

Composite Bodies: Race, Gender, and Dis/ability in Fairy Tale Performance

by

Christine B. Case

Bachelor of Arts, Williams College, 2015

Master of Arts, University of Chicago, 2017

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This dissertation was presented

by

Christine B. Case

It was defended on

May 23, 2023

and approved by

James Kincaid, Professor Emeritus, Department of English

Patrick McKelvey, Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre Arts

Jennifer Waldron, Associate Professor, Department of English

Courtney Weikle-Mills, Associate Professor, Department of English

Dissertation Director: Tyler Bickford, Professor, Department of English

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This dissertation interrogates the ways in which racial, gendered, dis/abled, and technological modes of embodiment reimagine what fairy tale performances can signify and who they can include. Through a framework of *composite bodies*, I chart diverse representational possibilities made possible by the appearance and performance of certain bodies in fairytale landscapes, from the crip Disney Park Guest to the Black incarnation of the white Disney Princess. By naming something a *composite body*, I serve witness to the processes wherein specific bodies test the limits of what is achievable through their performances.

Influenced by queer of color critique and contemporary girlhood studies, this research centers interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to performance, race, gender, and popular culture, particularly in US contexts. My archive ranges from Broadway musicals and their divas to Disney performances, Park rides and structural design, to promotional materials and autoethnographic experiences. Attending to the ephemeral and under-acknowledged, this dissertation both reflects and creates an archive of fairy tale performance.

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1.0 Introduction

In June 2018, I bought last-minute tickets to the new Broadway musical *Frozen*. Though my tickets were for the orchestra section, they were still strangely affordable, and I knew I had taken a gamble with the ticket resale site. Almost embarrassed to ask my friend if she wanted to join, I tried to laugh off my juvenile selection, saying I was sure it wouldn't be mind-blowing theatre.

In January 1996, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* published José Esteban Muñoz' article "Ephemera as Evidence: Introduction Notes to Queer Acts." Here, Muñoz affirms how even ephemeral "performances of queerness" can function as evidence of queer lives and queer worldmaking projects, in the past, present, and future (6). Muñoz understands performance scholarship as organized around objects which may not "'count' as proper 'proof,'" positioning this impulse to interrogate such objects as a queer act itself (6).¹ He continues:

With increasing frequency, queer and race scholarship, like feminist inquiry before it, are dismissed as merely passingly intellectual fancies, modes of inquiry that are too much in the 'now,' lacking historical grounding and conceptual staying power. Because the archives of queerness are makeshift and randomly organized, due to the restraints historically shackled upon minoritarian cultural workers, the right is able to question the evidentiary authority of queer inquiry. All of this amounts to a general critique of queer scholarship's claim to 'rigor.' (7)

¹ "Central to performance scholarship is a queer impulse that intends to discuss an object whose ontology, in its inability to 'count' as a proper 'proof,' is profoundly queer" (6).

In this way, Muñoz positions performance scholarship, queer and race scholarship, and feminist inquiry as derided and dismissed disciplines—derided and dismissed like their central objects, or archives. We may center “anecdotal and ephemeral evidence” *as evidence*, broadly construed. To limit access to the concept of “evidence” is to lock out those already “locked out of official histories and, for that matter, ‘material reality’” (7). This centering is a performative intervention.²

I almost didn’t pursue *Frozen* tickets that week I was in New York City in 2018; I am lucky to have gone, and to have gone that particular date and time, as during that night’s performance the role of Anna was to be played, not by principal actor Patti Murin, but by alternate Aisha Jackson. While I was familiar with alternate, stand-by, or understudies occasionally performing lead roles throughout a production’s run, Jackson’s embodiment of *Frozen*’s Princess Anna surprised me, and kept my mental wheels turning for hours and years after her performance. Jackson did not open the performance as Anna; rather, a child actor performs the role of Anna for the opening sequences until, during a musical number, she “grows up,” reappearing as the nineteen-year-old she is for the remainder of the musical. Jackson embodies this revealed adult persona, who re-presents an Anna who is Black. This representation of Anna deviates from the canon established by the animated film *Frozen* in 2014. From here, I became fascinated by the substitution or over-laying of bodies on the fairy tale stage—and the resulting world-making possibilities. These mechanisms of embodiment and the worlds built through that process are the foci of this dissertation.

² “Placing an event/image,” Diana Taylor states, “outside of its familiar context or frame can be, in itself, an act of intervention” (17).

1.1 Why Composite Bodies?

In September 2022, I attended the D23 Expo, Disney’s biennial fan convention, in Anaheim, CA. There, in a panel titled “100 Years of Treasures from the Walt Disney Animation Research Library,” animator Mark Henn, who worked on the character Ariel in Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989), understands an animator as a funnel: “you get from the storyboard level, the directors, and you kinda start getting an idea, but when the voice talent is decided upon, that’s when you open the door to who the characters really are.” The different “facets” of a character trickle down together, and the animator, per Henn, “[has] to spit out a performance at the bottom here” (Laughing Place). Not only does Henn acknowledge the significance of the voice actor in the articulation of a character, he emphasizes this combinatory alchemic animating process as a *performance*.

Display screens on either side of the stage fade from a title page (“Voice Recording”) to an image of Jodi Benson in blue...while from stage right, the living Jodie Benson walks onstage, also in blue. This is a surprise appearance, only guessed at by certain members of the audience. Jodie Benson is known as the voice actor for Ariel in 1989’s *The Little Mermaid*. The panel presented archival footage which demonstrated Howard Ashman guiding Benson through the voice-acting process, even standing in the sound booth behind her. Benson gives a quick backstory as to how she became involved in *The Little Mermaid*, starting from her Broadway days in *Smile* (1986) alongside songwriter Ashman, who was already involved in *The Little Mermaid*. According to Benson, “Ariel came to life long ago with Howard singing that cassette version on that cassette tape that I had of Part of Your World.” The archival, iterative technology of cassette tapes allowed these demos to be sent to voice talent, with Howard then influencing Benson’s own vocal embodiments of Ariel. Henn reminds us of the collaborative process between Benson’s

voice acting, the animators, and the live-action reference model, Sherry Stoner. Stoner, in a “little sound stage” with “Jodi’s tracks,” interpreted and tried out gestures for the animators to draw from (Laughing Place).

Throughout this Expo, I was captivated by the ways types of embodiments layered on top of one another—or even clashed—in bringing fairy tale characters “to life.” In the process of animating Ariel alone, Benson’s vocals, Stone’s gestures, Henn’s drawings, Ashman’s creative vision and many more talents both credited and not credited are necessary to the creation of an embodied, acting Ariel. Suitably, Ariel as a mermaid is already a *composite body*: half human, half fish. *The Little Mermaid* is about body and voice, and performance. In Hans Christian Andersen’s original tale, in exchange for human legs the little mermaid does not only lose her voice to the sea witch, but every time she takes a step with these new legs, it is as painful as “treading on sharp knives.” Despite this disability, the little mermaid performed grace at the prince’s court, even dancing.

Jennifer Fleeger, who examines the sonically “mismatched women” in U.S. history, highlights *The Little Mermaid* as a tale that is literally about the dissociation of body and voice. Fleeger points out the irony that “it was on *The Little Mermaid* (1989) that the studio figured out a way to erase even the traces of these female contributions.... Although Ursula’s witchcraft captured Ariel’s individuality, the magic of computer animation eliminated the collective practice of women’s work” (107). For work such as *Snow White* (1937), Disney “Animators were men, and enjoyed a much higher rank and pay scale than their field ink and paint colleagues” (106). The teams were even segregated into different studio buildings and discouraged from mingling between gendered teams, and the women were even discouraged from talking amongst themselves. With *The Little Mermaid* in 1989, Disney employed software which assigned color digitally, with

more shades of color and less Company expense (107). Women's ink and paint work was eliminated.

For Fleeger, this dissociation produced by the mismatched women's interactions with contemporary (yet always evolving) sound technologies exposes "just how fragile human subjectivity really is" (4). When the talents of mismatched women are not successfully dismissed, they serve to defy culturally ascribed "limits of the female body," challenging any era's circumscribed concepts of femininity (14).

In this dissertation, I propose a framework of *composite bodies* with which to analyze fairy tale performance. This *compositeness* references the layered nature of embodiment—a sedimentation of visual, audible, affective, and associative layers. Like Fleeger's mismatched women, the *composite bodies* I spotlight in this chapter assert a femaleness or "divadom" which resists heteronormativity and, prompting intimate audience publics, challenge easy notions of the individual subject. Bodies are constantly in flux in theatre, and the relationship between an actor and their role is already a composite one. By naming something a *composite body*, I serve witness to the processes through which these bodies test the limits of what is achievable through, or mandated by, the specificity of their performance event.

This project would not exist without the provocations of queer and queer of color theorists, such as Muñoz' valorization of ephemeral archives. In an interview on the release of *Cruel Optimist* (2011), Lauren Berlant acknowledges that while only two of her chapters deal with explicitly LGBTQ material, her work "could not have existed without queer theory." She states:

The idea itself that your object is a relation, that your object is a cluster of promises to you, that you produce kinds of patterns in relation to it that are fundamentally ambivalent and improvisatory—all of those kinds of observations come

from...queer theory's insistence that all objects are relations, projections, forms of interestedness that complicated what it means to be attached to the world.

Like Berlant, I am interested in the relational and the iterative, in promises and patternings. I understand circulation in terms of queer temporality (Elizabeth Freeman; J. Halberstam; Kathryn Bond Stockton; José Esteban Muñoz) and fairy tale performance in terms of critical utopianism (José Esteban Muñoz). Queer temporality speaks to the cycling of the past into the present, and from there into future imaginaries—time(s) not bound by the linear march of heterosexual reproduction. This reordering and re-cycling of temporal intervals is aided by, or even relied upon by, the process of artistic adaptation. I have focused my archive upon the performances, circulation, and adaptation of fairy tales. Muñoz draws from the “unboundedness” of fairy tales (Bloch) to praise performances which are “magically doing,” which are “calibrated to provide an idea of another way of being in the world that was not allowed within an antiutopian hermeneutics” (165). He insists: “investing in a fairy tale need not be a retreat from reality but a certain way of facing it” (165).

Throughout this dissertation project I have been interested in the objects that inspire, allow, invite, and/or demand certain identificatory practices between audience and object, audience and self, audience and itself. Per Berlant, this aligns my dissertation's central questions with those of queer theory. This very listing of verbs (inspire, allow, invite, and/or demand) represents my interest in the “ambivalent and improvisatory.” I am not interested in determining the moral nature or intent of a performance and its makers. Indeed, throughout my research I came time and again to the idea that distinct manifestations of a performance text may be incommensurable, or at least have different allowances or affordances. Here, I focus on how distinct modes of embodiment—or, in contrast, the insistence on specific modes of embodiment only—changes those affordances.

Through the spotlighting of *composite bodies*, fairy tale performances expose audience and corporate investments at play and offer alternative world-building possibilities. Interested in the iterative, each chapter in this dissertation chronicles how similar embodiments—even the same characters and actors—move across and through differing landscapes.

1.2 Archives and Field Sites

My archives are girly ones. It would be reductive to consider fairy tale performance and, within that, Disney transmedia, as only pertaining to (girly) girls. That said, there is an ideological-material feedback loop wherein the affordances expected from, and even built into, “girly” commodities and experiences can be informed by this misunderstanding. Working from a survey of girl culture scholarship, Alice Lai and Yichien Cooper affirm: “girly visual culture is part of *gendered* visual culture; that is, issues associated with girl culture should not be perceived as *girl-only* issues but as issues concerning every child” (97). Neither should girly material culture be perceived as child-only issues, but rather as generationally open ones.

Karen Sánchez-Eppler demonstrates the need to understand childhood as an ideological category that demands pluralization:³ The childhood I have experienced (or remember) may be vastly different from the childhoods experienced globally. Childhood studies acknowledges the difference between the figural Child with a capital C (in whom we invest) and the living, breathing child. My archives—fairy tale performances; their landscapes; their ephemera—are invested in the perceived child audience, in the circulation, romanticization, and monetization of childhood as

³ Tyler Bickford, drawing from Alan Proust and Allison James, positions childhood as “a socially constructed category of identity that intersects with gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, and sexuality,” and understands childhood as that which is performed by actual children (*Schooling New Media* 23)

concept and fantasy. That said, my research questions turn us back to the body. This dissertation tracks how the movements and materialities of real bodies change and/or compound fairy tale representation, asking what bodies—fantasy *and* real—are allowed legible lives and legacies. The composite nature of the bodies in question in this dissertation is, in part, due to this mash-up of fantasy and real, with embodiment and performance linking the two.

1.3 Chapter One

Ryan Bunch, whose current research hinges upon *The Wizard of Oz* and its adapted forms, draws from theatre historian Raymond Knapp and musical theatre scholar Stacy Wolf to establish the musical, particularly the musical as developed on Broadway and in Hollywood, as an American art form (54). Musical theatre conventions skillfully “translate ... symbolic national mytholog[ies] ... into participatory expressions of ... identity through embodied performance” (53). Because of this, Bunch argues, audience associations with famous musicals and their source texts are often “physical, performative, participatory, ritualistic [and] playful” (56). Bunch explains how MGM’s 1939 musical film, *The Wizard of Oz*, re-tooled, recirculated, and amplified the “body of common cultural knowledge” associated with L. Frank Baum’s children’s story, published in 1900. It was the intervention of musical conventions in 1939 that allowed audiences to perform this re-tooling and recirculating by “bursting into song and dance spontaneously” (54).

This chapter takes up three Broadway musicals: *Frozen*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Wicked*. Each book (the term for a musical’s script and narrative structure) is derived from a source text in another medium: *Frozen* from the 2013 animated Disney film of the same name; *Beauty and the*

Beast from the 1991 animated Disney film of the same name; *Wicked* from Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel. In turn, those source texts are themselves derived from fairy tale tradition, inspired by H.C. Andersen's "The Snow Queen" (1844), Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* (1740), and Baum's aforementioned *The Wizard of Oz* (1900). Just as the common body of cultural knowledge associated with Baum's text took on new life when filtered through musical theatre conventions, Disney's animated musical films *Frozen* and *Beauty and the Beast* packaged their fairy tale traditions in catchy song form, spurring circulation and embodied audience participation.

In an article on the function of the Disney Princess, Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario reminds us that the animated films of these Princesses "are consistently musicals" (35). She draws from Rick Altman, who warns us that "the musical *looks* as if it can be properly defined by a linear, psychological model, but this impression is created by no more than a veneer, a thin layer of classical narrativity which we must learn to look beyond, discovering instead the radically different principles of organization which lie just beneath the surface" (Altman qtd in Do Rozario 47). Bradley Rogers, like Stacy Wolf, affirm that certain "principles of organization"—like song and dance—can subvert a narrative's insistence on a heterosexual marriage plot. Rogers even notes how "moments of bursting into song" can both prompt those onstage "to 'become' bodies different than their own" and "structurally demand [the same] from spectators" (5).

In this way, there are gaps in a fairy tale musical's linear narrativity through which audience members can locate a different, even queer, set of values, and I argue these gaps, or moments of rupture, are often aligned with complex embodiments "that exceed the limits of a discrete body" and "demand" (Rogers) some affective response from the audience. Chapter One organizes these arguments around race.

1.4 Chapter Two

Of the three performance events highlighted in Chapter One, I was in attendance at one: Jackson's performance in *Frozen* June 30, 2018. Several contingent circumstances brought Jackson to the stage as Anna, and me to the audience, that night. By documenting (with all the subjectivities of the process) this performance event through this project, I am inviting it into an archive. Chapter Two is built around performances and audience/consumer experiences that are less accessible to the generalized public. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the range of performances, both scripted and spontaneous, that occur in curated fairytale landscapes like Disney Parks. From September 2021 through September 2022, I attended the following Disney Parks: EPCOT, Hollywood Studios, Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, Disneyland, Disney California Adventure, Disneyland Paris, and Walt Disney Studios Park. These range from Orlando, FL to Anaheim, CA and Coupvray, France. In these two years, the price of a Disney Park ticket for one day (and without additional perks) averaged around \$130, gatekeeping the experiences financially. By charting the range of performances at these parks, I hoped not only to archive and share my experiences of these performances, and their performance details, but also to question the role of material embodiment in a landscape where symbolic embodiment (read: fantasy characters) was so important.

Is this a Disney dissertation? Not exclusively. Of the three Broadway productions discussed in Chapter One, two were produced by Disney Theatrical Productions, the stage play and musical production subsidiary of the Disney Company. *Wicked*, instead, was produced by Universal Stage Productions. While the fieldwork represented in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation takes place at Disney Parks, events, and touring productions, the insights into the

capacity for performing bodies to change an iconic narrative, or for audience renegotiation of identity texts to exist alongside capitalist drive, are applicable beyond the Disney Company.

In 2013, fairy tale scholar Cristina Bacchilega affirmed that “Today’s fairy-tale transformations activate multiple—and not so predictable—intertextual and generic links that both expand and decenter the narrow conception of the genre fixed in Disneyfied...popular cultural memory” (ix). Bacchilega charts a shift since the 1980s wherein “the emergence of a renewed poetics and politics of wonder that, although hardly cohesive, are situated responses to the hegemony of a colonizing, Orientalizing, and commercialized poetics of magic” (ix). Here, Bacchilega points to the difference between expansive, intertextual, albeit incohesive fairy tale iterations and a narrow, hegemonic, “colonized...and commercialized” politics of magic. While the Disney Company many *represent* the latter for many, the fluid, composite embodiments of fairy tale performers (and the very the ins-and-outs of live performance) even within the Company betray a “politics of wonder” that works, through incohesion, intertextuality, and—I add—embodiment, to “both expand and decenter” a fixed understanding of Disney and of fairy tale performance broadly.

For my fieldwork at the Disney Parks, I was originally drawn most to Character Meet-and-Greets and the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, an all-out makeover experience for children 3-12. There, children can be transformed into young princesses or knights (“royalty-in-training”), complete with glittering hairstyles, deluxe Disney costumes, and a professional photoshoot. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, both Character Meet-and-Greet and the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique services were halted for the majority of my site visits; even parades were stripped-down and abbreviated. Similarly, I had intended to view the musical stage show *Frozen: Live at the Hyperion*, which did not return after COVID.

Ultimately, the four performances discussed in detail in Chapter Two include: the *Frozen Sing-Along Celebration* at Disney World Hollywood Studios; the Legends Awards Ceremony at the D23 Expo; two iterations of Disney Princess-the Concert; and the “Frozen Ever After” attraction at Disney World EPCOT. These each chart embodiments of Queen Elsa and re-enact *Frozen* in some way, illustrating (along with my Chapter One analysis of *Frozen: the Broadway Musical*) the diversity of meanings even one fairy tale source-text can create through iterative performance.

1.5 Chapter Three

This third and last chapter turns explicitly to me. As I was conducting my first research trip in 2021, from Pittsburgh to Orlando, FL to visit the four Disney Parks that make up Disney World, I became overwhelmed by my own limitations in relation to the Disney Parks and Disney Park Experience. Insisting on valuing my embodied experience, I decided to utilize these sensations and roadblocks as data. Critical autoethnography, per D. Soyini Madison, is “concerned with how human actions and experiences are generated by [their] social worlds” (3). She understands the researcher to be “a participant observer or a performative witness within a sustained, body to body, environment” (4).⁴ In Disney World FL, Disneyland CA, and Disneyland Paris, my field of research broadened from investigations into fairy tale performances (see Chapter Two) to also include my embodied sensations, emphasizing the *bodymind* in the “body to body environment.”

⁴ “Qualitative researchers and field researchers understand their work is more than a method of data collection, because the inter-animating symbols, actions, values, embodiments, meanings, power hierarchies, spontaneous moments of life in the field, and so forth, exceed categories” (Madison 4).

This chapter speaks to Disney's regulation of bodies within the curated fantasy environments of its Parks. I begin with a sketch of Disney's dress-coding practices, wherein Park Guests may be denied access due to aspects of their dress. Access to the Disney Experience (I think of it as the Disney Experience™) is predicated upon orderly community behaviors, a willingness to be surveilled and to leave aspects of individuality at the Park gate. However, this is not a comfy contract for everyone. This chapter is for the bodies and minds (*bodyminds*) which do not fit comfortably in this landscape, for whom the physical architecture, sensorial ambiance, corporate regulations, and digital policies are prohibitive.

I interrogate Walt Disney's (hereafter referred to as Walt, to distinguish between man and Corporation) pledge that Disneyland be a welcoming, happy place for all. The happiness of Disneyland is linked to a fondness for youth that tethers childhood and its ideals—i.e., innocence and health—to conceptions of nation and future. This is problematic for many reasons, including when we turn to questions of dis/ability. From here, I bring in recent lawsuits against Walt Disney Parks and Resorts which accuse the Parks of violating the Americans for Disabilities Acts; discuss the Parks' Disability Access Services (DAS); and provide an autoethnographic account of my own negotiations with Park landscapes, company websites and DAS. I argue Disney surveils, regulates, and ultimately mistreats disabled persons, and that another way to see the magnitude and range of this regulation is to consider Disney's treatment of Guest deaths.

2.0 Chapter One—Aisha Jackson, Toni Braxton, and Idina Menzel on the Broadway

Musical Stage

2.1 Introduction

I locate in the Broadway runs of *Frozen*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Wicked* charged moments which, bound up in intertextual associations, break from a narrative and performative norm. In this chapter, I track the *composite bodies* of actors Aisha Jackson, Toni Braxton, and Idina Menzel in Broadway runs of *Frozen*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Wicked* respectively. I do so in an effort to interrogate the role of race and putative whiteness in fairy tale performances and Broadway as an industry. The appearance of specific, racialized bodies on specific nights during specific performances brings to our attention not only the composite nature of performance in general but also the *composite body's* role in the creation of audience publics. These publics can be racist, anti-racist, and ambivalent.

2.2 Pt. 1: Aisha Jackson

With the 2013 release of the Disney animated film *Frozen*, the anthem “Let it Go” became the song the globe could scarcely escape. In March of 2018, Disney Theatrical Productions capitalized upon this film’s lingering popularity with the Broadway opening of *Frozen: The Broadway Musical*. Two and a half minutes into the show’s third musical number (“Do You Want

to Build a Snowman”), the child princess Anna transforms into her older self. Anna of all ages is canonically white, with white fair skin and red hair per the *Frozen* film.

However, in intermittent performances from March 29, 2018 through February 17, 2020, this older self materialized in the form of an unexpected body: Black actor Aisha Jackson, the alternate for the role of adult Anna. When Jackson performs as adult Anna, young Anna is still performed by white child actor Audrey Bennett.⁵ As Jennifer Fleegeer notes, the “mismatched woman” of song and film “tempt[s] us outside of the text to notice the present” (7). In these performances as Anna, Jackson’s presence instigates a time and space never meant to appear. This time and space is a gleeful girlhood of color, long shut out of the Disney princess canon. By “never meant to appear,” I invoke performance critic Tavia Nyong’o, who in turn is invoking poet and Black feminist Audre Lorde’s “Litany of Survival” for those populations “never meant to survive.” Based on my memory of the June 30, 2018 performance, Jackson emerges as Anna *in media res*, mid-song, echoing a lyric her child-self had just delivered. In terms of performance, Nyong’o understands *in media res* to allow subversive “moments and locations where a change in the surrounding that is blackness seems to come *out of nowhere*” (5). For her part, Jackson emerges “*out of nowhere*” from the shadow of a door frame, and, more systematically, from her position “in the wings” as an alternate. In doing so, Jackson enacts *afro-fabulation*, which Nyong’o defines as “the persistent reappearance of that which was never meant to appear, but instead meant to be kept outside or below representation” (3). Jackson’s appearance onstage in this role alters the visual, symbolic, and affective landscape of the theater. This rupture demands the audience reckon

⁵ In this analysis, I will focus on the optics of the original Broadway cast, including alternates. The performance I saw in June 2018 had only two cast changes from the original cast: Zoe Glick’s replacement of Audrey Bennet as one of the two Young Annas in May, and MiMi Ryder’s replacement of Brooklyn Nelson as one of two Young Elsas, also in May. Both Glick and Nelson are white actors. Whether young Anna is performed by Glick or Bennet, the optics remain the same—from seats in the audience, when Jackson is performing, a young white child “magically” transforms into a Black adult in mere moments.

with pre-existing expectations, and the structures of whiteness in *Frozen*, the Disney canon, and Broadway's corporate structuring.

“The history of the American musical is the history of white identity in the United States,” Warren Hoffman writes in his 2014 monograph about race and Broadway musicals,⁶ and Brandi Wilkins Catanese reminds us of the inextricable connection between Blackness and performance in the United States (1). We will discuss this later in reference to the minstrel history of *The Wizard of Oz*. Catanese understands representation in cultural performance “to matter, of course, but should be analyzed relationally rather than hierarchically in order to understand how multiple formulations of performance cohere to regulate, to provide pleasure, and to enact possibility” (2).⁷ Historically, this pleasure provided includes the pleasure of a white audience watching a Black body labor as entertainment (2). Nevertheless, the possibility that Catanese references includes the ability for performers to “‘restyle’ the body and attempt to gain momentum that will cause repetitions of this restylization [of gender and race] to spread from their local bodies to broader cultural sites” (19).⁸ *Frozen: The Broadway Musical* casts racially discrete Annas across a single role. Jackson “restyle[s]” Anna’s body, a repeated act which ultimately allows Black Anna to move from Jackson’s body to take on a life of her own, with material and digital afterlives.

⁶ Warren exposes how the American musical functions “as a site of manipulative racial politics” (5), in line with Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez’ understandings of Broadway as a “privileged imaginary space” and discursive location “where identities and social models are contested and produced” (Sandoval-Sanchez 9).

⁷ Queer black feminist Amber Musser argues, “We gain access to how [structures] act upon bodies. Though each body reacts differently, we can read a structure as a form with multiple incarnations and many different affects. All of this is achieved without having to appeal to identity: this is about opening paths to difference” (Nyong’o 81).

⁸ Bradley Rogers posits, “The desire at the center of musical theatre [to be] precisely the creation of complex relationships across bodies, through impersonation and projection—as modeled in the cross-gender, cross-racial, and cross-ethnic performances that relentlessly populate the genre” (Rogers 7). These “complex psychic relationships across different bodies” are, Rogers argues, created as a salve to human distress over “the expressive limits of a discrete body” (5). Specifically, we desire “to exceed” these limits (5).

The night I was present in the theater, the surprise appearance of Jackson's performing body⁹ caused the audience to stir, a hushed yet audible ripple to move through the space. Jackson refuses, or "fails," to embody the character's expected whiteness. "Anna" as a discrete body and coherent, singular subjecthood ruptures. Instead, Anna-as-composite-body, and as performance, is made visible.

Applying Sara Ahmed's theorizations, one could read this "failure" as queer. Ahmed asks: "What happens when bodies fail to 'sink into' spaces, a failure that we can describe as a 'queering' of space?" ("A Sinking Feeling"). In Jackson's own words:

Shortly after Disney released the cast list on their Facebook page...People were attacking me. People were saying that Anna couldn't be Black...Shouldn't [Disney], you know, also have some sort of support system ready for racist attacks? ... Our industry paints us in a certain picture...You perpetuating [sic] that our white counterparts are more important, and deserve to lead the show, and deserve to have these three-dimensional characters, but we don't. It tells our audience, "This is what you should always expect." So when they see me come out, they go "Oh, That's wrong," because you've told them that it's wrong time and time again. (@gifted2sing, "People said that...")

In 2020, Jackson directly addressed the industry ("You") and its failures, including the relative ease with which white actors can "sink into" (Ahmed) a certain picture of how things should be. In contrast, Black actors and "the surfaces of [their] bodies" (Ahmed) are barred from this comfort, which renders them queer in Ahmed's reading.

⁹ It is through *singing* that Jackson takes the stage, in line with Rogers' notion that the "transitive chain" (4) of (character and spectator) identifications amplifies when the musical "bursts" into song and dance.

There is uncertainty and ephemerality embedded in an alternate's role. While alternate performances onstage are at times announced in advance, they can also occur at the last minute, due to a principal's injury, illness, etc. In fact, Patti Murin confirmed canceling her appearance in a performance of *Frozen* due to an anxiety attack, illustrating how an unpredictable disease or disability may challenge scripted embodiments and temporalities.

Jackson's Anna appears *narratively* unfamiliar and *temporally* irregular. In this way, Broadway's *Frozen* fosters queer temporality. Even without this temporal rupture catalyzed by Jackson's embodiment, the temporalities of Broadway's *Frozen* are multiple. Due to its status as a remaking of a "fantastic text" (37)—a specific genre—Broadway's *Frozen* inherits "the affective temporality of nostalgic allegory" (38). Bliss Cua Lim ascribes a "repetitive, cyclical temporality" to genre itself, wherein genre conventions reference each other. Source texts and remakes must be understood as individual texts that may be consumed in disparate orders and understood in disparate relations; the "time" of remakes can never be regarded as simply a "chronological 'afterward'" (Lim 193). Jackson's appearances enact a queer temporality of circulation when audience members utilize her performances (or knowledge thereof) to re-script the *Frozen* source text, which technically came first (in 2013).¹⁰

Due to Jackson's position as an alternate, her initial performances as Anna were largely unarchived; only principal actors were featured in official promotional photographs (such as a *Vanity Fair* photoshoot, December 2017) and on the original cast album. Nearly a year after Jackson's debut as Anna on March 28, 2018, Playbill online highlighted her labor during Black

¹⁰ Broadway itself has many "entrance points" for consumption or audience affiliation; Shane Vogel understands musical theatre as a performance medium composed in part through "Broadway productions, mass-produced soundtrack recordings, and paratheatrical publicity" (134). Though the official designation of a "Broadway production" is reserved for those presented in select theaters, the spectatorial experiences and associations of Broadway productions are extensive and multimodal, rather than spatially delimited. This multimodality increases likelihood for consumers to engage texts in orders untethered to historical linearity.

History Month, February 2019. At this point, Playbill featured Jackson in multiple articles championing Disney's commitment to and celebration of diversity in their oeuvre. In "How Disney Has Made Diversity a Priority for 25 years," Felicia Fitzpatrick posits representation on stage as an extension of the Company's legacy of "creating whimsical worlds of magic and wonder." Racially diverse opportunities in these productions are thereby cast as "whimsical," perhaps even endearingly fictitious, rather than a reflection of the audience's local and global communities, as we will discuss later in reference to the 1997 Wonderful World of Disney *Cinderella*. In the promotional photographs released with this article as well as "Disney on Broadway Celebrates Black History Month," Jackson appears out of costume only, further under-archiving images of Black Anna on Broadway.

Meanwhile, in celebratory Instagram posts, Jackson and co-stars participate in community archiving, proudly disseminating photographs of Jackson in and out of costume as Anna, on- and off-stage and at the stage door, as well as any pre-announced dates for when Jackson would be performing as Anna. If the world of Jackson's Anna represents a world "never meant to survive" and "also *never meant to appear*" (Nyong'o), this world necessitates "critical and fabulative archiving" (Nyong'o 3). Jennifer Nash understands this labor, "This willingness to name, to make visible, to again and again describe and analyze structures of domination," to be a practice of political worldmaking," which often falls disproportionately on the shoulders of Black women (Nash 119). Nash's "black feminist archive" relies on what is witnessed, on "mak[ing] visible and palpable"—like the ephemera Muñoz celebrates as evidence.

On the night of Jackson's first performance as Anna, Jelani Alladin, who plays Anna's love interest Kristoff onstage, posted a photograph of himself and Jackson in costume to his Instagram. His caption read: "Tonight we made #blackhistory with @gifted2sing playing Princess Anna in

Frozen! I am so blown away by the professionalism and talent of this company! Wow! #wakandaforever CONGRATS AISHA!!!!!! #frozen #blackbroadway #kristanna.” Rhetorically, Jackson is asserting a connection between *Frozen* and *Black Panther* (2018), as well as Black History and Black Broadway. Here, Alladin claims Black Broadway as a “structure of feeling,” rather than an exclusively Afro-American creation (Vogel). Even though *Frozen: The Broadway Musical* had few Black artists in its leading production team, and even though *Frozen* featured only white principal actors as Anna during its Broadway Run (Patti Murin, followed by McKenzie Kurtz), even one performance by Jackson as Anna serves to re-enact, re-embody, and re-imagine the franchise; now, there is evidence that the film’s iconicity cannot lock in Anna as able to be embodied by only whiteness. *Frozen: The Broadway Musical* may enable *afro-fabulation* because select performances do so, and because of these *select* performances, the production as a whole may draw from a “tenseless” (unbound) Blackness to reimagine itself.



Figure 1 Image Description: Instagram post by actor Jelani Alladin with a photo of himself and Aisha Jackson in costume as Kristoff and Anna for *Frozen: The Broadway Musical*. Caption says, “Tonight we made #blackhistory with @gifted2sing playing Anna in Frozen! I am so blown away by the professionalism and talent of this company. Wow! #wakadaforever CONGRATS AISHA!!!!!! #frozen #blackbroadway

#kristanna.” Images screen grabbed by author 15 April 2019. By November 2019, this post was no longer discoverable on Alladin’s Instagram.



Figure 2 Image Description: Instagram post by actor Hames Brown III. One photograph of himself and Aisha Jackson in costume as King Agnarr and Anna in *Frozen: The Broadway Musical*. Another photograph of himself, Jackson, and Ann Sanders (who plays Queen Iduna) in costume. Caption says, “It was so amazing to have @gifted2sing as my Anna for 3 shows last week. She had big Princess Slippers to fill and she did it beautifully. She made me and her mother @annsannyc proud! Congrats [microphone emoji] @frozenbroadway #frozenbroadway #frozenfun #frozenfam #Anna #kingagnarr #queenidua #disneyprincess #disneyking.” Images screen grabbed by author 20 January 2023.

Like Alladin, actor James Brown III turned to Instagram to celebrate Jackson’s performance. Brown who played Anna’s father King Agnarr in the original cast, posted a photograph of himself, Jackson, and Ann Sanders, who played Anna’s mother Queen Aduna, all in costume on April 2, 2018. The royal family of *Frozen* is multiracial in the original casting: Black King, Asian American Queen, and two white princesses (Audrey Bennet/Mattea Conforti

and Brooklyn Nelson/Ayla Schwartz¹¹ as young Anna and Elsa; Patti Murin and Cassie Levy as adult Anna and Elsa, respectively). Because the King and Queen die during the Princesses' youth, Brown and Sanders appear onstage alongside the child actor embodiments of Anna and Elsa only. However, Brown claims Jackson/Jackson's Anna as his and "@annsannycs [Sanders]"s daughter on Instagram, and proudly displays a photograph of the three of them—a multiracial family that did not, in this version, appear onstage. He is archiving the relation, and the image, into reality in an example of *afrofabulation*.

Multiple Black actors were cast in canonically white roles for *Frozen: The Broadway Musical*. In regard to the principal cast members, James Brown III embodies King Agnarr, and Jelani Aladdin embodies Kristoff—both white in the film. However, when Jackson takes the stage *part-way through the narrative*, something beyond cross-racial casting is happening. The character Anna is not merely going from white in the film to Black on the Broadway stage, but exhibiting inconsistent embodiments on the same stage, in the same performance event—somewhere between girlhood and the age of 18, the character Anna racially transforms. This transformation explodes the notion of what “growing up” can entail. This is a moment of anxiety for the audience and fans: the anxiety over loss of childhood meeting the anxiety over the loss of whiteness.

Afro-fabulation, as previously referenced, functions as both a “theory and practice of black time and temporality,” a tenseless-ness “which is queer in both its resistance to the repro-futuristic and accumulative drives of chrono-normative development” (11). So generally, this method of

¹¹ Notably, Schwartz went on to voice the *Frozen II* “Into the Unknown” Elsa doll from Jakks Pacific, and Conforti was cast as voice actor for Young Elsa in *Frozen II*. In this way, *Frozen: the Broadway Musical* and its casting influenced *Frozen II* and *Frozen II* merchandising. One voice can be both Young Anna and Young Elsa; one voice can be both Young Elsa and a doll.

fabulative archiving works against “straight time” and the privileging of the white Child figure as society’s promise.

Allow me to take us back two years before *Frozen* premiered on Broadway to further understand *Frozen*’s relationship to anti-racist community archiving. In 2016, *Frozen: Live at the Hyperion* premiered at the Hyperion Theater in Hollywood Land at Disney California Adventure theme park in Anaheim CA and continued with up to five performances daily through 2020. Disney California Adventure, which opened in 2001, is the companion park to Disneyland (1955). Roughly 55 minutes (to the film’s 108 minutes), the Hyperion production sticks closer to the film’s narrative than does the Broadway production.¹² Though puppetry designer Michael Curry was carried over from the Hyperion show to the Broadway production, the rest of the creative team was changed.

Now, Jackson was not the first Disney-sanctioned Black Anna; she was the first Black Anna on *Broadway*. In 2016, audiences—gathered in a Disney space—were exposed to a Black Anna through *Frozen: Live at the Hyperion*. Videos captured by Guests at Disney California Adventure, as well as Instagram pages and TikTok accounts, celebrate Dominique Paton’s performances as Anna. However, there is a remarkable absence of institutional recognition of Paton’s role as Anna; in my research, I cannot find a source in which Disney recognizes the names of its individual, rotating actors in the Hyperion production. I discovered Paton’s name through the community archiving performed by users of YouTube and social media platforms, including an exposé of the show on Tumblr by Cooper Howel, Paton’s fellow actor in Hyperion performances, titled “Heaven or Hell: Or My Experiences Being of Person of Color in Disney’s

¹² The 2-hour Broadway production includes several new songs written by the film’s singer-songwriter team Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Bobby Lopez, and it dives further into Anna and Kristoff’s relationship, as well as Elsa’s internal struggle and persecution.

Hyperion Theater.” Jackson’s 2018 appearances as Anna in *Frozen: the Broadway Musical* suffered a similar lack of Disney promotion, yet were celebrated by similar community efforts to archive, circulate, and promote her labor and artistry.

Comments on Jackson’s 25 August 2018 Instagram post, with its image of Jackson in costume, alongside the actors for Elsa, Young Elsa, and Young Anna, reveal societal dis-ease with a racially composite Anna. One commenter asks: “Do they not use little black Anna’s?? I wish they did.” Another commenter replies: “they cast white girls as little anna, just as they cast white women as big anna. aisha came in to perform as anna, but the little annas were played by the regular actress they cast. but I agree it would have been nice to at least have a brown wig for the little anna...” (@gifted2sing, “[Snowflake Emoji]—S I S T E R S— [Snowflake Emoji]”). These commenters reveal two sticking points some spectators may hold: that the actor embodying Young Anna and the actor embodying Anna are not racially consistent; that the wig for Young Anna and for Anna as embodied by Jackson are not consistent.

The second commenter is correct in that Young Anna actors wear a red wig consistent with Anna’s red hair in the *Frozen* film, and they do this even when Jackson is performing as Anna. Jackson’s wig, instead of being red, was brown. The wig still featured the streak of white hair which is narratively significant for Anna’s character in *Frozen*. Jackson worked with the production’s wig designer, according to the aforementioned Playbill online article, “How Disney Has Made Diversity a Priority for 25 Years on Broadway” (Fitzpatrick). As the years went on, and as *Frozen: The Broadway Musical* closed on Broadway and began touring (Los Angeles 2019), other Young Anna actors would work with the production. As of January 2023, Aria Kane and Saheli Khan are sharing the role of Young Anna both performing with red wigs, per their Instagram accounts. Thus, on the tour the red wig is utilized for Young Anna even when she is a child of

color. All this to say, when Jackson performs, Anna is a composite character—even her hair color is inconsistent, composite. It is this composite nature that reveals audience investments in racial predictability and whiteness. I personally appreciate the fact that as of 24 January 2023, no one has *replied* to these commenters on Instagram; Jackson’s Instagram can function as a proud afro-fabulative place where she does not need to explain herself, or be spoken for.



Figure 3 Image Description: Instagram post by actor Aisha Jackson with a photo of herself in costume as Anna from *Frozen: The Broadway Musical*, as well as actors in costume as Adult Elsa, Child Elsa, and Child Anna. Jackson’s wig is brown; the wig the child actor playing Anna is wearing is red. One Instagram commenter asked, “Do they not use little black Anna’s?? I wish they did [crying face emoji],” to which another commenter responded, “they cast white girls as little anna, just as they cast white women as big anna. aisha came in to perform as anna, but the little annas were played by the regular actress they cast. But I agree it would’ve been nice to at least have a brown wig for the little anna.” Image screen grabbed by author 20 January 2023.

That said, Jackson's Instagram is not a place free of anti-Black racism. While @babyblue_lalune no longer has an active Instagram as of March 2023, their insistence that "This is stupid as shit" since Frozen characters "are Norwegians not n****s from Africa" exemplifies the ways in which racist publics can form in response to Jackson's performances as Anna, and adhere to her (online) presence.

Even if irregular, Jackson's performances as Anna forge room for Black imagining. Once Jackson's Anna exists as a possibility in one performance, the production's whole run and its paratexts are disrupted. She is "tenseless" (Nyong'o), not bound to one, isolated time of performance. The afterlives of Jackson's performances spin out from the embodied material realm, to the digital, and back. Jackson's Instagram is peppered with photographs of herself with young fans (mostly girls), as well as photographs of fan art given to her, often with the artist's Instagram handle tagged.

In February 2019 Jackson announced on Instagram that she will be giving out dolls commissioned from fan artist @princess_hayden at the stage door for Black History Month. On 25 August 2018, Jackson posted an Instagram boomerang video of herself in costume holding a doll made by @princess_hayden, whom she thanked and tagged. These dolls embody Jackson's Anna: in Anna's coronation dress, with Jackson's Black skin. Jackson does this for "the little black girls that see me as Anna" because "#RepresentationMatters." Jackson posts photographs of young Black girls in the theater, citing their exclamation, "Princess Anna has brown skin! That means I can be a princess too!" (1 February 2019). These dolls have moved from its creator (one fan), to Jackson, to social media audiences via Instagram posts, and in solid material form to fans at the stage door. This spatial constellation of Black Anna is stretched, with many entrance points and modes of embodiment; Black Anna also exists in temporal extension, in queer and "tenseless" *afro-fabulation*. Many of Jackson's interactions with young fans occur outside the stage door after

performances end; this engagement extends the spatial and temporal boundaries of the “show,” to include direct audience engagement with actors out of costume, and out of character.

Fan-made social media posts extend the *afro-fabulist* potential of Jackson’s performances to the *Frozen* franchise as a whole. On June 6, 2020 TikTok user @scrappydadon_ posted a short video in which she simulates a duet with herself. Singing both Elsa and Anna’s roles in “For the First Time in Forever (Reprise)” from the *Frozen* film, @scrappydadon_ is a composite voice whose camera technique nevertheless emphasizes duality. @scrappydadon_ films the video with the camera alternating between pointing at herself and at her image in the mirror; her editing exaggerates the sense of a confrontational duet attached to this musical number. Fans of *Frozen* the film and fans of *Frozen: The Broadway Musical* alike would be familiar with the lyrics and affective register of this number: a naive Anna seeks to pacify a fearful Elsa, who ultimately erupts in a fit of emotion and shattering ice-effects (her magical power).

While @scrappydadon_ sings along to the lyrics from *Frozen*, the video superimposes real-world political content, with text that expresses Anna and Elsa’s contrasting views. This following text is displayed as @scrappydadon_ sings the *Frozen* lyrics:

Anna: Actually you aren’t oppressed

Elsa: Wym we’re not

A: Slavery ended 400 years ago

E: But systemic racism didn’t

A: Well burning things down doesn’t change anything

E: It’s a civil rights movement

A: BLM is everywhere now

E: That's the point

A: He's arrested now, just stop

E: We wont, it doesn't end here [sic]

A: But its okay, I dont see color [sic]

E: Thats means you are ignoring my oppression [sic]

A: Well if we defund the police, who are you gonna call?

E: Anyone that is ACTUALLY trained properly...

A: Why are you so angry?

E: Why arent you? [sic]

A: Its okay Trump 2020 will Make America great again [sic]

E: Well great for who / BLACK LIVES MATTER

[Shattering sound effects]

@scrappydadon_ attaches this text-based protest to a catchy sound bite in such a way that Blackness cannot be fully extricated from the whiteness of the Disney Princess oeuvre, and activism functions alongside childhood.

I do not know if @scrappydadon_ was familiar with Jackson's performances as Anna when she posted her TikTok. But she is sharing in Jackson's legacy: forcing room for Blackness into Disney's *Frozen* franchise. Both @scrappydadon and Jackson mobilize their own embodiment, performed to music, to "restyle" Anna as a composite character, one which offers performers and fans alike many entrance points into the narrative.

2.3 Pt. 2: Toni Braxton

In 1998, a year after *The Wonderful World of Disney* debuted Brandy Norwood as a Black Cinderella, R&B pop star Toni Braxton took the stage as Belle in Disney Theatrical Productions' Broadway show *Beauty and the Beast*. Here, like with Jackson's embodiment of Anna, the layering of bodies is multifaceted, resulting in a *laminated composition* Braxton took over for Andrea McArdle, who replaced Sarah Litzsinger who replaced Jamie Lynn Sigler and down the line to Susan Egan, who originated the Broadway role in 1994¹³. What is more, Egan and all her successors may be seen as replacing, as mapping onto, the animated Belle of the 1991 film. Already, by taking the stage as a new performer and as a live enactment of a being of another medium altogether, Braxton is playing in substitutions. She is enacting a composite body.

Braxton's Belle, like Jackson's Anna, is a racially composite character. Braxton maps Blackness onto the character of Belle, who is canonically white per the *Beauty and the Beast* animated film of 1991. Alex Bádue and Rebecca S. Schorsch understand the performers of Disney Theatrical Productions to emulate their film predecessors, and for future performers to emulate that original cast recording (219), such that through the 1990s, "Disney also established and perpetuated a uniform vocal style through casting choices" (219). I disagree. Such a smooth history fails to account for Braxton's embodied disruption of Disney Theatrical Production's *Beauty and the Beast* in 1998. In this section, I argue that Braxton's performances as Belle catalyzed various effects and aftereffects which change not only Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*

¹³ When Egan originated the role of Belle on Broadway in 1994, cultural critic Jeremy Gerald bemoaned the fact that her "voice [was] more pop star than musical theater." Even Egan's performances, to which Braxton's would be negatively compared four years later for being too pop (see King), were themselves critiqued for being too pop from the outset. This betrays either 1) anti-Black racism that found "pop" to signify differently or more negatively for Black performer Braxton than white performer Egan; 2) that in the span of 4 years "pop" and "musical theater" would evolve to signify differently from what the genres signified in 1994, so that looking back Egan's voice may no longer have sounded "more pop star than musical theater"; or 3) both.

narrative generally but also the script and mood of the musical specifically. Braxton re-codes Belle racially and vocally, demanding an affective shift among theatergoers. I bring in Jason King's argument regarding the centrality of "sultriness" to Braxton's turn as Belle, broadening it to include analysis of lyrics and footage from *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, and positioning Braxton's Belle in context with Jackson's Anna in a history of #BlackBroadway. While there is contemporary fan debate surrounding Braxton's turn as Belle, I will note that footage of her performing is limited, and the social media platforms so central to Jackson's *afro-fabulative* community archive were not at play in 1998.

Jackson brought her position as a (popular yet bankrupt) R&B singer with her to Disney Theatrical Production's *Beauty and the Beast*, a celebrity persona that was both gendered and racialized. Jason King, in *The Drama Review*, writes:

Disney made an unusually generous series of aesthetic reconstructions in *Beauty and the Beast*. Some of these were intended to capitalize off Braxton's music stardom. Yet most were intended to anticipate and accommodate (rather than suppress or disguise) the 'demands' of Braxton's expressive black femininity as embodied onstage in performance. (54-55)

Braxton's performances are influenced by her embodiments, which exude an "expressive black femininity," a femme Blackness that *demands* (King). King references a "sultriness" that is linked to both Braxton's position as an R&B singer and her race. By 1998, Braxton's 1993 debut album had reached number one on *Billboard 200* and sold 10 million copies worldwide, winning Braxton Grammy Awards for "Another Sad Love Song" and "Breathe Again." Her second album, *Secrets*, debuted in 1996 with US hit singles "You're Making Me High/Let it Flow" and "Un-Break My Heart." The "Breathe Again" official musical video presents a romantic Braxton in a

light billowing gown amidst garden hedges and ornate fountains. Despite this visual romanticism, Braxton's lyrics reference sex explicitly, reminiscing "About the love you make to me" and questioning "[Will] I never make love to you again." These lyrics put forth a sensual and sexually active Braxton who even promises "never [to] breathe again" if she cannot "make love to" her lover once more.

Twelve years after this article was published in 2002, commenters on *broadwayworld.com* critique the Disney Theatrical Productions team, who "should have sought an actress that was better suited to a more Disney-style princess," instead of "basically Belle in a smoky jazz club given' it soul." Not only do these online commenters posit "soul" as antithetical to Disney princesses, they understand Braxton's embodiments—"breathy, sultry" and "sassy"—to be "a gross turn for such a magical production" (2014), a presumed incommensurability with magic itself.¹⁴

One of the aesthetic reconstructions King refers to here is the introduction of a new song into the score. "A Change in Me" was new to *Beauty and the Beast* in 1998, written by composer Alan Menken and lyricist Tim Rice (the stage adaptation team) specifically for Braxton to perform, part of her contract. In order to appease the celebrity singer and, per King, "to capitalize on her musical roots in gospel and soul" (55), the book of the show was uncharacteristically "un-frozen" years into its Broadway run. King understands this song to be "out-of-place," a "radical disruption" inconsistent with the rest of the score —of a key and tempo suitable to Braxton's performances of "pop ballads" yet distinct from the rest of Belle's songs in the musical (King). In this way, "A Change in Me" is a sonic disruption in the fabric of the show. And with Braxton's

¹⁴ King later states that, during a production of *Beauty and the Beast*, "even Braxton's soul traditions produce[d] magical effects" (my emphasis), thereby insinuating that such "soul traditions" would not be expected to "produce magical effects"—or at least, not in the context of a Disney Theatrical Production and princess narrative (62).

departure from the cast? The song remained, spilling over into years of subsequent Belles and becoming a staple of the set list, embedding that moment of disruption into the show's canon. The reigning set list is a composite of character embodiments and temporal moments.

“A Change in Me” is a song of reflexivity and interiority. In the 1990's, Braxton's hit song “Breathe Again” prompts interpretive slippage between female interiority and female sexuality, positioning a “You inside of my private thoughts [and] Touching my private parts.” “You” becomes intimately connected to Braxton through being both “inside” her thoughts and her “private parts.” This penetration by the Other even prompts Braxton to touch *herself*, to increase her knowledge of her own body. Were audience members familiar with this track of Braxton's by the time they viewed her in *Beauty and the Beast*—more than possible considering the release date and popularity of the number—, they may have interpreted Belle's new song, “A Change in Me,”¹⁵ differently. There, Braxton sings:

Now I realize / That good can come from bad / That may not make me wise / But
oh it makes me glad.../For in my dark despair / I've slowly understood / My perfect
world out there / Had disappeared for good / But in its place I feel / A truer life
begins / And it's so good and real / It must come from within.

In the musical, Gaston laments Belle's potential for interiority: “It's not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting *ideas*, and *thinking...*” (*Beauty and the Beast*). Belle's interiority in this number allows for the princess-protagonist to *change her mind*, to deviate from her previous script and the expectations of her “Small, provincial town.” The “true life” that Belle is ascertaining at this moment “must come from *within*.” In “Breathe Again,” the notion of “within” signaled a place of knowledge, self-possession, and sexual pleasure. In turn, “A Change in Me”

¹⁵ Susan Egan, who originated Belle in 1994, recorded the first studio version of “A Change in Me” in 2002, becoming the song's first English-language recording.

functions as a moment of realization in which Belle, a previously sheltered female teenager, bids naivete good-bye and welcomes in its place a more morally ambiguous reality, one which reimagines good and bad. Especially with the paratext of Braxton's pop/R&B career, "A Change In Me" can be interpreted as a song of sexual awakening.

Braxton's embodiment as an R&B singer, and now Braxton's embodiment as Belle, co-circulated in 1998—in terms of the auditory and in terms of the visual. Just as changes were made to the Tony-nominated musical score to highlight Braxton's background in gospel and soul, changes were made to *Beauty and the Beast's* Tony-winning costume design by Ann Hould-Ward to highlight Braxton's body and sensuality.

On October 7, 1998, Braxton appeared on an episode of the Rosie O'Donnell show in what appeared to be Belle's iconic yellow ball gown. She performed "A Change in Me" amidst fog machines and pink-and-purple lighting, beside a wishing well (iconography more associated with *Snow White*, or even *Cinderella*, than *Beauty and the Beast...*). Following a commercial break, Braxton reappeared sitting by O'Donnell in a dress very similar to her performance dress: this time, no off-the-shoulder sleeves or neckline ornamentation, and with different front paneling. This likeness was imperfect, but too close to be a coincidence. This appeal to continuity on behalf of Braxton or the show's publicists demonstrated attachment to the composite body of Braxton-Belle, but also fissures or failures in the imagining of this composite body.

Costumed as Belle, having sung Belle's part, Braxton next stated: "I'll always be Toni Braxton...*Look, let me show you.*" This "Look" is a command, and invitation, for visual scrutiny, for observation, for *gazing*. Braxton cued music (betraying the pre-established set-up of this "impromptu surprise") and began stripping. She swayed her hips and teases her gloves off, swinging one provocatively about. She tore-away Belle's pouf skirt to reveal a slim-cut, yellow

silk gown underneath, snug to her hips and legs. Turning her back and bottom to the audience, Braxton removed the tight curls of Belle's coiffed wig to reveal longer, smoother hair beneath. This act disrobes the persona of Belle carefully curated in the 1991 animated film and on Broadway up until this point, a persona of All-American purity.

Braxton has stated of Disney, "I'm not an actor...They're letting me be very Toni Braxton." King states, "That Toni Braxton was very Toni Braxton onstage, more Braxton than Belle, confirms for us that this is a tale about celebrity...If Braxton is essentially playing herself, that all the questions of difference that inform her star discourse...are operating in her onstage performance," including rumors of her lesbianism and details of her bankruptcy (King 75). In this way, Braxton's body onstage is *composite* in that she is performing multiple roles simultaneously, that become overlaid: Belle and Braxton—the latter both "herself" and her star text. Braxton's own *compositeness* bestows or transfers *compositeness* to this embodiment of Belle, as well, and as we have seen, the casting of Braxton as Belle served to interrupt the show's protocol, prompting changes to the production that remained in effect even after Braxton's departure from the role.

Drawing from first-hand experience as an audience member, King chronicles the affective shifts in the environs of *Beauty and the Beast*'s Palace Theatre catalyzed by Braxton's notes, "soul traditions," and "vocal wail[s]" (62). King states:

The first high note Braxton hit, stretched in time and space...[and] produced a collective sensation in the theater, which was evident in the spontaneous applause and verbal acknowledgement by the audience—gasps, small shrieks, and various other utterances—during, not after, the song...the formalized structure of the theatrical event itself seemed to fold in on itself—time seemed to stand still, and a dense, pervading warmth filled the space. (62)

With “a vocal wail that seemed to send a shuddering rush through to the back of the audience,” Braxton’s voice reconfigures the time, space, and conventions of the theater and its audience. This “wail” rubs against the tradition of the operatic, romantic notes of Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty. From King’s account, I understand Braxton’s voice to be queerly reproductive, “shuddering” in iterative waves “through the back of the audience,” producing “collective sensation,” and prompting the expression of further sound by audience members. The “demand” (to return to King’s wording) of Braxton’s voice here disrupts, opens, and re-constitutes “the controlled, closed system that is the Disney production” (55) broadly and the musical score specifically, as keys were lowered to fit Braxton’s range.

Braxton’s wail disrupts both the space of the theater and the genre conventions of the theater event. “The walls of the Palace Theater seemed to come down,” King writes, thereby reconstituting the space of the theater. The vocal outbursts of the audience during Braxton’s singing challenge the social etiquette expected of a theater audience—to applaud after a song, scene, or act. With time “stand[ing] still,” traditional parameters of time and space collapse through (as part of; as a result of) this performance event.

Michael Warner focuses upon publics which come into being “in relation to texts and their circulation” (50). Existing “by virtue of being addressed,” these publics are “relation[s] among strangers” which set their own boundaries and organizations. In this way, the theater audience becomes a composite body of no-longer-strangers, united in their relation to the live performance event, as well as the ways that performance event will circulate beyond that moment (think of Jackson, Instagram, and Black Anna dolls). In this way “the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity” are reshaped “around co-membership,” a co-membership that “requires our constant

imagining” (57). This is another way in which *the composite* unravels the notion of a cohesive human subjectivity. Here, subjectivity is relational, bound up in the communal imagining.

One function of this chapter is to put in conversation various iterations of *composite bodies* on the Broadway stage, which—when materialized—illustrate the instability and multiplicity of character, celebrity, self-hood, and fairy tale performance. More so, this archive of *composite bodies* speaks to the process of, and access to, archiving itself and challenges audience investments in specific Princess or diva embodiments—of the “expected” race, range, and costume.

2.4 Pt. 3: Idina Menzel

I turn now to an analysis of the megamusical *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*, which opened on Broadway in 2003. Based on Gregory Maguire’s novel (1995) and drawing iconography from the MGM film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), Broadway’s *Wicked* premiered with Idina Menzel performing the lead role of Elphaba. Elphaba, or the “Wicked Witch,” is born entirely green. Focusing on Menzel’s unscripted, surprise appearance during a specific performance of *Wicked* in 2005, I explore audience, press, and academic response to Menzel’s *composite* performing body to better understand the affective outpouring of the intimate public formed that evening. I also argue that the unanticipated absence of this “greenface” that evening spotlights the musical’s manipulation of, and dependence upon, race and racialization. I position the musical’s “greenface” as a legacy of the minstrel histories that influenced source-text *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (L. Frank Baum, 1900).

Like Jackson’s 2018 performances, Idina Menzel’s *in media res* appearance onstage during a 2005 production of *Wicked* deviated from audience expectation, re-signified the scripted

performance event, and conjured intimate audience publics—this time, through Menzel’s composite embodiment of herself, her diva persona, and the character Elphaba which she originated on Broadway. On January 9th, 2005, Idina Menzel made a shaky yet show-stopping appearance in the final minutes of the show that was to have been her last. Her appearance, however, was unanticipated by the audience since a last-minute injury had kept Menzel from the full performance, prompting Elphaba understudy, Shoshana Bean, to fill the part that night. However, following the act-two disappearance of Elphaba through the iconic melting of the Wicked Witch of the West, Bean did not return to finish the show. Instead, Menzel approached tenderly from stage left, a hand brushing her cheek—unmarked by Elphaba’s iconic green makeup (McKinley). She wore a red tracksuit with white detail. Almost bashful, she shrugged; she embraced Elphaba’s love interest Fiyero, played by Joe McIntyre. She turned her glance to the audience and the look was emotional, sustained. McIntyre shared a chuckling glance with the audience, whose applause continued on and on. They each looked up, stage right, towards where Glinda (Jennifer Laura Thomson) awaited. “We love you, Idina!” shouts one patron from the balcony, “How do you *feel*?” (McKinley) (my emphasis).

I draw the above description from a combination of grainy video footage from within the Gershwin Theater, uploaded to YouTube despite copyright infringement, and Jesse McKinley’s New York Times Review, “Ding Dong, a Witch is Hurt, But She Takes Her Final Bow.” Like Instagram, these sources are unstable and subjective. Speaking of instability, the “Menzel Red Tracksuit Appearance” 2019 YouTube video I began working with that year is no longer available. In 2023 I discovered similar (if not identical) footage uploaded to YouTube back in 2015 by a different account name, under a purposefully misleading title—“Idina Menzel and Taye Diggs officially divorced after 10 years of marriage”—to avoid removal due to copyright infringement.

Also working from McKinley's New York Times review, Stacy Wolf explains, "The performance was completely halted by 'this outpouring of love' (Changed 220), "equal parts ecstatic hello and tearful goodbye" (McKinley, qtd. in Wolf, Changed 220). This outpouring manipulated time in that it both impeded the progression of the show and prolonged the moment of applause. Menzel's specific presence brought about a sense of rupture: "a screaming, squealing, flashbulb-popping explosion" of a "standing ovation—some 1,800 strong and five minutes long" (McKinley). As "the trigger" for such disruptive "outpouring" (McKinley), the surprise presence of Menzel catalyzed an affective shift in the theatrical space. In Ahmed's terms, Idina "form[ed] an impression," and the sheer energy of the audience impressed, too, upon her and the "surfaces" of the performance (Ahmed 6). Unbridled audience affect resulted from, produced, and came in contact with the embodied affective experiences of the on-stage performers, such that through each other these groups "mark[ed]" (Ahmed) their constitutive presence. Fiyero's lines become self-reflexive jokes; Glinda goes off-script.

Upon their reunion, Elphaba traditionally speaks first: "I thought you'd never get here." However, in this instance, McIntyre spoke as Fiyero, taking up those self-same lines. He thereby manipulated the scripted dialogue of the show, offering instead a *kairotic*¹⁶ twist on the meaning of those lines. This is not lost on the chuckling audience. By virtue of perfect timing in an (im)perfect moment, McIntyre embodies both his character Fiyero and the character of Elphaba simultaneously, moving in space and time as a *laminated* persona. Menzel, tearfully, receives his words.

Invoking Ahmed once more, we can understand emotions themselves as worthy of critical analysis; they "show us how power shapes the very surfaces as well [as] worlds" (12). Like

¹⁶ Of *kairos* (noun): a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment (Merriam-Webster)

(though distinct from) Jackson in *Frozen* or Braxton in *Beauty and the Beast*, here Menzel's body "fail[s] to 'sink into' spaces," into makeup and costuming and scripts. She shines as a real-world disturbance in a fantastical land, red amidst hues of green. Jack Halberstam reimagines failure as a queer art, for "Under certain circumstances failing...unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2-3). Menzel's refusal to be either entirely absent or entirely present, her unanticipated body, may be seen as a failure in continuity and worldbuilding. The show, too, failed to go on as scripted—its tempo disturbed.

Wolf states, "Menzel's final performance 'as' Elphaba was actually as 'herself'" (Changed 220). Wolf draws from McKinley's review to support this, which describes Menzel's appearance thusly: "She wasn't in costume, she wasn't in makeup, she wasn't even in character" (Wolf, Changed 220). However, things are not so simple. I suggest that, following the success of *Wicked*'s original run, Menzel and Elphaba are largely blurred, cemented or "stuck" together as imbricated personae. Even according to Wolf, the characters Elphaba and Glinda and the actors who play them unite through the performance and embodiment of the diva figure. They have left their traces on one another. In this way, Menzel's appearance, especially on *this* stage surrounded by other *Wicked* performers in costume, could never be simply "as 'herself.'" As I ask in the following chapter, what does it mean to assert that Broadway performers are appearing "as themselves"? Wolf hints at this slippage through her use of quotations around "as" and "herself," but the declarative nature of the sentence as a whole shuts down discussion. Even the title of McKinley's *New York Times* Review, "Ding Dong, a Witch is Hurt, But She Takes Her Final Bow" illustrates slippage between the figure who is hurt (Menzel), the performer who takes her final bow (Menzel), and her character (a Witch).

The diva is “exuberantly self-expressive” (Wolf 227), “excessive, [and] performative” (Wolf 228). In fact, *Wicked* as a whole is discussed with similar language. Wolf continues, “Unlike other Broadway shows that might want to preserve the illusory world of the musical, *Wicked* revels in spilling outside its frame to frankly acknowledge the passionate girls who sustain it” (Wolf 220). Like the two diva characters—and their relationship—that drive the musical, and like the teenage girl fans that identify with the diva personae offered to them through the characters of Elphaba and Glinda and the stars who play them, *Wicked* as a production revels in excess, performance, and “divadom” (Wolf, *Changed*). Like Fleeger’s mismatched woman, this diva exudes a femaleness that transgresses societal limits of femininity (224), at once fundamentally nonnormative and nonheterosexual (222).

Menzel’s unanticipated appearance undermined insistence upon the individual citizen, the strict and tidy control of the self, the alleged success and power of those not emotionally affected (Ahmed 1-4). Instead, Menzel’s “tracksuit performance” celebrated a model of the self which exists among and as part of an uproarious, uncontrollable affective community.

Menzel’s surprise appearance surprised doubly: she appeared, and she appeared embodied “incorrectly”—that is to say, in unpredicted embodiment, one at tension with audience expectation, particularly given the time and space of appearance. “At curtain call, with two Elphabas on stage— one in greenface and Wicked Witch costume and one not” Wolf writes (*Changed* 220). Here, Wolf applies the language of “greenface” to describe the performance of green-ness by an actor for the role of Elphaba, attained through the use of green makeup applied to all body parts visible when in costume. From here, I unpack this legacy of “greenface” to exhibit the racist nature of *The Wizard of Oz* source-text and the resulting way in which Menzel’s performances as Elphaba, her *composite* embodiment of Elphaba, are themselves racialized. This

links us back to Jackson and Braxton's performances which are racialized in a more immediately visible manner.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was published in 1900, written by Frank L. Baum, and in it there is no green Wicked Witch of the West. Instead, the Wicked Witch of the West (who appears only in Ch. XII, and in no subsequent *Oz* texts) "[has] but one eye...as powerful as a telescope [that] could see everywhere" (102). She is a "wicked creature," a "wicked woman," and a "wicked creature" again in the span of a page (112). In 1902, a musical extravaganza titled *The Wizard of Oz* (original music by Paul Tietjens) premiered at the Chicago Grand Opera House, later moving to Broadway's Majestic Theatre in 1903—1904. While the Wicked Witch of the West is mentioned, she does not appear on stage. Components of this production were woven into the fabric of the 1939 film, namely the sequence in which the Good Witch of the North lands a magic snowfall upon the travelers to counteract the poppy field's spell. As Baum was continuing to write his *Oz* series during this time, certain narrative details which were introduced in the 1902 musical (such as Dorothy's last name of Gale) can be found woven into later *Oz* texts.

In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2012), Robin Bernstein chronicles this inter-penetration between *Oz* texts in the early twentieth century with specific attention to blackface and minstrelsy traditions. As Bernstein notes, 1915 was the semicentenary of the Civil War, and around this time children's culture often put forth a "concatenation of ruralism, patriotism, and nostalgia for antebellum America" (148). In designing and marketing the popular doll Raggedy Ann, Johnny Gruelle "shape[d] white girls' private practices of play." This *play* functioned as a quotidian performance which hid narratives of "slave holding and enslavement" beneath an image of "racially innocent fun" and "American love" (149).

This racially charged “innocence” reaches back in history from Gruelle’s 1918 publication of *Raggedy Ann Stories* to Baum’s 1900 *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Following the publication of Baum’s first *Oz* text, the aforementioned musical extravaganza featured blackface actors Fred Stone and David C. Montgomery in the roles of the Scarecrow and the Tin Man, respectively. Through his work with the J.H. Haverly minstrelsy company (touring), Montgomery met Stone, beginning their 22-year partnership in 1895. From there, they signed on to Gus Hill’s touring vaudeville company in 1896. By 1897 promotional stills of Montgomery and Stone were circulating widely, with the actors in blackface.

That is to say, when Montgomery and Stone came to *Oz* in 1902, they brought with them overt legacies of blackface performance, and audience members could be widely expected to be in the know. Bernstein points out that Baum crafted the subsequent *Oz* books (books 2-14) with Montgomery and Stone’s slapstick performances in mind, including book 7, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, understood to be a text influential to Gruelle in his creation of the *Raggedy Ann* narrative. Baum explicitly dedicates book 2, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904) to Montgomery and Stone with a frontispiece illustration of the two figures, and the following words: “To those excellent good fellows and eminent comedians David C. Montgomery and Fred A. Stone whose clever personations of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow have delighted thousands of children throughout the land, this book is gratefully dedicated by The Author.”

The painted faces of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow make their way into the 1939 MGM film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Beneath layers of aluminum powder/paste and foam latex prosthetics respectively, the facial expressions (the humanity) of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow were transformed/disguised, rendered *partially* relatable. Narratively, too, each character’s face is explicitly layered, malleable, impressionable: The Tin Woodman’s jaw rusts

shut due to precipitation over time;¹⁷ the Scarecrow has (implicitly) had his face painted on by a farmer wishing to scare off crows—throughout, hair comes off and pieces of straw are plucked from behind his ears. The Scarecrow, too, is introduced hanging, feet dangling in the air, with a tight rope circled about his neck; the allusion to the lynched black man is hard to miss.

Of course, the most famous painted face of the film is *green*. Margaret Hamilton stepped into the role of this “ugly” witch, boasting a prosthetic nose and chin for the part. According to Old Hollywood lore, the Witch’s skin became green due to a material constraint: the new Technicolor cameras didn’t successfully photograph Hamilton’s skin tone when contrasted with the all-black coverage of her costume. Her now-iconic green skin was crafted from a toxic, copper-based makeup which had to be thoroughly scrubbed off with alcohol—even when her face beneath had suffered first-degree burns due to a stunt malfunction.

Her green skin is provided with no explanation in the film. This absence serves as the basis for Gregory Maguire’s 1995 novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, in turn the basis for the mega-musical *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*, now the second-highest growing Broadway musical behind’s Disney’s *The Lion King*. In both the novel and the musical, the Wicked Witch of the West is given a name (Elphaba) and her history explored, including her mysterious pigmentation. Questioning the reason behind Elphaba’s green skin, the narrator of Maguire’s novel asks, “Was Elphaba devil’s spawn? Was she half-elf? Was she punishment for her father’s failure as a preacher, or for her mother’s sloppy morals and bad memory? Or was she merely a physical ailment, a blight like a misshapen apple or a five-legged calf?” (40). Here, the narrator prompts the reader to consider Elphaba’s greenness as curse, as

¹⁷ In Baum’s text, the Woodman begins as a *human* prior to being cursed by a witch to cut himself up limb-by-limb, until he was entirely tin (prostheses). This adds another component of layering to the Tin Man’s countenance.

fantastical, as moral punishment, or as disfigurement—something “misshapen,” or with one-too-many legs.

In terms of the musical, Wolf questions two possible interpretations of Elphaba’s skin color—race or disability—arguing the musical “forecloses” both (*Changed* 204). Nevertheless, the musical doubles-down on her optics, and on the idea that her physical, aesthetic difference is tethered to her embodied subjectivity and social ostracization. In the musical’s first act, Elphaba and the Wizard of Oz meet, and sing a duet. In “The Wizard and I,” Elphaba imagines what it would be like to work alongside the Wizard, who understands her “weird quirk [she’s] tried to suppress or hide” to be a “talent” instead. When Elphaba sings of “this gift or this curse [she has] inside,” she means her affinity for magic; however, the song continues on, enacting slippage between Elphaba’s internal difference (magical talent) and her external difference (her looks; her green skin). She asks, “Shouldn’t a girl, who’s so good inside, have a matching exterior?” Fantasizing about the Wizard offering to “de-greenify” her, Elphaba wishes for an exterior that matches her internal goodness, that matches those around her and allows her to pass as one-and-the-same.

For *Wicked*’s Elphaba, makeup is arguably the central costuming maneuver, with Elphaba’s green skin Othering her from all other characters in the narrative. It signals Elphaba’s alterity and, ultimately, her supposed wickedness. Elphaba works as a character, and *Wicked* as a conceit, because of the reliability of audience association: this green skin, particularly when topped with a black, pointed hat, clearly references Hamilton’s iconic embodiment in the 1939 film, the wringing of her hands and flapping of her cape, her gleeful vendetta against even “that little dog, too!”

So when Menzel takes the stage to replace Bean (who is portraying Elphaba, replacing Menzel portraying Elphaba) without green makeup, something is happening. She is now “mismatched” with narrative and audience expectations; in a full-circle moment, her natural skin color reads as an unnatural hue under stage lighting and through illicit, amateur videography. I ask: Can one “be” Elphaba without the green skin? Who is appearing onstage at this moment? Arguably, by this time the referent has evolved. Beyond Elphaba signifying “Wicked Witch” due to her green skin, we also have Menzel signifying Elphaba. This stage of being “stuck together” occurs despite their aesthetic difference in this moment, despite that Menzel does not *look* the (green) part.

2.5 Conclusion

Through these appearances on the Broadway stage, Menzel, Braxton, and Jackson illustrate the *composite bodies* upon which their respective fairy tale performances rely, and which open up the narratives to new interpretive and identificatory possibilities. These new identificatory possibilities include: 1) how Jackson’s performances in *Frozen: the Broadway Musical* prompted a system of community archiving that was both an antiracist, *afrofabulative* endeavor and a platform for racist commenting; and 2) how Braxton and Menzel’s performances prompted affective shifts in the theater that stretched time and space in queer fashions and broke down barriers between individual subjects. Finally, Menzel’s case here operates in a certain way as an inverse of Jackson and Braxton’s, in that the presence of her whiteness unsettled audience expectations, revealing the levels of embodied substitution, doubling, and “stuck-ness” at play. In

Jackson and Braxton's cases, the absence of whiteness—its disruption by Blackness—unsettles audience expectations. This Chapter serves its own archiving purposes which count ephemera as evidence and position these three figures in conversation with each other to better understand the structures of whiteness at play in Broadway performance.

3.0 Chapter Two—Disney Princess Performance

3.1 Introduction

“There'll be actual real live people; it'll be totally strange!”

—Princess Anna, “For the First Time in Forever,” *Frozen*

At Disney World: Hollywood Studios, the *Frozen Sing-Along Celebration* joins loosely scripted human acting and familiar scenes from the 2013 *Frozen* animated film. Once ushered into “the theater,” audience members of all ages can enjoy this hour-long *Celebration*, “spellbound as the Royal Historians of Arendelle recount the frosty story of their enchanted kingdom” (“Frozen Sing-Along Celebration.”)¹ The two Royal Historians here mentioned do not appear in the *Frozen* film.

As well as listening to the loosely scripted story of the Royal Historians, audience members can “Watch as thrilling moments from the movie play on-screen, then cheer as Anna, Elsa, and Kristoff appear to sing along with the audience!” When these scenes play, the Royal Historians are often still in sight, in front of, or even feigning interaction with, the screen. Additionally, on the screen appear lyrics of the relevant song segments featured to enable audience sing-along. After the sing-along to “Love Is An Open Door,” in discussion of Anna and Han’s expedited engagement, the still from Elsa chiding them appeared on the screen, in front of which a Royal Historian said: “As Queen Elsa once said, and I quote, ‘You can’t marry a man you just met.’” This Royal Historian brought attention to the layering of voices, all in the efforts of representing one character, in this moment—he, in a real-time moving 3-dimensional body, is quoting Elsa in

front of her stilled image, when the screen could easily have played a clip of Elsa herself saying this. Elsa's voice is thereby rendered *composite*, strewn between various bodies (even genders), voices, and impersonations.

The Royal Historians then continue with an expedited run through of the film's plot, with stills from the film following one another on screen in quick succession. This sense of narrative compression contributes to the conceit of the film's plot having happened in the past, which the Historians are detailing for us in the audience. It also reinforces a temporal disjuncture between the on-screen characters and the two embodied Historians, who are speaking live to us in real time. Eventually, Kristoff, Anna, and Elsa—familiar characters up to that point represented in this theater *on-screen*, in animation-form—appear onstage, embodied by character performers. These are “face characters,” where the face and human body of the performer is visible to the park guest, the performer transformed into their character via costume and make-up. The costumes, particularly Elsa's, are lower quality than in Parades or Meet-and-Greets. How can the same characters or personae be embodied by both flat, on-screen animation and 3-dimension living bodies in the same performance?

I attended the *Frozen Sing-Along Celebration* twice on the day of September 14th, staggered throughout the day to see different permutations of actors as shifts changed. Once, looking to give a talented performer credit in this very document, I asked a cast member managing the theater's waiting area if she knew the actor's name. She responded that, yes, she did, but she would not tell me; it would break the *magic*. If the cast member at “For the First Time in Forever” had given me names for the Royal Historian actors, this would admit to the Royal Historians being performed by individuated persons, groupings of which may fluctuate according to shift times and appointments; this would rupture a sense of narrative cohesion across showings and *of* the

characters themselves.¹⁸ Ironically, these Royal Historian characters were scripted for this Hollywood Studios show in particular; they need not be wedded to pre-existing images of characters from particular films or franchises, in this case *Frozen*. This gesture strips real-world identifiers from these performers, anonymizing them and rendering them exchangeable/replaceable. In doing so, the Park jeopardizes a mode of connection between Park Guest and performer/performance and suggests that “real world” and “Disney magic” are incommensurable.

Throughout this dissertation, I ask: What happens when “real life” bodies are thrown into the symbolic landscape of fairy tales? Chapter One unpacks what happens when the performers’ bodies are distinct from their performance canons in Broadway productions of fairy tale musicals; for example, a different race than the characters have been. When such rifts occur (Jackson, Braxton), we see *afrofabulative* insistence upon joyous Black girlhood and Princesshood, one compatible with Black sensuality and embodied performance. We also see racist pushback to this entanglement of innocence and magic from whiteness.

Chapter Two shifts focus to Disney theme parks and events. In this chapter, I spotlight three performance settings: the D23 Legends Ceremony, Disney Princess-the Concert, and Frozen Ever After, a family attraction at EPCOT.¹⁹ My goal here is to track the many ways Disney Princesses are embodied in/through these performances, as well as layers of performance at play.

¹⁸ At Disney Parks, the notion of character *likeness* is key. Meaning, a character ought to be immediately recognizable as that character, that character specifically, that character as a Disney property. To this end, at both Disneyland and Walt Disney World guests 14 and over cannot wear costumes or masks. When, during special events such as Halloween’s Boogie Bash, these older guests *can* dress as a favorite character, they are still prohibited from posing for pictures with, or signing autographs for, other guests. These rules are in effect so that guests will not mis-recognize non-authorized “characters” for Disney-endorsed, and Disney-trained, character actors.

¹⁹ Disney World itself is home to 4 distinct theme parks: Magic Kingdom (the first, which opened in 1971), EPCOT (1982), Hollywood Studios (1989), and Animal Kingdom (1998). Magic Kingdom is largely inspired by Disneyland, which opened under Walt’s supervision in 1955.

I ask: What tensions arise in/among Disney Princess embodiments, and what do these tensions expose about girlhood, womanhood, and consumer capitalism?

While conducting fieldwork at Disneyland (CA), Disney World (FL), Disneyland Paris, and the D23 Expo in 2021 and 2022, I observed Disney Parks' usage of varied representational styles to portray any one film's narrative. In *The Imagineering Story* docuseries on Disney+, Imagineer Tom Fitzgerald says, "It's not about replicating the movie from the story as you saw it. We try and do the part that fits best for our medium." Imagineers for Disney Parks selected aspects of the filmic base text which "fits best" for their medium of representation, their type of Attraction.²⁰ When all these "mediums" or Park Attractions and Entertainments are understood together, any one Disney franchise is rendered *composite*.

Karen E. Wohlwend understands these composite franchises in terms of *transmedia*. For decades, Karen E. Wohlwend has studied children's play practices within elementary school classrooms. Wohlwend's use of *transmedia* as her term of choice illustrates her understanding of Disney Princesses products as "identity texts" which, already in conversation with other products in the franchise, circulate expectations for children and produce a wild array of consumer interactions, or performances. Her ethnographic studies illustrate that not only do young girls revise Disney Princess stories through play (2009), but so do young boys (2012). Each group animates existing components or structures of these stories in order to produce counternarratives or situate themselves among the group of children in the classroom. Play, as an embodied literacy, allows for this re/negotiation.²¹ We can rephrase: Embodied performance allows for re/negotiation

²⁰ Disney describes Imagineering as "the creative engine that designs and builds all Disney theme parks, resorts, attractions, and cruise ships worldwide, and oversees the creative aspects of Disney games, merchandise product development, and publishing businesses" ("About Imagineering"). Imagineers are those Disney employs in Imagineering.

²¹ "That the body [of the Disney Princess] and its voice fail to cohere prompts our faith in the princess ideal; in spite of her story's patriarchal frame, the Disney Princess might follow in her mismatched predecessors' footsteps and escape technology's grasp, and in so doing become worthy of our daughters' imitative play" (Fleeger 108).

of Disney Princess identity texts, challenging the notion of a wholly negative, and wholly in-control, Disney cultural force (Alex Bádue and Rebecca S. Schorsch; Charles Carson).²² The inconsistencies and multiplicities in Princess embodiment throughout the Disney theme park and event landscape allow for diverse means of audience identification and illustrate the constant revision of Disney Princess Narratives as “identity texts” by audience members and performers alike.

3.2 D23 Awards Ceremony

A few blocks from the Disneyland, CA entrance, the Anaheim Convention Center hosted the D23 Expo from September 9th through September 11th, 2022. D23 is the Official Disney Fan Club. It is free to sign up, though a Gold Membership costs approximately \$100 each year. The Gold Membership is an example of Disney’s proclivity to “tier” their fan experiences, by money invested. “D23 is the official Disney fan club celebrating the wonder and excitement of Disney’s stories, characters, songs, and experiences.” The Expo, promoted as “The Ultimate Disney Fan Event” (“Expo 2022 News - D23”), is a three-day fan convention held at the Anaheim Convention Center, with merchandise booths and cosplayers filling the main floor, and panels in assigned rooms. The convention schedule includes the Disney Legends Awards, which were established in 1987 to recognize persons who made extraordinary contributions to the Walt Disney Company, from Imagineers to voice actors, animators, publishing, Park attractions, etc.

²² Do Rozario critiques “Mainstream Disney Studies” for its generalized understanding of Disney Princesses as a nostalgic figure “caught in an aggressively patriarchal society” (35).

By the scheduled start of the 10:30 am Disney Legends Ceremony, staged in a 7,000-seat hall, I had been downstairs in a basement holding area for three hours. I just barely snuck into the stand-by section before it reached mass capacity, and people were turned away. Most already there had beat me by several hours; queueing was allowable outside the 5 entrance points to the Convention Center at 4:30 am. In the stark basement hall, several fully costumed “Princesses”—that is, fans in Disney Princess cosplay—swept past, at times posing for photographs. There were few children waiting for the Legends Ceremony, which promised the appearances of celebrities Ellen Pompeo and Patrick Dempsey (each from ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*), along with Kristen Bell, Jonathan Groff, Josh Gad, and Idina Menzel (each from *Frozen*). For some women that I spoke with while waiting, Dempsey was the main draw.

Following a short video introduction which highlighted her contributions in “Film and Voice,” particularly her role as Elsa in *Frozen* and *Frozen 2*, Idina Menzel approached the microphone centerstage, reaching to adjust her dress, pulling up the front. It was an off-shoulder, pink dress with a sweetheart neckline. She started off tentatively:

“Is this?—Can I go in like this? I like to do that in the studio. Um, oh my gosh, thank you so much, it’s such an honor to be here ... Wait, I’m leaning over and I don’t want Elsa to have big boobies. Yeah, okay, sorry, Bob. It’s hard being a 12-year-old blonde animated character and a 51-year-old sexy goddess in real life. Uh, yeah, so when I was little, Grandpa Nat, he took me to those Sunday Disney double features, out in Jersey...”

Here, Menzel began by drawing a connection between this moment of accepting an award at the D23 fan convention and her moments in the recording studio. Each of these moments is a performance, each a moment when her body encounters a staged environment and, through her

movements and embodied presence, changes the landscape and soundscape of that environment. As she accepted her Disney Legends award, walls of screens replicated her image across the convention center hall. From my seat, I could see her human body at a distance and, in the same gaze, her zoomed-in representation on the screens. Her embodied presence visually collapsed against her mediated one.

Menzel performatively asked permission to do something she was already doing: to lean forward towards the microphone. She ascribes the act of “go[ing] in like this”—like she would in a Disney recording studio—with risking “Elsa hav[ing] big boobies.” Menzel’s rhetoric implies that her own physical movements (such as those done on the job) result in a change to an animated character’s embodiment. This ad-libbed portion of her speech drew verbal attention to something that could have remained unspoken, visual. She (somewhat flippantly) apologized to Bob Chapek, then Disney CEO, before saying “It’s hard being a 12-year-old blonde animated character and a 51-year-old sexy goddess in real life.”

This proposed struggle renders Menzel’s body *composite*. Menzel functions here as an actual human framing herself as an object of sexual desire, in contrast to her disembodied presence in the *Frozen* films. She is torn between being, or indexing, a 12-year-old animated character and a 51-year-old real life sexy goddess. Menzel’s statement establishes an inferred antithesis between “sexy goddess” and asexual human child. According to Jennifer Lee, *Frozen*’s screenwriter and co-director, Elsa is 21 years old for the majority of the first film, though this is not explicitly stated in the film. Moreover, the biological maturity of Elsa as a 21-year-old stands in contrast to Disney’s historical representation of young princesses, even when coupled with older men. For example, Snow White (the first Disney princess, in 1937) was 14 to her Prince’s 31, and the average age of the 11 Disney Princesses in the Princess franchise is 16.7 years.

Here, Menzel actually fails as an expert on Elsa, despite the fact that Menzel's own body and voice may stand-in for Elsa's. It appears that Menzel more easily, or subconsciously, associates a Disney "blonde animated character" with a tween or teenaged girl than with a 21-year-old woman. By apologizing for symbolically linking a "12-year-old blonde animated character and a 51-year-old sexy goddess," Menzel exposes a central investment society holds: the separation of children from sexiness. Children can be only as sexual as us adults want them to be. Peggy Orenstein works through this adult desire to prolong childhood innocence and "avoid early sexualization" in her book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. This adult desire becomes commodified, so that toys such as Disney Princess costumes and American Girl Dolls "promote shopping as a path to intimacy between mothers," with the concept of girlhood innocence itself in the shopping basket (52). James Kincaid argues that American society's obsession with children as innocent, pre-sexual beings actually further eroticizes the child figure. In this schema, mothers purchase signifiers of innocence for their girls, but thereby imbed their girls within "a consumer culture that will ultimately encourage the opposite" (Orenstein, Ch. 2). "People make contradictory demands of the objects that hold up their world," as Lauren Berlant says. And children represent the future—"hold up [the] world" (Berlant)—for contemporary U.S. culture (Lee Edelman).

Children (girls) are being called upon to play double duty: the presexual being, and the ultimately reproductive being. Here, Menzel acknowledged the societal forces, including her celebrity status and resume), which position her dually as the animated child or teen and the sexy and sexual fifty-year-old woman. Having named the tension at play, Menzel quickly transitioned from discussing "boobies" to discussing her Grandfather and Disney double features. This is a quick return to "family friendly" content, and to a nostalgic view of her own youth—which she understands as bound up with Disney cultural production.

Contemporary girlhood studies challenge the notion of girlhood as a strict, delineated slice of time. Instead, scholars such as Shauna Pomerantz and Aleksandra Kaminska establish girlhood as flexible and affective. Kaminska explains that girls in the 2010s are marked by disrupted temporality, in that their girlhood is no longer oriented towards the future; rather, through “failed adulting” girls/women can get “stuck” in girlhood. Kaminska relies on theories of queer time, namely Katheryn Bond Stockton’s idea of growing sideways, to position girlhood as a temporally anomalous state of being—something that can be stretched and reworked.²³ In turn, Pomerantz understands girlhood as an affective state, one a person can (and would even want to!) opt into at different points in their life. Pomerantz’ provocation that anyone can be a girl, at any age complicates the girl/woman bifurcation.

In turn, these views of girlhood complicate Orenstein’s positioning of girlhood consumer culture as coercively marching girls towards a manicured femininity. What if the girlhood being surveyed in Orenstein’s accounts was being experienced by a teenage boy, or a thirty-five-year-old woman? What if, instead of there being “that liminal space between girlhood and womanhood,” girlhood was a liminal space itself? Orenstein states, ““Princesses are just a phase, after all.” In my next example, I argue that the live performances in Disney Princess-the Concert celebrate Princesses as an identity text and mode of identification that does not become irrelevant simply due to age. I advocate for a more expansive understanding of both Disney princess performance and girlhood itself, one which tracks the movements of real bodies (schoolchildren; live performers) to see how these narratives are reformed through amateur and professional reiteration. Disney Princess-the Concert represents Disney Princess transmedia as fluid. Here

²³ The queer temporality of girlhood discussed above is distinct from “the special temporality of girlhood” that Barbara Jane Brickmann understands to be “an imprisoning trap or even an existential threat to queer sexuality, gender variance, and many other girl subjectivities that refuse to conform” (xii).

Disney puts on a show where Disney Princess embodiments shift, overlap, and multiply on stage, through performance.

3.3 Disney Princess-the Concert: D23 Convention Center, September 2021 and Benedum Theater Pittsburgh, November 2022

Disney Princess-the Concert Tour premiered on January 30th, 2022. Disney Princess—the Concert is co-produced by Disney Concerts and Broadway Princess Party, LLC. Broadway Princess Party began as a cabaret show in 2015, at Feinstein's/54 Below in NYC, and blossomed into a touring production. This touring concert series “guarantee[d] at least one of these dazzling ladies:” Christy Altomare, Liz Callaway, Susan Egan, Arielle Jacobs, Aisha Jackson, Laura Osnos, Courtney Reed, Anneliese van der Pol, and Sydnee Winters. According to Broadwayprincessparty.com, the transition from Broadway Princess Party to Disney Princess—the Concert will “bring you even more magical celebration...complete with Disney’s beloved animation and state-of-the-art effects, yet with the same intimacy, heart, and princess star-power that over 20 million viewers have come to love.”

An 83-city U.S. tour, Disney Princess-the Concert stars two quartets of “Princesses:” in the spring Susan Egan, Arielle Jacobs, Anneliese van der Pol, and Sydnee Winters; in the fall Christy Altomare, Isabelle McCalla, Anneliese van der Pol, and Sydnee Winters. Susan Egan voiced the character Megara (Meg) in Disney’s animated *Hercules* (1997) and starred as the original Belle on Broadway in 1994. Arielle Jacobs currently stars as Broadway’s Jasmine in *Aladdin*, and has toured as Nina Rosario in *Into the Heights* (Nessarose in *Wicked*, Mimi in *Rent*, Gabriella Montez in the US tour of *High School Musical*, Baker’s Wife *Into the Woods*). Anneliese van der Pol, a

Disney fan favorite for her performance as Chelsea Daniels in the Disney Channel series *That's So Raven* (2003-2007), debuted on Broadway in 2007 as Belle (the 17th and final Belle). Syndee Winters debuted on Broadway in 2012 as Nala in *The Lion King*, and has also appeared on Broadway in *Pippin* (2014) and as all 3 Schuyler sisters in *Hamilton*—Angelica, Peggy, and Eliza (2017). Christy Altomare debuted on Broadway as Sophie in *Mamma Mia!* (2012-2013) and originated the role of Anya in *Anastasia* (2016-2019). She has also starred as Wendla in *Spring Awakening* and Guinevere in *Camelot*.

In this way, each of the six “princesses” except Christy Altomare has previously been affiliated with a Disney film, a Disney Channel series, or Disney Theatrical Productions. Altomare is an interesting case—*Anastasia* the Broadway show is not affiliated with Disney Theatrical Productions, and the animated film off which it was largely based (of whose music it incorporated) was released by Fox Family Film in 1997...but Disney acquired 21st Century Fox in 2019. As such, many fans debate whether Anya/*Anastasia* is now to be considered a Disney Princess. This is more of a colloquial debate, as the Official Disney Princess Franchise is explicit: for marketing purposes, the Disney Princesses in the Official Franchise include: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, and Moana.

The Broadway credentials of these six performers work here alongside Disney affiliation to position them as authorities on Princess stories and experiences.^[17] Broadway voices and Disney voices have an intertwined history. On the one hand, while Princesses of the hand-drawn animation era (*Snow White*, 1937; *Cinderella*, 1950; *Sleeping Beauty* 1959), “sing operatically,” the Princesses of the Disney Renaissance “performs as if they were on a Broadway stage” (Fleeger 108). The Disney Renaissance marks the period between 1989 and 1999 during which Disney Animation returned to producing animated films in the form of musical adaptations of well-known

stories, or source-texts. These critically and commercially successful films include: *The Little Mermaid* (1898), *Beauty and the Beast*, (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998), and *Tarzan* (1999). In writing the songs for *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, Alan Menken and Howard Ashman brought musical theater experience and “applied the principles of the classical musical theater piece” (Vietrel in Bádue and Schorsch 216). In this way, Broadway performance styles, particularly those of the American Golden Age musical, have influenced the voices of Disney Princesses for the last thirty years.

On the other hand, Alex Bádue and Rebecca S. Schorsch understand Disney Theatrical Productions (1993 -- present) to have introduced a specific Disney vocal style to the American Broadway musical (213). In the early 2000s, musical theater singing was heavily influenced by Disney’s vocal blending of “theatrical and pop singing with microphone techniques,” itself influenced by Disney animated films (213). Bádue and Schorsch identify in Stephen Schwartz’s megamusical *Wicked* (2003), which is not a Disney Theatrical Production, proof of Disney’s “technological, commercial, and vocal techniques” “extending beyond Disney’s own productions” (213).²⁴

In Disney Theatrical Productions and otherwise, the actresses largely represent the female half of a hetero-romantic duo (Nala to Simba, Jasmine to Aladdin, Belle to the Beast, etc.). As Stacy Wolf explains of the Broadway musical, the form itself functions to further a hetero-romantic plot. Jacobs, Winters, and Altomare have appeared in fairy tale-themed/fairy-tale adjacent

²⁴ “One important difference between *Wicked* and its megamusical neighbors...is that this musical is not sung through or “locked down”; to the contrary, actors are encouraged to interpret characters anew and make the parts their own” (Wolf, *Changed* 200).

Broadway productions outside of Disney's purview, as well: *Wicked* and *Into the Woods*; *Pippin*; and *Camelot*, respectively. This only increases their Princess authority.

Benjamin Rauhala has served as the production's music director, creative producer, and "Fairy Godfairy" since its inception. Rauhala describes Disney Princess-the Concert, "You can have whatever kind of day you want coming to the theater, but as soon as you see a little girl in a princess costume, and you're doing Disney Princess the Concert, it's the best day ever." Here, Rauhala speaks as if "a little girl in a princess costume" is the catalyst in a chemical reaction which transforms "You," who is presumably older and bigger than the signaled "little" girl, into a Disney Princess enthusiast. Here, the catalyst is clearly gendered ("girl"), signaled as young ("little girl"), embodied, and dressed up; "the little princess costume" is necessary for "You[r]" full transition. The fandoms of little girls and those in close proximity to them, of an older generation, are interdependent in this schema.

This is an instance of financial gatekeeping on the part of Disney. The touring production sells various VIP packages for their event. As clearly advertised on their website, fans may purchase one of 3 different VIP packages: Disney Princess Royal Meet & Greet Package; Disney Princess Royal Palace Package; or, Disney Princess-the Concert Tour Package. Each of these comes with a premium reserved seat in varying degrees of closeness to the stage and various exclusive merchandising; top tiers allow for "Exclusive meet & greet" and "Intimate Sound Check/Q&A."^[18] A potential-attendee must scroll past these VIP Package Options on the homepage before arriving at an option to investigate, and purchase, non-VIP tickets. Disney engages in this VIP "tiering" frequently, creating motivation for consumers to spend more in order to gain ACCESS to insider knowledge, insider spaces.

The website's homepage pitches the Concert in this fashion:

For generations, the music of Disney’s princesses has been the soundtrack to our lives. Now, for the first time in forever, these beloved songs come to life on stage in *Disney Princess - The Concert!* Be our guest as a quartet of Broadway, television, and animated film icons celebrate the music from every Disney Princess in an unforgettable evening, alongside their magical Music Director and enchanting Prince.

Your every dream will come true as larger-than-life animation and theatrical effects immerse the audience in pure Disney magic, while these acclaimed stars sing your favorite songs and share their exclusive, hilarious, and heartfelt behind-the-scenes stories from their time on the stage and screen.

We invite you to relive your VHS glory days, dress up in your favorite royal attire, and share the joy of your loved ones at Disney Princess —The Concert, presented by Pandora Jewelry. (Disney, “Disney Princesses The Concert”)

The opening (3) segments of this promotion read as an almost-nonsensical listing of buzzwords and phrases: *for generations; come to life; larger-than-life; pure Disney magic; exclusive, hilarious, and heartfelt; stage and screen*. “For generations” marks Disney’s history in terms of family cycles, acknowledging that Disney has existed for and affected multiple generations. “VHS glory days” functions as a keyword to summon the nostalgic 1980’s and 1990’s. This promotion begins with a wink to its audience’s pre-existing, and extensive, knowledge of Disney lyrics—“For the first time in forever,” is a lyric from *Frozen* (2013), and “Be our guest” from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, 2017).

The promotion also insists: “This production features Broadway performers appearing as themselves. Costumed Disney characters do not appear at this event.” I argue that no one body stayed the same throughout the performance, that the interest lies in how these four bodies continuously slipped in and out of varied roles and personae. What does it mean for a Broadway performer to “appear”—to *perform* (on stage)—as “themselves”?

The first image you see upon loading the website is a looping superimposition of 4 of these stars (photographs) and 4 sketches of Disney princesses Jasmine, Cinderella, Tiana, and Belle. When Susan Egan is featured in the photograph, she is placed over/under the sketch of Belle, whom she played in Disney Theatrical Productions’ *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway in its debut year, 1994. In this way, the looping superimposition is invested in embodiment and substitution; viewers are encouraged to view the performers as human substitutions for cartoon, Disney princess counterparts. That the images loop, rather than change in a static linear progression, ascribes movement to these substitutions—they move back *and forth* between mediums, between embodiments, continuously.

When I returned to the website on October 21st, Egan’s image had been replaced with that of Annaliese van der Pool, who will replace Egan (as will Sarah Uriarte Berry) for the show’s fall run. Egan announced on October 6th, on Instagram, a recent diagnosis of Bell’s Palsy, “an often-temporary condition which paralyzes one side of the face” (Egan). This unanticipated arrival of disability not only illustrates the unpredictable, temporally unstable nature of disabilities, but also prompts a domino effect of further substitution: Van der Pool/Berry will “sub in” for Egan, who “subs in” for the animated characters of Belle or Megara.



Figure 4 Image Description: There are three similar images side-by-by. Each has a black background and says Disney Princess The Concert surrounded by bright dots and with an abstract tiara on top. There is a larger pink tiara-shape in the background, and the drawings of four women: Isabella McCalla in teal on the left, then Annaliese van der Pool in purple, Sydnee Winters in pink, and Susan Egan in blue on the right. The right image maintains Disney Princess The Concert at the top of the image and features McCalla, van der Pool, Winters, and Egan more clearly.

On Sunday, September 11th, I attended the Princess Concert event at the D23 Expo in Anaheim, California. Throughout this performance, bodies were in constant flux and exchange. The performers present spirited anecdotes about their big Broadway breaks; move both in and out of group choreography; and belt out Disney numbers—moments when, to varying degrees, a performer slips into character and embodies the Princess who sings the song.

When Susan Egan sang “I won’t say I’m in love,” she attained a level of collapse with her animated counterpart, Meg from *Hercules*, that stood out from the rest of the show. She had been joking with Rauhala and the audience regarding the presumptions of men when dating women, then seamlessly transitioned into a recognizable line of Meg’s: “They [Men] think No means Yes, and Get Lost means Take Me I’m Yours.” Her voice and cadence changed ever so slightly.

Notably, Egan *IS* the voice actor for Meg in this 1997 animated Disney film. I am a child of 1990s youth culture, and witnessing a human body emitting the voice of a beloved animated

character was a delightful, if uncanny, experience. In reference to silent films, Mary Ann Doane notes, “There is always something uncanny about a voice which emanates from a source outside the frame.” This is because “[a]s soon as the sound is detached from its source, no longer anchored by a represented body, its potential work as a signifier is revealed” (40). Conversely, here I am noting a sense of uncanniness when human body (Egan) and voice (Egan/Meg) reunite. As a child, I watched the animated film *Hercules* several times without knowing the name or face of the voice actor for Meg; rather, the animated figure Meg was all that rooted the sound, accent, and cadence of Egan’s acting voice. In this way, it was the coming (back) together of human body and voice that registered as uncanny.

Without looking at the screen behind her, which is presenting animated footage from this scene in the *Hercules* film, Egan echoes Meg’s movement—or vice versa. I crafted the following GIF (<https://makeagif.com/i/u2FgOO>) from the D23 Performance to draw attention to a particularly synchronized sequence: a dismissive gesture with the right arm, a quick and exaggerated turning of the head from right to left, a tossing over the shoulder gesture with the left arm. The overall sensation as an audience member is one of cohesion, and this live moment of human-animation harmony (aural and visual) brings attention to the corporeality of the bodies on stage—represented and actual—and one’s own body in the audience.

On Monday, November 28th, I attended a one-night-only performance of Disney Princess—the Concert at the Benedum Center theater in Pittsburgh, PA. This gave me the opportunity to compare productions, between a truncated (approximately 40/45 minute) version for the D23 Conference Center stage, and the one-and-a-half hour touring performance. Egan, McCalla, Winters, and van der Pol performed at D23; Altomare, McCalla, van der Pol, and Winters for the Fall US 2022 Tour.

Unlike D23, the Benedum Center Theatre was swarming with young girls in princess costumes—and a few teenagers in prom dresses, too. The website’s warning to parents that “Costumed characters do not appear at this event” is misleading, as myriad children in attendance embody Disney characters (Princesses) through costume.

Without Egan in the production, “I Won’t Say I’m In Love” was performed by McCalla and did not produce the same sense of uncanny familiarity within the 90s children in the audience. However, a stand-out performance of the night was Altomare singing “Journey to the Past” from *Anastasia*, a film recently brought into the Disney Princess fold through Disney’s 2017 purchase of 21st Century Fox. Disney Princess—the Concert engages the concept of the “original” (albeit with loose edges) by specifically having Altomare voice this song. And I will say, as a millennial audience member, I was hooked, sentimentally engaging with a meaningful song from my childhood (Anya’s “I Want” song, “Journey to the Past”) and as a Broadway nerd, attracted to feelings of belonging to an “in-crowd” who have witnessed Altomare sing this song. I felt a stillness in the theater, a buzzing presence in the air, silence.... Except the young ones weren’t as transfixed. For them it was a filler moment between the raucous participation that songs from *Moana* or *Frozen* inspired. A child behind me exclaimed, “*What movie is this even from?*”

Altomare’s Instagram bio includes “Come see Disney Princess - the Concert, a show for adults who love Disney (and kids will love it too).” This production plays to multiple audiences at once; for example, the 90s kids who are certainly familiar with *Anastasia*, and the 2010 kids who are not (Occasionally, these 90s kids are the parents of these 2010 kids and Disney gets a dual marketing opportunity within one family). During the performance, the performers dedicated time to dialogue between themselves, Rauhala, and the audience, to joke about potential gaps in understanding—for example, one performer fondly reminisced about their childhood Disney VHS

collection, only to pause and, with affected embarrassment, explain a VHS to the, presumably young and ignorant, audience. However, in this same moment, the performer nods to the VHS generations in the audience, appealing to a shared cultural touchstone, and even a shared sense of embarrassment regarding aging/our generation. The original trio of Princesses—Snow White 1937, Cinderella 1950, Aurora/Sleeping Beauty 1959—were introduced to the audience with a presumption that the audience would be unfamiliar with them, and one singular tribute medley was performed which linked the three films to a video backdrop which included sketchings from the animation process, serving to further antiquate the original trio, and with them any audience members who may be intimately familiar with them.

In both performances of Disney Princess-the Concert I witnessed this fall, and in keeping with the precedent set by Broadway Princess Party, performers of color voice the songs of Princesses of color. While on occasion a performer of color may voice a white Princess (such as McCalla embodying Merida to sing “Touch the Sky” from *Brave* the night of November 28th, 2022), it is not the other way around...Even though, originally, the singing voices of Princesses of color were often provided by white women, such as Judy Khun for Pocahontas (1995).

Returning to the promotional image(s) on the website homepage, we see that McCalla stands in for the character Jasmine, complete with resonant outfit colors. This makes sense, as McCalla starred as Jasmine on Broadway (and on tour). Next, we have Altomare standing in the place of Cinderella, with no particular performance history to link the two. Despite her history performing as Nala in *The Lion King* on Broadway, Winters stands in the place of Tiana from *Princess and the Frog*, the first Black Princess in the Disney Princess franchise. Finally, van de Pol stands in for Belle, whom she did play on Broadway. Disney Princess-the Concert not only allows but revels in its performers constantly shifting in and out of character, and between

characters. The four are even called Princesses themselves throughout the performance by Rauhala, in part due to their successful career trajectories (that ultimately brought them to Disney). Despite this general interchangeability, Disney Princess—the Concert appears dedicated to avoiding vocal black- and brown-face when possible; however, the visual and aural alignment of Princesses of color with whichever Princess performer of color is available reads as superficial.

On November 28th, Rauhala and McCalla guided the audience through three versions of Disney's *Aladdin*: the 1995 animated film, the Broadway show, and the 2019 live action film. Bemoaning Jasmine's lack of an "I Want" song in the original soundtrack (she sings only in duet with Aladdin for "A Whole New World"), McCalla sings a portion of the song derived for Jasmine on Broadway ("These Palace Walls") before transitioning into Jasmine's new song in the live action film ("Speechless"). Typically when one of the four have performed a Princess song, this has been done in front of a screen displaying clips from the corresponding animated film—to varying degrees of synchronization or discordance.²⁵ When McCalla performed "Speechless," the screen behind her took a stylized turn, a blank dark background with a roving, colored swoop reminiscent of an early 00s computer screensaver. Disney Princess-the Concert would not ask their audience to accept two clashing images of a human Jasmine at once: McCalla and Naomi Scott acting or singing "Speechless" in the 2019 *Aladdin*. However, by avoiding either an animated or "real life" Jasmine on screen during this performance segment, Disney Princess-the Concert ends up diminishing Princess of color (and actor of color) representation in their show. This *Aladdin* segment is a good example of a crisis of representation, of what happens when an animated film's afterlives grow so much that there is no original animated footage to pair with it.

²⁵ One exception is Winters' performance of "Shadowlands," which was before an image of a rising sun, rather than sequences of animated animals or the stylized animals of the Broadway performance.

When singing either “All is Found/Into the Unknown” (Act I Final) or “Let It Go” (Finale), the four princess performers would join and divide in a manner which spliced the character Elsa into multiple embodiments. These songs are sung by Elsa in *Frozen II* and *Frozen* respectively. In the animated film, “Into the Unknown” follows Elsa as she hears an unknown voice calling to her. The Disney Princess—the Concert sequence begins with Performer 1 singing lyrics from “All is Found.” Then, upon the segue into “Into the Unknown,” Performers 2 & 3 vocalize the unknown call that spurs Elsa into song. Performer 4 breaks out across the stage to begin singing Elsa’s part. Following Elsa’s first verse, Performers 1 & 2 vocalize the call, and then Performer 3 cuts downstage to sing the first half of Elsa’s second verse. Performers 3 & 4 join to finish this stanza together, and then all join in a four-part harmony to sing the chorus. From here, the four slide in and out of voicing both Elsa and the unknown voice individually and together, in varying combinations. They end in a line, with the two outside performers vocalizing and the two inside performers singing Elsa’s lyrics, to then all sharply turn to face the audience and finish by singing Elsa’s line, “Into the unknown.”

This four-part arrangement supports the narrative ethos of *Frozen II*, which hinges upon the fracturing, and eventual unification, of Elsa’s character. In *Frozen II*, Elsa finds herself unsatisfied with her life in Arendelle, despite having “Everyone [she’s] ever loved ... here within these walls.” “Feel[ing] [her] power grow, Elsa longs to follow an unknown voice into the unknown,” where she might find someone “a little bit like [her].” As Elsa’s second power ballad “Show Yourself” later illustrates, this voice calls back to a lullaby Elsa and Anna’s mother sung then as toddlers, before her untimely death; the unknown voice is implicitly revealed to be some combination of Elsa’s mother (Iduna), Elsa herself, and the powers Elsa shares with the Spirits. Elsa’s mother (voiced by Evan Rachel Wood), Elsa herself (Menzel), and the Spirits vocally unite

in the film's climax, and are vocally united within and through Elsa. Here we have a generational collapse in the world of the narrative, through sound. In Disney Princess—the Concert, Elsa is *composite*: shown as an animated character on the background screen, and tossed between—and ultimately unified/harmonized through—four bodies; four voices; four embodied parts. Performance choices and performance affordances of Disney Princess—the Concert allow an already multidimensional Disney Princess character to be embodied in ways which represent, accentuate, and compound this composite nature. This includes the choreography of the four performers. During this number, they each look towards the crowd (four different audience sectors) and back amongst themselves, and stagger and grasp towards the crowd while singing “Out you out there / Can you hear me / Do you feel me / Do you know me.” Their choreography demands the attention of the audience as involved in the narrative, aural, and affective drama, inviting them into a space where many *bodyminds* can embody Elsa.

While storytelling with Rauhala, one Princess performer joked about the presence of “Actual Real Live People...Like You!” gesturing towards the crowd. This manipulation of a line *For the First Time in Forever* from *Frozen*, in a moment when this performer was not explicitly performing as an animated Disney Princess (as Anna), directly addresses the audience (“You”) to a puzzling effect. I wondered: “If we are actual real live people, but you have to stop and point that out, who are these other people and who are you?” With the embodied presence of four live performers, with all the affordances of live stage performance, Disney Princess-the Concert offers varied reinterpretations of Disney Princess bodies, behaviors, and sounds. The identity of a Disney Princess here slides across multiple media and multiple persons, a girlhood mode that can be taken up and tossed between peers and between generations both on and off stage.

3.4 Frozen Ever After: EPCOT

It was 8:30 on a Monday morning, and I joined the families and their strollers rushing clockwise around EPCOT's World Showcase, a series of eleven pavilions meant to represent various countries. These include Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, the American Adventure, Japan, Morocco, France, United Kingdom, and Canada. Since 2016, the Norway Pavilion has been home to the "Frozen Ever After" Ride, a big draw for the kids. This five-minute dark ride runs through a refurbished course, previously home to the beloved "Maelstrom" ride. In a dark ride, Park Guests board a small boat form which is guided by tracks in water. Though "Frozen Ever After" is a newer ride, its status as a dark ride positions it squarely within the history of Disney rides—Walt oversaw the creation of dark ride "It's a Small World" for the 1964/1965 World Fair and its later move to Disneyland.

Moreover, when Disneyland opened in 1955, dark ride "Snow White and Her Adventures" utilized animatronic figures, like of Evil Queen, to situate the Park Guest as the film's protagonist, Snow White. In 1983 refurbishments, this Disneyland attraction changed its name to "Snow White's Scary Adventures" and an appearance of Snow White was added within the ride. Dave Caranci, who oversaw the ride's 2021 reintroduction as "Snow White's Enchanted Adventures," notes: "Snow White is the only princess attraction that we have at Disneyland Park. Now, we've got the princess meet and greets, but this is the only attraction" (Martens). EPCOT's "Frozen Ever After" adds another Princess animatronics to the list, when taking into consideration Parks beyond the original Disneyland, and as a dark ride draws not just from general Disney attraction history but Disney Princess attraction history as well.

After standing in the overflow queue that spread outside of the Norway Pavilion, I entered into an indoor-outdoor space underneath a palatial facade of (feigned) stonework. There, the queue

then wove me through a holding area, complete with wooden-styled doors, ceilings, archways, and eaves. Banners and bulletins addressed the crowd as citizens of Arendelle eager to attend Elsa's Royal Coronation. Above one archway hung a portrait of Sven and a portrait of Kristoff. However, something about these portraits felt odd to me. The characters were depicted in the animation style of the film, in the foreground of their respective portraits. The backgrounds were blue, lighter in the center behind the characters, and blended darker towards the edges, as if the characters were spot lit. For me, this staging was evocative of a school portrait, complete with fabric, paper, or digital background. This lent a feeling of realism (or staged realism) that is in conflict with the animation of the characters in the foreground and the Arendelle aesthetic which surrounded us Park Guests.



Figure 5 Image Description: A photograph, taken by the author 13 September, 2021, shows wooden rafters and the tops of archways. On display on the wall are three frames: one with a medal, one with the image of Sven, and one with the image of Kristoff— in the animation styles of *Frozen* but with a bright blue, speckled background behind each figure. *Frozen* but with a bright blue, speckled background behind each figure.

One announcement proclaimed a “Summer Snow Day Celebration,” complete with “Royal Reception inside the Ice Palace.” The illustration-style of this proclamation starkly deviated from the animation style of the film; rather, this artistic style of the proclamation was more angular, striving less for a 3-dimensional effect. Elsa was at the top-center of the proclamation, a stream of ice-powers coming from her left hand and curving across the landscape that fills the lower half of the proclamation. This image was then bordered, framed, and pinned to the wall in an alcove set off with a stone archway and purple fabric curtains, tied-back.

Four stylizations of bodies came together in this beginning section of the queue. First, the ride’s holding area constructed Arendelle in 3-dimensions, positioning Park Guests within the *Frozen* landscape. By placing us within the fictional country from the *Frozen* films, we were aligned with the fictional (animated) characters that populate that country. Second, the entrance-way portraits of Sven and Kristoff render their bodies in the animation style of the film. However, the staging of these characters before a portrait-style background added a third representational mode, one which clashes with the familiar aesthetics of the animated film. Fourth, the announcement for the “Summer Snow Day Celebration” introduced a new animation style for Elsa and Arendelle which deviated starkly from the animation style of the film.



Figure 6 Image Description: There is a recess in a wall with curtains framing a poster. There is an illustrative image of Elsa at the top of the poster, showering a white ray with snowflakes in it down upon the castle and port below. This poster proclaims, “Hear ye! Hear ye! The Kingdom is invited to a Summer Snow Day Celebration in honor of the day that Princess Anna saved her sister Queen Elsa with an unselfish act of true love. All Shall Be Welcome to a Royal Reception inside the Ice Palace.” Photographed by author 13 September, 2021.

The composite representational style of the holding area confused me. I wondered: Are we, too, animated characters which can be expected to interact on the same representational plane as Anna, Elsa, etc.? Park Guests are moved through spaces also inhabited by faux photographs of

animated characters, of artistic renderings, even of screen displays of animated characters in movement, performing an interaction with the Guests in line. With which bodies are we meant to identify?

There is also a composite sonic landscape present in the “Frozen Ever After” ride. The ride itself features songs from the first *Frozen* film, which blur into one another as guests’ boats travel through different spatial/auditory spheres of the ride. While in the film “Do You Want to Build a Snowman” is sung by Princess Anna (child and adult), in “Frozen Ever After” it is performed by Olaf. While in the film “For the First Time in Forever” is sung by Anna and, to a lesser degree Elsa, in “Frozen Ever After” it is performed by Anna and Kristoff. While in the film “In Summer” is sung by Olaf, in “Frozen Ever After” it is performed by Olaf, Elsa, and Anna. The song lyrics also deviate from the film script, addressing us Park Guests directly, urging us to the event at Elsa’s ice palace. The revised lyrics for the ride were written by songwriting team Kristin and Bobby Lopez, who composed the *Frozen* films soundtracks. While the ride design plays into audience familiarity with the soundtrack, it also provides a degree of novelty or surprise: this ride is offering *something* new. *Frozen Ever After* is a *composition*, a merger of the known and the re-mixed.

Which lyrics guests hear as they move through the ride vary. User 4K WDW posted a “Complete Ride Experience in 4K” to YouTube in August 2021, a recording from the guest perspective filmed on August 17 2021 around 4 pm. The verse of Olaf’s that is foregrounded for 4K WDW as they passed by is different from the verse on my own audio recording of my ride experience from Sept. 11, 2021. Each of these verse options deviate slightly from the film’s lyrics. Here we can see (hear!) how *Frozen Ever After* functions as a ride in which guests *pass through* visual and auditory scenes, experiencing differing segments of the ride’s looping performance.

Before the appearance of Elsa, Anna, and Kristoff—that is, humanoid representation—the Park Guest travels through an initial scene with Olaf and Sven, a subsequent scene with the Trolls, and a journey at an upward slant surrounded by snowflake light projections. Notably, in the scene with the Trolls, who are 3-dimensional animatronic figures, the figurine of Pabbie points to a part of the rock wall where, on a flat 2-dimensional screen, animated (filmic) sequences of Anna and Elsa appear. This adds yet another representational mode to the overall *composition* of embodiments.

Next, Olaf appears again, ice-skating, and then a scene with Anna, Kristoff, and Sven. Anna and Kristoff are the first humanoid animatronics in the ride’s sequence, singing a modified “For the First Time in Forever.” Doors opening revealing Elsa’s solo scene, singing “Let It Go.” At this point the boats keep the focal point on Elsa, but begin to move backwards and continue backwards over a drop. Still moving backwards, the boat passes through a tunnel with snowflake light projections, as if from Elsa’s powers, on either side. Smoke descends and the boat emerges to a sequence with Marshmallow the Snow Monster and his tiny friends, and then rotates forward, drops quickly, and passes through a sequence of Anna and Elsa holding hands and singing, along with Olaf, a version of “In Summer.” Guests then disembark the boat.

“Frozen Ever After” evokes the aesthetic of the film. The very medium of film is evoked through the emphasis on light and projection. “Frozen Ever After” includes scenes staged between various characters of the films, including human characters Elsa, Anna, and Kristoff. These characters are embodied by costumed animatronic figures. Their costumes are cloth, featuring many draping cloaks, and hair (or fur) is textured. However, the facial shapes of these humanoid actors are left as smoothed ellipsoids: that is, facial features such as the nose, eyes, and mouth are *not* crafted as part of the animatronic itself. Instead, these facial features, and the expressions they

make, are projected onto the material ellipsoids, producing vibrant colors and an eerie glow (See Image). The facial projection ends under the ellipsoid’s curve (the “jawline”). The glowing ends abruptly, *creating* a harsh contrasting line.



Figure 7 Image Description: A large animatronic reindeer and an animatronic snowman are surrounded by darkness and glowing blue and white lights. These eyes of the reindeer and the snowman glow blueish-white. Image screen grabbed by author from “Frozen Ever After at EPCOT – Complete Ride Experience in 4K | Walt Disney World Orlando Florida 2021” video on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYV2z4ObrxY&t=323s.



Figure 8 *Image Description:* Two pale women stand hand-in-hand under a banner of purple flowers. The woman on the left, Elsa, is blonde and wears a textured green dress. The woman on the right, Anna, is brunette, holds flowers in her left hand, and wears a bodice and hoop skirt. Their facial planes glow, with harsh lighting changes as you move under the cheekbone. Image screen grabbed by author from “Frozen Ever After at EPCOT - Complete Ride Experience in 4K | Walt Disney World Orlando Florida 2021” video on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYV2z4QbrxY&t=323s.

Twitter users, when exposed to the forthcoming Tokyo Disney Elsa animatronic at 2022’s D23, criticized this composite technology structure, stating: “Yeah, Oriental land company was like, get these screen faces out of here” (@ScottGutsin). Tokyo Disney Resort’s two parks, Tokyo Disney Sea and Tokyo Disneyland, are funded and officially owned by the Oriental Land Company, even while Disney maintains ownership of all Intellectual Property. This independent funding source has long resulted in high quality innovation and maintenance as Tokyo Disney

Resort properties. All this to say, Twitter User Cap Nap Sap illustrates fan dissatisfaction with the “screen faces” at EPCOT’s *Frozen Ever After*—“screen faces” harshly merged with the fabric of clothes and the color of the animatronic body.

The animation styles are inconsistent within the same body. This takes a body which is already composite—as discussed in relation to Ariel and *The Little Mermaid*, animated characters are an amalgamation of the skills and labor of several artists—and, in rendering it three-dimensional, makes the body increasingly disjointed.²⁶ The screen faces of the “Frozen Ever After” humanoid animatronics resulted in an unsettlingly disjointed body. This is ironic, given Walt Disney Imagineering and Walt Disney Animation Studios understand this means of bringing an animatronic to life as improving work-flow cohesion: “The ability to carry a single animator’s performance through from beginning to end was among the most important successes” of these projects (Madhani).

When my five-minute immersion into the ride’s composite representational style ends, I step away from the loading bay and into the gift shop to be greeted by two faceless mannequins: child-size, one dressed in an Anna costume and one in an Elsa costume (both available for purchase right there in the store!) (See Image 10). The facelessness of these mannequins, placed centrally to catch my attention right as I leave the ride, exaggerate my already-existing sense of uneasiness related to incohesive embodiment. The facelessness here evoked the surfaces of the humanoid animations without the facial light projection—what’s left when you turn off the lights. The facelessness depersonalizes the characters and positions Anna and Elsa as empty, vacant spaces to

²⁶ Stephen Marche of *The New York Times* draws from French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in understanding “The face is the key to the sense of intersubjectivity, linking mimicry and empathy through mirror neurons — the brain mechanism that creates imitation even in nonhuman primates. The connection goes the other way, too. Inability to see a face is, in the most direct way, inability to recognize shared humanity with another.” Without integrated facial features, the animatronics of “Frozen Ever After” read to me as even less human than their entirely animated filmic counterparts.

be filled. Considering the costumed Anna and Elsa mannequins were child sized, with the aim of selling these selfsame, Princess Line costumes to adults for children, the mannequins' facelessness also positions children as vacant, exchangeable bodies waiting to be dressed up. This would be in line with John Locke's notion of the child as the exemplary *tabula rasa*. However, this emptiness (of Anna and Elsa, of Disney princesses) also allows various embodiments, or subjectivities, to step in and fill the space.

In the Introduction to their 2019 edited collection *Performance and the Disney Experience*, Jennifer A. Kokai and Tom Robson Cham develop the idea of Disney as "constructing enormous immersive theatre spaces where guests perform as actors" (7). The Park Guests who ride EPCOT's "Frozen Ever After" interface with Princess performance in a way distinct from the audience at Disney Princess-the Concert. In "Frozen Ever After," the Princesses are embodied through a mismatch of technologies, and the human actors at play include the Guests themselves. The extension of the ride's immersive space to include the related shop illustrates the position of *Frozen* soft dolls, plastic figurines, and dress-up accessories as "scripted things" (Bernstein) which place the child in a certain relationship (performance) with toy and narrative.



Figure 9 Image Description: In a Disney merchandise store, there is a large placard announcing Frozen merchandise. There are two child-sized mannequins, elevated from the ground, made from white plastic. They have contoured faces but no detailing of eyes, lips, etc., and no hair. One wears a child-sized version of Anna’s green dress, and one wears a child-sized version of Elsa’s icy blue dress. These dresses are for sale in the store. Photographed by author 13 September 2021.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the *composite* embodiments that different modes of Disney Princess performance engender for their Princesses, their performers, and their Guests. Across the Disney Park and event landscape, the 2020s Disney Princess body is neither static nor sealed, asked like children themselves to shore up several “contradictory demands.” Though Disney Park

shops may visually depict children as deindividuated, even faceless subjects waiting to be dressed up, this same facelessness symbolizes the invitation of multiple positionalities—multiple girlhoods, multiple childhoods—to inhabit the Disney Princess body. In the next chapter, this question of who is invited to fill the Disney space is of key importance. We can see the absence of this question in the generalized depiction of the “Frozen Ever After” Guest experience above; it does not address the physical and emotional implications of the attraction’s requirement that a Guest transfer out of their wheelchair or ECV (electric conveyance vehicle), if applicable. From here, I proceed to consider the human bodies, embodiments, and subjectivities around which fairy tale environments such as the Disney Parks are not oriented.

4.0 Chapter 3—“Rules and Regulations” of Embodiment: a Crip Perspective on Disney Parks

4.1 Introduction

In 2021, a Tik-Tok trend spread with Guests intentionally getting “dress-coded” at Disney Parks. Disney World (FL) and Disneyland (CA) promote “Guest Courtesy and Attire Policies” on their websites, with “proper attire” including shoes and shirts, and excluding clothing that drags on the ground and costumes/masks for Guests 14 or older (“unless required for medical purposes”). Disney states, “Clothing with multiple layers is subject to search,” and Disney “reserve[s] the right to deny admission to or remove any person wearing attire that we consider inappropriate or attire that could detract from the experience of other Guests” (“Walt Disney World Property Rules”).

Until the summer of 2022, persons flagged for wearing inappropriate attire would likely be given a voucher to a Park store to purchase a replacement item that would be considered “appropriate,” to be worn for their remaining time at the Park. However, with the hordes of people trying to take advantage of this system to acquire a free shirt—and post the process on social media—Disney has eliminated this voucher system.

Of course, determining what is “objectionable,” “detract[ing],” or “inappropriate for a family environment” is a highly subjective, and often variable, act. Walt was initially so dedicated to a wholesome family environment that he wouldn’t sell alcohol in the Parks; to date, smoking is prohibited on Park property domestically. I bring in this example to demonstrate the extent to which Disney polices its properties and the *bodyminds* visiting those properties. Charles Carson

(2004) understands “Inclusion and community, not individuality” as central to the “Disney Experience.” He states:

The success of the park is predicated upon my willingness to participate in its illusions—I must *want* to believe. What motivates me to “believe” is the idea that, through my participation in this fantasy, I will become a member of a broadly defined community of Disney fans. It is this community, not the individual, that Disney celebrates. Thus, it is somewhat contradictory to speak of *my* “Disney Experience,” since Disney ensures that I *want* the same ‘experience’ as everyone else...What results is a contract between Disney and the guest. (23)

It is through cooperation in Fantasy that one becomes a Disney Park Guest, with access to a community of fellow-fans and the “true” Disney Experience. Part of this contract is to occupy space in an orderly and pre-scripted manner, even at the cost of one’s own comfort. Sara Ahmed writes on the discomfort of feeling that we do “not quite inhabit” social norms. She understands, “[n]ormativity [to be] comfortable for those who can inhabit it” (Ahmed). An able-bodied, neurotypical, heteroromantic individual will expend less effort fitting the regulatory functions of the Parks. These individuals, then, have a certain amount of privilege in their Park-going experiences. They have the privilege of expending less energy to pass through the world around them, which has been built with their image in mind.

4.2 Bodyminds

Margaret Price popularized the term *bodymind* in 2015, to signal the imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities called ‘body’ and ‘mind’” (271). *Bodymind* is “a sociopolitically

constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience” (271). The act of *misfitting*, Price continues, “opens the way to explore the possibilities of a more fully realized theory of the bodymind” (271). Ahmed’s queer discomfort may then be mobilized into an act of *misfitting* which demands and imagines alternative modes of being-in-space and of designing accessible spaces. Price draws on Garland-Thomson’s *misfit*, which brings attention to “the co-constituting relationship between flesh and environment” (Garland-Thomson in Price 271). The ideas of *bodymind* and *misfit* recall my term *composite body*, which calls attention to the co-constitutive properties of the individual, the material, the sensory, the environment (i.e., the audience or crowd). Similarly, I understand the “dis-composed” that Price’s crip politics privileges to be analogous to the *composite*, the hybridized embodiments at play throughout this dissertation.

This chapter moves from the composite bodies performing fairy tale musicals for an audience to the composite bodies placed inside the fairy tale landscapes of Disney Parks as Park Guests. In this chapter, I interrogate how Disney Parks render select *bodyminds* illegible in their fantasy spaces. Specifically, I conducted a critical autoethnography of my experiences as a disabled Park Guest in Disney World (FL), Disneyland (CA), and Disneyland Paris from fall 2021 through fall 2022. I ask: What is the comfort and fit of these public spaces for varying *bodyminds*, and where does “fantasy” fit in? Inspired by Price and Kafer, I offer a crip analysis of Disney’s fairy tale landscapes and their rules and regulations. This crip perspective—“a way of getting things done...by infusing the disruptive potential of disability into normative spaces and interactions” (269)—is enacted through critical autoethnographic methods.

Drawing from Foucault, D. Soyini Madison understands the “critical” in “critical ethnography” to remind us to “care for the self as a subject that is in formation and to excavate and

deconstruct those limits and meanings that circumscribe your subjecthood in advance of your coming into being” (5). Throughout this dissertation, I am interested in the prescribed norms of subjecthood and the performance events and other affective moments which may scramble these norms and suggest a way of living and being otherwise. Here, I understand my disabled self as rubbing up against physical, digital, and emotional infrastructure which, before my literal presence in the Parks, projects an image of who I am and what I may need. I become limited in relation to the architecture, soundscapes (sensory overwhelm), and protocols of the Parks. At the same time, my disabled presence in the Parks, along with my ability to seek out and navigate Disney Accommodations Services, offers an alternative embodied subjecthood which chips away at the fantasy of Disney as a happy, cherished place. In this way, disability denaturalizes the performances of the Parks themselves. Like the *composite bodies* of Chapters One and Two, the disabled body in the Disney Parks disrupts the performance space and its wider narrative(s), bringing attention to alternative modes of being and imagining.

The disabled body also disrupts social conflation of ability (health) and futurity. In her influential monograph *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), Alison Kafer challenges the common understanding of disability “as a terrible unending tragedy.” If this is so, “any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid” (2). She states:

A better future, in other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies; indeed, it is the very *absence* of disability that signals this better future. The *presence* of disability, then, signals something else: a future that bears too many traces of the ills of the present to be desirable. (3)

Here, Kafer exposes how the presence of the disabled body is understood as an admission of failure: failure to cure the ills of the present, and failure to *hide* the ills of the present. And

Disney Parks hide. In 1981, Jean Baudrillard famously positioned Disneyland, with its “play of illusions and phantasms”—including “its pirates, the frontier, future world”—as “a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation.” “Fantasyland,” the built environment, exists in Disney Parks in Orlando, Anaheim, Paris, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. The name of an entire Park within Disney World is Magic Kingdom. It is rhetorically clear that Disney trades in Fantasy. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler positions fantasy as a “critical promise,” which “when and where it exists, ... challenge[s] the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality” (Rodríguez 22). “Fantasy,” they continue, “is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home” (Rodríguez 22).

“Bring[ing] the elsewhere home” (Butler), or the pursuit of *critical utopianism* (Muñoz, whose queerness is always on the horizon), disrupts stagnant assumptions regarding what present reality, and its landscapes and infrastructures. If we think alongside Butler, we may consider the embodied presence of disabled individuals in the Disney Parks as a “critical promise” which “challenge[s] the...limits” of the Park’s design, disability accommodations, and even ideology. That is, by occupying Disney Park space—with architecture often designed as representing Fantasy—, disabled persons also occupy Butler’s “critical promise of fantasy,” which in turn exposes cracks in the Fantasy quality of Disney Park design and customer service.

4.3 “To all who come to this happy place”

To all who come to this happy place; welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past...and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future.

Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and the hard facts that have created America...with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.

—Walt Disney, Disneyland Opening 1955 (“Walt Disney Opens Disneyland”)

Walt Disney began his 1955 Disneyland opening speech, “To all who come to this happy place; welcome.” “This happy place” swiftly became “The Happiest Place on Earth.” This superlative catchphrase for the Disney Parks functions to alienate those who cannot (as) easily access Happiness there. David Koenig, author of *The People v. Disneyland: How Lawsuits and Lawyers Transformed the Magic* (2015), notes: “Year by year, Disney does get a little more accessible. Unfortunately, the logistics of efficiently processing and entertaining tens of thousands of guests a day are diametrically opposed to meeting every need of hundreds of guests a day who each require...individualized concessions” (Kost-Peters 14). Here, Koenig illustrates how the Disney Parks Guest Experience is not crafted on the scale of the individual.

The past 10 years have seen controversial changes to Disney Parks’ disability accommodation policies. In 2013, Disney Parks revised standing disability policies which had allowed Guests with developmental disabilities to arrive at a ride and receive “front-of-line” status. However, Disney abandoned this system “because of alleged abuse by both guests that needed GACs (Guest Access Cards) and those that did not,” including the creation of counterfeit GACs, the hiring-out of disabled Guests to “guide” a party through the park with special access, or the online sale of unexpired GACs (United States District Court).

With the October 9th, 2013 introduction of the Disability Access Policy, qualifying Guests receive similar “front-of-line” status at rides, though at later scheduled points throughout the day.

However, controversy surrounds this transition. For example, a lawsuit was filed in 2016 against Walt Disney Parks and Resorts U.S., INC., which continued in appeals through 2020. The plaintiff—A.L., a resident of Orange County (FL) “with moderate to severe autism”— and his mother argued that Disney failed to accommodate the plaintiff through this introduction of the new DAS and consequent discontinuation of the previous systems, GACs. The American Disabilities Act, which was passed in 1991 and updated in 2010, prohibits:

[F]ailure to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations. (United States District Court)

A.L. sought modifications because his autism demands a set routine; deviating from this set routine may result in overwhelm of stimuli and, as such, in episodic “meltdowns” of specific tics or tendencies. Previously, with the Guest Assistance Card, A.L. could follow the same circuit of rides, in the same order. The timing of when the party was to experience an Attraction was determinable by the disabled Guest, rather than by Disney. That said, per the United States District Court, A.L. and his party could have used a combination of the new DAS and readmittance passes (of which they had several) to maintain the A.L.'s preferred route with wait times under his alleged maximum of roughly 5-10 minutes. Because Disney was found to have provided equal or better Guest Experience options to A.L. than to other Guests, district judge Anne Conway ultimately ruled in favor of Disney, stating “Requiring the modification, based on the history of the former

system, would lead to fraud and overuse, lengthen the wait times significantly for non-disabled guests, and fundamentally alter Disney's business model" (Russon).

The American with Disabilities Act "focuses on physical features and functions, layout, and space measurements of buildings or other designed environments" (Kost-Peters 14, referencing Yanchulis). The 2010 update extended focus to youth and youth spaces, and crafted guidelines "for the design and use of rides and infrastructure in amusement and theme parks," focusing particularly on "accessible rides, routes, signage, wheelchair accessibility, transfer riding, and transfer devices" (15). However, questions of physical accessibility can differ greatly from questions of cognitive disability accommodations (Kost-Peters). Sara Kost-Peters researches "Inclusive Design, Cognitive Disabilities and Designed Break Spaces at Walt Disney World," with a particular focus on accommodations for those with autism or other sensory processing disorders. Kost-Peters notes that "disability" is widely recognized as signaling "obvious...disabilities such as physical impairments, blindness, or deafness" (31), but Inclusive Design takes into account "non-obvious groups," such as "those with temporary physical limitations, those who are very tall or short, caregivers, those with emotional or psychological conditions, the elderly, those who are drug or alcohol dependent, international visitors, victims of abuse, and refugees" (Kost-Peters from Steinfeld et al., 2021). When site design accounts for disability at all, it often conceptualizes its users as those who may have so-called "obvious disabilities;" corporations such as Disney may not fully account for cognitive and "non-obvious" disabilities and *bodymind* differences when envisioning accessibility and implementing accommodations.

4.4 Disability Access Services: Field Report



Figure 10 Image Description: There is a concrete meridian between two roads, one of which has two white buses on it in the distance. There are also palm trees and other lush greenery in the distance. In the foreground, there is a maze of handrails and a small kiosk with a placard that states, “Courtesy Wheelchair / Guests needing assistance reaching or wheelchair rental location may use one of these courtesy wheelchairs.” There are no courtesy wheelchairs. Photographed by author at Disney’s Animal Kingdom Theme Park, 15 September 2021, 3:45 pm EST.

Disney World’s four Parks, as well as the Disney Resorts and Disney Springs, are connected by an extensive internal transit system, consisting of shuttle buses, monorails, and ferry boats. In fact, Walt Disney World Resort as a conglomerate spans 27,000 acres and is the largest theme park in the world. The shuttle buses to the individual Parks deposit Guests outside of the

Parks gates, while Wheelchair Rentals are located within Park Gates. In turn, wheelchairs or other rented mobility aids such as ECVs (Electric Conveyance Vehicles) cannot leave Park gates. For example, if a wheelchair is rented in Animal Kingdom, it must be returned before the Guest exits Animal Kingdom. While Daily Rentals are advertised as transferable between locations, this means that a Guest would only pay the Daily Rental fee once and have access to rental equipment in all Parks for that day, provided equipment is available when they arrive at the next Park.

If a Guest is relying on access to Wheelchair or ECV Rentals, and travels to a Park on the shuttle buses, there is an interim distance the Guest must then travel between the shuttle drop-off and the Rentals kiosk within the Park Gates. Notably, the physical distance may be compounded by the fact that there are often crowds and wait-times outside the Gates; Guests must pass through security checkpoints and have their tickets scanned to enter, and this may lead to back-up outside the Gates.

There is meant to be infrastructure to alleviate this issue. At Animal Kingdom, for example, there is a kiosk placed strategically at the convergence of multiple shuttle-bus drop-off points. This kiosk boasts a placard which reads: “Courtesy Wheelchair—Guests needing assistance reaching our wheelchair rental location may use one of these courtesy wheelchairs.” However, as noted in the image above, as I passed by on Wednesday, September 15th, I found the kiosk at Animal Kingdom empty, without a single courtesy wheelchair. Here we see the ghost of accessible infrastructure, a nod towards the intended.

Guests must be 18 years or older, with a photo ID, to rent wheelchairs, or to rent and operate ECVs. The daily rate for wheelchairs in the Parks is 10 dollars, while the daily rate for ECVs is 50 dollars with a 20-dollar refundable deposit required (“EVC Rentals”). I will also note that a Guest cannot reserve a wheelchair in advance through this Rentals process. Rather, these

wheelchairs and ECVs are available “on a first-come, first-served basis,” as quantities are limited, Disney suggests interested Guests “plan to arrive early” (“EVC Rentals”). An issue with “plan[ning] to arrive early,” beyond putting the onus for securing accommodation on the disabled Guest, is that there is [typically] a peak of Guest numbers (crowds) for Parks’ opening moment, deemed “line drop”—resulting in a longer wait time in entrance lines.

By Thursday, September 16th, I had been in the Disney Parks for 3 days. *Okay been standing for twenty minutes and already want to vomit. Great,* my texts read. I woke up that day after sleeping for 12 hours, and after breakfast shortly turned around and napped for 3 more hours. My intention was to save up energy to do a half-day stretch at Magic Kingdom running through the fireworks show at 8 pm, with energy stores still full enough for the approximately hour-long experience of standing to secure a place for, watch, and exit the fireworks show. When I arrived inside the Magic Kingdom, I walked up to Stroller and Wheelchair Rentals and asked to rent an ECV. At this point it was about 3 o’clock in the afternoon, so the Park had been open 7 hours (since 8:00 am)—but had I been present in the morning to secure a non-reservable ECV, I would not have had the stamina to last 14 hours through the (9 pm) fireworks show, a key performance on my watch-list that day.

The Rentals kiosk was out of ECVs by this time. I did not consider a non-electric Wheelchair Rental at this time, as I have no prior experience with wheelchairs, especially not in crowds, and with no companion to help I feared the mobility, strength, and iteration of movement required to move myself throughout the Park would drain my energy and prompt pain flaring *more* than walking about would (my bodymind, at the very least, is *accustomed* to walking, even if painfully).

The Cast Member (Disney nomenclature for Parks employees) offered to put me on a wait list, so I jotted down my name and cell phone number. I received the following:

15:16—”You have been added to the Magic Kingdom ECV waitlist. We will notify you via text if an ECV becomes available. Reply STOP to stop messages from this location. Msg&data rates apply.”

18:08—“An ECV has become available, please return to the Magic Kingdom main entrance. The ECV will be held for 60 minutes.”

Three hours after my initial request, then, an ECV became available for my use through Disney’s Rental Services. The cost is not prorated, and I admit I did consider whether I wanted to spend \$50 for an ECV I would only be able to use for another 3.5 hours through the Park’s close. More significantly, I was no longer *near* the Rental Services, and was overwhelmed by the concept of walking back to the Park entrance in order to acquire a mobility aid to then return to the innards of the Park. Disney Park Maps are not transparent regarding distance between Attractions. Even the Disneyland Paris Accessibility Map is not drawn to scale, and despite marking an “Easy Access” route around the Park, does not gesture towards specific or approximate distances.

Through Google Maps, I charted several routes at Magic Kingdom a Guest may have to take back to Rental Services, if they were in a similar position as I was. The longest of these routes is about 0.5 miles; a Guest could potentially be 0.5 miles away from the Rental Services when texted about a now-available—available-*there*—mobility aid. One-half mile is roughly equivalent to 1,000 steps or ten minutes of “easy walking” (Google) for the average person, and I highlight

that this person would not have disabilities rendering that walk, and passage through parts of the Park (think audiovisual stimulation, crowding, etc.), difficult.

When I traveled to Disneyland in March 2022, I did not want to replicate my experience at Disney World, September 2021. By chance, while in a queue for a ride at Disney World, I overheard a cast member discussing upcoming changes to Disney’s domestic Disability Access Services. Motivated by this encounter, I began to navigate the Disneyland website, with these keywords in mind. The banner headings of the Disney World and Disneyland websites differ, with Disney World including an option for “Help & Rules,” which drops-down to include “Guests with Disabilities.” On the Disneyland website, one must scroll to the bottom of the homepage to see an option for “Help” -> “Guests with Disabilities.” From here, both sites proclaim, “Disney Parks have an unwavering commitment to providing a welcoming, inclusive environment and accessible experiences for our Guests. As part of this commitment, the Disability Access Services (DAS) is a program offered at Disneyland (CA) and Disney World (FL) to assist Guests who have difficulty tolerating extending waits in a conventional queue environment due to a disability” (“Disability Access Services”).

In order to register in advance with Disability Access Services (which is recommended), one must click open the “Read More” section under Step 1 above, then click on the hyper-link to “pre-register virtually with a Cast Member via live video chat,” 2 to 30 days prior to visiting a Park. This service is currently only offered in English—and, as may be evident, moderate computer literacy is also required, in addition to technological/internet access. Provided you are signed in to your Disney account (creating an account is free, though requires internet connection, a computing device, and a degree of digital literacy), this hyper-link sends you to a chat-box holding area, where you are asked to verify a handful of requirements for the Services and then

wait for an available Cast Member to video call you. The disabled Guest must be present for the video call, and video capabilities must exist on the Guest technology used.

My video experience with a Cast Member was upsetting. She asked about the nature of my disability/disabilities, and I began by saying that I have fibromyalgia, and my chronic pain spikes if I have to stand for too long (this in turn stresses mood disorder symptoms, such as anxiety and dissociation). This Cast Member replied that persons with difficulty standing or walking can always use mobility aids, which disqualifies you from DAS; she also stated that Disney Parks are places which demand high levels of walking and standing by nature, and Guests are signing on to those features when visiting the Parks. When I tried to explain that I do not typically use a mobility aid (and was wary of adding the stress of navigating a new aid to a Park visit), she assured me that many rides are wheelchair-friendly, and offered me a link to a list of these rides and attractions. Our call then (was?) disconnected.

Following this experience, I repeated the process several times, but each time the wait for a video-call was more than an hour, or I was booted from the glitching chat function. Finally, I resigned myself to the option of registering when I arrived at Disneyland Park, and though I was concerned with having to sacrifice Park time to this process, the Cast Member at City Hall was very accommodating (“City Hall” is a building near the entrance of Disney World or Disneyland). Having learned from my previous interaction, I stressed from the beginning that I have pain in my knee(s)—emphasized by my wearing of a brace—, as well sensory processing overload tendencies. Essentially, I had identified more effective keywords and was sporting a visual cue, my performance accentuated via script and prop.

I will also note that, for this conversation at City Hall, I was accompanied by my mother, a formidable sixty-year-old white woman who speaks like the lawyer she is. In short, I had “back

up.” Her authority was implicitly lent to my statements of dis/ability and requests for accommodation. However, her presence also catalyzed a complication. The Cast Member actually tagged my mother as the disabled Guest in our party of two, which restricted what rides I technically should have been able to ride with accommodation, alone. Meaning: A Guest’s successful registration with DAS is signaled virtually, through the Disneyland or Disney World smartphone app, which connects to the Guest’s Disney account. Photographs of the disabled Guest are linked to their name and profile. From this app, disabled Guests can then sign up for a future entry time for one specific ride, roughly equal to the time of sign-up plus the length of that ride’s line at that specific moment. Then, this Guest plus up to 5 linked Guest who are not registered through DAS may arrive at that ride at or any time after the appointed entry time, entry through an accessible* entrance, and board the ride with little to no additional wait time. However, the Guest registered with DAS must be present with any linked Guests in order to utilize this function and board the ride at or after the appointed time. Once a Cast Member has scanned the Guest’s smartphone to check them in for this ride, this Guest may select another future ride time from a list of available rides.

Though potentially a randomized accident, that a senior citizen was quickly flagged as the disabled Guest, rather than a thirty-one-year-old who “passes” as non-disabled, is disturbing given societal trends of agism and assumption regarding what disability looks like, and which bodies disability is more easily ascribed to.

On the homepage of the Disneyland Paris website, there is a tab for “Before You Arrive,” with a drop-down menu that includes an option for “Accessibility at Disneyland Paris.” The Park touts “A MagicALL experience for all,” with stated focus on “empower[ing] those with disabilities and special needs,” “hearing, mental motor and visual” (“Accessibility at Disneyland Paris”). The

website foregrounds safety, and “access and evaluation conditions” of individual attractions. Specific consideration is also given to conditions of epilepsy and photosensitivity (“Accessibility at Disneyland Paris”).

By scrolling down, or selecting the Access Cards tab near the top of the page, the Guest is guided to two questions: “What is a Priority Card and am I eligible?” and “What is an Easy Access Card and am I eligible?” (“Accessibility at Disneyland Paris”). Registering for a Priority Card, which a Guest can do upon arrival or up to one month in advance, requires official documentation “proving disability” in the form of an original document issued by the government or signed and stamped by a medical authority; accepted versions of this document vary according to country of origin (“Accessibility at Disneyland Paris”).

For example, a Guest from the United States would need one of the following, to be approved for a Priority Card: Disability card issued by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, Parking Card for Disabled People, Other official disability documents issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, VA Disability Compensation Benefits, Parking Badge (permanent or temporary), or an America the Beautiful Access Pass (“Priority Card Request”)

This Priority Card should a Guest prove eligible, “gives priority (but non-immediate) access to attractions, shows, parades, Selfies Spots, restaurant and shop checkouts” along with a 25% discount for the Guest and an accompanying person on a Park Ticket or Annual Pass (“Accessibility at Disneyland Paris”). An Easy Access Card, in turn, is meant for those with “a recognized Long Term Chronic Disease,” of which there are 30 approved options. These are:

1. “Debilitating stroke”
2. “Bone marrow aplasia and other chronic types of cytopenia”
3. “Chronic arterial disease with ischemic events”
4. “Complicated schistosomiasis”

5. "Chronic heart failure, chronic heart valve disease, serious heart arrhythmia, chronic congenital heart disease"
6. "Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis"
7. "Severe preliminary immunodeficiency disorder requiring long-term treatment, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)"
8. "Type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes"
9. "Severe neurological and muscular disorders (including myopathy), severe epilepsy"
10. "Haemoglobinopathy, chronic constitutional/severe acquired haemolysis"
11. "Haemophilia and severe constitutional haemostatic disorders"
12. "Coronary artery disease"
13. "Acute/chronic respiratory failure"
14. "Leprosy"
15. "Parkinson's disease"
16. "Inherited metabolic disorders requiring long-term specialised treatment"
17. "Cystic fibrosis"
18. "Acute/chronic nephropathy and primary nephrotic syndrome"
19. "Paraplegia"
20. "Periarteritis nodosa, acute disseminated lupus erythematosus, progressive systemic sclerosis"
21. "Severe progressive rheumatoid arthritis"
22. "Long-term psychiatric disorders"
23. "Ulcerative colitis and progressive Crohn's disease"
24. "Multiple sclerosis"
25. "Progressive structural scoliosis (where the curve is 23 degrees or more) through to spinal maturity"
26. "Severe ankylosing spondylitis"
27. "Organ transplant disorders"
28. "Active tuberculosis"
29. "Malignant tumor, lymphoma or hematopoietic cancer"
30. "Severe arterial hypertension was removed from the list of LTI by the degree of 24 June 2011" ("Priority Card Request")

With "an original medical certificate in French or English signed and stamped by a medical doctor and less than 3 months old," a Guest may obtain an Easy Access Card upon their arrival at the Park or Park Resort; this Card provides "simplified (but non-immediate) access to...attractions" where a Guest may "Present your Easy Access Card and 'appointment book' at

an attraction, and we'll give you a timeslot during which to come back and ride. You can make a 2nd reservation when the 1st is over" ("Accessibility at Disneyland Paris").

To be approved for an Easy Access Card for Disneyland Paris, you do not meet with a Cast Member online ahead of time. At Disneyland (CA) or Disney World (FL), if you have not been pre-approved by a Cast Member via video-chat, then you must enter a Disney Park and then proceed to its Customer Service (often located in a Park's "City Hall" building near the entrance). In this way, at Disneyland or Disney World, one may require a valid park ticket and park reservation before knowing for certain whether they will receive DAS approval. At Disneyland Paris, in contrast, you may be approved by Guest Relations at your Disneyland Paris Resort.

In August 2022, at Guest Relations at the Disney Sequoia Lodge, I presented the letter, on letterhead, from my doctor specifying which of the 30 approved Long Term Chronic Diseases I suffered from. This was the closest thing my doctor had to an "original" and "stamped" "medical certificate." The woman working the desk seemed reticent and somewhat annoyed at my presentation of a doctor letter and my request for an Easy Access Card. She said that many were "trying this" today (paraphrase), such that my utilizing an Easy Access Card might not save much time. I am not positive, but I think she was wary I was trying to take advantage of the accommodation systems in place.

4.5 Conclusion

Previously, I have demonstrated how the *composite body* of a human or animatronic performer may rupture fantasies of cohesion by making-visible the bodies and voices, human talents and efforts, and technologies at play in the performance of a fairy tale character. I have

traced how the ephemera, peritext, and audience associations surrounding a performer come together to challenge and change normative expectations for the fairy tale narrative at play. Walking around Disney Parks, waiting in queues, moving my body into the seats of passenger cars, I am both audience member and actor (Kokai and Robson), and in this autoethnographic experiment the performance I am assessing is that of my own body and the Park spaces it is in. I have a composite relationship to the rides I am on or inside of, as I move with and by means of passenger cars, themselves a component of the ride's entire infrastructure.

By tracking my sensory and somatic experiences throughout the process of visiting these Disney Parks, I can witness and expose how Disney performs allyship through its Disability Access Services while constructing disabling environments and authoritarian infrastructure. Why should my mother receive Disability Access Services by default, when we are both wearing knee braces? What does the discrepancy between how Cast Members in the same bureaucratic role treated my video call request for accommodations suggest? Navigating this Disability Access System requires English literacy (verbal and written), general computer and internet literacies, and buckets of expendable time.

A crip perspective on Walt Disney Property Rules expose generalized assumptions about who should navigate the Parks and how, and how easily; it exposes the regulatory forces of Disney Parks and the Disney Park Experience, as well as the performances invested in invisibilizing these forces. These are similar regulatory forces as those dictating the bodies of Guests via their clothing, or the anonymization of Cast Member performers names. My disabled body de-naturalized Disney's efforts at performing "MagicALL" fantasy.

4.6 CODA: Death at Disney

Disney even manages the bodies of their Guests and employees into death. In their interactive web article “Disney Death Tour: Monumentality, Augmented Reality, and Digital Rhetoric,” rhetoricians Jason Crider and Kenny Anderson address the popular legend, known as the Disney Death Myth, that rules that no one dies at Disney. This legend contends that medical professionals are not allowed to pronounce Guests “Dead” until they have transported the Guest off Park property.²⁷ In an effort to rectify Disney denial of death occurring in its Parks, and thereby to “restructure this [corporate] *polis*,” Crider and Anderson map over 55 deaths at Magic Kingdom since 1977, marking and memorializing the sites for readers/Park Guests. They explain their project, the “Disney Death Tour,” in this way:

When entering a Disney park, space is ordered, but not necessarily obeyed, and the Death Tour provides an alternative option for occupying the park. Corporations have images to maintain, which for Disney means preserving its parks’ status as the happiest, most magical places on earth. Space is carefully arranged to suppress or containerize contradictory narratives, in this case the deaths of parkgoers and workers. Like a designated smoking section, Disney confines death to the Haunted Mansion, where the afterlife follows a safe, playful script. In Barlow’s case, the

²⁷ While most deaths at Disney result from pre-existing conditions, a considerable number are the product of “accidents on rides or negligence by park officials” (Crider and Anderson). Walt Disney World opened in October 1971, with its Magic Kingdom theme park. Twenty-eight years later, in February 1999, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported, “A Walt Disney World custodian plunged 40 feet to his death Sunday morning after clinging to the outside of a rising cable car that had swept him from a platform.” Raymond Barlow, 65, “was looking for a place to land and let go over a flower bed, snapping some tree branches on the way down,” the workers said. While Disney was fined \$4,500 for a safety violation, and the Skyway was removed six months after the incident, the *Sentinel* states that “The ride closing is not a result of any concerns about its safety” (Crider and Anderson). By denying that closing the gondola in Fantasyland was due to safety concerns, Disney side-steps conversations of fallibility and culpability, despite press coverage of Barlow’s death.

official story dismisses any link between safety concerns and the decision to close the Skyway, but the claims of those constructing the narrative cannot assuage the death myth's subversive appeal. To die at Disney is to go off script, and flies in the face of the wholesome image of perpetual adolescence that the company cultivates. (Crider and Anderson)

Crider and Anderson here conceptualize the Disney Image as one of “perpetual adolescence”—a period (of childhood) that is somehow distended, never-ending, on-the-cusp. Not only do certain individuals fail this “wholesome” script due to disability and illness, but some children also fail to live to adolescence. Lane Graves was a 2-year-old gruesomely killed at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort and Spa (Orlando, Florida) in 2016. His death resulted from a commixture of wilderness (an alligator in the Resort's Seven Seas Lagoon) and parental and corporate negligence. Unlike many of the deaths at Disney that Crider and Anderson discover to be unmarked, Graves's death resulted in a memorial on site: a miniature lighthouse, “a beacon of hope; a light of love.”

Arguably, the existence of this memorial on Park property is related to Graves' status as a pure and innocent toddler. Per Crider and Anderson, “Disney *does* acknowledge death in one unique way, through their close support of organizations like the Make-A-Wish Foundation.” In this way, though Disney has historically “not allow[ed] for deaths that occur within the park to be acknowledged or memorialized, part of its magical performance exists to comfort the dying” (Crider and Anderson). With “part of [Disney's] magical performance” providing this comfort to children (as Make-a-Wish does not grant wishes to individuals over 18) (Crider and Anderson), Disney is arguably also positioning this comfort as a facet of its own magic: or, part of Disney's

performance of its own magic is comforting dying children. Is alleviation from reality and deadly, complicated, or simply non-normative embodiments.

A December 2021 TikTok contrasts a happy-go-lucky image of a “60’s theme park attraction minding its business” with the more ominous image of “Tourist carrying the ashes of their loved ones.” This TikToker’s handle, “unofficialdisneyceo,” situates this content creator as an unofficial expert on secret Disney histories (which are of course difficult to corroborate). According to various comments, the practice of dumping ashes often occurs on the following rides: Haunted Mansion, Peter Pan’s Flight, It’s a Small World, Pirates of the Caribbean. Self-identified former Cast Members recall being required to sweep or vacuum ashes up regularly, as well as file felony reports. One such Cast Member comments, “If you’re gonna leave [ashes] in Disney, do it somewhere out in a more natural part of the park, not one of the rides” (#distok). However, this presumes there are then natural parts of the park.

In disbelief, Disney scholar Carl Hiassan states: “Imagine promoting a universe in which raw Nature doesn’t fit because it doesn’t measure up; it isn’t safe enough, accessible enough, predictable enough, even beautiful enough for company standards.” “Raw Nature” would include a Florida alligator embodying its role as a predator. Disney Company standards pronounce all as welcome—from Walt’s Disneyland opening speech to Disneyland Paris’ contemporary “MagicALL” rhetoric—while their policies cast disabled *bodyminds* out, or at least into an experience of orneriness and pain.

5.0 Final Thoughts

On Tuesday March 14th, 2023 at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., I sat down in an orchestra center seat to watch the *Into the Woods* revival that had just ended its Broadway run. *Into the Woods* came to Broadway first in 1987, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by James Lapine. It is a messy, raucous musical that turns our fairy tale expectations for, well, fairy tales on their heads. The opening number is twelve minutes long with twelve-character voices layering over and through each other.

From where I sat, I could easily see the three ASL interpreters for that night's show. Dressed in black, they perched on stools in front of the apron, house left. Because so many of the lyrics are sung over one another throughout the musical, these three performers would have to take up one character's voice in one moment only to take up another character's voice moments later; the same voice could be split between multiple ASL performers, as well, depending upon the timing of the vocals' overlay. Characters were tossed between these three performers (and their genders) because of a structural demand—a limited number of interpreters and Sondheim's style of overlapping character voices. There were three ASL performers, performers who were not billed in the playbook or announced by name at any point. As they signed, their upper bodies moved along with their hands; they mouthed the lyrics and dialogue and expressed character emotion (and interaction) through their faces and body language.

The interpreters, through their embodied performances and their fluency in ASL and English, are *composite* performers. These interpreters, by taking up various character personae at different moments in the musical, are *composite* performers. The material restraints and structural

demands of Sondheim's musical changed the way embodiment (in this case, ASL interpretation) could service the show.

I just happened to be at the Kennedy Center for a performance evening that boasted ASL interpreters. Similarly, I just happened to be at the St. James Theatre for a performance evening that featured Jackson in as Princess Anna. I opened this dissertation with a discussion of ephemera as evidence. My archive is built of performance, happenstance, and ephemera. If we look at this in relation to Chapter One: I witnessed, but I do not have a visual recording of, Jackson's performance; King witnessed Braxton's performance and translated that experience into an object of academic analysis; audience members witnessed Menzel in her red track suit in 2005, which was translated into a *New York Times* review and recorded and posted to YouTube by anonymous fans. YouTube now only features one of the two fan videos of Menzel's appearance that existed on the platform when I began this research; what is more, the remaining video is now titled something else altogether, to deflect attention and copyright infringement.

This dissertation both discusses community archiving—particularly unstable Internet sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok—and participates in community archiving. I am documenting, as well as circulating or recirculating, subjective and emotional reactions to small- and large-scale performances. I do so by interrogating *fairy tale performance*, an intertextual and self-reflexive network of performances, recognizable from the entertainment industry to every day (often musical) snippets. This has been an assembly project. I have not seen scholarship that positions Broadway musicals, touring Concerts, fan conventions, theme park sing-alongs and animatronics, and theme park infrastructure and corporate policy together in the same research project, or under the same theoretical roof. Discussing some of these performances (and audience responses) required seeking them out, deeming them worthy of selection and observation.

Composite bodies is an example of a theoretical framework through which to look at them all side-by-side.

This dissertation moves beyond the insertion of new identities, or representations, into existing narratives. Throughout, I track when and how material realities engender or change those narratives, and how reworked narratives engender or change material reality. I question this dialectic through the mode of performance. This includes taking live performance into consideration, with all its contingencies. This includes the affordances and limitations of distinct human bodies and subjectivities—or, as Princess Anna of *Frozen* exclaims, the “actual real live people” that make things “totally strange!

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