is through increasing the company’s "green" image, or trying to be seen as an
environmentally friendly company. At the same time, the company faces a dilemma of striking a balance between being seen as environmentally friendly and maintaining their appeal to audiences so as to maintain their profits. They do not want to present an image that could alienate too many potential customers, but they similarly do not want to be seen as prioritizing their bottom line over their environmental friendliness. In Disney's case, the company has established over generations their ability to provide high quality content and their ability to convey a sense of authenticity to audiences. In recent years, they have also attempted to build a perception of themselves as an environmentally friendly company through efforts including the 1998 opening of Animal Kingdom and 2008 launch of the Disneynature films division. For these reasons, as well as the consistency of Disney messages across platforms, Disney provides an interesting case study to explore how a company negotiates these dilemmas.

Both in Animal Kingdom and in their nature films, Disney tells particular stories about nature and about how humans should relate to it. They combine narrative storytelling and visual techniques with broadly appealing and consistent views of nature to help create a sense of authenticity in the experiences of film viewers and park visitors. Through their products, Disney promotes a passive, non-offensive form of environmentalism that does not ask or require consumers to radically change their behavior in order to help the environment. They promote donations to organizations and small lifestyle changes that that do not address broader environmental trends and issues. Audiences, however, do not passively accept the Disney presentation of these ideas, but constantly compare and contrast their own ideas and experiences with the ideas and images presented through the Disney parks and movies. When consumers encounter
inconsistencies between the content presented and their ideas, they question the experience's authenticity.
Chapter Two:
*Media and Constructing a Sense of Authenticity: A Review of the Literature*

Nature films, tourism, zoos, and theme parks seem, on the surface, to have little relationship with each other. Through investigation into the literature, however, it becomes clear that these seemingly distinct areas of media production influence each other in interesting and complex ways. Nature films seem to encourage people to engage in tourism, especially ecotourism. When such an experience is not feasible, these films may lead visitors to zoos, which have recently begun to adopt principles from theme parks to increase their attendance rates and remain in business. The process works in the other direction, with trips to zoos sparking interest in animals and nature, leading visitors to turn to films to learn more.

In this chapter, I explore the four different areas of literature relevant to the project. Beginning with a discussion of nature films, I offer a brief history before moving into Disney’s *True Life Adventures*, the influential nature films produced by Walt Disney during the 1950s. This section also covers some pervasive trends in nature films, focusing mostly on the issue of authenticity – or the manipulation thereof – in such films. I then move into a discussion of tourism, which includes an exploration of tourists’ motivations and how tourism destinations are crafted and experiences created. Using the bridge of ecotourism, I move next into literature focused on zoos, which have been suggested as substitutes for expensive ecotourism experiences. I focus primarily on how zoos create experience and how they attempt to portray themselves as an authentic means of observing animals. I then transition into a discussion of theme parks, which have become more intimately linked
with zoos other than Disney’s Animal Kingdom. In discussing theme parks, I use Disneyland and Disney World as reference points, since Disney created the first theme park with the construction of Disneyland. The discussion here focuses on how theme parks create an immersive experience and on how they use that environment to convey specific messages and control perceptions. In this chapter, I sought to answer several questions. What constitutes an authentic experience in each of these areas? Is a sense of authenticity important to these different experiences? How do these different forms of media work to create a sense of authenticity for consumers?

While nature films, zoos, tourism, and theme parks define authenticity differently and utilize different techniques to create a sense of authenticity for consumers, these areas borrow from each other in creating experiences. This borrowing blurs the lines between these forms of media. For example, zoos explicitly utilize techniques from theme parks such as merchandising and theming to attract visitors. Animal Kingdom at Disney World presents an extreme example of this blurred boundary between areas of media: Animal Kingdom is both a theme park and an accredited zoo, and areas of the park such as Asia and Africa seek to replicate tourist experiences in a condensed, themed manner. Nature films and their popularity help influence consumers to engage in other experiences, as well as shaping their ideas about in-person experiences and what they can expect. Each of these forms of media relies on creating a set of expectations for the experience, expectations both based in fact and in fiction (for instance, using anthropomorphism to tell animal stories in films or crafting an image of "untouched" nature for tourists).

As much as the lines between nature films, zoos, tourism, and theme parks have blurred, they still have their own techniques and associated standards that lead to an
authentic experience. Theme parks, so long as it makes sense in the context of the park, can create a more magical form of reality, such as using fantastical characters and settings, which seem out of place in nature films, zoos, or tourist experiences. Nature films, meanwhile, can use techniques to shape an experience that are difficult to employ effectively during in-person experiences, such as editing, music, and voiceover narration.

**Nature Films**

Many authors writing about nature films attribute their current style and structure to Disney’s True Life Adventures, a collection of fourteen films made between 1948 and 1960. Disney, however, did not invent the nature film genre. Nature films have a rich history dating back to the development of film itself in the late 1800s that encompasses the True Life Adventures and leads to the growth of nature films today, from *Planet Earth* to the Disneynature division, whose films I later highlight. While I will offer a brief overview, a comprehensive history of the nature film genre can be found in Bousé (2000). Here, I will focus primarily on the True-Life Adventures, their effect on the nature films that followed, and some of the criticisms of the nature film genre.

From the late 1800s through World War II, nature films took a notably different form than that of the Disneynature films. In the 1890s, audiences flocked to theatres to view *actualités*, some of the earliest moving pictures, several of which "took advantage of the apparently considerable fascination with animals" (Bousé 2000: 44). The animals in these films tended to reside in zoos, so they were mainly shown eating or begging for food (*ibid.*). This changed in the early 1900s, when interest shifted toward more dramatic films, often depicting (staged) violent conflict between animals (*ibid.*). Drama centered on animals intensified with the rise of the hunting film, chase films reminiscent of the popular
Great Train Robbery (Bousé 2000: 45). Some early hunting films were shot in the Arctic, but filmmakers soon turned their attention south, toward the equator and Africa, leading to the eventual rise of the safari film, many of which had a greater focus on "straight wildlife footage" that depicted "natural behavior" (Bousé 2000: 48). Martin and Osa Johnson are often credited with popularizing the safari film, but their films often centered on "pseudo-events arranged and undertaken in order to be filmed" (Bousé 2000: 49-50). Safari films, however, went into decline in the 1930s as a result of the obvious staging and overly sensational content (Bousé 2000: 53-54).

While hunting and safari films dominated, some filmmakers attempted to make nature films that were both educational and entertaining, but none achieved the success of Disney's True Life Adventures. The True Life Adventures "united the disparate elements of wildlife filmmaking up to that time, consolidated them in a unified but still flexible form, and above all popularized them as never before" (Bousé 2000: 62). Combining a variety of different genres and adding successful techniques from animated movies such as Dumbo and Bambi, Disney helped create "the distinctive features marking a discrete and recognizable cinematic form" (ibid.). While the precise reasons Disney moved into making nature films are unclear (see Bousé 2000: 64-66), the lower production costs associated with making them (Bousé 2000: 63) surely assisted in the decision. Mitman (1999: 111-112) explains that the idea for True Life Adventures came when Disney purchased wildlife footage to use as reference for animators during the development of Bambi, a story Bousé (2000: 64-65) also relates, elaborating that the idea was put aside during World War II. Elsewhere, however, Disney states that he did not conceive the idea until after the war (Bousé 2000: 65). Both Mitman (1999: 112) and Bousé (1999: 65) explain that the True
Life Adventures helped bolster an animation division struggling due to high production costs and low box office returns. Since Disney already had experience producing propaganda and government information films during World War II, they shifted resources toward information films for corporations (Mitman 1999: 112). Bored by their lack of entertainment, Mitman explains, Disney shifted his attention to educational films, starting with an interest in Alaska as "America’s last frontier" (ibid.).

As Mitman explains, "'Completely authentic, unstaged and unrehearsed,' Seal Island and the other True Life Adventures portrayed a fantasy of pristine nature far removed from the commercial world of modern, industrialized America" (1999: 110). This "pristine nature" could only be achieved by excluding humans from the footage. "The True Life Adventures sought to portray an innocent and timeless past, a time before nature had been tainted by the corrupting forces of human civilization" (Mitman 1999: 114). "The physical world of these films," Bousé explains, "often seems parallel to our own, but not quite one with it. Events often appear to take place outside of history as we know it. At times they even appear to be set chronologically before the arrival of humans, or in places where human civilization had no effect," even when those places are national parks (2000: 134). The exclusion of people from the True Life Adventures helped maintain this almost fantastical, idealized natural world. Bousé explains elsewhere that the True Life Adventures retain many features from Disney's animated films, such as beginning "with an animated paintbrush that painted in the landscape in each film's establishing shot" (2000: 134).

Bousé explains that the True Life Adventures combined "scientific-educational films, safari films, animal adventure stories, fanciful animated features, a bit of comedy, and even
elements from legends, tales, and myths," creating films that highlighted animal behaviors, brought viewers to new places, weaved compelling narratives, could be sensational and sentimental, and relied heavily on anthropomorphism (2000: 63). The absence of humans aided in the films' anthropomorphism, explains Chris (2006: 36), because it "displaces the viewer's identification onto the animal, mapping human motivations onto animal behaviors". Bousé (2000: 62) explains that there were "mini dramas" in each film, interweaving the narratives with facts about the animals shown (though he acknowledges that such facts were somewhat superficial). "The task of the photographer," explains Mitman, "was 'to find each animal's eccentricity and to somehow exploit it and incorporate the individualism into the story'" (1999: 118). MacDonald explains that viewers are "sutured into the Disney vision by the continual presence of the narrator; by the music, which is carefully and continuously synched with the action so as to create particular, interpretive cinematic moods; and by the film's visual and textual framing of the 'adventures' of the animals" (2006: 8). These techniques were employed with the goal of increasing understanding about animals and their lives (Mitman 1999: 120). Mitman elaborates, "For Disney, nature was not only a space accessible to a select group of experts, but was open to anyone who had the yearning and diligence for understanding" (1999: 118). Izard (1967: 38) quotes Disney as having once said, "nature's wonderful house is entertainment—and this entertainment is informative...We can learn a lot from nature in action." True Life Adventures taught lessons about how animals live like humans, filtering any scientific information through an anthropomorphic lens. For instance, "Here Comes the Bride" plays as female seals arrive on Seal Island (Mitman 1999: 111). Editing and creative
use of music shaped these lessons, constructing stories that conformed "to the expectations and tastes found in the constructed family ideals of 1950s American culture" (*ibid.*).

Wilson explains that the True Life Adventures, "spoke to us [the audience] of a living and intelligible world beyond the fence of civilization, a world we could enter at will and experience in something like human time" (1991: 118). To increase the film's marketing, Disney advertised to schools, emphasizing the films' educational use (Mitman 1999: 113). While their use in schools made the films popular well past the final release in 1960, contemporary accounts conflict on how much the educational potential influenced the decision to produce the True Life Adventures (Bousé 2000: 68, 65). At one point, Walt Disney expressed apprehension about calling them educational, because the point was to be entertaining, and the use of scientists and teachers could reduce the films' creativity by forcing them to conform solely to facts (Bousé 2000: 65-66). Even so, Disney insisted that the photographers behind the films be naturalists, who had "a patience and passion for watching nature" (Mitman 1999: 118). Their knowledge may not have come from formal training, but Disney "privileged an experiential knowledge acquired not through academic training but through labor in the field" (*ibid.*).

This was part of making nature seem accessible to everyone, which "dispelled accusations that preservation of nature benefitted only those with the money, leisure, and physical stamina to experience nature for themselves" (Mitman 1999: 123). Conservation organizations such as the Audubon and Wilderness Societies believed increasing the accessibility of nature helped recruit Americans to their goals (*ibid.*). Chris (2006: 39) questions the conservationist message of the films, believing that the "conservationist messages these films contain is muted by the requisite happy ending," too much implying
that "the threat is contained, and the future is full of hope." Wilson, however, believes the films accomplished the goal of turning appreciation for nature into a desire to conserve it, stating that "the people who swelled the ranks of environmental organizations in the 1960s and 1970s grew up on Disney's utopian tales of cuddly fawns and lost but clever dogs" (1991: 120). Bousé (2000: 69) quotes wildlife filmmaker Marty Stouffer in a compelling anecdote that seems to support with Wilson's assessment:

"Suddenly, something deeper flashed through my memory. I remembered being six years old, perched on the edge of my seat in a darkened movie theatre, staring up...as two bighorn rams reared up and lunged toward each other on the screen in front of me. The name of the film was Walt Disney's *Vanishing Prairie* and it had affected me powerfully at the time...Now I realized that the effect of watching that scene so many years ago had been a driving force propelling me to this moment."

While the True Life Adventures captured attention on the big screen, nature programming moved onto televisions on the small screen with the premiere of *Zoo Parade* on NBC in 1950, which was cancelled and replaced with *Wild Kingdom* in 1963 (Mitman 1999: 133-134). The presence of host Marlin Perkins, a herpetologist and zoo director, made these programs different from the True Life Adventures, which completely excluded people other than the narrative voiceover. They did, however, rely upon some of Disney's model. According to Mitman, "*Zoo Parade* offered basic natural history information about animals through a format that entertained audiences by drawing upon conventions of situation comedies, dramas, and quiz shows" (1999: 136). *Wild Kingdom*, hosted from the field to provide a more "authentic" experience, often involved Perkins working with conservationists and biologists, a style which biologists later criticized for "excessive showmanship," even when they were "raising the public's consciousness about the value of and need for wildlife conservation" (Mitman 1999: 152). Other episodes of *Wild Kingdom*
focused on a particular habitat, showing a "pristine" environment without the presence of people (Mitman 1999: 155). Similar to the True Life Adventures, this style appealed to a "hard core of the audience interested only in the observation of wildlife without the interference of man" (ibid.). More networks entered the wildlife programming market and "by 1974, fully eleven wildlife and natural history programs were being aired nationally in the United States" (Bousé 2000: 80). More recently, due to the financial pressures of cable television, wildlife programming has shifted toward the cheap and popular, focusing on action and drama, often conforming more to the conventions of reality television than the "classic" or "blue chip" model of nature films (Vivanco 2013: 113).

This classic model bears a strong resemblance to the True Life Adventures, which Bousé (2000) outlines in detail. These films often have a typical narrative structure – "rising and falling action, dramatic conflicts and resolutions, uplifting endings, perhaps even a little comedy or tragedy" (Bousé 2000: 129). The content sits somewhere between fantasy and reality, such as calling it "Seal Island," rather than the Pribiloff Islands, which "idealized them, making them a setting where myth could mediate nature and culture, such that our own social and moral ideals could be reassuringly found among wild animals" (Bousé 2000: 134). Some films in this model use one representative to tell the story of a whole species, such as in the fictional Bambi or the True Life Adventure about a squirrel, Perri (Bousé 2000: 143-145).

Recent examples of this sort of classic nature film include the BBC series Planet Earth, the wildly popular March of the Penguins, and the Disneynature films (which will be explored in more detail in a later chapter). In an article on Planet Earth, Richard Beck states that the "visual spectacle is framed and filtered through a set of narrative conventions that
have been maturing and evolving throughout the twentieth century," and goes on to acknowledge the influence of the True Life Adventures (2010: 64). Beck quotes David Attenborough’s narration, which states that Planet Earth will take the viewer to the "last wilderness," adding that this "is a version of nature that is halfway between reality and myth, and drifting further every day into the latter" (ibid.). Scott MacDonald, in an article analyzing three nature films, states that the National Geographic film Sonoran Desert: A Violent Eden, "constructs a fiction from non-fictional elements" (2006: 12). In March of the Penguins, filmmakers created an emotional connection between the audience and the penguins through close ups, the musical score, and narration that emphasized their "humanity" (Vivanco 2013: 118). While scientists were divided in their opinions about it, at least one researcher believed that it was "helpful for fostering empathy and interest" in penguins (Vivanco 2013: 119).

Concerns about anthropomorphism are common in the literature about nature films. Bousé (2000: 93) states that "the line between anthropomorphism as a literary device and reigning belief about animal behavior was often blurred" in fables, leading readers to perhaps believe that the animals actually behaved in accordance with the human qualities given to them in the fable. In regard to nature films, he quotes Marty Stouffer and Walt Disney, both of whom talked about how much we can learn about ourselves from animals (ibid.). The editing process constructs nature films and, thus, not only may different viewers take different interpretations from the film, but the combination of editing, narration, and music may attribute traits to animals that are purely human, rather than an authentic representation of the animal itself (Vivanco 2013: 119).
Expectations of authenticity present another dilemma in nature films. Bousé explains that the "documentary" label often associated with nature films contains implications "about the authenticity and spontaneity of the events depicted, the absence of staging and editing tricks, and ultimately about the Truth of what is shown and the very relationship of images to reality" (2003: 124). This is consistent with viewer expectations that the films depict real events and that viewers' sense of authenticity is tied to this expectation. Wilson states, "In many wildlife movies, animal performance in front of a camera is presented as animal behavior" (1991: 123). This presentation assumes that the animal's performance remains in context, which may not be the truth.

Wildlife films rarely utilize completely unedited footage, and indeed they often contain unseen technical elements (ibid.). MacDonald explains, "While the kinds of events we see [in nature films] are certainly part of the real existence of the creatures depicted, the particular depictions are constructed, either by setting up a situation that would be impractical to wait for...or by creatively editing events" (2006: 14). This is not to suggest that such edits or constructions are meant to manipulate or intentionally mislead an audience. Indeed, as MacDonald acknowledges, "the moment a nature filmmaker begins to construct a particular film, there is no escaping point of view: filmmakers must choose what to show us and determine a filmic structure that exhibits a particular set of conclusions" (2006: 5). The difficulty comes in claims of authenticity made by the producer of a particular nature films – claims that it is "real" or "unstaged." As Beck (2010: 64) asks, "is it still 'completely natural' if two partially filmed hunts have been edited into a single whole?" In a similar vein, Mitman (1999: 72), explains, "The distillation of the natural world into a series of dramatic moments on film created an expectation of nature among
lay audiences that was rarely, if ever, realized in the field." Many animals spend much of their lives at rest, but such footage would not interest most viewers, and thus filmmakers often exclude it from the final product.

The editing and filming techniques, too, often convey more drama than exists in the "wild." Beck explains that "Planet Earth's time-lapse photography, extreme slow motion, and distorting lens effects push out toward an aesthetic and psychic wilderness, transforming the series' literal (but still Earth-bound) landscapes into alien worlds" (2010: 65). Bousé (2003) explains how the use of close-ups in nature films may lead to viewers feeling a more intense personal connection with the animals, a personal connection that may lead them to form false and possibly dangerous ideas about the behavior of these animals. He recounts a story about a woman who wished to "kiss and cuddle" a lion, only to end up mauled (Bousé 2003: 126). Films often seek to foster this connection between viewers and the animals with the goal of making viewers more concerned with conservation (ibid.).

Bousé argues, "One of the most common uses of facial close-ups in Hollywood-style fiction, as well as in television news stories and interviews, occurs when the camera zooms in at moments of emotional intensity" (2003: 128). Research has suggested that the narration or music behind such images plays a major role in how audiences interpret the footage, and therefore, Bousé argues, "there is little to argue that facial close-ups cannot be used in wildlife films to ascribe to animals almost whatever feelings and emotions the filmmaker wishes to assign them according to the requirements of the storyline at that moment" (ibid.).
Filmmakers often utilize close-ups, Bousé explains, to create a character using one particular representative animal, often to use that animal as the basis for a particular narrative (ibid.). Truthfully, however, this individual may be a composite of several different animals, editing together footage that may have been shot in different places (ibid.). One example of this is in Disneynature's Chimpanzee, which claims to tell the story of one particular young chimpanzee, the group with which he lives, and their struggle against a rival group. When viewers watch the credits, however, they learn that the footage was shot in two completely separate African countries. The chimpanzees shown may not even live within the same national boundaries, let alone within the same patch of forest. If the chimpanzees shown do not live in the same forest, it raises questions about the veracity of the story.

Tourism and nature films have an intimate connection, with the desire for such experiences driving interest in the films and interest in the films driving tourism. Mitman explains that Marlin Perkins' Zoo Parade chose shooting locations with the family audience in mind, "to ensure the biggest bang for the buck" (1999: 149). Episodes contained advertisements for airlines and focused on major tourist destinations such as national parks containing wildlife familiar to the "arm chair explorers" (ibid.). Shows such as Zoo Parade and its successor, Wild Kingdom, inspired tourists to search for "'pristine' wilderness and experiences similar to those watching wildlife on the television set" (Mitman 1999: 155). Given the constructed nature of the films, however, it may be impossible to replicate the film experience in tourism. In addition, the in-person nature of tourism makes it a distinctly different medium from film, with its own standards and conventions regarding authenticity, as well as presenting a different example of how visual
production techniques work to hide certain elements from consumers while highlighting others.

**Tourism**

Every year, millions of people engage in tourism, an industry that touches nearly every society (Stronza 2001: 264). Individuals engage in tourism for numerous reasons. Much of the literature focuses on a search for an "authentic" experience, while simultaneously acknowledging that "authentic" does not hold much meaning in such a context. Stronza (2001: 265-266) explains that tourism may help societies define which "important" places or events "allow tourists to reassemble the disparate pieces of their otherwise fragmented lives." She continues that, through this process, "life and society can appear to be an orderly series of representations" (Stronza 2001: 266). Urry states that, "at least part of the social experience involved in many tourist contexts is to be able to consume particular commodities in the company of others," meaning that part of tourism involves experiencing a place or event with other people, not solely as an individual (1995: 131). Tourism thus is a collective process as well as an individual one – both in how tourists experience it and in how they choose where to go or what is important to their "experience." Choosing locations and creating an "experience" often relies on a sense of authenticity of place, which may validate the decision to travel elsewhere rather than use another form of media (i.e. film).

Experience stands central to tourism, especially experience different from that of the tourist’s everyday life (Urry 1995: 132). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that the tourism industry is moving "from creating an experience based on seeing to one based on doing," or something that involves "an engagement of the senses, emotions, and
imagination" (1998: 137-138). Using a term tied to film studies, Urry (1995) describes two different "tourist gazes" that create this experience. The first, the romantic gaze, emphasizes "solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze" (Urry 1995: 137). The collective gaze, on the other end, recognizes that there are some places that look strange without other people (Urry offers the example of seaside resorts), that "other people give atmosphere to a place" (Urry 1995: 138). The romantic gaze is more concerned with the "authentic" than the collective gaze (Urry 1995: 140). A third category of gaze, that of the "post-tourist," occupies neither space. Post-tourists, he explains, understand that an "authentic" tourist experience cannot exist and "almost delight in inauthenticity," enjoying an experience they know to be "inauthentic" (ibid.).

Stronza (2001: 271) explains that tourists often define "authenticity," making the term subjective. Nelson (2005: 133) agrees, stating, "A person's perception of place is constructed through various representational media before the destination is ever experienced." Places possess identity beyond their physical location and have "become both a context for consumption and a consumable product [themselves]" (Nelson 2005: 131). This is called a destination image, a "set of visuals and ideas associated in the tourist's mind with a particular locale" which "acts both as a lure for potential customers and as a framework for perception and evaluation of the tourist's experience once she or he is on site" (Desmond 1999: 5). Playing to this destination image is what attracts tourists to the location, and is often used as a distinguishing factor for the location (Desmond 1999: 12). All tourists, however, are unlikely to interpret the destination image in the same manner. "Tourists have agency, active selves that do not merely accept but interpret, and frequently question, the producers' messages" (Bruner 2001: 899). They may question and doubt the
image presented to them, and may doubt the message in different ways, and may even interpret the message differently over time (Bruner 2001: 902). Interactions between tourists and the destination image may be complex. Bruner (2001: 901) offers several examples of how tourists interact with the image presented to them, including a man who explained that he intended to relax on vacation and "simply accepted whatever was offered to him" to the people "obsessed with issues of authenticity and [who] question the truth value of everything. They ask, 'Are these Maasai for real?'” Tourists "have the ability simultaneously to suspend disbelief and to harbor inner doubts, and sometimes to oscillate between one stance and another" (Bruner 2001: 901). A tourist may decide to prioritize enjoyment over criticism and enjoy the image presented to them, even if they harbor questions about that image (ibid.).

Manipulation of the destination images can help create a distinguishing trait for the particular location, something that makes this destination unique in comparison with others (Desmond 1999: 12). Nelson explains that Grenada’s tourism brochures "connote a pristine and undisturbed beach as a form of 'authentic' nature, in opposition to 'artificial' social beaches filled with umbrellas, sunbathers, and adjacent high-rise hotels" (2005: 139-140). They engage in a similar process with the island’s rainforest and mountains, showing "mountains covered with a deeply green, dense and unbroken plant growth … surrounded by low-hanging misty white clouds" with no sign of habitation by humans (ibid.)

Wilson explains that "nature tourism is simply the temporary migration of people to what they understand to be a different and usually more 'pure' environment. It's going out to nature for its own sake, and it's all of the ways we talk about that experience" (1991: 24). The experience offered by nature tourism makes it easier to commodify nature and the
experiences we have in it (Wilson 1991: 28). Often these experiences are created or produced for tourists: "even in culturally valorized scenic places, certain elements have to be rearranged to meet tourist expectations" (Wilson 1991: 48). On safaris in Africa, Wilson explains, this means making sure tourists see certain animals (like lions and elephants) and certain experiences (like watching lions hunt), while simultaneously ensuring that tourists on safari do not see too many other trucks filled with tourists looking for the same experience, as this could be distracting and interfere with the "pristine" experience and with the perceived authenticity (ibid.). In an example of blurred boundaries between areas of media, a similar editing occurs in nature films. Bousé quotes cameraman Stephen Mills as saying, "All over the world we frame our pictures as carefully as the directors of costume dramas, to exclude telegraph poles and electricity pylons, cars, roads, and people. No such vestige of reality may impinge on the period-piece fantasy of the natural world we wish to purvey" (2000: 14).

Safaris focused on observing and photographing animals have replaced hunts, and the photographs that tourists take "authenticate" their experiences and preserve them for later viewing (Wilson 1991: 45-46). Mitman explains that wildlife films, which "[fulfilled] the dreams of Americans to experience a type of nature not found in their back yards" helped develop "seemingly unproductive lands in developing nations...into gainful recreation economies" (1999: 181). Later, "Africa and its wildlife offered respite from the anxieties faced by a generation living in the shadows of the atomic bomb" (Mitman 1999: 188). Americans became drawn to nature tourism after the frontier was "closed" and most Americans lived in cities, because nature then became valuable as a "tonic for an unhealthy urban lifestyle" (Wilson 1991: 24-25).
According to Urry, this difference between the tourist experience and the tourist's everyday life is important (quoted in Desmond 1999: xxi). "Tourism can offer freedom from work and other obligatory time, an escape from traditional social roles, and the liberty to spend one's time however one chooses" (Stronza 2001: 266). If tourists view tourism as offering such an experience, then creating difference from their day-to-day lives is especially important. When exploring a world or place so different from their "regular" lives, tourists may find that even the most mundane activities may become fascinating (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 132). That said, "as exposure exhausts novelty, new ways to raise the threshold of wonder must be found" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 72). Tourists may eventually tire of repeated experiences, requiring the managers of such locations to innovate and change in order to keep tourists' attention. This could be as simple as adding detail to a location's narrative or as complex as creating new infrastructure (such as museums or cultural centers) with expanded information or programs.

Ryan and Saward (2004: 248) explain that zoos "can act as a substitute for tourism in natural spaces, and in doing so may be able to meet some of the aspirations expressed by tourists." Zoos, as more constructed and controlled environments than ecotourism excursions, must carefully manage visitors' expectations of authenticity. While zoos may attempt to replicate natural environments, they must also explain or conceal differences in animal behavior and the lack of space associated with captivity. In the case of the simulated safari at Disney's Animal Kingdom, Ryan and Saward (2004: 248) explain, an "existential authenticity" replaces the "objective authenticity" of a true safari.
Zoos

"The zoo is very much part of the tourist trail. In their publicity, zoos present themselves as tourist destinations and regional tourist brochures emphasize the zoo as a tourist attraction" (Beardsworth and Bryman 2001: 84). Zoos are a form of excursion into nature, "an escape from the cement, stress, and physical confinement of the city to a lush landscaped park" (Hanson 2002: 2) Ryan and Saward (2004: 246) state that zoos represent one end of a continuum "between, on the one hand, seeing animals in their natural habitat with minimal human intervention to, on the other hand, seeing animals within zoos in environments that can only be sustained by human action" (Ryan and Saward 2004: 247). This ecotourism continuum suggests that zoos may provide a form of ecotourism in their own right, though most views of ecotourism focus on more traditionally tourist experiences, such as safaris. As Mullan and Marvin explain, "the presentation of captive wild animals in the zoo reveals more about the human societies which have constructed them – and whose members roam freely within them – than about the animals which are confined within them" (1999: xvii). This has important implications for claims of authenticity, they elaborate, because "it is man who defines and represents [animals], and he can in no sense claim to achieve a true representation of any particular animal; it merely reflects his own concerns" (Mullan and Marvin 1999: 3). In fact, Malamud claims, the "passive spectatorship" that exists at zoos "teaches children and other zoo visitors exactly the wrong thing about a zebra [for example]: they do not see the creature as it is – an animal that lives its life in a certain way on a different continent – but rather as an amusement, a display, a spectacle in a menagerie" (1998: 2). Similar to how tourists
construct the destination image, zoo visitors define the "authenticity" of the image of animals presented at a zoo, a definition that may vary from zoo to zoo.

Beardsworth and Bryman (2001: 89) explain that the presentation of animals in zoos is a type of "scientific gaze" called the "zoological gaze." They explain that the animals "become objects of analysis in the discourses of such disciplines as ethology, parasitology, reproductive biology, animal nutrition and so on" (ibid.). Additionally, the animals are subjected to a "recreational gaze" on the part of zoo visitors, which Beardsworth and Bryman explain is a form of Urry’s "tourist gaze" (ibid.). They quote Anderson as stating that zoos "[inscribe] various human representational and material strategies for domesticating, mythologizing, and aestheticizing the animal universe" (Beardsworth and Bryman 2001: 89). Thus, through their control of the gaze, zoos manipulate how visitors see animals. Beardsworth and Bryman do, however, acknowledge that more recently, the image of zoos as "a site for the exercise of naked power over animals, and as a location for the indulgence of an unashamedly recreational gaze upon its captive inmates" has become less popular, which they state is "almost certainly compounded by changes in public perception induced by the enormous increase in the anthropomorphized portrayal of animals in printed, film, and electronic media" (2001: 89).

Hanson explains that, beginning in the early twentieth century, zoos began to focus on creating more natural settings, ones that "approximated an aesthetic ideal, and that evoked a set of emotional responses that middle-class Americans – through tourism, and popular painting and nature writing – could associate with encounters with nature" (2002: 131). The movement toward these exhibits began with Carl Hagenbeck, who tried to "create the impression of viewing animals in their wild state" at a zoo in Germany (Bulbeck
Mullan and Marvin (1999: 64-65) offer an extensive list of how exhibits and zoos create this effect, including "[ensuring] that the animals are seen as only a part of the surrounding landscape they occupy with the viewer" and "all structures should appear to grow from the landscape." Hagenbeck used moats to separate animal areas from visitor areas, which makes them appear less confined than animals held in barred cages (Hanson 2002: 152). It also makes the animals easier to see, "allowing both appreciation of the animal’s beauty and the thrill of proximity to a wild, dangerous creature" (ibid.). Not only could zoo visitors have a clear vision of the animal before them, but they could often see other animal enclosures beyond (Wilson 1991: 251). "Hagenbeck’s sensitivity to sightlines and cross-viewing were key contributions: the moats, groves of trees, artificial lakes, mountains...not only framed these vistas but also prevented zoo-goers from concentrating their gaze on other viewers" (ibid.).

Grazian (2012: 548-549) explains that, in creating exhibits, zoos must follow a "set of aesthetic conventions regarding what audiences collectively imagine the natural world to feel and smell like...[and] ideally attempt to hide all visible signs of artificiality, man-made technology, and human domination over animal species." This idea is often called "landscape immersion," the goal of which is to "transport visitors in their imaginations to places in nature beyond the access of most tourists," such as a gorilla exhibit that attempts to replicate a section of forest for the visitors as well as the gorillas (Hanson 2002: 159-160). Wilson (1991: 252) explains that it "conceals the barriers between people and the animals so well that we’re never sure whether the animals can approach us or not." Some exhibits achieve this goal by placing the animal’s area slightly above that of the visitor or using glare-resistant glass (Wilson 1991: 253). Similarly, aquariums simulate the
underwater experience using huge, seamless expanses of glass or acrylic, filling the visitors' vision with the simulated ocean (Desmond 1999: 179). Ryan and Saward (2004: 263) found that "people want to observe animals in as natural a setting as is possible, to have the experience of 'peering through undergrowth.'" Such "natural" enclosures may enhance a visitor's sense of authenticity by appealing to their sense of what an animal's environment is "supposed" to look like in the "real" world, or the world outside of the exhibit. Davis (1997: 107) demonstrates the importance of natural habitats at San Diego's SeaWorld in an explanation of the park's planning for a new dolphin pool. She explains that, as visitors have a "tendency to project [their] own feelings onto animals," the "animals can't seem too captive or too manipulated" (1997: 106, 107). In the case of the dolphin exhibit, SeaWorld found that visitors responded better to a killer whale exhibit at the Vancouver Aquarium that contained "artificial rock work, surrounded by 'nice trees,'" even though the exhibit was in fact a quarter or a fifth of the size of SeaWorld's (Davis 1997: 107). The mammal curator at SeaWorld explained that the Vancouver exhibit made people more comfortable with viewing the animals outside of their natural habitat (ibid.). Newer exhibits utilize the Vancouver model, working to create a more "natural" environment for the animals. Davis explains, "Realistically simulated settings help dampen awareness for both audience and presenters that the animal is in a cage; alternatively, techniques of environmental design make the enclosure seem more gentle" (1997: 108).

In this attempt to present a more "natural" world, however, zoos often achieve hyperreality, portraying an idealized nature rather than one that actually exists (Desmond 1999: 178). Desmond (1999) and Ryan and Saward (2004) characterize these as simulacra. Malamud (1998: 103) states that Disney is "taking the display of captive animals into the
realm of hyperreality" by combining the real, the fictional, and the extinct. Ryan and Saward (2004: 248) state that Disney's Animal Kingdom may be seen as the "epitome" of the modern zoo, seeking to replicate the experience of an African safari. Disney's safari, however, involves none of the danger associated with being "in the wild" and contains far less uncertainty about guests' ability to see animals. Ryan and Sward believe that, "for zoos to be effective simulated ecotourism experiences, 'a guided safari' needs to be replicated" (2004: 264).

Zoos seek to "sell an experience of the natural through exposure to wild animals," even though the animals on display may never have seen "the wild" (Desmond 1999: 147). Visitors to zoos seek to see animals behaving "authentically" or "naturally," but, ultimately, Desmond explains, this is an illusion, because the animals are dependent upon the zookeepers for all of their needs (1999: 164). Desmond (ibid.) characterizes it as a performance where only certain behaviors are permitted and other behaviors occur that are indicators of captivity rather than "natural" (Desmond 1999: 150). In aquariums, she explains, we believe the behaviors on display are natural, but that meaning is changed as a result of "the missing interactions and the rechoreographed behaviors caused by the confinement" (Desmond 1999: 184). Visitors see animals interact with a small number of other animals, and often only others of their same species (ibid.). Many animals in captivity also display displacement behaviors, such as pacing or other repetitive action, which signals their discomfort and, while natural, signifies an unhappy animal. Some visitors are acutely aware of these behaviors, and watching animals may make some feel uncomfortable. Bulbeck (2005: 185-186) explains that, for some, the experience of watching animals amounts to a "guilty pleasure, a tension between our enjoyment of the
animal encounter and a suspicion that the animal is not enjoying the encounter."

Beardsworth and Bryman (2001: 92) suggest that the movement toward landscape immersion and the cage-free zoos are an attempt to make visitors feel more comfortable about captive animals.

Part of increasing visitor "comfort" includes introducing a conservation focus in zoos (Beardsworth and Bryman 2001: 93). "Increasingly, modern zoos justify their existence with a focus on education, even conservation, rather than the entertainment of previous times" (Bulbeck 2005: 23). This new emphasis on conservation adds another dimension to how animals and experiences are presented in the context of zoos. For people to care about saving the wilderness or animals, some attest, they must have a relationship with nature (Bulbeck 2005: 152). Mullan and Marvin (1999: 152) raise the important question of why some animals draw more conservation concern than others. Some animals, they explain, "do not elicit sympathetic emotional reactions in people" (ibid.). Desmond (1999: 166-167) explains that animals appearing more human are easier to identify with than others, and the animals with which humans identify less are less likely to generate concern – mammals such as lions, for instance, remind people more of humans than do sea slugs. Desmond (1999: 193) explains that, in the context of "knowing" animals to feel motivated to "save" or "protect" them, knowing refers less to scientific facts and "more in terms of personality and individualism."

Zoos can more easily create merchandise around animals whose personalities they highlight, animals that are typically either endangered or charismatic. This merchandise, however, may clash with the presentation of animals "as symbols of pristine nature and therefore as beyond the clutches of a commoditized world" (Beardsworth and Bryman
This process, Beardsworth and Bryman argue, is a component of the Disneyization of zoos (2001). In their article, Beardsworth and Bryman demonstrate that Disneyization may be a direct process, where zoos intentionally borrow from the Disney theme park model. They quote the Director of the National Zoological Park as saying, "We [in zoos] need to borrow from the best exhibit techniques and quality management practices," while the Director Emeritus of the Columbus Zoological Gardens acknowledged Disney’s influence by quoting, "I would rather entertain and hope people learn than teach and hope people are entertained" (Beardsworth and Bryman 2001: 96). In adopting practices from theme parks, zoos occupy a difficult space between places of education and ones geared toward entertainment. To avoid becoming "theme parks," zoos must maintain an air of education and seriousness while being entertaining enough to attract visitors, especially repeat visitors. Attracting millions of visitors every year, Disney World’s Animal Kingdom makes this space more complicated to occupy, and Beardsworth and Bryman make frequent reference to the park. As a theme park, its primary goal is entertainment and, thus, does not have to maintain the same standard of authenticity in educational credentials as a zoo. Visitors may accept less "authentic" experiences from a theme park so long as the park remains internally consistent and so long as they are entertained.

**Theme Parks**

The term "theme park" has become synonymous with the Disney parks, and for good reason. "The concept of the "themed" environment first entered the American consciousness with the opening of Disneyland" (King 2002: 3) in 1955. The theme park did not emerge, fully formed, from Walt Disney’s head, however: theme parks have their roots
in "the older amusement park and its peripatetic forebears, the circus and carnival, and the industrial expositions and world’s fairs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Davis 1997: 20). Disney drew inspiration from these older forms, but wanted to turn them from "dirty, sleazy, money-grubbing places" into "'a place scaled down to kids' size'" (Watts 1997: 384). Theme parks are distinguishable from other types of amusement parks in that they "are a total-sensory-engaging environment built to express a coherent but multi-layered message" (King 2002: 3). They are designed as immersive, with all parts of the park contributing toward the overarching theme – from the goods sold to the architecture and rides (Davis 1997: 22). "The meanings the park contains are centrally produced to be as nonconflictual as possible" (Davis 1997: 25). The Disney parks present excellent examples of this synergy, both as the first theme parks and as masterpieces of cohesion. Watts (1997: 383-384) explains that "from its very inception, Disneyland functioned as a kind of command center linking together (and publicizing) the studio's myriad projects in television, movies, music, and merchandising." For example, during construction on the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California, Disney partnered with ABC on a Disneyland television show, with weekly themes corresponding to themed areas of the park, such as Fantasyland and Adventureland. Watts (1997: 391) explains, "[The] earliest blueprint for the television series in June 1953 stressed the need for televised progress reports on the Anaheim facility. They would encourage the viewing audience ...to remain interested as the park was 'transformed from the world of the imagination into physical reality.'" Inside the park as well, rides took on themes from popular Disney films and shows while stores offered Disney merchandise. "This saturation strategy took millions of visitors and immersed them in an enchanted, Disney-created world while softly selling an array of
Disney products" (Watts 1997: 391). Disney’s ideas about the American way of life threaded through these different areas and became physically embodied in the park itself. Ideas, messages, and broad themes from other Disney divisions manifest themselves in the park, creating the Disney Park reality that visitors experience as authentic.

For Disney, the point of the theme park experience was not solely to create a cohesive environment, but to take park visitors out of their everyday world and transport them somewhere else (Wilson 1999: 161). King argues that "theme parks are a distillation of cultural values," and the Disney parks successfully depict American cultural values (King 2002: 9, 12-13). Watts explains, "Disney demonstrated a remarkable capacity to grasp the essence of American attitudes about work, family, social life, and success and yet interpret them in light of evolving historical circumstances" (1997: 452). He explains that Disney represented optimism and that Disneyland told Americans there was nothing to fear and things were going to be just fine (Watts 1997: 439). Davis states that the primary goal of Sea World, as at Disney, is to make visitors smile, which involves "creating an entire atmosphere that is simplified, beautiful, unlike the real world, and stress and problem free" (1997: 161). The goal, then, of these theme parks, is to appeal to visitors’ emotions (ibid.).

Francaviglia (1999) offers a compelling example of this in his examination of Frontierland. Disneyland is divided into several zones, called "lands." Upon entering the park, visitors walk down Main Street, U.S.A, "a sentimental recreation of turn-of-the-century, small-town life" (Watts 1997: 389). Visitors then arrive in a plaza with Sleeping Beauty's Castle and a choice of several directions - spokes radiating out from the central hub: Adventureland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and Frontierland (ibid.). Each of these sections has its own particular theme, with marked boundaries between the lands.
Frontierland has a nineteenth century American West theme. Francaviglia states, "In Frontierland, Disney encouraged visitors to vicariously experience the unknown, turning theme park visitors into latter-day explorers far removed from the original time and place of exploration" (1999: 158). He sees the location of Frontierland in the park – west of the central hub – as evidence that Disney "constructed a mental map that was likely based on actual maps of the American West" (Francaviglia 1999: 162). Even the evocative place names – Rainbow Canyon, Devil's Paint Pots, Rock Gorge, Coyote Rock, Elephant Rock, Cactus Gardens – "reflect Disney's fascination with the region's unique natural history as immortalized in his popular early 1950s nature films, *The Living Desert* and *The Vanishing Prairie*" (Francaviglia 1999: 165).

Francaviglia characterizes Frontierland as an allegory, conveying the message that "the spirit of the frontier was not dead" (1999: 169). Through the design of the Rivers of America section of Frontierland, with its riverboat cruise and Tom Sawyer's Island, Disney linked the park to the legacy of Mark Twain (Francaviglia 1999: 173). Frontierland as a whole was designed as a "microcosm of the American West, capturing a glimpse of the environmental variation that exists there" (Francaviglia 1999: 174). In celebrating the natural environment of the American West, Disney connected Frontierland to national parks such as Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, adding concrete landforms designed to replicate these places. As a modern example, Thunder Mountain Railroad stretches into the air, all concrete rock designed to look like structures found in the deserts of the American West. For the Walt Disney's parents' generation, "these parks became meccas for the patriotic. To see their natural wonders was to reaffirm one's sense of nationalism and to confirm that American civilization respected the sublime" *(ibid).* Frontierland's narrative
"is ultimately a story about, and a longing for, what would be lost in the transition from nature to civilization" (Francaviglia 1999: 182), which Wilson (1991: 25) suggests is part of why Americans engage in nature tourism. Disneyland does not pretend to authentically replicate the frontier. Instead, it evokes nostalgia for the mythical American West, one tied up with impressive landforms such as the Grand Canyon and adventurous frontiersmen. Shared experience and shared mythology lend an air of authenticity to Frontierland.

Through his piece, Francaviglia is clear that Frontierland presents "a simplified image of the region that reaffirmed widespread popular beliefs about the historical geography of the West" (1999: 181), rather than a "real" image of the American West. Fjellman (1992: 254) explains that, "the Disney strategy is to juxtapose the real and the fantastic, surrounding us with this mix until it becomes difficult to tell which is which." The lines, he states, are "systematically blurred" so that "we progressively accept the Disney definition of things" (Fjellman 1992: 255, 254). King, however, disagrees, stating that the Disney parks are "not about the technics of the artifact; it is about our attachment to the idea of the thing," and thus do not pretend to be authentic in their representations (2002: 9). She states that the Disney parks believe "in the implicit power of the artifact, carefully chosen and positioned in context, to explain itself without words" (King 2002: 11). Mintz, meanwhile, argues that "it is a gross oversimplification to present the issue as one of 'real' versus 'artificial' experience, or one of 'learning' and/or 'inspiration' versus recreation, amusement, or for that matter, of consumerism or leisure as a commodity" (1998: 50). Audiences negotiate their expectations and views with the images and meanings presented to them, finding meaning and a sense of authenticity in the space between.
The literature reflects varying degrees of concern about Disney’s level of control exercised in the Disney parks. Fjellman exhibits more concern than does King. Hiaasen exhibits the most concern (and criticism), stating, "never before or since has such outlandish dominion been given to a private corporation" and "Disney isn’t in the business of exploiting Nature so much as striving to improve upon it, constantly fine-tuning God’s work" (1998: 27, 18). Wilson, meanwhile, states, "The organizing principle of the Disney universe is control. It’s as if every gaze of a spectator must be directed—just like in the movies" (1991: 182). This control, he explains, is achieved through "a sensory blanketing that renders the environment itself seamless" (*ibid*.). Wright, however, explains that Disney uses "soft control," characterized by "the relative absence of explicit instructions and prohibitions on tourists’ movements. Where these are present their potentially offensive nature is softened by an explanation," such as the sign asking tourists not to feed the ducks to keep them from becoming aggressive (2006: 307-308). In spite of this, though, visitors to the Disney parks tend to stay within the established limits (Wright 2006: 308). These limits are established through natural symbols, such as lightness and darkness, signage, or differences in the maintenance of plants (Wright 2006: 310-311). Thus, "restrictions on movement are typically symbolically identified; requesting rather than demanding guest compliance" (Wright 2006: 311). For example, the flowers in front of The Living Seas at Epcot simulate a wave, showing "civilization" and "order." In contrast, "at the side of each pavilion [in Epcot] is a narrow path that leads to the back area that is reserved for park employees. This is not only dark but is also flanked by unkempt shrubs and scrub. It therefore represents disorderly, uncivilized nature" (*ibid*.). This means of control, Wright (2006: 315) argues, allows Disney to maintain the friendly atmosphere the park tries to
create while still steering guests away from "backstage" areas, keeping them where they can be entertained.

These distinct forms of media – films, tourism, zoos, and theme parks – all place high value on an "authentic" experience. In films, that authenticity means "unstaged" film of animals in the wild, behaving naturally. Though editing imposes a filter on what audiences see of the hours of film shot by cameramen, that process should be invisible to film viewers to meet the standard of "authenticity." That said, many films now offer a "behind the scenes" look at how cameramen shot the film, typically in a special or during the credits. This new development allows viewers a glimpse into the process of filming, reassuring them that the filmmakers have not pulled tricks on them. It is similar to when a magician shows the audience how he or she performed a trick. Additionally, since audiences want to see "unstaged" nature, showing them how cameramen obtained a specific piece of footage reassures them the action was real. In tourism, authentic experiences rely on a destination image, created in the minds of tourists, often through consumption of media about a location (such as film, photographs, or promotional materials). For an experience to seem authentic, it must reflect this destination image. An authentic zoo replicates, as much as possible, an animal's natural environment, allowing zoo visitors to forget they are viewing animals in captivity. Theme parks rely on internal consistency in their created world for authenticity. As fully immersive attractions, anything that removes a visitor from the theme may interfere with the park's authenticity. Through these forms of media, producers construct a sense of authenticity by appealing to consumers' previously held standards – the experience feels authentic based on their conception of what it is "supposed" to be.
Audiences, based on knowledge obtained through education and other media, have a sense of how nature "should" look or what an experience "should" resemble. In exploring nature films, zoos, tourism, and theme parks together, the differences and commonalities in how producers appeal to that sensibility become apparent.

Disney Corporation products allow for an interesting examination of how producers use visual media to convey ideas about nature and construct a sense of authenticity for the audience, because they produce many of these forms of media. Disney’s nature films and Animal Kingdom theme park are two different forms of media, but some of the ideas and techniques translate between the two and Disney works to present consistent messages across the two divisions. In their nature film division, Disneynature, Disney not only attempts to convey a sense of authenticity about the film’s visuals, but uses the visuals and narration to build audiences’ appreciation of nature to encourage them toward environmentalism. Disneynature films draw strongly on the legacy of Disney's True Life Adventures, but clearly hail from a newer generation, focused even more intensely on visual spectacle and increasing appreciation and awareness for the natural world around us.
Chapter Three:  
Searching for Depth Beyond the Images:  
Nature on Display in Disneynature’s Oceans

For generations, Disney films have opened with the iconic castle and the Walt Disney name appearing from pixie dust. The castle definitively marks the content as produced by Disney, a marker meaning family-friendly entertainment. As Disneynature films open, audiences see an outline reminiscent of the iconic castle, only for the rising light to reveal mountains, with the Disneynature name appearing from reflected sunlight rather than from magical pixie dust. The new opening tells viewers, "We're not in the Disney world, we're in the real world," while still offering the assurance of Disney imagery and family-friendly entertainment.

To date, six films bear the Disneynature name: Earth, The Crimson Wing (about flamingoes), Oceans, African Cats, Chimpanzee, and Wings of Life (about pollinators). In April 2014, Disneynature will release Bears, a film that follows a family of bears in Alaska.

Most of these films follow the animals throughout a year, telling a short story about their lives. Oceans, on the other hand, sweeps across the globe, showing animals living under the sea in a variety of different locations. It does not tell a traceable narrative story in the same fashion, and this departure from the typical form interested me. The film also deviates somewhat from other nature films in how it discusses people. While many films ignore the presence of people on the planet almost entirely, Oceans not only shows humans during the film but explicitly mentions our role in maintaining the oceans' health. This aspect also interested me. I both analyzed the film and screened it for others in an effort to determine how audiences would react to the film and its content.
In this chapter, I begin with an exploration of why Disney returned to making nature films after a lengthy absence, having released the last True Life Adventure in 1960 and launching the new division in 2008. Disneynature's creation was part of an attempt by Disney to be seen as a more environmentally friendly company and to take advantage of the popularity and profitability of recent releases such as *Planet Earth* and *March of the Penguins*. I then offer some background on *Oceans*, including contemporary reviews of the film and a brief history of underwater film. From there, I move into my analysis of *Oceans*. What messages does *Oceans* convey to viewers? What techniques do they employ to convey these messages? How do the filmmakers work to establish a sense of authenticity for the audience? Following that, I share the results of my screenings and how others reacted to the film. The specific questions I asked in my screenings can be found in the appendix, but the primary question I sought to answer was do these respondents find *Oceans* authentic? What characteristics of the film lead them to this determination?

The literature indicates that authenticity in nature films centers on the film seeming to present unstaged footage of animals behaving naturally. While this may be a component of how audiences perceive authenticity in films, my research suggests that viewers have a more complex view on what makes the film "authentic." From my research, it seems that many viewers expect nature films to present situations in context, sharing information or facts about what they see onscreen. Viewers expect not only to see real events, but also to have real events explained. The film does not necessarily have to teach new information, but should convey a sense of authority on the subject matter. This may be related to how nature films often fall under the category of "documentaries," which often carry expectations of being both entertaining and informative. When a film does not meet this
expectation, viewers begin to question the film, voicing concerns about its authority and educational value. In the case of *Oceans*, many viewers found it focused too much on appreciating the oceans and too little on details about the animals that live there. While the narration states flat out that to appreciate the ocean, viewers must experience it, an emphasis on appreciation over information changes the dynamic of the film, seeming to minimize the role of facts and information in learning about nature. The lack of details pertains not solely to the animals, but also the environmental issues mentioned throughout. While issues about overfishing and pollution each receive a few minutes of screen time, each is quickly followed by a statement of the ocean's resilience. While some viewers appreciated the visuals and mentions of conservation, the film overall seemed to avoid controversial issues, suggesting a non-offensive form of environmentalism that would satisfy many environmentally minded viewers while not forcing anything on the ambivalent.

As one branch of the Disney enterprise, their nature films present one form of how Disney conveys ideas about nature and how humans should interact with it. The techniques utilized in a film differ somewhat from those employed at their Animal Kingdom theme park, but the messages and ideas are consistent. Films present an easy, low-cost means of consuming content about nature – there is a lot less work involved on the part of the audience to watch a film (especially after its release on DVD) than travel to a Disney park. As a result, the films may have a broader reach than the parks, and it therefore becomes even more important to examine the techniques employed and ideas conveyed about nature and humans’ relationship with it.
Disneynature

Disney launched Disneynature in the wake of the award-winning and commercially successful *March of the Penguins* and BBC’s *Planet Earth*. A contemporary newspaper article quotes Disney's chief executive officer Bob Iger as saying of *March of the Penguins*, "A light bulb went off. We all said 'That should have been a Disney film'" (Garrahan 2008). Another article quotes Iger as saying, "We were blown away by [Planet Earth] and we wished the Disney name was on it" (Glaister 2008). In launching the Disneynature division, Disney signed *Planet Earth*'s director, Alastair Fothergill, to a multi-film contract (*ibid*.). About the deal, he said,"Disney has been an inspiration to wildlife documentarians for generations and it's a genuine thrill to advance this extraordinary legacy under this new label" (*ibid.*).

As discussed in the previous section, Disney helped develop the nature film genre with its True Life Adventures. After the 1960 release of *Jungle Cat*, however, the company stopped making nature films. Molloy (2013: 174-175) explains Disney’s decision to end the True Life Adventures came as a result of structural changes in Hollywood and shifting consumer tastes. As tastes shifted, Molloy explains, Disney found that other areas, such as television and theme parks, "proved to be more profitable avenues than the cinema series that could facilitate the public consumption of nature [the True Life Adventures]" (Molloy 2013: 175).

In 2008, Disney released a corporate responsibility report with a section focused on the five areas of their environmental policy:

"water and energy conservation; greenhouse gas emission reduction; waste minimization; ecosystem conservation; and a commitment to 'engage and inspire' stakeholders to 'make positive impacts on the environment' by
'integrating environmental messages into products, guest experiences, and
media platforms worldwide'' (Molloy 2013: 176).

Though Disney added the conservation-themed Animal Kingdom park to Disney World in
1998, critics found that, at the park "nature is packaged as entertainment spectacle, as a
brand to be consumed" (Molloy 2013: 176). Criticisms such as this led to a 2008 corporate
responsibility report and Disney taking more actions to bolster their "green" reputation
(ibid.). Molloy (2013: 176) explains that Disney created the Disneynature division as a
major component of integrating environmental messages into their products. She quotes
the report as stating that Disneynature "aims to inspire a greater appreciation of the world
we live in and the creatures with whom we share it" (ibid.). Molloy argues that
Disneynature should be understood within the context of Disney's brand consciousness
and their attempt to be seen as a more environmentally friendly company (ibid.). Lending
further weight to Molloy's assertion, Disney was remarkably open about the multiple goals
behind launching Disneynature. Disney CEO Bob Iger "said he expected the division to
'entertain people in a very Disney way and create shareholder value' while 'doing
something for the environment. We like these three components'' (Garrahan 2008).

Disney's steps to increase their perceived "green-ness" seemed to pay off as their ranking
on a list of green brands increased from ninth to sixth between 2009 and 2011 (Molloy
2013: 170).

Based in France and headed by Jean-Francois Camilleri, Disneynature produces,
develops, and acquires nature documentaries (Molloy 2013: 177-178). Camilleri, while
working as senior vice president and general manager for Disney's film division in France,
backed March of the Penguins, which Disney's Buena Vista International Film Production
Finance helped finance in the late production stages (Glaister 2008, Molloy 2013: 178). The
film’s structure, relying on anthropomorphism and lying somewhere between entertainment and documentary, harkened back to the format popularized by the True Life Adventures, demonstrating to Disney that the model still worked (*ibid*). Still, the division’s first release took few risks – *Earth* (released in 2009) was a re-edited version of BBC’s *Planet Earth* (*ibid*). It enjoyed the highest grossing opening weekend for a nature documentary and achieved success in DVD rentals approximately equivalent to the *Hannah Montana* movie, remaining in the top 40 for seven weeks (Molloy 2013: 178).

To generate high revenue, a film must generate high interest. Alastair Fothergill stated that he felt frustrated by the constraints of television nature programs, and that "cinema is the place that does justice to the natural world" (quoted in Garrrahan 2008). In April 2008, the same month Disneynature launched, Warner Bros. Pictures and Imax announced the success stemming from their partnership in creating nature content for Imax screens, such as the 2006 film *Deep Sea 3D*, which made $64 million worldwide (Giardina 2008). Imax’s chairman and president of filmed entertainment stated that their nature films play for months or years in theatres, often enjoying the most success when running on weekday mornings for a long time rather than focusing on first weekend revenues (*ibid*). Giardina (2008) explains that film companies are shifting attention back toward nature programming both as a result of the success of such programming on television and as technology improves. Director Alastair Fothergill explains, "Technology is important because we are often trying to reveal things that people haven’t seen before" (quoted in Giardina 2008). New technological developments utilized by Fothergill include a high definition camera system where the heavy recording equipment sits inside a helicopter while the camera sits outside, making it easier to stabilize more powerful lenses
This allows the filmmakers to capture images of animals from farther away, where the helicopter will not frighten them (Giardina 2008). While Disneynature follows a different model from that of Imax, "Disney execs say developments in production technology, which are also making for more exciting content, will be a driver for its new brand" (ibid.). Bob Iger explained, "We love balancing heritage and innovation and Disneynature is a perfect example of this" (Garrahan 2008).

In marketing the Disneynature films, Disney stays true to proven formulas. Most of the division's films are widely distributed, with both Earth and Oceans screening in over 1000 theatres their opening weekends (Molloy 2013: 178). Wide distribution means the films have more in common with Hollywood blockbusters than with Imax nature documentaries. Advertising further pushes them toward blockbusters, with trailers utilizing dramatic narration and stunning examples of the photography featured in the film (Molloy 2013: 179-179). Trailers focus on a "shared planet" and anthropomorphism to appeal to audiences, calling Earth "an extraordinary motion picture event about one year in the life of the creatures who share our planet" and inviting viewers of African Cats to "experience the incredible true story and extraordinary adventures of two families striving to make a home in the wildest place on earth" (Molloy 2013: 179).

On April 18th, 2014, Disneynature will release its newest film, Bears, and marketing activities focus on "meeting the cubs" – the film’s Facebook uses #MeetTheCubs in every post and in the trailer has a translucent one in the corner of the screen. They also share regular "did you know" updates on the Disneynature Facebook page about bears. A portion of ticket sales from the opening weekend will go toward the National Park Foundation. This tie-in to an environmental cause is part of a regular marketing scheme for Disneynature
films. Each theatrical release includes an associated environmental charity receiving proceeds from opening weekend ticket sales, bolstering the film’s "green" credentials. Additionally, Disneynature releases films on Earth Day, including the straight-to-DVD releases such as 2012’s *Wings of Life*. Molloy (2013: 179) explains that this structures "the Disneynature release calendar around (what is marketed as) a 'globally' recognized day that acknowledges environmental awareness," especially as Disneynature announced their yearly film releases through 2012 at the division’s creation announcement in 2008. One of the films announced then was the 2010 release, *Oceans*, "a journey through our planet’s five oceans" narrated by Pierce Brosnan (Molloy 2013: 179).

**Oceans**

Released on April 22, 2010, *Oceans* promises "an unprecedented look at the lives of ... elusive deepwater creatures through their own eyes," allowing viewers to "migrate with whales, swim alongside a great white shark and race with dolphins at play" (Disneynature). Underwater cinematography presents its own unique challenges, such as preventing damage to cameras as a result of water or high pressure at great depths. The risks, though, come with high rewards, as underwater films are popular and have been for quite some time. Starosielski (2013) offers a cultural history of underwater films from the 1910s through the 1970s, tracing the evolution of themes in underwater films. She explains that "diving into the ocean, whether via scuba or cinematic technologies, is seen as an escape from the social and cultural processes that characterize every day life" (Starosielski 2013: 149). From early films, it became clear that "oceans could simultaneously be revealed to science and still remain in the realm of the supernatural and exotic" (Starosielski 2013: 153). One early underwater filmmaker, John Ernest Williamson, wanted to avoid using his
technology to debunk the myth of the Loch Ness monster, lest he "kill the thrills of this vast world of wonderers" (quotes in Starosielski 2013: 153).

In more recent iterations of underwater films, filmmakers draw comparisons between the ocean and space (Starosielski 2013: 150). Even as some films sought to mystify the oceans, others brought ocean life into suburban living rooms, effectively domesticating it. One such example is *Flipper*, in which "the ocean becomes a backyard for two young boys to explore and a site where family ties are reinforced" (Starosielski 2013: 160). Other attempts to domesticate ocean life were intended to introduce the idea of underwater colonies, such as those supported by filmmaker Jacques Cousteau, who believed such colonies could save the world from overpopulation (Starosielski 2013: 160-161). Thus, "filmmaking was important, not because it could save the ocean, but because it could reveal how the ocean would save us" (Starosielski 2013: 161).

Most reviews of *Oceans* were positive, though a few expressed some displeasure with aspects, most commonly with narration – a review from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* states, "the voice-over almost manages to turn the majestic into the mundane (Rea 2010). Many reviews highlighted the spectacular visuals. A reviewer from the Orlando Sentinel explains that, in spite of the narration, "It's still a movie of marvels, with many images so stunning as to trick the mind into thinking 'special effects.' But the movie magic here – mammals and fish, corals and crustaceans so strange, whimsical and blessedly numerous – is all Mother Nature's own" (Moore 2010). *Oceans*, though, unlike *Earth*, does not exclude the influence of people, which the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch’s* critic appreciated, calling it an "evolutionary leap forward, a visually exquisite film that doesn’t ignore the truths of pollution and predatory survival" (Williams 2010). While this could suggest that *Oceans*
may be seen as more scientific than its predecessor, *Earth*, several reviews mention the opposite, that the film fails to teach anything. The *Post-Dispatch* critic disregards this, stating, "exposing humans to the rich ecosystem that produced and sustains all life makes 'Oceans' inherent valuable" (*ibid.*). The *Philadelphia Inquirer*’s reviewer explains that *Oceans* is "more celebratory than scientific," but appreciates that it "avoids the anthropomorphic tendencies of old-school nature [documentaries] that related the behavior of mammals and marine life to humans" (Rea 2010).

The lack of educational material in *Oceans* seemed to bother *Washington Post* reviewer Rachel Saslow the most. "For all 'Oceans' does to please the eyes and ears," she explains, "it does nothing to engage the brain" (Saslow 2010). She explains that the film "has neither narrative arc nor organizing principles of any kind," as it jumps around the world in no discernable order, moving from creature to creature without transition (*ibid.*). Whereas one critic praised the film for revealing truths about "predatory survival," Saslow finds that it lacks teeth, explaining, "The filmmakers manage to turn a shark catching a sea lion in its teeth into a bloodless event" (*ibid.*). She finds the content lacking, especially in comparison to the television series *Life*, which had recently finished airing on the Discovery Channel (Saslow 2010). Whereas Fothergill believes that cinema is a better format for nature films, Saslow found that, even in presenting the same content, *Oceans* presented a merely pleasant depiction of a leafy sea dragon swimming among plants, whereas in *Life*, "you learn about and watch the sea dragon's elaborate mating dance, an elegant ballet of sorts in which the animals mirror each other’s movements for hours" (*ibid.*).

Criticisms about *Oceans*’ educational content could be important, especially if teachers are considering using it in the classroom. Though used in classrooms,
Disneynature films, as with the True Life Adventures, are not initially designed to be educational. After the films leave theatres, Disneynature re-edits the films and releases them as Classroom Editions, supplementing that with their own teaching materials (Molloy 2013: 180). The 42-page Educator's Guide for Oceans is designed for grades 2-6 includes activities and lessons covering two major themes: physical characteristics of the oceans and ocean habitats. Many activities correlate to sections of the film.

Helpful as reviews may prove in allowing viewers to make the decision about whether or not to see a film, they often offer little in terms of true analysis of a film. The reviews I found often latched onto one or two features to discuss, while the film may contain overarching ideas that were only touched upon in reviews or possibly overlooked entirely. For the purpose of this project, I not only had to examine contemporary reviews of Oceans, but watch the film for myself to analyze not only what the film conveys but how it conveys these ideas and messages.

**Film Description and Analysis**

In conducting a film analysis of Oceans, I focused on several questions, using the four-step process presented by Hamel (2012). Using this model, I examined the structure of the film (focusing particularly on the narrative arc), techniques employed (he highlights color, framing, editing, sound, shot distance, and lighting), how those techniques are used through the film (how and where might they repeat), and any messages conveyed by the techniques and patterns (Hamel 2012: 39, 39-49). Oceans stands somewhat apart from the rest of the Disneynature films, both as the only film not set on land and in not tracking the same animal over a lengthy period of time, as well as engaging in little anthropomorphism. It departs somewhat from the traditional model of the nature film in occasionally showing
people and engaging in little anthropomorphism, but still places a high priority on visual spectacle and on creating a connection between the audience and the animals shown. *Oceans* works to create a sense of authenticity through not only showing unstaged nature, but by using a wide variety of animals and settings to show the complexity of the oceans. Based on knowledge gained from other sources, such as media and schools, audiences enter into the experience of watching *Oceans* with some background knowledge and understand that a wide range of animals exist underwater. In offering even a glimpse of this complexity, filmmakers attempt to create authenticity by acknowledging the diversity of animals while also hoping to show audiences some different creatures and situations they may not have previously encountered.

*Oceans* immediately displays its departure from the traditional nature film model by opening with a shot focused on the legs of children running up a hill. As they crest the hill, the viewer sees them running toward the ocean, then the camera focuses on one young boy's face, set in a sort of thoughtful, curious expression. He looks out over intensely blue water dotted with large rocks, waves crashing all around. The narrator, Pierce Brosnan, informs us that we have to "hear" the ocean and "feel its power" to really know the ocean, pausing for us to listen to the birds and the crashing waves. Before long, we travel underwater to see a close-up of a marine iguana in the Galapagos, hearing the sounds of underwater currents and the soft sound the iguana's tail makes as it moves through the water. This sudden transition from a beach (presumably in France, given the headquarters of Disneynature and the French names of the directors) to an iguana in the Galapagos sets the stage for the rest of the film, a film that seems to jump quickly from location to location and from animal to animal. The boy frames the film, as it returns to him at the end, Brosnan
telling viewers that we now "know" the ocean. *Oceans* almost feels better paced for television than a film, seemingly to leave breaks for commercials and consisting of several short, separate segments. In my viewing, I identified ten sections, on which I shall elaborate more fully: the introduction, the majesty of the ocean, life under the sea, undersea community, human analogies, travel, humans and the ocean, recovery, research, and a conclusion. While each section has a general topic, everything conforms to the major theme of *Oceans*: appreciating the ocean through experiencing it, primarily framed by the narration at the film's opening and conclusion.

The introductory section ends soon after introducing us to the marine iguana. The iguana swims up to the surface, emerging and crawling onto the shore, with only the sound of the waves crashing behind him. Brosnan tells us that the "ocean is more than just a place," explaining that it is alive. As we shift to footage of horseshoe crabs on the beach, he explains that organisms filled the oceans long before the ancestors of these crabs crawled onto the shore, the first of a few veiled references to evolution. This sets up Brosnan's statement, "As the human race reached for the stars, it seems like all of nature got out of whack." With the iguana in the foreground, we hear and see a rocket blast off in the distance, lighting up the sky in a way that evokes a mushroom cloud. The iguana appears to watch the rocket, which we hear thundering over everything else. Throughout the film, *Oceans* utilizes what seems to be ambient sounds, those of the environment at the time of filming. (Given modern technology, these sounds may come from another place and another time, but seem to fit well enough with the images that they could originate from the raw footage.) The film also employs a grand, sweeping soundtrack, as well as parts that combine ambient sound and dramatic music. Often, the music replaces the narration,
though Brosnan sometimes talks over softer music. Narration through the film is sporadic at best, often with minutes passing between comments.

The rocket launch moves us into the second section, the one I see as centered upon the majesty of the ocean. In an attempt to connect to the rocket, Brosnan explains that we have found new galaxies in the ocean, showing tiny sea urchin larva and larger crustacean eggs floating through the darkness, comparing these to asteroids and planets. This comparison of ocean and space fits into broader themes used in other underwater films, and Disney takes it a step further with the next bit of footage, showing glowing jellyfish. As the camera zooms out and more jellyfish fill the screen, the music builds, a song that would seem to fit just as well in the Harry Potter soundtrack, a mystical, dancing tune reminiscent of a music box. No narration informs the viewer about these jellyfish or where they live.

Following a transition shot of open ocean (a recurring theme throughout the film), Oceans again employs music rather than narration, this time a dramatic, horn-heavy piece to convey a sense of chase. The music swirls and builds with surging strings, seeming to fit equally well behind charging horses and here, accompanying dolphins leaping and swirling around a ball of fish (a "bait ball"). Birds dive from above, also looking to catch their dinner and, before long, whales and sharks arrive as well. The editing also conveys chaos, quickly cutting from animal to animal, showing viewers the eating frenzy. The music climaxes as a large whale charges through the center of the bait ball, winding down with the action. Brosnan, having remained silent through this frantic scene, speaks up to explain that enough of the sardines survive this onslaught to ensure the survival of the species.

We soon see another view of a bait ball, this time backed by building, graceful strings in a repetitive piece, as if showing us the beauty of the fish’s movement, this time
with rays interspersed, seemingly flying underwater. We also see images of an old fashioned sailing ship, Brosnan discussing about how, when explorers sailed the oceans, there was so much they could not see. He offers the example of the "silk scarves" of the blanket octopus, a beautiful, delicate looking creature floating near the surface of the water. The narration offers no further detail on this octopus besides naming it, not even an explanation of why its tentacles resemble scarves, rather than the arms viewers may be used to seeing on an octopus. With no further explanation, we once again see a swirling bait ball with music swirling and building behind it, this time without any visible predators. These scenes are emblematic of the majesty of the ocean focus of this section, which focuses primarily on beauty and drama.

Shortly into the following section, Brosnan states, "Merely knowing these creatures exist isn't enough to tell the stories of their lives." This part of the film offers lightly detailed anecdotes about animals' lives, both using narration and allowing viewers to extrapolate based on the combination of narration, image, and music. We see sea lions playing, one chasing a puffer fish underwater. Brosnan tells us that a crab "tip toes" past the sleeping sea lions, one cracking open an eyelid, while other sea lions seem to cuddle in the shallow water. A young sea lion squawks, seemingly for comedic effect. While no music backs this scene, it soon returns as we see seals cutting through almost perfectly calm, glassy water. Plinking music builds dramatically a shark catches seals in an entirely bloodless scene that ends almost as soon as it begins, cutting quickly to sea lions whose faces appear worried. Then Brosnan explains that a group of orcas in South America have developed a unique method of hunting on the beach – we watch as they use currents and waves to surge up onto the beach to catch the sea lions. This scene is, similarly, short and bloodless, with
close ups focused just off the orcas' mouths, on the water and gravel splashing up around them as they surge onto the beach. Following the brief hunting theme, we cut suddenly to a blue whale. After offering numbers about how large blue whales are, Brosnan explains how the whale feeds. We watch as it moves, open-mouthed, through a swarm of small, red creatures called krill, the whale's stomach soon bloated with food. With a long pan of the whale's body from head to tail, we gain an appreciation for the animal’s size, returning once again to a broader theme of appreciating nature through seeing it up close.

The next scene employs a combination of narration and a light, building music with an air of mystery. A walking piano theme evokes moving legs, such as those of a walking starfish and crab. We focus here on a coral reef at night. (It could be a compilation of many coral reefs, but it is difficult to tell and seems irrelevant to the content.) Brosnan names some of the animals, but many go unnamed, including an octopus that suddenly changes its shape, color, and texture to blend into the ground. One of the final parts of this scene focuses on a mantis shrimp digging a hole. Brosnan tells us that he does not like intruders, setting up a confrontation between the shrimp and a crab, which appears to be slightly smaller. A fight occurs without narration, allowing the viewer to fill in the details based on the preceding narration and their own interpretation. During the fight, we see both long shots and close ups of the animals, ending with the crab having his claw ripped off. Throughout the fight, the sounds all appear to be ambient, with absolutely no music behind the encounter. We see a close up of the shrimp holding the crab's claw, appearing almost triumphant, while the crab appears to look defeated. The shrimp then flips him over almost defiantly. Throughout this section, the selective imagery seems to invite the audience to project their own thoughts onto the animals and anthropomorphize them without an
explanation or narration. This may be the most informative section of the film, but still imparts little knowledge to viewers about the animals.

In a similar vein, the next segment of the film seems to focus on communities and relationships in the ocean. Some of these relationships are predatory, such as the extended scene of baby turtles hatching during the day and being snatched up by frigate birds. This scene combines ambient sounds (such as the snapping of the birds’ beaks as they grab turtles) with music conveying a sense of urgency and cartoonish stealth, as the birds suddenly dive down on the defenseless turtles. Later, we see a stonefish and lionfish hunting by laying in wait and suddenly snapping to catch smaller fish in their mouths.

Music here conveys a sense of mystery and foreboding, as the audience, just like the fish, has no idea when the predators will strike. Dramatic music also backs shots of a sea snake just swimming through the water and a cuttlefish (called a "master of illusion" for its pulsating color changes) on several different hunts, which are here cut together in quick succession.

We also see symbiotic relationships, such as a clown fish living in an anemone, and smaller fish cleaning larger fish. There are several shots of small fish inside the mouths of larger fish, all of which go unnamed. (Brosnan humorously warns us, "it is never a good idea to swallow your dental hygienist.") We also see smaller fish cleaning an eel, one of which slips into the eel’s gill, which the eel quickly shakes to eject. The music through this section would, again, seem to fit in a Harry Potter film, conveying a sense of playfulness and fun, almost bouncing along. While viewers see smaller fish cleaning the mouths of larger fish, the narration again offers no explanation of why or even what the smaller fish are eating, preferring humorous analogies to human actions.
The next segment seems almost entirely for fun and unrelated to anything before or after. It falls, again, under that category of appreciation. I refer to it as a section focused on human analogy, because the two scenes are referred to as a "ballet" and a "battle," respectively. Brosnan transitions the view from the pulsating cuttlefish to a scene backed by a pizzicato in the music that evokes the precise steps of a ballet. "After the magic show," he says, "time for a garden eel and razor fish ballet." The section is short, with no additional information, and the music quickly transitions to a martial, drum-heavy piece clearly meant to evoke the feeling of battle. The camera scans across spider crabs in Melbourne Bay, Australia. Brosnan compares them directly to soldiers marching into battle, though we get no explanation of what the crabs are doing. Close ups of the crabs look almost like CGI (calling to mind the review that mentioned how much the real footage looks like special effects), and the sweeping camera shows an impressive number of crabs that appear to be crawling on top of each other while they move in opposite directions. The music changes during the scene to a sweeping, dramatic piece, almost acknowledging this is not, exactly, a battle. We alternate between long shots showing the scale of the encounter to close ups of the chaotic mass of crabs moving across the ocean floor.

Brosnan tells us the next section focuses on the travel season, and it feels either like a road trip, following the adventures and antics of travelling animals, or a travelogue, showing audiences new and different animals or behaviors. It alternates between migrating animals, such as the whales shown in the beginning, and animals simply travelling through the water, such as yellow fin tuna and dolphins zipping through the water, jumping, and spinning. It offers no differentiation between migration and simply travelling, as well as offering no explanation of why the dolphins engage in this jumping
and spinning behavior, which many viewers associate with trained action. As dolphins perform acrobatic maneuvers, we see other animals, such as rays and fish, speed by, conveying high energy. Brosnan tells the audience to "hang on tight, it's going to be a bumpy ride."

As the scene slows, he explains that the animals' energy depends on a "healthy, thriving ocean," bringing up conservation in a thread that manifests itself sporadically through the film, but never in detail. He uses this to transition into a mention of old fish, such as the Asian sheep's head wrasse in the China Sea, without offering a sense of how the audience should know the age of the fish. He references the fish's appearance, but without further explanation. This shifts into another general appreciation section, discussing "unspoiled places" where "every strange face tells a story." Brosnan spends some time on the leafy sea dragon, which will die if removed from the patch of water in which it lives its whole life. Without more elaboration, we cut to octopi, with Brosnan telling that the ocean holds "places where aliens gather, no makeup or costumes needed." We then see otters using tools, swimming, and playing. Parts of this section seem like an exploration of strange or interesting sea life, almost like the sort of "strange locals" you might see in a travel documentary, but with less explanation.

The narration then returns to the whales, which have finished their migration and have arrived in Alaska. The soundtrack in this section evokes traditional indigenous music, layered with whale songs, which Brosnan explains call other whales to eat. We watch as the whales generate bubbles to form a "fishing net," their actions explained by Brosnan's narration. This is one of the only times through the duration of the film where viewers have an explanation of what is happening and why. Lots of whales begin emerging from the
water, seemingly scooping up fish. They all eat at the same time, but avoid getting in each other’s way. This feeding scene has only ambient sounds; the music has disappeared in favor of the natural breathing and splashing sounds of the whales.

The grace of the previous scene quickly dissipates as ominous music begins, the camera cutting to close ups of blue fin tuna and other animals trapped in human fishing nets. Brosnan talks about these nets and the dangers of overfishing, as well as the fish caught accidentally in trawling nets. Close ups of animals desperately trying to free themselves – such as the turtle trying to bite through the rope net – tug at the heartstrings as the choral music builds ominously. We see a few glimpses of booted feet, but never the face of a human fisherman. The camera suddenly cuts away from the fishing nets to focus on crashing waves as Brosnan tells us "the ocean fights on," seemingly negating the negativity and heartbreak of the previous scene. The "fighting" Brosnan describes involves waves crashing into seaside towns, with big, dramatic choral music reminiscent of religious chanting competes with the sound of waves. We see a fishing boat, then a military vessel, tossed around by and crashing through waves, shots on board of people scrambling to get out of the water's way, people holding on, and water rushing toward the camera. This section conveys a sense of drama and danger to people, whereas the previous scene focused primarily on the danger posed to animals. This brief section of the film seems to focus on the relationship between people and the ocean, but mostly on the negative (the negative impact humans have on the ocean, and, for a brief section, the potential dangers the ocean poses to people).

The dramatic music begins to fade out as the camera pulls back from the ship and up, through the storm clouds, then above the clouds, and eventually into outer space, when
the music cuts out entirely and we have a few seconds of total silence. A satellite floats by as Brosnan says, "The human race reached for the stars and paused to look back at the blue oceans from outer space," informing us that we look back at the ocean all the time. "When she hurts," he tells us, "we can measure her pain." Satellite imagery shows pollution "penetrating like veins, spewing poison," first showing unaltered images, then superimposing a radar swipe over the image to darken the stream of pollution emerging from rivers and stretching into the oceans. Attention then shifts to floating trash, which Brosnan states is our fault. We see a seal swim around a shopping cart on the bottom of the ocean, the water no longer the blue we have seen throughout the film, but brown and dirty. "Human indifference is surely the ocean’s greatest threat," Brosnan muses.

The camera then cuts suddenly to a seal swimming under ice with Brosnan’s voice over it saying, "Yet even now, animals thrive." I consider this section a recovery from the negativity of the previous section, as if the filmmakers want to reassure the audience that conditions are not quite as bad as the previous section might have suggested, which seems to cancel out the serious tone. Since the film offers no resolution to these problems (and in fact seems to dismiss them), it makes their mention feel incomplete and divorced from not just the rest of the film, but from the reality of the situation. It seems to almost intentionally avoid these issues, as if to make the film more broadly appealing and not potentially turn off any audience with its "activism."

Light, happy music backs this section, which focuses on the polar regions. We see a mother seal coax her baby into the water, the baby seeming to give the camera an apprehensive look with its large eyes. We see penguins slipping and sliding on the ice and one walking alone as night falls before the camera shifts to the northern polar region to
show a polar bear walking alone across the ice. We are treated to sweeping, dramatic shots of the polar landscape, the music still pleasant and neutral in the background. "If dragons really do exist, this is where you'll find the narwhal, unicorn of the sea," Brosnan tells us as we see narwhals, once again moving into nature appreciation. We both see and hear beluga whales, and Brosnan informs us that the beluga vocalizations are unique to each animal, which is the first time this has been explained about any whale in the film. The camera then cuts to walruses and we see a mother cradle her baby as they swim, then appear to embrace him. Brosnan tells us that, while the story of the ocean is about survival, it must also be about tenderness, as sweet music plays in the background.

The camera then abruptly cuts to melting ice, telling us this occurs as a result of rising temperatures and that arctic water will soon be navigable by commercial ships. Brosnan asks what will happen to the animals who cannot stand up for themselves. He informs us that the "cries of endangered species go unheard," but then adds, in a seeming contradiction, "yet never has the will to protect them been so strong." This transitions into a section of the film focused on science and researchers. We see scuba divers, many of them holding white boards used to take notes. The music conveys a sense of mystery as the narration tells us that the ocean is a place of wonder and mystery, "a magical world where even the tiniest of creatures could shed light on how the universe came to be." Researchers, we learn from Brosnan’s narration over footage of divers taking notes next to huge jellyfish or in kelp forests, "look and listen, searching for answers to age old questions," only to find new mysteries. We see a diver beside a humpback whale, one of the first true senses of scale through the entire film. Brosnan tells us that researchers "marvel at a world where giants can fly" and where "fears may prove unfounded" because "the most gruesome face
may just hide a smile," as we watch a researcher swim alongside a large shark ("companions for an afternoon swim"). Though this section ostensibly focuses on the researchers, it still conveys a sense of appreciation, suggesting that, while researchers are engaged in scientific work, they still marvel at the wonder and beauty of the oceans, as we should. It also conveys a sense that the human researchers somehow do not belong in the ocean, because this world is so beautiful and complete without them. While the presence of humans in this film sets it apart, it still treats humans as quite separate from nature.

As the film concludes and we fade back to the boy on the shore, Brosnan says, "now you know the animals,' informing us that their lives depend on us. The assertion that viewers now "know" the animals seems questionable, as the film shares little information. Sweeping music plays as we fade between clips of animals, mostly long, grand shots of animals and underwater scenery, an overview of all the creatures we have seen in the preceding 80-odd minutes. Brosnan finishes his narration by saying, "So instead of asking, 'what exactly is the ocean,' perhaps we should be asking, 'who, exactly, are we?'" Gentle music plays behind his words as the image of a seal seeming to look directly into the camera lens, connecting to the audience with its large, innocent-looking eyes, fades to black.

Through most of the film, the images rather than Brosnan's narration, tell the "story," though music often helps create the mood. The film feels almost like Fantasia, where the focus is image and the soundtrack, the two parts telling a story in tandem. This, along with its lack of a clear theme, makes the film difficult to analyze. By sweeping across oceans (indeed using open ocean to transition between segments), the film's strongest "theme" is appreciation of nature, which Brosnan tells us we gain through experiencing
nature during this film. The film, however, also equates this experience and appreciation with knowledge, which seems strange. While the True Life Adventures prioritized experiential knowledge over academic, *Oceans* does not seem to share enough information to even be considered experiential knowledge.

In terms of authenticity, it does feel as if we are offered an unstaged glimpse into the underwater lives of these animals, but I would admit that staging in an underwater film would be less apparent to me than a film set on land. We seem to have a collective sense of mystique when it comes to the ocean, even after watching documentaries set in there. In this way, parallels to space are not unfounded. Even though the film feels unstaged and does seem to show animals behaving naturally, something about its content makes it feel somewhat inauthentic. Having screened all of Disneynature films, this one conveys the weakest sense of story, which other films used to convey interesting information about the featured animals (for instance, *African Cats* discusses the familial structures of lions and cheetahs, framed as a story about motherhood, strongly anthropomorphizing the "stars"). The lack of a story left me, as a viewer, feeling as if I learned little about the ocean or the animals that live there, which undermines the film's authority and made it feel "unreal," even though all of the content seemed to have happened naturally. Even the sections on pollution and overfishing felt strange because they were so quickly followed by reassurances, which conveyed to me a sense that these were not actually problems and everything would be just fine.

*Oceans* drowns the viewer in images, often grand and beautiful ones, but conveys little sense of why any of this is important or of how the scenes relate, which makes it feel ultimately empty. Part of watching a nature film, for me, is feeling as if I have learned
something new from watching it, or at least seen footage of something I have heard about, but never seen. Scenes in *Oceans* feel almost unreal because they lack sufficient explanation and context, the important details that connect various scenes and ensure the telling of a complete story.

**Interviews and Screenings**

Having read extensively on the topic of nature films, my views on *Oceans* are not sufficient to gauge how audiences would react to the film. Thus, I screened the film for a total of twenty-three individuals, sixteen of whom were current students, all but one at the undergraduate level (the other graduated in 2013 and is currently a graduate student). The other seven were science teachers at a private school in New York City whose students range from kindergarten to high school seniors. The two groups were asked slightly different questions, as my focus was slightly different for the two groups, so I address them separately in this section. I asked questions before and after the screenings, as well as taking notes while participants watched the film. Questions before the films focused on participants’ backgrounds – for students, their year in school and major; for teachers, their educational background and their experience as teachers. I also asked students whether or not they had previously watched nature films, what comes to mind when they think of nature, and how they feel about their relationship with nature and the environment.

Questions for teachers focused on the use of nature films in their classrooms. For the teachers, after the film, our discussion focused on whether or not they would utilize *Oceans* in the classroom. For students, we discussed aspects of the film that made an impression, what they thought the film conveyed about nature, and whether they felt differently about their relationship with the environment after having seen *Oceans*. 
While screenings were open to anyone, all sixteen students were women. Students from all years attended, with a total of two first-years, eight sophomores, four juniors, and one senior, all students at the University of Vermont. Most were majoring in a scientific field, specifically nutrition, nursing, wildlife biology, and animal science, with others majoring in engineering, business, education, communication, computer science, and social work. One freshman was undeclared; the graduate student had majored in wildlife biology but attends graduate school for an unrelated field. Only one could not remember having seen a nature documentary before, while others expressed that they watched nature films both for fun and in classes. Most associated nature with the outdoors, often with the immediate environment, focusing on terms like "trees," but many respondents explained that part of their understanding of nature was their relationship to it, especially if they grew up alongside the ocean or in a wooded area. They expressed a desire to be "one" with nature, especially "unadulterated" nature. Most considered themselves environmentally friendly, or that they at least attempted to engage in "green" practices. Others focused on their experiences with nature, such as gardening, hiking, or simply being outside.

Reactions during the film were surprisingly similar, even though screenings happened on several days and with different groups of people. Some groups were more talkative during the screening, using the content as inspiration for related discussions amongst themselves, such as mentioning the documentary Blackfish upon seeing orcas. Each group referenced the Pixar film Finding Nemo upon seeing a clown fish in Oceans, as well as reacting with sadness tinged with outrage when frigate birds snatched up baby turtles from the beach. Many respondents expressed appreciation for the visually stunning images, and a few wondered aloud how the cinematographers obtained the shots, including
wondering how they kept up with the speeding dolphins. They expressed wonder and awe at the animals' behaviors, such as the agility of the shark and the "tornado of fish" in the bait ball. Some found the narration "cheesy," often laughing about it. Each group commented on the use of music in the film, ranging from appreciation to noting that each animal seemed to have its own kind of music. A main issue, however, in each group was their lack of understanding of the animals on screen. Many asked, "what's that?" and were actively searching for more explanation from the narration. In some cases, other participants were able to fill in the gaps using their own prior knowledge about ocean animals. While this knowledge helped with some context, it never answered all of the questions that arose during the film.

After the film, respondents were often eager to discuss the film and their reactions to it. Everyone commented upon the conservation message in the film, so it became a major theme of post-film discussion, cited as one of the most memorable components of the film. In one screening, respondents appreciated the emphasis on how human indifference harms the oceans. One, who emphasized her desire to live in an environmentally friendly way, remarked often on this theme, as she expressed that, in her experience, many people do not understand how their actions impact the environment, and that these images were important for them to see. Respondents in another screening explained that the images – especially the satellite images of pollution streaming into the ocean – opened their eyes to the negative impact humans can have on the ocean. They also expressed that the images made information they heard feel real by showing them a concrete reality. Someone also explained that the images of animals playing made her not want to contribute to pollution, thus aiding the conservation theme. One respondent, however, found the conservation
theme, which appeared close to the end of the film, mild, almost as if the authors sought to avoid it. Having seen other shows and done some work on her own, she wanted more information about the leafy sea dragons. While the narrator mentioned how the animals live their entire lives in one depth of water, she said, the film ignored the extensive pet trade in leafy sea dragons and how people routinely pluck them from the water. Later, she mentioned it was strange they showed a dugong but mentioned nothing about conservation in relation to manatees and dugongs, and then expressed surprise at how the film mentioned evolution, but "wouldn't touch global warming with a ten foot pole."

Everyone responded strongly to the images, focusing on how beautiful "untouched" nature is and how the film showed how much there was in the ocean. In an early screening, when asked which images made the strongest impression, respondents grew especially excited, talking over each other about the sheer number of interesting and new things. They found the bait ball scenes compelling, especially with all the animals darting in and around it. One respondent said, "Everything is just coming together and it's so cool! You don't realize how many connections there are." Some people focused on how the film revealed information they never knew before, one person citing a close up on a walking starfish, explaining she never knew how starfish moved before.

Many people mentioned that they were struck by how much *Oceans* revealed about the diversity of sea life, expressing appreciation for the number of animals shown, especially the stranger ones. Someone stated, "I thought I knew a decent amount about the animals in the ocean, but there are so many weird animals out there." Another member of the same group used that to mention how she liked that the film mentioned how many unanswerable questions exist about the ocean, and others agreed. In another group, one
woman said that she was struck by how much we, as people, depend on the ocean, which we do not seem to know much about. Her group focused on the film’s construction, mentioning that the scenes from all over drew a contrast between the different kinds of animals and where they all lived.

For the most part, discussions centered upon the content of the film, rather than its structure or stylistic elements, but some viewers did talk about salient style elements. While viewing the film, some commented on the use of music, but one group mentioned it as well when asked what stood out to them about the film. They thought the music added drama to scenes. They also remembered the narration, answering quickly that it stood out the most to them, laughing about it. A self-proclaimed "documentary cynic" took issue with certain filming techniques. During the screening, she said, "I hate it when they film the Galapagos, because those animals have never seen people before. You can just follow around a marine iguana or sit on a beach with a sea lion. They don't know how awful we are." She later mentioned that the end was the only time they showed that the animals recognized people were there, commenting on how the sea lion staring into the camera was an attempt to impact the audience by connecting with them. In actuality, she said, the sea lion was probably just trying to figure out what the camera was doing there.

Several people saw Oceans as a wake up call about their environmental friendliness. Some felt they were doing enough, but the film reinforced their desire not to litter, while others said that they realized they were not as "in tune" with nature as they thought. One respondent said, "more people need to see this," explaining that "it’s all a mystery unless you put the effort in." Others too expressed that more people should take their actions into account and take responsibility for their choices. The woman who found the conservation
theme mild, however, thought the film needed more depth and was glad she already knew about the ocean and ocean conservation, because the film would not inspire her to look any further.

Conversation turned at the end toward the film’s educational credentials. One respondent summed the film up by stating that the film tells viewers, "Look how cool it is, but look what we’re doing to it." Her screening group agreed, stating that the visuals draw the viewer in, then show the effect human actions have on the environment to teach them something. One respondent mentioned specifically that the Disney name draws more people in, increasing the film’s general appeal. Another group thought that, while the film had a scientific basis and the filmmakers made it "scientifically," it definitely fell more on the entertainment side than the educational one, specifically citing the "silly narration." They also found it too broad, undermining its educational credentials. One viewer said that, while the film would be suitable for a "general audience that isn’t educated about marine biology or ecological topics," the film failed to take advantage of opportunities to delve deeper into such issues. "It’s great to spark interest for the lay person," she said, "but there was definitely a chance to make this educational and they went with flair and sparkle instead."

Exploring the film’s educational credentials and obtaining the "expert" view of professional science educators influenced the decision to screen for teachers as well as university students. I utilized a connection to an all-girls private school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and screened Oceans for seven science teachers. Six of the seven have taught science for at least ten years, three for over thirty years. Many hold Masters degrees in either a science field or in education, one holding a PhD in physiology. One of the
teachers had a strong background in marine biology, having participated in courses or 
programs focused on it outside of a school setting. Most of the teachers taught a wide 
variety of age groups, with a majority teaching at the middle or high school level. They 
agreed that they do not often use films in their classes, often as an introduction to a topic or 
when a teacher is absent. They have a few standard videos that they show, including one on 
evolution and on plant reproduction, and the films they use come primarily from BBC, PBS, 
or explicitly educational services. One teacher stated she favors PBS programs because they 
contain both strong scientific content (accurate, current, and analytical) while also 
providing "top-notch" imagery and narration. Another teacher explained he has four 
questions when considering using a film: how well does it fit the curriculum? How good 
and how accurate is the science presented? How appropriate is the level of the film for the 
age group? How engaging is the film?

During the screening, the teachers were not immune from the spectacular imagery, 
commenting, "cool!" and expressing awe as often as the students. The group kept a sort of 
running commentary on the film, objecting when sharks caught seals out of the air, saying 
"I hate nature" as the birds scooped up baby turtles. They also engaged with each other 
about the animals seen on screen, expressing frustration about how the animals shown in 
the film often went unnamed. Other teachers often filled in knowledge gaps, naming the 
animals for others who requested information beyond what the film showed. Most of them 
expressed frustration with the lack of information conveyed, with one saying, "They don’t 
give you nearly as much information as you want." They commented on how the film 
offered little sense of how many times they changed bodies of water, finding it 
disconcerting and potentially confusing.
While the teachers cited engaging material as one criteria used in considering using a film in class, they all agreed they would not use *Oceans* in a classroom setting. Many stated that the images were beautiful, but the film lacked in scientific content and was more entertaining than educational. One teacher stated, "It lacks any basic thematic approach to its view of oceans other than 'oceans and sea life are beautiful and wonderful!'" and, while they might be able to use short segments to make a particular point, he could not see using the film in its entirety and could not envision choosing a scene from *Oceans* rather than another film. Another teacher specifically made a point about octopi, stating that the film could offer something about "who" an octopus is so that "rather than merely [watching] the 'dance' of the octopus's movement, audiences could also be enthralled by their rapid-fire giant neurons that allow them to camouflage themselves instantly and even solve simple puzzles!" Two teachers also mentioned that the film seemed disjointed, with one stating, "there were also [unconnected] sequences on dolphins and other creatures included because they are also marine animals?"

Screening for two groups with different levels of knowledge about the content allowed for a broader and more nuanced view of how audiences might react to *Oceans*. In terms of authenticity, no one questioned whether events shown were staged or could actually happen, but most people also did not find the scientific content particularly strong. Everyone appreciated the beautiful imagery and commented upon it frequently enough that it does seem the film promoted appreciation of nature among the viewers. Viewers were, however, somewhat divided on the film’s content. While many found it more entertaining than educational, some were satisfied by the conservation angle and exposure
to a large number of animals. Others questioned whether the information conveyed about the animals and life under the ocean rose to the level of truly "educational." Those respondents questioned how much informational content the film held, often offering suggestions of where the narration could add more detail. The science teachers questioned the educational content most, but one group of students found that the "silly" narration interfered with their willingness to call it an educational film. One of the science teachers explained, "To me, at least, it belongs more in the genre of 'Hey wow!' science info-tainment where living things are pictured or phenomena shown but without the requisite context or development needed for principled action."

Issues about staging or unnatural behavior never arose when viewers watched Oceans, yet many participants, both students and teachers, were left unfulfilled by the film's content. This indicates strongly that the respondents' sense of authenticity relies on more than just believing in the reality of the events shown. It seems that each person approached the film with their own set of expectations of the film's content, and, when their expectations were not met, they began to question the film, suggesting that a film's authenticity depends upon more than just being unstaged and showing natural animal behaviors. The viewers who most questioned Oceans also expressed that it contained too little scientific or educational content. They wanted more from the film than what it offered. The viewers who expressed satisfaction felt the film did inform them about conservation and that it exposed them to more animals than they had previously known. Reactions to the material did not depend solely on someone's scientific background or environmental awareness. Two students who most vocally expressed their reactions to the conservation message were two who stated their interest in environmentalism. One
thought that "everyone should see this film," while the other found the conservation content weak.

While everyone saw the same film, sharp distinctions between reactions quickly emerged, as groups of viewers seemed to bring differences in expectations to the film, particularly expectations of information conveyed. For these groups, it seemed that finding *Oceans* authentic relied on an intangible sense of offering the audience a complete experience, with information and images conveyed in context. The audience should feel as if they have learned something new or been exposed to images they previously only heard about, but always with explanation and authority. *Oceans* achieves its goal of fostering appreciation and respect for the ocean through its stunning visuals, however, for many it fell short of feeling informative. The broad sweep served as an adequate introduction, but the lack of concrete information about many of the animals left a number of viewers questioning the authenticity of *Oceans*. By neglecting the details of a complicated reality, the film's content has the opposite problem of its images – the combination of the real images with the narration produce a film that feels incomplete and unreal.

The reactions of viewers to *Oceans* suggest that visual authenticity does not suffice. While a film may appear unstaged and depicting natural animal behavior, details about related issues – in this case, information about the animals or offering visuals tied to environmental causes – play an important role in establishing a sense of authenticity for viewers. Viewers enter into the experience expecting a completeness of story. What constitutes this completeness seems to vary based on the individual, but an experience that feels incomplete causes a viewer to feel disengaged from the content presented. A similar phenomenon occurs in the Disney parks, as park visitors expect not only a certain level of
quality from a Disney parks experience, but expect a story. When gaps emerge between imagined and experienced story, visitors question the authenticity of the experience.
Chapter Four:
*Safari Mickey and Putting "Ears" on Nature: Constructing Nature at Disney's Animal Kingdom*

As our safari vehicle nears the lion exhibit, our guide compares the rock formation ahead of us to Pride Rock from *The Lion King*, explaining that lions like to live in rock formations. We round the corner, everyone focused intently on the rocks, searching for any sign of the small group of lions living there. As we pass the far side of the exhibit, our driver stops the vehicle to point out the lion and lioness sleeping on one of the rocks. Barely visible due to the height difference between their rock and our vehicle, many guests strain for photographs, leaning over their companions and holding cameras high into the air. A man in the row in front of us, riding with his family and holding his infant son in his arms, whistles loudly. Our driver grows agitated, repeating, "Oh no, you shouldn’t have done that." My companions and I look at each other – signs along the line’s path told us in no uncertain terms not to make excessive noise because of the stress it causes the animals. As the driver tried to regain his composure so he can continue narrating the trip, the large male lion sleepily lifted his head as if to figure out what was going on and who disturbed his rest. Cameras snapped wildly, especially once the lioness sleeping near him lifted her head as well.

When riding the Kilimanjaro Safari at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, guests expect to see animals. A panel above their heads on the truck displays drawings of all the animals inhabiting Disney’s safari park, offering a visual reference for what riders may see. The driver-slash-tour guide warns, however, that "every safari is different; the animals make sure of that!" to establish that not every safari will see every animal living there.
Regardless, visitors want to see as many animals as possible. In designing the safari, Disney's Imagineers took this into account. Habitats were designed to maximize visibility, with trees providing shade and features such as termite mounds hiding feeders and water (Malmberg 1998: 108-109). In another part of the safari, the Imagineers found the lions preferred to hide deeper in the formation, where the shadows protected them from the hot Florida sun. This, however, meant visitors could not see the animals from the road. As a solution, the Imagineers air-conditioned one of the rocks to offer the lions a cool place to lie down in full view of the ride pathway.

Disney's Imagineers focus on telling stories in Animal Kingdom just as much as writers do in the Disneynature films, seeking to depict a vision of nature consistent with other Disney products and appealing to a broad base of consumers. In the case of the park, however, the story is often less explicit, as no narrator provides running commentary about the animals or what guests see. Thus, the Imagineers had to figure out a way to tell the park's story in a visceral way that park guests could connect with and understand with little or no prompting. Certain attractions – such as the Kilimanjaro Safari, Pangani Forest Exploration Trail, and Maharajah Jungle Trek – using either written or verbal guides for guests, allow for a more explicit form of storytelling than most of the park. An accredited zoo, Animal Kingdom offers an experience merging tourism, zoos, and theme parks, as different areas of the park attempt to mimic different experiences. The Imagineers, however, call Animal Kingdom "a theme park featuring stories about animals and the ways in which humans interact with them" (The Imagineers 2007: 20).

To conduct research at Animal Kingdom, I took two separate trips to Disney World, a four-day trip in November 2013 and a two-day trip in February 2014. On the first trip, I
brought four companions – my mother and three friends, who are current college students. My companions assisted by making observations and sharing their own thoughts on our experience, often offering different perspectives from my own and raising new questions. We stayed at the Animal Kingdom Lodge in a room overlooking the savannah. I spent time on the savannah overlooks, both alone and with others, on one afternoon and several evenings. Each time I spoke with one of the cultural representatives, who Disney brings over from Africa for a year, often as part of university programs. We made two trips to Animal Kingdom itself, each time spending several hours in the park. On the second trip to Disney World, my mother and I again spent time in Animal Kingdom, this time for the primary purpose of participating in the Wild Africa Trek. During both trips, we took advantage of Disney’s Extra Magic Hours, which allowed guests staying in Disney World hotels to enter the park an hour before it opened to the public, which may have led to slightly different experiences than we might have encountered if we arrived later in the day. In one memorable instance, we rode on one of the first trucks of the day for Kilimanjaro Safari, so some of the animals were eating hay recently left out for them. A man behind us in the truck remarked on this to his companion, stating, "They feed the animals so they come closer."

In this chapter, I discuss how Disney constructs and conveys ideas about nature in the Animal Kingdom Park at Disney World. In the first section, I use literature released by Disney to cover the broader themes at work in Animal Kingdom. Through examples and anecdotes from my time in the park, I compare the imagineered story with reactions and perceptions of park guests to examine how the park and guest both work to establish meaning. The examples focus on five different elements of Animal Kingdom: Kilimanjaro
Safari, the Oasis and Discovery Island, the Tree of Life, Animal Kingdom Lodge, and the Wild Africa Trek. I chose these as they presented the clearest examples of how a visitor’s expected story interacts with the story presented by the Imagineers. In most of these cases, gaps between the visitor’s expected story and the story presented by the Imagineers lead to a sense of inauthenticity, but I intentionally chose two examples of times experiences did feel authentic to offer a more complete picture. This chapter focuses on a few questions. What ideas does Animal Kingdom convey about nature and the relationship between humans and nature? How do the Imagineers convey this idea through park elements such as design and attractions? How do visitors engage with these messages? What factors determine a visitor’s sense of the park’s authenticity?

Throughout the park, Disney's Imagineers craft a story that encourages visitors to appreciate the nature around them and prompts them to engage in action to protect the environment. In conveying a message of appreciating nature, the Disney Imagineers worked to make areas of the park seem as natural as possible, often focusing on replicating real environments (i.e. the African savannah). While an appeal to guests’ love of nature and increasing awareness for conservation causes would seem to attract broad support from park visitors, the story does not always match what visitors expect from the experience, leaving guests with questions not just about the park's overall theme but the action Disney takes in conjunction with their professed focus on conservation.

My survey of the literature suggested that theme parks feel authentic when they offer an internally consistent, fully immersive experience, one that is "real" within the context of the park. My time in Animal Kingdom suggests this is accurate, but also indicates that the experience must coincide with the one expected by a visitor, which presents an
issue for the park’s producers (in this case, the Imagineers), as that expectation can be difficult to determine. The Imagineers attempt to circumvent such issues by offering a non-confrontational, broadly appealing vision of nature, but my research suggests it still clashes with at least some visions of the park. A major point of contention stemmed from concerns about how artificially constructed some sections of the park felt, especially when compared to its professed natural theme. As questions arose about the park’s theme, my companions also began to question Disney’s dedication to conservation, which can lead to apprehension about how Disney uses the money donated to their Worldwide Conservation Fund. Such donations often come as a result of the opportunity to donate as part of spending money on souvenirs or expensive additional experiences. This may, in turn, undermine the goal of increasing donations through broad based messages that appeal to more visitors, upsetting the delicate balance between being environmentally friendly and still profitable and appealing.

**Imagineering Animal Kingdom**

According to Melody Malmberg’s account of the development of Animal Kingdom, meetings conceptualizing the park began in early 1990, with an original pitch laying out a park with "three equal components—traditional theme park, Epcot-style pavilion, and nontraditional zoo" (Malmberg 1998: 9). As the original team began working on the project, they kept returning to the idea that "the park was not to be only about animals, but also about people’s emotional reaction to animals. It was not to be an information park or an issues park, but a park about love" (Malmberg 1998: 10). This decision led them to arrange the park around three different stages of love: "The child’s love of animals became
theme-park and fantasy elements. The adolescent desire for experience became the safari adventure/zoo side. Adults' love for animals inspired Epcot pavilion-like ideas" (Malmberg 1998: 12). These broad ideas about different types of love manifest themselves in different areas of the park. DinoLand, U.S.A. and Camp Mickey and Minnie, both bright, colorful, and exciting areas, focus on children. Camp Mickey and Minnie "takes us back to the days of our earliest introductions to animals. Here we are free to tap into our childhood mythologies—in which animals are walking, talking friends—where there's nobody with whom we'd rather spend our time" (The Imagineers 2007: 55). Set up to resemble a summer camp atmosphere, Camp Mickey and Minnie "represents fictional creatures and our tendency to anthropomorphize animals," as in *The Lion King* movie (The Imagineers 2007: 56).

DinoLand evokes carnivals, offering rides with just enough adventure to excite young children without scaring them. It also boasts a massive "dig" site, children can explore, pretending to dig up dinosaur bones.

For teenagers, rides such as the high-speed roller coaster Expedition Everest provide a sense of adventure, presenting a storyline focused around finding the mythical Yeti. The Imagineers also may have imagined that Kilimanjaro Safari would appeal toward teenagers, and they were correct: nearly every bus on the safari has people of all ages, from families to teenagers roaming in groups. During one of my trips to Disney World, a group of high school students on a band trip sat in the row behind us and kept their own running commentary on the animals of the safari. When we passed a group of wildebeest lying in the shade, one of them yelled, "You killed Mufasa!"

Both the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail and Maharajah Jungle Trek evoke the Epcot pavilions, allowing guests to meander through the trails at their own pace, consulting
maps as they go and reading plaques to learn about the animals. Pangani displays large signs filled with information near all of the exhibits, very much like what might be found at a zoo. The animals exhibits of the Oasis and Discovery Island also appeal to this sense of calmly looking at animals, feeling more like a zoo experience than a theme park, as families with children often spend little time in these areas. Animal Kingdom, then, has experiences for a wide range of ages, each of which emphasizes the Imagineers’ goal of fostering love and appreciation for animals.

One section of the park explicitly focuses on conservation. Rafiki’s Planet Watch offers guests "optimistic, positive conservation messages meant to instill hope that change can be effected, and knowledge as to how an individual can participate in that change" (The Imagineers 2007: 80). These messages address how to help animals both in faraway places and in guests’ own backyards (ibid.). To convey optimism, Planet Watch is brightly colored, but animals here are "presented in a more realistic fashion than almost anywhere else in the Park—with less human interpretation" (The Imagineers 2007: 81).

While the conservation message is most explicit in Rafiki’s Planet Watch, guests are reminded of conservation issues throughout the park and are offered the opportunity to donate to the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund (DWCF). Any purchase made in an Animal Kingdom shop includes with the opportunity to make a donation. Often the cashier will ask if a guest would like to donate by rounding up to the next dollar amount (i.e. adding $0.75 donation to a purchase total of $15.25, making it easier to pay in cash), though some ask if the guest would like to add a dollar to his or her total. Many of the extra experiences available – such as the Wild Africa Trek or backstage tour – include a donation to the DWCF. In acknowledgement of donating to the DWCF, guests receive a pin reading
"Conservation Hero," with special versions of this pin offered as part of experiences such as the Wild Africa Trek. In exploring the park, I often saw guests wearing pin-trading lanyards with one or more Conservation Hero buttons affixed.

In imagineering the park experience, Disney employees focus on details as small as how buildings age, details that most guests will not specifically notice, but contribute toward the overall ambiance of the park and work to shape a specific story. Malmberg explains, "The Animal Kingdom park has an extremely 'lived in' look that underlines the overall theme of nature’s transcendence over human effort," so park staff must work to maintain the proper levels of "lived in" to convey the story (1998: 104). Before the park’s opening, an executive production designer worked with the producers of each region of the park to determine how everything – from the walkways to the rocks to the buildings – should look: "from the slightly aged Countdown to Extinction building (only 10 years old) to the 40 or 50 years of the multi-use garage-turned-souvenir shop called Chester and Hester’s Dinosaur Treasures" (ibid.). Malmberg quotes the executive production designer as saying, "Our buildings are the establishing shot. They set the stage and tell the guest whether the attraction is cheerful or ominous, lighthearted or serious" (ibid.). To maintain the park’s story age, staff touches up high traffic areas every evening and the whole park is repainted every five years (Malmberg 1998: 104).

Not every area of the park can be completely created by the Imagineers, as Animal Kingdom has two sections with at least a nominal basis in reality: Africa and Asia. In creating these sections, park designers could not solely rely on their own imaginations to tell a story, but needed to craft the environment to resemble the reference locations in order to maintain a sense of authenticity. Imagineers travelled to Africa during the earliest
stages of Animal Kingdom’s development because they planned from the beginning to have a safari ride (Malmberg 1998: 18). The town central to the Africa section and serving as a launch point for the safari does not replicate any one place in Africa perfectly, but is designed to evoke a real place. Imagineers called the town Harambe, and based it on an East African fishing village (The Imagineers 2007: 66). They wanted to focus the story on modern Africa and thus tried to avoid relying heavily on colonial architecture, but Harambe includes nods to the fictional town’s colonial past, such as the Portuguese design seen in a fort now used as a restaurant (The Imagineers 2007: 67). That said, "while a cultural backdrop adds detail and enriches the experience, the core story line only deals with human development to the extent that it affects the animal kingdom" (The Imagineers 2007: 66).

Almost everything about Harambe focuses on the safari. According to Disney’s story, the people of Harambe established the Wildlife Reserve in the 1970s when conservation issues convinced them to change it from a hunting reserve (The Imagineers 2007: 68). With the townspeople running the Reserve, poaching impacted not just the endangered animals of the Reserve, but threatened the community’s economic base (Malmberg 1998: 40). Signs painted on buildings through the Africa section advertise the Wildlife Reserve and its safaris, while others warn about poachers and ask visitors to keep a watchful eye. The story here centers strongly on the actions the people of Harambe took to protect nature, and the centerpiece safari emphasizes that conservationist ethic.
Kilimanjaro Safari

Kilimanjaro Safari sits approximately a ten-minute walk from the park's entrance, in one of the farthest corners of the park. The twenty-minute Kilimanjaro Safari simulates a safari through several habitats in Africa. In its original form, the ride turned from a photo safari into a chase, as guests helped capture poachers trying to kill a mother elephant and her baby. Much of the literature on Kilimanjaro Safari reflects this storyline, but the ride in its current form no longer utilizes this story. Instead, the ride now simulates a two-week safari through several African environments.

When the Imagineers travelled to Africa for a photo safari, they went with the intention of making Africa the ride’s "only true competition" (Malmberg 1998: 18). While in Africa, "the team was struck by the 'theme park-ness' of Africa. The wild places are just not accessible to the average tourist" (ibid.). Their goal thus became, in the words of a project writer, to make the Animal Kingdom safari "as good as or better" than an African safari (ibid.). To make the safari so realistic, the Imagineers needed to set aside a massive piece of land on the Disney World property. Kilimanjaro Safari covers approximately 110 acres (The Imagineers 2007: 69), "an unprecedented area for what would essentially be a stage set" (Malmberg 1998: 40).

Once the issue of size was settled, Imagineers turned their attention toward making the safari park seem as real as possible. "Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park also had to hang together as a place, with rivers and ridgelines making geologic sense so that guests would, as they might when attending a play, 'willingly suspend disbelief' and become involved in the story" (Malmberg 1998: 40-41). Park planners brought in plants from Africa and Southeast Asia, balancing the needs of the animals and the potential
invasiveness of the foreign species, as well as how well the plants would grow in the Florida environment (Malmberg 1998: 87). To create a sense of place in Africa, they collected African thorned acacias and baobab trees, which "say Africa" (*ibid.*). That said, not all of the plants are native to the simulated environment – the trees on the savannah that appear to be acacias are really oak trees, which can better withstand hungry giraffes (The Imagineers 2007: 69).

Sometimes, however, even live replacements will not work to create a sense of place. Much of the safari is, in fact, man-made, but with "ears on it," Disney parlance for giving something "Disney quality and attention to detail from the very beginning" (Malmberg 1998: 88). In putting ears on concrete, Imagineers try to make it look like anything other than concrete, creating everything from rocks to trees. "It's even used to make dirt—in the most spectacular example, the cracked, pitted, wash boarded, flooded, almost-overgrown 'dirt road' for the African vehicles" (*ibid.*). On the savannah, Imagineers constructed large termite mounds from concrete – "your safari guide will tell you that termite mounds are as hard as concrete. And it's true...especially ours!" (The Imagineers 2007: 71).

The Imagineers can exert a greater measure of control by partially fabricating the environment, both of conditions and of animals' movements. Landscaping, too, finds a secondary function in "the screening of views in order to control the elements of the safari that the Guests are allowed to see" (The Imagineers 2007: 70). Lions must be kept separate from zebras, but the Imagineers tried to make this separation appear as natural as possible. "Each time the design called for a barrier, the designers created a coherent story for it; they worked out how the river flowed, creating islands and riverbanks and logjams " (Malmberg
While zoos have moved to more natural enclosures, Disney has taken it a step further and disguised barriers using steep slopes, geologic features, and plant life (Malmberg 1998: 107-109). Water along the truck pathway creates the appearance of connection between the two pools, seeming as if the safari vehicles ford the river (Malmberg 1998: 109). In actuality, "the apparently random ruts in the vehicle pathway are actually very carefully designed to keep the 'show' water in the road from intermingling with the 'life support' water in the animal habitats" (The Imagineers 2007: 69).

The ride itself – from the timing to the trucks to the roadway – was deliberately designed to improve upon the Imagineers' experience in Africa. Initially, Malmberg explains, they wanted small trucks to "give guests the illusion of traveling with their family alone on the vast plains" (1998: 109). It soon became clear, though, that to accommodate demand, there would need to be so many trucks that it would create a traffic jam on the savannah, so truck size increased (ibid.). They also wanted to avoid a programmed experience, so they decided that the trucks would be driven by ride operators and move along a worn-appearing set path (ibid.). (Side pathways appearing faint and disused are, in fact, service roads for non-ride vehicles (ibid.).) To test their ideas, the Imagineers built a test vehicle and track on their lot and the creative leader rode it. "The carefully orchestrated jolts and bumps were pronounced authentic and believable as his coffee spilled all over him and his fellow passengers" (Malmberg 1998: 109).

When guests enter the line for Kilimanjaro Safari, they walk underneath thatched-appearing roofs before entering the reserve's office. A telephone rings on a set schedule, but no one staffs the desk. Posters on the walls advertise safaris, map out the reserve, and warn about the risk of poachers. Outside of the office, many of the covered sections of the
line have safari gear overhead. Sections have televisions overhead, providing
entertainment when wait times lengthen. In an early section, the televisions play a sort of
nature documentary set on the Harambe Wildlife Reserve and proclaiming that it tells the
"true stories of Harambe's wildlife." A scientist narrates it, sharing facts about the animals
and warning about the dangers the animals face from people. Later, after the stroller drop-off in a tunnel covered in signs explaining the ride's rules, the televisions play a message
from the Reserve warden, welcoming guests to the Reserve. He explains that he hopes the
Reserve will foster "appreciation and respect for Africa's living treasures." He explains that
human encroachment is a major threat to Africa's wildlife population and warns about the
evils of poachers, who are "only thinking about profit." He finishes by thanking guests for
coming and alerting them to watch out for poachers. The line then splits into two launch
areas, so two trucks fill at roughly the same time, their departures staggered so the trucks
do not move through the course right on top of each other.

The safari ride charts a course through four distinct areas: the Ituri forest, the Safi
River, the savannah, and an area themed as having been recently added to the Reserve. I
believe was unpopulated by animals in the ride's earlier incarnation, but now has desert
antelope living there. (On three trips on the safari, two guides stated the Reserve reclaimed
the land from poachers, but that does not seem to be an "official" part of the story.) In the
ride's current version, the guide tells riders this is a two-week safari through the Harambe
Wildlife Reserve. Throughout the ride, the guide narrates with facts about the animals and
the environment. They never talk about the Reserve's connection to the town of Harambe,
setting it apart from the town, even though, according to the literature, the Imagineers
crafted a story that suggests the townspeople are intimately involved with the Reserve.
Additionally, on the ride, guides only mention people when talking about poaching or other ways humans have harmed the environment or the animals.

In taking several trips on the ride, it seems that guides have general guidelines about what they should say, as several points arose each time. For instance, on each of my three trips on the safari, the guides mentioned how Westerners only discovered the okapi in 1901, having previously thought it a myth, and each guide mentioned either protection of rhinoceros or elephants (sometimes both). That said, they also seemed free to shape the narration, as other parts of the guides’ narration were flexible. On one of the safaris I took, the guide acknowledged the ride's former storyline, which ended as a chase to track down poachers who entered the reserve with the intention of killing a mother elephant and her baby.

Three of my four companions rode Kilimanjaro Safari in its previous form, and two of them mentioned that they missed the poaching storyline. Anti-poaching signs throughout Harambe as well as signs and videos along the line leading up to the bus launch mention conservation and poaching directly, which seem to refer to the old storyline and now appear out of place with a ride now themed as a photo safari through Africa. My two companions who missed the former plotline remarked that, while they found it cheesy, it made Kilimanjaro feel more like a theme park ride, whereas the "two week safari" theme felt too educational, but in an artificial way. "We know it isn't a two week safari," one of my friends said. Another companion suggested it conveyed the sense that Africa is a single country, which seemed to make them uncomfortable in how it fed into stereotypes about the continent. Everyone felt that if the new story were to work within the parameters of the park, it would make more sense. The "two week" framing felt forced, as twenty-minutes is
not long enough for riders to forget how long they have been on the safari. Perhaps if the ride took closer to an hour, or even stopped for a break, that framework would feel more realistic. My companions also suggested that if the signs and videos referring to poaching on the line were changed, it might help the ride's new storyline, since those elements convey the wrong impression.

In my companions’ comments, they remarked on how engaged they felt with the animals around them, and were interested in learning more about the animals and getting to see them from up close. Two of my friends admitted that the previous poaching storyline might have overshadowed the animals and the experience of appreciating nature, which might be why Disney changed the safari’s storyline. Everyone remarked on how the safari showed animals in their "natural" habitat and that everything about the Africa section felt "natural" to them. Everything looked as they had expected, they agreed, though none had ever travelled to Africa, as they acknowledged. "It puts us in our version of their world," one person commented. The world they experienced, they agreed, felt complete and all encompassing, from the shops and music to costumes and buildings. They appreciated the completeness of the park, and found it made the experience of visiting the park more enjoyable.

As we continued discussing our experience, one friend mentioned almost in passing that she saw a sprinkler while we rode the Kilimanjaro Safari. We all asked her about it, because no one else had seen a sprinkler. She could not remember where, exactly, but she said that it jarred her out of the story. It reminded her of the artifice of the ride, she explained, and made it harder to suspend her disbelief. A few days later, when we rode the safari a second time, more comments focused on elements that reminded my companions
they were not on a real safari. Riding the safari again so soon, they explained, meant they noticed that the animals could not wander freely because many animals stood in the same general area where we saw them a few days before. "The safari looks more open than it actually is," someone stated, acknowledging that she could not tell exactly where the boundaries were, but that some internal boundaries clearly existed. They also focused on sculptural elements of the park meant to help convey the story, such as the elephant tusk marks in red clay and the termite mounds. They also remarked upon plants that looked "obviously fake" and water that appeared "unnaturally blue." On this second trip, they commented on how artificial these elements appeared, though it had not seemed to bother them on the first trip.

More than just design elements stood out to them on the second trip, however. While they enjoyed our second guide more, mostly due to his references to the old poaching storyline, they remarked how he oversold the conservation message. As we entered the savannah from the river section, he stated, "This is the Wild Africa we are trying so very hard to conserve." He later explained that, "One of the greatest threats to elephants are humans" and "the more we understand them, the better prepared we are to protect them." One companion mentioned that removing animals from their natural habitats to "protect" them reminded her of how antiquities were removed from their native cultures. Another friend stated that she found pretentious the idea that we have to save these animals. They found the conservation story the guide told too "Disney," pitting the "good guys" against the "bad guys" in a way that oversimplified reality. One of my companions remarked that while the guides talked about conservation a lot, it did not sound as if Disney were actually doing anything, an aspect she found concerning and
artificial. On each safari I rode, the guide mentioned some conservation cause – killing rhinoceros for the keratin in their horns, elephant poaching for ivory, and coltan mining destroying elephant habitats. Each time, though, it felt almost like a side note, something happening to these animals that we should work to stop, most without ever offering how to stop it or how to be involved, though they mentioned the DWCF and its success in raising and distributing money. The guide who mentioned coltan mining told us that we could help by recycling our electronics but, when I mentioned the story to one companion later, she said she probably would not do further research on the guide's statements or feel motivated to take specific action. The mentions of environmental issues on Kilimanjaro Safari open the door for the guest to engage with conservation, but rarely offer to pull them through it with specific courses of action.

Many of the problems my companions saw with Kilimanjaro amounted to disconnects between their ideas of what it should be and how the Imagineers presented it. On our first day, they seemed caught up in the "Disney" side of the ride – that sense of wonder and magic that Disney works so hard to cultivate. They appreciated how immersive the environments and themes were, finding everything quite "natural." On our second day, after having been there recently and seen most things before, that shine seemed to wear off. They were expecting – and had seen that first day – a "natural" park. They saw theming that fit their vision of what Africa was supposed to look like, a safari that matched the pictures they had in their heads, a picture influenced by media representations. On the second day, when everything looked the same, they began to realize that parts of what they saw as "natural" were artificial constructions, an observation at odds with their vision of park as a natural space. Concerns about the constructed and artificial nature of the park
arose in other discussions from our second day about different areas of the park, especially the Oasis and Discovery Island, the areas guests must move through to access any other area of Animal Kingdom.

**The Oasis and Discovery Island**

Guests enter through the Oasis, "an awesome and inspiring representation of the supremacy of unspoiled nature" (The Imagineers 2007: 23). It is a lush, green area, functioning as a decompression zone as described by Underhill: "When we enter any building, we need a series of steps just to make the adjustment between out there and in here" (2004: 47). In the case of malls, he explains that consumers are "not really ready to make any buying decisions for the first ten or fifteen feet" (Underhill 2004: 48). Indeed, Malmberg acknowledges, "Oasis is a radical idea—an entry not through a traditional retail corridor like Main Street at Disneyland Park, but a cool, green decompression zone" (1998: 60). Upon entering Animal Kingdom, there are a few small shops, a set of lockers, and then the lush expanse of the Oasis. The Imagineers explain that, in the Oasis, guests "find peaceful settings, fascinating animals in close proximity, rushing waterfalls, and a variety of plants drawn from the most lush and exotic locales on the planet" (The Imagineers 2007: 25). The animals here are chosen "because they are perceived to have a gentle disposition. This helps to achieve the sense of welcome that the land is intended to convey" (The Imagineers 2007: 27). The Oasis, however, functions not only as a decompression zone and welcome area, but an introduction to the overarching themes of Animal Kingdom: "The sense of kinship with our fellow inhabitants of this world, which is established by this
place, will affect our perception of the various settings and experiences to be found throughout the rest of the Park" (The Imagineers 2007: 25).

Guests may take one of two paths through the Oasis, splitting around a center island and rejoining at the end of the bridge taking them to Discovery Island.

"Over the course of this journey, we have made our way from the elevation of the parking lot—roughly that of the original Park site prior to construction—slowly but surely up to an elevation nearly twenty feet higher. By entering Discovery Island at that elevation, we are ensured of a clear vista, over the heads of fellow Guests up ahead, and we are able to see the Tree of Life in all of its glory—without allowing it to tower completely above us" (ibid.).

Upon entering Discovery Island, visitors encounter more animal habitats, as well as numerous shops and restaurants. Discovery Island’s animal residents "are intended to stimulate thought about the capacity of nature to generate unique and wonderful animal forms, so they are rather unusual animals" (The Imagineers 2007: 43). The buildings in Discovery Island are a riot of bright colors, standing out from the surrounding greenery. The buildings are not designed to reflect any one particular area, but the artists used Caribbean colors and drew inspiration from Mexican wedding dresses and Oaxacan carved animals (Malmberg 1998: 94). "The look for Discovery Island was to be a new interpretation of international folk-art styles," including pieces from artists in Nepal, Bali, Java, and Mexico (The Imagineers 2007: 46).

Together, the Oasis and Discovery Island function as both an introduction to Animal Kingdom’s themes and as a launch point for the park as a whole. This area of the park feels the most like a zoo – animal exhibits dot the landscape, surrounded by greenery designed to look like natural environments. Each animal exhibit has its own plaque offering a little information about the animals in the exhibit, and several have Disney park staffers nearby to answer questions.
On our first visit to Animal Kingdom, everyone paid little attention to these two areas. They failed to make much of an impression, as we were focused on the more exciting attractions deeper into the park. We consciously spent more time exploring them on the second day, as I was interested in the details of these exhibits. Everyone in our group appreciated the educational information accompanying these exhibits, especially when a staffer explained more about the animal, but were overall underwhelmed by these areas of the park. The animals felt too similar to each other, they explained, as if there were no separation between themes in the Oasis and in Discovery Island, and there were too few animals in these two sections. They also suggested the animals were all rather unimpressive, with all the exciting animals kept separate and in the attractions such as Kilimanjaro Safari.

The more exhibits they explored, however, the more they noticed the artificial elements. A couple of my friends complained about the artificial trees, confused as to why Disney included these in exhibits amongst the real ones. Some of the exhibits looked natural, while others, to them, appeared more constructed. The artificial elements felt more incongruous to them when they stood out from the real elements. For example, a lemur exhibit contained ropes made to look like vines, which did not bother them, but bird nests constructed of concrete crafted to resemble mud drew numerous negative comments. Once again, my companions expected to see more natural elements, causing a clash between their expectations and the park’s reality.

Kangaroos located near the Tree of Life in the center of Discovery Island drew questions from three of my four companions. When we all met up again after exploring the area separately, they asked if I had seen the kangaroos. I admitted I had not, and, as we
walked away, a discussion ensued. The other animals seemed African or Asian, they said, so why were there kangaroos? When I returned to the park in February, I sought out the kangaroos to see what they were talking about. This exhibit can be difficult to see from the path, with only a small area visible between the trees. The kangaroo seem to share a space with some vultures, set back from a small pond filled with flamingoes. The kangaroos occupy a space on a slight incline, so they often disappear down the small slope, only to come hopping back into view. Only a few people standing on the path notice the kangaroos; many focus on the flamingoes directly in front of them.

I reacted similarly to my friends upon seeing the kangaroos for the first time, because they seemed out of place given the other animals on display nearby. I consulted the literature afterward, certain that the Imagineers had a reason for including kangaroos in this area. One of the books explains that the animals on Discovery Island are "intended to stimulate thought about the capacity of nature to generate unique and wonderful animal forms," and are thus interesting or unusual animals (The Imagineers 2007: 43). Considering other animals occupying this section – flamingoes and lemurs among others – this theme begins to make sense, but nothing about the environment or organization of the exhibits suggests this when visitors explore Discovery Island. This seems to be an example of the story we expected as visitors not matching the story that the Imagineers tried to present, although in a different way. Here, the Imagineers seem to have expected visitors to pick up on a theme that is not easily apparent to visitors without context. When visitors did not understand the story the Imagineers wanted to tell, they were forced to pick up on what clues they could find, and those clues led them to a different story and a different conclusion. The difference between the guests' experienced story and the Imagineers’
intended story caused confusion and created questions about Animal Kingdom's overall story and theme. At the end of our discussions, one person brought up, and others agreed, that they previously thought of Animal Kingdom as more natural and more "real" than regular zoos, but that close examination of the park made them realize it might not be that different at all. A lengthy discussion about the central Tree of Life triggered some of the most questions about the park and its presentation of nature.

**The Tree of Life**

Decorated with 325 animal carvings meant to appear an organic part of the tree, the Tree is "a poetic statement about the majesty of nature, the stunning diversity of animals, and our respect for our place in the world, and underscores the ideal that all of these elements can coexist harmoniously" (The Imagineers 2007: 34). The Tree of Life dominates Discovery Island and Animal Kingdom as a whole. It stands as the focal point for the park and it functions as the center of its hub and spoke design. Other Walt Disney parks use the same format: Magic Kingdom has Cinderella's Castle, Epcot has Spaceship Earth, and Hollywood Studios has Sorcerer Mickey's hat. The Tree, as do these other features, orients visitors to the central point of the park, a location that eventually leads them to an exit, or offers an easy central meeting location for groups that split up. The Tree of Life towers above the park at 145 feet and the park's design serves to highlight its grandeur by ensuring a clear vista as visitors arrive at the top of the hill between the Oasis and Discovery Island.

The Imagineers explain, they are "more interested in what something *means* than what it *looks like*" (2007: 41). They concern themselves with creating a storyline and letting
that story inform the design decisions. "If you were to design a space in which to tell a story without knowing what the story was going to be, you might end up with an entirely incongruous collection of images" (ibid.). Thus, for an area like Discovery Island, an area centered upon the Tree of Life rather than on a real-world location, internal consistency is especially important to ensure that the pieces feel as though they fit together. If the Tree of Life is supposed to represent harmonious coexistence among animals, than the riot of colors and cultures through the buildings may suggest the same harmony among humans, as well as between humans and animals. In fact, the Disney mythology about the Tree of Life is that "the village came here to the Tree. It is the source of life and of water for the village and Discovery Island, and presumably for the rest of Animal Kingdom as well" (The Imagineers 2007: 34).

From the Imagineers’ description, it seems clear that they intend for the Tree of Life’s meaning to be primarily symbolic, but this meaning conflicted strongly with the meaning my companions attributed to it. After our first day at Animal Kingdom, one of my friends commented that she thought the Tree of Life seemed out of place with the rest of the park. Confused, I asked for an explanation. She elaborated that having a large, artificial tree as the central element to a park primarily about real animals seemed strange to her. Compared to the other, real trees around the park, the Tree of Life looks so obviously artificial, she explained, citing the leaf color as the primary culprit. She said that she could live with the carvings and the size because she understood having them to make the Tree more visually engaging and to have a marker of the center of the park, but the leaf color bothered her because they did not look life-like. In evaluating photographs I took at Animal Kingdom, the leaves on the Tree of Life do not appear an entirely artificial shade of green,
but do not blend with the colors on the real plants around it. In this way, I began to understand her concern that the colors did not appear life-like, though better blended green shade might have helped. Calling it the "Tree of Life" is wrong, she explained, because it clearly is not and never was alive or even remotely real. "They tried too hard to make it look overly vital," she explained. The other members of the group agreed about the artificiality of the Tree once she brought it up, but no one else had quite the same visceral reaction.

For my companions, the story of Animal Kingdom was one of nature and real encounters. They expected the experience to feel as real as possible, as true to life as Disney can create. The Tree of Life, as the central element, should fully embody this natural theme. Being constructed of steel, the Tree seemed to present an artificially constructed center of what they believe is meant to be a natural park. For my friend, the central element of the park felt disconnected from the rest of the story as she perceived it. This threw the meaning of the park and its elements into question for her, causing her to wonder if the park were not as different from other zoo experiences as she had initially believed, or that the story was not what she had imagined. In contrast, other experiences we encountered at Disney World did match with our expectations or, in the case of the Wild Africa Trek, exceeded them.

**Animal Kingdom Lodge**

Our experience at Animal Kingdom Lodge stands in sharp contrast to the experiences in the rest of the park. While our time in Animal Kingdom led to questions about the completeness of the story and how "real" the park felt, our experience at the
Lodge presented no such issues. Animal Kingdom Lodge was a place designed to "play host to guests who long to expand on their Animal Kingdom adventure by 'staying the night with animals'" (Malmberg 1998: 175). One guidebook called it "one of the most impressively themed and meticulously detailed Disney resorts," describing how "five-story thatched-roof guest-room wings fan out from a vast central rotunda housing the lobby and featuring a huge mud fireplace" (Sehlinger and Testa 2014: 147, 182). Most of the hotel's rooms face the savannah, allowing visitors to stand on their balcony and watch animals such as giraffes and zebras roam around. A main patio-like overlook outside the lobby allows for easy viewing of the more popular animals, while savannahs located on the sides of the hotel showcase wild donkeys. A flamingo exhibit sits near the pool and hot tubs.

Cultural representatives from Africa wander around the outdoor overlooks, most participating in yearlong programs as part of their universities. Some representatives wait to be approached while others will approach you. The representatives also run education programs in the lobby, both to share information about the animals and about life in the representatives' home countries. During my stay, I met representatives from Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, all of whom were studying or working in conservation or ecotourism. Most of the representatives seemed happy to talk about themselves, with one representative mentioning that they are encouraged to do so. Many carry small cards with them about their country to distribute to guests, including information about the size, location, and population of their country, as well as a "fun fact." Their presence offers the opportunity to learn about the animals and where they come from rather than just presenting opportunities to look at them, which makes the experience of staying in the hotel feel more complete.
Animals cannot walk up to rooms or to the overlook areas. There is a subtle but visible divide between the animals’ area and the hotel, with a line of small shrubs separating grass from dirt. Most animals do not approach the line at all. A cultural representative explained that there is something embedded in the ground that makes it uncomfortable (but not painful) for the animals to leave their area, but that most animals prefer to stay away from the guests. The animals also leave the savannah at night, spending their evening in a back pen area that guests cannot see or access. The animals emerge in the morning and food is placed in prime locations to draw them closer to the building where guests may see them.

Animal Kingdom Lodge does not seem to tell any particular story. It does not present an overall narrative, a choice that allows visitors to shape their own stories. Some want to look at the animals without speaking to anyone, choosing to enjoy being near the animals. Some guests want to engage with the cultural representatives, learning all they can about the animals. Other guests talk with the cultural representatives about their lives, rather than those of the animals. Stories here do not conflict with expectations as a result, which makes the experience feel more authentic and more real. No one tried to convince us that we were in Africa or we were supposed to feel as though we were. Instead, Disney and the cultural representatives seemed to try to take the opportunity to teach us about the animals we saw, sometimes with a conservation angle. Most of the cultural representatives work in conservation or ecotourism, thus they are happy to explain how they practice conservation in their country. One cultural representative talked about working on projects in his home country, programs designed to teach farmers about elephants and cheetahs, working with the farmers to protect both their farms and the animals.
In many ways, the vision of how nature and people should interact presented by the cultural representatives at Animal Kingdom Lodge differs from that presented elsewhere. In most places at the park, Disney allows space for guests to be interested or ask for information about conservation programs and Disney presents numerous opportunities for guests to donate to the DWCF. At the same time, Disney messages emphasize the ways people have harmed nature and the images suggest that, while humans may intrude on nature for a short time, nature will always reclaim the space. The story suggests humans and nature are separate from each other and should not mix, unless we are trying to help fix the ills we have caused. Even while the framework of the Animal Kingdom Lodge promotes appreciating and viewing animals without interacting with them, discussions with cultural representatives offer a different story. The representatives share experiences that focus on how they live with nature and how they have figured out how to balance their needs against those of the animals living in their environment.

**The Wild Africa Trek**

The Wild Africa Trek presents another interesting departure from the rest of the Animal Kingdom. A relatively new addition to Animal Kingdom and one of several new "behind the scenes" tours introduced at Disney World, the Trek brings guests onto trails behind and above parts of the Kilimanjaro Safari exhibits. While on the Trek, guides discuss the animal exhibits, often as guests stand on the edges of the exhibits, held in place by ropes attached to their harnesses. While I expected the Trek to be themed as a more adventurous version of Kilimanjaro Safari, the guides made no attempt to hide the constructed nature of the exhibits. In retrospect, since participants of the Trek could see
the buses of Kilimanjaro safari, it would not make much sense to convince us we were actually on an African trek. During the Trek, Disney World cast members offered more detailed information about the animals, including how the safari keeps animals apart and why certain exhibits take the forms they do. For instance, a cast member explained that the exhibit only has male crocodiles because having a female would cause the males to fight and possibly kill each other. Additionally, no eggs would be lost to predators, leading to overcrowding in the exhibit once the eggs hatched. The guides explained that, on the Disney savannah, plants and ditches kept certain animals away from each other, and, in a few instances, they pointed out the features separating exhibits. When we passed into the elephant exhibit, one of the guides pointed out the bridge over our heads. Themed as a railroad bridge, she explained, it actually allows the elephants access to another area. The other guide also admitted that the baobab trees in the savannah are not real because they could not bring in such large ones from Africa, but she explained that there is one real baobab in Harambe, albeit a young one.

While on the Wild Africa Trek, one of the guides shared a story about a DWCF project that seemed outside the mold of environmentalism Disney presents in the rest of their content. She explained that research revealed elephants dislike bees and will avoid areas with active hives, so Disney funded a project to help African farmers raise bees. The beehives kept elephants from trampling the crops while simultaneously giving the farmers access to honey, a product they could use or sell. Just as the cultural representatives shared stories about people working with nature rather than living separately from it, this project (and the prominence placed on it by our guide on the Wild Africa Trek) suggests that Disney’s view of environmentalism may be more nuanced than their main content suggests.
It turned out that one of our guides was a member of the team that developed the Wild Africa Trek. She came through the Disney College Program and then the education department, and she was passionate about the safari and the Trek. While we were waiting for everyone to finish crossing the bridges, I asked one of the Disney employees how they built the piers for the bridges over the hippos and crocodiles. He explained that it was done mostly at night, when almost all of the animals are taken out of their exhibits, but directed me to the guide for more information. The guide appreciated the question, telling me that the crocodiles were taken "off show" for three months while they built the bridge. The first Disney employee looked surprised that they would remove the crocodiles from the safari for such a long duration. I had not expected to get such an answer, let alone one that openly used the Disney vocabulary "off show." This exchange demonstrated the backstage experience of the Wild Africa Trek, where park staffers openly answered questions about how they craft park experiences.

While the guides' frankness surprised me, it was not an unwelcome departure from the theming of the rest of the park. The Trek contrasts with the safari, especially given my companions' reactions about how forced the safari's storyline felt. Many of the Trek participants seemed excited to get a glimpse behind the Disney curtain, and it offered a surprising departure from Disney's notoriously secretive attitude. While I am certain they constructed a form of storyline for us on the Trek, it felt less themed than other attractions within Animal Kingdom. There was a long lens camera with a notebook of drawings along the trail as a "surprise," signaling the nearby presence of a "researcher" (who, upon meeting her, seemed to just be a cast member, rather than a member of the animal care team), but the guides did not dwell on this fact. Indeed, they seemed to skim over this
somewhat out of place storyline, focusing more on the realistic, behind the scenes aspect of our tour. In many ways, the Trek felt like an actor breaking the fourth wall in a film, turning to camera and winking, letting the audience in on the joke. On the Wild Africa Trek, we were allowed to learn about and understand how Disney put the park together. As a direct result of its seeming openness and in feeling less mediated than other areas of the park, the Wild Africa Trek presented the most "authentic" feeling experience I encountered in the whole park.

Throughout Animal Kingdom, the Imagineers craft specific stories to engage park guests. Many of these stories are designed to encourage donations to the DWCF, from mentioning the DWCF on popular rides like Kilimanjaro Safari to consistently offering the opportunity to donate when purchasing park merchandise. From my research, it becomes clear that park guests do not quietly accept these stories, but instead engage with them, comparing the park experience to their own expectations, and occasionally finding the experience wanting when the stories fail to coincide. While the park primarily avoids discussing people in favor of highlighting animals and their stories, anecdotes about the DWCF’s work and other examples from cultural representatives at the Animal Kingdom Lodge suggest that Disney’s attitude toward environmentalism may be more complex and nuanced than indicated by the storylines throughout the park, as well as a deeper engagement than the superficial mentions of environmentalism throughout suggest. A quick glance at the DWCF website offers a link to a complete list of the projects the DWCF helped fund in 2013. The list involves projects in numerous countries, many of which seek to involve local communities in conservation projects. The DWCF’s own materials fit better
with the ideas presented by park staff in conversation than the experiences offered throughout the park. This inconsistency between expected story and park reality may, in fact, hurt Disney’s professed conservation goal, as the story presented in the park led my companions to question Disney’s dedication to the goal and the action taken in its advancement.

Taking a step back from the Disney example, my companions’ reactions raise questions about the effectiveness of conveying broad, non-confrontational ideas to maintain profitability while portraying a sense of environmental friendliness. It suggests that, in trying to balance environmentalism with profitability and appeal, an overly bland form of environmentalism may not attract the intended support from consumers. This might indicate that Disney should consider offering more information and detail about the sort of projects supported by the DWCF, because such projects might allay concerns about Disney’s true engagement with the environmental causes they say they support. Overall, my companions’ tepid response to the vision of nature presented in Animal Kingdom indicates that consumers engage with Disney’s images and ideas about nature in complex ways. It also suggests there is more work to be done on investigating Disney’s form of environmentalism and the efforts of the DWCF.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Disney’s latest animated film release, *Frozen*, recently became the highest grossing animated film in history with worldwide ticket sales totaling $1.072 billion dollars (Reed 2014). To achieve such numbers, Disney not only had to attract children, but also their parents and siblings. Part of this attraction stems from the Disney name. Molloy (2013: 180) explains that Disney begins by building an audience with children because "attachment to the brand early in life creates important associations between Disney and childhood innocence that, in adulthood, may be accessed as pleasurable or reassuring memories." Walt Disney explained that he aimed his films at "parts of people...that deathless, precious, ageless, absolutely primitive remnant of something in every world-wracked human being which makes us play with children’s toys and laugh without self-consciousness at silly things...You know, the Mickey in us" (quoted in Watts 1997: 159).

Tapping into this "inner Mickey" (or, as recent Disney Parks advertisements call it, the "Disney side") has fueled Disney’s success for generations. They aim to appeal to audiences of all ages with their films, both by tapping that "Disney side" and by slipping in jokes that delight older audiences but bypass younger ones.

Over the years, audiences have come to expect high quality from Disney. When viewing a Disney film or visiting a Disney park, audiences enter the experience with a specific set of expectations created over the years. They expect family-friendly entertainment, they expect a "happy ending," and they expect the experience to feel authentic because years of consumption of Disney products have shown them that Disney can provide these things. For young children, visiting the Magic Kingdom feels like stepping
into their favorite stories and everything about the park is designed to enhance this feeling. Other parks use different reference material, but seek to provide that same experience for park visitors. Disney’s strong connections between film content and park experience are indicative of how lines between forms of media have blurred. For a diversified company such as Disney, spreading consistent messages and content across forms of media is crucial. Experiences presented at Animal Kingdom are designed to cover the spectrum from tourism (Kilimanjaro Safari or the broader Africa and Asia sections of the park) to zoo (the Oasis and Discovery Island) to theme park (any of the several thrill attractions within Animal Kingdom). Images and ideas presented in the Disneynature films coincide with those presented at Animal Kingdom, so the two experiences do not clash with each other, producing confusion about Disney’s vision of nature and environmentalism. In a company as focused on cross-promotion as Disney, confusion about messages and images could prove damaging.

Creating a sense of authenticity stands central to how visitors experience the Disney parks because Disney history and previous experience tells audiences they can have high expectations for their Disney experience. When events do not go as planned or expectations go unmet, audiences can react sharply. In my own research, my companions felt let down when they realized that Animal Kingdom might not be as different from a zoo as they had previously believed. Lifelong experience with Disney and its products convinced them a particular sort of "Disney magic" accompanies a Disney experience. For my companions, Disney long ago established itself as presenting authentic content. Their love of Disney and belief in that content kept them revisiting Disney films and parks. When that sense of "Disney magic" faded for them as they discovered ways Animal Kingdom did
not meet their expectations, I could watch their reactions change. They looked concerned about the realization, as if it threw more than just this one experience into question. While none of them expressed reluctance to continue visiting Disney parks or watching Disney films (indeed, they even suggested they would continue to enjoy it, albeit in a new way), realizing that Animal Kingdom was not as "real" as they thought impacted them on a deeper level.

This indicates that Disney may be struggling with maintaining that sense of authenticity as consumers age. The company seeks to engage consumers from childhood through their adult years, and must thus provide experiences and entertainment for older visitors. While they seem to understand how to create authentic experiences for young people, the flexible definitions of authenticity in older visitors seem to present them with the dilemma of creating a sense of authenticity when visitors' sense of authenticity is not well defined. I worked solely with older park visitors, primarily ones who had visited the park before and had fond memories of their experiences, but even they felt alienated by the perceived lack of authenticity in their Animal Kingdom experience.

Throughout my research into the visual techniques Disney employs to create a sense of authenticity, it became increasingly clear that no single measure of authenticity exists. Through my work with literature about nature films, tourism, zoos, and theme parks, I found broad guidelines outlined by other scholars for what elements lead to a sense of authenticity. They proposed that, in films, a sense of authenticity stems from a perception that viewers are watching unstaged footage of animals behaving naturally. In tourism, scholars highlighted the importance of the destination image, an image created both by experience producers and by tourists. Authenticity in zoos hinges on a zoo
replicating, as much as possible, an animal’s natural environment, while theme parks rely on internal consistency and creating an immersive experience for the park guest. My research, however, quickly demonstrated that, while those elements play a factor, more complex phenomena factor into a viewer’s or visitor’s sense of authenticity in an experience. In each instance, a perceived lack of detail in the film or park contributed strongly to feelings of inauthenticity. During my screenings of *Oceans*, for example, teachers and some students who viewed the film remarked on how they craved more information from the film. They repeatedly asked questions about the scenes they saw on screen, particularly for identification of an animal or an explanation of its behavior. The lack of information from the narration led them to feel as if they had watched an introduction rather than a nature documentary. From their responses, it seemed as if the respondents expected informative, educational content from a nature documentary. They expected to learn something about the animals and how they live, such as feeding patterns and explanations of specific behaviors, not just that these animals exist somewhere in the ocean. In *Oceans*, it seems as if the lack of information about the animals is intentional because the filmmakers seemed to want to focus on a different aspect (specifically appreciation of ocean life), but it does differentiate this film from others released under the Disneynature label. In Animal Kingdom, the moments that contributed the most to questions about the park’s authenticity involved unclear or incomplete details, such as the lack of explanation around the kangaroos and the visible sprinkler on the safari. My companions even voiced concerns about Animal Kingdom’s nature theme as a result of their perceived lack of attention to detail in how Disney Imagineers crafted artificial trees and habitats. None of these instances of lack of detail seem intentional. Most appear as
differences between the stories my companions expected and the one Imagineers designed, while the sprinkler was an odd outlier, an interesting crack in Disney's concealment of the mechanisms that keep the park running.

Based on exposure to other media content and personal experience with nature and Disney, the people I spoke to created stories and scenarios in their minds against which they compared their experience in Animal Kingdom or watching Oceans. When stories matched their expectations, my companions felt they experienced something authentic. When the stories differed from the expected stories, my companions either rejected or questioned the authenticity of the experience at hand. Authenticity for them, however, could not easily be defined. The set of expectations they bring into the experience are often not conscious, suggesting audiences know authenticity when they see it, rather than entering into experiences with a sense of "this is what I must see to consider this authentic."

In its products, Disney tries to appeal to a broad base of consumers by using simple, broadly appealing messages and ideas about nature. They shy away from extreme or potentially controversial ideas about nature. Both through their films and the theme park experiences, Disney suggests to audiences that we must be kept apart from nature, as our actions inherently harm the natural world around us. Simultaneously, Disney products encourage audiences to work to conserve nature for future generations to appreciate. The style of environmentalism they advocate requires little major action on the part of audiences, mostly requesting donations to the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund and suggesting small changes audiences can make in their every day lives to help "make a change." They convey this idea in films primarily by removing humans from the narrative.
*Oceans* shows humans a few times through the course of the movie, but each instance fits into larger narratives about human-nature relationships conveyed through Disney products. The scenes showing animals trapped in nets or the impact of pollution clearly demonstrate ways humans harm the environment. The narration accompanying the scene of ocean researchers taking notes about animals and their behavior suggests that the researchers are somehow intruding in the ocean while simultaneously stating that their efforts to learn more about the ocean only lead to further questions, which conveys a sense that the ocean is too complex for the average person to understand. At Animal Kingdom, meanwhile, narration on rides such as Kilimanjaro Safari explicitly limit discussions of people, though literature produced by Disney’s Imagineers suggests a story in which conservation efforts are intimately tied to local initiatives and decisions. When guides on the safari do mention people, they again focus on the ways people harm the environment, rather than how humans successfully interact with nature.

The ideas Disney conveys about nature may ensure that their products appeal to a broader base of consumers. Most Americans live in cities or suburbs, and interact with nature in areas such as national parks and zoos, or they are limited to highly managed spaces like town or city parks. Additionally, many people want to feel as though they are making a difference in the environment without needing to make any major lifestyle changes, such as making the minor decision to buy a hybrid car rather than finding alternatives to driving. Disney’s messages and ideas may appeal to such people. From my research, however, it seems clear that, for many people, these messages and ideas about conservation only skim the surface. After watching *Oceans*, some respondents indicated that the film’s visuals of pollution motivated them to reconsider their actions and to take
further steps to limit their waste production, but all of these people previously stated they considered themselves environmentally conscious. Other respondents indicated that the mentions of pollution or conservation were not strong enough and contained insufficient information to motivate such action or educate about these issues. In the park, my companions voiced concerns that Disney representatives talked about conservation and environmentalism without taking any clear steps to accomplish their stated goals, a concept that unsettled them. The results of my research indicate that audiences interact with Disney's stories about environmentalism in complex ways, not solely accepting or rejecting the ideas, but again comparing the Disney presentation with their own ideas.

The reactions of my respondents indicate that Disney does struggle to maintain a balance between being perceived as environmentally friendly while still remaining profitable and continuing to appeal to a broad audience. For some, Disney's simple and easy form of environmentalism fits right in with their ideas and desired environmental action. Others use Disney's images and messages as a launch point, such as my respondents who suggested the pollution visuals inspired them to take action to decrease their waste production. For others still, Disney's view of environmentalism seemed noncommittal, as if it tried too hard to not take a position on the visuals they presented. The variety of responses to Disney's vision of the environment indicates interesting things about how Americans engage with nature and ideas about it. While Disney's ideas would seem to attract broad support, the wide variety of opinions and views from a relatively small sample of people suggest that there are a multitude of complex ways people envision their relationship with the environment. In one of my screenings, a disagreement arose about how involved people should be in nature, with one person suggesting that the only two
options are destruction or leaving nature completely alone. Another respondent argued that there are grey areas in between, where humans can take action to protect the environment while still shaping it and using it. This argument and how other respondents engaged with the material presented in *Oceans* and at Animal Kingdom suggests that such content can be used as a point of discussion and debate for the forms environmental action can take, and potentially the role of influential companies like Disney in shaping American environmentalism.

As part of writing this thesis, I explored the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund (DWCF) website to learn more about that organization, as my experience at Disney World did not offer much detail. While on the website, I learned that donations to the DWCF are not tax-deductible because DWCF does not have non-profit status. This initially concerned me, but it quickly became clear that the DWCF itself undertakes few (if any) projects. Instead, the DWCF turns donations into grants, helping fund numerous projects across the world. A glance at the list of funded projects from 2013 shows grants given to major organizations such as the Museum of Natural History, but also grants for projects that appear locally focused and locally driven. Many of the projects seem focused on research and gaining more information, but many descriptions highlight partnerships with local communities to conserve wildlife and benefit the community. For example, DWCF extended a grant to a project called "Dogs Saving Cats," which gives dogs to farmers to help farmers keep predators such as cheetahs away from their livestock without killing the predators (Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund 2014). Projects such as this and others on the list of annual grants suggest that Disney is more dedicated and engaged with environmentalism,
and a more complex form of environmentalism, than their content suggests to film viewers and park guests.

Whether or not Disney's environmental efforts stem from earnest concern about the state of the environment is debatable. If their efforts are solely "green washing," and are being used only to maintain a façade and attract business, then their actions should be criticized, as with any company engaging in such a practice. As a diverse company with thousands of employees, it seems likely that the business-based view coexists with honest concern and desire to make an impact. That said, the current state of their environmental efforts appears shallow, as if it is more about appearing environmentally friendly than affecting real change. Given their potential power and influence as a company, Disney's ability to mobilize action seems high, offering them a greater ability to make a difference, should they choose to do so. Given their willingness to take a potentially divisive stance on other issues, such as offering health insurance benefits to same-sex couples (Hiaasen 1998: 12), and the potentially youth-empowering ideas about the environment they could portray, a more aggressive environmental position appears not only possible, but potentially lucrative and fully consistent with broader company goals and ideas.

Within the parks, for instance, Disney could introduce a composting program or introduce the toilets with two buttons, one of which flushes with less water. Informational signs could explain in simple terms why these initiatives help, even offering feel-good statistics about how much water it saves or the environmental impact of composting. They could attempt to be more transparent about their efforts to "go green," which might allay concerns and address criticisms. The parks could move toward cleaner energy sources, especially for the buses making regular loops between parks and Disney resorts. Such
projects could educate guests and might increase the feel-good effect. These types of initiatives could make guests more aware of, for instance, the impact of their travel to the park, but these concerns could be addressed relatively simply. For one, the Disney's Magical Express buses to and from the airport could become cleaner vehicles, which might even increase the number of people using them. (As long as any associated extra costs do not get obviously passed on to guests and the service remains included in the ticket price, it seems unlikely that changing to cleaner vehicles would alienate visitors.) Disney could also pursue a program similar to that of Virgin Atlantic, offering ways to offset the carbon footprint associated with traveling to the park (Virgin Atlantic). As part of their Disney welcome packet, guests could receive a list of "Things To Do in the Park" that would allow them to offset the carbon and, again, feel even better about their trip to the "Happiest Place on Earth." Some of these initiatives would have an initial cost associated with them, but could help improve Disney's "green" image. If, however, Disney's environmental concern is superficial, they may still want to consider undertaking more significant action, even if only to maintain appearances.

Based on the information gleaned from the DWCF website, it seems that further studies might focus on an in depth investigation of that organization. A further study might examine why Disney engages with conservation differently than they suggest to consumers and why they choose not to connect their actions with the messages they present to consumers. Additionally, the study might consider the implications of the projects Disney funds through the DWCF. Based on my experience on the Wild Africa Trek during which a guide explained using bees to keep elephants away from farms and the readily available table of annual grants, it seems clear that Disney does not hide the projects they fund, but
certainly does not consistently connect this information to the park. The conservation area at Animal Kingdom sits in a relatively remote area of the park, requiring a short train ride to reach it. In my experience, Rafiki’s Planet Watch is not overwhelmingly popular, and the "Affection Station" (petting zoo) may be its most attractive feature. Perhaps Disney plans on introducing more from the DWCF to Disney World in future years, after their current expansion of Animal Kingdom, but how they present DWCF projects and the differences between those projects and ideas presented in the park merit examination.

Based on the prominence of the True Life Adventures, the Disneynature films certainly merit a study dedicated solely to the films and to analyzing them as a group. Though they release new films every year, it seems a worthwhile endeavor to examine the films in closer detail and begin building a literature about these films as extensive as exists for their predecessors. As the Disneynature films come from a different era of filmmaking and utilize tie-ins to environmental organizations that the True Life Adventures or other nature films do not, more general literature about nature films will not suffice to cover the potential impact of Disney’s new nature documentaries.

My project here was limited by constraints as a college student, so further studies with a broader range of respondents might lead to different conclusions and might offer more insight into the trends I noticed in my research. While Disney is historically reluctant to allow research in their parks, other scholars could undertake further research in the park, potentially either through multiple visits focusing on overheard conversations or by waiting and working through official Disney channels to gain permission to conduct research. The films, however, require no such permission from Disney, and a broader, more diverse research base would certainly extend the scope of this study.
As I considered the difference between expected and experienced stories, I began thinking about popular books and their film adaptations. When the process of adapting popular novels to the screen begins, outcry often emerges about casting decisions. Readers often create mental pictures of how characters appear, and when the actors and actresses cast for those roles differ from those images, fans often complain about how the character is not supposed to look like that. When a consumer experiences a film or park, they seem to encounter a similar phenomenon. Audiences build expectations about an experience and they anticipate having those expectations met. Young adult novelist John Green often tells fans of his books, "Books belong to their readers." His creation of the material does not extend him more authority on it than the book's readers. In a similar fashion, a filmmaker's or Imagineer's intended story in a film or Animal Kingdom does not prioritize that story over the one expected by an audience member. The story a filmmaker or Imagineer tries to tell works best when it coincides with the story a viewer or guest expects. A sense of authenticity emerges from this interaction between expected and experienced.
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Appendix

Questions Asked to Students at Film Screenings

Before

1. What is your year in school?
2. What is your major? (If undeclared, do you have a direction you are leaning – i.e. science, humanities, social sciences, etc.)
3. Have you watched a nature documentary before? If so, which one(s), in what setting (i.e. school or fun), and what do you remember about it/them?
4. When you think of nature, what comes to mind?
5. How do you feel about your relationship with nature and the environment?

After

1. What ideas do you believe the film conveyed about nature and the environment?
2. What images made the strongest impression?
3. What stood out to you most about the film?
4. Did you react emotionally to anything in the film? If so, please describe what was happening and your reaction.
5. How do you feel about your relationship with nature and the environment after viewing this film?

Questions Asked to Teachers at Film Screening

Before

1. How long have you been a science teacher?
2. What class levels do you currently teach? Have you taught previously?
3. What is your educational background (what did you study – did it include any study of nature? If so, please describe – and what degrees have you earned?)
4. Do you use films in your curriculum? If so, what is your purpose in using the films, what are they about, and who produces them? Which levels/classes do you use them in?
5. How do films in general fit into your curriculum?
6. How do/would you use nature films in a classroom setting?
7. How do you decide whether or not to show a film to your students? What are the main criteria driving your decision?

After

1. Would you consider using the film you watched as part of your curriculum, why or why not?
2. Do you think that the film would impact your students’ view of nature and, if so, how?