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The Cathedrals (and Landscapes) of Consumption

Continuity and Change

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The preceding chapters have been revised to bring them, and the information provided in them, up-to-date. The main concerns in those chapters—the cathedrals (and landscapes) of consumption and the hyperconsumption that supported and was heightened by them—were largely revolutionary products of post-World War II America. They expanded rapidly throughout that period and at a fever pitch in the late 20th century and in the first several years of the 21st century. This book has its roots in, and in many ways takes as its

subject matter, the heyday, even the excesses, of a consumer society and more generally an economy that had continued to boom until late 2007 and the onset of the Great Recession. Indeed, these extremes, especially in consumption, were major causes of that recession. Many of the economic excesses¹ that lay at the root of the current economic crisis have now been wrung out of the system, often with quite wrenching consequences. Of specific interest here is the fate of the cathedrals of consumption, some of which have become “monuments to excess,” at least in the current economic environment.²

Some might argue that the revolution in consumption in general, and in the cathedrals of consumption in particular, has ended (as President Barack Obama put it in his first press conference: “The party is now over”³). Both consumption and the cathedrals of consumption have experienced recent declines and setbacks, and it is possible that those declines will be transformed into a long-term devolution where consumption retreats to levels not seen in decades and the cathedrals of consumption experience a period of decline, even regression. Some of those cathedrals will disappear not only because of the recession but also because of the irrational exuberance that preceded it and led to overbuilding and to a great deal of excess capacity (a problem currently being confronted by, among others, the global automobile industry). Others may be replaced by newer settings of consumption that overcome some of the weaknesses (e.g., the high cost to build and to maintain them) of their predecessors. We are also seeing efforts to find new uses for some of the cathedrals of consumption (e.g., for empty, or soon-to-be-empty, big box stores⁴). In some cases, we may even see true devolution as contemporary means of consumption are replaced by early modern consumption settings such as small, independently owned shops. In some malls (enclosed and especially strip malls), we already see shops that have been vacated by the chains being occupied by small independent entrepreneurs.⁵ With the decline or disappearance of some chains, they have a better chance of succeeding, and mall owners are eager to have them occupy what would otherwise be dead space (a disaster from the point of view of mall owners). In some cases, the costs of renting or leasing have been reduced to meet the needs of small entrepreneurs.

The coexistence of the modern with the early or premodern (those small entrepreneurs, “mom-and-pop” shops) is often seen as one of the hallmarks of the postmodern. The revolution-devolution pairing is comparable to, and has some similarities with, the pairing of the modern idea of explosion with the postmodern idea of implosion by Jean Baudrillard. The implication is that we may be on the cusp of a postmodern era in which hyperconsumption (especially for the wealthy) coexists with less frantic forms of consumption

and modern cathedrals of consumption coexist with, and may even be replaced by, early or premodern consumption settings.

It is in the United States that devolution is likely to be greatest because it is there that revolution in this domain started and reached its peak. Having risen far, the fall may well be great and with devastating consequences. Globally, however, we *may* witness *devolution while the revolution is still in its infancy*. This best describes the situation facing the casinos on the Cotai Strip in Macau and the hotels on Palm Jumeirah in Dubai, currently under construction or planned for the near future (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of both). Here we may well see a decline *before* a rise; devolution *before* revolution. This all sounds eerily postmodern.

The American, as well as the global, economy is at the moment highly fluid, and its future is, at best, murky. This is all particularly true of consumption and its excesses, especially hyperconsumption and the cathedrals of consumption that both helped to create, and fed off of, such excessive consumption.

In the past few years, we have certainly witnessed the decline of hyperconsumption and many of the cathedrals of consumption. Some of that decline, especially as it relates to the cathedrals of consumption, has been discussed at appropriate places throughout the preceding chapters. In this concluding chapter, however, we need to examine whether this is but another passing phase in the “boom and bust” history of (consumer) capitalism or whether this change is of a more permanent nature. Is this only a temporary decline, or are we witnessing the end of the era of continually escalating consumption and ever more spectacular cathedrals of consumption?

While it is difficult to answer those questions and, more generally, to predict the state of the economy in general, and consumption in particular, after the current economic crisis plays itself out, this book operates with several premises about the nature of that future, premises that lead us to see *both* change *and* continuity in the future of consumption and the cathedrals of consumption. First, people will, indeed must, always consume. Second, when the economic environment improves significantly, at least some people will once again begin consuming beyond their basic needs. Third, people have long needed, and will continue to need, settings (e.g., agoras, bazaars, arcades, grocery stores, supermarkets, shopping malls, online malls) in which to consume. Fourth, along with an eventual improvement in the economy and increased consumption will come a revival of many of the consumption settings of specific concern here—the cathedrals of consumption—as well as the revival of older and the development of newer and more innovative consumption settings. In the long run, in order to compete with one another, many of the

cathedrals of consumption will be forced to engage in essentially the same processes described in detail in this book; that is, they will continue to seek to be more spectacular than their competitors.

That being said, it seems highly unlikely that any aspect of the world of consumption will return any time soon to the heights of its recent “glory days.” The effects and the lessons of the ongoing economic crisis will continue to reverberate for years to come (as they did in Japan after a similar economic meltdown in the 1990s led to its infamous “lost decade”⁶). Thus, I think the possibility of the revival in consumption described above will be tempered by a number of factors. First, consumers have lost trillions of dollars, and much of it will not be recovered; this is money that will never be spent on consumption. Second, credit of all types will be much harder to come by for some time to come, and this will serve to tamp down consumption. Third, consumers are now reversing a long-term pattern and saving more, and the money being saved will not be spent, at least immediately, on consumption. Fourth, in addition to having less to spend on consumption, many consumers will also find their “need”⁷ to consume diminished (again, as in the Japanese case) by recent and continuing economic conditions. Fifth, cathedrals of consumption will continue to exist, but many will be forced by economic exigencies to abandon the kind of reckless spending we have seen epitomized in Las Vegas and Dubai and to find more economical ways of creating spectacles.

There are precedents for this. For example, as discussed earlier in this book, Wal-Mart and others followed the dictum of “bigger is better” and created massive hypermarkets. However, they found that what they created was simply too big; consumers could not and/or would not navigate these vast spaces. They were forced to backtrack to smaller, and less expensive, supercenters. The latter are still spectacular (especially spatially), but they are more manageable and are more economical to build and to run.

In light of the Great Recession, many superstores have opened smaller and more specialized shops. For example, OfficeMax (others doing this are Best Buy and Radio Shack) has opened three new Ink Paper Scissors stores in Seattle. They are about one ninth the size of a typical OfficeMax (2,000 vs. 18,000 square feet) and offer a small number of basic and more profitable products. There are many advantages to such stores—less space, lower rental costs, less inventory, fewer workers, easier to enter new (often smaller) markets, more rapid entry into a market (and exit if things don’t work out), and most generally less risk because of lower investment. Such stores can also attract new customers attracted by the speed associated with shopping in small stores (shorter and easier to navigate aisles; shorter checkout lines) and who have been put off by the time needed to negotiate a superstore. Thus, in

at least some ways, “retailers are going back to their roots, evoking the corner store. At many new stores, personalized service is being emphasized, like explaining the features of a product.”⁸ Said one corporate official, “Consumers want stores that are more convenient, less time-consuming and more personal. . . . There is such a thing as too much variety.”⁹ To some consumers, stores that return to some degree to their roots can be seen as offering a spectacle, albeit a very different one that is also far less costly to create.

A similar trend is the emergence of “pop-up shops.”¹⁰ These are temporary storefronts that open for as little as a few weeks. Of particular interest here are those pop-up shops that offer low-priced and discounted products during these recessionary times. There is a kind of spectacle here as these shops come and go, as well as in the fact that some offer luxury and designer products.

The “dollar” stores are succeeding these days not only because of low prices but also because they are smaller than the superstores, the staff is more accessible, and the aisles are less crowded. One customer pointed out another advantage of the dollar store: “You don’t have to navigate the big-box parking lot.”¹¹

The idea of a more *economical spectacle* is central to this discussion. Such a spectacle seems like an oxymoron; producing a spectacle seems all about excess, including economic excess. However, while spectacles, especially as they apply to cathedrals of consumption like Las Vegas casino-hotels and modern cruise ships, are usually expensive (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of the opening of the Atlantis hotel in Dubai), it is possible to produce spectacles that are more cost-effective, that require fewer “bucks for the bangs,” and that offer “more bangs for the bucks.” For example, while implosion is employed to create a spectacle, it also can be used to create economies of scale. It is less expensive to manage a mega-mall than physically and geographically separate shopping malls and theme parks. Much greater use can be made of implosion as a way of limiting costs, while still producing a spectacle.

A real reflection of the tenor of the times, as well as an interesting example of an effort to create an economical spectacle, or at least one that appeared to be economical, was the opening production number of the 2009 Academy Awards show. Such numbers are always quite lavish, but cognizant of the Great Recession, the producers of the opening production number made it seem homemade, appear to be created on a shoestring budget. The backdrop for the number was “crude, supposedly garage-made cardboard sets.”¹² This was undoubtedly more appearance than reality, and the seemingly low-budget number actually was quite costly. Nonetheless, it reflected the new economic realities and the need to create at least the illusion of an economical spectacle. Many of the cathedrals of consumption to

be built in the near future will be forced to do far more than create the illusion of being economical.

This concluding chapter, then, needs to reflect, and reflect upon, the above developments and prognostications. However, even though much has changed in the wake of the Great Recession, we must not lose sight of great continuity as well as of the fact that the basic sociological realities described in these pages remain operant. The processes (implosion, simulation, and manipulations of time and space) discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 will continue to be employed to create spectacles in the cathedrals of consumption, although they are likely to be modified, at least in the short run, to better fit the new economic realities and to be joined by other means of creating spectacle.

It is now clear that the massive expansion of the cathedrals and landscapes of consumption, as well as the hyperconsumption that lay at their base and characterized the West in general, especially the United States, and quickly spread to other parts of the world such as Dubai and Macau (see Chapter 7), was unsustainable in the light of the Great Recession. In Dubai, the fuel for the development of the Palm Islands and of massive resort hotels to be built on them was the explosion in oil prices (reaching nearly \$150 a barrel in 2008, declining to almost \$40 a barrel, but as I write in mid-2009 having recovered to over \$70 a barrel).¹³ In Macau, long a gambling center, the expansion in casino-hotels was based on the boom in Las Vegas gaming and the ambitions of Vegas-based companies (e.g., the Sands, MGM MIRAGE) to become more important global players. An even more important factor in the case of Macau was the skyrocketing economy of China (of which Macau is, like Hong Kong, a special administrative region). In the United States, the growth in cathedrals and landscapes of consumption was fueled by a rapidly rising stock market, abundant credit flowing from banks and government agencies, and seemingly endlessly increasing home values. As a result, many American consumers were awash with money, and they also found credit easy to obtain to buy not only homes but almost anything else. Escalating home prices led banks to extend credit to consumers in the form of home equity loans (auto loans were also easy to obtain). The credit card companies were similarly eager to find new cardholders and to increase the credit limits of those who already had cards and had reached their upper credit limits. As a result, in 2008, Americans were in debt to the tune of about \$13 trillion in the form of mortgage (\$11 trillion), automobile (\$1 trillion), and credit card (\$1 trillion) loans.¹⁴ It is little wonder that the American consumer was labeled “the most over-extended consumer in world history.”¹⁵

All of that excess (and much more) came to a screeching halt in 2008 with the near collapse of the American, and global, stock markets and of the world’s banking, financial, and credit systems. Credit all but disappeared, and

banks (e.g., IndyMac, WAMU) either went belly up or refused to lend money, even to other banks. The banking crisis, like all of the other economic problems discussed here, had its origins in the United States but quickly became a global crisis, revealing the tight linkages among the world's economies and more specifically their leading banks and financial institutions.

More specific to our interests here is what happened to the leaders in the global casino-hotel business. MGM MIRAGE owns many of the premier casino-hotels on the Las Vegas Strip, including the MGM Grand; Bellagio; Luxor; New York, New York; and Mandalay Bay. It has other properties in the United States (including the Gold Strike in Tunica, Mississippi—see Chapter 1) and the MGM Grand Macau. It is also heavily involved (in partnership with Dubai World) in the new City Center project in Las Vegas (see below), which is in danger of bankruptcy. The stock price for MGM MIRAGE dropped from over \$60 a share at the end of March 2008 to just over \$2 a share in March 2009. The Las Vegas Sands Corporation (it owns, among others, the Venetian in Las Vegas, Marina Bay Sands in Singapore [opening in late 2009], as well as the Sands and Venetian, Macau) has experienced a similar dizzying fall from a share price of over \$74 to \$3.01 during the same time period. Since they were the most excessive, the Las Vegas casino-hotels (and their offspring) have experienced some of the most precipitous declines, but almost all the other major cathedrals of consumption have also declined (and, as we saw above, some have disappeared).

OPTIONS FOR THE AMERICAN ECONOMY

While it is clear that we are not returning in the near future to the frenetic pace of consumption (or banking, etc.) that existed in the first decade of the 21st century, are there viable alternatives for the American economy (and at least some other economies) to a return to at least a modified form of consumer society? The American economy has been dominated, sequentially over its history, by agriculture, durable goods-producing industries, service industries, and consumption. All not only had their day, but they all continue to coexist today and will continue to coexist in the future. However, over time, agriculture and goods production declined, while service industries became ascendant, as did the realm of consumption that was often facilitated by the service industries and service work. If those are America's four major economic alternatives, it seems clear that the United States is *not* returning to an economy dominated by agriculture or even to one in which goods-producing industry is preeminent (although alternative energy technology or the rebuilding of America's crumbling infrastructure may become

growth industries). Agriculture is now just too efficient and high tech to employ all but a small portion of the American population (most of whom, in any case, would have a hard time returning to an earlier point of the nation's history and to working the land).

While it has declined, production of durable goods in the United States is not moribund. Bright spots include "civilian aircraft, drilling tools, telecommunications equipment, agricultural machinery and excavators."¹⁶ However, various nations have captured other industries that America once dominated (textiles, tires, steel, automobiles). Those industries will be nearly impossible to recapture either because they are so advanced technologically and/or because they have employees who are willing to work for far less than Americans have been willing to accept, at least until now. However, while it is remote, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that America will enjoy an industrial renaissance and build even more technologically advanced factories where its citizens are willing, even eager, to accept wages that are closer to those earned by workers in Bangladesh or Vietnam.

It seems far more likely that we will see an array of efforts to restore America's service industries, consumer culture, and its cathedrals of consumption (in which many service workers are found), at least in some limited and greatly modified form. Much hope lies in the service sector, especially in the higher end, creative,¹⁷ postindustrial¹⁸ service jobs that require high levels of training and skill and rely on great creativity. However, the United States is facing stiff competition even in the area of service provision. Examples include the loss of call center jobs to India and other places in the world (the Philippines) and the outsourcing of many other jobs—some very high paying (e.g., radiology)—to many global locales.¹⁹ While some higher level service jobs exist in the realm of consumption, the latter is dominated by lower end service work ("McJobs" such as counterperson at McDonald's and card dealer at a casino-hotel).

From the 1950s on, the United States became the great innovator in the realm of consumer culture and exported interest in it, as well as many of its physical trappings (McDonald's, shopping malls, Disney Worlds, credit cards, exotic loans and investment vehicles, iPods, iPhones), to much of the rest of world. While service industries will continue to expand, a return to agriculture or heavy industry is highly unlikely. Thus, beyond the service sector (much of which is tied to consumption), there are few, if any, alternatives on the horizon in the United States but a return to a focus on consumer culture.

Of course, there are other, much more radical, alternatives such as completely reimagining our lives, our values, and the nature and structure of our society so that the economy shrinks and consumption occupies a far less prominent place in all of them.²⁰ We may yet see such a radical change, but

it is going to require that the wall our economy has hit remain in place, or even become more of a barrier, for years, perhaps a decade or more (as was the case in the Great Depression and in Japan's lost decade). Failing that, what we are likely to see, as the title of this chapter suggests, is *both* continuity and change in the economy, consumption in general and in the cathedrals of consumption in particular.

FROM CATHEDRALS TO DINOSAURS (IN NO TIME AT ALL)

While the low-cost cathedrals of consumption (Wal-Mart, McDonald's, "dollar" stores²¹), those that offer economical spectacles, seem to be weathering the current perfect economic storm well, the higher end, especially the costliest to build and to maintain, cathedrals of consumption are experiencing the greatest difficulties. This is certainly clear in the United States in general, and Las Vegas in particular, as the epicenters of the development of the paradigmatic cathedrals/landscapes of consumption. By late 2008, visitor volume to Las Vegas was down 3%, and gaming revenue declined by over 8%²²; in October 2008, revenue was lower by over 25% compared to October 2007; daily room rates were down over 14% for that same period. When one of the great cathedrals on the Strip—Wynn Las Vegas—opened in 2005, a bargain rate for a room was \$250 a night. The month after Encore (an adjacent casino-hotel also built by Steve Wynn) opened, rooms in January 2009 could be had for \$159 a night.²³ True to the need to be ever more spectacular, Encore, which cost \$2.3 billion to build, is three stories higher than the neighboring Wynn Las Vegas and features the original art of Fernando Botero, a 231-carat pear-cut Wynn diamond, and a nightclub that seats 3,000 people. Such a casino-hotel requires lots of visitors spending and losing enormous sums of money. That is going to be much more difficult to achieve in the midst of a deep recession. This has resulted in great economic pain, including a massive budget deficit for the state of Nevada, a drop in new construction of 92% from October 2007 to October 2008, a huge decline in housing prices, and a rise in statewide unemployment from a minuscule 0.4% to 10% by February 2009.

However, bigger problems confront new Las Vegas cathedrals of consumption that were planned, and on which construction had begun, or was even well along, before the plunge in the economy. Construction on the planned \$4.8 billion Echelon resort was halted in August 2008, with three of its towers having already reached 12 stories (one was to have been 55 stories). Other projects (e.g., the Fountainbleau) are on hold. However, some

huge projects were too far along and could not be held up or stopped. The nearly \$4 billion Cosmopolitan Resort and Casino, a complex of hotels, casinos, and condominiums scheduled to open in early 2010, was forced to file for bankruptcy. However, the bank that financed it (Deutsche Bank) decided that the project needed to be completed.

At the same time, an even larger and more spectacular \$11-plus billion project, City Center, a joint endeavor of MGM MIRAGE and Dubai World, is being built adjacent to the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas (the two projects may eventually be combined). In keeping with the emphasis on size, it is reputed to be the most expensive privately funded construction project in the history of the United States. The first phase of City Center is to open in 2009, and the project as a whole is planned to eventually include, among other things, the following:

- The 4,004-room 61-story ARIA Resort & Casino designed by Cesar Pelli
- A 165,000-square-foot casino also designed by Pelli
- The Mandarin Oriental Hotel/Residences with 400 hotel rooms and 227 condominiums
- The Harmon Hotel/Residences with 400 hotel rooms and 207 condominiums
- The Vdara Condo/Hotel tower with over 1,500 units
- Veer, which will be twin, 337-unit luxury condominium towers
- The Crystals Mall will encompass a 500,000-square-foot retail and entertainment area under a “crystalline canopy”
- There will be \$40 million worth of modern sculptures and installations by world-famous artists²⁴

While much else is planned for City Center (for example, a 2,000-seat stadium, its own fire station, and power plant), it remains to be seen how much of it will actually be built. Even if it is not fully completed as planned, it may encompass the last of the spectacular cathedrals of consumption and landscapes such as City Center that encompass several of them, in Las Vegas and the United States more generally, for some time to come. Unless the U.S. economy recovers far more dramatically in the next few years than is anticipated, it is likely that City Center will, at the minimum, face a rocky start.

Thus, with existing Las Vegas casino-hotels confronting a major downturn in business and others to be completed in the teeth of the continuing

economic crisis, it may be that at least some of these cathedrals of consumption should be better seen as *dinosaurs* of consumption. As was the case with the real dinosaurs of yore, they are in imminent danger of extinction. They are huge and enormously expensive to build and to maintain. Hotel occupancy needs to be high, if not near capacity, and the casino floors must be flooded with gamblers, especially high rollers. However, occupancy rates are down, and bettors, even well-heeled ones, are not coming in as great numbers and tend to be wagering less. The casino-hotels relied on competing with one another in terms of the magnitude of the spectacles offered. They could afford to do this and continually up the ante by offering ever greater spectacles because they simply passed the cost of the spectacles on to consumers in higher room rates, higher prices for food, more money spent on goods in pricey shops and malls, and, most important, ever greater sums lost in the casinos. However, in tough economic times, the casino-hotels have had to resort to something that they have long resisted—competing on the basis of price rather than spectacle.

What has happened, and is happening, in Las Vegas can be understood from the perspective of Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy's theory of "monopoly capital."²⁵ As Marxists, and writing in the 1960s, Baran and Sweezy focused on production, but their thinking can easily be applied to consumption. In an earlier era of "competitive capitalism," entrepreneurs competed with one another on the basis of price; the ones that offered the lowest prices were able to win out over their competitors. The problem with this is that it served to reduce profits or, in the case of "cutthroat" competition, all but eliminate them. Furthermore, many capitalists were driven to the wall, and some were forced out of business as a result of this kind of intense price competition. As capitalism rationalized, an increasing number of capitalists came to the realization that such price competition was self-destructive. The focus increasingly shifted to "sales" competition where the emphasis was on outdoing the competition on the basis of things like advertising and packaging rather than on the basis of a lower price. It was sales techniques such as these that came to draw in consumers, *not* low prices. Prices could be kept high while the cost of these sales efforts and mechanisms could be passed on to the consumer. The result was not only a less vicious economic environment but also higher profits to the capitalist producer than under a regime of price competition.

The modern, highly spectacular cathedrals of consumption came of age in the era of the dominance of sales competition in the production arena. As a result, and taking their lead from the dominant players in the realm of production, cathedrals of consumption tended to focus on sales rather than price competition. Thus, Las Vegas casinos, cruise ships, fully enclosed shopping malls, and so on concentrated on building bigger, better, and more expensive

consumption sites. The latter was their distinctive contribution to sales competition in the consumption arena, whereas in the production realm, such competition focused on design, advertising, and the like (these were not ignored by the cathedrals of consumption). These massive expenditures were made possible by the belief and longtime reality that those costs, no matter how massive, could be passed on to consumers who would willingly pay higher prices for the privilege of being “allowed” to consume in such palatial settings. Now, however, these consumption settings, like many of their predecessors, are being forced to rely less on sales competition and to focus more on cutting prices and being more competitive in terms of price.²⁶

In fact, Las Vegas recently launched a new promotion, “Vegas Right Now,” which seeks to increase the number of visitors by offering discounted hotel rooms, tickets to shows, and spa packages. Room prices are down all along the Strip, and promotions are rife (a free buffet meal with a room rental; discounted and even free show tickets at the major hotels). This may succeed in bringing more visitors to Las Vegas, but those who come as a result of lower prices are not likely to be the big spenders and high rollers who are required to support the massively expensive cathedrals of consumption. These cathedrals, built during the heyday of Las Vegas, may become dinosaurs ill suited to survive in this new economic climate. They may simply be too big and too expensive, employ too many people, and be too costly to operate. If the current downturn is brief, most or all will survive and perhaps thrive once again. However, if the downturn is severe, at least some of these cathedrals may, indeed, become dinosaurs and follow the “real” dinosaurs into extinction. Especially vulnerable are the ones currently under construction and nearing completion. Where will a sufficient number of the needed tourists, gamblers, and condo purchasers come from? The newer, very expensive casino-hotels (e.g., Encore) will also have great difficulty in this environment, although it may be that the very wealthy are best positioned to weather the economic storm and still afford such luxuries. The wealthy and near wealthy will allow the high-end casino-hotels (e.g., Bellagio) to survive and maybe even prosper. It may also be that the older casino-hotels on the Strip (e.g., Caesar’s Palace) that have long since earned back their capital investments are in a good position to survive. They are better able to compete on a price basis and still earn a profit. Also likely to survive are the least expensive casino-hotels (e.g., Circus Circus, where, at this writing, rooms can be had for \$29 a night). However, the older the casino-hotel (and both Caesar’s Palace and Circus Circus are in this category), the more modest the spectacle being offered, at least in comparison to the newest casino-hotels. While this is a source of their price advantage, will it attract enough consumers to them and to Las Vegas as a whole?

It also could be argued that continuity is traceable to the fact that many of these casino-hotels are, like banks and financial institutions such as Citibank, AIG, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac, “too big to fail.” While the failure of some of these casino-hotels would be catastrophic, especially for Las Vegas and Nevada, it seems unlikely that either the city or the state would have the funds needed to rescue them. It seems even more unlikely that the U.S. government would rescue them; the public uproar over saving such centers of gambling and other “sins”²⁷ would be enormous. However, as in the case of City Place, large investors may well find it in their interest to continue to pump money into the casino-hotels with the hope and expectation that their fates will improve in the future.

While the problems are most extreme in Las Vegas, probably because the cathedrals there were, at least until very recently, the most spectacular (and spectacularly expensive), they are also afflicting the other spectacular cathedrals of consumption. Cruise lines are responding by offering low-price promotions; the Disney cruise line is allowing children to travel free. Cruise ships have an advantage because of the perception, or the reality in some cases (if those who cruise do not purchase expensive add-ons such as side trips at various ports of call), that their package rates are a bargain, or at least allow the travelers to have a clearer sense of just what their total costs will be.²⁸ Nevertheless, many of the most popular cruise ships are huge and must attract thousands of customers every week, at least in season. The ships themselves are expensive and costly to operate, requiring large crews to handle the thousands of passengers.

Shopping malls throughout the United States (there are about 1,500 of them) and elsewhere have seen declines in the number of customers visiting malls, the amount spent per customer, and the total amount of business. They have responded by offering sales, promotions, contests, and so on. However, malls are plagued by an increasing number of empty shops (a devastating sight in malls that adversely affects the spectacle they are endeavoring to create), and many of these shops are outlets of chains that are retrenching or themselves going out of business.²⁹ Closed shops mean less revenue to the mall owners and make it more difficult for them to survive. Many malls are themselves in danger of closing, are in the process of closing, or have already closed (see www.deadmalls.com) as a result of the recession.³⁰ Also contributing to mall closures is the credit crisis associated with the recession and the inability of malls to get needed financing or refinancing. The result is the proliferation of “dead malls” such as the Randall Park Mall outside Cleveland, Ohio, which closed in late 2008.³¹ However, strip malls and even fully enclosed, “big box” malls have been experiencing problems for some time. Part of the reason is that too many of them were built (retail space per capita in the United States

doubled between 1990 and 2005, but consumer spending, adjusted for inflation, rose only 14% during the same period³²), and many were just too big; they are also losing business to other spectacular shopping sites such as “lifestyle” open-air malls (e.g., Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio [see Chapter 7], which is, as we’ve seen, having its own problems).

One of the major developers of malls, the Mills corporation, experienced severe economic difficulties and was taken over in 2007 by Simon Property Group (and Farallon Capital Management)—the company is now called The Mills: A Simon Company (General Growth Properties, the largest mall owner in the United States, is deeply in debt and announced in April 2009 that it was filing for bankruptcy). Mills had built a number of the United States’ biggest and best-known malls (e.g., Sawgrass Mills, Potomac Mills, Ontario Mills), and it had constructed malls elsewhere in world, including Spain, Scotland, and Canada. At the time of its sale, Mills was building a spectacular new mall—Meadowlands Xanadu—just outside New York City. The project was taken over by a private investment firm. It was originally scheduled for completion in 2007, but that has been pushed back until 2010 (certainly not likely to be an opportune time to open such a mall).

Xanadu is an interesting example of a *dinosaur of consumption in the making* (another is the *Oasis of the Seas* [see Chapter 6], which has been described as “a dinosaur—a floating emblem of a bankrupt era”³³)—a shopping mall that may be extinct before it opens its doors. Even if it survives, it may be the “last shopping mall” of its kind,³⁴ at least for some time to come. The fact that this mall seeks to be a spectacle is clear in its name, which comes from a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who describes Xanadu as a “stately pleasure-dome” built for Kubla Khan (based on Chinese emperor Kublai Khan). The mall will cost over \$2 billion to build, and it will encompass 2.4 million square feet of space.³⁵ Among the attractions imploded into that space are the following:

- A ski jump whose structure will also encompass a facility for indoor skiing and snowboarding
 - An 18-screen movie theater
 - A concert hall and live theater
 - An extreme-sports store with an indoor wave pool
 - A skydiving simulator
 - A 286-foot Ferris wheel (the largest in North America) offering a view of the New York skyline
 - A huge video screen in the sports area

- Five themed areas
- Children's Science Center
- Legoland Discovery Center
- Wannado City where children can play at being firefighters, police officers, and so on

At one time, all of this would have seemed quite normal for a new mall, but it seems very different in this new economic era. It seems more like a huge mistake akin to giving birth to a dinosaur when a gecko would be better adapted to the times. To top off Xanadu's problems is the fact that it is built in a monumentally ugly environment—the polluted wetlands of New Jersey and alongside the Jersey Turnpike—and it is itself described as horrendous: “a mishmash of big-box structures covered in aqua, blue and white tiles, with a little mustard yellow and brown thrown in to finish off the 1970s-nightmare look . . . ‘Looks like bathroom tile from the 1970s.’”³⁶

While some restaurant chains (e.g., low-priced ones such as McDonald's, Taco Bell, and Subway) are thriving, others are not. Some of the chains in trouble are at the low end (e.g., Arby's, Krispy Kreme), but most are mid-range, casual dining chains such as Applebee's and Outback Steakhouse (themed as an old-time Australian restaurant). Even high-end chains such as Morton's are struggling, in part because they have lost many of their expense account customers. As in the case of many cathedrals of consumption, the restaurant chains overbuilt, with the result that there are far more of them than are needed. A painful restructuring of the chain restaurant business is in process.³⁷

Amusement parks, especially Disney's theme parks, may fare better in the current recession than many of the other cathedrals of consumption discussed here. In part, this is due to the fact that Disney World is such a cultural icon (but Las Vegas is, as well, and it is hurting). However, Disney theme parks, like cruise ships, seem to offer low prices (although this often turns out not to be the case when all other costs are added up—food, souvenirs, hotels in or near the park, etc.) through their one-price passes for one-day or several-day visits. In addition, many Americans can drive to one of the U.S. parks, thereby saving on expensive airfares for several family members. More regional amusement parks in the United States, such as Cedar Point outside Sandusky, Ohio, are, or are perceived to be, even more economical vacation sites (e.g., the drive for many is shorter), with the result that they are even more likely to be resistant to recession. This is true, as well, of other parks around the globe such as Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, which can be reached by public transportation.

THE NOT SO CREATIVE DESTRUCTION OF STILL-BORN CATHEDRALS OF CONSUMPTION

Whatever the future, as I write what we are witnessing in the realm of consumption, as well as in the larger economy, is another of the economic “gales” that were the focus of the work of Joseph Schumpeter. What defines capitalism to Schumpeter is a process of “creative destruction” where new economic structures are created and old ones are destroyed in order to make room for them. Schumpeter, of course, was focusing on production (e.g., manufacturing plants), but much the same argument can be made about consumption (and, say, casino-hotels and shopping malls). Thus, from a Schumpeterian perspective, new—but still spectacular—cathedrals of consumption (albeit perhaps built more economically, more reliant on advanced technology) will arise and, in many cases, replace at least of some of the “dinosaurs” (e.g., superstores like Linens ‘n Things) that dominated an era that now appears to be in rapid retreat.

It is one thing for extant cathedrals of consumption, especially those that have been in existence for some time, to be destroyed (in the name of creative destruction), but it is quite another for those that are in the advanced planning stages or, worse, well along in their construction. The image conveyed by the theory of creative destruction is of a business that has succeeded for a time but has fallen on hard times and/or has been made increasingly marginal by a variety of changes (e.g., economic, technological, social). While we might fret about the destruction of such a business and the loss of jobs facing its employees, there is at least the consolation that it/they had their successes.

While we are witnessing many examples of such classic creative destruction in the current recession, there are many other cathedrals of consumption that are not being built even though much time, money, and planning have already gone into them. Furthermore, there are many others that will experience dramatic and costly delays. However, a much greater problem is created for the structures that have been destroyed during the process of being created (e.g., the Echelon in Las Vegas; see above) or are being completed even though they face a bleak future (at least immediately) and may face the possibility of destruction soon after completion (e.g., the Cosmopolitan and City Place in Las Vegas; the same might be the case for some of the hotels under construction on Palm Jumeirah in Dubai).

In these cases, we have no past history of success, as was the case for, say, Circuit City, to soften the blow of failure, no history of past profits, and no sense that they had their time in the sun but that that time has now past. All we have in these instances is failure (or the great likelihood of failure). This is

not a situation that is considered by the theory of creative destruction and its generally optimistic outlook. If we would like to salvage creative destruction as a theory (although there is no imperative that we must), we need to do so by taking into consideration situations such as these. Creative destruction *may* be a theory that has relevance to the contemporary economic situation, but it is not salvageable without a major overhaul. Among other things, it needs to be able to deal with such still-born organizations.

Creative destruction also needs to be reexamined in the context of globalization. Schumpeter wrote long before the current “global age,” with the result that his theory of creative destruction focused only on what transpired within a given country. Thus, his image was, for example, of a factory closing in the Midwest but being replaced by a newer and more efficient one in the South. From the perspective of the United States, this could be seen as a rather benign process since the country as a whole lost nothing and likely gained by such creative destruction. However, in the global era, it is likely the case that that which is new and more efficient might well be created in some other, very distant part of the world. Thus, in the era of globalization, creative destruction is not such a welcome process, at least for some of the companies and nations involved.

We might see this repeated in the case of the cathedrals of consumption. For example, one could conceive of a circumstance in which much of the Las Vegas Strip is decimated by a prolonged depression and/or a dramatic shift in the global economy away from the United States. In that case, it might be that the Cotai Strip in Macau becomes the world’s main landscape of consumption as far as gambling is concerned and comes to be populated by the most spectacular casino-hotels. Furthermore, if the global economic center of gravity is indeed shifting to China, India, and Southeast Asia, then it makes sense for Macau to replace Las Vegas as the paradigmatic landscape of consumption, at least as far as gambling is concerned. However, this is not a benign process of creative destruction, at least from the perspective of the United States. The decline of the Las Vegas Strip would be an economic disaster for the city of Las Vegas, the state of Nevada, and perhaps even the United States as a whole.

A WORST-CASE SCENARIO: THE DEATH OF AT LEAST SOME OF THE CATHEDRALS OF CONSUMPTION

There is another scenario to discuss in this concluding chapter, and that involves the ultimate step in the devolution of at least America’s cathedrals

of consumption—the demise of many of them! In Schumpeter’s terms, this is destruction *without* creation.

The warning signs are everywhere. Of particular interest are not only the cathedrals of consumption that have already disappeared but also those that may soon join them. Among those that have the potential to disappear as I write are the Rite Aid chain of pharmacies (with almost 5,000 stores and 100,000 employees), Blockbuster (a video rental chain with about 60,000 employees), Sbarro (a pizza chain with over one thousand stores and 5,500 employees), Six Flags (an operator of a chain of 20 theme parks), and Station Casinos (which operates 15 casinos off the Strip in Las Vegas and employs 14,000 people).

More generally, at some point in the future, all of the cathedrals of consumption, like all structures throughout history, will die. What sociologists and historians of the future will be left with are the remnants of today’s cathedrals of consumption, much as we have today in the case of Stonehenge or the ruins in various locales that are all that remain of the Roman Empire. Returning to the dinosaur metaphor, specifically the bones that remain of them, we will be left with many of the relics of today’s leading cathedrals of consumption. Like the dinosaur, these cathedrals of consumption were well suited to one type of reality (economic abundance) but totally ill suited to what may come later (economic decline or other large-scale changes).

Let’s assume we are at a relatively early point in the process that will lead in the end to the death of at least some of today’s cathedrals of consumption. In thinking about these cathedrals from this point of view, we have much to learn from Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of this work). Benjamin wrote this book over a number of years in the 1920s and 1930s, but he was writing about a largely 19th-century phenomenon that was at the time in its death throes (“the arcades are dying”) or at least in decline. Thus, he treated the arcades as “monuments” that had been left behind by, and had left “traces” of, an earlier age or, more negatively, as the “detritus” of that era. For example, the Eiffel Tower in Paris is a monument (it’s hard to think of it as detritus) left behind by the Paris Exhibition (or World’s Fair) of 1889 (the same is true of the Unisphere that remains from the New York World’s Fair of 1964–1965). He was interested in studying such structures as detritus that offer insights into a prior epoch. He saw the arcades as “dreamworlds”³⁸ that cast light on the collective dreams of the era in which they were constructed.

Today, arcades continue to exist in various places in the world, especially in Europe, where they can be studied from Benjamin’s perspective. Furthermore, many other cathedrals (or, as Benjamin called them, “temples” [the arcades were such temples in his view]) of consumption, created both

before and after the arcades, continue to exist (although they are in decline) and can be studied in much the same way. In fact, the discussion in Chapter 7 of the landscape of consumption in the heart of Milan, Italy, dealt with not only an arcade but also the Duomo that preceded it by several centuries, as well as a department store (La Rinascente) that succeeded it by a few years. All three can be seen as examples of monuments that can be studied for what they tell us about the eras in which they were built and reached their peak.

It could be argued that all of the cathedrals of consumption discussed in this book will experience the same fate sooner or later. However, what the Great Recession has indicated is that some of them are farther along in this process of decline than others. For example, the strip mall, which was already in decline before the recession, has devolved still further in recent years. Those that remain, either as functioning or dead malls, can be seen as detritus of an earlier era when comparatively little spectacle was needed in order to construct a cathedral of consumption. These were, and are, very functional sites that have, in many cases, been abandoned for the more spectacular fully enclosed malls and mega-malls.

Even if we assume that all of the above is true or comes to pass, the point is that a study of all of these monuments is worthwhile for what it tells us about the age, just past or now passing, that gave us the ultimate, at least until now, cathedrals of consumption. Furthermore, it would be useful to think of all cathedrals of consumption as having a life cycle with some in their early stages of life (e.g., online malls, shopping via a smartphone) while others (e.g., strip malls) are in their twilight years. This gives us a more processual view of all cathedrals of consumption and allows us to compare and contrast them from this perspective. If nothing else, this will allow us to see that what now seem to be permanent structures are really in the midst of a process that will end some day, as did the Roman Empire, in their “decline and fall.”

GLIMPING THE FUTURE OF SPECTACLES

It seems likely that once the price competition discussed above is set in motion, it will continue for some time, even if the economy recovers more rapidly than is expected. Consumers come to expect price cuts, sales, and bargains, and the cathedrals of consumption will have no choice but to continue to satisfy those expectations, at least for a time. This could become part of a process of deflation that many observers fear could develop in the wake of the Great Recession and is already occurring in Spain, Iceland, and elsewhere.³⁹

However, as soon as it is feasible, the cathedrals of consumption will seek to shift back to sales competition. On one hand, this means a focus on the

same kinds of things that one finds throughout the economy such as advertising and marketing. However, as we have seen, what is unique about the cathedrals of consumption is their reliance on spectacle as a means of competing on the basis of sales. Thus, it is argued here that we will see a return to spectacle and to the specific methods discussed in this book to create spectacle. However, the lessons of the Great Recession will not be lost on those who own and control the cathedrals of consumption. They will come to see that some mistakes were made in the creation of spectacles, and we are likely to see less use of at least some of those techniques in the future. Conversely, it will become clear that other methods made sense and will continue to make sense down the road. Furthermore, it is likely that efforts will be made to rediscover older, or to create new, methods for generating a spectacle.

Here we need to differentiate between extant cathedrals of consumption and those likely to be built in the near future. In terms of the former, the cathedrals exist, and they need to attract large numbers of people in order to survive. They will rely on not only price competition but also traditional methods of generating spectacle in order to save themselves, if not to prosper once again. They will also be attuned to searching for new ways of generating spectacle, but they will be hampered in that search by the nature of their structures. That is, massive structures are likely to continue to require equally massive spectacles. Furthermore, such spectacles are inherent parts of most of those structures. However, this means a continuation of the cycle that got these cathedrals of consumption into great difficulty in recent years—massive expenditures to build and operate great cathedrals of consumption with enormous and very costly spectacles in order to attract huge crowds.

In light of this discussion, one of the most interesting and telling responses of indoor malls in trouble is to turn to traditional spectacles in order to save themselves by luring potential customers. In early 2009, a number of U.S. malls began planning to install a huge and costly (approaching \$2 million to install) contraption called a Flowrider in spaces in the mall vacated by, for example, department stores. The Flowrider is a glass-enclosed wave pool with a machine that propels 35,000 gallons of water over a slope at 30 miles per hour.⁴⁰ Some potential customers are drawn to play in the pool; many others just come to watch the spectacle. Of course, as with all spectacles, the hope is that people will stay in the mall and consume in various shops. However, the Flowrider represents a continuation of the belief that cathedrals of consumption need large and expensive spectacles in order to survive.

The cathedrals of consumption to be built in the future will not labor under the constraints on extant cathedrals. Furthermore, they will, or should, have a clear-eyed view about what has happened to the economy,

consumption, and the cathedrals of consumption. This will enable them to learn better from past mistakes. They are in a better position to build on those lessons because they are not as constrained as extant cathedrals of consumption. Thus, they will examine critically the traditional methods of creating spectacle, and they will be more determined to find and to experiment with new methods of creating spectacle.

As mentioned above, it is the cathedrals of consumption under construction that are in the most difficult situation, although their fate will vary by their position in the global economy. In the United States, there is the new condominium complex, Icon Brickell, at the confluence of the Miami River and Key Biscayne in downtown Miami, Florida. It cost \$1.25 billion to build and has the following spectacular characteristics:

It has 1,646 condos, a 28,000-square-foot fitness area and a two-acre pool deck with a 12-foot-high limestone fireplace. The 22-foot-tall sculptured columns, 100 of them, marking the entry way were inspired by the monumental moai statues on Easter Island and cost \$15 million.⁴¹

It has three towers, the smallest is 50 stories high (said one real estate executive who, seems belatedly, to have come to his senses, “Bigger is not better”⁴²), and the complex includes a boutique hotel. The problem is that this building complex was completed and its condos came on the market as the Great Recession emerged and also in the face of massive overbuilding in Florida in general (yet another example of excess and irrational exuberance). Between 2003 and 2009, 83 towers were built in Miami, putting 23,000 new condo units on the market. As of December 31, 2008, 45% of them had not been sold. In the case of Icon Brickell, only 30 of the 500 condos (priced between \$400,000 and \$800,000) that were ready for closing at the end of 2008 actually closed. Like many cathedrals of consumption of this bygone era, Icon Brickell is spectacular and spectacularly expensive. For the moment, it sits largely empty and looks very much like one of many dinosaurs still standing in Miami Beach, as well as elsewhere in the United States and the world.

The key point is that Icon Brickell is in existence, and the expensive spectacle associated with it is going to do it little good in the current economic environment. It is going to need to compete, very reluctantly, on a price basis, and that means cutting prices, probably drastically, until its inventory of condos, and that of others, is eventually sold. It, like all other extant cathedrals of consumption, has little choice, but those currently being contemplated can rethink the nature, extent, and type of spectacle they wish to create.

However, it should be pointed out that the actions taken and the fate of cathedrals of consumption will vary by geographic location. Within the United States in general and the Miami, Florida, area in particular, the cathedrals of consumption are going to have a difficult time, and it will not be easy for them to avoid becoming dinosaurs. Other areas of the world—Dubai and Macau, in particular—are likely to continue to experience some difficulties, but in the long term, their cathedrals of consumption are more likely to escape the perils of “dinosaurization.”

The one type of spectacle that we are certain to see less of in the future is that which relies on spatial manipulations, especially the creation of huge, and hugely expensive,⁴³ spaces (although the Flowrider discussed above indicates this will not disappear). Instead of “more is more,” the dominant ideology is going to be “less is more.” As has been discussed previously, huge physical spaces have become liabilities. No matter how spectacular a cathedral of consumption is physically, it is quite unspectacular if it is more or less empty. In boom times, luring large crowds is not a problem, but it is in depressed times and even in a more normal economy. While overall, there will be less reliance on large spaces to create spectacle, there will, once again, be global variation in this. Given its likely economic decline, there will be fewer such spaces in the United States, but in other places that are likely to expand economically—China and the Arab States, for example—we are apt to see a resumption of the building of such spaces once the recession ebbs.

The other type of spatial spectacle—being in many different geographic locales—is also likely to be used less, although it will not decline as much as the use of great spaces. Lower end global chains like McDonald’s, IKEA, and Wal-Mart are likely to expand their reach into ever more locales, while those on the higher end will slow down in terms of expansion or even retreat, at least until the economy picks up dramatically. Building yet another locale in still another part of the world is, in the end, a comparatively low-cost undertaking, especially for low-end chains, and if it doesn’t work, it can be closed with relatively little effect on the massive corporations that created it. In fact, the companies mentioned above have not been shy about either building or closing locales as demanded by market considerations.

Creating spectacle via implosion has a mixed future. On one hand, this has often involved huge spaces and great costs (e.g., Xanadu). Given what has been said above about size, we are likely to see fewer implosions of this magnitude in the future. On the other hand, implosion does not necessarily require great spaces and huge expenditures. Implosion can occur in very modest settings with a multitude of offerings, making them attractive to consumers. 7-11 is a chain that, over the years, has changed from its roots as a convenience (grocery) store; a number of other means of consumption have

imploded into it—newsstand, restaurant, coffee shop, bank (ATM machines, etc.), phone store (purveyor of prepaid phone cards), and so on. There is a spectacle to all of this, but it is a highly economical form of implosion. It is likely that cathedrals of consumption will make more use of such economical forms of implosion. They create a spectacle and a synergy that leads to greater sales and profits (and lower costs). It is certainly not eye-popping; it is more a spectacle of convenience, but given the global proliferation of 7–11s and their clones, it seems to work and to be highly profitable.

Given the fact that many of the cathedrals of consumption are likely to continue to exist, we are apt to see new forms of implosion into at least some of them. While some fully enclosed malls will be closed or used for other purposes, many of them will look to new forms of implosion for their salvation. Among the likely new inhabitants of malls are not only more small independent businesses but also libraries, medical facilities, classrooms for community and technical colleges, dance studios, nonprofit arts groups, and even religious centers.⁴⁴

Manipulations of time will continue to be attractive sources of spectacle, again largely because time can be manipulated in an economical manner. Being spectacularly fast does not necessarily mean high costs, as is well demonstrated by the fast-food restaurants, 7–11, the express package delivery services, and the like. Seeming to be everywhere is also not extraordinarily costly, as reflected, again, in the same examples. Combining a variety of different time periods in one setting is also not inherently a costly operation, although it has at times been done at high cost (e.g., Disney World, the Las Vegas Strip). Similarly, concealing the time of day or obscuring the fact that time is passing is also amenable to being accomplished at low cost. Finally, while we will discuss technology at more length below, the manipulation of time is particularly amenable to the use of various advanced technologies, and as will be argued, technology represents an important tool in the production of future spectacles, especially those that are done economically.

While many well-known simulations have been extraordinarily costly, there is no reason inherent in them that requires that they be expensive. At the extreme high end have been the simulations that define Las Vegas and the casino-hotels on the Strip. However, at the lower end of the continuum in terms of cost, there have been, and are, fast-food restaurants (e.g., Long John Silver, the now-defunct Roy Rogers), as well as more upscale chains (e.g., Rainforest Cafe) that simulate some other world. There is nothing to prevent the creation of highly appealing, even spectacular, simulations that cost relatively little to produce.

Beyond the possibilities associated with the methods of creating spectacle discussed above and earlier in the book, there are other possibilities for

creating economical spectacles. One example is moving away from the idea of overwhelming consumers and to the opposite direction of underwhelming them. Clearly, as a general rule, it is going to be far more costly to overwhelm than underwhelm consumers. The idea here would involve such things as packing a great deal into a small space, producing a cathedral of consumption that is highly manageable rather than being unmanageable, and relatedly focusing on producing a space that is defined by its walkability rather than requiring all sorts of conveyances (e.g., monorails) to traverse the property. There are, in fact, spectacles such as this, including, as mentioned earlier, Main Street in Disneyland/Disney World and Easton Town Center. Another is Madurodam near The Hague in the Netherlands. It is a “typical” Dutch city, with characteristically Dutch buildings, built on 1/25th the actual scale of the buildings. Not a lot of attention has been devoted to producing spectacles that are underwhelming, but they have been done, and more important, there is a lot more that can be done with them.

However, the most important factor in producing less costly spectacles in the future will involve the use of new and advanced technology. Most of the major cathedrals of consumption discussed in this book are based on brick-and-mortar structures that employ large numbers of people. Such structures, as we have seen, are very expensive to build and maintain. Furthermore, they all tend to be highly labor intensive, and the employment of large numbers of human workers is very costly. The future would seem to depend on the invention of new and in many cases unimagined technologies that will be, or will produce, spectacles that do not require large and expensive structures or large numbers of people to operate. Here we are still in the realm of science fiction, but a technology that is capable of creating virtual reality or holograms in which consumers can immerse themselves and that requires few employees to staff and maintain comes to mind.

However, the use of advanced technology to create spectacle is already with us in various realms such as video and online games and on much of the Internet, especially Web 2.0 (e.g., Second Life). While this technology is initially expensive, once it is up and running, the costs are minimal. Better yet, because they exist in an immaterial world, the spectacles are free of material limits. This means that one is much freer to create and to experience a spectacle than in the material world. The possibilities for using the techniques discussed in this book to create spectacles—simulation, space, time, and implosion—are infinitely greater on the Internet than they are in the material world. Furthermore, relating to the point made above, it all occurs in a far more manageable world on one’s computer and computer screen.

By the way, a cost saving associated with the Internet, especially Web 2.0, is using the consumer to do labor at no charge that in other instances would

require payment (e.g., doing the “paperwork” involved in ordering books on Amazon.com). Another way of saying this is that the consumer has been transformed, at least in part, into also being a producer. The fusion of the producer and the consumer, as discussed earlier, has come to be called the *prosumer*.⁴⁵ Making greater use of prosumers should aid in the creation of more economical spectacles. That is, prosumers will create at least part of the spectacle on their own and at no cost to the businesses involved.

In the end, if the cathedrals of consumption must choose between price and sales competition, they will always choose the latter, specifically in terms of the creation of spectacle. The new economic realities brought on by the Great Recession will lead to rethinking spectacles, to focusing on some and deemphasizing others, and, most important, with experimenting with new, different, and often more economical spectacles. However, while the nature, form, and cost of producing spectacles may change, the fact remains that spectacle will remain the preferred mechanism by which cathedrals of consumption compete with one another, allowing them to attract, they hope, larger numbers of consumers.