

Participation in a story usually takes place via characters and action. They are the connecting link that allows us to identify with our own world and experiences. On one level, the buildings themselves can be considered characters, whose very juxtaposition can create harmony or conflict. But a more literal interpretation depends on the living characters that inhabit these places, without whom the place is but a shell. Historic places are rife with characters of infamy and legend, remembered by prose, song, and art. What would Edinburgh be without its 'Old Town' stories of Burke and Hare, Deacon Brodie, or Greyfriars Bobby, or the 'New Town' memories of Lister, Simpson and Conan Doyle? These 'sons of Reekie', and the many others immortalised by story and statue throughout the city, provide a kind of 'streetmosphere' in much the same way as the walk-around storybook characters of a theme park. They awake memories, often related to childhood, and early fantasies. They make the stories accessible.

In story places, people also participate through sound and smell as well as sight. These other senses are extremely potent stimuli of memory. If any sensory input is inconsistent the place suffers. Imagine Disneyland smelling of fish and the music being techno-rap. It just doesn't work. This kind of participation can be the difference between success and failure. At Disneyland and in Las Vegas the music is as carefully choreographed as the flow of spaces. Music is there to provide the right ambience and emotional emphasis at just the right moment and place, in the same way as a movie score. The occasional fiddler and bagpiper on the Royal Mile though often annoying to locals, achieves the appropriate result for Edinburgh's tourists.

In summary, all places are to some degree invented, but the successful ones are characterised by planning, building design and programme that is clearly integrated with story. Story makes places more meaningful and more accessible. Story is both an individual and a shared experience. It's what connects us as human beings and defines our cultures. Like places, story may come about over time, or may arise instantaneously. It doesn't matter which, providing the particular story and place are consistent and immersive.

It doesn't mean the whole world should be a theme park. But there are lessons to be learnt from these experientially successful, cross-cultural, operationally intense places. Derived from a lineage including fairs, expos, museums and heritage-sites and the places of fictional story, theme park design is part art, part science. Theme parks have influenced a host of places in the urban environment, like Las Vegas, and innumerable retail entertainment centres around the world. The theme park epitomises the 'invented place', but it does so with a nod to some of the great places of history; places like Edinburgh, the 'Athens of the North', 'Auld Reekie'.

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