

“Disney Dreams!“ – A Nighttime Spectacular in the Tension Field of Crowds, Communion, Emotion, and Religion

Emotional personal statements of visitors to Disneyland Paris, such as “I for one believe that as soon as I’ve walked through the entrance, all cares and troubles just drop away, a woman pushing 40 becomes a girl and loves to monkey around, to whistle the music, to sing along on the street, to chitchat with the C[ast]M[ember]s, simply to see the world with the eyes of the children,”¹ have induced me to examine this park more closely. There seems to be something special to it, something that may not be exactly grasped at first.

Collaborating on the book *Massen und Masken – Kulturwissenschaftliche und theologische Annäherungen an die Phänomene Masse und Karneval* (2017), I became familiar with the instruments – Canetti’s crowd theory and Turner’s *communitas* approach, among others – which are necessary to access Disneyland Paris from a completely new perspective.

Out of the numerous potential subjects of study the park offers, I decided on the “nighttime spectacle” show “Disney Dreams!”, which, due to its content, is particularly well-suited for an analysis in the tension field of crowd – communality – religion.

The following complex of themes is based on an analytical, if not a content-related distinction: First, having recourse to Canetti, Turner, Durkheim, and Joas, “Disney Dreams!” will be investigated from the perspectives of Sociology, Religious Studies, and Theology.

With this paper, I would like to continue my approaches to investigating the Disney theme parks I began in “Disneyland Paris – Eine Pilgerstätte?” (2017) from an academic perspective, and to sensitize readers to the idea that, from the specific perspective of my discipline, there is more potential to the parks than might be expected at first glance.

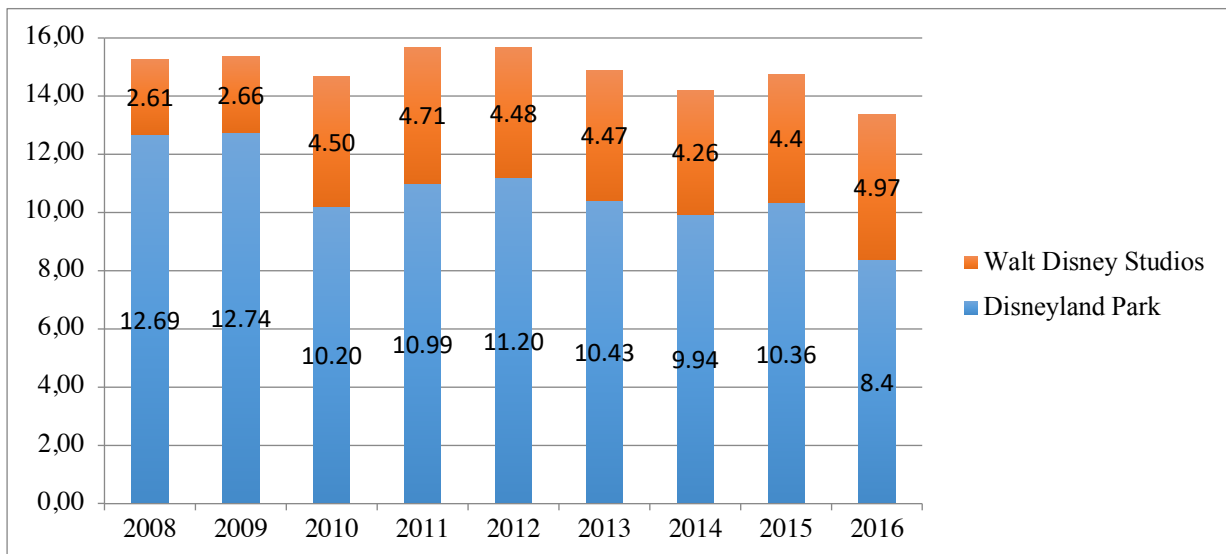
“Disney Dreams!” – Crowd and Event

Looking at pictures and videos of Disneyland Paris, two first spontaneous associations are possible: “What a lot of people!,” and “It all looks very artificial, but the visitors seem to be having fun“ – *crowd* and *event*. Both terms are closely connected, in popular culture in general and in Disneyland Paris in particular, so that in this context they require terminological clarification for better understanding. The insights gained from this will be summarized at the end of

¹ Melli: “Warum freut Ihr Euch, wenn Ihr ins DLP fahrt?“ (page 3). <http://msemposium.de/board/showthread.php?p=277841>. Creation date: May 25, 2013. Last access: Aug 26, 2016.

this section, to be used as a foundation for a possible religious dimension of “Disney Dreams!” in the following.

What kind of crowds we are talking about exactly becomes clear in an analysis of the visitor figures for the past years. In the diagram below, the lower, blue sections represent the visitors to Disneyland Park, where “Disney Dreams!” takes place. The upper, orange sections show the numbers of visitors to Walt Disney Studios, the second theme park in Disneyland Paris.²



On average, Walt Disney Studios had approx. four million visitors every year since 2008, Disneyland Park about eleven, resulting in a total of around 15 million. Accordingly, the number of visitors per day was 11,000 for Walt Disney Studios and 30,000 for Disneyland Park – less in the off-season, more during peak season.

In the sense of the conventional understanding of the term as “a great number, a multitude,” we can definitely speak of *crowds*. From an academic perspective, however, the term appears to be more complex: *Crowds* in general show four characteristics, as according to Canetti:⁴

1. *Growth*: The desire for/the drive towards its own growth

² TEA: *Global Attractions and Attendance Reports 2008-2016*. <http://www.aecom.com/theme-index/>. Creation time 2009-2017. Last access: Dec 18, 2017.

The visitor figures vary slightly in the different reports for the past years. The drop in visitor numbers in 2016 is, in my opinion, due to the extensive renovations for the 25th anniversary, during which several attractions were closed for a longer period of time.

³ Wissenschaftlicher Rat der *Duden*-Redaktion. “Masse.“ <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Masse>. No creation date. Last access: June 22, 2016.

⁴ cf. Canetti, Elias: *Masse und Macht*. Frankfurt am Main 1992, 30. (*Crowds and Power*. New York 1978)

2. *Equality*: The disappearance of individual differences / the desire for a “communitas experience”⁵, i.e. – according to Turner – a special experience of communality that may act as identity-forming or –reinforcing.
3. *Density*: No existence of a crowd-free space
4. *Direction*: Pursuit of a common goal

This list of characteristics must be relativized insofar as, e.g., the *growth* aspect only applies to *open*, and not to closed crowds. Open crowds may be mobs or shitstorms on the Internet. Closed crowds are by nature limited for various reasons and therefore oriented towards stability, e.g. a birthday party in a private context. Disneyland Paris, and hence “Disney Dreams!”, also fall into this category: On the one hand, the possible number of visitors is restricted by the price of admission (economic criterion), on the other, it is subject to the constraints of security reasons (pragmatic criterion).

Canetti’s approach shall now be related exemplarily to the “Disney Dreams! Nighttime Spectacular”, as described below.

The nighttime spectacular ran for the first time in 2012, commemorating the 20th anniversary of Disneyland Paris. It is a 23-minute event staged every evening at the end of Disneyland Park’s opening hours that employs projections on Sleeping Beauty’s Castle, water, water fountains (hydro technology), fire and fireworks (pyrotechnics) to depict various stories from the Disney universe, alternating in irregular intervals, on 2,500 square meters.⁶ It becomes apparent immediately that Disney is aiming at a holistic experience here.⁷

The event focuses on well-known songs from Disney movies, such as “Let It Go” (*Frozen*), “Friend Like Me” (*Aladdin*), or “I See the Light” (*Tangled*).

Various themes, e.g. the fight of Good versus Evil, hope, love, and friendship are addressed, respectively conveyed by the songs. In terms of content, the tunes are linked both by a musical arrangement especially composed for the nighttime spectacular and by a frame narrative: After a short intro, the Peter Pan character loses his shadow, which destroys the magic of

⁵ Building on Turner 1982: Gutmann, Hans-Martin/ Eckardt, Simon: “‘Events‘ – Zur Ambivalenz von Massenphänomenen. Masse, Kommerz und Religion.“ In: Janus, Richard/ Fuchs, Florian/ Schroeter-Wittke, Harald (Eds.): *Massen und Masken. Kulturwissenschaftliche und theologische Annäherungen an die Phänomene Masse und Karneval* (= pop. religion: lebensstil – kultur – theologie, vol. 2). Wiesbaden 2017, 9-24.

⁶ Mayné, François: “A look behind the scenes of Disney Dreams! at Disneyland Paris.” <http://www.newsparc.com/en/article/00006037-a-look-behind-the-scenes-of-disney-dreams-at-disney-land-paris>. Creation date: June 2, 2013. Last access: June 23, 2016.

⁷ In other events in the Park, the holistic experience is even heightened by specifically used scents emitted by the floats. When meeting the Disney characters, visitors may touch them or even have conversations, which intensifies the event even more.

the “Second Star” during its escape.⁸ The magic dropping down from the Star, represented as glittering pixie dust, “initiates“ the stories listed above, Peter Pan now traveling through them to reclaim his shadow and to bring back the magic to the “Second Star” with the aid of his fairy friend, Tinkerbell.

Said Star is present all through his quest, shining laser beams over the crowds as far as the park entrance.

An inherent problem when writing about an event is that readers, unless they have experienced the event themselves, cannot get the real, full picture from mere description. Hence, it is advisable for the understanding of the following remarks that they form their own impression, e.g. via *YouTube*, even if this impression is only medial and indirect. This access to “Disney Dreams!” does not trigger the same immersion experience as the physical presence in Disneyland Park, yet it may at least convey a rough idea of the event.⁹ This assessment is also shared by people who have seen the live-show, for instance, “It’s amazing. But it don’t reach the feeling to stand in front of this Castle and see the show Live.”¹⁰ Immersion is not only intended and achieved by the show itself but ultimately by everything inside the Park: “These distillations – from musical cueing and food to landscaping, lighting, scaling, signage, sounds, surfaces, textures, and smells – play off perception and collective memory to create ‘instant moods.’”¹¹

⁸ In the story of Peter Pan, “the second star to the right“ enables the journey to Neverland.

⁹ Suitable videos, showing both the event itself and the participating crowd, may be found on YouTube, e.g.: *DLP Guide: Disney Dreams! Disneyland Paris World Premiere 2012 full show (20th Anniversary)*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glNjMOXSL7k>. Creation date: Apr 3, 2012. Last access: June 26, 2016; and Javi Rod: *À bientôt Disneyland Paris!, Disney Dreams Fireworks Finale + Walking out through Main Street*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-ZZ-V5M400>. Creation date: Aug 19, 2014. Last access: June 26, 2016.

¹⁰ Steinberg, Andre: Comment on “Disney Dreams!”“ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDtosjvTrBc>. Creation date: 2016. Last access: June 26, 2016.

¹¹ King, Margaret J.: “The Disney Effect. Fifty Years After Theme Park Design.” In: Jackson, Kathy Merlock/West, Mark I. (Eds.): *Disneyland and Culture. Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*. Jefferson, NC/London 2011, 224.



Figure 1 Crowd waiting for "Disney Dreams!"

In the terminology of Canetti, "Disney Dreams!", respectively the spectators watching it, constitute a *closed* (not-open), *stagnating* (not-rhythmic), *quick*, goal-focused (not-slow), *visible* (not-invisible) *feast* or *double crowd*, with the latter characterized by a demarcation from both inside and out:¹² It is *closed* due to the fact that a ticket is necessary to visit the Park. It is *stagnating*, because the crowd positions itself in front of the Castle and remains there until the end of the spectacle. It is *quick*, as the crowd pursues a common goal, the experience of the show, which is directly imminent. The crowd is *visible*, since the people are physically present before the Castle. It is a *feast crowd*, because it is waiting for the event in an emotionally positive basic mood, and a *double crowd*, as the fact that the crowd is closed shows a clear separation between inside and outside – between being inside and outside the Park, respectively between spectators and non-spectators.

The three characteristics of a crowd listed earlier – the reasons for excluding *growth* with respect to Disneyland and "Disney Dreams!" have already been discussed – can be regarded as given: The watching crowd is highly *dense*, especially during peak season. On Main Street, U.S.A., the thoroughfare leading from the park entrance to the Castle, and on Central Plaza, the square in front of the Castle, the people stand together so closely that getting through is virtually impossible. There exists no space in which the crowd is not. Moreover, the crowd, as already implied, pursues a common goal (*direction*), the experience of the evening extravaganza. Due to its complexity, the last criterion, *equality*, will be discussed in the next section "Disney Dreams!" – Crowd and Event as Enabling Basis of Manifold Experiences" (page 9).

Our analysis as conducted so far must be supplemented by the addition of the criterion-*commercial*, respectively *commercially organized*. Gutmann/Eckardt define *commercially organized crowds* as "[...] organized by a third party who is not content-interested, coming about only by this third party's initialization."¹³ Doubtlessly, the park visitors are a crowd that is organized commercially, which is made more than clear by the sales of annual passes, day and

¹² cf. Roth, Florian: "Elias Canetti – *Masse und Macht*." Lecture by Dr. Florian Roth. http://sfb89b7e12c5b103c.jimcontent.com/download/version/1345165620/module/6416526785/name/Canetti_Masse_und_Macht.pdf. Creation date: Oct 10, 2003. Last access: June 22, 2016.

¹³ Gutmann/ Eckardt 2017, 19.

multi-day tickets, and flat rates. It is also indisputable that the crowd of park visitors only comes into being through initialization (sale of tickets, opening of the Park).

It must nevertheless be doubted that the organizing instances –Euro Disney SCA, Euro Disney Associés SNC, or The Walt Disney Company, depending on their respective areas of responsibility – have no content-related interest in the crowd, respectively in the Park.

It might well be that, when formulating their definition, Gutmann/Eckardt were thinking of concert promoters or ticket vendors – i.e. third parties who have no content-related connection with an event, for instance, a concert. Yet regarding Disneyland, we must assume that the organizing instances have quite an interest indeed in the Park and its visitors: The Disney brand itself, the reputation of the theme parks, the attractions, shows, and events they offer, are guarantors for many millions of consuming people coming to the Park every year.

Statements from official presentation videos support the thesis of the event organizers' content-related interest in the Park: “Since the very beginning Disneyland Paris has been all about offering high quality experiences. Packed full of dreams, magic and wonder. [...] We're aimed to offer you exceptional und unforgettable experiences. [...] The place where dreams come true – for all ages.”¹⁴

After the term *crowd* has been reflected, the following will discuss why “Disney Dreams!” not only constitutes a crowd but a popular *event* as well. This will clarify the close relation between these two phenomena, which enable certain sensations, respectively experiences, and which are relevant to the continued argument of this paper.

As with *crowd*, there also are characteristic features to distinguish a *popular event* from others:

1. An *event* pursues financial interests on the part of the organizing instance.¹⁵ This aspect has already been covered in the remarks on crowds; it can therefore be accepted as a given.
2. An *event* does not exist in isolation but in conjunction.¹⁶ “Disney Dreams!” is no standalone event in Disneyland Park and in Walt Disney Studios – Disneyland Paris

¹⁴ *Disneyland Paris: 2015. Official presentation of Disneyland Paris.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqC98NbKvyA&index=1&list=PL1zje29bwPej03tWfNNevpcHQcU8AcsIb>. Creation date: Nov 27, 2015. Last access: June 23, 2016.

¹⁵ cf. Schroeter-Wittke, Harald: “Event(uelle) Kirche.“ In: Janus, Richard/ Fuchs, Florian/ Schroeter-Wittke, Harald (Eds.): *Massen und Masken. Kulturwissenschaftliche und theologische Annäherungen an die Phänomene Masse und Karneval* (= pop. religion: lebensstil – kultur – theologie, vol. 2). Wiesbaden 2017, 72.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

may rather be called “eventicized” through and through, in its every feature. Many minor events, such as the *Frozen* Sing-Along, the Jedi Training Academy, or the Parade, which also meet the criteria listed above, contribute to the impression that this theme park is “eventicized” utterly and completely.

3. The goal of an *event* is communalization.¹⁷ This aspect, together with the concept of *equality*, will be analyzed as a *communitas* experience in the following section.
4. Attending an *event*, visitors are seeking something special, “which shows itself in the longing of humans for enjoyment, pleasure, and entertainment.”¹⁸ Simply put, people expect to have fun when attending an event, they are looking for “moments of joy.”¹⁹ This is facilitated by a certain structure and planned processes: “In Disneyland things generally ran smoothly, and everyone smiled and felt safe.”²⁰

That visitors to a theme park are looking for entertainment and fun requires, in my opinion, no further explanation.²¹ By the operators of Disneyland – and of all other theme and recreational parks – this desire is used for commercial interests.²²

5. *Events* are obligatory only insofar as visitors want them to be.²³ A visit to Disneyland Paris, respectively the attendance of “Disney Dreams!“ is optional and voluntary and does not involve any commitments, so that this characteristic may also be regarded as a given.
6. An *event* constitutes an extraordinary, out-of-the-everyday occasion.²⁴ “Disney Dreams!“ may well be considered such an occasion, as people certainly do not encounter a show of these dimensions in their everyday lives. Visitors stay at the Park for one or several days, e.g. for a short vacation, as a break from their everyday routine. Nevertheless, during a multi-day visit, the nighttime spectacle can be integrated into the newly

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ cf. Herrmann, Peter: “Freizeit- und Themenparks – Multimediale Zufluchtsorte einer erlebnishungrigen Gesellschaft?“ In: Quack, Heinz Dieter/ Klemm, Kristiane (Eds.): *Kulturtourismus zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Festschrift für Albrecht Steinecke. München 2013, 199.

The search is not only limited to recreational or theme parks. According to Opaschowski, approx. 27 million German citizens attend some form of mass event in the arts or entertainment sectors at least once a year. (cf. Opaschowski, Horst W.: “Freizeitkultur.“ In: Hügel, Hans-Otto (Ed.): *Handbuch Populäre Kultur*. Stuttgart 2003, 36).

²⁰ Scibelli, Cathy: “Forget the Prozac, Give Me a Dose of Disney.” In: Jackson, Kathy Merlock/ West, Mark I. (Eds.): *Disneyland and Culture. Essays on the Parks and Their Influence*. Jefferson, NC/London 2011, 218.

²¹ A global analysis of this search would be highly interesting, as the number of people going to recreational or theme parks has been continually increasing worldwide for the past years. Thus, across the world 5.4% more people visited a park in 2015 than in 2014 (cf. *TEA 2015*, 6).

²² cf. Herrmann 2013, 199.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Hepp, Andreas/ Höhn, Marco/ Vogelsang, Waldemar: “Einleitung. Perspektiven einer Theorie populärer Events.“ In: Hepp, etc. (Eds.): *Populäre Events. Medienevents, Spielevents, Spaßevents*. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden 2010, 7.

established routine, in the sense of an everyday ritual, since it always takes place at the same time.

7. *Events* are restricted to a part of the population, respectively, they are only designed for a specific target group.²⁵ This aspect has already been explained as well, in the context of the term *crowd*.
8. *Events* are mediatized.²⁶ Even if one is not aware of this in Germany, Disneyland Paris, as the site of many events, and “Disney Dreams!” are highly mediatized. Yet advertising and announcements are hardly to be found in German media. One possible reason might be that, statistically, only few Germans go to Disneyland Paris. The proportion of German visitors in 2011, e.g., was at 3%,²⁷ which corresponds to approx. 471,000. According to official data, this figure also remained constant in 2015²⁸ (approx. 444,000 German visitors).

Whether only so few Germans go to this theme park because there is so little advertising, or whether Disney advertises so little in Germany because so few Germans want to come anyway, is a question that cannot be answered here. One look at other European countries, however, shows how strongly Disneyland Paris and “Disney Dreams!” are mediatized and therefore advertised there.²⁹ In addition, there are the posters and signs in the Park referring to the nighttime spectacle.

9. *Events* are emotionalized.³⁰ In his remarks on the term *worlds of experience*, among which Herrmann also counts Disneyland Paris,³¹ he expounds that theme parks as a whole are emotionalized to the highest degree. This also applies to “Disney Dreams!” as part of this world of experience, since the scenes that are shown and the songs that are played may bring back memories of one’s own childhood, which might be positively connoted. Even without any familiarity with the films and their music, the nighttime spectacle is staged so lavishly and (technically) elaborately that emotional responses,

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ cf. Schroeter-Wittke 2017, 74.

²⁷ cf. Sheridan, Anthony: “Attendance breakdown reveals where 15 million Disneyland Paris visitors come from.” <http://www.dlptoday.com/2011/03/11/attendance-breakdown-reveals-where-15-million-disneyland-paris-visitors-come-from/>. Creation date: Mar 11, 2011. Last access: June 23, 2016.

²⁸ cf. *Disneyland Paris: [EN] Disneyland Paris 2015 Key Figures*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkiRCCFu6is&index=17&list=PL1zje29bwPej03tWfNNeVpCHQcU8Acslb>. Creation date: Mar 1, 2016. Last access: June 23, 2016.

²⁹ cf. Search results https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=disneyland+paris+commercial, and https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=disney+dreams+paris+commercial.

³⁰ cf. Herrmann 2013, 196.

³¹ cf. *ibid.*, 194.

such as feelings of being overwhelmed and elated, which will be discussed in more detail below, are quite conceivable and, in my opinion, even highly probable.

Moreover, it is characteristic for events that they are elaborately staged with the aid of certain devices. Following Canetti, Gutmann/Eckardt list fire, rain, and water as symbols of the crowd,³² which also serve as theatrical devices in “Disney Dreams!”, in the form of pyro and hydro effects. The list of symbols can be expanded by the already mentioned “Second Star”, shining over the crowd and present for the entire duration of the show, as a symbol of magic.

As could be seen in this section, *crowd* and *event* in general and, with relation to “Disney Dreams!”, in particular, are closely connected to one another, which makes this everyday nighttime spectacular a *crowd event*.

After this analysis of the subject with regard to *crowd* and *event*, the following will investigate which experiences – and which related emotions – the “Disney Dreams!” crowd event can enable.

“Disney Dreams!” – Crowd and Event as Enabling Basis of Manifold Experiences

The potentially religious dimension of the crowd becomes evident when one becomes aware of the aspect of *communitas* and the concomitant possible experiences and emotions. A *communitas* experience according to Turner is identity-forming and –reinforcing, as already mentioned above. This, in turn, is an acknowledged function that religion can render.³³ (cf. Kaufmann 1989, 84f.)

It becomes apparent, e.g., in Christianity, in the attendance of worship services, the German Protestant Church Congress, celebrations of the Eucharist, or at a christening. While the latter represents the initiation of a person into the community of the Church, which may become part of one’s own identity over the course of one’s life, the other examples constitute possibilities of reinforcing one’s Christian identity within this community.

The question is whether a visit to Disneyland Paris, or more concretely, the experience of “Disney Dreams!” can also involve a *communitas* experience. That experiencing this event can be identity-reinforcing – although it does not have to be – is, in my opinion, beyond question: If during “Disney Dreams!”, recipients are emotionally touched by film scenes, melodies, and characters to which they might have been attached since their own childhoods, this may very well act as a reinforcement of identity. In addition, spectators find themselves standing in

³² cf. Gutmann/ Eckardt 2017, 14.

³³ Kaufmann, Franz Xaver: *Religion und Modernität. Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*. Tübingen 1989, 84f.

a crowd of people who might feel a similar response. This shows itself, e.g. in joyful exclamations, the enraptured faces of many spectators, loud expressions of amazement, or in singing along with the songs of “Disney Dreams!”.³⁴ Like-minded individuals are bonded here, proving the integrative character of this show.

Whether the experience described can also be identity-forming can only be surmised at this point. Yet if the spectacle deeply touches someone emotionally, so that it “absolutely involves” them, it is at least conceivable.

Canetti’s last characteristic of the crowd, *equality*, therefore can also be regarded as a given.

A *communitas* experience can have at least one other as a consequence, a flux experience, a *flow*. This also refers back to Turner, who assigns the following characteristics to a *flow* experience,³⁵ which have been related to the concrete example of “Disney Dreams!”:

1. A *flow* experience is characterized by focusing attention on a specific point – the Castle with the projections to be seen on it
2. Additionally, during a *flow* one is exclusively in the Here and Now, i.e. the focus is on the current experience – the spectacle in its totality
3. Besides, according to Turner, the loss of one’s own self in the sense of a submersion into the experience, the flux, is a characteristic symptom of a *flow* – the holistic merging with the melodies and the projections
4. In spite of their absorption in the visual flux, spectators retain control over their own actions and environments
5. The experience of the *flow* itself is perceived as gratification, no other reward being necessary – experiencing “Disney Dreams!”, with all the facets described, as pure satisfaction

The experience described above creates a relationship between a subject, the spectator, and an object, “Disney Dreams!” It is not a relationship of equals, however, in the sense of both of them being active. Instead, the spectator is passive in the *flow*, he/she is submerged in the river of images. A *flow* experience is therefore based on a passivity structure – the watching subject is *acted upon*!

³⁴ This becomes evident in the video by Javi Rod: *Disneyland Paris – Disney Dreams! (Frozen Summer – Full Fireworks Show HD)*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tycqils4iI>. Creation date: June 16, 2015. Last access: June 26, 2016. From 14:14 to 14:50 min, the crowd is singing “Let It Go.”

³⁵ cf. Turner, Victor: *Vom Ritual zum Theater. Der Ernst des menschlichen Spiels*. Frankfurt am Main/New York 1989, 88ff. (*From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York 1982)

This provides a connecting point for a rather more Sociology/Religious Studies-oriented or religious interpretation of the reception of “Disney Dreams!”

In the context of Sociology and Religious Studies, the terms of “self-transcendence”³⁶ and “collective effervescence”³⁷ appear compatible. They allow for an interpretation of the *flow* experience described – without prematurely resorting to theological categories of interpretation.

1. Joas defines “self-transcendence“ as “experiences in which a person transcends herself but not, at least not immediately, in the sense of moral achievement but rather **of being pulled beyond the boundaries of one’s self, being captivated by something outside of oneself, a relaxation of or liberation from one’s fixation on oneself.** We thus initially define this self-transcendence only as a movement away from oneself, as the somewhat antiquated German word *Ergriffensein* expresses quite beautifully.”³⁸ The German noun *Ergriffensein* (‘emotional excitation‘ or ‘elation‘; literally: ‘to be grasped or seized [by emotion]‘) can be regarded as an apt synonym for *passivity structure*, as the fact that one is captivated by something implies a passivity of the subject.

If the characteristics of the *flow* according to Turner focus more on the (passive) subject, Joas outlines the opposite in this experience, the object “outside of oneself.” Returning to “Disney Dreams!”, my understanding of the term *self-transcendence* allows me to conceive of two objects acting on the passive subject: The event itself, taking place outside the spectator, acts directly on him/her. Or, while experiencing “Disney Dreams!”, the spectator is captivated/elated by something else, something located outside of this event as well. From the perspectives of Sociology or Religious Studies, who or what this *Something* might be remains open.

In the terminology of Rudolf Otto, this experience could constitute an encounter with “the Sacred.”³⁹ According to Otto, a creature feeling⁴⁰ can ensue from these encounters, which he then refers to as “mysterium tremendum et fascinans” – a feeling of being overwhelmed, captivated, elated, that may confuse the senses but also delight.⁴¹ Personal statements from “Disney Dreams!” spectators point in this direction: “I can't even DESCRIBE how AMAZING that was. I was freaking out and tearing up and screaming the

³⁶ Joas, Hans: *Braucht der Mensch Religion?* 2nd ed. Freiburg im Breisgau 2007, 17. (Translation from: Joas, Hans. *Do We Need Religion?* Trans. Alex Skinner. Boulder, CO, 2008, 7.)

³⁷ Durkheim, Émile: *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens.* Frankfurt am Main 1994, 289. (Translation from: Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York 1995)

³⁸ Joas 2007, 17; Emphasis F.F. (Joas 2008, 7)

³⁹ cf. Otto, Rudolf: “Das Heilige.“ In: Härle, Wilfried (Ed.): *Grundtexte der neueren evangelischen Theologie.* Leipzig 2007, 91-96.

⁴⁰ cf. *ibid.*, 91.

⁴¹ cf. *ibid.*, 95f.

whole time I just. Oh my goodness. I applaud you Disneyland Paris. I can't imagine seeing that in person too;"⁴² "This is the show I watched in January/2015 !! I was so moved, I couldn't stop crying like a child!";⁴³ or "I cried. My brother cried. We all cried, it's so beautiful!"⁴⁴ This emotional aspect, or more exactly, this emotional ambivalence, is typical of theme parks.⁴⁵

2. Another term which can conceptualize the flow experience described above is Durkheim's "collective effervescence:"⁴⁶ "Experiences of the loss of self that at the same time are the experience of a force – an extraordinary power that sweeps the individual away and translates it to another world. For Durkheim himself, this force represents nothing else than the effect of the union of the individuals themselves."⁴⁷ The commonality between *self-transcendence* and *collective effervescence* lies in the experience of/the encounter with a power capable of pulling the passive individuals out of their environment. In this aspect, the two terms may be considered synonymous. However, in the interpretation of Durkheim according to Joas, this power is not left open but becomes concretized as the "effect of the union of the individuals themselves."

On the one hand, the aspect of community formation points out the proximity to Durkheim's functional definition of religion: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." (Durkheim 1994, 75/Durkheim 1995, 44). Durkheim directs the focus of his definition of *religion* towards the aspect of the community of community formation.

On the other hand, the force described by Durkheim can, in my opinion, be connected to Turner's *communitas* experience, which represents identity-forming, respectively – reinforcing communality: Watching "Disney Dreams!", the spectators unite into a community which, as mentioned above, may be more than a mere loose gathering. Moreover, the moment of the loss of one's own self, which can, in my opinion, also be called

⁴² Angela: Comment on "Disney Dreams!" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8jNiv1n8_s. Creation date: 2014. Last access: June 26, 2016.

⁴³ Carvalho, Patrick: Comment on "Disney Dreams!" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8jNiv1n8_s. Creation date: 2015. Last access: June 26, 2016.

⁴⁴ Lizziloufizzlestix: Comment on "Disney Dreams!" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8jNiv1n8_s. Creation date: 2014. Last access: June 26, 2016.

⁴⁵ cf. Herrmann 2013, 197.

⁴⁶ Durkheim 1994, 75/Durkheim 1995, 44.

⁴⁷ Joas 2007, 69.

a merging with a crowd, finds itself in Turner (I-loss) as well as in Durkheim (loss of self).⁴⁸

The experience of “Disney Dreams!” can be interpreted not only from a Religious-Studies or sociological perspective, but also from a theological one. I see the decisive connection point in Joas’ further remarks on his term of *self-transcendence*: “I therefore propose that we reflect on those kinds of experiences that are not yet experiences of the divine, but without which we cannot understand what faith, what religion is.”⁴⁹ In reception of his monography *Braucht der Mensch Religion?*, I see the term *experiences of the divine* as a synonym for religious experiences, which, although he may set them apart analytically from those of self-transcendence, he still refers to again: “without which we cannot understand what faith, what religion is.” To me, there is a certain similarity to Luckmann’s concept of the *great transcendences* – in Knoblauch’s interpretation: “Experiences of great transcendences form the basis for what we call religious, but *per se*, they are not necessarily religion yet.”⁵⁰

Therefore, Joas sees a connection between the two terms, which, returning to my previous analysis in the contexts of Sociology and Religious Studies, I would like to describe as follows: In an experience of self-transcendence, the (passive) subject encounters a *Something* that Joas does not conceptualize any further.

It is exactly this openness that gives room for a range of interpretations relating to the question *What is this Something?* In this, I see the strength of the term *self-transcendence* as opposed to *collective effervescence*, for Durkheim – in his reception by Joas – narrows down this *Something*, quite in accordance with his functional understanding of religion: “For Durkheim himself, this force represents nothing else than the effect of the union of the individuals themselves.”⁵¹ Joas’ self-transcendence, however, is open and thus allows not only functional fillings but also substantial ones, i.e. it is very well possible to interpret the *Something* that happens to a person during an experience of self-transcendence as *God*. The connection between self-transcendence and an experience of the divine/a religious experience implied by Joas

⁴⁸ This refers back to the video of the people collectively singing “Let It Go.“ The collective wonder and elation, in my opinion, may also be adduced as examples of “collective effervescence“, as *Attractions Magazine: Full Disney Dreams nighttime show at Disneyland Paris* makes clear. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBP-SKePrEc>. Creation date: June 27, 2015. Last access: June 26, 2016. From 12:20min.

⁴⁹ Joas 2007, 17/Joas 2008, 7.

⁵⁰ Knoblauch, Hubert: “Transzendenzerfahrung, Kommunikation und populäre Religion.“ In: Dalferth, Ingo/ Stoellger, Philipp (Eds): *Hermeneutik der Religion* (= Religion in Philosophy and Theology, vol. 27). Tübingen 2007, 156.

⁵¹ Joas 2007, 69.

himself becomes clear in a modification of his original definition: experiences, in which a person rises above themselves, in the sense **of being pulled beyond the boundaries of one's self, being captivated by God, a relaxation of or liberation from one's fixation on oneself.** This religious experience is determined as a movement away from oneself, as the somewhat antiquated German word *Ergriffensein* expresses quite beautifully.

In conclusion, and to continue my attempt at theological interpretation, I would like to address the terms *Ergriffensein* (*elation*), *passivity structure*, and the related *acting upon*. In theological tradition, both concepts are closely connected with the term of *revelation*, which, according to Härle, is characterized by three aspects: the originator of the revelation (in Christian interpretation, God), a recipient of the revelation (spectators), and a content of the revelation (“Disney Dreams!” with its themes of love and friendship).⁵² It is a further characteristic of a revelation that a new reality opens up to the passive subject, a reality which may provide “a foundation for one’s own life”⁵³ – but must not necessarily do so. Moreover, a revelation always points beyond itself, i.e. it does not stop with the content revealed but refers to the all-determining reality according to Christian understanding, God.⁵⁴

Following these considerations, it appears possible that spectators experience a revelation during “Disney Dreams!”, if ...

1. ... they are aware of the interpretative categories of a revelation. In subsequent reflection, an experience can turn into a religious experience or even a revelation for a person, if he/she knows what (in the Christian understanding) a revelation is. Naturally, it is also conceivable that a person finds God in the sense of a revelation, but that it is not interpreted in this way.
2. ... the person has a certain openness to religious experiences, respectively interpretations.
3. ... the contents of the message – hope, love, friendship, Good being victorious over Evil – are internalized, possibly furnishing a foundation of one’s further life, e.g. “Life is not as negative as I always perceive it”, or, “I always believe in Good.”

⁵² Härle, Wilfried: *Dogmatik*. 4th ed. Berlin/ Boston 2012, 81.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁴ *cf. ibid.*, 87.

This interpretation, however, can solely be performed by the experiencing subject, in the aftermath of the experience, i.e. the interpretation of “Disney Dreams!” as *revelation* is individual and should not be regarded as generally valid for all spectators.⁵⁵ In his remarks on popular religion, Knoblauch is right when he emphasizes that especially “personal religious experiences“ play a central role here,⁵⁶ from which he further derives the terms “experience religiosity”,⁵⁷ “experience orientation“,⁵⁸ and “subjectification of religion.“⁵⁹ On the basis of the previous analysis of “Disney Dreams!”, this nighttime spectacular can definitely be subsumed under these terms. “Disney Dreams!” therefore is situated in a tension field between crowd, event, popular religion, and possible *communitas* and self-transcendence experiences, which may also be interpreted as religious experiences.

Concluding Observations

To sum up, we can say that the “Disney Dreams!” crowd event, respectively the crowd watching it, can be interpreted from all of seven perspectives:

1. A “normal” crowd of people that watches a spectacle.
2. A “normal” crowd of people that watches a spectacle but can be analyzed in terms of its structure , e.g. using the characteristics of crowds according to Canetti.
3. A crowd of people who are bonded during “Disney Dreams!”, in the sense of a *communitas* experience.
4. A crowd of people of whom some individuals – presumably not all of them – have a *flow* experience.
5. A crowd of people of whom some individuals have an experience of *self-transcendence* or *collective effervescence* during “Disney Dreams!”
6. A crowd of people of whom some individuals have a *religious* experience.
7. A crowd of people of whom some individuals have a *revelation*.

“Disney Dreams!” is a phenomenon of popular culture that refuses to lend itself to a mono-perspectival interpretation as the entertainment offer of a business concern. The nighttime spec-

⁵⁵ cf. Korsch, Dietrich: “Zum Umgang mit religiöser Vielfalt aus theologischer Sicht.“ In: Gräß, Wilhelm/ Charbonnier, Lars (Eds.): *Individualisierung - Spiritualität - Religion. Transformationsprozesse auf dem religiösen Feld der Bildung* (= Studien zu Religion und Kultur, vol. 1). Berlin 2008, 307.

⁵⁶ cf. Knoblauch 2007, 170.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 172.

tacular – and the entire Park along with it – offers visitors a wide range of possible interpretations, which may be integrated into one’s own life and help perceive phenomena of popular culture as multi-layered and open to different interpretations.

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