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Theorizing urban spectacles

Festivals, tourism and the transformation of urban space

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In this paper Kevin Fox Gotham critically explores a number of urban festivals in the US city of New Orleans, namely Mardi Gras, the Jazz and Heritage Festival, and the Essence Festival (previous articles in City have looked at similar topics—see for example Tony Harcup (Vol. 4, No. 2) in relation to Leeds, and Kim Dovey and Leonie Sandercock (Vol. 6, No. 1) in relation to Melbourne. Gotham's central concern is to develop a critical theory of urban spectacles, using the ideas of Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre, to highlight the conflicts and struggles over meanings of local celebrations, highlight the irrationalities and contradictions of converting cities into tourist spectacles, and wider concerns about the relationship between tourism and local culture. Rather than seeing this spectacularisation of local cultures as simply negative or positive, Gotham discusses how tourism is a conflictual and contradictory process that simultaneously disempowers localities and creates new pressures for local autonomy and resistance. Detailed ethnographic material is used to show how local festivals have become 'battlefields of contention', with different groups and interests attempting to produce them for their own ends. In the face of globalised forms of cultural production and consumption that limit creativity, we hear voices from local actors who use urban spectacles to sow seeds of dissent, create breeding grounds for reflexive action and launch radical critiques of inequality.

This paper develops a theoretical understanding of the transformation of local festivals into high-profile spectacles for tourist consumption, using a study of three festivals in New Orleans: Mardi Gras, the Jazz and Heritage Festival and the Essence Festival. The analysis of urban celebrations, festivals and carnivals has attracted increasing attention from urban sociologists and other scholars in recent years (Featherstone, 1998; Hiller, 2000; Roche, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002, 2003). Some scholars maintain that urban festivals and celebrations benefit cities economically by increasing the extra-local exposure and prestige of local products and cultural institutions (Schuster, 2001). Other advocates contend that tourist-oriented celebrations can be a source of ethnic pride that contributes to the development of different ethnic communities, strengthening the content and meaning of collective identification (for an overview, see Law (1993)). Other urban scholars are critical and express concern that the proliferations of festivals, parades, carnivals, and so on amount to instruments of hegemonic power (Waitt, 1999) or public relations ventures that shift local attention away from everyday social problems in the city (Kearns and Philo, 1993; Evans, 2003). For David Harvey (1988, p. 168, 2000), the mass production of festivals and celebrations creates 'voodoo cities' in which the facade of cultural redevelopment can be seen as a 'carnival mask' that covers

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continuing disinvestment and increasing social inequality. Interestingly, some condemn urban celebrations and festivals for incessantly recycling familiar themes for passive consumers (Ley and Olds, 1988), while others celebrate festivals and celebrations for their potential to stimulate inward investment (Kotler et al., 1993).

In this paper, I sketch a critical theory of urban spectacles that highlights both progressive and resistant characteristics, and oppressive and negative attributes. Drawing on seven years of participant observation and other data, I identify the conflicts and struggles over meanings of local celebrations, highlight the irrationalities and contradictions of converting cities into tourist spectacles, and address wider issues concerning the relationship between tourism and local culture. My aim is to deploy the ideas of Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre to build a multi-dimensional critical theory that locates the production and consumption of spectacles within the larger political economy of consumer capitalism, especially the shift to tourism and entertainment consumption in recent decades. Much of the empirical work on urban tourism lacks conceptual clarity and has made little progress in providing rich theoretical insight into the development of tourism and its attendant spatial manifestations. Moreover, many theories of tourism present it as either primarily negative, a destroyer of cultures and local traditions, or positive, as bringing a wealth of new products, ideas and economic opportunities to people (for overviews, see Crouch, 1999; Alsayyad, 2001; Meethan, 2001). Many accounts are one-sided for or against tourism, failing to grasp the contradictions and conflicting costs and benefits of the process. Hence, current theories do not capture the novelty and ambiguity of the present moment, which involves new social relations and technologies and emergent conflicts and problems generated by the paradoxes of globalized tourism.

Against one-sided views, I argue that tourism is a conflictual and contradictory process that disempowers localities at the same time that it creates new pressures for local autonomy and resistance to hegemonic images. Tourism is important because it illuminates the twin processes of global homogeneity and local heterogeneity that distinguish modern capitalism.[1] On the one hand, tourism is a global process of standardization and uniformity in which trans-national hotel firms, marketing corporations, airlines and global entertainment firms predominate. On the other hand, tourism accentuates local particularity by making possible unique appropriations of culture and heritage, thus encouraging the proliferation of difference and diversity. Unlike other commodities, the tourism commodity and related services are spatially fixed and consumed by tourists at the place of production. In short, tourism stands at the nexus of global forces of trans-national flows and networks of activity, and local forces of territorial embeddedness and place particularity. The present conjuncture, I suggest, is marked by a conflict between growing centralization and corporate control over the design and production of local spectacles, and opposing processes of social fragmentation and discontinuity that are making power relations more transparent and thus open to contestation. Thus, rather than stigmatizing urban spectacles as inauthentic or engaging in celebration and endorsement, a critical theory of urban spectacles focuses attention on those aspects that reinforce relations of domination while illuminating the diverse forms of resistance that people engage in to challenge inequalities and promote social justice. Grasping that spectacles are multi-dimensional and embody contradictory tendencies is crucial to articulating the conflictual and contested meanings and avoiding one-sided, monolithic and reductive conceptions.

Theorizing urban spectacles: tourism, theming and urban space

Urban spectacles are spectacular public displays, including festivals and mega-events,

that involve capitalist markets, sets of social relations, and flows of commodities, capital, technology, cultural forms and people across borders. Spectacles have a long history, ranging from the festivals of the Middle Ages, the mid-19th-century Parisian boulevards with their *flaneurs*, and the international exhibitions in metropolises like Berlin and Paris described by Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel. Today, spectacles are no longer discrete and isolated events but are rationally produced and scientifically managed by bureaucratic organizations for instrumental purposes, especially tourism-oriented revitalization. Over the years, various forms, types and technologies of spectacle have spread into media images, advertising and architectural design. Moreover, new 'cultural strategies' of economic redevelopment, including adaptive reuse, designating areas of the city as artistic quarters, and historical preservation, among others, are becoming common features of cities in which consumption and leisure become 'experiences' to be consumed, collected and displayed (Zukin, 1995, 1997). Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands's study of the growth of urban nightscapes (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002, 2003), John Hannigan's discussion of place marketing and "fantasy city" (Hannigan, 1998, 2003), George Ritzer's account of the "new means of consumption" (Ritzer, 1999) and Mark Gottdiener's examination of "theming" (Gottdiener, 1997, 2000) suggest that mass advertising, branding and other corporate efforts to stimulate consumer demand now fuel the production of urban space, creating a more homogenized and standardized urban experience. Growth in the number and size of tourist resort areas, theme parks, redeveloped waterfronts, trade expositions, mega-events, shopping complexes, festival markets, art shows and galleries, opera halls and museums testifies to this trend.

Today, urban scholars confront the challenge of theorizing emergent forms of globalized tourism and novelties of the present age constructed by new technologies and novel forms of capital circulation in the built environment. In the *Society of the Spectacle* and other essays, Guy Debord (1981, 1994) developed the concept of the 'spectacle' to refer to a new stage in the development of capitalist urbanization, a shift to an image-saturated society where advertising, entertainment, television and mass media and other culture industries increasingly define and shape urban life while obscuring the alienating effects of capitalism. Debord's work contains several meanings of spectacle. On the one hand, spectacle refers to particular public events, high-profile extravaganzas and urban spaces. On the other hand, the spectacle refers to a theatrical presentation or controlled visual production that is the antithesis of a spontaneous festival. In short, the spectacle is neither a set of geographic sites nor a collection of images but a "social relationship mediated by images" (Debord, 1994, no. 4). Influenced by Georg Lukacs, Debord viewed the 'spectacle' as a conceptual extension of the phenomenon of reification, a process of 'objectification' or 'thingification' of social relations and products that extends to the production *and* consumption of images. In turn, individuals view and experience the 'image society' as passive spectators, forced to consume images that are produced by others with ulterior motives, usually profit making and bureaucratic control. For Debord, the contemporary city is the locus of conflicts and struggles over the spectacle. In the city, the spectacle is a space of consumer exploitation juxtaposed with the space of collective resistance and revolutionary struggle (Swyngedouw, 2002).

Much of Debord's analysis and ideas come from a dialogue with the work of Henri Lefebvre.[2] Several major themes unite Lefebvre's critique of urbanization and capitalist modernity. One theme involves theorizing the extension of alienation and the commodity form to the social realm of leisure and entertainment. For Lefebvre, leisure is not a separate social world that stands apart from the conditions of wage labour (1991b [1958], p. 29). In capitalist societies, leisure is commodified and rationalized, and therefore represents a profitable avenue of capital

accumulation at the same time as it involves the pacification of people through the ideology of consumerism. In the *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre noted that: "leisure involves passive attitudes. Someone sitting in front of cinema screen offers an example and common model of this passivity, the potentially 'alienating' nature of which is immediately apparent. It is particularly easy to exploit these attitudes commercially" (1991b [1958], p. 32). On the one hand, the fragmentation of labour and the exploitative nature of industrial society create the "general need for leisure" (p. 33) which "should offer liberation from worry and necessity" (p. 34). Furthermore, leisure and entertainment pervert human values and relations through the creation of "fictitious, artificial, and imaginary needs" (p. 161). Thus, advertisers, marketers and other capitalist producers manufacture the "need" for leisure, vacations, and other "breaks" from work through the dissemination of advertising images, signs and other simulations of pleasure and fantasy (p. 33). In turn, communication technologies and mass media (e.g. the 'leisure machines'—radio, television, etc.) atomize and massify individuals while reinforcing trends toward the abstraction, homogenization and quantification of human relations embodied in the abstract commodity form.

One of the guiding assumptions of this paper is that urban spectacles must be analysed critically and dialectically, i.e. as a set of activities that are situated within and express the conflicts, struggles and contradictions of capitalism. Throughout his major works, Lefebvre describes capitalism as an intensely contradictory process of fragmentation, polarization and re-differentiation of social relations. Given the accounts by David Harvey (1989, 2000), Anthony Giddens (1990, p. 64; 1991, p. 21; 2000), Manuel Castells (1996) and many others, it would be hard to deny that today cities are organized according to the capitalist imperatives of labour exploitation, commodification, capital accumulation, and processes of time–space compression and distanciation. Moreover, in recent decades, an immense variety of flows, networks and circuits have intensified social–spatial fragmentation and reorganized cities in historically novel and highly conflictual ways, affirming Marx's famous observation that under modern capitalism "everything is pregnant with its contradictory" and "all that is sold melts into air" (Marx and Engels, 1978 [1888], p. 476). In the *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre (1995 [1962], pp. 233–237) noted that modern society moves in a continuous contradiction that unfolds unevenly as a series of crises and upheavals. In his later works, especially *the Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991a, p. 40) maintained that the contemporary city expresses in concentrated form the oppressive nature of capitalism at the same time as these conditions generate their own spontaneous critique of everyday life. Similarly, for Debord, the modern city is a site of conflict and antagonism where processes of domination and exploitation reinforce and express tendencies toward emancipation and transcendence. The major point is that urban spectacles cannot be analysed separately from other spheres of social activity but only as part of a wider totality that includes new forms of technology, bureaucratic organization and capital in the development of globalized tourism. Thus, urban spectacles represent a complex, multifaceted reality, a mixture of repressive and resistant qualities that have to be analysed in terms of the dialectical concern with conflict and contradiction.

Historical development of tourism in New Orleans

During the 1950s and later, the city of New Orleans began to enter a phase of chronic industrial decline marked by the triple problems of deindustrialization, a falling tax base and declining public expenditures. In the 1970s, the combination of federal retrenchment and intense inter-urban competition for capital and consumers led to a search for new forms of urban regeneration and alternatives

to industrial production-based jobs. Since the 1970s, civic and business leaders in New Orleans have forged close institutional links and developed several public–private partnerships in pursuit of tourism as a strategy to encourage inward investment and urban revitalization. The various components of this tourism strategy have included the building of a domed stadium, a festival mall, a massive convention centre, new office towers in the Central Business District, a land-based casino, a theme park, a World War II museum and the staging of many mega-events, including the 1984 World's Fair, periodic Super Bowls and (Nokia) Sugar Bowls, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball tournaments, and so on. In the 1980s and 1990s, riverfront development included Canal Place, an office/hotel/retail development, Jackson Brewery, the Riverwalk, the Morial Convention centre and the Audubon Aquarium. The building of the aquarium on an old wharf represents a segment of the larger conversion of downtown riverfront from port industry to tourism. The construction of these and other facilities has paralleled the development of a major airport and expressway system, tourist attractions and hotels, and a highly organized hospitality industry that specializes in tourism management and service delivery.

Today, tourism is one of the leading sectors of the metropolitan economy. According to data gathered by the city of New Orleans, the city attracted over 13 million visitors in 1998, a 63% increase since 1990. The hotel industry has grown considerably over the last few decades. In 1971, the Marriott Corporation opened a 42-storey hotel with more than 1000 rooms and convention facilities on Canal Street adjacent to the Vieux Carre, or French Quarter, one of New Orleans's oldest neighbourhoods and a major tourist site.[3] The number of hotel rooms increased from 4750 in 1960 to 10,686 in 1975 and 19,500 in 1985. In 1990, the metropolitan area had approximately 25,500 hotel/motel rooms. This figure increased to 28,000 in 1999 and more than 33,000 by 2004.[4] The convention market has also grown immensely since the 1970s. The city hosted 764 conventions in 1976, 1246 conventions in 1987, 2000 conventions in 1992, and 3261 conventions in 1999. The number conventions in the city declined after the downturn in the national economy and the September 11 tragedy. In 2003, the city and state governments approved financing for phase four of the expansion of the Ernest Morial Convention Center. This expansion will make the convention centre the forth largest in the US and it is estimated that it will bring in more than 1.4 million visitors to the city (City of New Orleans, 2000).

In New Orleans, the building of an elaborate and highly organized tourism infrastructure of theme parks, themed restaurants, riverfront shopping and entertainment venues feeds into and supports the production of urban festivals and celebrations. The last few decades have witnessed an immense growth in the number of festivals, Mardi Gras parades, the number of visitors that attend New Orleans annually, and the amount of money generated through the annual celebrations. From 1857 to the late 1930s, there were approximately 4–6 parades per Mardi Gras season. The number of parades doubled from 5 in 1930 to 10 in 1940, reached 21 by 1960, 25 by 1970, and peaked at 55 in 1986. Since this time, the number of parades has remained at between 45 and 52 per year. The estimated economic impact on New Orleans from Mardi Gras is approximately $1.2 billion dollars (McClain, 2000). Mardi Gras day is scheduled on a different date each year and is set to occur 46 days before Easter (the 40 days of Lent plus six Sundays). Mardi Gras is always the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, called 'Fat Tuesday'. Local parish ordinances dictate that the New Orleans Mardi Gras parade season officially begins on the second Friday before Fat Tuesday. During the 12 days leading up to Fat Tuesday, more than 50 parades are held in the three-parish area of Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard. Almost all carnival parades follow a standard parade format with approximately 18 floats, more than a dozen marching bands, and other units, including dancing groups,

Figures 1–4 Images of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Since the 1960s, New Orleans' economic and political leaders have looked to Mardi Gras as a strategic marketing device and mega-event to attract tourists, consumption-oriented investment and international media recognition for the city. Unlike most mega-events, Mardi Gras is not trademarked, is not sponsored by a body outside the city and has been held in New Orleans for over 150 years. While the city does not earn revenue from licensing Mardi Gras, the celebration offers free exposure and publicity for the city through corporate advertising and global media coverage (Marc Pagani Photography).

Figure 2

clown units, motorcycles and torch carriers (or flambeaux). Most parades contain about 3000 participants, including members of the parading organization (called krewes) and other people in the parade. In 2000, the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau

Figure 3

(NOMCVB) estimated the total number of Mardi Gras parade viewers at 6.1 million people. This estimate includes over 2.9 million local residents and 2.2 million visitors.

Like the Mardi Gras celebration, the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival has also witnessed tremendous growth over the last few decades. In 1970, only about 350 people attended a

Figure 4

five-day festival. By late 1970s, attendance had grown to 80,000 and the festival expanded to two full weekends. By the end of the 1980s, more than 300,000 people attended the festival and, in 2001, the total attendance eclipsed 650,000. In addition to presenting a variety of musical acts and food, the Jazz and Heritage Festival offers consumers the opportunity to view and buy products such as handicraft artworks, paintings from local artists, photographs, baskets, jewellery and sculptures from more than 300 local and regional artists. The festival is sponsored by Acura, Miller Beer, Popeyes Chicken and Biscuits, Virgin Music, Bell South, Sheraton New Orleans Hotel, Sprint, Hibernia, Barqs Rootbeer, People Misters International, Rhodes Insurance and Zatarains.[5]

In the 1990s, New Orleans became the de facto home of the Essence Festival, a multi-day, predominantly African-American celebration that showcases performers and musical blends of R&B, jazz, hip-hop, funk and soul. The festival also contains 'empowerment' seminars for consumers interested in consciousness raising, building self-esteem and creating positive social relationships. Initiated by Essence Magazine in the early 1990s, the festival attracts more than 220,000 people and is held every July. In 1996, the Coca Cola Corporation became a sponsor of the Essence Festival and increased its contribution to become the title sponsor in 1998. The festival's marketing reach has increased in recent years to target international consumers under a partnership Essence Communications established in October 2000 with AOL Time Warner. The relationship began with online promotions in 2001 and expanded in 2002 with advertisements in magazines such as *Time*, *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*.[6]

What is important is that spectacles like the Jazz and Heritage Festival and the Essence Festival are designed to attract not only local residents, but also domestic and international tourists. We should keep in mind that festival organizers and promoters create spectacles not as ends in themselves, but as means to persuade large numbers of people to spend money. The animation and advertising that

goes into marketing a celebration like the Jazz and Heritage Festival or the Essence Festival is to increase sales of goods and services. To be fair, Mardi Gras is not as thoroughly commodified as the Jazz and Heritage Festival or the Essence Festival. Access to the latter two spectacles is restricted by ability to pay the admission fee. Nevertheless, all three spectacles are rationally produced to enhance consumption-based activities and are under constant pressure to make themselves ever more spectacular.

The contradictions of urban spectacles

It is important to remember that urban spectacles produced for profit are the outcome of a process of commodification, homogenization and rationalization of time and space. Lefebvre's concept of abstract space suggests that spectacles are associated with the space of capital accumulation in which production and reproduction are separated and space takes on an instrumental function governed by the techniques of formal rationality (Lefebvre, 1991a). Today, for example, Mardi Gras celebrations and jazz festivals are occurring in many areas of the world, with city after city attempting to out-perform the others using ever-changing forms of advertising hype, glitz and theming. Yet the rationalization and standardization of these and other celebrations leads to a paradox that is associated with tourism in general: whereas the appeal of local celebrations is the opportunity to see something different, celebrations that are redesigned to attract tourists seem more and more alike (Harvey, 1989, p. 288; Urry, 1995, pp. 163–170; Fainstein and Judd, 1999; Rojek and Urry, 1997). As several scholars have noted, the commodification of place begins by seeking to produce distinction between places (see, for example, Britton, 1991; Gottdiener, 1997, 2000). But as the standards of what constitutes spectacle and novelty constantly escalate, the extraordinary becomes ordinary and tourism becomes "the chance to go and see what has become trite" (Debord, 1994, no. 168). The main point is that spectacles must continually stimulate new forms of gratification and revelry if they are to remain attractive and profitable. One outcome, according to Lefebvre (1984 [1971]), is the impoverishment of the qualitative and sensuous aspects of human existence, a reality that is masked by the ubiquity of consumption and the single-minded pursuit of profit.

Another contradiction of urban spectacles manifests in the conflict between the qualitative nature of time and the quantified and homogenized nature of time characteristic of commodity exchange. Today, the production of urban spectacles is subservient to clock time, a phenomenon that constitutes a critical form of alienation from what would be the ordinary course of social events and festivals not dictated by clocks. In pre-modern societies, Lefebvre (1991b [1958], pp. 201–227) asserts, everyday life was not separated by specialized activities or differentiated by time. Popular celebrations, festivals and collective rituals were fully integrated into a relatively undifferentiated totality of human practice (pp. 30–31). In pre-modern time, as Ozouf puts it:

> "the activities of festivals do not endure beyond the time given to them; the expectations satisfied within it do not continue in the period that follows. There is no tomorrow: the evidence of an exuberant squandering of time, of energy and of goods reveals the festival's lack of concern with an afterward. Festive time, insularly delimited, opens the parenthesis of uncommon days: separated from daily rhythms, men relinquish the serious use of their time, and their lives with ordinary moral and social values become undone." (1975, p. 372)

Today, all spectacles are produced and organized to occupy precisely the length of clock time given for them and to end on time, regardless of the desires of the participants. By reifying clock time, modern spectacles are the antithesis of spontaneity, creativity and originality. Like all social activities in modern society, including work and leisure,

spectacles are fragmented, rationalized and specialized. As a result, people confront and experience spectacles as external forces that constitute them as atomized consumers rather than as collective and creative beings.

In the *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord draws attention to the significance of "spectacular time", where the qualitative and use value of time is erased and transformed into a quantified, homogenized and exchangeable unit (1994, no. 149). Under the conditions of modern production and consumption, the packaging and the selling of " 'fully-equipped' blocks of time" (no. 152) become part of the expanding economy of leisure activities. Debord's critique of time as commodity is based on his observation that time as lived and experienced, as a sequence of qualitative events that constitute traditions and community, has been replaced by the image of time, the advertisement of time, and consumable pseudo-cyclical time. As more and more aspects of social life become defined by clock time, people come to expect and value routinized control of spectacles, as evident from the anger and frustration people feel when scheduled events and spectacles are delayed, postponed or cancelled. Once time and space are commodified, it becomes possible to mass produce festivals and celebrations that incite people to spend money while producing only an illusion of community, a phenomenon discussed by Georg Simmel (1971 [1903]) in the 'Metropolis and mental life', and later by George Ritzer (2000) in his analysis of McDonaldization and Michael Sorkin and colleagues (Sorkin, 1992) in their explorations of the Disneyification of urban space (see also Bryman, 1999; Eeckhout, 2001).

Many scholars have argued that the development of globalized tourism is associated with the de-territorialization of space, the erasure of local traditions and the replacement of genuine festivals with contrived spectacles for tourism consumption (for overviews, see Fainstein and Judd, 1999; Gottdiener, 2000; Meethan, 2001; Urry, 2002; Hoffman *et al.*, 2003). While I would argue that tourism is promoted by powerful economic forces and it often undermines local traditions and decision making, I would also argue that there are openings and possibilities for resistance. Local actors can use urban spectacles for positive and progressive ends, including launching radical critique that exposes the deprivations of class and racial inequality. In recent years, for example, the Essence Festival has become a vehicle for encouraging critical dialogue and debate over the causes and consequences of social inequality and continuing black marginalization in US society. Festival promoters have dubbed the Essence Festival the 'party with a purpose' because of its 'empowerment seminars' that attract consumers to participate in inspirational seminars about healthy lifestyles, creating wealth and economic empowerment, and building quality relationships. On the one hand, attendance at these events is based on ability to pay and thus belies the existence of democratic public space and represents an extension of the commodification of daily experience under modern capitalism. Moreover, in following the rationalized nature of modern festivals, the Essence Festival offers safety and predictability, the assurance that spectators are insulated from unsavoury elements of crime and poverty that exist on New Orleans streets. On the other hand, the empowerment sessions serve to mobilize participants by offering strategies and advice on how to fight for social justice and strengthen black communities. The growing attendance at the seminars points to general dissatisfaction, alienation and anger over the racial oppression that African-Americans face. The empowerment seminars focus intensely on everyday life for African-Americans, help nurture a critical awareness of the plight of marginalized people, and provide a forum to contest social deprivation.

Analysing urban spectacles as conflictual and contradictory focuses attention on the ways in which individuals and groups oppose tendencies toward rationalization and homogenization and use the institutions and instruments of tourism to further resistant

agendas. While on one level tourism significantly increases the power of large corporations (e.g. advertisers, place marketers, transnational hotel and airline chains), it can also open opportunities for local individuals and groups to participate in local culture. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, for example, provides grants to foster local economic development and bring jazz artists to the city to perform. The Foundation also hosts a music school and organizes a nationally based network of jazz-presenting organizations to commission new works, provide support for artists' residences and build endowments that support and build jazz programming. In 1991, the Foundation began the Neighborhood Free Street Festivals which utilize proceeds from the Jazz and Heritage Festival to produce free mini-Jazzfests in communities across New Orleans throughout the year. The stated purpose of these street festivals and the other activities the Foundation supports is to build and strengthen local pride in New Orleans culture and build public awareness and interest in local music.[7] On the one hand, these developments reflect efforts to reinforce and transform the city into a site of tourist consumption. On the other hand, the Jazz and Heritage Foundation is an institutional resource and set of relations that local actors can access and use to preserve local cultures and nurture alternative forms of culture that oppose the homogenizing effects of globalized tourism. While opposition is typically weak and diffuse, the existence of localized cultural preservation movements suggests that there are fissures and openings in the system for critical discourse and intervention.

Contesting urban spectacles

The shift to tourism and the growth of spectacles in New Orleans has opened debates about whose reality is being promoted and represented and for whom. In this section, I want to focus on the meanings and images that residents of New Orleans have about tourism, point to conflicts over how different groups represent tourism, and identify the basis for people's acceptance or resistance to dominant images. David Harvey (1988, 1989) has suggested that celebrations, festivals and carnivals are important not only for generating profit and supporting inward investment, but also for pacifying local people—a form of ideological control referred to as "bread and circuses" (see also Kearns and Philo, 1993, p. 5). Yet residents and tourists are not simply passive recipients of accepted meanings produced by advertisers and place marketers. They are actively involved in the production of meaning and, indeed, produce meanings, some of which are unintended by place promoters. Indeed, urban spectacles are sites of struggle where powerful economic and political interests are often forced to defend what they would prefer to have taken for granted. In this conception, urban spectacles are "a *horizon of meaning*: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore" (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 222, emphasis in original). Understanding the cultural construction of spectacles requires addressing a range of socio-spatial processes from encoding the practices of institutions involved in the representation of spectacles to individual and collective responses to these dominant representations.

Over the last few decades, as tourism has come to dominate more and more areas of social life within New Orleans, local celebrations have become battlefields of contention. Some local residents view tourism as a harbinger of social instability, a threat to local culture and a mechanism for commercializing local culture. Others view tourism as a potential resource for preserving culture and history by showcasing the city and its celebrations to an international audience. Yet, the paradox is that the loose use of locally rooted lifestyles, arts and traditions (i.e. 'culture', 'history' and so on) for the purpose of selling places can cause tension and conflict, especially if the people within that place feel that various cultural and

historical materials portrayed by place marketers are 'inaccurate' or 'inappropriate'. In the case of Mardi Gras, concern over public nudity along parade routes and 'baring breasts for beads', for example, have become commonplace in the local and global media, leading to discussions about 'cracking down' on disrobement and lewdness—activities that are seen by some locals as outgrowths of the shift to tourism. "Nationwide, the image is that of a drunken orgy", according to Arthur Hardy, who publishes a popular Mardi Gras guide (Associated Press Release, 23 February 1998). As another Mardi Gras traditionalist and historian, Henri Schindler, put it:

> "More and more people not only expect to catch a lot of stuff, but they demand it. They've come to view the parades as an exercise in shopping, in that they're going to get something free.… [Mardi Gras] is incredibly rich, culturally, historically … I'm not sure that even gets through anymore. Everything is buried in this crush of plastic and beads and screams and demands for more". (see Mowbray, 2001)

Newspaper reports in recent years paint a picture of increasing lawlessness and out-of-control crowds along the parade routes and in the French Quarter, a neighbourhood and tourist destination that is a major locus of partygoers. In 2000, the New Orleans police began intensive enforcement of anti-nudity statutes, leading to the arrest of hundreds of people—actions that elicited both praise as well as condemnation from residents. In March 2000, more than 70% of the 3000 residents surveyed by the local *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (1 March 2000) newspaper

Figure 5 Baring breasts for beads. A woman attempts to expose her breast to persuade a person on a French Quarter balcony to give her beads. Nudity, disrobement and exhibitionism can be common sights in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, especially in the French Quarter. While some people contend that the practice of 'baring breasts for beads' has 'always existed' in New Orleans, there is little evidence to suggest that it was a widespread practice before the 1970s. Signs and displays such as 'show your tits' and 'show your penis' and other sexual slogans have become commercialized on T-shirts, buttons and a variety of Mardi Gras paraphernalia (Marc Pagani Photography).

felt that Mardi Gras had lost its meaning for local residents, becoming a raunchy, anti-family affair, staged for tourists. Many of these respondents welcomed a 'crackdown' on nudity and lewd conduct.[8] According to several respondents:

> "You have to practically keep your children in or take them out of town for Mardi Gras. They cannot grow up with the tradition of Mardi Gras because of the nudity that takes place all over the city during this time of year. It is not a traditional part of the Mardi Gras scene and other things that hurt people and property such as Silly String, voiding on people's property, that's a total lack of respect for your fellow human being and their property."

> "Flashing is completely different than nudity in the context of costuming and art, which is what the history of Carnival is about, not teenagers from out of town coming in and flashing themselves for a pair of beads, which takes it to a whole vulgar level."

> "Carnival in New Orleans has always been traditionally a family oriented fun time. With this new immortality of baring breasts, this sends a bad message to our young people and the rest of the entire country. I say yes to arresting anyone who tries to make New Orleans Mardi Gras into a Sodom and Gommorah city."

These voices do not represent the New Orleans population as a whole, and they may represent more of a vocal sub-group rather than a norm. Indeed, some residents praise the high-profile image of Mardi Gras for its potential to bring tourists to the city to spend money. Others fear that the annual celebration is out of control and has become a caricature. While the tossing of beads from floats has been a common feature of Mardi Gras for many decades, the exposing of breasts by women in exchange for beads has developed only in the last two decades (Shrum and Kilburn, 1996; Wilkie, 1998).

According to some, under-age drinking and public nudity have led corporations and their advertisers to conflate nudity with the entire celebration—i.e. naked female breasts becoming the signature motif of Mardi Gras—and exploit this bawdry image to sell nude Mardi Gras videos nationally and promote television shows that feature women showing breasts. In 2000, *Playboy* magazine printed eight pages of photographs centred on Mardi Gras that contained models showing their breasts, tourists exhibiting themselves and women posing nude in local homes and gardens. While some local residents and officials condemned *Playboy*'s coverage, other tourism officials welcomed the free publicity for the city in a national magazine with a circulation of 3.2 million and a readership of almost 9 million people. To purchase that kind of coverage would have cost more than $700,000 in advertising fees. As Steve Ferran, chairman of the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau put it: "I think it's good in the sense that the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Tourism Marketing Corporation could never have afforded to buy eight pages of print and pictorial advertising in national publication."[9]

Playboy magazine, Hustler magazine, and other men's magazines and web sites have now established a regular presence in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, beaming images of elaborate parties and playmates tossing beads and flirting with tourists. Interestingly, some residents and tourists, mostly men, endorse this image and associate it with other fun aspects of carnival, including hedonistic escapist leisure activities. Opinions range from "I think this is much ado about nothing" to comments such as the "crackdown on flashing and throwing beads from balconies is too rigid"[10] According to others:

> "I've been coming to New Orleans the week before Mardi Gras now for five years. I'm a 50-year-old professional, I come with my 35-year-old wife, who is also a professional. We will not come again if the crackdown continues. We cannot afford to have my wife arrested with the kids back home for her one to two minutes of exposure here and there."

Figure 6 Religious groups battle over Mardi Gras in the French Quarter. Recent years have witnessed the growth of Christian evangelists who congregate on French Quarter streets during Mardi Gras, hoping the crowds will follow their pious lead and be saved. Other groups deride the evangelists as hypocrites. Note the individuals at the bottom of the photograph holding a sign, 'Women with Balls' (Marc Pagani Photography).

> "My wife and I were both born in New Orleans, I in '19 and my wife in '21. We know Carnival better than you children of the 50s. It was never a pure thing for families. We loved to go down to the Quarter and be pushed around by the crowds and watch the girls throw their bras down. It did not affect our marriage one bit."

> "New Orleans has promoted even boasted its Mardi Gras celebration for decades, including the breasts for beads that have been a tradition at this, the 'World's Largest Party'. The city simply can't crack down on this tradition without causing trouble to harmless Carnival goers who were drawn to Bourbon Street on the very platform that New Orleans has encouraged, not to mention seriously profited from, year after year!"

The mixed impressions given by locals suggest that Mardi Gras straddles several different types of images: on the one hand, there are those who value and cling to a nostalgic image of carnival as a local celebration for residents and their families. For these people, Mardi Gras is about the 'loss' of meaning, originality and local authenticity; lewdness and other forms of debauchery are seen as consequences of the growth of tourism in the city and represent a subversion of local culture. "What we've known and loved has been turned into a theme park to amuse visitors … We've lost quite a bit", laments Henri Schindler, a Mardi Gras historian and local resident.[11] For other locals, however, Mardi Gras has always been in flux, in agitation, in transformation, and therefore never seems to change at all. For these locals, Mardi Gras should be about having fun and be captivating in the eyes of local and tourist consumers. The harnessing of Mardi Gras for profit and economic gain is emphasized so as to highlight the distinctiveness of New Orleans culture and history, and increase the economic competitiveness of the city. Accommodating carnival with commercialism is seen by some as a way of giving new strength to New Orleans and its local culture. Rather than viewing tourism as eroding culture, tourism is appropriated and put to the service of carnival and New Orleans culture. New Orleans culture and carnival are cast as under-utilized resources which can be harnessed as development tools to attract tourists, shape the course of economic development and strengthen local pride and interest in traditional culture. These diverse interpretations of Mardi Gras reflect multiple sites of struggle and conflict: struggles for local autonomy, struggles against attempts to constitute people as passive spectators and struggles against efforts to turn New Orleans into a staged theme park.

Finally, as a complex of relations and activities, urban spectacles insinuate their own immanent critique of social life. Both Debord and Lefebvre argue that the desire to transcend the rationalization and homogenization of everyday life is an expression of a genuine need to overcome the conditions of exploitation and domination. Rather than embracing the conventional view that urban spectacles generate a 'false consciousness' that disempowers the masses, Lefebvre and Debord contend that ideological de-mystification, de-reification and de-pacification are elements of an ongoing struggle by people to experience social life as reflexive and acting subjects. Debord informed his critique of the spectacle with a vision of liberation using the strategy of *detournement*, a practice of transforming the original meaning of a photograph, film, advertisement or other text by placing it in a new context, using new images and signs, to reveal the oppressive character of consumer capitalism and expose the contrast between the image of abundance and the reality of impoverishment (Debord, 1994, pp. 206–211). For Debord, *detournement* is revolutionary praxis that attempts to reveal that the ideas, values and cultural and technological means of launching progressive social change are already available to everyone. Figure 7, for example, shows the attempts by a New Orleans parading organization, the Krewe du Vieux, to appropriate the 'Girls Gone Wild' corporate theme to deride corporate advertising and condemn the stultification induced by corporate entertainment. The act of ridicule and satire by Krewe du Vieux exposes

Figure 7 The Krewe du Vieux parade mocks 'Girls Gone Wild'. In 1987, several local groups founded the satirical Krewe du Vieux parade organization dedicated to the "historical and traditional concept of a Mardi Gras parade as a venue for individual creative expression and satirical comment". The parade organization claims that "it alone carries on the old traditions of Carnival celebrations".[12] The float in the photograph mocks the 'Girls Gone Wild' videos that sell images of women exposing themselves for beads during Mardi Gras. Such a strategy is indicative of Debord's use of *detournement*, a collage-like technique that takes pre-existing materials (i.e. texts, quotations, advertisements, etc.) and reassembles them into a new context and message to challenge the status quo. Float riders and organizers developed the 'Girls Gone Wild' theme as a subtle form of contempt, parody and protest against the company that markets gendered images of Mardi Gras for profit and economic gain (Marc Pagani Photography).

corporate signs, images and advertising as deceptive and misleading, and reflects a non-mystified knowledge of the exploitative nature of the commodification and profit-making that characterize capitalist social relations. The point is neither to valorize these actions as manifestations of an embryonic revolutionary class consciousness nor to denigrate them as superficial and unreflective expressions of the cultural industry.

In sum, urban spectacles are contested terrain, with different groups and interests attempting to produce and use them for their own purposes. Just as "class struggle is inscribed in space", struggles over meanings and uses of spectacles are inscribed in space (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 55). On the one hand, political and economic elites and other tourism interests seek to construct tourist 'sights/sites' and 'experiences' through the strategies of corporate advertising and place marketing. On the other hand, opposing forces attempt to use spectacles and tourism institutions, technologies and media to challenge dominant meanings and power relations. We can see this in the establishment of grass-roots music and cultural organizations who seek to use tourism to enhance neighbourhood revitalization and resist the corporatization of local culture by global tourism

firms and their local allies.[13] In New Orleans, groups such as the Urban Conservancy and the New Orleans International Music Colloquium lament what they view as the distortion of local culture by trans-national hotel firms, marketing organizations and other corporations that are *in* New Orleans but not *of* New Orleans. Local groups do not oppose tourism per se, but oppose the disproportionate power that marketers and public relations firms have in defining urban reality and controlling what is advertised to the world, a visual power that advantages the economic and cultural interests of elites and other dominant groups. To some extent, urban spectacles have the capacity to be revolutionary and offer the means to launch a revolution of everyday life. Yet social structural constraints, combined with the profiteering actions of powerful economic and political elites, continue to promote consumer society and new modes of fetishism, often short-circuiting resistant attempts to challenge the pacifying nature of tourist-oriented spectacles.

Conclusion

The growth of entertainment and place marketing, the predominance of theming and the transformation of urban celebrations into tourist spectacles has assumed increased importance with the expansion of the global tourism industry. What is new today is the way in which different *types* of spectacle (shopping malls, casinos, worlds fairs, sports, theme parks, tourist-oriented celebrations, and so on) and different *technologies* of spectacle (theming, simulation, virtual reality, and so on) have encroached into the public realm and the everyday life of the city. The proliferation of new spaces of consumption, corporate branding and place marketing has meant that more and more people increasingly live in a world reconfigured as entertaining and spectacular. The growth of corporate dominance in the production and representation of spectacles is not unlike trends in other sectors of the economy, based on concentration of ownership, market segmentation and deregulation (Held *et al.*, 1999; Klein, 2000). These political–economic trends combine to facilitate the serial reproduction of spectacles (like Jazz festivals and Mardi Gras) and to disembed or displace older modes of creating and experiencing festivals. In the past, festivals were locally unique gatherings, indigenously conceived, rich in distinctive content, based on local consumption and organized around localized geographic ties. Today, this social form is eroding and the current round of urban spectacle restructuring is toward increased standardization and rationalization. To paraphrase George Ritzer, the production of urban spectacles is about the “globalization of nothing” in which “nothing” refers to a social form that is generally “centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive content” (Ritzer, 2004, p. 3) On the other hand, while new globalized forms of cultural production and consumption limit choice and creativity, they also sow the seeds of immanent critique that provide the breeding grounds for reflexive action and opposition.

My analysis of Mardi Gras, the Jazz and Heritage Festival and the Essence Festival sheds light on the contradictory and paradoxical elements of urban spectacles. As I have pointed out, there are certainly negative aspects of urban spectacles that strengthen elite political and economic control over local populations. Urban spectacles consist of hegemonic ideologies and dominant images—e.g. promotional rhetoric, corporate advertising and spectacular displays—which seek to transform the built and social environment of the city into an aesthetic product symbolizing consumption, leisure and entertainment. Yet I have also suggested that there are possibilities for new expressions of local autonomy and resistance against social marginalization and exclusion. The intent of most spectacles is to pacify people, ferment political indifference and stimulate consumption. I have attempted to show, however, that spectacles have a

Janus-faced quality. They have the potential for creative encounters and enabling social practices. They can also produce a host of unforseen and irrational consequences, including period manifestations of social revolt. Furthermore, there is a utopian expression in urban spectacles, as well as the possibility for increased domination by political and economic forces. Tourism is not just an aggregate of economic activities, nor an ideological framing of culture and history. Tourism is a highly complex, contradictory and ambiguous set of social relations, forms of social organization and flows of goods and cultural forms that together generate new conflicts, new struggles and new crises.

The kinds of conflicts experienced in New Orleans are evident elsewhere and there are other, more active, lines of resistance against corporate homogenization and control over urban space. Activists and historic preservationists have long fought the Las Vegasization, Disneyification and McDonaldization of urban space (Ritzer, 1999; Bryman, 1999; Gottdiener *et al.*, 1999; Eeckhout, 2001). In recent years, local discontent has erupted in Middle Eastern and Asian cities over efforts to transform ethnic heritage into staged tourist attractions (Shoval, 2000; Teo, 2003; for an overview, see Alsayyad, 2001). In many cities, local people have organized to protest at the allocation of public funds to finance major spectacles such as the Olympics, World Fairs and other high-profile mega-events (Eisinger, 2000; Whitelegg, 2000; Andranovich *et al.*, 2001). Opposition is not just to dramatic public displays, but to the broader spectacularization of everyday life. Urban movements for racial justice, the growing anarchist movement in US cities, the Slow Food and the Slow City movements in Europe, and the burgeoning anti-globalization movement have all in various ways brought awareness to the growing corporate penetration of everyday life (Carrol, 2000; Chatterton, 2002; Pendras, 2002). In addition, there are examples in many US cities of efforts to establish local currency and barter systems to encourage the production and consumption of local goods. One way to understand these diverse forms of opposition is to view the activists and their allies as protesting at what they perceive to be their lack of control over the conditions of their communities in the face of global, market-based agendas. The opposition also reflects, to quote Swyngedouwn and Kaika, local efforts to "build an enabling and empowering urbanization process" in response to corporate efforts to transform cities into a "staged archaeological theme park" (2003, pp. 5, 11). A greater awareness of the dialectic of corporate control and local resistance is a first step toward avoiding reductionism and determinism, and clarifying the possibilities for democratic inclusion and social justice.

Notes

1 Tourism comprises land uses, organizations and businesses involved in transportation, accommodation, food and beverage services, attractions and events, marketing and advertising, recreation and entertainment, and travel agencies. Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. According to the World Tourism Organization, worldwide receipts for international travel reached $473 billion (501 billion) in 2002, the highest ever. The number of international tourist arrivals reached 702 million for the first time in 2002, a 64.8% increase since 1990. International tourism is relatively concentrated in the industrialized nations of Europe, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific. The US leads the world in international tourism expenditures ($58 billion in 2002) followed by Germany ($53.2 billion), the UK ($40.4 billion), Japan ($26.7 billion) and France ($19.5 billion) (World Tourism Organization, 2002).

2 Recent years have seen the growth of a vast secondary literature on the writings of Debord, Lefebvre, and their influence on one another (Bracken, 1997, pp. 89–97; Jappe, 1999, pp. 73–81; Gardiner, 2000, pp. 102–126; Merrifield, 2002, pp. 105–106; Swyngedouw, 2002). Debord was a founding member of the Situationist International, a merger of surrealist-inspired visual artists and architects and a group of anarcho-socialist political theorists and activists who had been affiliated with the Lettrist International and the Imaginative Bauhaus. Debord and the Situationists carried on an intellectual exchange with Lefebvre during the late 1950s and early 1960s before they

parted ways over accusations of plagiarism. Despite their collaboration and similarity of topical focus, their work is neither seamless nor consistent. Debord and the Situationists disparaged academic scholarship and rejected the philosophical and anthropological nature of Lefebvre's sociology. Lefebvre maintained that the Situationists's central concepts of 'situation', 'unitary urbanism' and 'derive', among others, were vacuous and lacked specificity (Ross, 1983).

3 '1971 is recalled as year they built those hotels', *Times-Picayune*, 23 January 1972, Sect. 10, p. 10.
4 See http://www.neworleanscvb.com/new_site/visitor/visstats.cfm.
5 See http://www.nojazzfest.com.
6 'Essence plans third music fest in N.O.', *Times-Picayune*,13 November 1996; 'Essence music festival is blazing trail for summer tourism in New Orleans', *Times-Picayune*, 2 July 1999; 'Essence vibes keep tourism flowing', *Times-Picayune*, 4 July 2002; 'Essence fest, city to announce deal', *Times-Picayune*, 9 January 2003; 'Sweet essence: festival brings much needed tourism dollars to New Orleans', *Times-Picayune*, 3 July 2003.
7 See www.nojazzfest.com.
8 *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (2000) 'Talk back', 1 March.
9 "Is New Orleans' bawdy image good for Carnival tourism", 27 February 2000, Associated Press Newswires.
10 'Talk back', *New Orleans Times-Picayune*,1 March 2000.
11 'Merrymaking is clashing with tradition in Mardi Gras tableaux', *New York Times* 23 February 1998, Section A, p. 10, col. 1.
12 See www.kreweduvieux.org/history.html (accessed 6 July 2005).
13 See, for example, www.noimc.org; www.ucno.org.

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