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# The Modern Las Vegas Casino-Hotel: The Paradigmatic New Means of Consumption

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This essay argues that the Las Vegas Casino-hotel is a paradigm for the new means of consumption. The new means of consumption are designed to attract and service large numbers of customers by rationalizing their operations while enchanting their setting. Casino-hotels create a spectacular environment usually by simulating well-known attractions from the past, present, or imagined future. Further, they implode boundaries between gambling, shopping, travel and entertainment thereby making it possible for gamblers to bring their families, to reduce the regrets associated with excessive gambling by normalizing it, and to increase expenditures on things that are peripheral to gambling. The casino-hotels also manipulate time and space to create settings in which time seems not to matter and spatial boundaries to consumption are eliminated. Last, through the "comp" system they create incentives for those who frequently gamble large sums of money. As a result, the Las Vegas casino-hotel increases the likelihood that guests will spend more than is prudent.

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Over the past decade, the senior author of this essay has written a trilogy of books on structures (fast food restaurants, credit cards, means of consumption) that have facilitated the expansion of contemporary consumption and consumer culture. A recurring issue associated with this work has been the identification of the paradigms for each of these structures. In the case of the fast food restaurant, and more generally the McDonaldization of society, it is clear that McDonald's is that paradigm (Ritzer, 2000; see also, Ritzer, 1998). Similarly, a strong case can be made that Visa is the paradigmatic credit card company (Ritzer, 1995). But the paradigm for the "new means of consumption" (or the "cathedrals of consumption") is less clear (Ritzer 1999). Strong cases can be made for the fully enclosed shopping mall, the megamall (e.g. Minneapolis's Mall of America), the superstore (e.g., Toys R Us), the cruise ship, and the theme park (e.g., Disney World). It is the thesis of this essay, however, that the strongest case can be made for the Las Vegas casino-hotel as the paradigmatic cathedral of consumption.

What makes for paradigmatic status? For one thing, the paradigm must be among the earliest of its kind, though it need not be the first. While several fast food chains (e.g., Dairy Queen) preceded McDonald's, some by several decades, the founding of the McDonald's chain in 1955 was a decisive early moment in the development of fast food

restaurants and McDonaldized consumer culture. Similarly, Visa had predecessors (Diners Club began issuing cards in early 1950), but it was the founding of BankAmericard (which later became Visa) in 1958 that was key to the massive expansion of universal credit cards. The new means of consumption emerged with the consumer boom after the end of WWII. By 1946, the very first modern Las Vegas casino, the Flamingo Hotel, opened its doors. Although there were less elaborate casinos in Las Vegas and stylish, even spectacular, casinos in Monte Carlo (and elsewhere) before this time, the Flamingo initiated the development of the modern hotel-casino.

A paradigm should also serve as a model for subsequent structures. McDonald's quickly became, and still is, the model not only for all fast food chains, but also franchises of all types. As, by far, the most successful universal credit card, Visa has been copied by its competitors in many different ways (for example, American Express developed its own universal card, Optima, to compete more directly with Visa). The "themed" Flamingo served as the model for many of today's lavish Las Vegas casinos, the growing number of casinos around the world, and other new means of consumption.

Finally, a paradigm is also a model for the process undergirding a structure. For example, McDonald's is the proximate source of the process of McDonaldization that is at the base of the success of the fast food restaurant. This process is characterized by increasing efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through the replacement of human with non-human technology. The McDonald's chain has clearly taken the lead in the process of McDonaldization, as well as in each of these sub-processes. Similarly, the processes that characterize the credit card industry—increasing consumer debt, fraud, invasion of privacy, and rationalization—are best exemplified by Visa. As we will see below, the Flamingo and, more generally, the Las Vegas casinos that followed in its wake are the best examples of the processes that characterize the new means of consumption—rationalization, disenchantment, re-enchantment, spectacularization, simulation, implosion, and manipulations of time and space.

Given this general background, let us turn first to an explanation of the idea of new means/cathedrals of consumption and then to the argument that the Las Vegas casino-hotel is paradigmatic of this structure.

## **THEORETICAL BACKDROP**

*Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Ritzer, 1999) introduced the interchangeable concepts of the means of consumption and the cathedrals of consumption. Both concepts relate to the settings in which people consume but the former is derived from the spirit of Marxian social theory while the latter places an emphasis on the Weberian aspects of consumption settings. The notion of means of consumption makes it clear that these settings make consumption, indeed many different types of consumption, possible, while the idea of cathedrals of consumption suggests that these

settings are both rationalized and enchanted. Rationalization serves to expedite consumption, while enchantment lures consumers to these sites. Consumer settings have been in existence for centuries, but the concern in *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, and here, is with the “new” means of consumption—those that came into existence in the United States after the close of WW II. After we offer more of the theoretical background to this issue, we will turn to the casino-hotel and demonstrate how well it fits the idea of new means/cathedrals of consumption, as well as the basic processes associated with these settings.

Although the term “means of consumption” is derived from his work, Karl Marx is far better known for the superficially parallel concept of the means of production. By the latter, Marx meant those things (e.g., tools, raw materials, factories) that made production possible and made it necessary for laborers to work for capitalists. Given the structure of capitalism, the fact that the capitalists owned the means of production also made it convenient to exploit workers. To be allowed access to the means of production, workers had to sell their labor time to the capitalists. When workers sell their labor, capitalists exploit them by paying less than the value of what they produce. In Marx’s labor theory of value, the value of any commodity is traceable to labor. This means that paying workers anything less than the full value of what they produce amounts to exploitation. In fact, workers are paid far less—a subsistence wage—than the value of their production and the remainder goes to the undeserving capitalist.

Marx also uses the concept of the means of consumption and it is reasonable to expect him to employ it in a way that is consistent with his idea of the means of production. Yet Marx defines the means of consumption as commodities and differentiates between the luxury means of consumption (e.g., fine mansions) and the necessary means of consumption (e.g., basic foodstuffs needed to survive). The conceptual problem here is that commodities and the means of consumption mean exactly the same thing to Marx. We know, however, that the things we consume are not the same as the settings in which they are consumed.

Hence we need to deviate from Marx to define the means of consumption. The roots of an alternative and parallel definition of the means of consumption can be found in the concept of the means of production. The means of production occupy an intermediate position between workers and products; we need a sense of the means of consumption that occupy a similarly intermediate position between consumers and commodities. Thus, the means of consumption can be defined as those things, especially settings, that allow consumers access to commodities; they allow consumers to consume.

As with Marx’s ideas about production, a key issue is whether the means of consumption are employed to exploit consumers in the same way that the means of production are used to exploit workers. It could be argued that the means of consumption lead consumers into hyper-consumption: buying more than they intend, paying more than they should (to help pay for the cathedrals of consumption and to increase

profit margins), spending more than they can afford, going deeply into debt, and so on. While there is certainly exploitation taking place, is it the same as the exploitation of the worker through the means of production?

It is difficult to argue that consumers are exploited in the same sense that workers are exploited. Owners of the means of consumption do not have the same coercive power over consumers that owners of the means of production have over workers. Consumers are free not to use a particular means of consumption or to avoid means of consumption altogether. It is worth pointing out, however, that if consumers want goods and services, it is hard to avoid a means of consumption. More specifically, they increasingly must use one of the new means of consumption since these are driving out most of the alternatives, including the older means of consumption (e.g., independent groceries, diners, cafes [Oldenburg 1989; Nasaw, 1993]).

Picking up on more recent developments in Marxian theory (e.g., Braverman, 1974), it is more plausible to argue that the key issue in both today's means of production and means of consumption is control rather than exploitation. Just as today's means of production (actually those who lead and work in them) seek to gain control over workers, the means of consumption seek to control consumers. Both production and consumption settings are set up to get people to behave in the desired ways. However, the means of production can still rely on "hard" measures of control (e.g., reprimands, suspension, firing), while such measures are not available to those who control the means of consumption. Instead, consumer settings must rely on "soft" methods of control such as structuring settings in such a way that consumers unconsciously behave in ways that are in the best interests of those who control and profit from the means of consumption. Thus, while the means of consumption may not exploit people in the same way as the means of production, they control people in a similar way.

How do the means of consumption control consumers? It is here that the notion of the cathedrals of consumption comes into play. There are two defining characteristics of any type of cathedral—rationalization and enchantment. These two concepts move us away from Marxian theory and in the direction of Weberian theory.

In saying that the cathedrals of consumption are rationalized we are saying, in Weberian terms, that they exhibit formal rationality: they lead people to find the most efficient path to whatever end they are seeking. Formal rationality is one of four types of rationality identified by Weber. The other types are practical, theoretical, and substantive rationality, each of which highlights a particular dimension of rational action (see Ritzer, 2000). Weber believed that the modern era was characterized by an increase in formal rationality, in relation to the other types, because it is well suited to the competitive conditions of capitalism. In the cathedrals of consumption, both cathedral and consumer employ rationality, though the rationalities can conflict. Consumers who enter a means of consumption may have an end or ends

in mind and they may have a sense of the means they intend to employ as well. However, once they enter a means of consumption they encounter an array of means and ends that serve the interests of those who control the means of consumption more than their own interests. While the consumer may be searching for a particular location, the setting may be designed to force the consumer to pass other locations deemed more desirable (or profitable) by those who control the means of consumption. The blue jeans are usually located along the back wall of the Gap, so customers need to navigate the entire store to reach them. While the consumer may have as an end the purchase of a particular commodity, those in control of the means of consumption encourage the purchase of as many things as possible. Formally rational systems can also be defined as McDonaldized systems. Such systems are characterized by their efficiency, predictability, calculability and replacement of human with non-human technology. These characteristics serve to make McDonaldized means of consumption highly effective "selling machines". To put it another way, they are highly effective at controlling large numbers of consumers. All rationalized systems suffer from a range of irrationalities of rationality, but the most notable for our purposes is disenchantment. Prior to becoming formally rationalized, the means of consumption were more likely to have had magical elements that provided a great deal of meaning. Magical elements might include the simple fact that a consumer formed a meaningful, but not necessarily rational, attachment to a particular means of consumption like a local bakery with a "perfect" chocolate éclair reminiscent of a youthful trip to Paris. While it is in the interests of cathedrals of consumption to McDonaldize, this inevitably leads to the disenchantment of those settings. That local bakery may be able to increase profits if it produces twice as many éclairs and opens a chain of shops, but the special quality that attracted our hypothetical consumer is likely to be diminished in the process because of a decline in the quality of the product or the disenchantment of the setting as it is copied again and again. Consumers are not drawn, at least for very long, to rationalized settings that lack enchantment, especially for non-routine consumption. A warehouse-like outlet store, for example, may incorporate all the elements of McDonaldization but none of it will make consumers want to shop in a dimly-lit, cavernous space. Although price competition and economies of scale help warehouse stores succeed, other rationalized means of consumption look for ways to become more attractive to consumers.

Weber's work offers little guidance to our effort to understand the methods used to enhance the attraction and enchantment of rationalized means of consumption because he focused on the ways in which enchantment was being extracted progressively (without hope for reversal) from modern societies. The more recent contribution of Campbell (1987), however, provides a basis for understanding how consumer settings might become reenchanted. In his research on the Protestant Ethic, Weber focused on the fact that the early Calvinists sought to root out emotion and enchantment from

their lives. Campbell found that later Calvinists reversed course to some degree and began allowing space for emotions and enchantment in their lives. While the early Calvinists looked for "signs of economic success," the later Calvinists shifted their attention to "evidence of good taste." Good taste, in turn, was tied to beauty and goodness. People who sought beauty and goodness, who sought pleasure, came to be thought of as possessing good character. Pleasure-seeking was tied to being in fashion and the consumption of luxury goods. In this way, the ethic and the lifestyle of the later Calvinists gave birth to the "spirit of modern consumerism." The defining characteristic of this spirit, self-illusory hedonism, contrasts sharply with the asceticism of the early Calvinists. Under the spell of self-illusory hedonism, actors constantly seek pleasure. Yet the object of their desire—the luxury object at the top of their list—always fails to gratify. Rather than abandon their faith in pleasure, people became involved in an insatiable cycle of desire with the belief that the next object could and would be more gratifying than the previous one. In short, Campbell described an enchanted individual world characterized by illusions, daydreams and fantasies about consumer objects<sup>1</sup>.

**1.** Campbell's self-illusory hedonism suggests that consumers who fantasize are fulfilling a social psychological need to escape from the constraints of work, family, and society into the more perfect world of the imagination. It is worth noting that such an account is only one of several plausible social psychological models of consumer behavior. Because this essay examines the settings in which consumption takes place rather than the motivations of consumers themselves, we have skirted the complicating factors of social psychology. We hope it will be sufficient to simply suggest the type of effect that the fantastic settings may have on consumers while taking greater care to describe the techniques of enchantment employed in the cathedrals of consumption. A more definitive analysis of the social psychology of gamblers and casino patrons is beyond the scope of this essay.

Campbell (1987) succeeded in re-injecting a notion of enchantment into Weberian theory. However, the enchantment of concern to Campbell exists at the level of the individual, while our concern is the enchantment of rationalized structures. Williams's (1982) work on French expositions and department stores is of great help here. Williams views French department stores as highly enchanted "dream worlds." As she sees it, these dream worlds employ enchantment, glamour and romance to seduce consumers into spending their money. However, these settings were also highly rationalized. This point is made by Miller (1981) in his study of the Paris department store, Bon Marché. Miller describes a number of Bon Marché's rationalized elements including the division into separate departments, and the use of files, statistics, sliding chutes, conveyor belts and escalators. Thus, the early French department store, like today's new means of consumption, was both rationalized and enchanted.

Even when the two co-exist, rationalization is the more powerful force and it tends to marginalize, routinize, or drive out enchantment. For this reason, the cathedrals of consumption are in constant need of re-enchantment. This brings us to postmodern social theory where the idea of re-enchantment is of great importance. For example, according to Bauman (1993: 33), «postmodernity brings 're-enchantment' of the world after the protracted (...) modern struggle to disenchant it.» To take a specific example, Baudrillard (1983/1990: 51) privileges seduction as a type of enchantment and its «play and power of illusion» over the complete clarity and visibility (disenchantment) of the modern world. Thus, re-enchantment occurs throughout the postmodern world, including the cathedrals of consumption where re-enchantment lures and controls consumers. However, it is important to bear in mind that rationalization continually poses a threat to efforts

at re-enchantment. As some attempts at re-enchantment are rationalized, others emerge, but they too eventually become rationalized and disenchanting.

In a way that is consistent with the postmodern de-emphasis of the agent, re-enchantment is only partly intentional. Many things that serve to re-enchant cathedrals are unintended consequences of actions undertaken by those in charge of the cathedrals. Whether intended or not, re-enchantment in the cathedrals of consumption (and elsewhere) occurs as the result of the creation of spectacles (Debord, 1994). According to Debord, spectacles can mesmerize individuals with an image more exciting or glamorous than their own existence. Although Debord believed that spectacles were reified and available only for contemplation, the new means of consumption are participatory spectacles: they allow individuals to escape mundane everyday life into a double-edged world that is both vibrant and controlling. Some of these spectacles—what we call extravaganzas—are created quite intentionally. Examples would include the bright neon lights and huge signs one associates with Las Vegas. However, the most interesting are those that come about, at least in part, unintentionally. They will be the focus of the remainder of this essay. In order to illustrate the argument that the Las Vegas casino-hotels are the paradigmatic cathedrals of consumption, most of the examples that follow will be derived from them.

It should be pointed out that the Vegas casino-hotel is also paradigmatic because of how well it fits the theoretical argument presented in this section. The casino-hotel is a means of consuming many things, especially the gambling experience (and the losses that generally accompany such an experience). It is a highly rationalized setting, equipped to handle the hordes of people that pass through the casino each day. As such, it tends to become disenchanting, but through the mechanisms to be discussed below, constant efforts are made to re-enchant the casino-hotel. We will focus on three of the mechanisms—simulations, implosion, and manipulations of time and space—through which the cathedrals of consumption seek to re-enchant themselves. These mechanisms are informed by concepts drawn from postmodern social theory (although time and space are also important to late modern social thinkers).

## **SIMULATIONS**

The idea of simulations has become central to postmodern social theory largely through the work of Jean Baudrillard. Simulations are defined as copies or fakes. A postmodern world is characterized by the disappearance of originals and the increasing preeminence of inauthentic copies. In fact, people become so accustomed to dealing with simulations that they begin to lose a sense of the distinction between the original and the simulation, the authentic and the inauthentic. The authentic is swamped and eventually disappears in an avalanche of simulations. To the extent that they still recog-

nize the difference, people come to prefer the simulation to the original.

Those involved in creating new cathedrals of consumption have increasingly been drawn to creating versions of some of aspect of historic or contemporary reality. In so doing, they have no alternative but to build a simulation and even where they have choices, they prefer simulations to reality. For example, even when they could use real boulders in these simulations, builders prefer simulated boulders because they look "more real." In this era where the real is rarely exciting enough, only the "hyperreal" will do. Simulations are also preferred because they are easier to control and to mold to the interests of those who control the means of consumption. Thus, there is only so much one can do to the "real" Grand Canyon to make it more spectacular (if such a thing is possible). However, there is great deal that can be done to the simulated Grand Canyon that takes up a significant part of the Showcase Mall. An integral part of this simulated Grand Canyon is an hourly show involving waterfalls, lightning storms, and flash floods. It is impossible to make the "real" Grand Canyon as dramatic, at least regularly and on command. Adding to the spectacle at the simulated Grand Canyon is the fact that it is but a few steps from the shops that dominate the mall (*Associated Press*, 1999). The Park Service is unlikely to allow such a mall to be built on the grounds of the "real" Grand Canyon, but never say never.

Of course, Las Vegas is literally *the* home of simulated cathedrals of consumption (Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens, 1999). Each year, millions of visitors travel to the middle of a hot, dry desert to gamble in, and increasingly merely to see, the spectacular simulations that have been built in and on it. Insofar as the city of Las Vegas is built on a desert in which virtually nothing natural survives, almost every bit of its current landscape is a testimony to the city's simulated qualities. The casino-hotels are the ultimate simulations of this simulated city. Although the very first of the modern Vegas casino-hotels, the Flamingo, was not a simulation, within a few years hotels with a simulated Arabian motif, including the Sands, Dunes, Aladdin, and Sahara, opened their doors. Although these hotels were spectacular in their time, they were to pale in comparison to what was to come. In 1968, Circus Circus opened its doors and began a whole new era in the simulations that characterize today's casino-hotels. The casino in Circus Circus was surrounded by a simulated circus and the entire casino-hotel was built around the circus theme (Gottdiener, 1997). Later, Caesar's Palace simulated ancient Rome. Soon such simulations came to dominate Las Vegas—Main Street Station, Monte Carlo, Orleans, Rio, New York, New York, Venetian, Paris, Bellagio, Mandalay Bay, and so on—with each new one seeking to be more dazzling than its competitors. The newest themed casino-hotel is likely to replicate the San Francisco Bay area. There are at least two developers competing for the San Francisco project (Thompson, 2000). Like Disney World's Epcot Center in Orlando Florida, Las Vegas casinos simulate the world's distinctive, exotic tourist sights and in so doing lure not only gamblers but their families.

New York, New York may be the pinnacle of Las Vegas simulations, at least for the time being. It certainly led to the creation of many casino-hotels (e.g., Paris, Venetian) that were modeled after it and sought to simulate a specific city or geographic locale. This casino-hotel attempts to simulate a romanticized New York City circa the first half of the 20th century. The Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, Coney Island, Central Park, Rockefeller Center and other aspects of New York's iconography are jammed together in a miniature representation of the city (Littlejohn, 1997). At street-level, authentic-looking trash-cans, manholes, street signs, and graffiti add another simulated layer. The effect is to condense everything associated with New York City into a gigantic movie set. Yet, «this isn't a real New York, or anything like it. If you look closely, almost everything dissolves» (Littlejohn, 1997: A16).

Simulations in the built environment are usually carried over into the theming of the rest of the casino-hotel's operations. Employees typically dress in costumes consistent with the hotel theme. In Caesar's Palace, some of the staff is costumed as Roman gladiators and maidens. Restaurants also carry through a theme. In the Orleans Hotel, the French Market Buffet serves Louisiana specialties. Shows, too, echo the theme. In New York, New York the show "Madhattan," featured authentic New York street performers. The cumulative effect of theming is simply to reinforce and extend the power of the simulation.

Simulations are one way in which rationalized settings can be reenchanted. As noted above, simulations help casinos to temper the effects of rationalization. As a counterfactual, imagine that casinos were built like warehouses—dimly-lit, cavernous buildings wrapped in plain brick. Such warehouse-like casino-hotels would be easy to construct and inexpensive to build and to operate. Gamblers might stop in once or twice, but would they return again and again? Would they travel great distances and at great expense to gamble in a warehouse? Using Campbell's terms, would fantasizing about enormous winnings be enough to bring them to Las Vegas (especially since there are now so many more local casinos in which they could gamble)? More importantly, would gamblers bring their families, at great expense, to a city populated by warehouse-like hotel-casinos? The answer to these questions is clearly no. Visitors to Las Vegas casinos require spectacles and reenchancement and one way of providing them is through elaborate simulations. Yet the success of a new means of consumption is premised on the extension of both rationalization and reenchancement. Without the former, hordes of customers could not be serviced efficiently. Without the latter, those customers would be put off and unlikely to visit with the frequency needed to support the simulated gambling palaces that dominate Las Vegas. For this reason, Las Vegas hotels spend a fortune on what amounts to little more than elaborate decorations.

Most of the other new means of consumption involve the use of simulations of one type or another. However, it is in Las Vegas that simulations have come of age and come to dominate the landscape. Those

who control other means of consumption and who want to counter rationalization with the re-enchantment associated with simulations would do well to study, and are studying, the recent additions to the Las Vegas landscape. In other words, they would do well to “learn from Las Vegas.”

## **IMPLOSION**

The term implosion refers to the erosion of boundaries between two, or more, formerly relatively distinct spheres. If modernity is characterized by progressive differentiation of consumption from other activities (e.g., production), then a symptom of postmodernity is “dedifferentiation” in which the borders between consumption and other aspects of the social world are imploded. Functional distinctions that once seemed natural, like, at a more macro level, the distinction between consumption and entertainment, disappear. Similarly, what were once separate shops such as the butcher, the grocery, and the bakery implode into the supermarket. At its most extreme, implosion results in extensive homogenization. Ultimately, implosion results in a world of consumption seemingly without borders or limits where everything is available, anywhere, at any time.

When the boundaries to which people have become accustomed dissolve, one result is a reenchanted world in which things that were once familiar are recombined in a way that makes them seem novel and unfamiliar. In this way, a set of structures can be combined and recombined to create new spaces of consumption that satisfy a contemporary consumer’s desire for novelty. There are many good examples of this kind of recombination in contemporary consumer culture: laundromats with exercise equipment, health clubs with lounges for socializing, movie theaters with pubs or restaurants, and coffee shops with Internet access. Each of these settings relies on a novel combination to attract customers. By doing so, they make familiar or routine consumption seem fresh and different.

These imploded worlds of consumption create a kind of spectacle that can lead people to consume and at ever-higher levels. Not long ago, Las Vegas was almost exclusively a destination for gamblers. As we saw, simulations have drawn a wide range of non-gamblers to Las Vegas and the same is true of implosions. For example, at the MGM Grand and Circus Circus we have the implosion of a casino and a theme park into the hotel. The combined casino/theme park is more spectacular than either would be on its own. The boundary between gambling and shopping has also been eroded in Las Vegas. The Venetian Hotel and, as we’ve seen, the MGM Grand Hotel both include large shopping malls; adjacent to Caesar’s Palace is an elaborate and expensive mall, the Forum Shops. A more general implosion involves the erosion of the boundary between touring and consuming. Although tourism has always involved the consumption of goods and services, in Las Vegas consumption has become the main point of touring. Most people go to Las Vegas with the sole intention of spending time and

money consuming, whether gambling in the casinos, trying out the rides in the amusement parks, or shopping at the malls. The boundary between touring and consuming has also been imploded in the sense that Las Vegas casinos aim to simulate tourist attractions from around the world, making it conceivable to “tour” by simply promenading on the main drag and visiting “places” like Venice, Paris, Bellagio and New York.

One of the interesting things about the use of implosion in Las Vegas is the way in which it has confounded the meanings associated with gambling. Las Vegas is, in the main, no longer associated with “vice” or “sin” in the popular imagination and, in fact, has become something of a “family” destination in recent years. This is in large part due to the deliberate implosion of casino facilities with other, more mainstream, forms of leisure and consumption like those outlined above. The result is twofold. On the one hand, gambling is normalized as a legitimate form of entertainment, comparable to visiting a shopping mall or theme park. This reorientation is reflected in gaming industry periodicals such as *Casino Player* which position gambling as a part of a “high-living” lifestyle that also includes gourmet meals and up-market consumer goods. On the other hand, implosion has made Las Vegas a more attractive destination for families on vacation. Thus, the implosion of casinos with other consumer settings has made Las Vegas a more attractive setting for people who may have once had qualms about gambling and for people who have families.

The Las Vegas casino-hotel is not the only setting in which we have witnessed implosion. The amusement park and the shopping mall have imploded at the Mall of America and the Edmonton Mall; the casino, the mall, and many other means of consumption (e.g., the health spa) have imploded into the cruise ship. However, as was the case with simulations, the casino-hotel is the paradigm of this process.

## **TIME AND SPACE**

In recent years, many sociologists have focused on the centrality of time and space in contemporary social life. Perhaps the most relevant formulation for this essay is Harvey’s (1989) notion of time-space compression. Harvey believes that a central fact of the contemporary capitalist economy is the tendency for production processes to speed up over time and spread over space. At the same time, new “post-Fordist” production processes enable production for smaller niche markets rather than the traditional mass market. What results is the “condition of postmodernity” in which consumer goods, among other things, appear to be in flux with an increased availability of a *mélange* of new products.

The new means of consumption have tended to compress time and space in ways that can be both spectacular and enchanting. For example, goods, like Maryland crab cakes or Maine lobster, that were once available only in local markets, are now available throughout the country and the world with improvements in transportation and storage. It’s

simply astounding that practically any consumer product can be ordered one day and arrive the following morning on our doorsteps. Harvey's view, while it is perhaps now (over a decade after his book first appeared) outmoded, is that such a situation can be disorienting and disruptive of our sense of order.

The idea of time-space compression has much in common with the notion of implosion. With implosion, boundaries between differentiated spheres dissolve thereby challenging traditional notions of appropriateness and order. With time-space compression, the sense of the world as divided spatially into discrete localities characterized by particular consumer goods, lifestyles, and material culture is overwhelmed by the profusion of goods that are available around the world. A similar temporal compression is the recycling of old forms in which historically specific styles are revived in contemporary bouts of nostalgia (Jameson, 1991). In this form of compression, the logic of fashion is turned on its head as old and new styles intermingle in contemporary art, architecture and consumer goods. A good example of recycling and nostalgia is the recently modish Volkswagen Beetle that mimics the fashion of the 1960's and 1970's.

In the new means of consumption, time-space compression becomes a spectacle: it is manipulated to create magical effects. The manipulation of time in casinos takes place in at least three ways: 1/ control of the casino environment to create a sense of the absence of time passing; 2/ the availability of gambling beyond normal temporal constraints in the sports books; 3/ and the use of images, styles, and architecture from past, present and future to create extraordinary effects.

The overarching effect of moving around the new means of consumption is the loss of a sense of time and a dream-like state in which the passage of time seems not to be occurring or not to matter. This sensation seems to work in conjunction with the gigantic size of the new means of consumption (see below); being lost in space seems to induce the feeling of being lost in time. Las Vegas casinos make efforts to enhance a sense of timelessness that complements their twenty-four-hour-a-day operations. This is accomplished by removing things—windows and clocks, for example—that provide signs of the time of day and of time passing. Moreover, the same activities take place throughout the day and night—the gaming tables are open, drinks are being served, slot machines are buzzing and flashing. Although less busy in the morning than the evening, casinos are very successful in eliminating a sense of time of day and of time passing.

In the sports books in all major casinos, betting on simulcast horse and dog races around the country begins early in the morning and continues until late at night. A full day of wagering is made possible by exploiting time zone differences. The day begins with betting on matinee races run on the East Coast and ends with evening races run on the West Coast. In this way, time is stretched so that gamblers can bet on races for twelve or more hours a day compared to the four or five hours available for betting at a given race track. The sports book is an excellent example of the compression of space because it makes it possible to gamble on races taking place in many different areas of the

country. It is also a good example of the compression of time because it removes barriers to consumption by making racing available for a far greater part of the day than it would be at any single track.

In what could also be considered both a form of simulation and implosion, Las Vegas casinos make spectacular use of time by drawing on the past, the present and the future to produce spectacles. Such manipulations fall under the category of implosion because past, present, and future worlds co-exist at a given time. They fall under the category of simulation because they involve inauthentic recreations from other times and places. While these techniques for manipulating time are common to a hyperreal or postmodern condition, and can be found in a variety of consumer settings (e.g., Disney World), the case can be made that Las Vegas casino/hotels manipulate time more ambitiously and on a larger scale than other cathedrals of consumption. In no other place than Las Vegas can a consumer find a greater variety of large-scale simulations of other times and places. For example, the Strip offers the ancient past at the Luxor and Caesar's Palace, the Dark Ages at Excalibur, the Old West at the Golden Nugget. The present, at least in a simulated form, is to be found at places like Bellagio, Venetian and Paris. The future can be found at the Stratosphere and at Star Trek at the Las Vegas Hilton. The ready availability of such a variety of time periods is quite alluring to visitors and helps to bring them to Las Vegas and the specific casino-hotels.

Casino-hotels also manipulate space in order to create spectacles and to thereby re-enchant themselves. This is often achieved through the creation of a sense of enormous space. Huge shopping malls like the Mall of America and gigantic cruise ships like Carnival's Destiny exemplify the allure of the large. However, it is once again in Las Vegas that we find the paradigmatic use of large spaces to lure consumers.

Las Vegas casino-hotels, of course, are among the largest in the world. It is difficult to describe in words the enormity of these settings. The Luxor takes the form of a glass pyramid into which it would be possible to stuff nine Boeing 747 aircraft. Adjacent to the pyramid is a sphinx that is larger than the original sphinx in Egypt. The Stratosphere has a 1,000 foot observation tower touted as the tallest building west of the Mississippi. New York, New York has a 150-foot high replica of the Statue of Liberty. Paris has a half-scale copy of the Eiffel tower and a full-scale model of the Arc de Triomphe. All of this, of course, says nothing about the huge number of guestrooms, gaming tables, and slot machines inside the casino-hotels.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS IN SURVEILLANCE**

The preceding sections of this essay have followed the logic of *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* in order to argue that the Las Vegas casino-hotel is the paradigmatic new means/cathedral of consumption. That is, it is the model for the interrelated processes of rationalization, disenchantment, and re-enchantment through the use of simulations, implosion and manipulations of time and space. In this section we want

to go beyond the logic of that work to argue that the casino-hotel is paradigmatic of the cathedrals of consumption in another sense—surveillance. We argue that the pattern of surveillance pioneered in Las Vegas casino-hotels has been, and is likely to continue to be, adopted by many of the new means of consumption.

The new means of consumption place a premium on controlling and eliminating crime and for this reason are under heavy surveillance. Security guards and electronic cameras help protect against shoplifters, employee theft and other problems. However, it is in the Las Vegas casino-hotel that the threat of crime, and the efforts to control it through surveillance, reaches their apogee, suggesting the direction surveillance in consumer society in general will take. After all, huge sums of money change hands daily in the casino. The high stakes attract all sorts of gamblers intent on cheating the casino. There is the ever-present possibility that employees (e.g., those who run the roulette wheels or deal the cards) will conspire with others to bilk the casino out of large sums of money. Then there is the threat of thieves who might attempt to rob the casino and/or some of its high rollers. All of these threats and others have led the casino-hotel to spearhead the effort to find new and better methods of surveillance.

On the casino floor, surveillance serves not only the purpose of protecting against employee theft and card-cheats, but it is also used to keep track of, and dispense rewards to, active players through a system known as “comping.” In the comp system, players who average a certain amount of money wagered over a certain amount of time are entitled to perks. The casino bases this calculation on the percentage it can expect to win from each bet. Average players can receive free lunches while bigger players (“whales”) get such things as free flights, rooms, limousine service, fight tickets and deluxe meals. For those games involving large wagers, the comps can be very high indeed. Casinos are happy to dispense perks because they keep gamblers playing and returning at later dates. Since the more one gambles, the more likely one is to lose, increasing the number of times a gambler plays, increases the chances that the house will win, and win big.

The comp system is also a way casinos keep track of players and induce consumer loyalty. Reflecting the paradigmatic status of the casino-hotel, systems based on this model are rapidly spreading to other means of consumption. Many supermarket chains, for example, now use swipe cards to track customer purchases. These same cards are used to activate discounts on some items (instead of the traditional sale price) and shoppers can accumulate vouchers if a certain amount of money is spent monthly. We can expect that surveillance will be used in conjunction with incentives in more and more cathedrals of consumption as the value of customer loyalty and repeat consumption is emphasized increasingly.

The comp system is especially important because it provides a method through which large, often faceless, consumer settings will be able to personalize their interaction with customers—especially preferred cus-

tomers—through the use of advanced technology. This technology runs parallel to accounts, such as Harvey's ideas discussed above, of the so-called post-Fordist model of production. Recall that in the post-Fordist model of production, new technology enables more flexible production techniques than the mass-production associated with the Fordist model. The "comp" model suggests an emergent flexibility in rationalized systems with the development of new ways of monitoring, rewarding, attracting and retaining consumers. Such a model enables a modicum of individualized treatment in otherwise faceless, phantasmagoric systems.

## **CONCLUSION: SELF-ILLUSORY HEDONISTS IN FANTASY LAND**

It is clear that gambling, like all other forms of consumption, has its allure. There is an adrenaline rush associated with placing a wager that can be both exciting and enjoyable. A problem exists when the casino environment encourages gamblers to bet more than they wish and more than they can afford. Casino gambling involves self-illusory hedonism in its purest form. Casino gamblers believe that they can win despite well-known statistical evidence to the contrary. After a losing bet or a losing evening, self-illusory hedonists return to the gaming tables to try their luck again and again, each time sure in the belief that a jackpot is imminent.

Casino-hotels do their best to support and foster the self-illusory hedonism of gamblers by providing them with a spectacular and enchanting setting in which to gamble. The casinos create a spectacular environment that is far more stimulating and glamorous than the mundanity of everyday life, usually by simulating well-known attractions from the past, present, or imagined future. Further, they implode boundaries between gambling, shopping, travel and entertainment thereby making it possible for gamblers to bring their families, to reduce the regrets associated with excessive gambling by normalizing it as just another form of consumption, and to increase their expenditures on things that are peripheral to gambling itself. The casino-hotels also manipulate time and space to create a setting in which time seems not to matter and traditional spatial boundaries to consumption are eliminated. Lastly, through the comp system they create a system of incentives for those who frequently gamble large sums of money. The result is a situation in which the setting increases the likelihood that one will gamble more than is prudent. Gamblers seem to prefer the simulated environment of the casino to the more mundane settings of everyday life.

It is the purity of the casino-hotel which makes it paradigmatic of the new means of consumption. At least some people seem to prefer consuming to other everyday activities. At least some seem to suffer, as Campbell (1987) argues, from a form of self-illusory hedonism where the next piece of clothing or electronic gadget promises to make life live up to fantasy, but never actually does. The new means of con-

sumption nurture this hedonistic impulse by feeding individual fantasies with the more macroscopic fantasies associated with simulation, implosion, manipulation of time and of space. What results, at least for some, is a situation in which people consume too much or in which consumption, and the costs associated with it, come to interfere with other parts of their lives.

There is certainly nothing wrong with consuming now and again, just as there's nothing wrong with an occasional trip to Las Vegas. Not everyone over-consumes or is unreflective about the ways in which they are manipulated by the new means of consumption. But it is incumbent upon us to understand the logic of these consumer settings and the Las Vegas casino-hotel is the perfect laboratory in which to understand the essence of this logic. In gaining an understanding of why so many people are drawn to these casino-hotels, and why people spend so much money in them, we can gain a greater understanding of the more general process of consumption that increasingly takes place in cathedrals of consumption.

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