



ISSN: 1286-4892

**Editors:**

Martin Evans, *U. of Toronto*

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## Adrian Carr 2001

Understanding the “Imago” Las Vegas: Taking  
our Lead from Homer’s Parable of the Oarsmen,  
*M@n@gement*, 4(3): 121-140.

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# Understanding the “Imago” Las Vegas: Taking our Lead from Homer’s Parable of the Oarsmen

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A reading of Las Vegas is provided in this paper using an optic of critical theory and the heuristic power of Homer’s tale of *Odysseus* and his crew’s encounter with the sea creatures called the Sirens. This analysis reveals Las Vegas to be a city remade for visual consumption where the streetscape becomes a fantascap and the arts that are on display are amusement goods—patterned and predigested products for consumption. This paper also argues that the present glitz, glitter and newness of Las Vegas appears all the more meaningful in the light of the archaic. The juxtaposition affords us an opportunity to see ourselves in spite of ourselves, or to be decentered from our historical position of privilege.

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## INTRODUCTION: ON PARABLES

Parables are generally thought of as stories and legends, used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. They are allegorical in the sense that a comparison is being made to some other situation or circumstance. The parables recorded in the Bible are, of course, very familiar and have enjoyed a degree of currency, as have those derived from other religious and philosophical tomes. Some ancient stories and myths, which have been recounted in the sense of being a parable, have been passed into both common and scientific usage as a simple word or phrase—a form of shorthand. For example, the term narcissism is commonly used as a reference to an infatuation with self. Its definition, and the inferred dire consequences, is a “lesson” clearly derived from the legend coined in the work of the Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC-AD 17), otherwise known as Ovid (Ovid, 1955).

Some scholars, in the social sciences, have drawn upon a parable in order to give a profound insight into something that is otherwise difficult to capture, or has been so well captured to make somewhat redundant the construction of a new narrative/commentary. Of course, like metaphors, tropes and alike, in being used in an allegorical manner, it always needs to be kept in mind that this is a similarity rather than a literal relationship. Caution has been voiced in the organization dis-

course that metaphors and stories can have a seductive kind of power—drawing us into the image and simultaneously averting our eyes from where the allegory breaks down, or just doesn't fit with the "facts" (see Carr, 1997; Carr and Leivesley, 1995). A parable may have a coherence, that not only gives us a picture or touchstone helpful to understand and deconstruct our present circumstances, but also may have an ending which the present circumstances do not. Thus, an aspect of parables is to glimpse a possible future if the analogy to our present circumstances continues. This possible future can itself be an alluring vision—perhaps a fantasy or wish to be fulfilled; or, it might be one that signals impending disaster. Whatever the future vision contained in a parable, the nature of the "lesson" is problematic in as much as it is in the eye of the beholder as to whether the present circumstances appear similar enough for the "lesson" to be considered relevant.

Having made this preliminary and somewhat cautionary note, in this paper I intend to use a story, considered by some to be a parable, to gain a deeper appreciation of the spectacle that is Las Vegas. The story, written around 700 BC, is Homer's tale of *The Odyssey* (1991). Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) saw this tale, amongst other things, as containing a parable of modern European history—the "parable of the oarsmen", as it has been dubbed (see Jameson, 1996). In the reading of the parable, this paper concentrates upon aspects that would appear most relevant to a Las Vegas trying to remake itself as a family destination. A "remake" for visual consumption. There are some parallel readings of the parable that are also possible, but not extensively discussed for reasons of space. It is to this parable I now wish to turn.

## THE PARABLE OF THE OARSMEN

1. The doctrines of Enlightenment include: reason is crucial to the capacity to act; humans are by nature rational and good; individuals and humanity as a whole can progress to perfection; all persons are created equal and should be accorded equality before the law and individual liberty; tolerance is to be afforded to all groups in society; beliefs are accepted only on the basis of reason (note: often the Age of Enlightenment is called the Age of Reason); rationality is the universal binding force that transcends differences in culture and creed and as such devalues customs and local practices to the extent that they maybe historically based rather than the exercise of reason; the non-rational is to take a back seat to the rational, thus education is to be viewed as imparting knowledge rather than developing feeling, emotions, and art as the product of good taste rather than genius (see Honderich, 1995: 236-237).

It was during World War II that Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which they try to come to terms with how fascism could arise and gain a firm footing in a nation that seemed to embody the principles or doctrines of Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>. How could these ideals be so easily replaced by the myths of national socialism? What were the flaws that made that nation so vulnerable to such a doctrine? These were the basic questions that Adorno and Horkheimer wished to address and it was Homer's *The Odyssey* that they saw as providing the clue to answering such questions.

The modern flyleaf of Homer's work *The Odyssey* (1991) describes it as recounting «the story of Odysseus' return to Ithaca from the Trojan war and tells how, championed by Athene and hounded by the wrathful sea-god Poseidon, Odysseus encounters the ferocious Cyclops, escapes Scylla and Charybdis and yields temporarily to the lures of Circe and Calypso before he overcomes the trials awaiting him on Ithaca. Only then is he reunited with his faithful wife Penelope, his wanderings at an end.» Many would read this tale as depicting the triumph of skill, intellect and the human spirit over nature and the powerful and

mythic forces of a hostile world. Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997) reading of this tale is a little more complex and involves seeing the tale as an enactment of a dialectical relationship (one of many) of myth and Enlightenment and, moreover, as a tale of how the price for self-preservation has been exacted only through denying (read: sacrificing, repressing and renouncing) aspects of our own nature; resisting temptation/allurements. It is in the episode of the Sirens, the parable of the oarsmen, where Adorno and Horkheimer find the essence of their reading of the tale as a whole.

The episode of the Sirens, for those unfamiliar with *The Odyssey*, is an encounter in which Odysseus, the hero figure of the story, is told by Circe—the daughter of the Sun-god—that his sea journey will next take him through waters in which there are sea creatures that sing irresistible songs that lure sailors to their "doom". No one escapes the allurement of their song. These sea creatures, called the Sirens, know everything that has happened «on this fruitful earth» (Homer, 1991: 12. 192; see also Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 33) and give pleasure—producing a narcotic-like intoxication in which travelers succumb to rejoice and lose themselves in the recounting of memories of the past. The price for listening to these "sweet songs" is, not only to lose the self in the euphoria of the past, but also the promise of one's future is lost—«There is no home-coming for the man who draws near them unawares and hears the Sirens' voices (...) For with their high clear song the Sirens bewitch him, as they sit in a meadow piled high with the mouldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon their bones» (Homer, 1991: 12. 40-46). Circe advises Odysseus, that he should take some beeswax and plug the ears of the crew so that they are prevented from hearing the songs and can row beyond the danger. If Odysseus wishes to hear the Sirens, he should have himself bound, hand and foot, and strapped to the mast «but if you beg and command your men to release you, they must add to the binds that already hold you fast» (Homer, 1991: 12. 53-55).

Odysseus tells his crew of this forewarning and requests they bind him to the mast in the manner suggested by Circe. Their vessel nears «the Sirens' isle» (Homer, 1991: 12. 167) and the wind drops. The crew take up the oars and, with their ears plugged with beeswax (by Odysseus), row past the voices. All the while, Odysseus remains bound to the mast and hears the alluring songs of the Sirens. He gestures with his eyebrows to two of his crew to free him. The crew members respond by tightening his binding to the mast and adding even more rope to stop him breaking free. Having rowed past the Sirens, the crew unblocks their ears and free Odysseus from the ropes that bound him.

## HEARING FROM ADORNO AND HORKHEIMER

Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) read this adventure as one densely packed with meaning and providing lessons for the present. They open their discussion by asserting that the "entanglement" of myth,

reason, domination and labor are «preserved in the encounter with the Sirens» (1997: 32). For them, the adventure is a portrait of modernity with all its central elements on display. Odysseus «shows himself to be a prototype of the bourgeois individual» (1997: 43) that comes to embody the principle of the capitalist economy, that is «Homo oeconomicus» (1997: 61). It needs to be remembered that Odysseus was “ruler” of his ship, through a recognition of his reasoning skills, and also he had aristocratic standing. In this duality we can see the strands of legitimacy characteristic of modern history. The victory over the threat posed by the Sirens adds further credence to the power of reason.

Risk taking, renunciation and sublimation of instincts are the archaic elements of the bourgeois in which reason becomes embodied in the interests of survival and self preservation. In the encounter with the Sirens, risk taking can be seen in the decision by Odysseus to choose a route to sail past the Sirens. He does not choose an alternative route but instead views the «ratio» (1997: 61) of return, a calculated risk, that was in his favour. He could listen to the sweet song of the Sirens, assured that the ropes that bound him would save him from the danger. At the same time, the wax in the ears of the crew safeguards them from succumbing to the allurements of these voices. Adorno and Horkheimer read even more into this decision than to entertain risk. They argue that what Odysseus is seeking to do is to defy the rule of law, in this case “natural” law. He must heed the laws of nature but, through his cunning, he finds an “escape clause” which enables him to fulfill the rule of law while at the same time eluding it. Adorno and Horkheimer argue:

«Odysseus (...) satisfies the sentence of the law so that it loses power over him, by conceding it this very power. It is impossible to hear the Sirens and not succumb to them; therefore he does not try to defy their power. Defiance and infatuation are one in the same thing, and whoever defies them is thereby lost to the myth against which he sets himself. Cunning, however, is defiance in a rational form. (...) Odysseus recognizes the archaic superior power of the song even when, as a technically enlightened man, he has himself bound.» (1997: 58-59; see also page 50 where the deception in sacrifice as a stratagem, is cast as «the prototype of Odyssean cunning»)<sup>2</sup>.

The element of renunciation appears in the context where Odysseus may listen to the sweet song of the Sirens but just as pleasure seems to intoxicate and beckon him, his crew members add extra rope to retard him even more tightly—«just as later the bourgeois would deny themselves happiness all the more doggedly as it drew closer to them with the growth of their own power» (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 34). Later in their volume, Adorno and Horkheimer link renunciation to Odyssean cunning to make a more general observation that, in some ways, projects beyond the parable. They argue that:

«Only consciously contrived adaptation to nature brings nature under the control of the physically weaker. The ratio which supplants mimesis is not simply its counterpart. It is itself mimesis: mimesis unto death. The subjective spirit which cancels the animation of nature can

**2.** This paper contains a number of extracts directly quoted from the volume in which they appear. This approach has been deemed necessary as there are a number of differently translated volumes in existence which gives rise to specific problems in understanding the choice of words and phrases of the author/translator (see the “translator’s introduction” to Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997). Also, there is such a degree of differing opinion, in some cases bordering on personal animosity, amongst the various commentators that it has been deemed appropriate to quote directly so as to avoid or minimize any misrepresentation and/or reductionism. Giving the authors the opportunity to speak for themselves in this way also helps make clear the trail to the linkages and conclusions reached in this paper.

master a despiritualized nature only by imitating its rigidity and despiritualizing itself in turn. Imitation enters into the service of domination inasmuch as even man is anthropomorphized for man. The pattern of Odyssean cunning is the mastery of nature through such adaptation. Renunciation, the principle of bourgeois disillusionment, the outward schema for the intensification of sacrifice, is already present in nuce in that estimation of the ratio of forces which anticipates survival as so to speak dependent on the concession of one's own defeat, and—virtually—on death.» (1997: 57)

To master nature requires imitation of its most rigid aspects. Today, the strictures that we can note in the scientific method require strict discipline of the researcher in applying experimental controls and in their personal actions in performing the experiment. The same discipline is to be encountered in the control mechanisms in factories and bureaucracies that are seen to control the less "rational" nature of people. The price of such control over nature is renunciation.

We will draw upon the above citation again, later in this paper, but the element of sublimation is also implicated in a manner that Adorno and Horkheimer view as present in the parable itself and, in my view, is of the most profound importance in the context of the *raison d'être* of the volume as a whole. It also has profound importance for the observations made in this paper about Las Vegas. The triumph of Odysseus, the hero, is one gained at a price. Odysseus wishes for «emancipation from the forces of nature and to regress to a pre-rational pleasure» (Rocco, 1994: 75). In his efforts to imitate nature, he must, however, learn renunciation and sublimation. The crew that Odysseus "commands" must sublimate such desires in the interests of applying their labor for their own and their commander's survival. All the while the crew also labor in order that their commander may indulge in the beauty of the Siren's sweet songs and play-out the risk he has taken with their collective fate. The reconciliation of the apparent antagonism between work and pleasure, that appears in the parable, is attempted in the modern bourgeois in the same way, i.e., in the contemplation of art. Adorno and Horkheimer explain this "lesson" and simultaneously provide a restatement of Hegel's master-servant parable—a parable of the dialectic of self and other<sup>3</sup>:

«Whoever would survive must not hear the temptation of that which is unrepeatable, and he is able to survive only by being unable to hear it. Society has always made provision for that. The laborers must be fresh and concentrate as they look ahead, and must ignore whatever lies to one side. They must doggedly sublimate in additional effort the drive that impels diversion. And so they become practical. The other possibility Odysseus, the seigneur who allows the others to labor for themselves, reserves to himself. (...) They [the oarsmen] reproduce the oppressor's life together with their own, and the oppressor is no longer able to escape his social role. The bonds with which he has irremediably tied himself to practice, also keep Sirens away from practice: their temptation is neutralized and becomes a mere object of contemplation—becomes art. (...) Thus the enjoyment of art and manual labor break apart as the world of prehistory is left behind. The

**3.** The story of Odysseus is very much a story of self and other and the fear that other will dominate or engulf the self. However, the relationship of self and other cannot be conceived of as a simple dichotomy. Rather, it is a dialectical relationship that appreciates the degree to which the other is both manifested in, and experienced as external to, self. Alternatively expressed, I would suggest that the relationship of self and other implies an existence which includes the experience of «the extension of self into other, [and] of other into the self: the degree to which the self is experienced as part of the other» (Modell, 1996: 97). For example, in humanity's (self's) quest to dominate nature (other), nature is not completely alien, for humans are also a part of nature (i.e., the self is also other to itself). Thus, domination of nature can be read as self-mastery and repression (see Carr and Zanetti, 1999 who also show how in Freud's work they find the psychodynamic parallel, specifically in the ego and the ego-ideal, to the Hegelian dialectic vision of self and other).

4. In using the term “capitalism”, I am prompted to comment that readers of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* need to be aware that some terms were changed from the mimeographed edition of 1944. Euphemisms were inserted such that: capitalism became “existing conditions”; capitalist bloodsuckers was changed to “knights of industry”; class society became “domination” or “order”; and, ruling class became “rulers” (see Wiggershaus, 1994: 410). There were other small changes to phrases and certain phrases that were omitted, in acts of self censorship, in the interests of maintaining the goodwill and support of the American authorities. The Institute for Social Research, in Germany, that was the home of the Frankfurt School scholars was closed in 1933, under the Nazi regime, for tendencies deemed hostile to the State. The Institute moved its home, temporarily, to Geneva and then to New York, becoming affiliated with Columbia University. The Institute did not return to Frankfurt until 1949.

5. Apart from illustrating how reason collapses into repressive and archaic forms, they also discover, in their contemplation of the “lessons,” the essence of why fascism could arise and gain a firm footing in a nation that seemed to embody the principles or doctrines of Enlightenment. Alford (1988: 107) incisively summarizes this discovery well, when he remarks: «As reason becomes an instrument of the cunning thinker, rather than an objective principle, it becomes solely a human attribute. But this attribute does little to make the individual more secure, because it cannot speak to his need for meaning and purpose, as objective reason once could. The result is an individual susceptible to mass movements that speak to his needs for security via unity with a greater power than himself. In times of economic and social crisis, such an isolated, powerless individual is all too likely to respond to a demagogue like Hitler, who panders to the most regressive narcissistic needs for fusion. This, too, is the dialectic of Enlightenment.»

epic already contains the appropriate theory. The cultural material is in exact correlation to work done according to command; and both are grounded in the inescapable compulsion to social domination of nature.

«Measures such as those taken on Odysseus’ ship in regard to the Sirens form presentiment allegory of the dialectic of enlightenment. Just as the capacity of representation is the measure of domination, and domination is the most powerful thing that can be represented in most performances, so the capacity of representation is the vehicle of progress and regression at one and the same time.» (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 34-35).

The parable exposes the archaic elements of the bourgeois, but also, as can be noted in the citation above, a linkage is made between these elements and a structure of domination. Again using the parable of the oarsmen Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) draw the analogy to the present when they assert:

«The over-maturity of society lives by the immaturity of the dominated. (...) The regression of the masses today is their inability to hear the unheard-of with their own ears, to touch the unapprehended with their own hands—the new form of delusion which deposes every conquered mythic form. (...) The oarsmen, who cannot speak to one another, are each of them yoked in the same rhythm as the modern worker in the factory, movie theater, and collective. The actual working conditions in society compel conformism—not the conscious influences which also made the suppressed men dumb and separated them from truth. The impotence of the worker is not merely a stratagem of the rulers, but the logical consequence of the industrial society into which the ancient Fate—in the very course of the effort to escape it—has finally changed. (...) Domination, ever since men settled down, and later in the commodity society, has become objectified as law and organization and must therefore restrict itself.» (1997: 36-37)

Adorno and Horkheimer go on to expose the structure of economic domination arguing that it is a form of commodity exchange. As we noted earlier, Odysseus used his cunning—instrumental reason, to turn sacrifice into a stratagem that was encased in a contract, which reason itself could undermine. Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 49) remark, that «if barter is the secular form of sacrifice, the latter already appears as the magical pattern of rational exchange, a device of men by which the gods may be mastered: the gods are overthrown by the very system by which they are honored.» By juxtaposing the archaic practice of sacrifice with the present commodity form called capitalism<sup>4</sup>, the irrationality of the latter becomes clear.

The Homeric parable of the oarsmen, is one that Adorno and Horkheimer view as containing important lessons for their present time<sup>5</sup>. Their reading of *The Odyssey*, like Foucault’s genealogies, is one which juxtaposes the past and present without glorifying or reifying either. The intention is to clearly reveal how risk taking, self-denial, repression and sublimation are archaic constituents in modernity. The reading of *The Odyssey*, and the parable of the oarsmen included, is an attempt to open up the present to analysis and to «free the present

moment from the power of the past» (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 32). Rocco (1994: 77-78) argues:

«The juxtaposition of the archaic past to the events of the present is not merely, as Habermas would have it, an undialectical attempt "to follow the (largely effaced) path that leads back to the origins of instrumental reason, so as to outdo the concept of objective reason". Nor is it an attempt to construe the process of rationalization as a negative philosophy of history. Rather, Horkheimer and Adorno seek to juxtapose an image of the past to our vision of civilized modernity in a way that would open up the present to critical assessment. They make the archaic appear meaningful in the light of the present, whereas the very newness and modernity of the present they reveal as significant in the light of the archaic. *The Dialectic [of Enlightenment]* juxtaposes the moments of a seemingly overcome past to the most barbaric, most irrational phenomena of the present in order to demythologize the present and the past's hold over it. Their juxtaposition of the archaic to the modern thus worked not to establish a historical origin for a noninstrumentalized reason but to criticize the present by undermining belief in the myth of history as progress. By juxtaposing the archaic to the modern they decenter our historical position of privilege (...).»

## ADDING TO HOMER

In that same sense of opening up the present to analysis, the parable appears to have led Adorno and Horkheimer to explicitly consider the issue of culture—an issue of importance for our reflections on Las Vegas. At one level, the reading of the parable was of how self seeks to dominate other and implicated in that process was how "art"<sup>6</sup> and manual labor became structurally divided. In a chapter entitled «The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception,» Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) developed this thesis further in the context of their contemporary era.

Adorno and Horkheimer, like Gramsci (1971), viewed capitalism as engendering a new form of domination. The power of the ruling classes was being reproduced through a form of ideological hegemony; it was established primarily through the rule of consent, and mediated via cultural institutions such as schools, the family, churches and mass media. It was in this context that Adorno and Horkheimer argued that culture, like everything else in capitalist society, had been transformed into an object. This objectification resulted in both the repression of the critical elements in its form and content, but also represented a negation of critical thought. As Adorno (1975: 13) was to remark:

«Culture in the sense, did not simply accommodate itself to human beings; (...) it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honoring them. Insofar as culture becomes wholly assimilated to and integrated into those petrified relations, human beings are once more debased.»

Culture had, metaphorically, become another industry producing commodities, which had little or no critical function. Adorno (1975: 14)

6. Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) often used the terms culture and art interchangeably but in other instances were more disciplined and used culture as a more generic term that includes art, music, film, etc. This is an important point as in their chapter on the culture industry when they refer to art they mean the arts more generally as in culture, yet they also single out the world of art, as in painting, as an example.

**7.** Bearing in mind the issue raised in a previous footnote (i.e., footnote 2), the language used in the crafting of this section of the paper is in keeping with the language used by Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) in their chapter on the culture industry. The resemblance to the terminology to that used by them in the telling of the parable is thus not a contrivance on my part, but a preservation of what I view as suggestive vocabulary that has a connection to the parable in their earlier chapter.

was to clarify that «the expression “industry” is not to be taken literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself—such as the Western, familiar to every moviegoer—and to the rationalization of distribution techniques [... and] not strictly to the production process.» To paraphrase Adorno in a number of his works (see also Held, 1995: 94; Rocco, 1994: 87), music, art, film were essentially, aimed at a passive, passionless and uncritical reception, which it induces through the production of “patterned and pre-digested” products. The images and messages that are commercially produced are largely mimetic of the broader socio-political relations. The criteria of merit for these products was perverted, according to Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 124), as it was judged by the amount of «conspicuous consumption.»

Positivist rationality, the manipulation and suppression of critical imagination, were embodied in the images and messages produced by the culture industry—an industry so reductionist that culture was mere amusement<sup>7</sup>. The structural division between work and “art” (read culture) was such that culture was to be the vehicle of escape from the boredom, drudgery and powerlessness inherent in mechanized work processes. Culture had, instead, become an extension of that same world of work. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 137):

«Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the same time mechanization has such power over a man’s leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardized operations.» (for a similar critique, see also Marcuse, 1955; 1964; 1968).

Nowhere was Adorno and Horkheimer’s criticism of the culture industry greater, and more illustrative, than in the realm of art. Scathing as to what art had become, Adorno and Horkheimer suggested that art had not simply been turned into a commodity but from the outset was conceived of as an item for sale to a market. In an idiom of style, art and advertising had merged as cultural products with perhaps the ultra-realism of Andy Warhol’s Campbell Soup painting saying it all (see Giroux, 1983: 21). Art had been robbed of its ability to suggest alternative possibilities to a world in which it now seemed to merely act as a mirror. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 158; see also Adorno, 1997: 139): «The principle of idealistic aesthetics—purposefulness without a purpose—reverses the scheme of things to which bourgeois art conforms socially: purposelessness for the purpose declared by the market.» As in the parable of the oarsmen, art had been neutralised into a mere object of contemplation.

The views of Adorno and Horkheimer on the matter of art and its critical function have to be seen within a context of how a number of the scholars of the Frankfurt School viewed art, for there was a significant degree of mutual influence within the School. The scholars I have in

mind here, in addition to Adorno and Horkheimer, are Marcuse and perhaps the lesser known work of the (equally brilliant) scholar Benjamin. In what might, at first glance, seem a slight digression, the work of these scholars as a collective gives us further depth of understanding as to the importance of art and to the central arguments being raised by Adorno and Horkheimer. A very brief pause to consider some aspects of the work of these scholars on art I believe is in order before we resume our discussion to illustrate how Adorno and Horkheimer's discourse on the culture industry might be useful in understanding Las Vegas.

## **ADDING BENJAMIN AND MARCUSE**

Walter Benjamin (1999b) suggested we all have a "mimetic faculty" (mimicry) responsible for producing and perceiving resemblance. While imitation maybe the ultimate form of flattery, and a basic behaviour through which we may learn new skills, etc., Benjamin (1999a: 698; 1999c: 720) also viewed it as one of our most irresistible impulses. Indeed, Benjamin, along with his fellow critical theorist Adorno, came to think of mimesis as an assimilation of self to other—a type of enactment behaviour (Adorno, 1997: 111; Benjamin, 1999c: 720; see also Nichol森, 1997: 147; Jay, 1997b: 32).

Benjamin (1999c: 720) notes that a child's play is «everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behaviour. (...) The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and a train.» Anyone listening to their adolescent offspring trying to sing along with whatever is the top of the hit parade, will soon discover it is not only a matter of getting the words right, you also have to get the right accent to sound like the original! Of course, this behaviour is not always reproduced in the same form, i.e., an aural phenomenon imitated aurally. For example, the child who moves through the house as though they were an aeroplane. Here a human being is seeking to imitate a non-human object. Some areas of this imitation, such as flying, are substituted with a behaviour that is in another form—in this case, running around the house with outstretched arms. Thus the similarity is not necessarily embodied in the same form. These brief examples cause us to consider, perhaps more deeply, the dimensions of mimesis—not only the issue of the success in producing a likeness, but the more general question, that of: «What is the nature of the link with otherness that is both presupposed and created by imitation?» (Nichol森, 1997: 138). The ability to produce but also perceive resemblance would appear to implicate some form of human mimetic faculty or capacity.

Mimesis and the mimetic faculty, for Benjamin (1999a: 695), in times long gone is different to that of today. In those earlier times, Benjamin points to interest in the cosmic order and divination as the medium through which the reading of correspondence was to occur. Today the system of signs takes the form of language, as Benjamin (1999a: 696-697) argues:

«Language now represents the medium in which objects encounter and come into relation with one another. No longer directly, as they once did in the mind of the augur or priest, but in their essences, in their most transient and delicate substances, even in their aromas. In other words: it is to script and language that clairvoyance has, over the course of history, yielded its old powers.»

It was the process of producing similarities rather than the object of the similarity that was important for Benjamin (see NicholSEN, 1997: 140)—important, in as much as the mimetic faculty could be noted to exist throughout the course of history. NicholSEN (1997) makes the profound connection of mimesis and self and other, which she notes in the work of Benjamin, and argues: «Language, in short, can mediate the mimetic assimilation of self to other. Words mediate the loss of self as a loss of one's own image, figure, or face. Words could make him like things, Benjamin says, but "never like my own image;" the child is "disfigured by likeness" to everything that surrounds him» (1997: 143).

Adorno (1997) agreed with these sentiments but suggested that, rather than language, it was art that had become the emergent form of the mimetic impulse. He did, however, suggest that art had a non-conceptual but language-like character (enigma) which incited philosophical reflection. For Adorno (1997) a work of art actually induced mimetic behaviour in the viewer (or listener, in the case where he uses the term art in its broader sense to include music, film etc.). NicholSEN (1997: 149-150) summarizes his position here well<sup>8</sup> when she says:

«The work itself is analogous to a musical score. The recipient—listener, viewer, reader—follows along or mimes the internal trajectories of the work at hand, tracing its internal articulations down the finest nuance. (...) the act of aesthetic understanding is an act whereby the self is assimilated to the other; the subject virtually embodies, in a quasi-sensuous mode, the work, which is other.

«It is the enigmatic face of the work of art, the enigmatic gaze it directs at us, that incites this philosophical reflection. (...) First of all, the work is enigmatic because it is mimetic rather than conceptual. Being non-conceptual, it cannot be unenigmatic, because it cannot have a discursive meaning. Further, it is enigmatic because it lost its purpose when the mimetic migrated from ritual into art; art has become, in Kant's phrase, purposive but without purpose. As Adorno says, art cannot answer the question, "What are you for?"

«The enigmatic quality implies otherness as well as affinity. It requires distance is if it is to be perceived. The experiential understanding of art that is gained through mimetic assimilation to the work does not have this kind of distance. It is trapped inside the work, so to speak, and accordingly cannot do justice to it.» (see also Adorno, 1997: 119-131).

For Adorno, all autonomously generated artworks are enigmas in as much as they have a capacity to sustain this discrepancy between projected images and their actuality. Carrying similarity yet difference at the same time: «Artworks say something and in the same breath conceal it» (Adorno, 1997: 120; see also Held, 1995: 82, 83, 88-89). At

**8.** It is noteworthy that very few commentators on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* have attempted to come to terms with his concept of enigma, and, indeed, how it is related to mimesis. NicholSEN is an exception, but she does not pursue the logical conclusion of projecting Adorno's argument further. If mimesis is enactment behaviour in which self seeks assimilation to other, then enigma would seem to represent an other to other. Thinking about this more laterally, the dialectical assimilation of self to other and other to self (see Carr and Zanetti, 1999) would in the same process appear to "create," as an artifact of that process, an other that remained unassimilated—unassimilated as it represented a quality, or in NicholSEN's words "being nonconceptual".

one point Adorno (1997: 54) added to this dynamic and argued that «the survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as "rational"». Art overcomes the constraining and unreflective nature of rationality through this very act of expression of non-identity with itself. It was in these dynamics that art carried its critical perspective. It was also the decline in this autonomous art that Adorno saw as the flip-side of the rise of the culture industry.

The capacity of the arts to resist assimilation was a view shared by many of the scholars of the Frankfurt School. Benjamin and Marcuse saw in surrealism an instance within the arts to further rescue its critical dimension from assimilation and positivist rationality. While it could be said that Adorno was hesitant toward embracing the work of the surrealists,<sup>9</sup> Benjamin and Marcuse found that this body of work engendered an opportunity to see the world anew. The variety of techniques developed by the surrealists in writing, poetry, painting, theatre and film were intended to inspire new associations and overthrow the usual linear correspondence of objects and "logical"/familiar associations. The paintings by de Chirico during 1911-1917 which inspired some of the early work of the surrealists, and prefaced the formal declaration of surrealism by Breton in 1924 (see Breton, 1969), was work that echoed the founding philosophy of surrealism. De Chirico, like some of the "officially" declared surrealist painters that followed, e.g., Magritte, Dali, Delvaux, and Toyen, questioned the familiar identity of objects by faithfully reproducing them but placing them in unfamiliar settings and using such unfamiliar associations to produce a kind of poetic strangeness. The shock of the juxtaposition of objects in unfamiliar association elicited unforeseen affinities between objects and, perhaps, unexpected emotion and sensations in the observer. As Breton more generally observed: «the external object had broken with its customary surroundings, its component parts were somehow emancipated from the object in such a way as to set up entirely new relationships with other elements, escaping from the principle of reality while still drawing upon the real plane (*and overthrowing the idea of correspondence*)» (1965: 83, italics is added emphasis<sup>10</sup>).

Marcuse and Benjamin both viewed surrealism as producing a discomfort, turmoil, shock and/or emotional disturbance, in short, borrowing from Bertolt Brecht, an "estrangement-effect". Citing the words of Brecht, Marcuse (1964: 67) explains the effect in the following manner:

«To teach what the contemporary world really is behind the ideological and material veil, and how it can be changed, the theater must break the spectator's identification with the events on the stage. Not empathy and feeling, but distance and reflection are required. The "estrangement-effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*) is to produce this dissociation in which the world can be recognised as what it is. "The things of everyday life are lifted out of the realm of the self-evident... That which is 'natural' must assume the features of the extraordinary. Only in this manner can the laws of cause and effect reveal themselves" (Brecht, 1957).»

**9.** Wolin (1997) comes to this conclusion about Adorno's position on surrealism. I concur with this view. Adorno seemed to think surrealists fetishize certain object and representations, producing a form of reification. The production of such images was carried out with little awareness of the mediated nature of their production. The whole work, in his view, is programmatic and becomes one imbued with rationality with the sole intention to shock and provoke. The problem I see in this position is that Adorno has failed to distinguish between the different "techniques" used by the surrealists and he appears less than sensitive to the different form that surrealism may have to take in different arts. This said, Adorno was sympathetic to montage and in his last major work, *Aesthetic Theory* (1997), surprisingly praised the surrealists for the ability to produce the "shock effect" and in so doing defetishize and help disarm everyday rationality (see also commentaries by Agger, 1992: 228; Held, 1995: 104-105; Jay, 1997a: 129-131).

**10.** See Carr and Zanetti (1998; 2000) for a much larger discussion of surrealism and the connection with the work of the critical theorists Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse, and, also, the parallels with aspects of the work of post modernists/post structuralists.

**11.** Hegel argued that dialectical thought begins with a “thesis,” any definable reality that is the starting point from which all further development proceeds. As reflection progresses, this thesis is seen to encompass its opposite, or “antithesis,” *as part of its very definition*. The triadic structure of Hegelian thought is not simply a series of building blocks. Each triad represents a process wherein the synthesis absorbs and completes the two prior terms, following which the entire triad is absorbed into the next higher process. Hegel himself preferred to refer to the dialectic as a system of negations, rather than triads. His purpose was to overcome the static nature of traditional philosophy and capture the dynamics of reflective thought. The essence of the dialectic is the ability to see wholes and the conflict of parts simultaneously.

Marcuse (1964: 67) further argued, using literature as a specific example, that the estrangement-effect «is not superimposed on literature. It is rather literature’s own answer to the threat of total behaviourism—the attempt to rescue the rationality of the negative». Amongst other things, for Marcuse, the estrangement-effect was part of a “great refusal” to one-dimensionality.

Both Benjamin and Marcuse saw an affinity between the production of the estrangement-effect and the mode of critical thought championed by the Frankfurt School scholars, i.e., dialectics. This affinity was such that Benjamin (1997) argued that surrealism needed to be perceived dialectically in order to appreciate its purpose and contribution and, in particular, to understand that «we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a *dialectical optic* that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday» (1997: 237, italics is added emphasis). The dialectic optic is used in its Hegelian sense<sup>11</sup>. The estrangement that comes from contradiction, paradox and irony are the necessary reflective opportunities in which juxtaposition aids dialectical self-consciousness. For Benjamin and Marcuse, the surrealist movement and the estrangement-effect become an artistic-political reflective device only to the extent that the estrangement can be maintained «to produce the shock which may bare the true relationship between the two worlds and languages: the one being the positive negation of the other» (Marcuse, 1993: 187). Marcuse warns that, in the past, intellectual oppositions to the mainstream became impotent and ineffective because the estrangement-effect was, in effect, disarmed by the assimilating mechanisms of the prevailing order. He argues in *Aragon*, for example:

«The avant-gardistic negation was not negative enough. The destruction of all content was itself not destroyed. The formless form was kept intact, aloof from the universal contamination. The form itself was stabilized as a new content, and thus came to share the fate of all contents: it was absorbed by the market» (Marcuse, 1993: 182).

Thus the estrangement-effect can only be maintained to the extent that it continues to reveal the prevailing order in its opposition and (simultaneously) the opposition in the prevailing order—that is, to the extent that it maintains a dialectical tension. The opposition between antagonistic spheres is a dynamic conceived as the mediation of one through the other (see Adorno, 1997: 44-45). This, of course, is the dialectic optic that Benjamin argued was crucial to the understanding of surrealism. Adorno (1997: 44) was to remark, more generally, that art could not be reduced to «the unquestionable polarity of the mimetic and the constructive, as if this were an invariant formula [but what] was fruitful in modern art was what gravitated toward one of the extremes, not what sought to mediate between the two». This line of thought leads Adorno to make a more general point about dialectics, when he states that «the dialectic of these elements is similar to dialectical logic, in that *each pole realizes itself only in the other, and not in some middle ground*» (1997: 44, italics is added emphasis).

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, although not adopting these words, it was the dialectic tension and the maintenance of some estrangement that Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) had concern for in the face of the culture industry. They despaired at how the culture industry had assimilated the arts into a world of advertising and kitsch<sup>12</sup> and in this process of objectification had repressed (neutralized) art's critical function. The work of Benjamin and Marcuse gives us a deeper understanding of these dynamics. Most recently Jameson (1996) has examined Adorno and Horkheimer's rendering of the parable of the oarsmen and discerned a somewhat more subtle distinction as to the forms of art both in this joint work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and in Adorno's subsequent and last publication *Aesthetic Theory*. By way of supplementing the much broader commentary thus far, perhaps the insertion of a "Post-it note" on Jameson's additional insight on these forms of art is in order.

## ADDING A "POST-IT NOTE" ON JAMESON

In one-third of a volume entitled *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (1996), Jameson examines Adorno and Horkheimer's view of Homer's parable of the oarsmen and, indeed, how Adorno's book *Aesthetic Theory* helps to clarify how art is being conceived. Jameson (1996: 128) suggests that Adorno's thinking, in particular, «takes place on two distinct axes, which often intersect, but cannot be combined or conflated». Jameson believes Adorno is making a distinction «between "art" in general and the experience of individual works» (1996: 128). What is then teased-out, by Jameson, is not just one "opposite" to art but in fact two oppositional terms—anti-art (in the form of the culture industry) and non-art (as in being excluded, as was the case with the oarsmen), «which do not quite overlap conceptually» (1996: 151). However, Jameson believes there is another position on art which is the negation of all of the other positions. This position on art is that of the philistines which is a position Jameson (1996: 151-152) finds can be «identified allegorically as a character in Adorno's deeper ideological and phantasmatic narrative». The allegorical reference is to the final chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on the matter of anti-Semitism.

In using the word "philistine" Jameson (1996) is not using it in the sense «to be grasped in terms of categories of taste; their project is a more active one, and their refusal is a gesture that has a social meaning which ultimately transcends the matter of art itself and the more limited sphere of the aesthetic» (1996: 152). It is not that this group does not understand art, quite the contrary they understand it all too well. They understand that art offers alternative conceptions of the world—a world that has a social order that is less «deformed» (1996: 154) by class. Cultural envy is but one transcendent expression of this position.

Thus to summarise Jameson (1996), he suggests (derived from the work of Adorno) there are in fact three positions «that come into being

**12.** For some, the position that these scholars are expressing on art and its function could be seen as elitist, simply just one point of view, a personal preference, or merely an expression of taste. I think the key point here is, however, that Adorno and Horkheimer have identified that art appeared to have a critical function which has been surrendered or lost in the context of the rise of a culture industry. It is the analysis of this loss that is the focus and as such is beyond the realm of simply a matter of taste (see also Jameson, 1991: 298-289 for a parallel argument on postmodernism). The issue of kitsch was a significant matter for some scholars of the Frankfurt School. Adorno and Benjamin were very careful in their interpretation of kitsch. Adorno (1997), in terminology reminiscent of his analysis of the oarsmen, argued: «Kitsch is not, as those believers in erudite culture would like to imagine the mere refuse of art, originating in disloyal accommodation to the enemy; rather it lurks in art, awaiting ever recurring opportunities to spring forth. Although kitsch escapes, implike, from even a historical definition, one of its most tenacious characteristics is the prevarication of feelings, fictional feelings in which no one is actually participating, and thus the *neutralization* of these feelings. Kitsch parodies catharsis. Ambitious art, however, produces the same fiction of feelings; indeed, this was essential to it: The documentation of actually existing feelings, the recapitulation of psychological raw material, is foreign to it. It is in vain to try to draw the boundaries abstractly between aesthetic fiction and kitsch's emotional plunder. It is poison admixed to all art; excising it is today one of art's despairing efforts.» (1997: 239, italics is added emphasis). Benjamin (1999b: 4-5), in the context of discussing surrealism, refers to kitsch in the following manner: «Picture puzzles, as schemata of the dreamwork, were long ago discovered by psychoanalysis. The Surrealists, with a similar conviction, are less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things. They seek the totemic tree of objects within the thicket of primal history. The very last, the topmost face of the totem pole, is that of kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, the one with which we adorn ourselves, in dream and conversation, so as to take in the energies of an outlived world of things. What we used to call art begins at a distance of two meters from the body. But now, in kitsch, the world of things advances on the human being; it yields to his uncertain grasp and ultimately fashions its figures in his interior. The new man bears within himself the very quintessence of the old forms, and what evolves in the confrontation with a particular milieu from the second half of the nineteenth century—in the dreams, as well as the words and images, of certain artists—is a creature who deserves the name of "furnished man".»

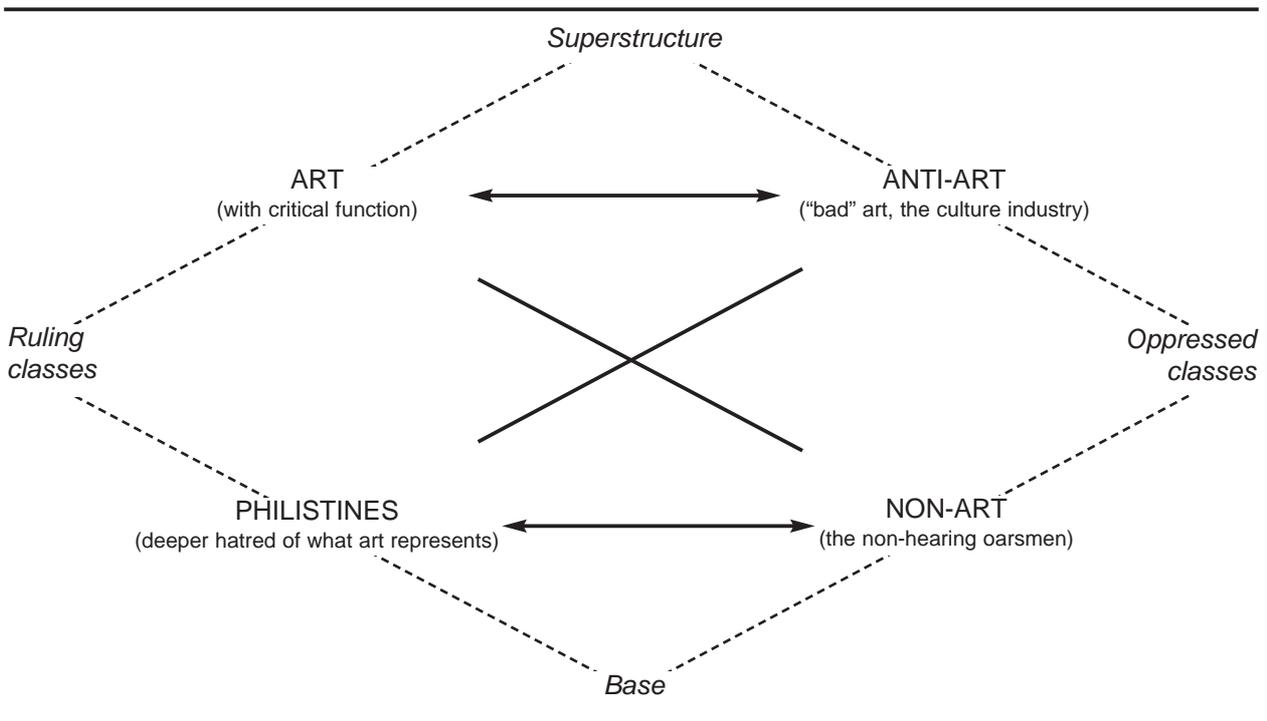
over against art» (1996: 152): those, like the oarsmen, who are deprived of their very sense organs to appreciate culture, whether it be commercial or authentic, and are initially excluded (non-art); those, like the public of the culture industry, who passively consume mass culture in place of what they have been excluded from (anti-art); and, those, like Odysseus who are all too aware of art and its deeper meaning, but however, unlike Odysseus, resent it (philistines). The variety of positions that Jameson discerns and the manner in which they relate to the broader social structure are shown in **Figure 1**.

Having added this “post-it note” to our pages on the Frankfurt scholars’ views on the matter of art and its critical function, I would suggest the work of these scholars provides us with a valuable optic through which we can view, and perhaps more deeply understand, Las Vegas and what Las Vegas represents. It is to Las Vegas that I now wish to turn our attention.

### THE “IMAGO” LAS VEGAS

The term “imago” is one used in the psychoanalytic arena as meaning an idealized image that has become an acquired but unconscious representation (see Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988). Living in Australia, the

**Figure 1.** The Location of “Art”



Adapted from Jameson (1996: 151, 154)

image of Las Vegas that I have acquired initially came vicariously, i.e., through the various written and visual media rather than first hand experience of it. Las Vegas and Los Angeles are the "fun" places to be in the States. Las Vegas, or, more in line with the media shorthand—"Vegas" was the place to be to win your fortune at the roulette tables all the while being entertained, often for "free," by the world's top popular entertainers. Actually, Frank Sinatra, Trini Lopez, Wayne Newton, Barbara Streisand, Tom Jones and alike are part of the lure to get you into the Casino in the first place. It is at this point in the paper, that I thought it would be useful to check my memory of what I understood to be "Las Vegas." I "surfed the net" and came upon the Lonely Planet's description of Las Vegas with a brief history of the place. They informed me that:

«The only natural feature to account for the location of Las Vegas is a spring north of downtown. Once used by Paiute Indians on their seasonal visits to the area, it was re-discovered by Mexican scout Rafael Rivera in 1829. The area became known to overland travelers as las vegas—"the meadow"—a place with reliable water and feed for horses. (...)

«In 1931, Nevada legalized gambling and simplified its divorce laws, paving the way for the first big casino on the strip, El Rancho, which was built by Los Angeles developers and opened in 1941. The next wave of investors, also from out of town, were mobsters, like Bugsy Siegel, who built the Flamingo in 1946 and set the tone for the new casinos—big and flashy, with lavish entertainment laid on to attract high rollers.

«The glitter that brought in the high rollers also attracted smaller spenders, but in large numbers. Southern California provided a growing market for Las Vegas entertainment, and improvements in transport made it accessible to the rest of the country. Thanks to air conditioning and reliable water supplies, Vegas became one of the most popular tourist destinations. In recent years, Vegas has bent over backwards to remake itself into a family resort destination, building theme parks inside its hotels. Hotels have outdone each other with working volcanoes, million-gallon fishtanks and miniature Manhattans.» (Lonely Planet, 1999).

The sweet songs of the Sirens may have been replaced by the alluring tones of popular entertainers but, the song of the Sirens has also taken the form of the sound of poker machines and the barrage of aural stimulation associated with winning and the announcement of jackpot winners. The urge, so akin to an Odyssean approach to temptation, to defy the odds and emerge triumphant with money in hand. Being able to enjoy the entertainment of it *all* is a temptation not to be resisted («it is impossible to hear the Sirens and not succumb to them», Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 59), but it is a temptation to be mastered through cunning. Earlier we noted that «cunning (...) is defiance in a rational form» (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 59). One can allow oneself the fun of it all, and even to be mesmerized by the spectacle, but at the same time, still sufficiently aware that this is a spectacle that has the intent to seduce one to spending more money than one

had intended. Of course, there are those who cannot resist the “song” and are fatally drawn to the allurements.

Odysseus, aware of the laws of probability, might have a system to succeed on the roulette tables. On the card tables, he might just be The Gambler that Kenny Rogers sings about advising, «Son I made a life out of reading people’s faces, knowing what the cards were by the way they held their eyes.» Kenny then sings the chorus, «you got to know when to hold em, know when to fold em, know when to walk away, know when to run» (D. Schlitz, ASCAP—Writers Night Music). The risks for Odysseus and other captains of industry and commerce are, however, not the same as for the “smaller spenders”. Odysseus and the captains of industry are already wealthy, and can afford the risk of losing money—it’s not really “theirs.” It is money that represents the extracted profit of the labor of others. The ropes that bound Odysseus to the mast, that Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 34) observed have «irremediably tied himself to practice,» have their parallel in an economic system that binds the collective fate of worker and owner—a yoke created by a superstructure which will continue to hold them in a relationship that safeguards and yields a differentially greater benefit to the “captains.” For example, recently, Kerry Packer lost AUD \$30 million at one sitting at the gaming tables, but the structure of his empire continues to extract profits giving him access to tax havens<sup>13</sup> (access to institutionalised cunning, i.e. tax lawyers) and alike, ensuring that he can indulge in the song of the Sirens like few others.

**13.** The President of the National Tax and Accountants Association of Australia issued a media release on the 14th October 1998 that announced that Kerry Packer paid AUD \$2.87 in tax in 1990-91 and AUD \$21.12 in 1992-93—this at a time of being Australia’s richest person. The Federal Court in Australia also ruled on the 14th October that Packer’s privately-held company Consolidated Press Holdings was to pay only AUD \$25,000 in tax instead of AUD \$100 million that the Australian Taxation Office assessed was owed. Packer’s challenge to the assessments by the tax office related to the years 1990 and 1991 and the judgement in his favour saw law experts around the country declaring that the court had helped Packer flout Australia’s tax laws (see <http://www.ntaa.com.au/10kerpac.htm>).

Those that respond to the allurements of the sounds of the Sirens and visit the gaming houses may also see around them the pile of «mouldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon the bones» (Homer, 1991: 12. 40-46). Those who became addicted to gambling, loiter with intent—more concerned for their habit than their own general welfare or the welfare of loved ones. They have moved from “chasing” the money they’ve lost to the next phase, gambling on credit and future earnings—the power of the allurements of the Sirens rob them of their future. Then there are the “skeletons” that are less visible: the increased crime rate; white collar crime that can be attributed to a gambling problem; the bribery and corruption of politicians and public officials; the increased domestic violence and relationship stress; the escaping behaviours to other excesses (alcohol, drugs, sleep); and, the decline in work performance of the gambler.

It was noted in the citation from the Lonely Planet that «in recent years, Vegas has bent over backwards to remake itself into a family resort destination.» A recent visit to Vegas suggests that the discontinuity with the past is really superficial. On route, I was in Los Angeles airport and overheard an irate traveler complaining to a desk attendant about missing a connecting flight to St Louis. The attendant told the traveler that unfortunately there were no seats left on direct flights. The attendant then made the suggestion that he could get a flight via Las Vegas «as they fly people from around the country for the gambling and entertainment. There are lots of flights to that destination as they

want to cater for the folks who just want to fly there for the day.» Talk about an industry! As we came into land in Vegas, I was momentarily disoriented. Was that a pyramid and the Sphinx I could see through my tiny porthole? I was later to learn this was the Luxor Hotel and casino. I am sure Adorno would be asking why make a pyramid and the Sphinx the objects for mimesis? That fundamental question that was posed in the theoretical framework seems to present itself, i.e., «What is the nature of the link with otherness that is both presupposed and created by the imitation?» It is a question that suggested itself as one did the tourist thing and explored the compact downtown areas called Glitter Gulch and the Strip.

Glitter Gulch is an area downtown that mostly houses some famous casinos, such as the Golden Nugget and the Golden Spike, and strip clubs<sup>14</sup>. The Strip is the area where one finds the most visible evidence of Vegas trying to remake itself as a family destination. The overpowering first impression is one that this city is a "remake" for visual consumption—a world of mimesis and enigma. Of course, commercial buildings like hotels, represent spaces, or places, for consumption but the fantasy-theme-architecture of this area is about attracting your attention to visit. In a sense the fantasy buildings have become cultural monuments to be visited in their own right and, at the same time, the monument is the place for consumption. An interesting duality. A duality that Horkheimer and Adorno had not envisaged but one that is consistent with their idea of the dynamics of the products of a culture industry. In this context I might suggest that the streetscape be probably more appropriately called a fantascape. I will return to this point presently but for those unfamiliar with this "new" Vegas let me describe some of the buildings in a little more detail.

The building that I saw when approaching Vegas, the Luxor, is a hotel and casino that alludes to an image of ancient Egypt. Built at a cost of USD \$375 million, this black glass 36-story pyramid has a 10-story replica of the Sphinx as its entrance. Inside there are some 4,476 rooms and a casino that occupies 120,000 square feet of floor space. The Egyptian and ancient civilization theme is carried through in some parts of the building. There is, for example, a simulator to give visitors the illusion that they are descending 1,000 feet below the surface of the earth to an archeological dig. There is museum and a reproduction of King Tutankhamun's tomb. The Luxor web site describes this feature informing us that: «The measurements of each of the rooms are exact. The treasures were reproduced using the same gold leaf and linens, precious pigments, tools and original 3,300-year-old methods.» Elsewhere, restaurants and bars bear the names: Nefertiti; Isis; Ra; Papyrus; and the Sacred Sea Room—the latter has murals and hieroglyphic reproductions adorning the walls and there is a blue ceiling mosaic to give an illusion that you are dining at sea.

The Luxor also houses an IMAX-3D theatre that has a 7-story high screen and some 30,000 watts of sound. There is also "VirtualLand" (virtual reality as the new form of "gaze") where you engage in a car racing game on a 14-by-50 foot "screen" with "individual motion-based race cars".

**14.** As noted in the introduction to this paper I have tended to focus on the newer aspects of Las Vegas and the attempts to remake itself. One can, however, develop some other parallel readings of the parable of the oarsmen that are not necessarily contradictory to the reading in this paper. For example, a discussion on this matter with a fellow critical thinker, Lisa Zanetti of the University of Columbia-Missouri, suggests a gender-related interpretation. One could read Odysseus is trying to having it all—the seductive pleasures of the narcotic intoxication without self-destruction. One might read this as a patriarchal tale where males are fearful of self-destruction from feminine lures. Giving in to the song of the Sirens would be to lose the maleness character of control. Thus the domination that Adorno and Horkheimer identified was not just one associated with capitalism, but also one that is associated with a male fear of female sexuality and having to, perhaps, lose control. In this context, using the terminology of Adorno and Horkheimer, the strip clubs could be read as an example of eroticism being neutralized—being merely objects of contemplation in the web of capitalism. Some of these strip clubs are well known as also being fronts for prostitution. In venturing into a strip club the social control in being in the company of others, forms of morality etc., may hold Odysseus from succumbing—and being an active participant rather than mere observer. The sound of the sirens in this case may be a call or prelude to responding and giving into for what, for some, becomes an irresistible impulse for sexual gratification. This said, moving from observing a strip show to paying for a prostitute becomes more complex in terms of applying the parable. For example the customer (usually male) may still feel a fair degree of control and detachment in the way the service is transacted i.e. payment, agreeing conditions and timeframe. Nonetheless, it is an allurements which is intoxicating the customer into the transaction and at this point relinquishing control.

The Luxor is typical of a number of the buildings on the Strip. The intention is to give the tourist an escape from the world of work and the everyday, and transport them to another realm—a realm of fantasy. The schism between work and pleasure, that Adorno and Horkheimer identified in their analysis of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens, is on show in Vegas. The visual consumption that is on offer here is tantamount to a commercialization of common fantasies. A product is offered for consumption, which seeks to almost overwhelm the senses in both the real and virtual objects/experiences that it provides to the consumer. The product is something inaccessible to the real everyday world of the consumer and has a kind of hyper-real (or ultra-real) quality that is designed to elicit amazement and large emotions. The arts that are on "display" here are not those with critical function, they are amusement goods and, in the language of Adorno—noted in earlier in this paper, aimed at capturing attention but inducing passive and uncritical reception. These are patterned and pre-digested products of common fantasies. To resonate, they must have the appropriate (i.e., predictable) "players" and "scripts" and must not contradict the consumers' expectations. The mimesis presupposes the elements of this otherness called fantasy.

The comments about fantasy and what the mimesis presupposes, are comments that are also relevant to many of the theme parks and playground ensembles that we find in and around hotel complexes in Vegas. The continuities with childhood fantasy abound. Some of the buildings, however, have a very overt relation to consumption. In what must be one of the biggest "exclamation marks" to the Adorno notion that art has merged with advertising as cultural products, imagine a building in the shape of the largest Coca-Cola bottle in the world and in it you are invited to recall associations in your own life with the product, Coke. Such is the case in Vegas and these associations may then be retold and become part of Digital Storytelling Theater. We find consumption of a slightly different kind in the hotel called the Mirage, which is also on the Strip. Outside the Mirage a fake volcano erupts every half hour, belching smoke and fire, while 54 artificial waterfalls help to complete the orchestra of sound. Once you make your way through the mini tropical rainforest and are in the building at the check-in counter, your attention cannot help but be attracted to what the Lonely Planet (1999) describes as the «bête noire of water conservationists»: a 20 metre long aquarium with over 1,000 fish which uses over one million gallons of water a day. In the context of Nevada being a relatively dry State, this seems an act of conspicuous consumption!

One could go on with further examples that appear to "fit" the critical framework developed earlier in the paper. Clearly aspects of Las Vegas might be read through the framework, but the glitz, glitter and newness of the present does appear all the more meaningful in the light of the archaic. This juxtaposition affords us an opportunity to see ourselves in spite of ourselves, or as we noted earlier, to be decentered from our historical position of privilege—not a bad starting place for deconstruction?

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