

Glorified Fantasies and Masterpieces of Deception on Importing Las Vegas into the 'New South Africa'

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Abstract

With the end of apartheid, Johannesburg and other South African cities are now part of a new global race to become 'world-class' tourist and business centers. At the center of this development is the importation of Vegas-style spectacle by local entrepreneurs, firms and other city boosters who create fantasyscapes such as the Emperor's Palace and GrandWest. Financed and run by South African impresarios — whose luxurious empires transcend the continent — these resorts represent not only the globalization of gaming but the way in which South African cities see themselves within the worldwide urban hierarchy. As such, this article seeks to untangle the global and local aspects of importing fantasy into the 'new South Africa'.

Introduction

The real is not impossible; it is simply more and more artificial.
Deleuze and Guatari (1984: 37)

With the end of apartheid and the transition to parliamentary democracy, new urban growth machines, consisting of loose alliances of city boosters, real estate developers and corporate business enterprises, have sought to favorably position Johannesburg and Cape Town in the 'global cities' hierarchy. One major component of this market-driven strategy has been the conjoined effort of large-scale property owners, investors and city officials to refashion the urban landscape in conformity with the standardized stylistics of what a 'world-class' city might look like. This 'fight for the global catwalk' (to borrow a useful metaphor from Monica Degen) involves the construction of major flagship projects where 'cities compete with each other by parading made-up images of different areas of the city which advertise these spaces as favorable and attractive to business and leisure' (Degen, 2003: 867–8).

Faced with the declining significance of industry, manufacturing and related activities as the main wellsprings for sustained economic vitality, large-scale business enterprises and key civic leaders in aspiring 'world-class' cities around the world have increasingly looked to upscale leisure and consumption opportunities as the main catalysts for reanimating their historic downtown cores and inner-city fringes (Jessop and Sum, 2000; Lloyd and Clark, 2001; Degen, 2003). As a general rule, city builders in aspiring world-class cities have undertaken culture-led regeneration efforts in the belief that high-profile, flagship 'mega-projects' such as sports and entertainment sites, arts festivals, museums and historical heritage sites both enhance the city image while serving as catalysts for successful downtown urban renewal (Lim, 1993;

Kenny, 1995; Zukin, 1995; Strom, 2002; Gotham, 2005a; 2005b; Lehrer, 2006; Kanai and Ortega-Alcázar, 2009; Knox, 2011). This culture-led approach to urban regeneration reflects what some have called the 'new conventional wisdom' in urban policy (Gordon and Buck, 2005: 6). In a crowded marketplace marked by intense competition to attract corporate investors, business travelers and tourists, the stress on place promotion has become a central element of civic boosterism (Gospodini, 2002; Greenberg, 2008).

In following global trends, city builders in Johannesburg and Cape Town have recognized the strategic importance of 'place marketing' in luring property investment and tourist visitors to the city and in jumpstarting downtown revitalization. Market-led regeneration strategies that focus on entertainment and cultural consumption depend on 'selling the city' to business travelers, tourists and local leisure seekers (Crilley, 1993; Holcomb, 1993; 1999; Lloyd and Clark, 2001; Horvath, 2004; Gotham, 2005a; 2005b; Gözl, 2006). Place making lays particular stress on how branding, imagineering and other place-marketing strategies have produced a 'city of surface', calculated for visual and aesthetic effect (Boyer, 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 2001: 1–8; Kenny and Zimmerman, 2004; Urry, 2007; Donald *et al.*, 2008). These efforts to 'sell the city' have generated their own terminology: 'imagineering', 'disneyfication' and 'branding' (see Rutheiser, 1997; Eeckhout, 2001; Evans, 2003; Teo, 2003; Klingmann, 2007; Greenberg, 2008). City imaging, city marketing and the packaging of city life as commodified units for a burgeoning tourist and business services industry have taken root in cities aspiring to 'world-class' status (Boyer, 1991; 2001; Judd and Fainstein, 1999; Mele, 2000; Judd, 2003). These place-marketing strategies neatly dovetail with culture-led urban redevelopment (see Hetherington, 2007; Grodach, 2008; Kanai and Ortega-Alcázar, 2009).

The steady growth of Arcadian pleasure palaces as festival marketplaces, showcase shopping arcades and themed tourist destinations are visible expressions of an underlying structural and aesthetic logic of the post-apartheid landscape. The driving force behind much of this urban restructuring comes from the profit-seeking perspective of corporate managers and financiers, real estate developers, land speculators, entertainment entrepreneurs, architectural and design professionals, and municipal authorities. Concerned with the relative location of South African cities in the highly competitive global economy, their attention is focused on improving the marketability of South Africa's aspiring 'world-class' cities by enhancing their image, their qualities of life and their cultural accoutrements (Murray, 2007; also see Sihlongonyane, 2005).

In the triumphant world culture of consumption, glitzy showcase mega projects and packaged built environments have become vital instruments promoting the distinction, desirability and prestige of a place (see Kenny, 1995; Ellin, 1996; Goss, 1996). For city boosters, local merchant associations and urban planners, the creation of themed entertainment destinations offers the possibility of a new sense of urban vibrancy and vitality in the face of the widespread perception of post-apartheid cities as disorderly, dangerous and chaotic (see Dirsuweit, 2002; Dawson, 2006). Festival marketplaces, heritage theme parks and waterfront revitalization schemes appeal to the consuming tastes of overseas tourists, affluent local pleasure seekers and itinerant spectators alike (Harvey, 1990; Boyer, 1994a: 1–5). When juxtaposed against the pervasive and disturbing image of the 'city' as a frightening place, these ornamental architectural compositions — expressed by both spatial and symbolical distance — become even more exaggerated (Bremner, 1998; Murray, 2008a).

This spatial configuration epitomizes what Christine Boyer has termed the 'city of illusion' — a market-driven approach to city building that seeks to multiply showcase 'promotional spaces', while simultaneously ignoring the disturbing realities of joblessness, desperation and social injustice (Boyer, 1994b: 111–27, especially pp. 111, 115, 119–20). In South Africa's cities, where there is virtually no escape from the visible signs of impoverishment and deprivation, affluent residents have retreated *en masse* into fortified enclaves of luxury, partitioning themselves off from the disorderly parts of the

city. These cocooned pleasure palaces are total environments that enable those who gain access to temporarily set aside the distressing pathologies of urban life: there is no crime, and there are no dirty streets and no informal settlements.

The globalization of fantasy and urban form from Las Vegas to the 'new South Africa'

What was once the gambling casino and is now being transformed into the 'gaming resort' has become on its own terms, the real thing. The outrageously fake fake has developed its own indigenous style and lifestyle to become a real place.

Huxtable (1997: 75).

Scattered around the metropolitan landscapes of the 'new South Africa' are an assortment of global familiars — festival marketplaces, waterfront developments, gated residential communities, enclosed 'shoppertainment' extravaganzas, luxurious golf estates, retirement villages for the affluent, heritage museums, 'swagger buildings', five-star hotels, eye-catching bridges and cutting-edge architecture (Dirsuweit and Schattauer, 2004). As key components in a market-led strategy to draw attention to the city, these spatial products are neither innocent nor neutral interventions into the urban social fabric (see King, 1996; Easterling, 2005: 3–5). In Cape Town, such large-scale real estate mega-projects as the Century City business and commercial hub (Marks and Bezzoli, 2001) and the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront (Killian and Dodson, 1996; Worden *et al.*, 1998; Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo, 2009) reflect the globalizing influence of international capital. In Johannesburg, city builders have constructed a withering array of upscale locations for affluent consumers, including the huge expansion of the Sandton City mega-mall (Murray, 2010: 114–17), the New Urbanist enclave at Melrose Arch (Fife, 2001; 2009; Sanders, 2001; Krige, 2002; Reilly [Pauling], 2003; Dirsuweit and Schattauer, 2004; Mbembe, 2004), and the Montecasino entertainment complex (Murray, 2008a). In seeking to carve out a niche market in the world of sports entertainment, city boosters in Johannesburg and Cape Town turned to the strategy of hosting sport mega-events such as the 2010 FIFA World Cup as a platform for promoting global tourism (Cornelissen and Swart, 2006; Cornelissen, 2007; 2008). While city boosters have enthusiastically championed these high-profile, short-term sport mega-events for the kind of global recognition that was impossible during apartheid, critics have charged that these one-time-only occurrences are politically and economically high-risk ventures that rarely produce the results their proponents promise (Hiller, 2000).

When looking at the increasing number of upscale tourist entertainment sites in post-apartheid South Africa, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the 'real fake' and the 'fake fake' (see Huxtable, 1997: 75; Murray, 2008a: 154). To be sure, all fakes are not equal; there are good fakes and bad fakes. In gambling casinos, entertainment complexes and other tourist sites, the standard is no longer 'real' versus 'phony' but the merits of the imitation. In other words, the construction of spectacle is not powerful because it can simulate environments that may or may not have ever existed. Rather, exotic locations, surreal dreamscapes, fantasylands and other 'pseudo-worlds' are preferred over actual places (Eco, 1983: 14; Debord, 2009: 7). In fact, the truly good 'fakes' improve on reality so much that they persuade consumers to actually prefer the copy to the original (see Eco, 1983: 30–31, 40–44; Bégout, 2003).

While this 'real fake' reached its apogee in places like the Las Vegas strip, it can now be found in all 'world-class' cities in some shape or form (see Venturi *et al.*, 1977; O'Brien, 2000; Jaschke, 2002; Knight, 2002; Schwartz, 2003). Yet, the steady proliferation of lavish gambling casinos in cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town,

and as far away as Las Vegas, Melbourne, Detroit, Hong Kong and Macau suggests something deeper than the playful construction of spectacle (see Stevens and Dovey, 2004; Hsu, 2006; Tieben, 2009). Casino resorts represent something more complex than ruptures in the time-space of local landscapes. Cities, after all, are not isolated spaces, but tied together through the circulation of capital, commodities and ideas. Cities — large and small — are economic, political and cultural hubs where relations, networks and circuits crystallize in space.

Following the example of Las Vegas, many cities have turned to gambling casinos as a way to anchor and jump-start economic growth and development (Sklair, 2005: 498). Instead of the fairy princesses and magical realism of theme parks, the fantasy of casino owners and their customers is rooted in the desire to make money. By tapping into the highly lucrative tourist-entertainment industry, such cities have become world class both in accoutrement and in the global imagination (Jameson, 1991; Hannigan, 1998; Vidler, 2000; Saunders, 2005; Sallaz, 2006; Punter, 2007; Jones, 2009). In response to the vagaries of market economics, city boosters in aspiring world-class cities seek to ascend the ranked hierarchy through fierce competition over access to business traveler and tourist dollars (Jessop and Sum, 2000; McCann, 2004).

The scenographic spectacle of 'trophy buildings' that serve as tourist points of interest are key elements in urban boosterism (Stevens and Dovey, 2004; Sklair, 2005; Yeoh, 2005). These are mega-developments that dominate the imaginations of local builders and global travelers. Casino owners must compete for business with other gambling resorts and other themed entertainment sites under local and global circumstances where legalized gambling has become a widespread form of economic development. In Australian casinos, such as Melbourne's Southbank, Quentin Stevens and Kim Dovey (2004: 361) argue that such developments 'draw together global decision-makers and raise the profile of the city through a celebration of the triumphs of international commerce'. In fact, boosters and developers in many Asian cities have deliberately followed the lead of Melbourne in introducing casino gaming resorts as part of a wider strategy of tourist industry development (see Hsu, 2006).

Therefore, new South African casino resorts not only compete for international tourist attention, but play a considerable role in the stiff competition for regional advantage between local growth coalitions. Rivalries for symbolic primacy have significant spin-offs as cities in the 'new South Africa' compete to provide the latest urban socio-cultural amenities. Because of the relative mobility of corporate headquarters and the geographical dispersal of financial and service operations, the development of showcase entertainment and leisure sites is essential if a city is to remain attractive for large-scale private investment. The urban boosterism of local growth coalitions is usually at the forefront of these efforts. Upscale shopping malls (symbols of lavish lifestyles), sporting complexes (symbols of aggressive competitiveness), office towers (symbols of corporate success and domination), and sites for theatrical performance and art galleries (symbols of aesthetic sophistication and civic refinement) are all important 'trophies' in the cut-throat game of urban ascendancy (see Shields, 1989: 149–50). However, what makes casino resorts stand out is how they embody and encompass all of those consumer spaces.

While growth coalitions are at the forefront of these efforts, in South Africa the face of this trend has been hotel magnate Sol Kerzner who introduced other real estate entrepreneurs to the possibilities of reaping huge profits out of 'fantasy environments'. Kerzner is perhaps most remembered for building Sun City as part of his Sun International group of properties. It was officially opened in December 1979; at the time it was located in Bophuthatswana, about two hours drive northwest from Johannesburg. Under the Homelands policy, the apartheid regime had declared Bophuthatswana an independent state (although unrecognized as such by any other country). As such, Bophuthatswana was allowed to provide entertainment such as gambling and topless revue shows, which were banned in South Africa. Sun City quickly acquired a reputation as 'Sin City'. This notoriety, combined with its relatively close location to the large

metropolitan areas of Pretoria and Johannesburg, ensured that Sun City became (and remained) a popular holiday and weekend destination for middle-class adventurers and pleasure seekers (Kesting and Weskott, 2009; van Eeden, 2009; Witz, 2009).

Most importantly, Kerzner's empire is truly international.¹ As Leslie Sklair argues, 'the global era iconic architecture tends to be driven by the transnational capitalist class . . . and much more in the context of the culture-ideology of consumerism than was previously the case' (Sklair, 2005: 490). Stanley Ho of Macau, Steven Wynn of Las Vegas and Sol Kerzner are the leading impresarios of a new global vernacular of consumer-oriented luxury playgrounds. While Kerzner clearly dominates South Africa's fantasyscape with 16 casinos and resort hotels, Sun International's projects are spread throughout the African continent (Botswana, Lesotho, Nigeria, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia) as well as Chile. Kerzner's separate One&Only Resorts provide elite getaways in the Bahamas, Dubai, Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico and, of course, South Africa. Finally, in the United States, he developed and managed Connecticut's Mohegan Sun Casino — the country's second largest casino in terms of gaming space (Kilby *et al.*, 2005: 10–11).

Mimicry and irony in the 'new South Africa': themed entertainment as urban regeneration strategy

Just as a nation, in order to set itself apart from the others, in order to humiliate and overwhelm them, or simply in order to acquire a unique physiognomy, needs an extravagant idea to guide it, to propose goals incommensurable with its real capacities, so a society evolves and asserts itself only if ideals are suggested to it, or inculcated in it, out of all proportion to what it is.

Cioran (1987: 93)

Focusing attention on such tourist spectacles enables us to more fully understand the shifting political, social and cultural terrain of urban life in aspiring 'world-class' cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town. Property developers, architects and designers use idealized images of what a 'world-class' city should look like to fashion upscale tourist destinations appealing to the desire, nostalgia or paranoia of people who can afford to be there (see Marks and Bezzoli, 2001; Dirsuweit and Schattauer, 2004). With their stress on escapist entertainment and consumerism packaged as a kind of dream fulfillment, the lavish casino resort is the quintessential, real fake fantasy place in South Africa after apartheid.² South Africa's corporate 'culture-entertainment industries' have feverishly set about building casino resorts all over the country to tap the tourist market. To guarantee approval for these projects, large-scale property developers have entered into business partnerships with Black Economic Empowerment companies to share in the construction, management and profits of these undertakings (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 5–24). Kerzner's Sun International is not alone in casino and resort development. Other South African developers such as Moloko Investment Group, Peermont Global, Tsogo Investment Holdings are fellow competitors with international investments in gaming and tourism, which have driven the local and global spectacle machine (Sallaz, 2006: 265–97).

1 It has been argued that Kerzner's projects such as the Lost City often mimic a colonial gaze in its careful selection of 'history' and 'myth' to commodify a stylized false version of the past (Hall, 1995; van Eeden, 2004; 2009; Witz, 2009).

2 This idea owes its origin to Eco (1983: 40–4) and Huxtable (1997: 97).

In their quest for global wealth and fame, individual casino resorts are subjected to a 'make-believe' theatrical staging, where they fulfill a mythologized fable with a linear, logical narrative. The initial stage depends upon the discovery of an exotic 'other' place, one that has receded into history: the quaint insularity of a Tuscan village (Montecasino); the glory of ancient Rome (Emperors Palace); legendary seafaring life of early Cape Town (Grand West Casino and Entertainment World); the Cape Dutch homestead architecture synonymous with the Breede River Valley (Golden Valley Casino, Worcester); historic Johannesburg at the time of the gold rush (Gold Reef City Hotel and Casino); Victorian heritage in a waterfront/seaside setting (Boardwalk Casino and Entertainment World, Port Elizabeth); the Miami-inspired Art Deco buildings set against the Indian Ocean coastline (Suncoast Casino, Durban). The act of naming the casino resort has the effect of bringing back into existence those distinctive 'qualities of place' that have intrinsic aesthetic value but have been lost: the insular, mountain-top communities of northern Italy, the glory and grandeur of the Roman Empire, the 'strike-it-rich' fever pitch of the late nineteenth-century Johannesburg gold rush or the festive ambience of the seaside boardwalk (Banks and van Eeden, 2002; Raento and Douglas, 2001).

The second stage depends upon the identification and marking of the attributes of this long-lost place to effectively call attention to what makes it different. This stress on 'old world' qualities serves to highlight the distinctiveness of place — their 'otherness' — when juxtaposed against the humdrum ordinariness of everyday life. The third stage depends upon reducing the traces of 'otherness' to a formula that renders these differences similar to what is already known and what is not disturbing or threatening: exciting, leisurely entertainment organized around consumer spending. This process takes place both in the careful construction of an overpowering built environment designed to entertain and mesmerize and in the fashioning of soothing discourse. Place making is reduced to place marketing through 'imagineering' and 'branding' incorporated within sanitized 'public relations' discourse. Lastly, in order to compensate for the inevitable dilution, assimilation and disappearance of the 'otherness', the 'imagineering' experts who design the casino resorts manufacture and reproduce differences through the use of appropriated and recontextualized narratives and spatial exercises that seek to conceal the underlying profit-seeking motives that lay behind the construction of these places in the first place (Chaplin *et al.*, 2000: 207–8).

Through a combination of outright mimicry and creative improvisation, the promoters of these casino hotels have invented, or perhaps reinvented, a faux urbanism oriented entirely around scenographic spectacle. The new lavish casino resorts exemplify the key elements of the 'experience economy': the commodification of visual and sensory distraction (see Klingmann, 2007). Unlike outdoor theme parks with their pedestrian entertainments, upscale casino resorts have become more sophisticated in theming and creating holistic designs that allow for visual escapism so that customers are fully integrated into a 'total environment'. Thus, these gaming resorts are not just about gambling; they are about entertainment and theatrical performance. These qualities are inscribed into every space — from the gaming rooms to the themed restaurants, and from the public lobbies to the private hotel guestrooms.

Because gambling alone typically does not attract crowds, casino owners have turned their attention to becoming more broadly appealing as tourist destinations. The corporate owners of these casino resorts promote and package these places as 'family-friendly' amusement centers with something for everyone (Newman, 1995). These places become sites 'dedicated to organized vacationing' (see Eco, 1986: 47). What were once known as 'gambling casinos' have resurfaced as less offensive 'gaming' resorts, cleansed of all pejorative connotations and rendered euphemistically harmless. This renaming marks the triumph of skillful public relations (see also Huxtable, 1997: 76).

The evolution of the casino resort — as unadulterated fantasy, as 'other worlds', as themed entertainment destination — has finally all come together in the 'new South Africa': the slot machine and the luxurious hotel, the amusement park and the shopping

mall, themed and prefabricated, available as a packaged vacation for all. The casino resorts of urban South Africa form a checkerboard pattern of themed destinations, which borrow from other places and other times, and are juxtaposed in the built environment. Glamorous and pretentious, the new casino resorts that have sprung up around the greater Johannesburg metropolitan region are the quintessential architectural marvels of the post-apartheid age. They provide a kind of spatial continuity befitting a total leisure environment. Modeled after the theme park, it is a collective spectacle, or more accurately, a series of contiguous spectacles, where interconnected walkways function as a flow of spaces through which mesmerized patrons can move serially from one specialty fantasy to the next at timed intervals (see Chaplin *et al.*, 2000: 213–14). The refurbished international lobbies at the new glitzy gateway airports in Johannesburg and Cape Town follow this logic as well, as they introduce visitors to South Africa's spaces of postmodernity, and transform them into consumers as soon as they land (Forty, 2001).

Fantasy's reality: dreaming of ancient Rome at the emperor's palace

Julius Caesar would have enjoyed indulging in the pleasures of the magical fantasy offered at the Mini-roman Empire created at Caesars Gauteng. More than 2050 years after the demise of the Great Roman Empire, it has come back to life, with lots of artistic license — this time at the Gateway to Africa.

Giesen (2000b: 40).

With Carnival City Casino and Entertainment Complex (at Brakpan, east of Johannesburg), Gold Reef City Casino (at the southern edge of Johannesburg), Ridge Casino and Entertainment Resort (to the northeast at Witbank), Montecasino (north of Johannesburg at Fourways) and the Emperor's Palace (formerly Caesars Gauteng) (to the east next to Johannesburg International Airport), city boosters have enthusiastically pointed out that virtually every middle-income household in the Greater Johannesburg metropolitan region is never more than 20 minutes away by automobile from the nearest casino resort.³ The competition to lure customers is intense. The selling of these sites of consumption marks what Reyner Banham in another context called 'the total surrender of all social and moral standards to the false glamour of naked commercial competition' (Banham, 1975: 80).

The Emperor's Palace was born out of Caesars Gauteng. The complex was strategically located near a network of major highways and alongside the recently remodeled Johannesburg International Airport (what city boosters like to think of as the 'gateway to southern Africa'). Costing R1.3 billion when it was built in 2000, this sprawling entertainment complex constitutes a hotel, convention, entertainment and casino resort. This stunning exemplar of theatrical pseudo-architecture represents 'place-making' both at its best and at its worst. The 'merchants of high-end schlock' — to borrow a phrase from Huxtable — have constructed a purposefully 'over-the-top' entertainment site which combines the excitement and raw energy of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas with the elegant classicism found in the European baroque style of the Monte Carlo casino (Huxtable, 1997: 112). All of this excessive ornamentation introduces what one fawning commentator has called a 'touch of frivolity and lightness' (Patterson,

3 For the source of some of these ideas, see Murray (2008a: 155). A great deal of the visual description for both Emperors Palace and GrandWest casinos is derived from several on-site visits to these two locations. The customers for these places are drawn primarily from the middle-class, salaried professionals without distinction according to racial identity.

2001). Promoted as a glamorous place that caters ‘to the tastes of the most jaded international jetsetter’, Caesars Gauteng was a joint venture between South African-based casino resort developer and operator Global Resorts SA, the South African black empowerment consortium Marang [East Rand] Gaming Investments, and Las-Vegas-based Park Place Entertainment Corporation — the largest casino resort operator in the world, and owner/operator of the world famous Caesars Palace in Las Vegas (quotation from Giesen, 2000b). However, as an indication of the growing interest of local corporate enterprises in gaming and resort developments, in 2005 Johannesburg-based Marang and Peermont Global acquired the stake that Park Place Entertainment Corporation held in project and changed its name to Emperor’s Palace.⁴

‘Place is the product of a relationship’, Barry Curtis has suggested, ‘part subjective projection, part internalization of an external reality’. Whatever else it does, architecture seeks to establish the distinctiveness of place through a dual process of enclosure and metaphorical association (Curtis, 2001: 55). Like Montecasino and other garish casino resorts that have been built after the collapse of apartheid, the Emperor’s Palace is a cloistered setting with its own idiosyncratic place identity. Described with typical flamboyant hyperbole in a leading trade publication as ‘style without boundaries’, the architectural facades and interior design of the casino resort seek to imitate the ‘glory [and] romance of the ancient Roman Empire during the rule of Julius Caesar’ (Patterson, 2001: 42). The US-based design firm that conceived of the themed environment for the original Caesars Gauteng tried to ‘create a lifestyle’, with the accent firmly on ‘fun and variety’, rather than on the construction of an architectural monument or signature building — like the Guggenheim in Bilbao.

The architects and builders responsible for fashioning the ‘place thematics’ at Caesars Gauteng have created an imaginary portrait of the Roman Empire at the height of its power. The collapsing of historical time periods and the eclectic mixing of signs and symbols borrowed from ancient Rome serve a dual political and an ideological purpose. The reconfiguring of the history of ancient Rome and the restructuring of images celebrate excess and waste while deliberately overlooking the exploitation of legions of slaves who contributed forced labor to build the city. This masterful display of creative artistry, with all its gaudy pastiche and theatricality, pretense and mimicry, illusion and subterfuge, becomes itself the focus of attention. Architects and designers do the job of imagining this ‘glorious past’ for us by salvaging selected bits of disconnected history and mimicking old-fashioned art appreciation. This ‘make believe’ world depends upon the power to simulate, to substitute signs of the real for the real. Fantasy is brought to life through some sort of magical realism (Connolly, 1999: 15). Here, imitation produces an ontological ambivalence in which the original story of the rise and fall of Roman Empire is largely ignored and no longer needs to be told. Iconic images of historic figures like Julius Caesar, Marc Anthony, Cleopatra and the Emperor Augustus are inserted into a new narrative without any reference to their actual historical roles to serve the interests of crass commercialism. Actual historical figures become characters in a faux theatrical performance that has lost all connection with historical truths (Giesen, 2000b: 42; Patterson, 2001: 103–5).

The elaborate exterior landscaping at the front of the resort complex plays a major role in establishing the Roman theme. Two colossal carved stone statues of Julius Caesar and Emperor Augustus stand guard with regal simplicity over the main entrance, symbolically announcing to visitors that they are about to be ‘transported back’ into an ancient world of ‘splendiferous fantasy’ (Giesen, 2000b: 42). The main focal point is the spectacular entrance courtyard, the Plaza di Caesare, featuring prominent fountains dominated by a magnificent larger-than-life bronze sculpture depicting a charioteer standing tall in a horse-drawn chariot. In contrast to the grandiose ornamental design that

4 See ‘Caesars ready for takeover’ *Independent Online* 12 May 2005, <http://www.iol.co.za/tonight/what-s-on/gauteng/caesars-ready-for-takeover-1.929652>.

embellishes the exterior landscaping, the interior space of the resort is a veritable bricolage, a makeshift assemblage, of historicist recreations of Romanesque and Italianate streetscapes combined with high-tech fantasy. This design fragments conventional geographical space and historical time with its hybrid *mélange* of disconnected interior settings, evoking disparate times and places, while at the same time imposing its own stable order on the spatial ensemble. Architects and designers have gone to great lengths to replicate the artwork and finishes that symbolize the power and glory of the 900-year history of the Roman Empire, where life-sized sculptures of Roman gladiators flank the passageways where they loom out of the shadows with imposing theatricality, meticulously hand-painted frescoes depict the splendor of the Roman Empire, and busts of Greek and Roman Gods grace the perimeter walls of the Odeon Show Bar. However, the majestic coffered ceilings, glittering custom-made chandeliers, and stained glass further enhance the interior ambience with Renaissance interpretations of antiquity. Tying the expansive interior into a cohesive whole, paint finishes and *trompe l'oeil* create the illusionary effect of aged surfaces, solid marble columns and distant Roman landscapes (Giesen, 2000b: 42). This effortless switching back and forth from place to place and across the centuries in a crazy quilt of 'simulated history' produces a kind of schizophrenic, spatiotemporal haze (Shields, 1989: 152).

A 2,000 square meter walkway of creamy marble with heavy, mock Corinthian columns topped with capitals embellished with gold oak leaves circumambulates the main floor with its unusual octagonal shape. The lavish interiors are artfully transformed into flowing pedestrian promenades. This spatial layout is ideal for a casino configuration. The entire interior volume of this central space opens up in every direction, thereby giving the impression that one has arrived almost effortlessly at the site. Slot machines and gambling tables are located in the center of the ring, while the periphery, with its supporting service facilities, establishes the major circulation route. The subtle and unobtrusive use of spatial boundaries, impeding barriers and physical partitions between zonal components in the vast interior counters the feeling of claustrophobia that often accompanies enclosed spaces using artificial light. Patrons can access the casino through different entrance routes, including the Plaza di Cesare, the 196-room D'Oreale Grand Hotel, the parking garage, the Emporium and the Conference Centre. To promote easy identification, each of these entryways has its own special focal feature, 'characterized by large circular areas crowned by magnificent domes featuring classical hand-painted frescoes or stunning stained glass features' (Giesen, 2000b: 42).

The Emperor's Palace consists of an aggregation of built fantasies where the deliberate excessiveness embodied in its opulent extravagance verges on parody. Branding experts have constructed the Emperor's Palace as a collective spectacle, or more precisely, a series of mini-spectacles, in which the layout functions as a flow of spaces between which pedestrian consumers can move at their own pace from one fantasy to the next at timed intervals: from the gaming tables, to the staged performances scattered around the premises, to the restaurants and eateries (Giesen, 2000b: 48–51).

The fantasy world theming of the interior is most prominent in the casino area. The luxurious Palace Court Salon Privé, with 72 slot machines and 16 gaming tables, is the crown jewel of the casino complex and is a theatrical triumph of the first order. The inside of the palace is detailed with sparkling marble floors and colorful hand-painted frescoes, providing visitors with an immaculate yet comfortable setting within which to enjoy their gaming experience. Like other casino resorts, the Emperor's Palace has also enshrined its own caste-like hierarchy within the spatial environment. With access carefully restricted to 'celebrities' and 'high rollers', the Imperial Suite — one of the world's most glamorous and most exclusive gaming venues — where totally private dining and gaming take place under a frescoed ceiling, hand painted in the style of Michelangelo. The most distinctive and eye-catching site is Cleopatra's Table, a buffet restaurant set both inside and around an Egyptian-styled Pharaoh's Barge and flanked by three-dimensional 3.5 meter sculptures of Egyptian soldiers. The domed ceiling features a sky mural painted in a colorful luminescent patina, while Egyptian rockwork decorated

with faux hieroglyphics, imitation sandstone columns, custom-designed tiles, and original artwork complete the ornately themed environment (Giesen, 2000b: 42).

Around the casino floor, and scattered throughout the complex are ‘amenities’ baring plagiarized motifs such as Marc Anthony’s Piano and Cigar Bar, the Odeon Showbar, Octavia’s Sensorium Bath in the Health Club and the 1,000-seat Circus Maximus Theatre — a venue for Las Vegas-inspired variety shows with comedy, dance and well known entertainers. The retail concourse, aptly named the Emporium, is modeled on the world famous Forum shops at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, which attract around 15 million visitors annually. Many design components, including the characteristic spacious piazzas, lofty atriums, colonnaded walkways, quaint facades and dramatic sky ceilings, bear a striking architectural resemblance to the Roman Forum. Boutique shops, restaurants, cafe bars and the opulent Monsoon Lagoon adult nightclub line streets and piazzas stylized to imitate the buoyant ambience of fashionable Rome.

However, promoters concerned that the Roman theming could become too overwhelming and gaudy, included a *mélange* of architectural and thematic settings for visitors to escape to (Giesen, 2000a). Façades, balconies, and roof coverings in the Emporium, complemented by highly decorative columns and faux marble archways, are reminiscent of classical Italianate architecture. The tree-filled Piazza Navona village square, cobblestone pathways, sidewalk cafes and the replica of Michelangelo’s magnificent statue of David, featured in the center of a fountain on the festive Piazza di Spagna, create the illusion of old-world charm and the quaint ambience of Renaissance street life (Giesen, 2000a: 72–3; 2000b). Restaurants include the Squisito Ristorante, a stylized Mediterranean restaurant in a relaxed, modern setting style, as well as the double volume Fu Li Hau, which serves a wide range of Asian fusion cuisine, and the African-themed Tribes steakhouse and grill.

The Emporium offers a unique, unrivalled and novel retail experience in tourist-conscious South Africa, creating a charming shopping component within a casino that, on its own merits, is a sufficiently strong magnet to attract large crowds of visitors not particularly interested in gambling. In addition to shopping, the complex features the 4,500 square meter Hydrogen World of Entertainment, providing a host of exhilarating diversions for the entire family, including an indoor roller coaster, a 12-car laser bumper car track, fairground rides and a 10-pin bowling alley. For teenagers under 18 years old, there is a discotheque with an imitation nightclub atmosphere, featuring a dance stage, drum and guitar machines, pool tables and video games. For younger children, there is the Jupiter Adventure Zone, offering a safe and secure childcare environment for play (Giesen, 2000b: 48–51). The five-star Emperor Hotel combines the elegant charm of Monte Carlo with the visceral excitement of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

The spatial discreteness of these ‘micro-universes’ as counter sites gives way to the spatial continuity of the Emperor’s Palace as a total leisure environment. This hyperreal world, taken as a whole, allows distinctions between surface and depth, as well as real and imaginary, to dissipate (Irazábal, 2007). The Emperor’s Palace itself is an autonomous world, with its cacophony of sounds and self-referential language. It crosses over from the realm of the artificial, or merely fake, to the ‘hyper fake’, where any attempt to refer to everyday reality is set aside in the headlong pursuit of an altogether new experience. The Emperor’s Palace mixes together exotic influences without too much concern for their historical, functional, geographical, political and social contexts. Places that achieve this degree of artificiality paradoxically create their own reality (Polo, 1997: 30).

GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World

The GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World is located on a sprawling 57 hectare site along Vanguard Drive, sandwiched between the N1 and N2 freeways, at the site of the old Goodwood Showgrounds, around 20 miles north of the Cape Town central business district. This site has been a well known entertainment destination for more than 60

years, and its central location offers easy access to most areas in the Greater Cape Town metropolitan region (Wale, 2001: 72). GrandWest was conceived by Sunwest International, jointly owned by Grand Parade Investments, AfriLeisure, and Sun International. To fully comply with the national Gambling Act, 51% of the equity of Sunwest International is held by 'historically disadvantaged' shareholders. With a total investment valued at R1.5 billion in 2005, Sunwest has the largest single capital investment in the leisure, tourism and entertainment industry in the Western Cape, spread out over three projects: a new convention center located close to the central business district, a canal linking the convention center with the popular Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, and the GrandWest complex, the largest leisure and entertainment site in the Western Cape (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 12–13).

Rather than seeking to create a total fantasy out of a mythical past, GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World appropriates an eclectic mixture of images from the authentic history of Cape Town, reshaping these to create a highly stylized version of historic Cape Town (Wale, 2001: 85–6). Unlike the otherworldly, dream-like stage sets of the Lost City or Emperor's Palace, GrandWest takes the authentic architectural heritage of historic Cape Town as its point of departure. The key concept underlying the architectural design of GrandWest was the careful recreation of 17 Cape Town buildings of historical significance. While these historic buildings had been destroyed during the twentieth century, they have been replaced by high-rise office towers. Seeking to pay homage to the 'legend and history of the Cape', real estate developers selected a rich palette of reconstructed buildings to represent the thematic diversity of 300 years of the architectural history of Cape Town, including the early Dutch settlement, Cape Dutch homesteads, British colonial architecture and the stylized recreation of a once-vibrant 'Cape Malay' neighborhood (also see Hall, 2006).

The aim of GrandWest is not to present itself as a realistic substitute for actual built environment of historic Cape Town, but rather to use replicas of old buildings to evoke the grandeur and texture of what was once a dazzling, multisensory architectural pastiche. The range of reconstructed buildings includes such familiar icons as the Victorian-style Grand Hotel on Adderley Street (Figure 1), the Spanish baroque Alhambra Theatre and the neoclassical General Post Office. To ensure some measure of verisimilitude in the translation and reinterpretation of these historic buildings, the architects and designers painstakingly reviewed original building plans and old photographs to reproduce as much as possible their ornate decorative details to assure historical accuracy. This attention to detail paid huge dividends; the new structures look very much like the old buildings (Wale, 2001: 76–7).

By building around reconstructed replicas of historic buildings that actually existed, GrandWest seeks to wrap itself in 'deep history' (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 22). This approach creates a more complicated relationship between the real and the fake. The casino entertainment complex is organized around four distinct design themes, each of which lays particular emphasis on a well-known aspect of local heritage. These four themes follow a gradually unfolding historical sequence, telling the story of how Cape Town evolved from its rather inauspicious beginnings as an out-of-the-way Dutch outpost at the tip of Africa to its contemporary incarnation as a modern metropolis with 'world-class' aspirations (see Worden *et al.*, 1998).

As is almost always the case in the reconstruction of historic Cape Town, 'history' begins with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company and the establishment of the first permanent European settlement in 1652 under the leadership of Jan van Riebeeck (see: Bickford-Smith, 2009). A highly stylized replica of the 'Fort of Good Hope' evokes the period of early Dutch settlement (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 12–13). Access to the reconstructed Fort is through the so-called 'Magic Castle' area that forms the centerpiece of the family-friendly entertainment area. A timber drawbridge crosses over a shallow moat and leads into the Fort, filled to capacity with a brightly colored carousel, mini-golf, bumper cars, a roller coaster and midway games for family fun. The reconstructed Fort itself consists of outer stone walls and ramparts, a narrow moat



Figure 1 Grand Hotel on Adderley Street (photo taken in 2009 by Danie van der Merwe, reproduced with permission)

and cast iron balustrades lining a paved walkway. A replica of a 1770 tall sailing ship, ‘the Victoria’, is incongruously moored in the moat, serving as a platform for parties and special events. Rather than an accurate reproduction of the original Fort, the moat, balustrades and paved walkway more closely resemble the mid-1980s restoration of the Castle, a more formidable structure that replaced the original Fort in 1666. Seen in this light, the GrandWest Castle precinct is more a cluster of signs, an amalgamation of elements stitched together to evoke a historical era than a single point in time (*ibid.*).

The Cape Dutch precinct (the ‘Cape Village’) represents the second stage in the historical sequence. ‘The Cape Village’ is in reality a shopping area that masquerades behind traditional Cape Dutch façades, baroque-style and neoclassical gables, and vine-covered pergolas that evoke the eighteenth-century Cape Dutch homesteads and vineyards. The ‘Cape Village’ represents an eclectic mix of contrasting styles. The historicist allusions captured by the replicas of Victorian-era colonial buildings, like the Post Office and the Grand Hotel, form the third step in the historical sequence. These buildings recall the period of British settlement in the nineteenth century. As with the exterior façades, the interior of the casino celebrates the core features of historic Cape Town, its seascape, harbor and maritime history. Models of famous ‘tall ships’ displayed in glass cabinets, ships’ lanterns, low timber beams and staff in stylized nautical dress establish the faux ambience of the seafaring life at a great port city. Promotional materials proclaim that GrandWest is ‘a recreation of historic Cape Town’. The stylized architecture that seeks to evoke eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cape Town borrows liberally from Cape Dutch and Victorian neoclassical motifs rather than producing historically accurate replicas of the original building styles (*ibid.*: 13).

Finally, what completes the story of Cape Town is ‘The District’, a themed restaurant and entertainment zone inspired by District Six, with its distinctive narrow cobbled

streets, alleyways and well worn vernacular façades (Wale, 2001: 85–6). 'The District' is fashioned after the creole, 'Malay' style that gives Cape Town its distinctiveness as a place of pastiche, hybridity and mixture. With its roots in Indonesia and India, the distinctive Cape Malay style formed the cultural bedrock of slaves emancipated in 1838 and found expression in such cultural events as the annual 'Coon Carnival'. 'The District' dresses itself in these themes, with a highly stylized architecture replete with the clichés of outdoor washing lines, artificially rusted street signs, simulated cobbled streets and a collage of 'period posters' depicting a vibrant community that no longer exists (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 22).

The stress on a vibrant nightlife evokes the slightly edgy yet manageable atmospherics of the real-life 'Cape Malay' quarters of twentieth-century Cape Town. As a gesture to the past, 'The District' incorporates such widely recognized names from District Six as Hanover Street and the Seven Steps. Two murals reproduce the common stereotypical representations of 'Cape Coloureds' — flower sellers and singing and dancing minstrels. As such, 'The District' makes use of derived images of heritage rather than making a claim to historical verisimilitude. It is here where real-life human tragedy returns as marketing gimmick. District Six was bulldozed in the 1960s to fulfill the apartheid promise of residential segregation under the terms of the infamous Group Areas Act. By plagiarizing from the real District Six, 'The District' replaces actual history with romanticized nostalgia. The stylized design of 'The District' contributes to collective amnesia by smoothing over shared memories of forced removal and displacement. As a stylized, faux representation of the past, it stands in marked contrast to the District Six Museum, a widely known community-based historical preservation project that seeks to preserve the collective memory of an actual place destroyed under apartheid (also see Rassool and Prosalendis, 2001). At GrandWest, historically significant landmarks like District Six which represent the true tragedy of apartheid rule are stripped of their original socio-historical and geo-cultural meaning and repackaged for visitors as quaint, nostalgic sites for consumption and gambling. The spatial layout of 'The District' is designed to enable visitors to enjoy a sanitized 'urban experience'. All the rough edges have been expunged to promote the consumption of commodified urban nostalgia. By ignoring the historical tragedy of District Six, GrandWest becomes nothing more than a contemporary money-making enterprise.

The reconstructed buildings create a measure of realism that seeks to offset the crass commercialism that defines the core principles of casino resorts worldwide. In cobbling together building styles that amount to 'replicas of replicas', GrandWest does not even approximate the exacting standards of historical veracity or traditional architectural integrity (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 13). Rather than attempts at accurate reproductions, the Fort, the Cape Dutch precinct and the Cape Malay area are syncretic blends of multiple influences that form pseudo-historic versions of the original buildings, 'resulting in the over-determination of the obvious' (*ibid.*: 21). GrandWest does not do more than offer a sanitized past — without exploitation, racism or the shameless legacy of segregation and apartheid. While GrandWest takes the history of Cape Town as its organizing theme, it offers nothing more than a concocted, ersatz heritage of the city and its people. GrandWest provides what John Urry calls the 'spectoral gaze', for an expanding and ever-diversifying tourist industry, for which heritage is the main commodity (Urry, 2002). Such heritage functions as a kind of staged 'performance with a message, an enactment of the past that serves to frame the future'. Rather than achieving success by faithfully reproducing what actually happened, ersatz heritage productions 'gain respectability if they convey the essence of a place or an era — if they persuade their participants to reflect a bit, or to appreciate the qualities of an environment'. GrandWest constitutes what might be called a 'heritage invention', that is, a simulated environment that meets the rather loose goal of conveying the essence of a time and place, but without the constraints of historical veracity or accuracy (Hall and Bombardella, 2005: 18).

The popularity of casino resorts in the 'new South Africa'

In the wake of the end of apartheid and the transition to parliamentary democracy, why are gambling casinos, shopping malls and other themed entertainment sites so popular? Like other carefully crafted spatial products, these post-public sites of consumption are an integral part of the process through which late modernity and global capitalism have transformed the relationships between subjective identities and lifestyle choices, consumer fantasies and desires, and the commodity form.

Themed entertainment sites depend for their commercial success on the staging of a certain kind of accessibility, inclusiveness and openness. Casino resorts engage with and actively enlist the participation of visitors in their own spatial charade and visual spectacle. The power of seduction works 'through the experience of the space itself', through its ambient, sensory qualities of sights, sounds and smells (Allen, 2006: 442; see also Degen *et al.*, 2008). Ambient power derives from the character of these post-public spaces, where the spatial layout, aesthetically pleasing architecture and controlled experience produce 'a particular atmosphere, a specific mood, a certain feeling' that together induce conformity with expected behavior and action (Allen, 2006: 442).

As Mbembe (2004: 400) has argued, the ways in which tourists, site seers and consumers — contemporary *flâneurs* of the postmodern age — experience and inhabit these places 'cannot be easily subsumed under the commonplace triptych of manipulation–alienation–mass deception'. In the age of contemporary global capitalism, subjective identities are increasingly tied to consumer preferences and the accumulation of commodity objects. Late modern capitalism has effectively brought about a widening and deepening of commodity desire and the stylized appeal of mass consumption. Like the powerful forces of nature, the desire to participate in consumer culture and commodity consumption has trickled down to the urban poor. 'It is not simply that things are objects of consumption', Mbembe (2004: 401) has suggested, '[i]t is also that they organize desires and provoke fantasies'.

Casino resorts are at once contrived places, adept at masquerade and concealment, superficiality and shallowness, and catalyzing places, actively engaged in producing new subjectivities, giving new shape and meaning to the post-political figure of the consuming citizen (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo, 2009: 352). Casino resorts are ambivalent and paradoxical places. They represent the entanglements of global capitalism, the logic of commodity desire, and the flowering of consumer citizenship (Christopherson, 1994). For this reason, it is perhaps too simplistic to suggest that these glamorous sites of consumption operate solely through the crass and deceitful manipulation of the subjective desires of those who enter.

There is little dispute that casino resorts in the 'new South Africa' represent self-enclosed micro worlds that operate in a totally contrived, artificial atmosphere of Disneyfied make believe. They 'epitomize precisely the "calico world" Siegfried Kracauer spoke about: copies and distortions ripped out of time and jumbled together in a dramatic and temporal arbitrariness' (Mbembe, 2004: 400). Without a doubt, casino resorts are seductive places, luring consumers with the fantasy hope of acquiring something for nothing and instilling in them the longing to consume objects of desire. Yet it can also be said that casino resorts do more than simply mesmerize and manipulate those who venture inside by dulling their senses, undermining their will to resist the temptation to buy, and as such, transforming them into passive consumers of useless things. The real power of casino resorts is that they allow for the creation of willful agents who actively engage with the experience of place to deliberately participate in the make-believe fantasy.

Conclusion: (re)creating global fantasy

The worldwide spread of casino gambling represents the globalization of fantasy. The use of the European 'old world' motifs in South African casinos and themed entertainment complexes are not unlike those found in Asia, the Middle East and North

America. Bright lights directing patrons to buildings based on the European 'old world' appear almost universal. Take, for example, Macau, the so-called 'Monte Carlo of the Orient'. The city not only has its own version of Vegas casinos such as the Wynn, MGM Grand and Venetian, but it is also home to many other casinos financed by Chinese entrepreneurs and companies (Tieben, 2009). What is interesting is that, like South Africa, many of them reference the classic 'old world' with names such as Greek Mythology, the Pharaoh's Club and Casa Real. Even Las Vegas casinos and 'entertainment' complexes have in recent years moved away from local 'Western' or mythical themes toward exoticized tropical, oriental and Mediterranean motifs (Jaschke, 2002: 119). With this remixed mythology, new casino complexes effectively construct imaginary utopias that attract visitors (see Raban, 1974: 122–3; Kowinski, 1985: 207; Baudrillard, 1986; Apple, 2000: E43).

Seen in this light, it is not simply about the Las Vegas gaming industry exporting a one-size-fits-all brand. Rather, what we see is the globalization of a particular conception of entertainment and fantasy — one that is a spectacular simulacrum of 'old world' fantasyscapes. However, this trend is more complex than the McDonaldization of luxury resorts and casinos. As André Jansson argued, such spectacle can be used as a force in directing the ultimate fate of a city. That is, the symbolic and the economic are tied together in the promotion of urban redevelopment. Growth coalitions and other boosters legitimate the proliferation of casinos as integral components of a truly 'world-class' city (Jansson, 2005).

Thus, the use of 'classical' civilization and its timeless iconography is more than historicist inspiration. Rather GrandWest and the Emperor's Palace are asserting South Africa's progress toward a better future. Accordingly, casino builders aspire to make their pseudo-civilization achieve a timelessness that rivals those of the past. This dream of 'world-class' status is in itself an aspiration, dream and fantasy. At the same time, architecture deals with promotion of fantasy as well as the organization of space. As such, the spectacle of casino resorts is part of a 'make-believe' historiographical staging. With exacting precision, they select just the right fragments of history to convey convincing myth(s) of both time and space (Barthes, 1957; Banks and van Eeden, 2002; van Eeden, 2004; Hall, 2006).

Such design-led regeneration projects — seeking to make the local achieve an 'international quality' — has in turn magnified the good and the bad of urbanism (Punter, 2007). Casinos and their associated entertainment complexes and resorts have blossomed across South Africa and the world. More importantly, they play a considerable role in the stiff competition for regional advantage between local growth coalitions. Rivalries for symbolic primacy have significant spin offs as cities in the 'new South Africa' compete for the claim to provide the latest urban socio-cultural amenities. The urban boosterism of local growth coalitions is usually at the center of these efforts. Upscale shopping malls (symbols of lavish lifestyles), sporting complexes (symbols of aggressive competitiveness), office towers (symbols of corporate success and domination), and sites for theatrical performance and art galleries (symbols of aesthetic sophistication and civic refinement) are all important 'trophies' in the cut-throat game of urban ascendancy (see Shields, 1989: 149–50).

The evolution of the casino resort — as unadulterated fantasy, as derived experience of 'other worlds', as themed environment — has finally all come together in the 'new South Africa': the slot machine and the luxurious hotel, the amusement park and the shopping mall, themed and prefabricated, available as a packaged vacation for all. Part of this is tapping into global fantasies. It is a collective spectacle, or more accurately, a series of spectacles, where interconnected walkways function as a flow of spaces through which mesmerized patrons can move serially from one specialty fantasy to the next at timed intervals (see Chaplin *et al.*, 2000: 213–14). Yet, at the same time, these spaces appear to be historically fixed. Fixed on the glory of civilizations long gone — or mythologized beyond and outside of history — they represent global aspirations and competition.

Casinos like Emperor's Palace and GrandWest are celebrations of consumption, excess and technological showmanship. Part of the appeal of these places is the sheer extravagance of the over-the-top construction. As Achille Mbembe (2004: 400) has put it, casinos in post-apartheid South Africa can 'be defined as synthetic spacetimes, constructed tableaux on which disparate images are grafted'. Like other architectural spectaculars, part of the appeal of expansive blockbuster casinos emanates from the excess and wastefulness of land and material. Spectacles in architecture become triumphs comparable in status to the original events they represent. Indeed, the size of some of the reconstructions makes the originals of which these are copies seem pale by comparison. The casino is a metaphor for the entertainment industry itself: it celebrates the ability of property developers to recreate past historical eras wherever they like; the heroes are not those who lived in the historical past but the entertainment guru of today.

Unlike outdoor theme parks like Disneyland that create make-believe environments consisting of scattered attractions loosely grouped together, casino resorts create a more intense, city-like atmosphere reproduced in an interior setting. The more the notions of time and space become ambiguous and fragmented in the urbanized world of contemporary globalization, the greater the urge to retreat into a world of make believe and fantasy (Waldrep, 2002). As such, they blur the boundaries between the original and the reproduction. The ostensible aim of a genuine reproduction — to make one want the original — has been supplanted by the feeling that the original is redundant and hence no longer necessary. The copy is considered just as good and, in some cases, even better than the original (Huxtable, 1997: 59, 82–3). Beyond this practice of montage and simulation is the peculiar way in which these sites are theatrically staged and absorbed into architectural discourse. The process of transforming other spaces into familiar sites takes place in the construction of discourse, just as in the construction of the built environment: new concepts are identified and neologisms are coined, and these are gradually tamed by overuse to the point that they become accepted and incorporated into everyday discourse. Finally, to compensate for the inevitable assimilation and disappearance of originality, there is an attempt to reproduce or manufacture 'newness' with reified images or appropriated or recontextualized examples, as a form of textual, visual or spatial gaming which masks reality (see Chaplin *et al.*, 2000: 206–7).

In conclusion, concentrating on casino resorts allows us to better understand the political, social and cultural aspects of aspiring 'world-class' cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town. These spaces are linked imaginatively to each other, to other aspiring 'world-class' cities, and to a shared discourse of conspicuous consumption (see Boyer, 1991; 1995). The steady expansion of these showcase sites of 'luxury living' acts to reinforce the existing patterns of spatial separation, division and fragmentation that characterizes city building after the end of apartheid (Bremner, 2004; 2010; Murray, 2008a; 2008b; 2010). In the absence of open cities, enclosed themed entertainment sites are no longer the antithesis of the street, but instead operate as a greater urban world that was heretofore represented by the city and the metropolis (Pope, 1996: 179–80). Despite the consequences of such developments, the idea of 'world class' is materialized by property developers, architects and designers to appeal to the desires, nostalgia or paranoia of people who can afford to be there. In this sense, casino resorts represent the market-driven strategy of conforming to the standardized stylistics of contemporary city building.

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