

I

A Tour of the New Means of Consumption

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We consume many obvious things—fast food, T-shirts, a day at Walt Disney World—and many others that are not so obvious—a lecture, medical service, a day at the ballpark. We consume many goods and services that we must have in order to live and more that we simply want or think we need. Often we must go to particular settings to obtain these goods and services (although, as we will see, more and more of them are coming to us). This book is concerned with those settings: home-shopping television, shopping malls, online shopping sites, fast-food restaurants, theme parks, and cruise ships, to name a few.

Unlike many treatments of the subject of consumption, this is *not* a book about the consumer¹ or the increasing profusion of goods and services.² Rather, it is about the settings³ that allow, encourage, and even compel us to consume so many of those goods and services. The settings of interest will be termed the *new means of consumption*. These are, in the main, locales that came into existence or took new forms after the end of World War II and that, building on but going beyond earlier settings, dramatically transformed the nature of consumption. Because of important continuities, it is not always easy to distinguish clearly between new and older means of consumption,⁴ but it is the more contemporary versions, singly and collectively, that will concern us.⁵

To get a better sense of the new means of consumption, let us first look at Walt Disney World and the larger Disney operation of which it is part. Disney's worlds and lands are important not only in themselves but also because they have served—through a process that has been labeled “Disneyization”⁶—as a model for other amusement parks, as well as many other new means of consumption.

DISNEY'S WORLD

Building on late-19th- and early 20th-century efforts, including world exhibitions (and fairs) and Coney Island in New York, Walt Disney and his company created a revolutionary new type of amusement park, the theme park, defined by areas, or even an entire park, devoted to a given motif (e.g., the various lands at Disney World to be discussed below). The first of its theme parks, Disneyland (renamed Disneyland Park in 2007), opened in Southern California in 1955 (a second, adjacent theme park, Disney's California Adventure, as well as a shopping area [basically a mall]—Downtown Disney—were added in 2001).⁷ It was followed by Disney World in Florida in 1971, Tokyo Disneyland in 1983 (the adjoining DisneySea opened in 2001),⁸ and Disneyland Resort Paris in 1992 (Walt Disney Studios Paris

joined it in 2002). In addition, the Hong Kong Disneyland was opened in 2005, and another is planned for Shanghai in 2014. The Disney theme parks (even the initially financially troubled Paris Disney) have, of course, been enormous successes, in great part because they built, and greatly expanded, on the bases of the success of the early amusement parks. This includes entertainment for the masses, great spectacles, use of advanced technology for consumption rather than production, the commercialization of “fun,” and the offer of a safety valve where people can expend their energies without threatening society. In addition, Disney systematically eliminated the “seedy” and risqué elements that characterized and played a major role in the decline of many amusement parks in the first half of the 20th century.

Disney transformed amusement parks by, among other things, cleaning them up, creating a far more “moral” order than most of the early parks ever had, and making them acceptable as family entertainment.⁹ Disney offered a self-contained, controlled environment free from the kinds of problems that had undermined earlier parks. It pioneered the order and constraint that are characteristic of virtually all contemporary theme parks.¹⁰ Although visitors arriving at earlier amusement parks felt a sense of looseness, even danger, tourists arriving at Disney World know and take comfort in the fact that inside the gates lies a tightly regulated world. The primary appeal of early amusement parks such as Coney Island was that they offered visitors “a respite from . . . formal, highly regulated social situations,”¹¹ but the main attraction at Disney World is just such tight regulation.¹² To put it another way, although parks such as Coney Island provided “a moral holiday,”¹³ Disney World created a new morality emphasizing conformity to external demands.

Disney World is highly predictable. For example, there are no midway scam artists to bilk the visitor. There are teams of workers who, among their other cleaning chores, follow the nightly parades cleaning up debris—including animal droppings—so that an errant step should not bring with it an unpleasant surprise. There is no sexual titillation of the kind that characterized many early amusement parks. The park is continually cleaned, repaired, and repainted; there is nothing tacky about Disney World. The steep admission charge, the high cost of eating, shopping, hotels (especially many of those on park premises) and so forth, as well as the costs involved in getting there, have succeeded in keeping “undesirables” out. A Disney executive said, “Think of Disney World as a medium-sized city with a crime rate of zero.”¹⁴ As a result of this sanitizing of the park experience, Disney parks have become a favorite destination for middle-class families and many other people as well.

The heart of Disney World is the Magic Kingdom (a telling name given, as you will see, our interest in this book in enchantment) and its seven themed “lands.” The trek through Disney World begins (and ends) in Main

Street, U.S.A. (basically an outdoor shopping mall), which leads to the six other themed lands—Tomorrowland¹⁵ (with, among other things, a roller-coaster-like space adventure on “Space Mountain”), Fantasyland (“It’s a Small World,” among other attractions), Adventureland (“Pirates of the Caribbean,” etc.), Frontierland (anchored by such traditional favorites as “Country Bear Jamboree”), Liberty Square (with, among others, “The Hall of Presidents”), and Mickey’s Toontown Fair (with “Minnie’s and Mickey’s Country Houses”).

Epcot Theme Park has Future World, which includes “Mission: Space Pavilion.” Reminiscent of world fairs, Epcot’s World Showcase has pavilions featuring exhibits from a number of nations, including China (“Reflections of China”), France (“Impressions de France”), and Mexico (“Grand Fiesta Tour”).

Another set of major attractions at Disney World is Disney Hollywood Studios, which includes the “Great Movie Ride,” “Indiana Jones: Epic Stunt Spectacular,” and “The American Idol Experience.”

Animal Kingdom encompasses 500 acres, nearly five times the area of the Magic Kingdom. Visitors enter through the Oasis, a lush jungle-like setting that leads to the themed lands of Animal Kingdom and includes a branch of the chain of Rainforest Cafe theme restaurants. Discovery Island offers the centerpiece of Animal Kingdom, the massive “Tree of Life.” Several hundred hand-carved animals seem to grow out of the tree, inside of which is a multimedia theater. Dinoland USA attempts to depict life as it existed millions of years ago and includes the “Boneyard,” a children’s playground with equipment made out of what appear to be giant dinosaur bones. Africa includes the “Kilimanjaro Safari” involving a trip through the countryside and a high-speed automobile chase across, among other things, a collapsing bridge over a “crocodile-infested” river. Asia has the “Maharajah Jungle Trek,” and there is also Rafiki’s Planet Watch as well as Camp Minnie Mouse, which includes “Festival of the Lion King.”

Beyond the four theme parks, there are two water parks (Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach); DisneyQuest (loaded with games of all sorts); Downtown Disney, which features a shopping area (Downtown Disney Marketplace); an area that is more oriented to entertainment (Downtown Disney West Side with Cirque de Soleil La Nouba and a 24-screen AMC movie theater); Pleasure Island (in transition but with more shopping and dining); Disney’s Boardwalk modeled after turn-of-the-century boardwalks like the one at Coney and with still more shops, restaurants, and entertainment; about two dozen “resort” hotels divided into four categories (deluxe villas, deluxe resort hotels, moderate resort hotels, and value resort hotels), as well as campgrounds; the town of Celebration (although in recent years, Disney has been divesting itself of its interest in the town);¹⁶ and even a huge

sports complex (Disney's Wide World of Sports, to be renamed ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex)—all means of consumption in their own right.¹⁷

Disney has become a global presence not only through its many products (the CEO claimed that worldwide, more than one billion people use a Disney product in a given month¹⁸) and theme parks but also through its many other enterprises, such as its movies (Walt Disney Studios, among others), television shows (Disney Channel), and cable television network. Of greater relevance to the concerns of this book are the 229 Disney stores that are found in innumerable shopping malls and online, Radio Disney (a children's radio network), Disney Mobile (wireless phones, which are extremely popular in Japan despite failing in the United States market), the Disney Cruise Line, Disney's ownership of ABC and ESPN (expanded to include ESPN2, ESPN Classic, ESPN-NEWS), Disney publishing (the world's largest publisher of children's books), Disney theatrical producing live stage musicals in several locales throughout the world, the Disney Catalog, and even the Disney Credit Card. All of these are employed synergistically to sell one another in a tightly integrated system that ultimately sells the Disney brand name and yields huge profits. Disney in general and its theme parks in particular are revolutionary in many senses, but perhaps above all they are part of a "selling machine" capable of marketing Disney to an unprecedented degree.¹⁹ Said the CEO, "It is virtually impossible to travel anywhere in the world and not see someone wearing a piece of clothing adorned with Mickey's smiling face."²⁰

Disney is a potent force, and its power is reflected in the opening of the acclaimed Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (with a startling design by legendary architect Frank Gehry) and the central role it played in the resuscitation of the area around Times Square and 42nd Street in New York City.²¹ Prior to Disney's arrival, this area was all but dead as a commercial center, dominated by peep shows and street hustlers. In fact, *Rolling Stone* dubbed 42nd Street "the sleaziest block in America."²² Many previous high-profile efforts to rebuild the area never got off the ground. But in 1993, Disney agreed to invest what is for it the paltry sum of \$8 million in the renovation of the New Amsterdam Theater to serve as a site for Broadway productions of Disney shows. In addition, a Disney Store was opened. Because of the luster of the Disney name, theme restaurants, a 25-screen movie theater, Madame Tussaud's wax museum, B. B. King Blues Club, a Virgin Mega-Store, Starbucks, and major hotels (Westin New York, Times Square Hilton), among others, have since opened in this area. The result is that Times Square has been revived as a consumption and business center, and this helped to revivify other areas of New York City. For its part, Disney gained more stature and a theater, yet another means of consumption and way of selling itself and its products.

THE NEW MEANS OF CONSUMPTION

Disney World (and many other aspects of Disney's world) is of interest to us because it represents a model of a new *means of consumption* or, in other words, the settings or structures²³ that enable us to consume all sorts of things. As a new means of consumption, Disney World has many continuities with older settings, as do many of the other new means of consumption. The predecessors to today's cruise lines were the legendary ocean liners of the past. Las Vegas casinos had precursors such as the great casino at Monte Carlo. Shopping malls can be traced back to the markets of ancient Greece and Rome, the souks of the ancient Arab and Muslim worlds, and the arcades of 19th-century France. At the same time, these new means also exhibit a number of important and demonstrable differences from their predecessors.

The means of consumption are part of a broader set of phenomena related to goods and services: production, distribution, advertising,²⁴ branding,²⁵ marketing,²⁶ sales, individual taste,²⁷ style,²⁸ and fashion.²⁹ Our concern is with the process leading up to, and perhaps including, an exchange of money (or equivalents such as checks, electronic debits to bank or credit card accounts, etc.) for goods or services between buyers and sellers.³⁰ This is often dealt with under the rubric of shopping,³¹ but our interests are broader than that and include the consumer's relationship with not only shops and malls but also theme parks, casinos, cruise lines, and other settings, including athletic stadiums,³² universities, hospitals, and museums,³³ which surprisingly are coming to resemble the more obvious new means of consumption. In most cases, an exchange occurs;³⁴ people do purchase and receive goods and services. This process may take place instantaneously or over a long period of time and may involve many steps—perception of a want, arousal of a desire by an advertisement, study of available literature (e.g., *Consumer Reports* and ConsumerReports.org), comparison of available options, and ultimately perhaps an actual purchase. Of course, the process need not stop there; it is not unusual for people to take things home, find them wanting, return them, and perhaps begin the process anew.

Many of the new settings have attracted a great deal of attention individually, but little has been said about them collectively. I undertake to analyze them not only because of their growing importance and inherent interest but also because they have played a central role in dramatically altering the nature of consumption. Americans, especially, and increasingly many others throughout the world, consume very differently, and they consume on a larger scale (at least until the recession that rages as I write in 2009; much more will be said in Chapter 8 about this and its implications for the analysis presented in this book), in part because of the new means of consumption. Furthermore,

these settings are important beyond their role in the consumption process. Many of the settings considered here—for example, McDonald’s, Wal-Mart, IKEA, Disney—have become some of America’s and the world’s most powerful popular icons. My net is cast even more widely than the reach of Disney’s extensive empire of means of consumption to include discount malls, superstores, warehouse stores, Las Vegas casinos (which are increasingly Disneyesque with their theming and goal of attracting families), and so on.

CATHEDRALS OF CONSUMPTION

The new means of consumption can be seen as “cathedrals of consumption”—that is, they are structured, often successfully, to have an enchanted, sometimes even sacred, religious character.³⁵ To attract consumers, such cathedrals of consumption need to offer, or at least appear to offer, increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume. (Sometimes this magic is produced quite intentionally, whereas in other cases, it is a result of a series of largely unforeseen developments.) A worker involved in the opening of McDonald’s in Moscow spoke of it “as if it were the Cathedral in Chartres . . . a place to experience ‘celestial joy.’”³⁶ A visit to Disney World has been depicted as “the middle-class hajj, the compulsory visit to the sunbaked city,”³⁷ and analogies have been drawn between a trip to Disney World and pilgrimages to religious sites such as Lourdes.³⁸

Shopping malls have been described as places where people go to practice their “consumer religion.”³⁹ It has been contended that shopping malls are more than commercial and financial enterprises; they have much in common with the religious centers of traditional civilizations.⁴⁰ Like such religious centers, malls are seen as fulfilling people’s need to connect with each other and with nature (trees, plants, flowers), as well as their need to participate in festivals. Malls provide the kind of centeredness traditionally provided by religious temples, and they are constructed to have similar balance, symmetry, and order. Their atriums usually offer connection to nature through water and vegetation.⁴¹ People gain a sense of community as well as more specific community services. Play is almost universally part of religious practice, and malls provide a place (the food court) for people to frolic. Similarly, malls offer a setting in which people can partake in ceremonial meals. Malls clearly qualify for the label of cathedrals of consumption.⁴²

As is the case with religious cathedrals,⁴³ the cathedrals of consumption are not only enchanted but also highly rationalized. As they attract more consumers, their enchantment must be reproduced over and over on demand. Furthermore, branches of the successful enchanted settings are

opened across the nation and even the world with the result that essentially the same magic must be reproduced in a wide range of locations. To accomplish this, the magic has to be systematized so that it can be easily re-created from one time or place to another. However, it is difficult to reduce magic to corporate formulas that can be routinely employed at any time, in any place, and by anybody.⁴⁴ Yet, if these corporations are to continue to attract consumers who will spend money on goods and services, that is just what they must be able to do. Although such rational, machine-like structures can have their enchanting qualities (food appears almost instantaneously, goods exist in unbelievable profusion), they are, in the main, disenchanting; they often end up *not* being very magical. There is a tendency for people to become bored and to be put off by too much machine-like efficiency in the settings in which they consume. The challenge for today's cathedrals of consumption (as for religious cathedrals) is how to maintain enchantment in the face of increasing rationalization.

Although the new means of consumption will be described in terms of rationalization and enchantment (as well as disenchantment), it is important to recognize that they are not all equally rationalized or enchanting. Some are able to operate in a more machine-like manner than others. Similarly, some are able to take on a more enchanted quality than others. Disney World, a Las Vegas casino, or a huge cruise ship seems far more enchanted than the local McDonald's, Wal-Mart, or strip mall. In addition, specific settings may enchant some consumers and not others. For example, fast-food restaurants and theme parks may enchant children far more than adults, although adults may be led by their children or grandchildren to participate—and to pay the bills. Furthermore, enchantment tends to be something that declines over time for consumers as the novelty wears off. After over a half century of existence in the United States and proliferation into seemingly every nook and cranny of the nation, modern fast-food restaurants offer very little enchantment to most adult American consumers. However, we should not forget that many adults found (and young children continue to find) such restaurants quite enchanting when they first opened in the United States, and they still do in other nations and cultures to which fast-food outlets are relatively new arrivals. In sum, although we will describe the new means of consumption in terms of rationalization and enchantment, there is considerable variation among them, and over time, in their degree of rationalization and enchantment.

The terms *new means of consumption* and *cathedrals of consumption* will be used interchangeably in this book to refer to the new settings in and through which we obtain goods and services. The idea of the new means of consumption emphasizes both that these settings are new and that they allow and encourage (and sometimes compel) us to consume. The idea of

cathedrals of consumption emphasizes that these settings are characterized by the enchantment needed to lure consumers, although disenchantment is an ever-present possibility as a result of the process of rationalization.

Two theories (a third will be added later) lie at the base of these conceptualizations of the new means of consumption. The first is the work of Karl Marx and his extension of his ideas on the means of production to the lesser known, but central to us, conceptualization of the “means of consumption.” The second is the theorizing of Max Weber, who gave us the ideas—rationalization, enchantment, and disenchantment—that are fundamental to the conceptualization of the “cathedrals of consumption.” I will offer a more detailed discussion of these and other theoretical ideas in Chapter 3, but before that, I need to delineate more fully the major cathedrals of consumption.

OVERVIEW OF THE CATHEDRALS OF CONSUMPTION

We will review the cathedrals of consumption, beginning with fast-food restaurants and other franchise systems.

Franchises and Fast-Food Restaurants

A large proportion of fast-food restaurants are franchises. Franchising is a system in which “one large firm . . . grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade name and processes to a number of smaller firms . . . franchise holders, although legally independent, must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company.”⁴⁵ Franchising began in the mid-1800s,⁴⁶ and today, 1 out of 12 businesses in the United States is a franchise.⁴⁷ Nearly half of all retail sales come from franchises.⁴⁸ On business days, a new franchise opens once every 8 minutes; more than 8 million people work in the franchise industry.⁴⁹

A&W was the first food service franchise, beginning operations in 1924; Dairy Queen opened in 1944 and, by 1948, had a nationwide chain of 2,500 outlets. Bob’s Big Boy started in the late 1930s, and Burger King (then InstaBurger) and Kentucky Fried Chicken (now called KFC) began in 1955. McDonald’s was a successful hamburger stand in San Bernardino, California, owned by Mac and Dick McDonald before it was discovered by Ray Kroc; the first of the McDonald’s chain opened in 1955. By the end of 2007, McDonald’s had in excess of 31,300 restaurants.⁵⁰ In addition to its expansion within the United States, McDonald’s has become a significant international presence in recent years with restaurants in almost 120 nations.

The other big player in the fast-food business is Yum! Brands, which owns three of the largest franchises—Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and KFC, as well as A&W All-American Food Restaurants and Long John Silver's. Overall, Yum! Brands has almost 36,000 restaurant units in more than 110 countries and operates the largest fast-food system in the world.⁵¹ There are, of course, other important players in the industry, including Subway, Hardee's, Wendy's, Domino's Pizza, and Starbucks.

It is worth noting that the fast-food industry and franchises are not coterminous. Franchises represent only 70% of McDonald's restaurants, and Starbucks does not offer franchises; most of its coffee shops are company owned.

Chain Stores

The chain store is closely related to the franchise. The main difference is that chain stores have a single owner (thus Starbucks is a chain), whereas individual franchises are owned by independent entrepreneurs. The first true chain store was the supermarket chain A&P (the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company), which by 1880 encompassed 95 stores. Others were J.C. Penney (begun in 1902) in the dry goods area and among the variety stores the five-and-dime store opened by Frank Woolworth in 1879 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Although many of these early chains have declined or disappeared, the chain store is still an important presence in American retailing. Examples include chains of supermarkets (Giant, Kroger, Safeway, Whole Foods, Harris Teeter) and the multi-purpose Wal-Mart (see "Discounters"), which, among other things, is now the largest supermarket chain in the United States (as it is in Mexico), doing much more business than its nearest competitors⁵²; drug stores (Rite Aid, Walgreens, CVS); and department stores (Sears, Macy's) as well as elite shops such as Valentino, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, and Dolce & Gabbana.⁵³

Shopping Malls

The first planned outdoor shopping center in the United States, Market Square, was built in the Chicago suburb of Lake Forest in 1916.⁵⁴ It was followed in 1924 by Country Club Plaza on the then-outskirts of Kansas City. The Highland Park Shopping Village in Dallas, built in 1931, represented the first time that storefronts were turned away from the public streets inward to a central area. Virtually all of the early malls, and most of what we still think of as malls, are so-called strip malls. There was a hiatus in the building of malls until the post-World War II suburban boom gave it new impetus. The first "dumbbell" mall, Northgate in Seattle, was built in 1947. It included

“two department stores anchoring the ends of an open-air pedestrian mall, set in the middle of acres of parking.”⁵⁵ More important, the first modern, fully enclosed shopping mall was Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, which opened in 1956. Enclosing the mall gave it a vertical dimension and served to make it more spectacular. Enclosed malls were also cheaper in many ways to build and created a synergy that increased business for all occupants. Many shopping malls have since been built on the Southdale model, and they are considered one of the new means of consumption. One of the largest is the 1.7-million-square foot Ontario Mills outside of Los Angeles with 200 stores and a 30-screen movie house.⁵⁶

However, the formulaic pattern of shopping malls and the competition from newer means of consumption have caused the conventional outdoor mall, especially the strip mall, considerable difficulty. One observer went so far as to argue that we are moving into a “postmall world,”⁵⁷ and this was *before* the onset of the current recession. Shopping time per trip to the mall has been declining since the early 1980s. The number of trips to the mall has declined dramatically as well.⁵⁸ A significant number of existing regional malls either will be forced to close or will be converted to other purposes. While the current economic downturn is one source of the malls’ problems, another is the fact that they all look very much alike. “There is too much sameness in retailing. If you dropped a person into most malls, they would not know what part of the country they were in.”⁵⁹ The result is a shift toward entertainment in shopping malls⁶⁰ (more generally, the “entertainmentization” of retailing⁶¹), as well as the development of different kinds of malls.

Of tremendous importance itself as a cathedral of consumption, the shopping mall has been of perhaps even greater importance in providing the groundwork for a variety of related developments. There is, for example, the development of increasingly large malls culminating in so-called mega-malls such as the West Edmonton Mall (opened in 1981) in Alberta, Canada, and the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota (opened in 1992). The newest mega-mall is Xanadu, scheduled to open in late 2010 (for more on Xanadu and its likely problems resulting from opening in the Great Recession, see Chapter 8).

In recent years, the epicenter of the growth in malls and mega-malls has shifted from the United States to other parts of the world, especially China. A majority of the world’s largest indoor shopping malls already exist in China; most of the largest mega-malls now exist in Asia.⁶² The largest, by far, is the South China Mall in Dongguan, China,⁶³ which is much larger than the Canadian and American mega-malls (see Chapter 8).

There is also the profusion in the United States of various kinds of specialty malls, especially the discount outlet malls that have been so popular in resorts

or as tourist destinations. The first outlets appeared in the 1920s attached to the mills of New England fabric companies. Later, the outlets took hold in association with the sewing factories in the Southeast. The first outlet centers are traceable to the opening of the Reading (Pennsylvania) Outlet Center in 1970. Larger outlet malls began to appear in the 1980s. The largest is Sawgrass Mills in Florida, which encompasses 2 million square feet, attracts millions of customers a year, and is one of the state's most popular tourist attraction (trailing Disney World and Universal Studios).⁶⁴ The outlet mall in tiny Manchester, Vermont (population 3,600), is a large contributor of sales tax revenue to the state.⁶⁵ While they have suffered a decline in numbers in recent years,⁶⁶ outlet malls have become a cultural phenomenon, destinations in their own right. People even take vacations or trips to go to outlet malls. For example, on a typical fall weekend with the changing foliage at its peak, one is likely to find long lines at Manchester's factory stores, but the nearby Appalachian Trail is apt to be comparatively empty.⁶⁷ Outlet malls and their seemingly discounted prices are likely to be particularly attractive in hard economic times.

Also of interest is the spread of shopping malls into other settings such as Las Vegas casinos, cruise ships, airports, train stations, and college campuses (especially in student unions). And we can think of various sites on the Internet—eBay.com, Amazon.com, and Overstock.com, for example—as virtual shopping malls (see “Electronic Shopping Centers”).

Finally, mention should be made of a more recent type of mall—Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio—to be discussed at length in Chapter 7. Easton is, as we will see, a shopping mall that is also a town with apartments and substantial office space. Once part of larger towns or in distinct and separable (often suburban) locations, the mall of the future may be, like Easton Center, a town unto itself. While it has an indoor mall, Easton Town Center is primarily an open-air mall. As such, it is part of a very recent trend away from indoor malls and back to those that are outdoors.⁶⁸ As one architect put it, “There's something magical about being able to look up and see the sky.”⁶⁹

Overall, in an average month, hundreds of millions of people shop in U.S. malls, the vast majority of the adult population. Malls employ millions of people and a significant percentage of nonfarm employees in the United States.⁷⁰ Malls are now so diverse and ubiquitous that one scholar describes the United States as “the world's biggest shopping mall.”⁷¹

Electronic Shopping Centers

Worthy of special treatment is the advent of the “dematerialized” new means of consumption. One variant is the television home-shopping networks such as HSN (Home Shopping Network) or QVC (Quality, Value, Convenience).

Round-the-clock television retailing has grown enormously in the years since it was first broadcast on HSN in 1985; QVC followed a year later.⁷²

Another variant is the infomercial, which is estimated to have done almost \$200 billion in business in 2007.⁷³ These are ordinarily half-hour “shows” (typically broadcast late at night or on weekends) that are really extended advertisements for a particular product. They are included as a means of consumption because they usually offer telephone numbers that allow viewers to purchase the product by telephone and credit card.⁷⁴

Internet shopping, or more generally e-commerce, is still relatively new. The Internet was founded in 1988, based on earlier technologies such as Arpanet (created in 1969 by the Pentagon for messages between defense labs and universities) and NSFNET.⁷⁵ Although fewer than 10 million households had online computer access in 1995, by early 2008, 77% of American homes had such access.⁷⁶ Wal-Mart opened its online Internet center in 1996 with 2,500 items; it now offers over a million items online.⁷⁷ Big attractions are sites that offer stocks, computer equipment, music, movies, books, and flowers.⁷⁸ Worth special notice is Netflix, which began renting DVDs through the mail in 1999 and now has 7.5 million subscribers.⁷⁹ However, Netflix is now moving away from movie delivery by mail and to the streaming of movies to one’s PC, TV, TiVo, Xbox 360, and Blu-Ray DVD player.⁸⁰ This is likely to be its big growth area in the coming years. Then there are sites such as ebay.com and craigslist.com where one can find virtually everything one could ever want. While indications are that Internet sales will continue to boom (e.g., even during the otherwise disastrous Christmas season of 2008, Amazon.com claimed that 2008 was its “best ever” holiday season⁸¹), the biggest growth is likely still some years away, and additional future major expansion may be in business-to-business commerce and finance.⁸² In the long term, it is likely that online shopping will outstrip the shopping mall, especially as more and more people use their PDAs (e.g., iPhones, Blackberries) to shop.

Amazon.com is an interesting case study in this realm. In 1994, the company’s founder, Jeff Bezos, then on Wall Street, noticed that the new World Wide Web was growing at 2,300% a year. He decided he wanted to do business on the Web and thought through a list of products that could be sold. He decided on books because of the large variety, the fact that no single merchandiser controlled the market, and because computers could help customers find what they wanted. He quit his job and headed for Seattle because it was a high-tech town and provided him access to an important book distribution center. Thus, a new means for consuming books was founded. Amazon.com moved well beyond simply selling books and sells such a diverse array of products that it is now thought of as a virtual shopping mall. By the late 1990s, Jeff Bezos had become a multibillionaire.⁸³

Also worth noting is the dramatic and controversial growth of gambling through online casinos such as World Sports Exchange.⁸⁴ Already a multibillion dollar a year business,⁸⁵ it is expected to continue to grow. Like all of the cybersites discussed, it is a threat to the more conventional means of consumption, in this case the casino (to be discussed shortly). The reason is clear from the following statement by a person who plays almost every day for 2 or 3 hours: “It’s great. I don’t have to leave the house. . . . It’s very private. There are no distractions, no dirty looks from the casino people if you win.”⁸⁶ Much the same thing could be said by consumers of perhaps the most important online business, pornography, and Web sites devoted to consuming it are expanding at a dramatic rate (although they are losing ground to free amateur sites).⁸⁷

Discounters

Discount merchandising began to boom in the 1950s. Although such stores had predecessors (e.g., Korvette’s, Kmart), discount department stores have undergone enormous expansion.⁸⁸ Of great note is the Wal-Mart chain. It and its major competitor, Target, were both founded in 1962. For the fiscal year ending January 31, 2008, Wal-Mart’s total sales were almost \$374 billion, and it had more than 176 million customers per week.⁸⁹ As of 2008, there were 971 Wal-Mart stores, 2,447 supercenters, and 132 neighborhood markets.⁹⁰ In addition, Wal-Mart spawned Sam’s Club—a chain of warehouse stores—that began operations in 1983 and now has 591 outlets. (Warehouse clubs are very basic retail operations with merchandise displayed in huge, bare settings, and they offer opportunities to buy in bulk. They advertise little and offer few services. Membership requirements are very loose, and the annual cost for an individual is usually between \$40 and \$50.⁹¹)

Another warehouse club, Costco, was created out of a merger of Price Club (founded in 1976 by Sol Price) and Costco (created in 1983). As of the end of 2008, the company operated 403 warehouse stores in the United States (a total of 550 throughout the world), averaging more than 130,000 square feet in size, in 40 states (and Puerto Rico). In 2008, it had 57 million cardholders and employed more than 142,000 people in the United States. In fiscal year 2008, its revenues exceeded \$71 billion.⁹² Like Sam’s Club, Costco is characterized by simple, warehouse-like settings. A limited range of low-priced and discount goods, including food, are sold. Costco offers discounted goods, especially in large sizes and in multiple-item packages, so that consumers often end up purchasing more of a given commodity than they intended to purchase. Demonstrations and samples are abundant. Goods are laid out in such a way that customers often end up buying many things on a whim that they may not need or ever finish.

Also worth mentioning are supercenters that combine a grocery store, a drug store, and a mass merchandiser in one enormous setting. For example, a 200,000–square foot Wal-Mart Supercenter is twice as large as a normal Wal-Mart and six or seven times the size of a typical supermarket.⁹³ Wal-Mart opened its first supercenter in 1988 and, as mentioned above, now has almost 2,500 of them. Other important operators of supercenters are Fred Meyer in the West, Meijer in the Midwest, Target, and BJ’s.

It is worth noting that because of their emphasis on low price, discounters and supercenters continue to succeed even in the current recession. The same cannot be said of the cathedral of consumption to be discussed next—the superstore.

Superstores

Not to be confused with the supercenter is the superstore (or “big box” store), which is arguably traceable to a 1957 ancestor of the current Toys ‘R Us.⁹⁴ The distinguishing characteristic of a superstore is that it carries an extraordinary number and range of goods within a specific retail category.⁹⁵ Toys ‘R Us has all the toys one can imagine (and it controls 16% of the U.S. toy market, although it long ago lost its leadership position in this area to Wal-Mart, which now accounts for over 25% of toy sales,⁹⁶ largely because it sells many toys close to or below wholesale prices); Home Depot is the giant in home improvement building supplies (a major competitor is Lowe’s); Best Buy offers a wide range of electronic gear; books are the specialty at Barnes & Noble and Borders; office supplies are abundant at Staples, and the specialties of many of the rest—Sports Authority, Babies R Us, PetSmart, and so on—are obvious from the names. Superstores have evolved in a number of incredible, even bizarre, directions with, for example, Garden Ridge at one time offering 4,000 varieties of candles. Many of these superstores overspecialized (in candles, canes, or thousands of varieties of recreational shoes) and have since disappeared.

Superstores are sometimes called “category killers” because their enormous variety and low price tended to drive an earlier means of consumption, the small specialty shop, out of business.⁹⁷ They account for a large proportion of retail revenue in the United States, up from virtually nothing a few decades ago. However, like much else in the economy, the superstores overexpanded in the boom years of the 1990s and early 21st century. A number of them have gone bankrupt or have reduced their number of stores.⁹⁸ While such closings are likely to continue (see Chapter 8), this can be seen as a weeding out of weaker chains and stores in a domain that saw great overexpansion. After the dust settles, the stronger superstores

(e.g., Best Buy; Bed Bath & Beyond) will remain as the dominant players in this type of cathedral of consumption.

The new means of consumption discussed to this point are the kinds of settings that most of us frequent on a regular basis. There is a whole other set of new means of consumption that are more unusual. They relate more to tourism, or extraordinary vacations, than to day-to-day activities; they involve attempts to escape the mundane.⁹⁹ In fact, they are part of a general trend toward viewing tourism as a type of consumption.¹⁰⁰ Disney World and other theme parks are one example, but there are several others.

Cruise Ships

Cruise ships have a long history. The great ocean liners of the late 1800s and early 1900s are certainly important predecessors. However, the modern cruise ship can be traced to the maiden voyage of the cruise ship *Sunward* in Florida on December 19, 1966.¹⁰¹ A major boon to the cruise business occurred in 1977, when the television series *Love Boat* made its debut. The show took place on ships of the Princess Line and made that line famous. It also served to popularize the cruise. The Carnival line began operations in 1972 and soon thereafter came to emphasize the “Fun Ship.”

In recent years, both cruise ships and the idea of a cruise have been revolutionized. In the early years of the industry, people took ships to get from one location to another; the ship was seen as a novel way of getting to interesting locales. Now the experience of the ships themselves, as well as the entertaining experience onboard, is the main reason for taking a cruise. There are significantly more cruise ships, and cruises are far more frequent. Although the cruise lines carried only about one-half million passengers in 1970, by 1995, that number had increased tenfold to 5 million passengers¹⁰² and has since increased to about 12.6 million passengers.¹⁰³ Through most of the 1980s and 1990s, the number of cruise passengers grew at a rate of 7.6% per year,¹⁰⁴ and despite a lull due to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, by 2007, the number has grown by 4.7% a year.¹⁰⁵ With the beginning of the recession in late 2007, cruise ships began to experience declines. While problems will continue, cruise ships will survive because they are so spectacular *and* because they are perceived by many as offering an inexpensive type of vacation (cruise lines are now even offering customers the option of financing their voyages) for such a spectacular experience (the largest cruise ship by far, the Royal Caribbean *Oasis of the Seas*, which can handle well over 6,000 passengers,¹⁰⁶ is currently under construction and scheduled to launch in December 2009 [see Chapter 6]). There are now many more cruise destinations and a much wider variety of types of cruises (gay, family, nature, etc.).

The cruise ship itself has been transformed. Ships of the 1970s tended to be small, uncomfortable in inclement weather, with tiny cabins, no television, and limited menus. Although there are a wide variety of cruise ships, the most popular have become much larger and more spectacular. They also have come to encompass a number of other means of consumption such as casinos, night clubs, health spas, shopping malls, bars, and so on. Each of these plays a role in making the modern cruise ship a highly effective means for getting people to spend large sums of money and consume an array of services and goods.

Casino-Hotels

Like amusement parks and cruise ships, casinos (often coupled with hotels as casino-hotels) have a lengthy history. The modern casino-hotel can be traced to the founding of the Flamingo by gangster Bugsy Siegel in Las Vegas in 1946.¹⁰⁷ There had been casinos in Las Vegas prior to this time, but the Flamingo was the first of what was to be the development of increasingly spectacular casino-hotels. In its early years, Las Vegas relied on income from gambling, and other potential money makers (hotel rooms, food, shows, etc.) either were loss leaders or marginal producers of income. Later, Las Vegas reinvented itself and became more oriented to family entertainment. Although gambling was still an important source of revenue, the other facets of the business of casino-hotels were also designed to make lots of money. The casino-hotel became a highly effective means of promoting gambling, the Las Vegas experience, and the activities, souvenirs, and other products that go with them.

More recently, Las Vegas has begun to rethink its emphasis on family entertainment. With business beginning to flag in the early 21st century, there was some return to the basics of Las Vegas's early success—gambling and sex. However, it seems likely that to maximize its number of visitors, Las Vegas will try to combine the latter with more family-oriented venues and activities.

Modern Las Vegas hotels make money by offering thousands of rooms with high operating margins. The city as a whole has well over 100,000 hotel rooms, and new casino-hotels have opened (Wynn Encore in late 2008) and are under construction (e.g., the Cosmopolitan and City Place [see Chapter 8]). The casinos are enormous and spectacular, offering an increasingly large number of ways to gamble. And these casinos are huge money makers for the house with operating margins on table games (e.g., blackjack) of roughly 25% and of more than 50% on slot machines, the true cornerstones of the modern casino.¹⁰⁸ Whatever last small bills and coins a departing visitor

might not yet have lost or spent are apt to be taken by the slot machines at Las Vegas's McCarran Airport or in state-line casinos for those who are leaving by automobile (if they haven't lost it, as well).

Las Vegas casinos have also, in one way or another, been transported to much of the rest of the United States. The most notable examples are the casinos in Atlantic City, on Native American reservations, and in many other settings. Tunica County, Mississippi, "long known as one of America's most wretched backwaters," almost overnight became a gambling mecca with nine casinos (several of them branches of Las Vegas casinos) and by the late 1990s was averaging 50,000 visitors a day.¹⁰⁹ In just 5 years, it went from the poorest to the richest county in Mississippi. Other examples of the spread of the casino influence include the previously discussed online casinos as well as racetracks, many of which are managing to survive only because of their poker rooms and slot machines. Las Vegas hotels have also expanded overseas with perhaps the most notable example being in Macau, just off the coast of China (see Chapter 7).

Yet, the ongoing recession has been difficult for casino-hotels in Las Vegas, Macau, and many other locales throughout the United States and the world. There may be some closings because of excessive expansion, but it is likely that in the long run, most major casino-hotels will survive and at least some will prosper.

Entertainment Aimed at Adults

The Las Vegas casino model has had other kinds of influences. For example, there is a chain of adult-oriented entertainment centers known as Dave and Buster's (the first one opened in 1982; there are now 48 complexes throughout the United States¹¹⁰), which look like miniature casinos; the chain was at one time seen as a possible harbinger of "the Las Vegasification of America."¹¹¹ In fact, one of the co-owners said, "By virtue of its scale and the adult concept . . . yes, we're like Las Vegas."¹¹² They are large (in one case, 50,000 square feet) and have bars, restaurants, pool tables, and many modern (video and virtual reality games such as virtual skiing and car racing) and traditional (e.g., skee ball) arcade games. One can win tickets redeemable for prizes. Servers deliver food and drink to the play areas from the restaurant and bars.

Reflective of the Vegas influence, Dave and Buster's is itself also representative of the growing number of new means of consuming adult-oriented entertainment (now sometimes called "shoppertainment"). Many shopping malls offer entertainment like that found at Dave and Buster's.

Eatertainment

Another contemporaneous example of the trend toward emphasizing entertainment is chains of themed restaurants (often called “eatertainment”). Theme restaurants “typically combine lackluster food, designs that resemble theater sets and entertainment ranging from costumed waiters to museums of memorabilia.”¹¹³ The pioneer in this realm, Hard Rock Cafe, was founded in London in 1971. Although a British creation, it took as its mission the introduction of “good, wholesome American food” to the English. Today, there are 124 Hard Rock Cafes in 48 countries.¹¹⁴ It is interesting to note that it is not the food but products with the Hard Rock Cafe logo that are generally coveted by visitors and tourists. According to one observer, “Most people who wear the T-shirts never even sit down to have a meal there; they simply walk into the apparel stores to look at and purchase Hard Rock buttons, caps and sweatshirts. What in the world compels these people to buy memorabilia from a restaurant in which they have never eaten?”¹¹⁵ In fact, with the wide array of merchandise (including \$295 leather jackets) now available sporting the Hard Rock Cafe logo,¹¹⁶ the wearing of anything with that logo gives the wearer almost instant international recognition. As Thorstein Veblen argued long ago, “Esteem is awarded only on evidence,” and for many today that evidence is the Hard Rock logo on a T-shirt.¹¹⁷

A similar chain (albeit one that has had financial difficulty and been through bankruptcy) is Planet Hollywood, which openly admits that it “operates movie-themed restaurants in the Hard Rock Cafe ‘eatertainment’ vein.”¹¹⁸ Instead of rock memorabilia, Planet Hollywood offers movie memorabilia. It does not try to conceal the fact that its hamburgers are “high-priced.” And it proudly states that the sale of T-shirts and other souvenirs accounts for 40% of all of its sales. Planet Hollywood has 16 restaurants throughout the world, as well as a casino-hotel in Las Vegas. Hard Rock also operates a casino-hotel in Las Vegas, as well as at a number of other locations throughout the United States.

The leader in children’s eatertainment is Chuck E. Cheese’s restaurants, which in late 2007 had 490 company-owned and 44 franchise restaurants in 48 states and five countries. In addition to food, Chuck E. Cheese’s offers games and entertainment of various kinds. It is best known for its “musical and comic entertainment by life-size, computer-controlled robotic characters.”¹¹⁹ Rainforest Cafe is another player in this area with 35 locations in eight nations.¹²⁰ However, this is a tough market and many entrants have failed, with others having difficulty getting established, let alone expanding to any great extent.

OTHER MEANS OF CONSUMPTION

The cathedrals of consumption are important not only in themselves but also for their influence on other parts of society. A surprising number of settings are emulating the new means of consumption in one way or another.

A variety of modern athletic facilities such as golf clubs, tennis clubs, ski resorts, and fitness centers can all be seen as new means for consuming athletic activities. The newer professional athletic stadiums can be described in a similar fashion. In baseball, early innovators were Baltimore's Oriole Park at Camden Yards, the Cleveland Indians's Jacobs Field, and the Atlanta Braves's Turner Field. A number of others have been built in recent years, with the most notable and expensive being the new Yankee Stadium that opened in New York City in 2009 (it will end up costing well over \$1 billion). Although these stadiums often resemble earlier versions and even seek to copy them in many ways, they also have a number of innovations. For example, they all feature spectacular computerized scoreboards; they have all become more adept at extracting money from those who use their services (e.g., high-priced suites at baseball and football games; food courts that resemble those found in shopping malls; elaborate souvenir shops). The new Yankee Stadium features a "Great Hall" with over a million square feet of retail space (as well as, among other things, a Hard Rock Cafe). As a stock prospectus for the Cleveland Indians Baseball Company put it, "Fans at Jacobs Field are offered a customer-focused experience in an attractive, comfortable environment featuring a variety of amenities, concessions and merchandise options."¹²¹ Although these athletic facilities have a long history, the more modern forms are far more oriented to, and effective at, serving as means for the consumption of athletic services (and related goods and services). Not only have new stadiums been built with these amenities, but older ones (such as Boston's Fenway Park¹²²) have been altered to include a number of them.

Many of these things have now found their way to the college level in football stadiums and basketball arenas (e.g., the renovated Byrd Stadium [football] and the relatively new Comcast Center [basketball] on the campus of the University of Maryland). In minor league baseball, there is a miniature version of Oriole Park (Ripken Stadium) built in the small town of Aberdeen, Maryland, by former Oriole Star Cal Ripken Jr. for his team, the Aberdeen IronBirds.¹²³ In addition to many other similarities with Oriole Park, Ripken Stadium offers a scaled-down version of the old-fashioned warehouse beyond right field in Oriole Park (which was left standing and renovated to help give the Oriole Park the aura of an old-time stadium). On the Aberdeen complex, of which Ripken Stadium is part, there are other fields for youngsters. Besides those "themed" to resemble Oriole Park, one

is reminiscent of Memorial Stadium that preceded it as the home of the Baltimore Orioles.

Like the new athletic stadiums, luxury gated communities often seek to resemble, and even to copy, traditional communities. Unlike the majority of these early communities, these new communities have opted to wall themselves off from the outside and to privatize their streets.¹²⁴ Consumed in these spectacular settings are expensive homes and a rich and luxurious lifestyle, including golf courses, tennis clubs, fitness facilities, and so on. Almost de rigueur in these communities are expensive home furnishings, landscaping, and automobiles. (In the exclusive and expensive gated communities of Boca Raton, Florida, the high-priced Lexus is known as the “Boca Chevy.”)

Administrators are coming to recognize that in order to thrive, their educational campuses need to grow more like the other new means of consumption. The high school has been described as resembling a shopping mall.¹²⁵ The university, too, can be seen as a means of educational consumption. These days, most campuses are dated, stodgy, and ineffective compared to shopping malls, cruise ships, casinos, and fast-food restaurants. To compete, universities are trying to satisfy their students by offering, in addition to state-of-the-art athletic facilities that have many of the characteristics of professional stadiums, food courts and “themed housing”—dorms devoted to students with shared special interests.¹²⁶ As universities learn more and more from the new means of consumption, it will be increasingly possible and accurate to refer to them as “McUniversities.”¹²⁷ A related and important trend is the growth of the online university, especially the Western Governors University put together at the initiative of the governors of 19 states (as well as 20 U.S. corporations)¹²⁸ and University of Phoenix online.¹²⁹ It will be increasingly difficult to distinguish such dematerialized universities from e-commerce.

A similar point can be made about medicine and hospitals.¹³⁰ We already have “McDoctors” (drive-in, quick service medical facilities), and there are many indications that we are moving in the direction of “McHospitals.” Examples of the latter trend include expensive suites that look more like hotel than hospital accommodations, more and more “in-and-out” procedures, and so on.

Even museums are coming to look more like shopping malls.¹³¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art houses what amounts to a small department store and has 17 satellite stores in six states as well as 17 international stores in seven countries, selling books and museum-made products. The “MetStore” is even online.¹³² The Louvre has 55 shops in France (with 14 others licensed to carry its products), an underground shopping mall with high-end boutiques such as Chanel and Yves Saint-Laurent,¹³³ and an online store.¹³⁴ The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., has been described in the following terms:

The huge skylighted atrium is surrounded by promenades connected by bridges and escalators; individual galleries open off this space, placed exactly where shops would be in the mall. Potted plants, lavish use of marble and brass, and, in the neon-lit basement concourse, fountains, shops, and fast-food counters make the resemblance even more striking.¹³⁵

The former chair of Neiman Marcus said, “I was in the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] recently, and I was flabbergasted when I saw the size of their store. They are selling everything from rugs to jewelry.”¹³⁶ He might have been less flabbergasted had he known that the roots of the modern museum are, in part, in the World’s Fairs and Expositions.

We can bring this discussion full-circle by pointing out that although the cathedrals of consumption have a quasi-religious character, religion has begun to emulate those cathedrals¹³⁷ and, more generally, to become more oriented to “Christotainment.”¹³⁸ Here is one description of the result:

Megachurches are huge steel and glass structures with acres of parking . . . at their fanciest [they] feature aerobics classes, bowling alleys, counseling centers, and multimedia bible classes where the presentation rivals that of MTV. On Sunday morning, big screens project Scripture verses and the lyrics to pop-style religious songs so that everyone in the congregation can see and follow along.¹³⁹

Said one expert, “They’re the biggest movement going in the Protestant Church.”¹⁴⁰ Another commented, “They are what I call the Wal-Martization of American Religion.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, the pastor of a large Baptist church has sought to make his services “fun” and to that end urged his staff to study Disney World.¹⁴²

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been devoted to introducing the twin concepts of new means of consumption and cathedrals of consumption. I have also introduced the reader to the major types and examples of such means. Chapter 2 offers insight into the wider context and implications of the cathedrals of consumption, as well as their impact on the way Americans and, increasingly, much of the world consumes.