MATTERS OF AUTHENTICITY AND SIMULATION



Is Disneyland authentic?

This is a question I have pondered for a number of years, since I visited what was Eurodisney in 1992 (and explored in my book with Mike Pearson – Theatre/Archaeology – [Link]).

It is too easy to say that Disney is superficial, or fantasy, or ideology.

Here are a couple of cases of Disney *simulacra* that grabbed us last week – the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror (a haunted hotel), and the Indiana Jones attraction.

Simulacrum – an exact copy of an original that never existed.





Dig house and vehicle





Hotel lobby

There is no claim here that these are anything other than what they are. Fabrications. As you're told when you enter Disneyland – it's not about the present, but the past, the future, and fantasy – (re)workings.

So the simulacrum is not a matter of simulation.

I recall the case that I made a while back to think less of the distinction between fact and fiction and focus rather on creative potential.

The authentic as the genuine – that which generates – the generative.

Here is how I put it in my book *Experiencing the Past* (pages 86-87, and with reference to full-fathom five in Shakespeare's Tempest) [Link]:

… following the interplay of past and present, order and disorder, where the accumulation and preservation of a separate authentic past is disrupted by the quotation of the past in the present. Following the fate of the object, its decay and emergence in the life of the present. Following not authenticity but the material content of the past, the directions the look of the past points, anywhere, anything. Writing those magic encyclopaedias of Walter Benjamin. Heritages of dreamings and desires, longing and belonging.

The past is dead and decayed, but it has suffered a sea-change. We can dive for those pearls and coral, bring them up to the surface. We can accept change and loss, the decay, because the sea-change may be crystallization, past and present reflected within.

What is a genuine object? As we commonly use the word, genuine means not pretending, frank and sincere, original. But it holds a deeper cultural meaning. Genuine ultimately comes from the Latin *gignere*, the Greek *gignomai*, the Sanskrit *gán*, *gánami* – to beget, give birth, come into being, become, produce, cause.

So authenticity is connected to originality in the sense of origination – a

creative process of giving rise to that which was not anticipated.