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Faux Naturale:

The Reality of Selling Fantasy in a Themed Leisure Utopia

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Social Anthropology

The Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities

At

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Research Supervisor: **Dr. Andre Czeglédy**
Submission Date: **24 January, 2011**



Figure 1: An internal Tuscan sunset over the western entrance to the casino (Image: Illuminating Engineering Society, 2002)

Abstract

The theming of entertainment and leisure spaces is an increasingly popular phenomenon, one that brings together the ideals of the past, the best of the present and visions of the future. Montecasino and complexes like it promote escapism, transporting guests to another time and place, one where they are anonymous, with no past baggage and no future concerns. Their carefree environments and dream-like atmosphere are conducive to consumerism, their ultimate material purpose. These 'timeless' private spaces are being appropriated as public and social gathering places in an environment where the truly public space has all but evaporated, and safety concerns have necessitated a shift to more controlled spaces. They are the modern sites of cultural consumption and consumerism, and are important symbols of what eludes the experience of modern city living. However fleeting the hope, fantasy and escape they offer, their value as a site for cross cultural pollination is undeniable.

Declaration

I _____hereby declare that:

- my submission as a whole is not substantially the same as any that I have previously made or am currently making, whether in published or unpublished form, for a degree, diploma, or similar qualification at any university or similar institution.

- the work is submitted for a degree in Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and consists solely of my own work.

- until the outcome of the current application to this University is known, the work or works submitted will not be submitted for any qualification at another university or similar institution.

Date _____

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Acknowledgements and Dedication

Over the course of studies that endure for as long as a doctoral thesis takes to complete, one's life, and direction within it, is dramatically impacted by the people with whom one has interaction, both inside and outside of one's academic pursuits, the two sometimes combining. Not only this, but often, one's role will change, from student and tutor, to friend, to husband and father. Through the course of my studies, I have been fortunate enough to encounter remarkable and inspirational people, all of whom have enriched my life and knowledge in a positive and enduring way. To these people, I owe a deep debt of gratitude.

Firstly, to the management and staff of Montecasino, not only for allowing me access to your village, and indeed many of its villagers, but for the progressive approach taken with regard to driving synergies out of academic pursuits and commercial, real world gain. All too often, real world pragmatism is dismissive of more theoretical academics, finding no real application of theory to practice. I would like to thank you for the mutually beneficial partnership which I believe we have established over the years, and hope that you have learnt from me, as much as I have from you.

To my loving wife Karin, my daughter Madison and the rest of my incredibly supportive family - Thank you for your support, encouragement and understanding throughout my studies. The personal sacrifices you have made, particularly in terms of time have been great, and I thank you for your patience and understanding.

Lastly, to my research supervisor, Andre Czeglédy, his wife Julie-Kate and their family. I have had the privilege of knowing Andre for more than 10 years, when he joined the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Anthropology in 1999. It is difficult for me to quantify what I have leant from Andre, both on a personal and

professional level, and it is not possible for me to do it justice in this short paragraph. My first lesson from Andre was a tough one, and one I only came to fully appreciate many years into our partnership. I was given a poor mark for an essay I had written for Andre's second year class, one that went against what I had been led to believe from marks obtained in my other classes. Andre expected more, in fact demanded more of me, and it was only through these demands that I was inspired to pursue this degree. Andre, your support, patience and guidance throughout my studies have been both inspirational and invaluable. Your vision and ability to see opportunity in all situations are skills which I hope to obtain with time. Your critiques are constructive, insightful, and inspire self belief, and without your supervision, I would neither have taken up nor completed this degree. More than a research supervisor, I consider you a friend, and have been sad to see you and your family leave our shores. I wish you all the very best on your new path, and have no doubt that you will be as successful in your new role, as you were in your past roles.

To all of you, thank you. Without you, and the support and direction you have given me, this piece of work would not have been possible, and so, I dedicate this thesis to you.

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Introduction

> "Weeks before Montecasino formally opened, crowds began amassing and, one way or another, managed to get a preview. Opening a facility this grand in one of Johannesburg's most beautiful neighbourhoods is a major event. As opening day came closer, security teams could not hold people back as looky-loos posed as retailers, restaurateurs, workers; whatever might get them in the door." (Illuminating Engineering Society, 2002)

Montecasino officially opened on the 29th of November 2000 to much fanfare and celebration, but as can be seen from the quote above from one of the development's many contractors, the anticipation, excitement and curiosity surrounding this venue began much earlier. As Gauteng's self proclaimed "Premier Entertainment Destination", Montecasino promised to revolutionise the South African leisure and entertainment landscape. Outsiders were captivated by its Tuscan theme and architecture, its synergistic amalgamation of gambling, entertainment and retail. It offered the residents of Johannesburg's northern suburbs and its surrounds an escape to a fantasy world, a leisure utopia.

The media and social commentators were quick to heap both praise and scorn on Montecasino, and the 'landmark' site quickly became an object of fascination and scrutiny for both Johannesburg residents and academics alike. While the acceptance of theming was overwhelmingly positive by those for whom it was intended, academic literature has been more critical of the role such spaces occupy in modern society. Moreover, academic and theoretical assessments of themed spaces have predominantly centred on the simulation of architecture, the erosion of truly public space and the capitalistic and consumerist tendencies of modern society.

While such appraisals provide an important contextualisation of themed leisure environments, this thesis will use existing academic perspectives as a backdrop

against which to demonstrate their place and value in modern society. It sets out to provide a critical, but balanced perspective of how these spaces are appropriated by its visitors, and conveys the human narratives of those for whom Montecasino and places like it provide an important (albeit temporary) alternative to their lived reality. Themed environments are about narratives, about telling a story in which the visitor can interweave their own stories and ultimately find comfort and escape. Here, alternate realities are created through spatial dislocation, and time, space and place are masterfully blurred.

The stories themed venues tell are about how life once was, or how we wish it to be. Leisure utopias bring together all the best elements of our lived reality, distilling it and presenting it to the public for consumption. They do so by being private places with the right of exclusion, the authority to exclude all undesirable elements (crime, fear, responsibility). This they achieve by taking over the real world functions and responsibilities of visitors. Montecasino, while taking no legal responsibility, disarms its guests by providing them with a safe and pleasant leisure environment, allowing the visitor to surrender their hyper-vigilant states and submit themselves to the charms of consumerism and commoditisation. While Montecasino is a private space, part of its success lies in its ability to pass itself off as a safe and inclusive public place, a rarity (in its true form) in contemporary Johannesburg.

Paradoxically, these environments of escape and freedom are substantially more restrictive and controlling than the real world from which visitors come to escape. It is in search of greater control that guests must ultimately surrender control. Freedom and escape are like everything else at Montecasino, an illusion. Themed complexes employ various techniques of observation and suggestion in order to both monitor and direct visitor behaviour and perception. From the visual stimuli of Tuscan architecture, to the smells and sounds of a romanticised Italy, visitors are

coaxed, massaged, manipulated and coerced by overt and unconscious cues, ultimately aimed at drawing them into the realm of consumption.

Furthermore, these spaces of escape and places of consumption are constantly evolving and reinventing themselves in order to remain relevant in a fluid and fickle reality. At the very heart of their existence is the drive for commercial gain. In an increasingly competitive market environment, where multinationals vie for the attention, time and spend of consumers, visitors to such complexes must constantly be bombarded by stimuli, unique offerings and spectacle in order to encourage consumption. Montecasino has mastered this trick, not only by developing a deep understanding of its consumers wants and desires, but by capitalising on their fears and insecurities.

The thesis will further demonstrate that the success and popularity of such venues lies not in their ability to transport their visitors to another time and place, but rather from the 'here and now' in order to escape the difficult realities of an unpredictable and unstable environment. This is a phenomenon that is of particular importance in South Africa, where crime, poverty and unemployment are very real, inescapable concerns. Themed environments bring security, predictability and a sense of comfort and order, while also offering the promise of hope and escape. As such, they occupy an important place in modern day South Africa and will continue to do so until a viable, more authentic alternative is made available.

Methodology and Ethics

The largely qualitative methodologies of anthropology have, since the inception of the discipline, been the foundation of much societal and organisational documentation. The study of culture has contributed vast amounts to academic discourse, and had a profound influence on our understanding of 'difference', 'other' and perhaps more importantly, ourselves, for it is inevitable that we should learn more about our own thoughts, constructs and surrounds, not through mere interaction with people, but through an intimate engagement and embeddedness with them and within their everyday. As Abdellah Hammoudi, professor of social anthropology at Princeton University, realised in his study of the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, anthropology is an experience of self-discovery as much as it is a venture in understanding other cultures and practices. Raised in the Islamic culture of Morocco, but not a practicing Muslim, Hammoudi undertook the study with what he terms, a sense of *existential risk-taking*. In his book, A Season in Mecca: Narrative of a Pilgrimage, Hammoudi (2006) notes the importance of his own self-questioning within the framework of his study of the pilgrimage, and highlights the depth of meaning and experience in anthropological journeys that are so often lost, or perhaps more accurately, never uncovered in the fleeting glances often taken by the casual observer. It is the entrenched characteristic of anthropology that allows for the unearthing of meaning and cultural relevance in what, at face value, may seem superficial, incomprehensible, or at least unimportant to those not directly involved.

Anthropologists use a variety of methodologies to uncover the many layers of meaning embedded in arenas of activity and gather a holistic perspective of a multitude of social situations. As Geertz's (1975:22) famed quote from The Interpretation of Cultures reminds us:

> Anthropologists don't study villages; they study in villages.

Such a comment reveals as much about the positioning of anthropology as about its practice. During his time at the University of Chicago, Geertz became the leading advocate of symbolic anthropology, which sought to understand the role of thought and symbols in society, and how these two constructs ultimately guide and inform action. He understood that the function of culture was to impose meaning on the world and an individual's environs, not only in order to make it understandable, but in order to communicate and perpetuate this understanding. The role, therefore, of the anthropologist, is to unpack and unravel this understanding through what he coined *thick description*. Geertz, himself, was all too aware that the lofty goals of a fully encompassing exactness of culture could never be attained, partly because, like beauty, interpretation too, is in the eye of the beholder. This is both a matter of perception as well as the articulation thereof (Latour, 1986). Moreover, the multi-faceted layers of complexity within behaviours, cultures and motivations leave room only for an objective view of the reality as it presents itself and the interpretations and understandings of the behaviour as well as their underlying beliefs and motivations (Latour, 2005).

In the same vein as Geertz, this is not a study of a village, but a study within a Tuscan styled village in Johannesburg, South Africa. While this phenomenon is in itself worth significant examination, it must be added that there can also be no village without people. In these latter terms, and as a façade, Montecasino is the antithesis of urban, yet its physical placing in the sprawling northern suburbs of Johannesburg speaks to many of the notions and ideas forwarded by contemporary urban anthropologists interested in the juxtapositions of post-modernity.

Urban Anthropology

As a sub-discipline of social and cultural anthropology, urban anthropology is still a relatively young field (Foster and Kemper, 1980), but has over the past years matured as an academic discipline. Urban, and more recently, organisational anthropology has subsequently evolved into an indispensable field of study that continues to make invaluable contributions to scientific and cultural knowledge. There is, however, a tendency in urban anthropology to study that which is atypical (Fox, 1980), therefore providing a distorted or biased view of the city (see also Johnson, 1990). Despite this, anthropologists are increasingly contributing to the existing body of information generated by architects, sociologists and psychologists and providing novel perspectives (Wolcott, 2001).

As Basham (1978) and Martin (1997) recognise, anthropology has made significant contributions to the study of Western societies and science, domains many anthropologists would previously have approached with great apprehension. Marc Augé (1994 and 1995) rightly argues that the more recent gravitation of anthropologists toward studies of more contemporary settings is not as a result of practitioners getting bored with foreign field settings. Rather, this phenomenon is merely a natural progression, an evolution of a field of study which is adapting to a world accelerated change. A natural reflection of the anthropological methodology too, is required, particularly as it relates to the 'other' in near field settings with which the practitioner is more familiar. (Augé, 1995). Basham (1978:28) does, however, concede that participant observation in urban societies does come at the cost of some holism:

> The very scale of a city, with its diverse peoples and ways of life, almost precludes total comprehension.

This notion ties into Geertz's (1975:29) argument that "Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete". Like Geertz and Basham, I do not believe in the prospect

of total comprehension, but by restricting the research field, a comprehensive understanding of a community in flux is possible. Indeed it is the incomplete picture that is nearer the truth than any singular body of work that seeks to be the only authoritative explanation of people, places, events, and as such, cultures.

Using various interviews, participatory and observational techniques, anthropologists are finding more urban and organisational applications for the rigours of ethnography. Lien (1997), for example, studied the marketing department of a Norwegian food company while Janelli (1993) looked at the social and cultural construction of a South Korean conglomerate. Latour (1986) conducted fieldwork in the science laboratory of Roger Guillemin at the Salk Institute (see also French and Daniel, 1997; Kim, 1996; Low, 2003; Martin, 1997; Passaro, 1997; Spradley, 1972; Frost et al, 1991 for examples of urban anthropology). Urban and organisational anthropology, as with many other disciplines, is a direct response to the changing world in which we live, and the city is a rich site of cultural innovation, evolution and hybridity (Redfield and Singer, 1980). Globalisation and the international trend toward urbanisation have necessitated a shift from traditional anthropology to a more contemporary urban brand of the science that is making provision for the fluidity and malleability of contemporary urban and organisational settings (see Jackson, 1995).

Traditional anthropology, in its purist sense, is becoming increasingly difficult to conduct, firstly because there are few - if any - societies that have been untouched on a substantial basis by the reaches of modernity. Moreover, traditionally rural people are migrating to culturally diverse cities in increasing numbers, leading to a greater hybridity of urban cultures, and further problematising the very concept of ‘culture’ (see Gluckman, 1958; Mayer, 1961; Schapera, 1947). Classical ethnographies such as those conducted by Malinowski (1922), Mead (1930 and 1943), Radcliffe-Brown (1933) and Evans-Pritchard (1940) are in today’s circumstance neither possible nor viable. Instead, contemporary ethnographic

fieldwork and its methodologies must take cognisance of the fragmented and borderless nature of the societies in which we find ourselves (see Gubrium, 1988).

Still hailed as the historic benchmarks for ethnographic excellence, the ethnographies of these anthropological giants deal predominantly with the description and chronicling of cultures for the primary purpose of documentation (Latour, 1993). While the enormous scientific and historical value of these texts cannot be underestimated, contemporary anthropology has required a more introspective reassessment of the utilitarian purposes of the discipline, beyond analytical description and towards a reciprocal sharing of knowledge and solutions to issues of poverty, xenophobia and the like.

In keeping with the ideological and theoretical advances within anthropology, fieldwork too has witnessed a fundamental shift in the application of anthropological methodologies. Using variations on traditional methodologies, greater numbers of anthropologists are seizing the opportunity provided by the phenomenon of urbanisation to document the various cultures and subcultures of cities and organisations. Global media and travel too have enabled a better understanding of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

Like more established interests in anthropology, both urban and organisational anthropology present a unique set of challenges and opportunities, one of which is highlighted by Benita Luckman:

> Instead of being a full time member of one 'total and whole' society, modern man is a part-time citizen in a variety of part-time societies. Instead of living in one meaningful world system to which he owes complete loyalty, he now lives in many differently structured 'worlds' to each of which he owes only partial allegiance (Luckman, 1978:282).

Hammersly and Atkinson (2000) reiterate the gist of Luckman's quote, asserting that much of the social interaction of public life is evanescent and ephemeral.

Urban anthropology is fraught with interpersonal difficulties because of its impersonal and detached nature (Ferguson, 1998). The study of organisations has, however, borrowed greatly from the traditions of ethnographic fieldwork in order to capture the essence of the socially and culturally embedded, and often taken-for-granted, meanings within institutions. Whatever the topic being researched, the fieldwork process begins with gaining access to the community, organisation or village (Punch, 1986; Schwartzman, 1993).

Access

It has been argued that gaining access is the most important phase of research, not only because it ultimately determines whether the research takes place or not, but also because it is the period during which socialisation into the community or organisation occurs (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Because Montecasino is a highly formalised and bureaucratised environment, several important steps had to be followed in order to successfully gain entry for the purposes of research. In corporations and large-scale organisations, it is the correct protocol to seek permission to conduct fieldwork by submitting a formal request and receiving written permission from the highest authorities (Fetterman, 1998). In May of 2002, a letter was delivered to the Montecasino Public Relations (P.R.) department, expressing my interest in the commercial marriage between entertainment and retail. The letter explained my status as a student at the University of the Witwatersrand and requested permission to conduct ethnographic research at the village. This letter anticipated that:

> Soliciting and securing permission may involve an introductory meeting with various stakeholders to exchange pleasantries, a formal explanation of the research project (including submission of the proposed research), letters of permission, and periodic formal exchanges, including notice of the study's termination (Fetterman, 1998:45)

Two weeks after having delivered the introductory letter, I contacted Montecasino to follow up on whether the letter had been received by the Public Relations department. In conversation with Debbie Costello, the Montecasino Public Relations Manager, she revealed that she had reviewed the request but that management had been busy attending to other more pressing matters. Such time constraints are typical of most organisations which place a priority on time management on the one hand, and commercial priorities on the other (Lien, 1997). During the telephonic conversation, Debbie invited me to a meeting with the Public Relations department the following week to discuss the letter and how Montecasino could possibly accommodate my request. We arranged a convenient time to meet, 11:00am the following Monday, and I was eager to obtain clearance to begin fieldwork. During the call, Debbie asked that upon my arrival, I make my way to the 'village's' information centre and ask the information staff to contact her, notifying her that I had arrived.

Not wanting to be late, I arrived just after 10:00am and parked in the outdoor parking lot. I sat in the car for approximately twenty minutes, reading through some notes I had already made and rehearsing some questions I had jotted down on my orange, A5 notepad. It was a cold and overcast day, with intermittent rain, making the transition into a beautiful and clear Montecasino evening a pleasant, albeit surreal experience. I was in an instant, delivered into another world, where day had turned to night, and in some places dusk, where there was no rain, no wind, no time. Wanting to familiarise myself more with the village, and with some time to spare, I made my way through the perfectly uneven cobbled streets, past shops and restaurants, wandering with no particular purpose other than to soak up the atmosphere of what I hoped was to become my adopted village for the next several months.

As 11:00am drew nearer, I made my way to the information counter at the foot of the grand entrance, as instructed by Debbie, and waited for the lady behind the counter to finish explaining to an elderly man where the ATM was (This I learnt was a common request at the information counter). The assistant at the information counter was young, smartly dressed woman with long blonde hair plaited halfway down her back. While it was not cold in the village, she wore a woollen navy blue jersey over her crisp white shirt and tie, over which was a smart sports jacket with the Montecasino emblem on the left pocket. With a friendly smile and understanding and patient tone, the lady explained that the nearest ATM was in the Casino.

"Over the bridge, straight, then a left…. Pleasure Sir, have a nice day."

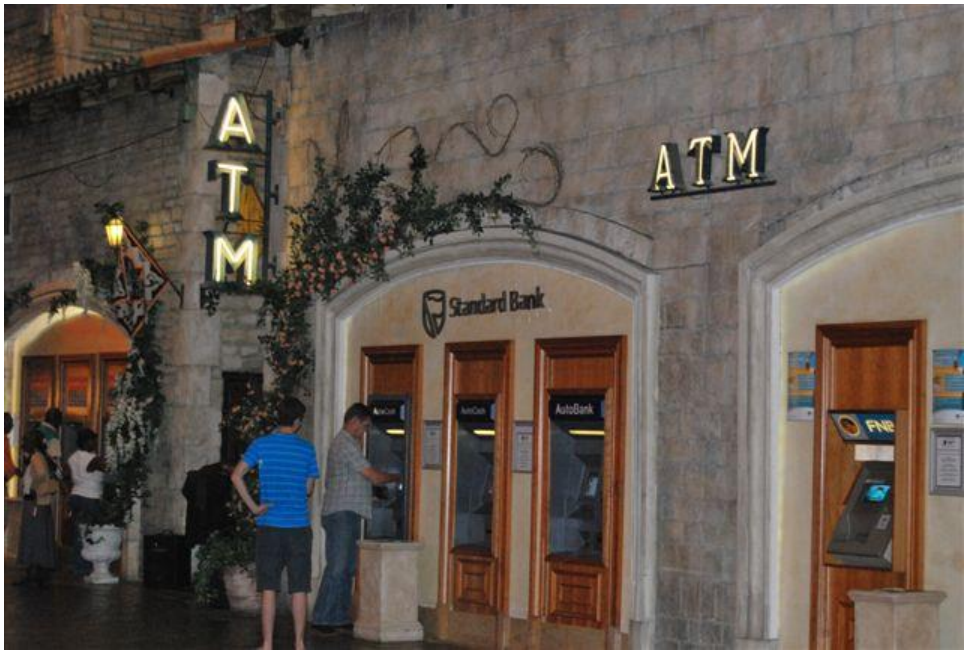


Figure 2: One of several Automated Teller Machine centres in Montecasino (Image: Jason Muscat, 2009).

The gentleman slowly made his way toward the bridge, over the 'river' which separates the casino from the rest of the complex. "Bon Giorno Sir, how may I help

you?" smiled the lady as I stepped toward the spot where the elderly man had been standing just moments before. It seemed well rehearsed, but very polite and friendly.

> "Hi, my name is Jason Muscat. I have an appointment with Debbie Costello for eleven a.m.".

"Certainly, Sir, just a moment please," was her response as she reached below the counter for a book containing all the names and extension numbers of the executives. "Costello, Costello," she whispered to herself as she used her right index finger to run through the alphabetical listing. Once she found it, she reached for the phone and dialled the four-digit extension.

"Hi Debbie, Jason Muscat is here to see you" I heard her say. She put the phone down and turned to me again. "Someone will be with you shortly, Sir". I thanked her and decided to wait near the concrete bench next to the information kiosk. I watched people crossing the bridge, which is directly adjacent to the information counter, from both sides, entering and leaving the casino. I was more interested in those that appeared to be leaving as I suspected that was the direction from which whoever was meeting me would come.

After about five minutes of waiting and having been distracted by the noise, the lights, the people, the smells from the nearby Italian restaurant, I noticed a lady walking toward the information counter, dressed not like any of the other patrons. She smiled at me as she walked past and then to the lady at the information counter, who upon seeing her, pointed to me. She turned her attention to me again and I stood from the bench. "Hi Jason, my name is Jenni Caister. Should we go through?" I introduced myself with a firm handshake and we crossed the bridge which she and the elderly man had just crossed, in opposite directions, and made our way through the maze of slot machines with their electro-organ-like chiming. Jenni was probably in her late twenties and very well dressed. Her dark brown hair

was neatly cropped in a bob which rested on the collar of her blouse. She was friendly and chatted about the weather we were having. We continued to snake our way through the slot machines toward the back of the casino until we reached a faux wooden door at the far end of the gaming floor. Debbie reached for an access card which hung around her neck and pressed it against a magnetic sensor, allowing us passage behind the Tuscan façade.

Behind the door was a small waiting area, tiled and with a couch and small coffee table, and adjacent to it, a mirrored elevator, which we took to the second floor. The area behind the access controlled door was completely unlike the Tuscan world from which we had just stepped, bare of any type of theming, with a modern and light aesthetic. As the elevator door opened to the second floor, the hustle and bustle of punters and their slot machines which we had left on the other side of the door was replaced by the hustle and bustle of a typical office environment. I was again struck by how different it was from the village I had just left behind. People going about their business, office banter and relative disorder compared to the structured environment below. Designs for upcoming promotions lay in the hallways, rooms that were seemingly once offices were now home to promotional gifts, cardboard cut-outs and mountains of paper. Jenni led us through a short passage and right, into the office of Debbie Costello. Debbie stood and smiled as I entered and extended her hand, “You must be Jason”. We introduced ourselves and I was offered a seat, while Jenni too took a seat on my left, as Debbie explained that she had asked Jenni to sit in on the meeting. Like Jenni, Debbie was well dressed, in a black skirt and white blouse. She had long blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail and clear-framed spectacles which rested on the end of her nose. She too was very friendly, but spoke with a greater sense of urgency than I had received from Jenni. It was clear that Debbie was rather busy and we immediately began discussing my request and Montecasino’s response to it.

While my letter seeking permission to study in the village provided details of my objectives and methodologies, Debbie was eager to learn more and had several questions for me. I too had questions which Debbie gladly answered and invited Jenni to provide her perspective. After some discussion, Debbie paused and smiled, her eyes peering over her spectacles, and explained that Steve Howell, the General Manager of Montecasino, had granted permission for the research to be conducted at the complex. As Lofland (1971:95) notes, gatekeepers "are likely to be interested in what the proposed observation can do to help them and to hurt them". These matters of reciprocity and confidentiality were discussed at length in the meeting, and in subsequent meetings, Jenni admitted that it would be beneficial to Montecasino if my research could be used to compile an informational brochure about the complex.

Debbie also explained that the reason she had requested Jenni to attend the meeting was because she was to be the person through whom all my correspondence and questions would be directed. In a corporate setting, because of the delicacy and confidentiality of so much of the information gathered, it is very often impossible to gain access without an escort or guide whose task it is to monitor and control access to information and informants. It is also unlikely that the researcher will be granted unrestricted access to information (Lofland, 1971). This is what Fetterman (1998:34) calls the *devil's bargain*, a tightly negotiated compromise between researcher and community representatives that often reflects the shifting terrain of power that is a part of modern ethnography. As fieldwork requires compromise and diplomacy (Wolcott, 2001), and the process of gaining access is a matter of negotiation, I gladly accepted the conditions of access and worked within the parameters set out in the introductory meeting. Debbie, Jenni and I briefly discussed Jenni's role in assisting with the arranging of interviews, and providing a channel of communication and interaction. Jenni was to be my Tuscan tour guide. Once we had discussed some of the broader protocols, I thanked both Jenni and Debbie for being granted permission to study in the village, as well as for

their time. A firm shake of Debbie's hand concluded our meeting and Jenni led me back past the cluttered offices, down the elevator and through the waiting room, and knowing that both ladies were involved in other pressing matters, I politely declined Jenni's courteous offer to walk me back to the information kiosk.

Having a guide to arrange interviews and review research-orientated requests served several purposes for both Montecasino management and myself. It enabled management to monitor and exert some measure of influence over my movements and activities. It also allowed them, to some extent, to determine to whom I spoke and what questions were asked. Before every meeting or interview, either Jenni or Barbara Hadebe (the third member of the Public Relations team), who physically escorted me to the management offices or the premises of the interviewees, would meet me at the information desk from where we would make our way to the interview site[1]. This enabled the Public Relations department to introduce me to the interviewee and informally monitor my interaction. While this control restricted my movements, there were also benefits to having Jenni as a guide and gatekeeper (Fetterman, 1998). As one of the Public Relations staff and an influential and integral villager[2], Jenni was well acquainted with many of the tenants and was able to negotiate interviews on my behalf, interviews I may otherwise not have been able to arrange.

Having been formally granted permission for the research to be conducted, there were several other conditions that were set out and which I was asked to respect. First, I was asked to keep the Public Relations department informed and abreast of the progress of the research. This was to be done through electronic mail, telephonic conversations and periodic informal meetings. Second, all the questions

[1] The interview site was almost always at the tenant's restaurant or store, or in the Montecasino offices

[2] All Montecasino employees are referred to as villagers, a term that not only connotes subscription to the Montecasino ideals and lifestyle (as set out in their credo), but also demonstrates management's attempt to instil a passion for, and belief in the Montecasino brand. See "Controlling Fantasy" chapter for more on this.

I intended asking were to be endorsed by Montecasino management. This related particularly to interviews with tenants and other Montecasino staff members. I was also requested not to ask questions that management had deemed unfit or inappropriate. Such questions primarily related to the commercial identity of Montecasino, measures taken to create an awareness of the complex and commercial synergy. Issues of commercial identity and synergy are very often sensitive topics within corporations as often they speak of the direction in which the company is moving on a strategic level. The stringent monitoring and censoring then is designed to prevent the divulgence of any information that would compromise the 'competitive edge' within the marketplace.

In general, I was instructed to avoid the 'politics' (a collective term encompassing nearly all sensitive, internal matters that was not, and should not be public knowledge, particularly those matters that may cast Montecasino in a negative light) surrounding tenants, management and the complex as a whole. I was also initially asked not to take any photographs inside the complex as this could also expose some of the 'trade secrets'. Instead, I was offered photographs from Montecasino's photographic library[3]. Such restrictions are commonplace in organisational settings and serve to preserve the public and commercial integrity of the organisation, as well as prevent the disclosure of any confidential information. Although such requests are not out of the ordinary in organisational fieldwork, the exertion of such control is a common denominator in the casino and retail industry as will be demonstrated in the following chapters. Inspired by the success of my first visit, I was confident that the research would be able to get under way promptly. Several promotions and events, however, conspired to delay the research for several months.

3 The policy of taking photographs within the complex has been relaxed, and I was subsequently allowed to take my own photographs.

In June of 2002, Montecasino became the 'Playground of Big Brother', a reality television programme in which twelve contestants are locked in a house and weekly evict a housemate until there is a winner. As the official sponsor[4] of the programme, Montecasino hosted 'eviction parties', promotions, tie-ins and media events, all of which required the full attention of the Public Relations department. As a result, Jenni and Debbie asked that I delay the start of interviews, as at the time, they were unable to arrange any meetings with tenants. Another event that delayed the research process was the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which was held in Johannesburg in June of 2002. The summit began at the same time as 'Big Brother' was drawing to a close and utilised the conference and hotel facilities on offer at Montecasino. Delegates from all across the globe were guests of the Palazzo Inter-Continental Hotel adjacent to the Montecasino casino and entertainment complex.

Because the Public Relations department's portfolio includes the hotel and conference centre, arranging interviews again proved extremely difficult because of the scheduling pressures. Moreover, security was dramatically increased at the summit, thus restricting physical access to many of the areas one may otherwise venture. Commercial tenants too were occupied catering for the international guests attending the conference and could not set aside time for an interview. During this time, when the interviewing process was delayed, a great deal of visual documentation and strict observation was conducted. Once the WSSD had drawn to a close, interviews and participant observation could begin in earnest, and my membership status within the village changed.

[4] The irony of having Montecasino as the official sponsor of "Big Brother" (a voyeuristic television show in which people are under constant surveillance) will become apparent in the discussion of security and surveillance at the complex. See "Controlling Fantasy" chapter.

Membership

The membership role of the researcher has an important bearing on how information is gathered and consequently, the end product (Thomas, 1993). Becoming a part of the community is indeed the essence of anthropology. What Adler and Adler (1987) term *peripheral membership* may best describe my role within Montecasino. Peripheral membership is a more marginal form of membership whereby the researcher participates in many of the activities of a group, except the core or sensitive activities, and does not assume a functional role within that group (Adler and Adler, 1987). This may be the result of control from the gatekeepers, as it was in my own experience, or it may be a strategic move on behalf of the researcher who wants to avoid being classified as belonging solely to one group or another. The role of peripheral member limited my involvement, but as Adler and Adler (1987:34) point out:

> Researchers are also more free to select a certain membership role when they are pointed downward in a society's hierarchy than upward, where boundaries are more guarded and passages blocked.

There are several reasons why my membership role in Montecasino was peripheral – if not marginal. First, Montecasino is a very large organisation employing more than one thousand, five hundred staff members deployed across several largely independent departments. What is more, there are several hundred tenants and retail staff, making it impossible to meet and interview everyone. The general control exercised over the research by management did not allow for more active membership. I therefore chose to narrow the focus of my interaction to the members of the Public Relations department and several of Montecasino's tenants. While there was a great deal of interaction with other individuals and groups, this interaction was not as personal as with the tenants and staff with whom I spent the majority of my time. The narrowing of the research scope allowed for in-depth and 'thick' information, reflective of the broader Montecasino community. *Thick*

description is a term brought to prominence by Clifford Geertz (1975). It refers to the dense or descriptively rich data gathered by anthropologists using the various qualitative research methodologies. The largely neutral position thrust upon me did, however, prove to be beneficial during the research process as being aligned with neither group allowed me to move between the tenants and the management staff and obtain information from both groups. My objectivity also made interviewees feel more comfortable during conversations, and consequently divulge greater amounts of information.

Methodologies

There is no one particular methodology which, in itself, provides a sufficiently holistic body of information (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In order to gain a comprehensive account of Montecasino, several of the qualitative methodologies used by social science researchers were employed. Among the various methodologies available to the anthropologist are a multitude of interview and observational techniques, providing an insider's understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Jones, 1996). During the first stages of gathering ethnographic information, data was acquired by simply listening to conversations and comments, and observing both the layout of the immediate built environment of Montecasino and social interaction within it (see Spradley, 1980). Use of such methodology allowed me to quietly establish a presence at Montecasino while obtaining a broader lay of its unique terrain.

Participant Observation

Participant observation, the principal qualitative investigative tool, is the oldest of all the social research methodologies and provides a privileged insight into peoples' lived reality as a whole (Hofstede, 1994; Willis, 2000). It is the most

penetrating data gathering tool in the social sciences (Lofland, 1971), and is one of the main means of countering ethnocentrism (Johnson, 1978). It encompasses an array of methodologies that will be expanded upon in this section, including observation, conversations and the different types of interviews (Bernard, 1995). Participant observation implies living and behaving like the people one is documenting, adopting their habits and participating in their tasks. It is thus the most intimate methodology and it provides enormously rich data, giving the researcher a first-hand appreciation of how people go about their daily business and insight as to why they behave in the manner that they do.

Participant observation was the primary research methodology utilised at Montecasino and proved an invaluable tool in the research as this 'public' space is often highly impersonal, preventing the formation of close ties to the complex, the people who work in it, and those who frequent it. Much of the initial participant observation conducted at Montecasino included repetitively walking through the complex and simply listening to comments made about the architecture or the design – not least watching people interact around me. Montecasino is also a place of conspicuous consumption, where sidewalk cafes are filled with people who come to 'see and be seen'. As Edmund Batley, one of the chief architects of Montecasino told me:

> People want to people watch. They want to be part of the action. (Interview with author, August 15, 2002)

Montecasino is an environment where a wealth of information can be learned about public behaviour, commercial synergy, and simulacra in fantasy environments. The social phenomenon of 'people watching' is facilitated by the village atmosphere and design, and made the task of observation far easier than it may have been in other less socially orientated environments. By observing people from cafés, restaurants, lounges and the park benches within the complex, I was in no way acting any differently than regular Montecasino patrons. Only perhaps

through my note-taking was I behaving slightly differently and I had to adapt my behaviour accordingly becoming more discreet about penning my notes. Often, observations made were recorded at a later stage, in a less busy part of the complex or in my car prior to departure from the complex. I also found that recording notes was easier in the foodcourt, particularly during the day (a quieter period for the complex) when this area is used by Montecasino staff and other businessmen and women to get something to eat while they write reports or even work on their laptop computers. In this way, my note-taking was acceptable, and not viewed as being out of the ordinary.

Participant observation was also used to good effect in both the casino lounge and the foodcourt where punters and patrons sought refuge from the barrage of stimuli offered by the complex. This involved a lot of what Bernard (1995:151) terms, simply *hanging out*. By becoming a gambler or a patron, this form of moderate participation enabled me to gain the trust and confidence of people who may otherwise have ignored me[5]. While hanging out, I was able to strike up several conversations which revealed the patron's perspectives of the complex, their reason for visiting and other valuable details. In the main, the methodologies employed at Montecasino incorporated all the various techniques that fall under the ambit of participant observation.

Observation

> The public realm represents an arena particularly characteristic of modern, urban society, with its density, heterogeneity, and danger. Observational techniques are particularly suited to studying this phenomenon because they enable researchers to gather data on large groups of people at a time, and to isolate patterns of group behaviour (Adler and Adler, 1998: 94).

[5] See Douglas and Rasmussen (1977) for an example of how "hanging out" was used in an ethnography of nudism on American beaches.

Aside from participant observation, one of the initial methodologies employed was that of continuous monitoring. This is a form of direct, reactive observation and is widely used in the field of management by organisational researchers (Bernard, 1995). This methodology, as its name suggests, entails the detailed documentation of groups and individuals in order to establish routine behaviour and interaction between people. Observation also offers a look at behaviour patterns that informants may take for granted, such as how patrons of the complex react to the architecture, how gamblers choose what slot machines to play and how tenants prepare for the day ahead. Because of the public nature of Montecasino, with vast numbers of people passing through its doors every day, direct observation enabled me to distil the generic behaviour of Montecasino patrons without impinging on their liberties (see Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest, 1966). This methodological technique has been used by Erving Goffman (1971) for his now classic study, *Relations in Public,* Lyn Lofland (1973) who looked at the behaviour of people in cities, and Nash and Nash (1994) who investigated public order in skyway (rail transportation) systems.

Content Analysis

Content analysis investigates the complexity of narrative. It involves the deconstruction and – sometimes - debunking of written records (mission statements and credos), newspaper stories and information from other media and internet sources (Bernard, 1995, Fetterman, 1998). The print and electronic texts that were analysed in the case of this research include newspaper articles pertaining to Montecasino, the Montecasino website, Montecasino television advertisements, photographs and video footage made by Montecasino for potential investors, stakeholders and tenants. These documents allowed for an in-depth analysis of the discourse of Montecasino, both from an insider's (website, television advertisements and promotional videos) and outsider's (media reports) perspective. Indeed, the perspectives of insiders and outsiders often vary

considerably (Bartunek and Louis, 1996). These documents also allowed for the uncovering of symbolism within the organisation:

> Symbolic aspects of organisations are worth exploring to understand the aesthetic and stylistic identities which are generated within them, to increase our knowledge of how boundaries are constituted around organizational identities and to promote strategic change (Turner 1992:63).

These views are paralleled in the academic literature by the work of Hodder (1998), who has described the anthropological significance of written documents, records, memos and letters. Harper (1998) and Fetterman (1998) also detail how photography, video footage and the internet all contribute greatly to the formation of a holistic understanding (see also Collier and Collier, 1992). Jones (1996) points out that such qualitative methodology is better suited to uncovering the many layers of symbolism prominent in organisations and environments such as Montecasino.

Interviews

Interviewing is a fundamental data gathering technique (Fetterman, 1998), and there are many different types of interviews and interview techniques (Fontana and Frey, 1998), most of which were used during the research process – including group formats. Unstructured and semi-structured discussions were held with management staff, security guards, cleaning staff and shop attendants. Their understanding of Montecasino and their role within the complex allowed for a holistic view of the organisation and the people who work in and for it (Johnson, 1978). These discussions were of an *ad hoc* nature and were used primarily to provide background information to Montecasino, from which further research themes were developed. As Bernard (1995:209) mentions, this form of information gathering helps establish a rapport with informants, particularly during the early

phases of the research. These informal interviews, which at a glance may appear to be a simple, even wayward conversation, allowed me to establish an acquaintance and rapport with the personnel of the information desk as well as several store attendants, thereby providing valuable insight into the personal experiences of the people at Montecasino (Holstein and Gubrium, 1990).

Ethics and Challenges

Research of almost any nature inevitably presents challenges. Perhaps the greatest difficulty of this research was gaining direct access to staff, tenants and patrons. I was encouraged by complex management to request interviews with tenants and staff via the Public Relations department. Not only did this extend the research process, but it also provided them with some level of influence over my movements and questions. Concerns were also raised when I requested permission to interview Montecasino patrons. Consequently, much of the data gathered from patrons was gathered through observation. Interviews that were conducted with patrons were usually (off-site in line with management request) with acquaintances, or with friends of acquaintances who had visited the complex. Their experiences of Montecasino, albeit not always at the time of our interviews and discussion, provided invaluable insight into their reasons for going to the complex, how long they spent there and what activities they partook in while they were there. Since it was not always possible to interview patrons on the premises, I believe that this was a suitable compromise, achieving the same goal, but without interrupting the patrons experience, or shattering the fantasy of escape.

Research should be a reciprocal process and my relationship with Montecasino was of a mutually beneficial nature. Fetterman (1998) notes that the gatekeepers are often concerned with how the research and its findings can potentially impact on them (see also Lofland, 1971). As management was interested in using my research to create a brochure that they could distribute to students, the media and

other interested parties, I was encouraged to gather data about Montecasino in its entirety and chronicle all the facts and features of the complex. The creation of such a document was one of the reasons why the direction the research was actively monitored by Montecasino management. Much of the information I was able to gather did not always have a direct bearing on the main themes I was interested in pursuing, but provided an important background to the research nonetheless. At this point, it must be mentioned that the duty of the Public Relations department is to control the image of Montecasino, both in the eyes of the media and the public. This element of regulation and management will become a recurring theme throughout the discussion to follow - as it was in the research process.

The Public Relations department was understandably keen to highlight their successes, most notably their social responsibility programs. They were, however, also candid about their failures and shortcomings. A reshuffle of tenants towards the end of 2002 meant that I was asked to avoid discussion of any tenant 'politics' as legally confidential leasing negotiations, to which I was not privy, were deemed to be at a sensitive stage. As well as having my questions screened, many of my interviews were arranged with the assistance of the Public Relations department. These interviews were very fruitful and may not have taken place at all were it not for the assistance of the Public Relations department. On several occasions, however, interviewees spontaneously began discussing issues that were of concern to them, and which could not be pre-approved by Montecasino management. This was done without any prompting, and every effort has been made to conceal the identity of respondents. All the people interviewed were made explicitly aware of my objectives and purpose. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form[6] that explained who I was and what I was doing in their village. Interviewees were also free to withdraw from the interview at any time of their choosing, or could simply decline to be interviewed. The majority of people

[6] See appendix 2

approached for an interview, however, were eager to have their opinions heard and share their views, thus allowing for a rich and diverse array of comments.

As Miller (2002:128), an anthropologist, comments in the closing paragraph of his contribution to *Contemporary Art and The Home,* anthropologists need to accommodate their "academic interests and presuppositions to the diversity of (these) relationships as we encounter them." The Methodology and Ethics chapter has attempted to illustrate how my academic interests were managed and accommodated to suit the environment and people of Montecasino. The methodologies employed were tailored according to the requirements of the research, and provided the optimal quality of interaction in the time available, and parameters set out by Montecasino management.

Literature Review

While much of the literature surrounding consumption, fantasy and simulacra has been addressed in the proceeding chapters, few authors have integrated and rooted these themes within a single environment. This can, to a large extent, be attributed to the fact that environments such as Montecasino are relatively new phenomena which have only recently garnered interest among academics, particularly the postmodernist movement. The thesis does not wish to capitalise on the current fashionability of postmodernist discourses, but rather will explore the current sentiment regarding themed environments and its practical relevance for the way in which such places are appropriated by the public who frequent them.

The postmodernist discourses that exist are generally of a theoretical nature and are not grounded in a single field as is the anthropological tradition. The opportunity for sustained research allows for the exploration of new methodologies in Anthropology and a more holistic incorporation of thematic ideas generated by other disciplines such as Architecture, Town Planning and Psychology. As Hesmondhalgh (2002:35) comments, “there has been a lack of empirical attention to what happens in cultural-industry organisations”. Montecasino is a prime example of a cultural-industry organisation, as it commodifies culture for the purposes of leisure, entertainment and consumption. Moreover, the themes of gender, social agency and ethnicity have been sorely neglected in urban consumption studies with Edwards (2000:141) calling this “overwhelming ‘whitewash’ or lack of racial awareness…, quite appalling.”

> Gender stands as one of the most important and pervasive, but most sloppily conceived aspects of consumption and consumer society. Perhaps it is its very pervasiveness that explains the messiness in making its connections with consumption and in defining just what is gendered in consumer society. Part of the difficulty also lies in the high degree of strongly gendered images and stereotypes surrounding consumption (Edwards, 2000:132*).*

Consumer and consumption studies, which have predominantly been conducted in the sociological vein (see Bourdieu, 1984; Baudrillard, 1998:b; Bauman, 1998), have further been criticised for neglecting the role of the consumer in the process of consumption (Edwards, 2000). As a discipline, anthropology has tended to approach culture from the rural perspective. Previously, when anthropologists working in Africa focused their attention on urban areas, they usually did so in relation to processes of urbanisation (Ferguson, 1998), migrant labour (Mayer, 1961), and the incorporation of rural subsistence populations into the industrial economy (Gluckman, 1958). This trend persists somewhat, although more and more ethnographies of an urban and corporate nature are emerging in the broader international context (see Czeglédy, 1995, Lien, 1997, Janelli, 1993, Kim, 1996, Wah, 1999).

Escape to Fantasy

Part of what makes places like Montecasino an attraction to the public is the way in which they offer their visitors a range of 'cultural' and social activities that allow them to escape the reality of everyday suburbia (Nagle, 2000). Themed environments offer people something different through the implementation of various strategies that alter the perceptions and consciousness of the patron, transporting them into different historical eras, social environments and cultural ambiences. As Philips (2001:106) contends:

> The theme park is a space which is unapologetically penetrated by influences quite distant from their geographical location, and which distances itself from its actual locale.

Some of the techniques that the creators or *imagineers*[7] of these environments employ include the manipulation of architecture and the 'mythologizing' of commercial dimensions. Not only does this cultivate a sense of place or 'placelessness' but by removing the guest[8] from the confines of reality, themed environments inject into the psyche of the guest a sense of exoticism, wonder and bewilderment, the basic preconditions for consumerism. Lost Jungle Kingdoms (Sun City and The Lost City), recreations of ancient Rome (Emperor's Palace, formerly Caesar's Palace) and a mock-up of early Johannesburg (Gold Reef City) are among some of the local, themed complexes that transport guests to different times and places. In the same vein, Montecasino seeks to envelop its guests in the romance and quietude of a Tuscan village, offering them a multitude of entertainment, leisure and retail options.

The idea of theming retail environments (or commercialising themes) sprung from two primary sources that today have become almost indistinguishable; the amusement park and the shopping mall (Goudie, Killian and Dobson, 1995). Koolhaus, Chuihua, Inaba and Leong (2001) somewhat whimsically note that shopping is merging into everything, and that everything is merging into shopping. Popcorn (1991) has gone so far as to say that malls are amusement parks for adults – although this estimation has less historical credence than social assertion. To better qualify and contextualise the impact of theming on commercial environments, it is important to consider the range of analytical discourses surrounding both the shopping mall and the theme park in anthropological and sociological literatures.

[7] This is a term which the Disney Corporation uses to refer to its architects and designers. The use of the term demonstrates the premium themed complexes place on creating escapist environments which are not limited by the imagination

[8] Montecasino and other themed complexes refer to their visitors as "guests", a word that suggests a temporary visit to a private and hospitable world. Words such as customer or patron are strictly avoided as they betray the commercial character of these environments.

> The modern mall is about shopping and the selling of experiences and encouraging a culture of consumption and fostering desire. It encourages hedonism and pleasure; it seeks to transport the consumer into a world of choice in which the consumer is in control. The creation of the theme park, another major twentieth-century invention, is similarly aimed at creating fantasy and the illusion, of escapism and reinforcing the message that postmodernity is about fun rather than work (Thorn, 2002:139).

Malling

> The migration out of the city and the rise of the suburbs provided a unique opportunity for developers to create a revolutionary retail experience – 'the shopping center' (Alexander and Muhlebach, 1992:2).

As Alexander and Muhlebach (1992) assert above, the prominence of the automobile (see Wachs and Crawford, 1992) and the urban sprawl[9] it facilitated in the form of suburbs (Longstreth, 1992) has made communities dependent on regional shopping centres. Unable and often unwilling to travel into the city[10] for shopping, social and entertainment purposes, suburbanites have appropriated the mall as a quasi-city or town, and mall designers have in turn reciprocated by making the mall more leisure and entertainment orientated. Indeed the model on which Montecasino is based is on that of a town, replete with many of the amenities offered by a city, but without the associated dangers. Partly as a consequence of crime, the suburbs have had to become independent and self-sufficient, what Dewar (1992) refers to as an introversion. For many suburbanites, the city has become obsolete. The mall has replaced it.

The concept of the mall evolved out of the eighteenth and nineteenth century arcades of Europe (Benjamin, 1973), the first mass-consumption environments,

[9] See Bruegmann (2005) for a comprehensive account of the history of sprawl.
[10] Crime and the escalating levels of violence with which it is enacted has necessitated a shift toward access controlled environments, a phenomenon the suburbs are better equipped to provide, financially and in terms of infrastructure. See Beavon, 1998; Bremner, 1998; Palmary, Rauch and Simpson, 2003 for discussion on crime and the city of Johannesburg.

(Jacobs, 1984; Dawson, 1983; Crawford, 1992) which were predated by Roman forums and bazaars (Gruen, 1973, 1960; Kowinski, 1983)[11]. Crawford (1992:17) contends that it was in the 19th century Parisian department stores of these arcades, that "the shift from a market economy to a consumer culture based on intensified commodity circulation became apparent". The opening in 1956 of Victor Gruen's Southdale Mall in the United States, the first fully enclosed shopping mall, signalled the beginning of a revolution in retail architecture and consumption patterns. The shift to consumer culture and commodity fetishism has ensured that the shopping mall has become a characteristic feature and focal point of many city suburbs. The character of malls has, as a response to this shift (and others) adapted to accommodate the increasing social significance placed on them by the surrounding communities they serve. Shields (1992) asserts that the mall forms the locus of many suburbs, and as such is appropriated as a surrogate town square. Atriums[12] in contemporary malls and the foodcourt in Montecasino are prime examples of this as they have intentionally been designed as town squares, where people can congregate and fraternise (Macionis and Parrillo, 2001).

Entertainment complexes in South Africa (and indeed globally) reveal people's longing for intimate social neighbourhoods and public squares largely absent in South African suburbs[13]. Within the South African context, the mall fulfils another important requirement. It provides safety, security, even refuge from an often violent, unpredictable and turbulent suburban reality of escalating crime[14] (Guy, 2000). The physically encapsulated nature of the mall, the prominence of closed circuit television (CCTV) and the deployment of private security guards allow for a safe and predictable shopping and leisure experience (Miles, 2000). This safety

[11] See Davis (1966) for a history of shopping and marketplaces.
[12] See Ferguson (1992) for a discussion of "Atrium Culture" in shopping malls the art of conspicuous consumption.
[13] See Description chapter for an analysis of the factors, (globalisation, urbanisation, apartheid, crime and violence) that have facilitated a societal shift to access controlled environments.
[14] See Chapter on Security for a more detailed discussion of crime in Johannesburg and South Africa.

aspect may be another one of the reasons why such complexes have proved to be so successful in South Africa, where crime, violence and other security concerns (Palmary, Rauch and Simpson, 2003) have necessitated a move to access-controlled residential and commercial environments (Czeglédy, 2003). As Crawford (1992:23) has commented on the social and public roles that many malls fulfil:

> Repackaging the city in a safe, clean and controlled form gave the mall greater importance as a community and social center. The enclosed mall supplied spatial centrality, public focus, and human density – all the elements lacking in sprawling suburbs.

The advent of the mall has allowed shopping to become more efficient in accordance with Ritzer's (1996 and 1998) notion of McDonaldization and the increasing application of industrialised consumerism. Hundreds of stores, department and speciality, are located in the same venue, allowing people to shop, dine and be entertained without having to visit several locations. As Smoodin (1994) cautions, however, this type of efficiency comes at the expense of originality and flare. His point is amply demonstrated by the uniform design of malls throughout the world, all of which follow the same basic form based on the same intended function; to make shopping and leisure efficient. Moreover, such complexes inspire a juxtaposition of spatially non-proximate cultures, with Japanese sushi restaurants, Italian cuisine and Irish pubs, all within several metres of each other. Kroes, (1996) in his assessment of American mass culture and cross cultural influence, details the European influence in the formation of a unique and distinctive culture which would later lead to what he calls an unduly alarmist caution against Americanization. Rather, any direct interaction and influence is as he points out, about transmission and reception, each impacting and reshaping the other, and cannot be seen as a one way relationship. In this regard, Montecasino is ripe for deconstruction as it is as much an embrace of European culture as it is of American mass culture, all of which come together to give birth to a new, distinctly South African, but at the same time wholly global phenomenon.

While the fundamentals of supply and demand, buying and selling, are still resolutely enacted in the mall, it is no longer just a convenient place to purchase goods. Mall designers are devoting enormous amounts of attention to entertaining the shopper in the hope that the longer they stay, the more they will spend.

> The mall is loaded with props, with a backdrop of ever present Muzak to soothe the savage shopper… Then there are the restaurants, bars, movie theatres and exercise centres to add to the fun. On weekends, clowns, balloons, magicians, bands, and the like further entertain those on their way from one shop to another (Ritzer, 1996:127).

For example, at Montecasino, clowns on stilts often chase each other through the streets, amusing the children who have come to watch movies or play in the video game arcade. Magicians bewilder passers-by with their 'levitating card trick', after which they inform captivated guests that they too could perform such feats for a modest price. These entertainers are a part and parcel of how Montecasino builds layer upon layer of consumption experience into its venue. The mall's new role as leisure, recreation and community centre far supersedes the basic character of a place for convenient material transactions. Movie theatres, restaurants and food-courts, live entertainment and virtual reality game centres are just some of the ways in which malls are now satisfying the needs of increasingly demanding consumers. This diversification of commercial offering, the marriage between entertainment and the commodity, has problematised the separation of malls and themeparks. As Baudrillard (1998) so eloquently comments on the blurred distinctions between culture, consumerism and identity:

> Work, leisure, nature and culture, all previously dispersed, separate, and all more or less irreducible activities that produced anxiety and complexity in our real life, and in our 'anarchic and archaic' cities, have finally become mixed, massaged, climate controlled and domesticated into the simple activity of perpetual shopping. All these activities have finally become desexed into a single hermaphroditic ambience of style! (Baudrillard, 1998:38).

The dramatic lengths to which mall owners and managers go in terms of entertaining their patrons are specifically designed to make shoppers stay longer (Ritzer, 1998). This generally falls under the guise of adding value and entertainment for the customer. From the ancient Roman *fora* to the modern hyper-malls and the more recent themed complexes, consumerism is constantly evolving, mutating and enrapturing the shopper in new and exciting ways. The penchant for theming, of which Montecasino is a prime example, is but one of the latest innovations in this quest. Offering a plethora of services and entertainment options in a Tuscan themed environment, Montecasino disorientates and mesmerises its guests in a world of fantasy where spending money enhances participation in, and enjoyment of the retail and leisure experience.

Theming

> Nowhere can modern Americans escape the profusion of recognizable symbols and signs attached to virtually all aspects of our culture, constantly reminding us that we are on familiar and comforting ground. “Just come in, friend, and buy; make yourself at home,” these symbols seem to say, thus tying our media culture and the seductions of consumerism to the production of ingeniously designed symbolic spaces. (Gottdiener 1997:127)

The trend of theming originated in the United States where malls were constructed according to a certain style or period in an attempt to add value and entertainment to the shopping experience – as well as to distinguish one from another. Of the prevalence and influence of theming which increased rapidly during the 1990’s, Young (2002) notes how themeparks became a metaphor for postmodern urban life. The dominant role which Disney played in growing this phenomenon led critics to refer to any space developed to engage with multiple audiences through theming, and ultimately stimulate and direct consumption, as *Disneyfication* (Young, 2002). As Gottdiener (1997) notes above, its ultimate goal is to lure the visitor into the act of consumption. Walsh (1992) further asserts that transposing

settings from the past onto consumerist environments encourages spending, and often results in the commodification of culture and history[15]. This trend of theming and commodification has since spread to Europe (see Benjamin, 1973) and the rest of the globe. It is a subject that has received significant coverage from authors from the architectural field. Brian Lonsway (2009), in his book *Making Leisure Work*, offers a particularly detailed analysis of the spatial construction of themed entertainment spaces, and the various strategies and trickery involved in bringing together such a venue. Theming is also a phenomenon that has become prominent in South Africa, where the granting of casino licences gave new impetus to the leisure and entertainment industry. Carnival City, The Lost City, The Carousel, Emerald City, Emperor's Palace, Gold Reef City and Hemingways are but a few of the themed entertainment complexes that have emerged out of the liberalisation of South Africa's gambling regulations (Christopher, 1994).

In Mark Gottdiener's (1997) landmark criticism of what he sees as the relentless march of capitalism, commercialism and consumerism, *The Theming Of America: Dreams, Visions, And Commercial Spaces*, he elegantly tackles the issue of what he calls, *the commodification of everything* through the use of themed environments, from restaurants, malls, and airports, to theme parks, museums, and even war memorials.

> Since the 1960's, a new trend of symbolic differentiation within the built environment has appeared that contrasts graphically with the earlier period. More frequent use of symbols and motifs characterizes the space of everyday life in both the city and the suburb. Signification involves not only a differentiation of particular material objects, but also a constant reworking of facades and interior spaces by overarching motifs drawing on a broad range of symbols. These new modes of thematic representation organize daily life in an increasing variety of ways. Social activities have moved beyond the symbolic work of designating ethnic, religious or affluent status to an

[15] See Keat (1999) and Meethan (2001) for a discussion on the commodification of culture in relation to tourism.

> expanding repertoire of meanings. More important, and in contrast to previous historical periods, today's environmental symbolism is derived from our popular culture – from common themes that can also be found in films, popular music and novels. In turn, today's themed environments, constitute in fact, a part of our popular culture as well. Our present themed environment merges fluidly with contemporary, commercialized popular culture and the entertainment media. (Gottdiener, 1997:2)

Gottdiener's (1997) quote illustrates the pervasive nature of theming and symbolism, and how it has come to be a part of our everyday experience. Surreal and distant images have been made 'real', and brought closer to home in order to provide us with new and novel experiences. The manipulation of the internal environment of the mall, in terms of lighting, temperature, (Sundstrom, 1986)[16] scenery and architecture, enable such entertainment complexes to mimic the ambience of foreign, exotic and even fantasy locations (Edwards, 2000). Theming has become a popular architectural phenomenon across the country, but particularly in Johannesburg, a city where themes seem to convey status and social identity. In *Jozi*, the *City of Gold*, *Egoli*, it is not only malls and casinos that have succumbed to the allure of theming though. From African Bushveld-styled thatched housing complexes (Savuti Sands) to Tuscan styled villas (Montepulciano, Santa Vitoria and Mio Palazzo), golf estates and office parks have all followed the trend toward foreign and distant themes. Bremner (1998) argues that theming, at least in South Africa, is a means of escaping the violent reality of the city by constructing and living in an independent, safer surreality preserved by private security companies and electrified perimeter fencing.

> Style becomes a vehicle for denying the violent context of the city and creating the image of a preferred lifestyle; if you can't emigrate, you can at least dig in with style. The city is becoming a giant themepark, an assemblage of fortified and styled enclaves,

[16] See Sundstrom (1986) for a detailed analysis of the role lighting, temperature, space and architecture play in the work environment. The principles discussed by Sundstrom are masterfully employed in malls and themed environments to control the movement and behaviour of patrons (see "Controlling Fantasy" chapter).

> residential, commercial, retail or leisure, to which access is guarded and selectively granted (Bremner, 1998:62).

Implicit in Bremner's quote is a very real concern for the future of suburbia and all suburbanites, particularly those who are going to be ostracised by this new method of exclusion[17]. A parallel can be drawn between Montecasino and the festivals which took place in South Africa during Apartheid, which were amply analysed by Leslie Witz. Witz (2003) writes of how these festivals, such as the 300th anniversary of the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck to the Cape, was both a festival of unity as well as exclusion (the festival took place at the height of apartheid). At Montecasino, however, the distinction between those who are part of the celebration, and those who are explicitly excluded is not based on race, but rather on social, upward and economic mobility[18]. Czeglédy (personal communication with the author, March 31, 2009) extends this analysis to the cultural level by observing how themed, gated communities in South Africa are both an index of isolation, and a form of control in the built environment that play on nouveau riche ideas of cosmopolitanism.

He notes how, under the threat of crime and attack, suburban residents have gated off public streets in flagrant disregard for municipal bylaws, denying access to all but residents. Themed complexes not only emulate romanticised versions of the truth but they improve on them in a veritable quest for utopia, excluding all the undesirable elements of the real world. In South Africa then, theming is not a denial of the country's dangers and reality, but a tacit acknowledgment of these exact struggles. Their very existence implies a need for an alternative, safer and more sanitised 'reality', however temporary this may be. Suburbanites who have subscribed to this lifestyle, through concerns of security or otherwise, can leave the relative security of their themed, access controlled and guarded complexes with

[17] See "The Paradox of Escape" chapter for a discussion on the privatisation of public space.
[18] See also Charmaine McEachern for a brief discussion of how South African Game parks constitute themed spaces through the narratives they relate, as well as how the entry fee prevents the majority of South Africans from partaking in the park activities.

manicured lawns, and run the ‘gauntlet’ to their place of work, which in many cases, may also be a themed, security controlled office park. On the weekends, when not holed up in their safe, compound-like enclaves, they may seek relief from the confines of their stylised homes and complexes by visiting one of the several themed and secure malls or entertainment complexes in their area.

It is precisely the awareness of the dangers, the poverty and unemployment, the crime, the dirt and despair that theming provides sanctuary from. Thus, in a country with such a gaping cleavage between rich and poor, where the suburbs are infiltrated by the poor and downtrodden who are constant reminders of its divisive history, themed, security controlled complexes are laagers of sanitized surreality, even if that reality only extends as far as the electrified perimeter wall. They acknowledge that all the unsavoury elements exist. Indeed their entire conception is presupposed on the existence of outside evils which they are designed to keep at bay, not only reducing one’s exposure to them, but in so doing, reducing any associated guilt that comes when the super wealthy and the desperately poor live in such close proximity to each other. South Africa has proved fertile and receptive soil for the flourishing growth of such complexes. Real estate in secure, often themed golf estates and country clubs have over the last decade commanded a premium because of the shelter and exclusivity they provide their inhabitants, many of them being sold out before a single brick has been laid. Theming then, more than any other characteristic, allows for the element of control, a control that whether real or perceived, brings a sense of comfort, security and a clearer conscience. ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ so to speak.

Visitors to any suburban mall can shop and dine in a comfortable, climate-controlled environment, largely devoid of the litter and crime found in the inner city. These man-made environments create an artificial, yet sensory indulgent environment in which people can abandon their security concerns and feel pampered, while being surrounded by a variety of social activities and spectacles

not available to them in the ‘real world’. Van Eeden (1999) has described the mall as an essential part of the postmodern commercial and entertainment landscape and when one considers the absence of ‘truth’ (or the preference for simulacra) in these centres, it is not difficult to understand this viewpoint. This is not simply because of the fall of meta-narratives, but much to do with the rise of consumer culture as popular culture on an international – and globalised – basis that begs the question of whether or not contemporary postmodern society offers anything but surface values.

Not only do themed environments offer their visitors an improved or idealised version of reality but they also draw upon public dissatisfaction with the inability of the city to provide stability, security and predictability. Indeed, Crawford (1992) hints at the idea of the mall replacing the city for suburbanites by mimicking and internalising the city it has fled. She notes how the prototypical West Edmonton Mall in Canada is designed to mimic the 19th century boulevards of Paris, the very inspiration for the modern mall (Shields, 1992). This observation presents an interesting irony found in many themed complexes where the mall, borne out of a rejection or aversion to the city, imitates and improves on that same environment. Indeed, the Disney theme parks, the most famous of all themed environments, were developed in response to Walter Elias Disney’s disenchantment, not only with other theme parks, but also with what he perceived as the chaos of Los Angeles. Disney, who was notoriously dictatorial in his organisational vision (Hollister, 1994), imagined his themeparks as the model city, something to which he felt ‘real’ cities should aspire (Smoodin, 1994).

Themed entertainment / retail venues, are therefore simulations of the ‘authentic’, even simulations of simulations which are ‘more real than real’ (see Ritzer and Liska, 1997, Baudrillard, 1998:a, Eco, 1990). From their borrowed architecture, which acts as a giant advertisement for the ‘idyllic’ internal environment of the complex, to the artificial trees within its walls, themed entertainment / retail

complexes are safer, decontaminated versions of the cities and spaces we long for, how it once was or how we would like it to be (Crilley, 1993). The most widely recognised capitalisation on the idea of theming is that of the Disney Corporation (see Gomery, 1994), who with their lavish stage sets and extravagant pageants, have set the benchmark for simulated environments. Disney World, the quintessential and archetypal theme park has long held the fascination of architects, geographers and social scientists because of its commercial and public success, its self celebrating-nature and its rejection of the 'outside' world in favour of a simulated one. So strong is the influence of such venues that Bartunek and Cavanagh (1994) assert that theme parks are the media through which global images are disseminated (see also McGee, 1994).

"Disneyfication"

Sorkin (1992) called Disney World, the most successful themed entertainment / retail corporation, "America's stand-in for Elysium" (1992:205) and "the alpha point of hyperreality" (1992:206). Indeed, Walt Disney, founder of the Disney Empire, has been lauded as a visionary for his utopian ideals:

> When Walt Disney began dreaming of a 'planned city' for his Florida project, he joined a line of noble visionaries including Plato, Francis Bacon, Samuel Butler, Lewis Mumford and Sir Thomas More, all of whom dreamed of an ideal society in which the social, economic, and environmental evils that plague humankind are eradicated, and the society functions for the good of all (Kurtti, 1996:19).

Kurtti's likening of Walt Disney to people such as Plato, Bacon and More reveals the extent to which Disney has become a pervasive force in reshaping the face of societal ideals.

> Unlike the amusement park, the themepark tries to create an autonomous, utopian space cut off from the rest of society…The paradox of this fantasy is that the more successful Disneyland is in its creation of fantasy space, the less conscious visitors are of its fantastic nature. Fantasy succeeds only when it is not perceived as such (Yoshimoto, 1994:186).

Themed environments offer visitors a glimpse of other worlds, worlds far removed from the reality of traffic congestion, poverty, homelessness, crime and the many other concerns that supposedly vex our existence, and prevent the attainment of true bliss. As Harvey (2000:167) has commented of Disneyland:

> Disneyland eliminates the trouble of actual travel by assembling the rest of the world, properly sanitized and mythologized, into one place of pure fantasy containing multiple spatial orders. (Harvey, 2000:167)

This is at least what Disney would like to impress upon us. Take as an example the Montecasino 'payoff line' that accompanies each Montecasino advertisement, and which is sung operatically over the Montecasino public address system at approximately five minute intervals: "Life is Beautiful". As Ward (1998:54) notes, a slogan "suggests the essence of a place, its appeal and its main market". This 'payoff line' (in marketing parlance) provides an interesting glimpse at what these venues purport to offer, because of the implication that life outside of Montecasino is not beautiful, or at least not as beautiful. Montecasino recently underwent a significant image and publicity makeover, part of which required the implementation of a new payoff line. While life at Montecasino is still beautiful, the new slogan tells guests and visitors to the complex, "Montecasino: We've got it". Similarly, Hemingways' Mall in East London uses the slogan "Ultimate Delight", while its casino component assures visitors that they are "Living the life". While the attempts of advertising departments to lure potential visitors may be viewed as nothing more than a conventional marketing tool, themed environments really do offer the guest something quite unlike what they experience 'on the outside' everyday. Their slogans primarily deal with life as it is supposed to be lived, with

vibrancy, and with offering its visitors something that is beyond their dreams and expectations.

Themed environments claim to have the solution to worldly problems within their walls, where, if we succumb to commercial temptation, we may (if only fleetingly) experience true happiness. They do this through the 'out of sight, out of mind' principle, whereby these problems are excluded by creating a pseudo-reality that bombards all the senses with irresistible and overwhelming stimuli. Themeparks thus invert reality, invent (or reinvent) history, cultivate nostalgia for a mythical past, and excitement for a techno-future (Harvey, 2000). They transport their guest into another world by overwhelming the senses, a technique Findlay (1992:68) refers to as the *suspension of disbelief*. It is not simply a case of offering something different or novel, but rather offering something better. It is where in the mind of the visitor, the ideas of all that is good, all the potential of the outside world is realised. Themed complexes and theme parks offer an improvement on lived reality, albeit a false one that only exists within the confines of the park. As Zukin notes:

> The appeal of imaginary landscapes is that they offer a retreat from the real world of power. They appeal to the child who delights in visual consumption (Zukin, 1991:259).

Spectacle

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord (1994:153) writes:

> The spectacle erases the dividing line between self and world, in that the self, under siege by the presence / absence of the world, is eventually overwhelmed; it likewise erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances.

While Debord may not have directly intended for this assertion to be applied to themed environments, his words neatly capture the commercial and psychological genius behind such environments. Spectacle itself becomes the commodity and this it achieves by providing "a counterpoint to the malaise of everyday life" (Findlay, 1992:87), and making its consumers commodity fetishists (Debord, 1990). As Brown and Marshall (1991:4) have noted of themed complexes, they are:

Unrepentantly garish, yet undeniably alluring.

Indeed, themed casino environments are precisely designed to be garish and ostentatious in order to draw attention to themselves, to stir up the curiosity of the 'outside' public and ultimately coax them within its walls, where they can be more fully subjected to the immersive environment and commercial temptations. These are spaces created to offer the visitor the pleasure of looking and to attract the pleasure seeker (Bauman, 1993 and 2002). Brown and Marshall (1991) highlight the ambivalence with which complexes like Montecasino are often viewed.

> Given the paradoxes of modernity, there is little wrong, and perhaps a great deal right, with being ambivalent – especially when there is so much to be ambivalent about. Wolfe. 1989:211).

Such ambivalence was demonstrated to me by Frederique, a French academic whom I met when asked to act as an informal tour guide of the complex for a group of visiting academics. He cut a tall and lanky figure, his blonde hair cropped very short with a goatee neatly trimmed, outlining the contours of his upper lip and chin. We had taken a break from our walk through the streets of Montecasino to lunch at Verdicchio, one of Montecasino's long standing and more successful restaurants. Frederique is a self-confessed "lefty" and attributes his loathing of themed environments to his socialist upbringing. Between all the critical comments he made about Montecasino during the tour, between our complimentary bread and

main course of penne pasta, Frederique, in a broad French accent, made an interesting confession which animates Brown and Marshal's (1991) quote above.

> I wouldn't come to a place like this without another academic in case I might like it.

Frederique's intimation was that his fellow academic would help him resist surrendering to the charms of Montecasino by reminding him of his loyalty to the 'original' and his disdain for simulacra. Essentially, this was an ironic acceptance of consumer attraction – the very stuff of post-modernist black humour. His words are indicative of a great deal of the popular sentiment expressed regarding themed environments and their allure. While many despise what such environments reveal about the suburbanisation of the city, few can deny having visited such complexes for the commodities, experience or entertainment they offer, or even out of simple curiosity. I was curious as to his comment and prodded further. He explained that as a European native, much of what has been recreated by Montecasino and similar themed complexes, he has lived or at least seen in its original form. He had visited San Gimignano, the small Italian town on which Montecasino was modelled, only a few years earlier and while the simulacra and what it represented was not to his taste, he gave due credit to the architects for their thorough research and the builders for the realistic reconstruction of the town.

The attitudes of Frederique and of many of those in his tour party are reflective of the great deal of the academic sentiment regarding such places, and I could not help feeling that they were missing the point, not seeing the underlying role that Montecasino and the like serve (even if only for a minority) in a country, in a world that is becoming increasingly devoid of places of social interaction. While the environment may be fake, the people who utilise these spaces are not, and neither are their reasons for utilising private space as public place.

> They cannot be denigrated by ascetic sociologists as pseudo-actors. While an urban built environment can be simulated in plaster, board and plastic, social centrality only occurs if a space is appropriated as public by people (Shields, 1992b:104).

Whatever one's opinion regarding the authenticity, it is important to look at why these venues are so popular and what purpose they serve. The growth and movement toward such places can, to some extent be considered in purely economic terms, where there is no supply without demand. That is to say that places such as Montecasino would not exist were there not a need or use for these types of spectacles, retreats and fantasies.

Theming can be considered an introductory step to intrusive consumption, a type of visual consumption that numbs and massages the senses in preparation for full-blown consumerism. Theming and architecture provide the consumer with a spectacle, an invitation to partake in the consumption of the spectacle, the exotic architecture and the ambience. Once these temptations take root in the fertile imagination of the patron, once the patron is fully immersed in the narratives these complexes tell, then true consumption can manifest, albeit under the pretence of enabling the holistic, unadulterated leisure experience.

> Consumer culture actively distorts reality for its own ends. Consumer culture works because consumers want reality to be distorted (Miles 2000:65)

This is how the increasingly popular themed entertainment / retail complex and its distortion of reality has been described. The artificial and highly controlled environment of the themed entertainment complex, or "hybrid mall" as Dovey (1999:127) has dubbed it, seeks to recreate a simulation of the architecture and ambience of exotic and romantic faraway places and distant times. It allows its patrons to escape their everyday lives and surroundings, (Crawford 1992:16) and transports them into another world, from grand Roman Empires, to Lost Jungle

Kingdoms and ancient Italian villages. The themed entertainment complex hosts several retail and entertainment stores, including various restaurants, cinemas, theatres, casinos and boutiques, some even zoos and game-parks. Here, in the commercial and human environment of the entertainment complex, a variety of projected cultures come together. Local visitors and foreign tourists come to experience Italian architecture, Japanese cuisine and a Vegas-like casino atmosphere – all in one locale.

Consumerism and the Commodification of Culture

> The themed nature of the consumer experience is a tendency that many shopping malls have duplicated in the apparent realisation that the more the consumer feels he or she is escaping into another world, the more he or she will be prepared to consume (Bryman 1995:159).

Themed entertainment / retail complexes are one of the most recent trends in the competition to lure customers away from more traditional shopping complexes and the high street as a whole (Sorkin, 1992). More than this, theming facilitates consumer spending by removing visitors from reality and placing them in a world disengaged from the concerns of reality. In these environments, there is no past or present with which one can materially identify, and as such, guests abandon their inhibitions and concerns. As Bremner (2002) writes, places like Montecasino are motivated by the commercial imperative to forget time, place and circumstance, removing guests from the very real concerns of everyday life. Theme parks do not necessarily remove people from reality, but rather invite them to temporarily abandon their lived reality in favour of a pseudo-reality borne of the hardships, inadequacies and concerns of the world beyond the borders of the façade. Augé's (2002) notion of "nonplace" is an important consideration at this point, as in his view, these are spaces of ambiguity, where those who occupy it experience both pleasure and unease at being suspended in a state of limbo. In many instances, places such as Montecasino can be considered nonplaces, as they are both the

destination and the journey, where each attraction holds the visitor suspended in both disbelief, and anticipation of the next spectacle (Bauman, 2002).

The concept of escape is a prominent theme in all Disney creations. As Wasko (2001:117) observes, many of the Disney animated movie plots (e.g. Cinderella, Snow White) revolve around a character wishing to escape their oppressive environment, and having their wish granted by magical beings. In a very real sense, themed complexes are the magical beings that rescue us from our mundane existence and transport us to a magical world free of earthly burdens.

The Disney concept shares much in common with Montecasino which, like Disneyland and Disney World (and indeed all such sophisticated theme parks), are at their very heart, the machinations of commerce and enterprise, packaged and marketed under the guise of escape and fantasy fulfilment. For this reason, shopping must become part of the attraction. As Yoshimoto comments;

> The ultimate purpose of narrativizing experience is to naturalize consumption activities, so that visitors consume without being aware of it (Yoshimoto 1994:187).

It is increasingly being understood that shopping can be a leisure activity (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999). As a consequence, malls have had to adapt, becoming more leisure and entertainment orientated, thus giving rise to the themed entertainment / retail complex (Morris, 1993). Van Eeden (1999:153) says of the mall:

> It is clearly more than a space for shopping. It entices with promises of entertainment, romance, excitement, seductive choices, consumer freedom, escapism, images of status, sophisticated, sensuous experiences, and social validation.

Shopping out of necessity for everyday items is considered by some as work, but when people shop for and purchase more exclusive, more discretionary items, either for themselves or others, shopping can be a pleasurable activity, even a

leisure activity (see Miller, 1998). Falk and Campbell (1997) call into question the role shopping plays in issues of social life, as it raises the questions surrounding the prominence of shopping centres, the restructuring of the relationships between public and private, between the individual and the collective, inside and outside (see also Mort, 1996). In particular, it is sociologists who have applied shopping as an idea, but to a greater extent the act of consumption, to critique the existing social order[19]. Consumption is, after all as Urry (1995:129) asserts, "indelibly social". Social theorists such as Bauman (1998) and Bourdieu (1984) argue that consumption is a "cultural site of social stratification through which wider economic and political tensions of contemporary capitalism are played out to a somewhat uncertain end" (Edwards 2000:36).

It is understandable that Marxist writers have contributed greatly to the topic of consumption (Keat, 1999, Ray and Sayer, 1999), understanding it as the direct result of production (Miles, 2000). Marx (1867) himself was keenly aware that many aspects of social life were subject to the whims of the marketplace, and the phenomenon of rapidly increasing material culture (Miller, 1987) or *(hyper)commodification* as it has been termed, (Crook, Pakulski and Waters, 1992:58) shows no signs of abating. The commodification of culture has largely been interpreted in fatalistic terms (Meethan, 2001) with authors such as Bleasdale and Tapsell (1999) and Henrici (1999) arguing that culture cannot be traded like a commodity without consequence. Mbembe (2004:401) goes one step further, saying that things are not simply objects of consumption, but that they also organise desire and provoke fantasies.

Commodification has become a popular topic within the social sciences with researchers looking at everything from the commodification of sport, (Lasch, 1985, Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Row, 2001) and music (Longhurst, 1995) to the packaging of pleasure (Tomlinson, 1991). The commodification of culture for the

[19] See Douglas and Isherwood (1979) for anthropological perspectives of consumption.

purposes of tourism (Meethan, 2001) has gained attention, and it has received possibly the most comprehensive and holistic investigation to date with respect to the phenomena of commodification. Hamilton (1998:189) notes how “Shakaland”, a Zulu-themed tourist resort, has proved very popular with tourists. This is in part because of its interactive component and the absence of claims to authenticity (although it was paradoxically perceived by the tourists as being highly authentic). As McEachern (2002) notes, most cultural villages today (this is not exclusive to South Africa) are villages of the dispossessed and disempowered, where cultural expressions are rendered not in their true state, but rather in the way that the colonising power has come to see the colonised. In this way, culture is simplified, prostituted and sold off to eager tourists who happily consume without question (McEachern, 2002). It is, as Adorno (1991, 1997) an industry obeying the same rules of production as any other producer of commodities. Neither is it exempt from the laws of supply and demand. The commodification of culture for the purpose of leisure entertainment and touristic consumption is becoming increasingly popular (Craik, 1995, Ritzer and Liska, 1997), and Montecasino is a more recent addition to the ranks of “culture peddlers”.

> Consumerism is ubiquitous and ephemeral. It is arguably the religion of the late twentieth century. It apparently pervades our everyday lives and structures our everyday experiences and yet, it is perpetually altering its form and reasserting its influences in new guises (Miles, 2000:1).

Synergy, Leisure and Gambling

The concept of commercial “synergy” has of late gained considerable academic attention, particularly from the discipline of architecture. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Brown, 1993:3190) defines synergy as, *“Of a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects”.* Puckrin (1992:1) adds another dimension to this with her definition of synergy: *“The synthesis of disparate*

elements in a combination which is more beneficial for each element than isolation". Fundamentally, synergy is the seamless bringing together of different elements in order for the new whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. The most notable theorist of synergy within architecture is Kisho Kurokawa (1988 and 1991) who looks at intercultural architecture and symbiosis in the built environment. Contemporary architecture stresses the importance of synergy between nature and the built environment (Puckrin, 1992) and between private and public space (Dingwall-Fordyce, 2000).

> It [synergy] is a glue that creates community out of disparate entities (Campbell and Goold, 1998:xi)

The commercial sector has also taken an interest in the concept of synergy as a way of increasing productivity and profit margins (see Benders, De Haan and Bennett, 1995, Harrison, Hitt, Hoskisson and Ireland, 2001, Schmitz and Sliwka 2001, Burns and Napier, 1994). Synergy is a concept which is still very much in its infancy, and many doubt whether it can ever truly be attained (see Geenen and Bowers, 1997, Sirower, 1997). This question is given voice in the entertainment / retail complex where restaurants, casinos and retailers come together under one roof in an attempt to offer a complete leisure experience. Anthropologically, synergy has briefly been addressed by Ingold (1992) with reference to human beings and the built environment, and by Morris (1999) who discusses the efficacy of synergy between emic and etic approaches to research on culture and cognition. The concept has, however, not been applied to cultural commercial contexts thus far, particularly as it relates to the commercial marriage of leisure, entertainment and consumption.

More contemporary studies of leisure have been conducted by sociologists (see Henry, 1993, Rojek, 1989. See also Wimbush and Talbot, 1988, Deem, 1986 for a feminist perspective on leisure), although anthropologists have also concerned themselves extensively with this topic. Margaret Mead is perhaps the most

prominent anthropologist to have studied a group's leisure activities. In *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1943) and *Growing up in New Guinea (1930)*, Mead devoted considerable attention to the ways in which these Polynesian cultures, particularly the women and the youth, spent their free or leisure time. Geertz (1975) too, in his classic analysis of a Balinese cockfight described how wagering or gambling (on the result of a cockfight) is a leisure pastime for this particular group of people. Of all the leisure activities in South Africa, one of the most controversial has been gambling – particularly in its legalised variations.

Gambling has long been a feature of many West African cultures particularly in relation to market day leisure activities (Zaslavsky, 1973). More contemporary ethnographies of gambling have been conducted by Alvarez (1991) and Hayano (1982) but both approach gambling from the perspective of an occupation, highlighting the difficulties of being a professional gambler. More and more studies are beginning to give credence to the idea that gambling is indeed a leisure activity (Caillois, 1962) and casinos are beginning to situate themselves alongside other entertainment venues or within wider entertainment complexes (Sunter, 1994). Indeed casinos are very often an important anchor of entertainment venues in South Africa, and are centrally situated within the themed entertainment complex. Montecasino is a prime example of this, where the casino is the prime tenant, using a Tuscan theme to allow its visitors to escape and indulge in leisure and consumption activities.

Montecasino: A Description

Montecasino, South Africa's "Tuscan village-in-a-box" (Fife, 2002) is one of the country's largest leisure and entertainment complexes, a commercial and built phenomenon resuscitated by the post apartheid state's legalisation of gambling in 1996. Montecasino is also the largest of Gauteng's five casinos, covering 38 hectares of prime real estate in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. It is a Tsogo Sun initiative, a partnership that started in 1994 from the marriage between Southern Sun and Tsogo Investments, a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) venture. Tsogo Investments and Southern Sun each hold a fifty percent stake in Tsogo Sun, whose projects were, until recently, underwritten by South African Breweries. Tsogo Sun currently operates four other casinos, in Nelspruit, Witbank, Durban and East London, with Montecasino being their flagship development. Recent media reports have suggested that Tsogo Investments would be given the option of buying out Southern Sun's stake in the venture as part of the current governments BEE initiative, making Montecasino and its sister complexes wholly owned by Tsogo Sun. More than simply being an illustration of the growing emphasis placed on BEE in South Africa, Montecasino, through its architecture and décor (and perhaps even the very reason for its existence), brings into sharp focus questions of authenticity, simulation and the future of the suburban experience. Situated in the country's wealthiest province and one of its most affluent suburbs, this "authentic representation of a Tuscan village" (Montecasino Promotional Video, 2000) provides a unique and novel leisure and entertainment experience as trumpeted by the Montecasino fact sheet. It is an upmarket complex that was borne out of the legalisation of gambling in South Africa in 1996 under reforms implemented by the country's new democratic government.

In South Africa, almost all forms of gambling were banned or restricted by law from as early as 1673. The Gambling Act of 1965 officially banned all forms of gambling and betting, except on horse racing. During the late 1970s, in a move to circumvent

South Africa's tough anti-gambling stance, casinos began operating in the then Bantustans of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei and Venda. By 1995 an estimated 2000 illegal casinos were believed to be operating within the country. The National Gambling Act instituted a system of licensed casinos, which has since its inception, seen a proliferation of small (by international standards), usually themed, gambling and entertainment complexes. As of 2008, South Africa boasted 37 operational casinos which combined accounted for almost R30 billion in capital investment. The establishment of these casinos bring a massive capital injection to the regions in which they are situated, and the returns on these investments are immense. During the 2009 financial year, South Africa's casinos generated quarterly revenue of approximately fifty billion rand, with a full year aggregated figure of two hundred and twelve billion rand (The South African National Gambling Board, 2009). Gauteng boasts seven casinos and is by far the main revenue generator, with the Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Western Cape each offering five casinos. In total, South Africa's casinos have approximately twenty two thousand slot machines and over seven hundred and fifty gaming tables.

The proliferation of themed casino complexes dotted throughout the South African landscape became very apparent on a recent trip to the Eastern Cape, where several of the towns en route (Bloemfontein – Windmill Casino, Queenstown – Queens Casino, East London - Hemingways) proudly boasted casino advertising billboards. One in particular showed a large billboard of elegant ladies dressed in cocktail dresses and dapper males in black suites, smiling at each other while gathered around a roulette table. The billboard is followed several hundred metres later by sign posts providing the motorist with directions to the town's casino, which is often the town's main draw card and centralised entertainment area. Bloemfontein's Windmill Casino and Entertainment Centre offers the visitor over three hundred slot machines as well as thirteen tables. There is also a twelve lane bowling alley as well as three restaurants to choose from. The casino complex borrows its theme from Paris, with its website describing it thus:

> Inspired by the enchanting world of the famous Moulin Rouge in Paris, The Windmill Casino and Entertainment Centre is an elegant experience for those who dare to flirt with chance and blow kisses at Lady Luck. It's a world of entertainment for the whole family in the most glamorous of surroundings, a place where fantasy becomes real. We dare you to give it a whirl. The romantic and the risqué combine in an imaginative blend reminiscent of Herbert Baker's playful architectural style, hinting at all the excitement that lies within the Windmill. Here, a glamorous world class casino offers you only the very best in entertainment and gaming pleasure. So, put on your best bohemian attitude and come and enjoy top-notch gaming and much, much more! (Windmill Casino and Entertainment Centre Website, 2010).

As is evident from the Windmill's marketing material, the complex is truly a mix of eclectic (imaginative blend) inspirations. The British born Sir Herbert Baker was a dominant force in South African architecture for more than two decades, having designed the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Responsible for several well known buildings in South Africa, Baker was also the architect of several cemeteries in France in the wake of the First World War. The term "Moulin Rouge", which is French for "Red Windmill", is a cabaret built in 1889 by Joseph Oller, in the Paris red-light district (the risqué) of Pigalle on Boulevard de Clichy, and is marked by a red windmill on its roof. The Moulin Rouge is widely known as the home of the modern form of the can-can dance, a seductive dance by the courtesans who operated from the site. Bloemfontein's Windmill, is however, a more refined and sanitised version, which only draws its inspiration from these roots, and markets itself as a world of entertainment for "the whole family", where "fantasy becomes real".

Queenstown's Queens Casino, markets itself as *"Probably the best casino in the country!!!"* While certainly a bold claim in South Africa's growing casino market, offering only one hundred and eighty slot machines and six tables, this casino caters for a significantly smaller population, one that does not have nearly the

disposable spending power of those that frequent the larger complexes in more metropolitan areas. Queens was opened in 2007 and is based on a Railway theme. It was inspired by the town's steam locomotive housed in the local museum for the past thirty years. The now restored locomotive was once used to transport Princess Elizabeth during a visit to South Africa. Continuing on from this theme, Queens offers visitors "The Royal Treatment", and boasts several restaurants and coffee shops, a games room (video arcade), and a crèche facility. As their website boasts:

> We provide entertainment for the whole family. Great fun. Kids come check out this room filled with exciting games! We have 22 games to choose from for the kids to play while their parents are enjoying the facilities. (Queens Casino website, 2010)

Less than two hundred kilometres from Queenstown's Queens Casino, and bounded by the N2, Two Rivers Drive and Western Avenue in East London, is Hemingways Casino, which:

> "brings a touch of Key West to East London, with the theme of the Complex based on the Key West home of Author Ernest Hemingway." (Hemingways' website, 2010)

Ernest Hemingway's Key West home was originally built by Asa Tift, a marine architect, in 1851 in a colonial southern mansion style. Hemingways Casino and Hotel was developed by Tsogo Sun Emonti on an 11 Hectare site atop a hill overlooking the city of East London, a small coastal city best known for its production of Mercedes Benz motor vehicles for the international automotive export market. Hemingways was originally a small, stand-alone Casino and entertainment complex, but the quarter of a billion Rand investment has subsequently grown, adding a large, one and a half billion Rand mega mall, East London's first, to the casino structure. The mall continues the theme of the Hemingway's Key West home on the exterior façade, but is in many respects, state of the art internally.

With more than one hundred and fifty retail outlets, many of them amongst the most modern and fashionable franchises in the country such as Capellos, Fashion TV Café and Primi Piatti, the mall offers a significant retail addition to what was solely a casino. Rather than bringing the casino to the mall, Hemingways has brought the mall to the casino, and the new expansion has brought with it significantly increased visitor numbers, but how this will translate into footfall, and ultimately revenue, for the casino remains to be seen.

The South African landscape is littered with examples of themed retail and entertainment complexes. Apart from the Windmill, Queens Casino and Hemingways, several other themes include ancient African jungle kingdoms (Sun City and the Lost City), ancient Roman palaces (Emperor's Palace) and big-top like carnival recreations (Carnival City). Others give away their identity with exotic names like Graceland Hotel, Casino and Country Club (Secunda), Desert Palace Hotel Resort (Uppington) and The Carousel Casino and Entertainment World (Hammanskraal). Each of these venues offers a level of difference in both genre and commercial profile, making the South African market the most developed on the African continent, as well as an important point of comparison for global investors as much as local and international tourists.

The Emerald Resort and Casino on the banks of the Vaal River in Vanderbijlpark approximately seventy five kilometres from Johannesburg openly acknowledges the assortment of inspirations, architectures and influences, calling itself:

> A curious mix of contrasts, a place where business is combined with pleasure, action with relaxation, and finesse with frivolity. (Emerald Casino website, 2010)

The emotive language employed in the marketing and advertising of these complexes often speak to the realisation of a fantasy or dream. They all claim to be family orientated, despite their primary activity, the very reason for their existence,

gambling, being an activity only legally open to those who are eighteen years or older. They all marry gambling and casino activities with dining and entertainment activities such as retail and shopping, gaming arcades, and in many instances, a hotel component. Moreover though, all of these complexes borrow from one or several themes and inspirations in order to create an amalgamation of eye catching, enchanting and alluring visual spectacles that appeal both to the senses as well as the curiosity, however disparate, however close or far from the truth they may be. All of them tame the real world in order to create, a distilled, idealised and sanitised version that is closer to what we want our spaces to be than the reality of what they are. As Gottdiener (1997) notes, even the original home of gambling, Las Vegas, has overhauled its image in order to capitalise on a the spending power of a broader audience.

> "Las Vegas, once a mecca for alcohol, sex and gambling, has become the theme park capital of the United States as casinos switch to family orientated entertainment and spectacular fantasy facades, such as the Luxor Hotel, with its ancient Egypt motif." (Gottdiener, 1997:3)

Montecasino, like its forbearers, follows the same principles and traditions in order to draw crowds, from gamblers, to diners, shoppers and walkers.

Location, Location, Location!!!

> "The generative imagery of Johannesburg – or its "invented tradition" – has always laid considerable stress on its energizing qualities, its kinetic dynamism, and its seemingly limitless opportunities for self enrichment. Despite the relative blandness of its topographical surroundings, Johannesburg has always traded in glamour, and illusion, ephemeral traits that never cease to lure countless numbers of expectant newcomers into its captivating orbit. For more than a century, this glittering "City of Gold" has been the most telling touchstone for South Africa's extremes and excesses, the true-to-life mise-en-scene for conspicuous displays of ostentatious wealth in the midst of deplorable impoverishment and depravation, a resplendent playground for affluent white consumers, most of whom have never

> set foot in any of the literally dozens of dreary, sprawling black townships and informal settlements that remain hidden on the urban periphery." (Murray, 2008:144).

As Murray (2008) eloquently notes, Johannesburg is a city characterised by the dichotomy between rich and poor (Beal, Crankshaw and Parnell, 2000, Bremner, 1998), something which he believes is easily put down to the city's founding "frontier mentality". Johannesburg has always been the City of Gold, where millions of settlers flocked to find their fortunes on fledgling gold mines, and where millions of immigrants continue to arrive in search of a better life. As the country's wealthiest province in Africa's wealthiest country, Johannesburg is South Africa's land of opportunity. It is a city that thrives on making dreams of extreme wealth come true, where excess is an accepted part of its vibrancy and ostentation (Murray, 2008). Mbembe (2004:376) adds to this, highlighting the city's propensity to adapt itself through imitation, and in so doing, create something that is new.

> But even cities born out of mimicry are capable of mimesis. By mimesis, we should understand a capacity to identify oneself or establish similarities with something else while at the same time inventing something original. More than any other African city, Johannesburg has evidenced this capacity to mime." In the process, the city has developed an aura of its own, its uniqueness. The mimetic structure of Johannesburg is still evident in the city's contemporary architectural forms, or more simply, in its mania for wealth, for the sensational and the ephemeral, for appearances. (Mbembe, 2004:376)

As a city of wealth, of ostentatious displays of affluence and conspicuous consumption, this once gritty mining town has transformed itself into a still gritty but vastly more consumerist city, yet just as entrepreneurial. Johannesburg was thus the ideal location for the situation of South Africa's premier entertainment and leisure destination. But as Murray notes, Johannesburg is a vast city made up of disparate groups of people under vastly different economic conditions, with a very

distinct divide, socially and geographically between those who have *succeeded* and *achieved*, and those who believe they are yet to do so.

> Like other aspiring "world-class" cities where the yawning gap between the anxious rich and the desperately poor is an integral feature of urban life, Johannesburg after apartheid has come to exhibit the morphological characteristics of what urban theorists have referred to as the "garrison city", the "dual city", or the "carceral city" where the urban landscape is partitioned into what Saskia Sassen has called an "urban glamour zone" – a new hyperspace of global business and finance with streamlined airports that double as fancy shopping malls catering to affluent travellers, advanced telecommunications networks, state-of-the-art corporate headquarters facilities, luxurious hotel accommodations, and an absorbing culture of "world class" entertainment diversions – and an "urban danger zone" – the interstitial spaces of confinement, with their broken-down infrastructure, few social amenities and restricted opportunities for escape, where vast legions of service workers and the casually employed compete with the unemployed, the unemployable and the marginalized and the "socially excluded," for survival" (Murray, 2008:145)

Fourways, the Johannesburg suburb in which Montecasino is based is just such an "urban glamour zone", and it exists in close proximity to several "urban danger zones" (Diepsloot, Alexandra[20]). In an effort to make more land available for luxury housing developments, golf courses and upmarket malls, the north is encroaching on informal settlements, which in previous years were some distance from the northern suburbs. In the Johannesburg context, much of this occurs in a rapidly expanding area which has been dubbed the New North by anthropologist Andre Czeglédy (personal communication with author, May 27, 2009). Fourways is an example of this, as the upmarket suburb is only some five kilometres from Diepsloot, an economically depressed and crime riddled informal settlement. In the suburban north then, one finds exclusive houses and golfing estates within close proximity of informal settlements, which is presenting some very interesting

[20] See Davis (2006) for more detail on the conditions of squatter and informal settlements such as Diepsloot

challenges to urban developers and the local council. A similar situation presents itself in Sandton, only a few kilometres from Fourways, where Alexandra Township, is on the doorstep of this wealthy suburb. Davis (1992) too, tells of how several of the extremely wealthy Los Angeles suburbs live in close proximity to impoverished Black and Latino ghettos.

From the 'no-cost' corrugated iron shacks of the informal settlements, to the multi million rand retail and entertainment complexes of the wealthy suburbs, the Johannesburg skyline (and that of its surrounding suburbs) is a pastiche of influences from across the globe, and to this list, Montecasino has added Tuscany. The site chosen for South Africa's very own Tuscan village, Montecasino, is situated in the heart of Fourways, one of the city's more recent urban conurbations It is a suburb of mixed commercial and residential use and provided the ideal location for the establishment of Montecasino. When choosing the site for a themed entertainment complex, great care was taken to ensure the viability and sustainability of the project. Strategic decisions regarding the location of the complex will ultimately impact on the success or failure of the establishment (Jacobs, 1984:1). Commenting on the preconditions for the construction of malls, which equally applies to Montecasino, Alexander and Muhlebach (1992:3) express the importance of locating the complex in a densely populated area, near an expressway and near other attractions. Furthermore, the complex should be easily accessible for convenience and be highly visible to the public to remind them of its presence. This site is a suburban landmark point of visual and spatial significance. The economic climate of the suburb in which the complex is to be based depends to a very large extent on the desired customer base the complex wishes to attract. Montecasino, through various means, is aimed at Gauteng's upper classes, albeit that this intention has not necessarily been realised. It is for this reason that the economically booming suburb of Fourways was chosen, as it not only fulfilled many of the requirements of such a complex, but it also provided the appropriate economic climate in relations to Montecasino's target market.

The Johannesburg northern suburbs and Fourways in particular, have over recent year's experienced and major injection of capital due to the relocation of businesses and residences from Johannesburg's Central Business District (CBD) (Beavon, 1998; Czeglédy, 2003; Tomlinson and Larson, 2003). This decay began as early as the 1970s but became a topic of public concern (and considerable debate) by the 1980s. The period witnessed massive retail, office and even residential flight that has been best described by the human geographer Keith Beavon (2004) in his seminal volume on Johannesburg. By the end of the 1990s and the turn of the Millennium, the "crime and grime" stories that had become routine in the local newspapers had been replaced by outright avoidance on the part of the middle and upper classes nearly entirely. The freefall was so severe that it resulted in an inverted and hollowed out (Czeglédy, 2003) urban structure that substantially remains to this day. In spite of various municipal, provincial and even national level contributions to reviving the downtown core, the dominant role of the city may never be regained given the shift in people, resources and economic interests to the north and especially Sandton, a wealthy suburb of the city now considered the business heart of the country.

Through the sustained investment of both capital and confidence, the north has experienced an explosion of construction (Bremner, 1998; Tomlinson and Larson, 2003) and has constantly had to creep ever further north to accommodate the appetite for real-estate, thus giving rise what is colloquially termed, 'the New North'. As a result, the local property market too has experienced a boom, with land prices soaring on the back of demand from corporations who seek to locate themselves in the new and fashionable area. Fourways plays host to several office parks and retail establishments, among them Fourways mall, Fourways Crossing, Pineslopes Shopping Centre, Broadacres Shopping Centre, The Design Quarter, and at one stage, Extreme 16, an experiential Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) showroom (Czeglédy, personal communication with author, March 7, 2003). The

Design Quarter is an upmarket retail space with a host of home décor and exclusive furniture stores and upmarket restaurants. Make note of new car dealerships. Fourways is also home to several exclusive automotive dealerships, among them Ducati and Lexus. It has also become the preferred site for corporations who wish to relocate their headquarters or who simply want to forge new inroads into the burgeoning suburban elite market by establishing outlets and showrooms. These are among the diversity of attractions of which Alexander and Muhlebach (1992:3) write regarding the strategic location of a complex such as Montecasino.

Fourways has also proved an attractive option to the developer of luxury housing complexes that are home to the nouveau riche who inhabit the northern suburbs. Over recent years, there has been a proliferation of upmarket (and often themed) townhouse complexes, which fetch exorbitant prices (Bremner, 2006:61-62). The most prominent such example is Dainfern an exclusive golf estate which is home to a large foreign / expatriate contingent, the majority of whom are American expatriates who have come to South African on contract work for large multinationals. Just north of Dainfern is the American School, a school that caters exclusively for the children of these American expatriates. Dainfern can best be described as a fortified and security obsessed enclave of the elite, with lavishly styled houses and the cars that befit them. Access to the estate is through one of two boomed and guarded entrances, where inhabitants are required to swipe their access cards to gain entry. Visitors on the other hand have their name telephone number and vehicle registration number recorded, before the justification of their visit is verified by security personnel who contact the intended destination for confirmation. Protected by high walls and patrolled by a private security force, Dainfern seems a world apart from the concerns of the country outside its high perimeter walls and electrified fencing, yet it fits neatly as a component part of the new north.

The phenomenon of obsessive fortification is by no means endemic to the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. In Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space, Mike Davis (1992) documents how public space is increasingly being privatised as the “Urban form obediently follows repressive function” (Davis, 1992:156). Like for South Africans, it is becoming difficult for ordinary citizens of Los Angeles to enter the privileged and exclusive suburbs, such as Hidden Hills, Bradbury and Palos Verdes Estates, without an invitation. High walls, private security forces and signs foretelling of “armed response”, and even public park access restrictions discourage Black and Latino communities from venturing in to these wealthy suburbs (Davis, 1992:154). Like Dainfern and the privileged suburbs of Los Angeles, Montecasino too has an obsession with security which acts both as a measure of exclusion, and a means to restrict and control movement of people.

Not only does Fourways provide a favourable economic and demographic profile but its geographic location makes it the ideal site for an establishment such as Montecasino, which aims to draw upper-middle and upper-class patrons from all across Gauteng. Fourways is centrally located in what is called the P.W.V. (Pretoria, Witwatersrand, Vereeniging) area, thus making it easily accessible to the majority of Gauteng. As with all major complexes seeking to attract visitors from surrounding areas, the complex site should be easily locatable and accessible to the surrounding areas it will serve (Alexander and Muhlebach, 1992:3, Jacobs, 1984:1). Montecasino is less than two kilometres from the N1 Highway (also known as the western bypass), which connects the eastern and western corners of Johannesburg, as well as linking Southern Gauteng with Pretoria in the north of the province. Two of the major roads that service the Fourways area are William Nicol (which connects the south and “new north” ends of the northern suburbs) which intersects with N1 highway, and Witkoppen Road (which links the east and west ends of Johannesburg North). It is at the intersection of these two roads that Montecasino can be found. Ironically, neither of these two roads provide direct

access to the artificial Tuscan village. Instead, the two roads are linked by Montecasino Boulevard, a purpose built and privately named byroad which runs in a south westerly – north easterly axis. Montecasino Boulevard links William Nicol Drive and Witkoppen Road, thus situating Montecasino in a triangular island of roadways. To this end, Montecasino is, like Dainfern, and many other urban enclaves, isolated from the suburbs to which they owe their existence, but not their allegiance. Much of this disconnectedness has to do with the nature of the urban sprawl, which was facilitated by the prominence of the automobile among residents to whom the northern suburbs play host.



Figure 3: Map indicating Montecasino's positioning (Image: Google Earth)

The urban geography of Johannesburg, the vastness of the urban sprawl, does not make any provision for pedestrians, or even cyclists. Curiously, however, the meandering Montecasino Boulevard is lined with neatly trimmed grass verges and shrubbery that wanders alongside paved pedestrian paths I had seldom seen used. This is because there is no surrounding infrastructure for this path to connect

into. On a warm summer morning in January, a young couple was pushing a stroller along the Montecasino Boulevard walkway. I thought to myself that they must be tourists who were staying at the Palazzo hotel. How else could they have found themselves there?" The couple seemed confused, as if they had just discovered that there is no place to walk to and no pedestrian infrastructure apart from Montecasino Boulevard, which is no more than two kilometres long and essentially goes nowhere. Johannesburg, like Los Angeles (See Wachs and Crawford, 1992) for a comprehensive account of the role of the automobile played in shaping American cities) is a city dominated by the automobile. Thus for most, a trip to Montecasino begins in the vehicle, a car, a taxi, a bus. There is an enormous irony to this as the Tuscan village with its internal cobbled streets and piazzas is constructed in a manner so as to encourage patron to experience the harmony of walking freely through the 'mock' streets. To indulge the architects in this vision, however, one must first arrive by motor vehicle since there is no pedestrian infrastructure to Montecasino. Even if there were a suitable infrastructure, the distances that one would have to walk would discourage most from doing so. Ironically, one needs transport to be a pedestrian at Montecasino and to indulge in the flanerie of which Benjamin (1982) speaks.

Another prerequisite for building a large complex is that it not be located in an area already saturated with the amenities and entertainment facilities that the complex proposes to bring to the region. Northern Johannesburg, and indeed South Africa as a whole, does not have a casino-orientated retail and entertainment complex of similar scope, at least not to the extent that Montecasino incorporates retail. Approximately forty kilometres east of Fourways is Emperors Palace, a casino and retail complex which places far less emphasis on retail, as does Emerald City, 60 kilometres south of Fourways in the industrial town of Vanderbijlpark. While Gauteng abounds with malls, shopping centres and casinos, there is no directly comparable complex that places such emphasis on the marriage of these

conventionally independent dimensions. As Shields comments of the new trend in sites of consumption:

> In their totality, post modern consumption sites are characterised by a new spatial form which is a synthesis of leisure and consumption activities previously held apart by being located in different sites, performed at different times or accomplished by different people (Shields, 1992a:6).

Not only is Fourways strategically located within the province of Gauteng, but it provides the appropriate commercial and economic environment, as well as hosting the patrons and clientele that Montecasino hope to attract through their portrayal of an upmarket, idyllic lifestyle. While Fourways provides the ideal location for Montecasino, it simultaneously presents a social and moral dilemma which has long plagued urban planners and development agencies, that of the juxtaposition of extreme wealth with extreme poverty. The use of a Tuscan theme, however, will soothe the spirits of the downtrodden, and offers indulgences to those that can afford them, and hope to those that can't.

Why Tuscany?

> What traveller visiting Tuscany for the first time has not been struck by a sense of familiarity when descending from the heights of the Apennines, which divide the province from the northern plains, with the little hills topped by a farmhouse or villa with an avenue of cypresses leading up to it, the strip-like fields divided by long lines of olive trees, with vines slung low growing like hedges between them? Where has one seen it all before? Then the realization dawns: in every art gallery of the world where paintings of the Tuscan school are hung; for centuries this landscape provided the background for so many of the world's masterpieces that it has become familiar to all of us as the very heart and soul of Italy, as the soil from which the Renaissance sprang (Masson, 1959:124).

The Tuscan landscape, and its architecture, has now provided the background for another of the 'world's masterpieces', Montecasino, the place from which the South African retail and entertainment Renaissance was predicted to spring. The narratives of themed environments are those that are familiar to us and form part of the "global cultural vocabulary" (Philips, 2001:97). As Masson (1959) notes, there is a tremendous sense of familiarity with the Tuscan landscape because of its prominence in artistic pieces. Poets and writers such as Dante and Boccaccio, and painters like Giotto revived Tuscan art and literature, bringing the region to prominence as a place of culture and sophistication. In South Africa, Montecasino has 'revived' the Tuscan lifestyle and architecture, bringing this region to prominence as a place of gambling and escape.

South Africa and Johannesburg in particular, appears enamoured with the Tuscan aesthetic. Over the past ten years, a proliferation of upmarket housing complexes in the northern suburbs have been styling and marketing themselves as Tuscan, an example being "*Montepulciano"*. *Montepulciano* is where the "Villa Grande comes to Craigavon", a suburb of northern Johannesburg (approximately five kilometres north of Montecasino) and is inspired by "a quaint village in Tuscany, best known for their Montepulciano wines" (Property week, Randburg Sun, 28 October, 2003:10). Other examples of Tuscan styled housing complexes, also with the seemingly obligatory "*Monte"* prefix, and which highlight the current affinity for all that is Tuscan include *Del Monte* and *Monte Classique.* The exoticness of the styling is thus carried through to the name, with only the South African Bushveld styled complexes having 'local' (and even these names are usually in of Kenyan or Botswanan origin) names. The more difficult it is to pronounce, the more exotic and exclusive it sounds.

Tuscan architecture, the perceived slow and relaxed pace of life, for many epitomise the heart and soul of Italy, a country with a highly romanticised image. In as much as South Africa may conjure up images of Apartheid, wildlife safaris and

exotic cultures, so Italy is synonymous with well-tailored suits, a passion for football, fast cars and fine cuisine. Even the Mafia has come to be romanticised by both the media and Hollywood (see *The Sopranos, The Godfather, Goodfellas*). The emotive and romantic sentiment with which Italy is viewed, together with the social ambience the developers wished to extol (if only to hide the true character of economic self-interest) must certainly have played a prominent role in settling upon the Tuscan theme. It would seem, however, that the choice of a Tuscan theme might have been more fortuitous than a moment of inspirational business rationale. Rather than conducting intensive research as to the viability of a Tuscan theme in South Africa, Montecasino was in fact somewhat more whimsically inspired.

Ken Rosevear, former Sun International CEO was captivated by the region of Tuscany, an area that he had visited on holiday in the mid 1990's. His fascination for the region, together with the knowledge that the Tuscan theme had not been used for a casino anywhere else in the world, led to the adoption of Montecasino as a theme. *"It was not a big intellectual decision, it just happened because Rosevear thought it would work"* (Edmund Batley – interview in Sunday Times with Bremner, 2002). Creative Kingdom were the concept architects of the development while the contract for the architectural design of Montecasino was awarded to Bentel, Abramson and Partners, the firm at which Batley worked. Creative Kingdom is, in their own words, *"Defining the future of themed destinations".* The Los Angeles California based company was founded in 1997 by Eduardo Robles and has offices across the globe, including in South Africa where the company has done extensive design and planning work.

Apart from the conceptual design of Montecasino and the Palazzo Intercontinental Hotel, Creative Kingdom has also been intimately involved in other South African landmarks such as The Table Bay Hotel (Cape Town), Ushaka Island Marine Park (Durban), Century City (Cape Town), Southern Sun Hemingways (East London), Sun Coast Casino (Durban), The Lost City (Pilansberg), as well as several yet to

be constructed ventures in the country, such as a Durban theme park and a high rise, luxury residential tower in Umhlanga Rocks, Durban, called the Pearls of Umhlanga. The company's role was to expand and capitalise on the ideas of Rosevear's Tuscan inspiration. Since its inception, the company's portfolio of services has expanded to include 'Master planning', Architecture, Graphic Design, and even three dimensional animation and computer generated imagery (CGI). Their evolution in many instances, can be seen as a natural progression, from reality (architectural design) to fantasy, imagination and unreality, or at least, constructed surrealism (computer generated imagery). In much the same fashion as Disney's 'imaginers', Creative Kingdom was given design license to dream up elaborate and fanciful designs inspired by old world Tuscan romanticism and charm. Once their imaginative framework had been *dreamed*, it was the role of locally established firm, Bentel Abramson and Partners to turns these dreams into reality.

Bentel Abramson and Partners, which was established in 1960, renamed itself in 2005, becoming Bentel Associates, coinciding with their opening of offices in Dubai and India. A 2005 article in Architect Africa provides a short background to the company's work and establishment in the local architectural landscape:

> The Company pioneered the design and introduction of internal mall shopping centres and the "Theme Centre" concept. Rapidly establishing themselves as a premier retail architectural firm Bentel Associates undertook the design of the first fully enclosed shopping centre in South Africa, Randpark Centre, now known as Heathway Centre, in Blackheath Johannesburg, which opened in 1968, and was followed by a multitude of similar centres around the country. More than any other form of architecture, retail architecture is subject to the critical test of its success, where public approval is measured directly in shopping volumes and retail turnover. The immediate and continuing success of the many shopping centres designed by the Company is testimony to its design skills and expertise. As one of South Africa's leading "Theme Architects", Bentel Associates International are responsible for some of the most colourful and dramatic shopping centres and complexes in South Africa. Theme centres were becoming popular throughout the

> world in response to an increasing desire amongst people to experience other cultures and environments. The concept worked well in the Workshop in Durban; the design converted the original locomotive workshop into a retail complex with Victorian features. This award winning design was heavily themed and ingenuously executed. Further theme centres were developed and the design of the Canal Walk shopping centre saw the opening of Bentel Associates offices in Cape Town in 1997. Through the years, the Company has also become involved with casino design culminating in the magnificent Montecasino complex in Fourways. This complex was also highly themed and the final plans were only drawn up after intensive research and attention to the most minute design details. Providing a challenge to the practice, the Canal Walk and Montecasino projects were completed concurrently (Architect Africa, 2005).

Apart from these significant projects, the practice has also been responsible for the design of the Michelangelo Hotel in Sandton as well as the recently opened Bedford Square in Bedfordview, East of Johannesburg.

Edmund Batley of Bentel, Abramson and Partners was the chief architect for the development, and mentioned to me in a separate interview that Rosevear chose Tuscany because it was a *"forgiving theme"* and it suited the South African social climate. I met with Edmund Batley early on in the fieldwork process at the Wierda Valley, Sandton offices of Bentel, Abramson and Partners. Edmund is a tall, athletic man with blond hair that curled over his ears. He was dressed casually in beige Chinos and brown loafers with an open neck Polo shirt, the sleeves rolled to the midpoint of his forearm. Edmund extended his hand in a warm greeting having come from his office to the reception area of the firm's headquarters to meet me. He had a warm, welcoming smile and relaxed demeanour, which gave the impression that he was glad to be able to share his time with me. Having led me to a small boardroom and offered me coffee, we chatted casually for approximately an hour. The small boardroom itself was sparsely decorated, with only two chairs and a modest round table around which we sat. A single picture of an ocean vista decorated the wall. From our discussion, it was clear to see from the enthusiasm with which he spoke that this was a man who was deeply passionate about

architecture and design. He spoke openly about some of the challenges that he and his team faced in the design of Montecasino. He was, however, in no way the type of person who liked to boast about his achievements. His personality and warmth were genuine, and he was humble about the role he played in the project, clearly playing down the responsibility with which he had been tasked, and the expectations that had been placed on him and his team to deliver.

> "Of course there were challenges and we (architects and client) did not always agree on everything, but you have to respect the client's wishes. There was a lot of contention about the Pieter Torien theatre. It was a last minute thing that the client wanted added to the design. We were basically drawing the plans the night before work was supposed to begin on the site. I would perhaps have done things slightly differently, but I think that it all worked out pretty well in the end." (Interview with author, August 5, 2002).

While I did not get the sense that Edmund was particularly enamoured with the idea of theming, the Montecasino project was pioneering, both in terms of its total devotion to the Tuscan theme, as well as the immense scale of the project. The tight deadlines required to be met for the pre-scheduled opening date of Montecasino meant that many decisions had to be made "on the fly", with last minute changes to blueprints and meticulous on-site supervision being a common occurrence on the project. It was the groundbreaking nature of this project and the constant challenges that it continued to deliver that he clearly thrived on. I learned a few years later that Edmund had left Bentel Associates in 2005 to set up his own architectural practice, Batley Partners.

Themed retail complexes were not something new to the firm, nor was it new to Edmund, who prior to his role on the Montecasino project, had worked on several large themed complexes in Jakarta, Indonesia and in Singapore, which as his website states, "have a broad cultural influence, from a worldwide perspective". Despite the "intensive research and attention to the most minute design details", Montecasino was not a world first in terms of the Tuscan theme, at least not in so

far as mixed use retail and entertainment space is concerned. As it happens, the theme had already been used in the United States for a shopping mall in Scottsdale, Arizona, just years before Rosevear's holiday to Tuscany:

> In Scottsdale, the Borgata, an open-air shopping mall set down in the flat Arizona desert, reinterprets the medieval Tuscan hill town of San Gimignano with piazza and scaled-down towers (made of real Italian Bricks) (Crawford 1992:16).
>
> The Borgata of Scottsdale has been a major shopping destination in Arizona for nearly two decades. The center's ambiance reflects the spectacular atmosphere of northern Italy. Scottsdale's popular shopping village mirrors what can be found in the region of San Gimignano, and visitors are charmed by the blend of specialty shops, patio dining and an "Old World" courtyard atmosphere. The center courtyard is the setting for a weekly concert series and an eclectic European Market. (www.borgata.com).



Figure 4: A picture of San Gimignano, Montecasino's primary inspiration (Image: Google Images).

This incident demonstrates that despite the most meticulous planning and research, oversights do happen. More importantly though, it demonstrates that despite the most original of intentions, and the desire to be first to market with a new and novel concept, originality is increasingly difficult to achieve due to the proliferation of theming and culturally and geographically inspired commercial spaces. There are only a certain number of ideas and inspirations that will be commercially viable. It also speaks to the popularity of the Tuscan theme that has been embraced around the world because of the emotive connotations that it conveys.

Ironically, San Gimignano is one of the Tuscan towns on which Montecasino is based, further highlighting the popularity of this theme. Unlike Johannesburg, which has long been Africa's most developed city (Simone, 2000:181), many Italian towns are people, rather than vehicle centred and, are characterised by fountains centred in a populated piazza. Such a design facilitates and encourages social interaction, providing a context for the expression of the gregarious nature innate in all people. This people-centred design was the rationale behind the construction of Sandton Square, another one of the northern suburbs' large architectural projects, which after what Batley believes was a tentative start, has become one of northern Johannesburg's most popular venues. Considering the lack of secure public spaces in South Africa, and Johannesburg, in particular, the Tuscan theme provided the developers with an opportunity to construct a *faux* village in which people could congregate and meet in relative safety, a rare opportunity in what is left of *public* Johannesburg. While the primary goal of all such complexes is ultimately to extract money from the visitor, the social aspects of such places play an important role in a society looking for a means of expression. Aside from the obvious social benefits the Tuscan theme would allow, Czeglédy (2003:30-31) also believes that Mediterranean architecture gels well with South Africa, a country which has a similar warm climate to the Mediterranean region as a whole.

The layout and structure of the many Tuscan towns and villages from which Montecasino draws inspiration is people-centric and socially aware. Montecasino simulates this design and allows South Africans an opportunity to walk through *public* streets and indulge in what Shields (1992:7) refers to as *flanerie.* Before drawing up the design for Montecasino, Edmund Batley and his team looked at more than six thousand images of Tuscan towns. Of these images, the best features were, in his own words, “mixed and matched” until finally a vision of Montecasino began to emerge. Montecasino is truly a farrago of Tuscan towns that have been adapted and reengineered to best serve consumerist imperatives.

During our interview, Batley further admitted to me that throughout the construction process, there was no set formula and no fixed end point. Architectural and structural changes were continuously being made to the plans, both to improve the end product and to overcome unforeseen difficulties that arose during the construction process. Some aspects of the Montecasino complex were only added to the architectural drawings six months before the complex opened. These design changes had to be included without compromising the structural and Tuscan themed integrity of the complex. This fluidity of design is something that continues at Montecasino today, where the complex is constantly adding new attractions and reinventing itself to remain relevant to the leisure and entertainment needs of its patrons. First and foremost, such complexes are designed to generate money through patronage and this design flexibility reflects the necessary compromise of such venues between commercial interests and an adherence and loyalty to the demands of a particular theme and style. The use of the Tuscan theme for a gambling, retail and entertainment complex in South Africa reveals several interesting ironies and parallels.

Tuscany, which draws its name from the Roman Tuscia, the land of the Etruscans, is according to Masson (1959), one of the few regions of Italy to have preserved its territorial and spiritual identity (only, it seems, to have this identity replicated and

compromised for the purposes of consumption). This preservation of heritage exists despite Tuscany being under Spanish influence for nearly two centuries. Tuscany is a region of northern central Italy, and is characterised by hilly terrain and a temperate climate. It is a popular tourist destination within Italy and its landscape is dotted with small cottages and farmhouses where farming families live in closely knit independent units.

In the eleventh century AD, Tuscany witnessed the rise to prominence of the communes and widespread agricultural revival. During this period, large estates, which had degenerated into marshland or arid tracts, were subdivided and once again made sustainable. From this rich heritage of subsistence farming grew the two pillars of the Tuscan agricultural economy. The *mezzadria* (sharecropper) system, is a system whereby the tenant farmer farms the land sharing expenses and profits with the landlord, and the *podere* which refers to the smallholder. It would seem then that Montecasino has borrowed more than just the Tuscan theme and aesthetic. The complex has also applied the Tuscan tenets of the *mezzadria* system to its business philosophy. In the same way that Tuscan farming landlords would share the expenses and profits with the farmers who would work their land, so too Montecasino lets retail space to tenants who not only attract visitors, but who pay rent and create an opulent environment conducive to consumerism.

To this day, Tuscany is an agrarian region of Italy, but because of its hilly terrain, is not suited to the methods of modern mass production. While the Tuscan terrain is not suited to large mercantile ventures, it has not dissuaded the creators of Montecasino from commercialising vignettes of this environment to engage people in the fantasy of escape (Zelinsky, 1990:48). In this regard, Montecasino shares no commonality with the land of its inspiration, which is rural, humble and without ostentation. Instead, Montecasino has inverted the Tuscan predilection for modesty in favour of that which is brash and ostentatious. Unlike the region of Tuscany, the City of Gold in which Montecasino is located has always been a city driven by

commercial gain, often at the expense of the natural environment. True to this philosophy of self-enrichment, the creation of Montecasino ironically necessitated the acquisition of 38 hectare of land in Fourways, stripping it of everything natural and replacing it with:

> "A world of make-believe that's completely real"[21] (Montecasino promotional video, 2000).

The conversion of (formerly) rural land for the purposes of constructing fantasy environments is not new and Deborah Philips (1999), has noted how themeparks are often set up on reclaimed agricultural land. Indeed Disneyland was built on the site of former orange groves, Disney World in the Florida swamp lands. In much the same vein as the ancient Tuscans, who through their agrarian skills breathed new life into unproductive tracts of soil, the developers of Montecasino turned the acquired land in Fourways into a gambling and entertainment Mecca. In the process, they created a commercial and recreational point of focus for the surrounding areas as a whole. Rather than being seen as problematic, it is regarded by Montecasino management as progressive because of the employment and consumer opportunities it brings to the people of the surrounding areas.

As fortuitous as the Tuscan theme was, it has seemingly paid dividends as is reflected in the public popularity of the venue. The success of the venue is not solely due to the theme, but this has certainly played a major role in distinguishing it from other entertainment venues. Ultimately, as Le Page (2001) points out, "The choice of a Tuscan aesthetic follows the same logic of spectacle that has seen pyramids rise in Las Vegas". They generate curiosity and interest, entice patronage, and encourage consumerism. Themes are a very big part of the intrigue

[21] As this excerpt demonstrates, Montecasino is a 'world' that is thought to be real and that is marketed as real because patrons are "made to believe". The statement is thus not necessarily contradictory, as the term "make-believe" can be interpreted as implying that Montecasino is a real creation of fantasy.

and allure of such complexes, and provide the visitor with a novel and even *foreign* experience.

Design flexibility is something which continues at Montecasino, where there have been several additions since the opening of the complex, both in order to add retail space, but also to make the complex appeal to a wider audience and to play more to the family orientated claims that Montecasino make. Additions such as the open air piazza as well as the Montecasino Bird gardens are more recent additions to the complex and have generated renewed interest in the venue, making it appeal to both punters and leisure seekers alike, and bringing a more family-centric nature to Montecasino, by playing down the casino aspect, and encouraging more diverse use of space, one that is more entertainment orientated.

A casino by any other name

Very often, the name of a complex is the first impression prospective patrons have of the complex, and the name therefore plays a crucial role in creating and managing patron's perceptions of the venue. Ward (1998:54) emphasises this point adding that the name and the slogan "suggest the essence of a place, its appeal and its main market". The name of a venue, like its architecture, relates and communicates to those who come into contact with it, the mood and energy of the place. Moreover, the name and architecture of a complex should complement each other, so that there is a continuing theme that is conveyed to the public. The name 'Montecasino' is intimately bound with an Italian identity and would therefore, at least on the surface, seem an appropriate word to convey to the public the sense of 'Italianness' the creators of the complex wish to exude. The name seems a complimentary continuation of the Tuscan theme, and to the uninitiated South African patron of Montecasino, the name sounds foreign, exotic and wondrous. It appeals to the imagination of the visitor as distinctly Italian, romantic and lavish.

What is more, as the Best Casinos South Africa website points out:

> "The name Monte Casino [sic] is extremely reminiscent of another name of casino gaming prominence: Monte Carlo, on the French Riviera. It was here, among luxury hotels, sand, surf, and sun that heroic figures such as James Bond would come to sequester themselves in private rooms costing millions and engage in high-stakes games with their socialite companions. Monte Casino may not be located on the French Riviera, but it is located in another place of great interest: Johannesburg, South Africa." (www.best-south-africa-casino.co.za)

Not only does the name Montecasino set it apart from other such venues but it also elevates the Tuscan Village complex to a higher status level than its counterparts. Theming then, is considered to be a sophisticated elaboration of normative commercial operation – something special. Considering the initial responses of the students in the focus group, it appears that naming the complex 'Montecasino' does indeed evoke the desired association. It is responses such as these that management would hope to elicit from all who hear of the complex and visit it. What, however, is the origin of the name used for the Tuscan styled village in the heart of Gauteng?

Monte Cassino (not to be confused with Montecasino) was an Italian monastery of the Benedictine order, situated atop one of the hills flanking the Liri Valley in central Italy. The monastery which overlooked the town of Cassino, was founded in 529 AD by Saint Benedict of Nursia, and was during the 11th and 12th centuries, a centre for the study and teaching of medicine. During the Second World War, Cassino and the monastery of Monte Cassino was occupied by German troops as its location provided a strategic vantage point over the advancing Allied forces who were determined to expel the German occupiers and march on to Rome. After three unsuccessful attempts to wrest Cassino and its abbey from German control, 2 attempts in February of 1944 by American, Indian and New Zealand regiments, and a further one in March without American assistance (Parker, 1989:189), a new strategy had to be adopted in order to liberate the town.

The position of Monte Cassino atop a hill ensured that any attack from below on the town was in full view of the Germans, and attempted land assaults had thus failed, as the German troops were able to mobilise their forces to resist the allied advances. (Hart, 1970:527). Francis Tukes, who was at the time in command of the 4th Indian division charged with liberating the town, suggested:

> "…that the historic monastery, which crowned this height, should be neutralised by a concentrated air bombardment. While there was no evidence that the German troops were using the monastery – and ample proof subsequently that they abstained from entering it – the great edifice so dominated the scene as to have a sinister and depressing effect on troops who had to attack the height (Hart, 1970:529-530).

Tukes' request was granted, and on the 15th February 1944, an enormous air bombardment, which Murray and Millet (2000:383) call "one of the most inexcusable bombings of the war", was launched that completely demolished the monastery. The air attack, however, was like the attempted land attacks, ineffectual and only served to further frustrate the efforts of the Allied forces. Not only did the ruins of the monastery provide the German troops with additional protection from attack, but the rubble also prevented the advance of Allied tanks. Many of the military attacks launched against Cassino were characterised by poor planning and "several serious [strategic and technical] blunders" (Ellis, 1980:71). During one of the attempts to break the German resistance, a flight of allied bombers dropped their payload ten miles from their intended target on the town of *Venafro*, destroying an English commander's caravan, much of the 4th Indian Division's "B" echelon, and a Moroccan military hospital (Ellis, 1980). The final attack on Monte Cassino, which relied on deceiving the Germans into expecting a seaborne assault on the west coast of Italy (Cruickshank, 1979), finally liberated the town from German occupation. This liberation, however, came at a heavy price as more than 4 000 Polish troops and thousands more South African, British, Canadian (and German) troops lost their lives in the attack (Hart, 1979). As David

Le Page (2001:41) has commented on the naming of Gauteng's retail and entertainment complex:

> "Parodying its name for the purposes of running a gambling joint is rather like naming a dental practice after Dachau or a pyrotechnics business after Dresden."

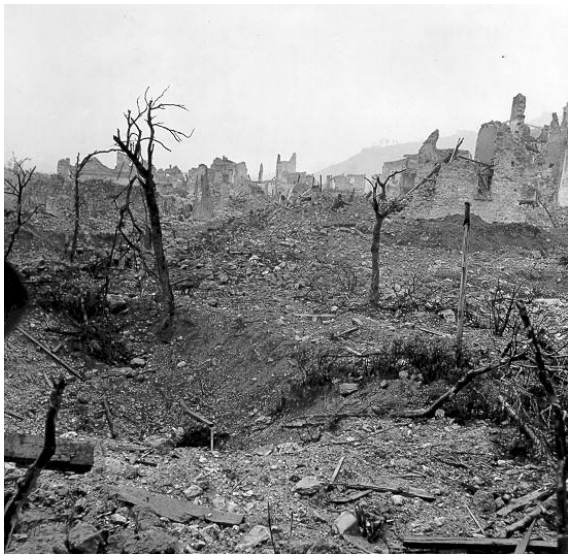


Figure 5: A picture taken of Monte Cassino after the Allied bombing assault (Image: Google Images)

Just how many of the people that pass through Montecasino's doors every day are aware of the tragic history behind its name is uncertain, but what is clear is that the name displays a certain insensitivity to all those who lost their lives in the battle of Monte Cassino. Not only has the name of a Benedictine monastery been used as a marketing tool for a casino, but the complex draws its name one of the bloodiest and most tragic battles of the Second World War to lure customers to a gambling, retail and entertainment complex.

The parallel between the 'poor planning and several serious blunders' that characterised the Battle of Monte Cassino, and those that mark the naming of the

South African Tuscan village are self-evident. Just as the Allied forces negligently dropped their payload of bombs on their own troops in Venafro, so too has the naming of Montecasino become a point of contention. The naming of the casino and entertainment complex, while it is meant to conjure up romanticised images of the Tuscan landscape, is also related to a bloody World War Two battlefield in a way which trumpets the consumer bravado of post-modernity and its ability to overlook dimensions of the past as much as use it to mine iconic references. The choosing of the name, and the true history behind this name, is much like the selection of the Tuscan theme for Montecasino, which was at the time, believed to be the only one of its kind in the world. The name Montecasino, is intended to control perception, and this is reflective of the way in which Montecasino manages or controls the internal environment and people on a much larger scale.

Visual Narratives: A Guided Tour of Montecasino

Situated on the corner of two of Johannesburg's busiest arteries, the Tuscan-styled pseudo-village that is Montecasino cuts an imposing figure against the backdrop of the Magaliesburg Mountains towards its north. Surrounded by luxury vehicle dealerships, upscale shopping malls and "designer" shopping centres (Fourways Mall, Fourways Crossing, Cedar Square, Sevens, Design Quarter, Extreme 16, Lexus Dealership, Broadacres Shopping Centre), Montecasino is at home among the nouveau riche to whom it was designed to appeal. As the city of Johannesburg and its suburbs have expanded ever northwards, Fourways is no longer on the outskirts of a fluid and dynamic city. Set within what were once far flung suburbs and outlying plots of land (the land on which Montecasino was constructed was formerly a farm), Montecasino is located in what is today one of the fastest developing commercial and residential urban conurbations in the country.

Montecasino is so dominant a feature of the area that it has become the principal landmark used when giving people directions to any venue in the surrounding vicinity. As a point of geographical reference, Montecasino has become the “North” of surrounding suburbs’ compass, from which directions to, and positioning of all other areas can be inferred. This I leant first hand when asking a petrol pump attendant in Bryanston for directions to the Indaba Hotel where I was scheduled to present at a conference:

> “You know Montecasino?” he asked, with his arm outstretched and index finger pointing northward up along William Nicol Drive, to which I replied that I did. “Go straight past Montecasino on your right, through the robot to Diepsloot. Indaba is there where the hill goes down”

Not only do people choose Montecasino as the foremost reference point because of its sheer size and visibility, but also because it is so well known throughout Johannesburg, not only in the northern suburbs. Moreover, it is a venue that is easily accessible and locatable, and one that many people who live in Johannesburg have visited before, if not for gambling and entertainment, then for sheer curiosity. It is known by rich and poor alike, whether it be for what the “old money” considers distasteful architecture, or the poor who see it as the playground of the rich, and the village where perhaps one day, lady luck will smile down upon them and make their dreams a reality. As the Montecasino website points out:

> Montecasino, located in Fourways, North of Johannesburg is known for being Gauteng's number one entertainment destination, having being voted Best Casino, Best Entertainment Complex, Best Cinema Complex and Best place to take out-of-towners. (Montecasino Website, 2009)

Approaching Montecasino from either William Nicol Drive or Witkoppen Road, the sheer immensity of the complex becomes immediately apparent as it stands in stark contrast to its surrounding townscape. Alexander and Muhlebach (1992) note the importance of shopping malls being highly visible, as an established visual presence will remind people of the complex’s existence, even when there is no

immediate need to purchase something. This applies even more so to complexes such as Montecasino, which rely less on retail for patronage than they do on novelty and spectacle, much of which is achieved through external architectural facades. In many ways, this relationship trumps the traditional role of so-called 'anchor tenant' department store in the typical mall environment. At Montecasino, the perception of size and grandeur is enhanced by the fact that the complex is raised from the surrounding area, particularly on the northern and western sides. Although Montecasino may not be poised high atop a hill in Tuscany like the abbey from which it drew its name, it is nevertheless significantly higher than the roads which serve it. Not only does this heighten the sense of visually beholding the archetypal Tuscan village, but having the complex higher than its surroundings ensures that both passers-by and visitors have to look up to the complex, as if looking at an ethereal or heavenly body. This creates an imposing and dominant feature that becomes the focal point of the area, demanding the attention of one's senses.

Furthermore, true to the traditions of themed complexes, Montecasino is set as far as possible from the road, thus enabling the fullest possible view of the complex and showcasing the immensity of the site (thirty eight hectares). These are all architectural tricks or illusions, the purpose of which is to create an aura of opulence and luxury, adding to the commercial mythology and history that plays such an important role in establishing the village in the imagination of the visitor. In this way, architecture becomes a powerful statement and an unashamed advertisement, an invitation to experience the wonders that lay within the walls of the complex (Crilley, 1993).

Solicited by the enormity of the complex, one is directed to the relative subtleties of the architecture. While certainly setting itself apart from the surrounding architecture, it is difficult to criticise Montecasino as being anachronistic, particularly in light of the fact that urban South Africa, through years of foreign

persuasion, borrows so much of its architecture from all corners of the globe. Montecasino is made up of two primary buildings, the Palazzo Hotel, and Montecasino itself which is home to the casino floor, themed restaurants and the retail space. The Montecasino Bird Gardens separates the two buildings and is a more recent addition to the complex, as is the open air piazza on the northern side of the centre.

When approaching the complex from the south or from the west (as most people do), the first building to arrest one's attention is the five star Palazzo Inter-Continental Hotel, a 246 room hotel operated by Southern Sun Hotels. The Palazzo is built in a U-Shaped configuration and has been designed as the palace at the edge of the Tuscan village. The seven-storey, symmetrically built hotel is uniformly painted in a dull mustard colour, exuding both the impression of stateliness and grandeur. The mustard colour is reminiscent of the regal architectural tones used through the Hapsburg empire (Czeglédy, 1998). The hotel is set amid well manicured, "classically laid-out Tuscan gardens" (Montecasino Brochure). The northern face of the hotel is dotted with square wooden framed windows which overlook Fourways Mall, the Pineslopes Shopping Centre, Fourways Crossing (another shopping centre), and in the distance, almost out of sight, the hills of Magaliesburg (Montecasino Fact Sheet). The Palazzo includes a "luxurious Tuscan presidential suite, the Palazzo Penthouse, ten suites, deluxe rooms and elegantly appointed superior rooms, each with en-suite bathroom and separate shower" (Montecasino Fact sheet).

> "The five-star Palazzo Hotel is a picture of elegance and sophistication, catering for the business or leisure guest with a taste for the high life. Surrounded by magnificent landscaped gardens, the Palazzo Hotel is a tranquil island amidst the business hub of Sandton. The hotel has easy access to major highways and is linked to the Montecasino entertainment complex by an open-air walkway. A meandering pathway through the magnificent water features leads to the hotel pool, perfect for unwinding after a hard day's work or shopping. A walk across a paved square leads you to the Montecasino Entertainment Complex,

> which offers an array of themed restaurants, coffee shops and entertainment bars, a theatre, cinemas, retail shops, children's entertainment, a casino and our famed outdoor Montecasino Bird Gardens." (Southern Sun Website, 2007).

The Palazzo provides a decadent and lavish environment in which guests are soothed and pampered. Among the other facilities, offered by the Palazzo is the Medeo, a 140-seater restaurant, a fitness centre, a business centre, 2 meeting rooms, a boardroom, an outdoor swimming pool and oriental curio shop and limousine service. For most visitors to the complex, however, the Palazzo is simply another optical attraction, one that is viewed through the car or bus window, the reality of which will never be fully experienced because its expensive rates put it out of reach for many South Africans. Having passed the Palazzo, the surreality of the visit truly begins with the first glimpse of Montecasino, the Tuscan Village.

The architecture of Montecasino is quite different to that of the Palazzo. Unlike the windows of the Palazzo, the windows of Montecasino are all closed by shutters, or have the curtains drawn, thus not allowing any view of the inside. Not only does this add to the isolation of the complex, but it also creates an aura of mystique and expectation as to what lies behind the walls. The external façade of Montecasino has been made to look as if it naturally weathered over hundreds of years, when in reality, the entire project was completed in 18 months. This effect has been achieved by having the single large outer façade made to look like many individual buildings constructed in different styles with different materials and colours, suggesting different periods of construction, as would have occurred in a town such as San Gimignano which grew and evolved naturally over time according the needs of the townsfolk and inhabitants. In some respects, Montecasino too has evolved over different periods, albeit that the venue has only been open for a decade. More than any other change at the village and its surrounds, has been the growth from what was essentially a casino at its opening, to a more family oriented, truly mixed use development. Despite this growth and all its accompanying changes, the precinct has been consistent in its dedication to the Tuscan theme.

The outer façade stretches around the entire complex and gives the visitor the impression that the village has developed in haphazard stages, with alterations and extensions being added to the existing structures, thus providing a seemingly hodgepodge development.



Figure 6: A picture showing the outer façade of Montecasino (Image: My Fourways, 2007).

The aged effect is further enhanced by the use of earthy tones, such as light browns, reds, yellows and beige, which have been dulled in certain places in order to make them seem weathered, and giving the precinct a ‘rich history’. Some of the external façade consists of brick and stonework, while other sections have been plastered. In several of the plastered sections, large portions of the plaster have intentionally been chipped off, exposing the brickwork beneath, and adding to the idea that this is a village with “buildings aged and weathered as they have through the centuries in Italy itself” (Montecasino Fact Sheet). Of the weathering

techniques used to compress time and space, the narrator of the Montecasino promotional video boasts:

> "In Tuscany, buildings have weathered over centuries. At Montecasino, the buildings were artificially weathered using ageing techniques first perfected in a R4 million, purpose built mock-up. The design team managed to create one thousand hears of history in just a few months." (Montecasino Promotional Video, 2000).

The "thousands of years of history", that were achieved in a mere eighteen months are emblematic of our increasing longing to cling to those aspects of life and living which we hold most dear and romanticise, while at the same time, taking only what is best and rejecting or replacing those related aspects that can be improved upon with modern comforts and technology. For all its "old world charm" achieved through simulated architecture, Montecasino is in fact a very "high tech", "state of the art facility" that boasts some of the most modern technology and surveillance available today. Ironically, the achievement of a sense of history and the passing of time is entirely due to the modern technologies which architects and construction companies today have at their disposal.

Places such as Montecasino, which rely so heavily on theming and a constructed, manufactured and massaged sense of history, where space and place are compressed and manipulated, also reflect our need for instant gratification. It successfully marries the old with the new, concealing our wish for modernity and comfort with the façade of the past, where desirable histories and imageries are chronicled by "seamlessly" integrating all the best aspects of what visitors to complexes like the South African Tuscan village yearn for. In his introduction to *Variations On A Theme Park*, Michael Sorkin (1992) discusses the paradoxes and contradictions that are emerging in modern cities, and which are increasingly alienating people from their environs through the privatisation of space. Addressing the subject of history and authenticity, he comments:

> The history of cities is embedded in the ways their elements are juxtaposed, the structures of art and regulation that govern urban amalgamation (Sorkin. 1992:xii).

Through its falsified architecture, and the extreme measures that were taken to achieve some semblance of recognisability and age, Montecasino created a history for itself. Its history though does not play on the age and weathered nature of its appearance, but rather reflects the effort and capital expended in creating a "historicised" image. In this sense, the technological "inauthenticity" becomes a marketing tool, rather than a betrayal of that which is natural. The Montecasino Promotional video lauds the "vision" and "creative genius", and the technological and architectural ingenuity of the cutting edge, ancient Tuscan village (Montecasino promotional video, 2000). Montecasino, like its promotional material, is full of oxymorons. The old is new, and moreover, it is cutting edge. The natural is constructed and manipulated. It is, in every sense, "real fake". As Murray (1998) comments:

> "In Johannesburg after apartheid, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the real fake and the fake fake. Surely all fakes are not equal; there are good fakes and bad fakes. The standard is no longer "real versus "phony", but the relative merits of the imitation. What makes the good ones better than the bad ones is their improvements on reality; that is their ability to entice the consumers to actually prefer the copy to the original" (Murray, 1998:154)

The historical image that Montecasino projects is for the patron, patently false, but creates and ambience in which the sentiment and romanticism of an ancient village can be exploited for commercial gain.

Stimulated and tantalised in equal parts by the architecture of the rich and textured external façade which promises a novel and exciting experience, one's vehicle is directed to Montecasino Boulevard, with its three traffic circles, each leading to a different section of the complex, one of which is the Palazzo Hotel. The other two

traffic circles lead to the seven-level, R140 million parkade, designed to look like a large aqueduct, again highlighting the attention to detail when designing the complex and its devout following of the Tuscan theme. Because the automobile has played such a radical role in shaping the city and its suburbs, and continues as a dominant force in human movement, large covered parkades have become common accompaniments to large shopping and entertainment complexes. Parkades are designed to provide visitors to these complexes with convenient, adequate and secure parking for their personal vehicles.

Alexander and Muhlebach (1992) stress the importance of providing the customer with high quality, well lit, secure parking as failing to do so may deter potential patrons. The parkade at Montecasino is the equivalent of twenty soccer fields and can accommodate 3,800 vehicles, five hundred of which are reserved for VIP's, effectively the casino's most valued guests. There are an additional 235 open parking bays at the eastern end of the complex and a further 120 parking bays at the Palazzo hotel. The parkade has a six-lane entrance, each of which is manned by a cashier in a booth. A flat rate of five Rand is charged for open air parking, while parking in the covered parkade will cost an additional five Rand. The price of a ten Rand flat rate for covered parking has been stable since Montecasino opened and is very competitive when compared with many of the malls in and around Johannesburg, which usually charge according to the length of time spent in the parkade, but which do not generally charge a fee for open air parking. The reason that Montecasino charges a flat rate rather than one determined by time is that the very foundation of the theme is designed to keep visitors in the complex for as long as possible in the hope that the longer they stay, the more they will spend. To charge a timed rate may deter people from lingering and thus, potentially consuming, but the flat rate upfront allows guests to stay as long as they like, whilst at the same time recovering money for the use of the facilities.

Unlike the open air parking at malls and strip malls, however, Montecasino spares its guests from the advances of self-styled ‘parking attendants’ who ostensibly guard cars on the open streets much like in many other parts of the Developing World. The parkades are efficiently patrolled by Montecasino security who ensure that the experience upon arrival is as convenient and unhindered as possible, and reassuring to South Africans fearful of the ludicrously high rates of violent crime in the country. Hence, while convenience is certainly an important factor in attracting patronage, in a country such as South Africa, safety and personal security is an extremely important consideration, and the driving motivation behind many of the design features and procedures of the complex. Convenience and ease of experience then, start as early as the car park, which sets the tone for what lies within the walls of Montecasino.



Figure 7: Montecasino’s seven-level, security controlled parkade (Image: author, 2008)

As one leaves the parkade behind, and crosses the threshold of the retail and entertainment complex, one is transported to a different time and place. The entrances provide the guest with one last reminder that they are still within the borders of a security obsessed country, this even though they are about to enter the relaxed and carefree environment of a Tuscan village. One male, and one female security guard, whose duty it is to screen guests for any suspicious items, staff each entrance to Montecasino. Once the screening process has been completed (this will be covered in greater detail in the Security chapter), patrons are wished a good day and allowed to proceed into the actual entertainment village.

The Grand Entrance at Montecasino opens into a wide, marble floored balcony, which overlooks the edge of the casino that occupies its own precinct on the complex's main floor. The casino is to some extent hidden by two large willow trees, but through the trees, the bright flashing neon lights, the din of polyphonic tones of the one-arm bandits, and the rattling of coins are all unmistakeable. Even the sounds of Muzak, or "dentist music" as Jacobs (1984:6) brands it, is not enough to conceal the sounds of money being lost, and won, and lost again. Above the casino, the 14 metre high ceiling is painted to resemble an eternal twilight, which as one looks further left, gradually becomes day.

> In South Africa, this time of day is associated with the end of the workday, romantic sunsets and lingering twilight. In local jargon, "Keep those punters playing!" Punter is the South African word for gamblers, and gaming tables and slot machines naturally start to fill up at days' end. At Montecasino, this part of the day never ends. The retail mall has a similar feeling, as you stroll by facades glowing with evening light and sparkling decoratives. (Illuminating Engineering Society, 2002).

To the right, the ceiling is covered with a jet-black material (to resemble the night sky) which is embedded with recessed halogen lamps. These lamps were originally intended to look like stars, but the required design would not provide sufficient

lighting, and rather than looking like stars, the more closely resemble tiny moons orbiting alarmingly close to the village. In this way, the design brings together all of the possibilities of time and space in a single, centralised and controlled environment, reinventing, relocating and compressing various geographies and doing the same with day and night.

As one peers over the balcony, coffee shops, restaurants and specialty boutiques, all painstakingly disguised to mimic traditional Tuscan storefronts, line the 2.5 kilometres of cobbled and paved walkways. Escalators convey guests from the balcony at the Grand Entrance to the village below. For the disabled who are wheelchair bound, and parents with prams, there is a tiny elevator to the right of the security table which, in stark contrast to the rest of the village, is entirely bland, with no mirrors, no marbled floor and barely enough room to accommodate two people standing side by side. The elevator, as important as it is to a family entertainment complex catering to all, is unlike the elevators that transport guests from the covered parking. These elevators have ornate, gold dusted and seemingly weathered hand rails, mirrors which adorn their more spacious interior, marble floors, and the dim lighting that is in keeping with the interior theme. Even the stairwell, which many choose to use during busier periods when the elevators from the parkade can take up to seven minutes to arrive, are elaborately themed and decorated.

During one of my very last fieldwork visits in 2009 – and as a new parent on a visit to Montecasino - I had to ask the security personnel on duty how I was to get the folding pram down to the village floor, since the escalators all have grey metal bollards at the centre of their entrance, to prevent people with prams and wheelchairs from entering. This is a safety design and mechanism of control that is common throughout South African malls, and indeed many malls across the globe, as complex management seek to limit any potential litigation or accident that may arise from toddlers or the infirmed losing control and falling down the escalators.

The design is as much in the interest of patron safety as it is in Montecasino's reputation as a safe and people friendly destination. The elevator to the right of the main entrance though, seems more an afterthought of design necessity than it does a well planned and integrated feature of the village.

At the foot of the escalators and across the cobbled street is the information booth from which guests are free to take a Montecasino brochure, which features a map of the village, and directory of all the attractions, restaurants and retail outlets available to the guest. The staff at the information booth refer to the brochure as a "guide" which is designed to provide the "tourist" with a complete and easy to understand layout of the village so that they may plan their activities, whether they be dining, entertainment or gambling.

> *What looks like a town on the hillside in the Tuscany region of Italy, is in fact one massive structure covering more than 4 ha, incredibly, it contains a complete and authentic Tuscan village of about one hundred individually designed buildings complete with cobbled streets, piazzas and fountains. (Montecasino promotional video, 2000).*

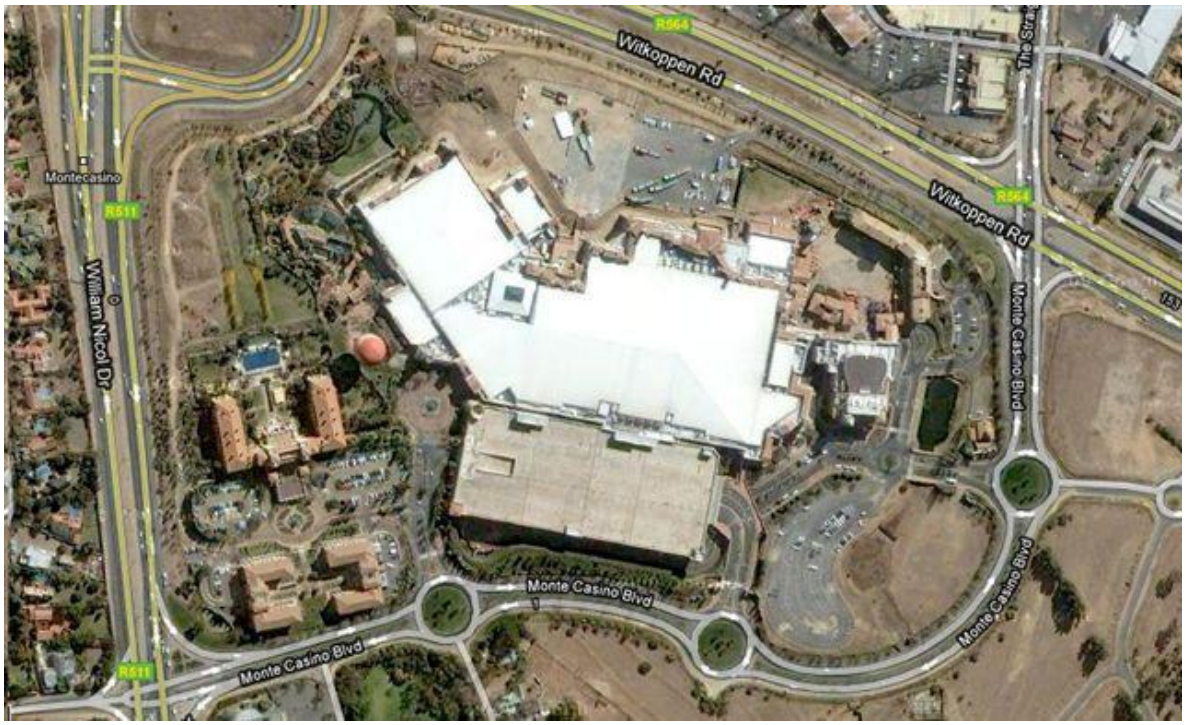


Figure 8: An aerial view of Montecasino betrays its warehouse characteristics (Image: Google Earth, 2009)

The layout and design cleverly disguise the fact that Montecasino is essentially one cavernous warehouse space made to look on the interior (as well as the exterior) like a village full of villas and avenues, and the map, which shows how islands of shops are arranged within the warehouse, betrays this. The map also illustrates what a dominant role the casino plays in the complex. This is not immediately evident to the guest, whose perception of the casino is skewed by the way in which the retail component wraps around the gambling floor, giving the guest the appearance and experience that the large single structure is in fact dominated by cinema's, gaming arcades and boutique stores. In the same way that a single expanse of the outer façade gives the impression of an aggregation of buildings, so the retail component masks the true vastness of the casino.



Figure 9: A map indicating the complex's layout (Image: Montecasino Promotional Brochure, 2000)

The casino is separated from the retail and restaurant component of the complex by a small, artificial river which is approximately two foot deep and four feet across, with the casino accessed by three arch bridges that span the stream. The river bed is lined with small rounded rocks, as if they had been formed through hundreds of years rolling in the slow moving current, in between which are hundreds of 5 and 10 cent pieces thrown in by children wishing for toys and gamblers wishing for a change of fortune. Despite its shallow depth, several "no swimming" signs have been placed around the river. The sign, which depicts a caricature doing freestyle swimming, with a red border and line drawn through it, makes it clear that no access whatsoever is permitted to the 'river'. While any sort of swimming is

physically impossible, the signs are again mechanisms of control, designed to ensure individuals contain their behaviour, and is aimed primarily at small children (presumably under the supervision of their parents), mischievous teens, and drunken revellers. The fact that the stream is out of bounds for all visitors is reinforced by a one and a half foot high concrete ledge which borders the river, and which is approximately as wide as it is deep. Its styling is in keeping with the architecture of the village, but its design is intended to keep small children for whom the river could pose a safety risk, at bay.



Figure 10: A sign board indicating that no access to the "river" is allowed (Image: author, 2009).

The river originates from, and ends in two gauzed drains that are situated at each end of the casino, where it disappears behind the vast and clandestine inner workings that lie behind the Tuscan façade to be filtered, screened and cleaned of any debris that may have found its way into the stream. Once the sanitization process has been concluded, the water is again filtered through the slow moving stream. The small stream, its movement so gentle that there are no sounds of trickling water across the pebbles, acts as a metaphor for the way in which the complex is regulated, filtering out all the unwanted elements, and only allowing that which is pure and "natural" in the most artificial way. Here, even the water is

subject to the control of Montecasino management, who regulate its flow through the constructed canal, just as they do the flow of patrons through parts of the precinct, its path and tempo rigidly defined by the confines of the channel which meanders alongside the cobbled streets and under the arched bridges which give punters access to the casino area.

The House Wins

The casino, the very heart of Montecasino's existence, and so prominent as to be given mention in the complex's name, is a highly regulated and controlled environment. All of the casino bridges that cross the river delineating the retail and entertainment villages from the gaming floor are staffed by uniformed security guards who ensure that no underage patrons enter the gaming floor. Gambling activities are only open to those eighteen years or older by South African law, and any person or venue found to be allowing underage visitors access to the casino and its gambling activities will face severe censure, not only from authorities, but from a public relations perspective. The former consequences (of condemnation) may come not only from authorities, but from a highly vocal consumer public; in the frame of a public relations perspective, the fallout would severely damage the reputation of Montecasino as well as have an impact upon visitor numbers which contain a high percentage of families.

As indicated by the map, the casino makes up a significant portion of the complex, totalling eight and a half thousand square metres of gambling space. This constitutes more than 10% of the total floor space at Montecasino. The casino offers one thousand, seven hundred slot machines, and seventy different tables which present the gambler with a host of gambling and entertainment options, including Blackjack, Roulette, Poker and Baccarat. The casino itself is split into three sections, the main floor, the Salon Privé and the smoking casino. The main floor houses the majority of the slot machines and tables, while the Salon Privé is

an exclusive section of the casino, intended for the high rollers, those clients that Montecasino considers its most valued guests and on whom they lavish free drinks in the hope that the longer they stay, the more they will gamble. Access to this exclusive area is usually by invitation only, and is given further mystique and exclusivity by virtue of it being discretely hidden from the general public by large, ornately carved, dark stained, double volume wooden doors that nonetheless make the exclusivity within a very apparent one.

The Salon Privé offers indulgence, exclusivity and anonymity. It caters to the every whim of its higher end clientele, and in April of 2008, opened a dedicated, non smoking section in order to cosset its more health conscious regulars:

> *Bringing even greater luxury to the upper tier of gaming at Montecasino, a brand new extension to the exclusive Salon Privé of Gauteng's premier entertainment destination was opened. The extensions, which have been designed to give patrons a truly luxurious gaming experience, include a non-smoking slots and tables area, making it the first and only Privé in Gauteng with a non-smoking section. Not only are the health benefits of a non-smoking Privé numerous, with patrons now able to enjoy a clean-air gaming experience, but the addition is also an added benefit to all non-smoking Montecasino patrons - one that not many casinos, and certainly not any in Gauteng, offer. The extensions to our Salon Privé make this one of the country's most luxurious upper-end gaming areas, and we are delighted to now be able to offer our non-smoking patrons at this end of the market a dedicated area where they can enjoy their games of choice. (Montecasino Website, 2009).*

The decorations and furnishings, as well as the snacks and drinks available within the Salon Privé are designed to appeal to the more discerning gamblers. Eighteen year old single malt whiskeys and caviar topped finger snacks are among some of the delights that gamblers in this area are accustomed to, and which they can enjoy whilst they gamble the night away. Its walls, covered in rich beige wallpaper, are furnished with oil paintings of Tuscan landscapes, framed in bold, heavy and flamboyantly detailed frames. Dark walnut panels break the wallpaper and give an austerity to the area that is distinctly upmarket, and one that is not found on the

main floor. The lighting too, is slightly brighter than can be found in other parts of the casino, and allows the privileged guests to take in the lavish atmosphere that has been created. While there are slot machines in this area, catering for higher denomination bets (ten, twenty, fifty and one hundred Rand denominations as opposed to machines for bets as low as five cents on the main floor), the private gambling area is dedicated to table games such as poker and roulette.

As careful managers aware of the sensitivities of its well-heeled patrons, Debbie and Jenni were understandably reluctant to allow me to enter this exclusive area during its busier times. Nevertheless, I was allowed to walk through this seemingly hallowed space early one weekday morning, when it was deserted. There were several reasons why I was not permitted to walk the Salon Privé during peak times, which are usually on a Friday and Saturday evening. Firstly, the space is an exclusive one, usually occupied by people who value their privacy and do not want to be interrupted or made to feel that they are being observed (there are however cameras in the Salon Privé). Moreover, many of the guests within this area do not wish to make known their penchant for gambling, whether infrequent or habitual, and the anonymity and privacy which this area provides cannot be compromised. Guests and visitors to this area have their own separate vehicle and pedestrian entrance and parking area, which is controlled by guest cards issued to VIP clientele, so that they may keep their comings and goings to the casino discrete

In stark contrast to the Salon Privé are the two smoking casinos situated on the north western and western peripheries of the gambling floor. Unlike the Salon Privé, they are located behind large glass doors in full view of the main gambling area, which serve to keep the smoke from permeating the fresh air of the non-smoking section. In recent years, South African legislation regarding where smokers may light up has tightened, forcing many establishments to either make design alterations to their venue to protect non smokers, and encapsulate the smokers, or potentially lose the revenue smoking patrons would bring. As such,

gamblers who smoke are accommodated by way of these cordoned off areas, whose frequently emptied ashtrays keep distractions to a respectable minimum that is paralleled by the large extraction fans drawing smoke upward and out of the building, as well as the small vending machines inside which dispense a variety of cigarettes for an inflated fee. While even the large smoking casino is considerably smaller than the main floor, it is almost always significantly fuller, and its mood and atmosphere altogether more sombre.



Figure 11: Neon lit slot machines at the eastern entrance of the casino (Image: author, 2009).

In spite of precautions to the contrary, as one pushes open the large glass doors, the instant haze of cigarette smoke assaults the senses, your eyes burning with the smoke that has not yet been extracted by the fans. Once the brief sensation has eased with a few blinks of the eyelids to clear away the fine smoke particles, the unmistakeable smell of smoke impregnated air makes its way up the nostrils with the first breath, one that is involuntarily shorter than you anticipate it to be. Despite the extraction fans, the air hangs heavy with the odour of cigarettes and scented cigars, visibility seemingly reduced a few feet by the dull haze that endlessly makes its way upward toward the pull of the extraction fans.

The surfaces in the smoking casino, while not visibly so, seem grimy compared to those throughout the rest of the complex, having been coated anew each day in a fresh layer of invisible soot. Gamblers tiredly punch the ‘Spin’ button on the slot machines, their eyes expectant and hopeful, their body language indicating the exact opposite as they slouch on their swivelling stools with a cigarette perched in the corner of their mouth. Whips of smoke drift casually upward from lit end of the cigarette as the burning paper burns slowly toward the filter, which when reached, is often quickly replaced by another cigarette, and the cycle starts again. Perhaps it is the smoke, or the people on whose faces years of smoking has taken its toll, their teeth and fingers yellowed over time. Perhaps not surprisingly, the smoking casino does not inspire a sense of excitement or hope: Individuals look drained and listless, many wandering from slot machine to slot machine, peering over the shoulder of fellow gamblers to inspect their fortunes. As they look on for several spins, their expressions are defined by the concentration of the decision-making process and mental calculations they believe are necessary to choose a more forgiving machine. Many punters play several machines at once, up to four at a time, their territory marked by the dirty upturned margarine tubs that are used to carry ones coins to be fed into machine after machine with a regular monotony that is still disturbing. This, many of them fervently believe, increases their probability of winning. With many the idea that winning is less about luck and more about the skill of choosing the most vulnerable machine, one that has not paid out in a while and which will soon be ripe for the picking.

The smoking casino is a self-contained environment, with no need to leave its confines unnecessarily. It has its own cashier counter, where gamblers can exchange notes for coins, top up their ‘membership’ cards, or cash in their winnings. Cashiers stand behind a chest high counter, the remaining space between counter and roof protected by thick steel bars so as to create a secure environment for cash handling. They exchange and count millions of Rands a day, their every move monitored by closed circuit television cameras and on duty

supervisors. It also has its own bathrooms and bars, with waiters who circulate the floor offering drinks that are paid for with cash. Every convenience is offered to the gambler in order to facilitate the act of gambling. There is though, a fine balance between making the gambler comfortable enough to stay at the slot machines, and so comfortable that their attention is free to wander from the possible chance Lady Luck may have in store for them. Focus is everything.

The smoking casino floor, dominated by slot machines, is covered in a gaudy, red, beige, blue, green and black carpet, with the patterns of oak and willow tree leaves on, as if the autumn leaves had just fallen to the casino floor. Casino carpets are like no other, usually thick and soft underfoot, almost always dark, garish and purposefully selected. On the practical side, casino carpets need to weather an enormous amount of traffic and abuse, with spilled drinks, dirty shoes, gum and dropped cigarettes among just a few of the things that foul the carpets. The darker colours are better at concealing the dirt and grunge, and greatly reduce the cost of maintenance. Furthermore, the reduced maintenance means that sections of the casino are less in need of being cordoned off for cleaning, thereby ensuring that the space is optimally utilised by gamblers. In this way, interior decoration doubles for attraction and maintenance efficiency. Despite their pragmatic design, there are several other theories as to why casino carpets are as unappealing as they are. In fact, David Schwartz, director of the Centre for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas has created a website dedicated specifically to some of the world's most outrageous casino carpet designs (www.dieiscast.com). Schwartz believes that:

> *Casino carpet is known as an exercise in deliberate bad taste that somehow encourages people to gamble. Beauty doesn't drive casino play at all. What would be the real issue here is gambling is a hyper experience. Nobody gambles to relax. They gamble for the adrenalin rush. Therefore, it is possible that a more exciting carpet pattern will create a more exciting atmosphere but nobody has ever demonstrated that. (Interview with David Schwartz – San Francisco Chronicle, 2008)*

It is believed that the uglier and more unappealing the carpet, the more reluctant punters are to look down at it, thereby concentrating their attention on the slot machine or table in front of them. This subliminal technique, although empirically unproven, is one that is employed throughout almost every casino in the world. Every effort is made to both make the gambler as comfortable as possible, though not so comfortable that there may be any lapse in attention on the gambling. The design of the carpets are in striking contrast to the rest of the Montecasino village, where painstaking effort has been taken to invite and entice, to enrapture the patron in the beauty of Tuscany, its architecture, foods, smells and idyllic way of life. Despite the contrast, however, both are equally purposeful and are aimed solely at extracting money from paying customers. Ironically, in a world of chance, nothing is left to chance.

The garish carpets of the smoking casino are continued through to the main floor of the casino, where four bars are dotted strategically among the rows and islands of slot machines. Like the smoking casino, waiters and waitresses patrol the gaming floor looking to quench a thirst and earn a tip. An entertainment lounge and restaurant situated within the casino provides the gambler with an opportunity to withdraw from the casino floor and have a drink or order a meal while watching sporting events on a big screen, or take in a live performance on the small stage. Also in the casino are several automated teller machines (ATMs) from which gamblers are able to withdraw money from their bank accounts. All four of South Africa's major banks have ATM representation.

During one of my waits for Jenni at the information centre (we had agreed to meet there for every meeting and interview, from where we would together walk to the scheduled venue) I chatted to Mase, one of the information centre staff whom I had met several times before and become friendly with. She was a short, sturdy and well groomed lady who always seemed to be smiling, with and energetic and

effervescent personality, perfect for the role which she was fulfilling. She animatedly recounted to me how an elderly lady, who arrived with a cane, had come to ask where the ATMs were located so that she could make a withdrawal. Mase told me that she had politely explained to the short grey-haired lady where to find the ATM and, angered by the distance she would have to walk with her limp, responded:

*"So far? F*ck!"*

Mase began to chuckle before she could deliver the punch line of her story and imitated the stooped over stance of the lady on her cane as she told it. Surprised by the foul language of the elderly lady, Mase simply watched her turn and trundle off in the direction of the ATM. While the casino is a very dominant part of the complex, for many, it is not among the reasons they visit Montecasino. Despite this lady's inconvenience, almost everything is done to make the gambling experience as user friendly as possible.

Like the smoking casino, the main floor space is dominated by slot machines of various denominations and game types which over the years have become more electronic to remain abreast of current advances in gaming technology. While players of the slot machines sit under the Tuscan night sky, players at the tables are situated underneath faux vineyards which provide cover for security cameras which hang like large round black grapes from the vine. Because the slot machines are electronic and less susceptible to manipulation less surveillance is dedicated to them. Springing up from the dark floral carpets are several large plastic and fibre glass oak trees which provide a nesting spot for security cameras that focus on the slot machines. The tables, however, require a far larger degree of human intervention, making it more vulnerable to mistakes and manoeuvring by those who wish to give Lady Luck a "helping" sleight of hand. Croupiers, Montecasino gaming staff and gamblers alike are all monitored by the cameras concealed within the vines. Brining the human touch to Montecasino is an integral part of what the

complex has to offer, but the human element, and its capacity for mistakes and deceit have no place on the casino floor. Not only do the vines obscure surveillance equipment, but in the same way as the carpets are designed to gravitate attention to the slot machines, so to do the vines create an artificial ceiling, so that eyes do not wander skyward, but remain firmly fixed on the action taking place on the table.

The casino is always a hub of activity, even in the small hours of the morning. The timelessness created by the faux night ceilings encourages gamblers to lose themselves in the game, the hunt for that elusive winning hand, or generous slot machine. While most gamblers would admit that the odds are heavily stacked against them in favour of 'the house', almost all believe that each time they visit, may just be the time fortune smiles upon them. All are there voluntarily, giving up their money for the chance to make more, all filled with the conviction that at some point, their luck must turn. For those concede defeat and acknowledge that today is not their day, there is always the retreat of the Tuscan village, its tranquil architecture designed to soothe the pain of losing, and help people escape, however briefly, their troubles.

Village Life

Leaving behind the energy and atmosphere of the casino floor as one crosses the arched bridges that separate the casino from the village, the sense of urgency and purpose immediately dissipates, and is replaced by a more sedate, tranquil pace in order to take in the 'authentic representation' of a Tuscan village. Perhaps, it is, as has been suggested, that the casino environment is created purposefully to be frenzied and frenetic in order to subliminally manipulate gambler behaviour. The village however brings together a very different set of design techniques to ultimately achieve the same commercial goal. Montecasino masterfully

manipulates, mesmerises and enraptures its transient villagers. As a town that is in a constant state of flux, it must use every tool in its armoury, every trick in the book, to pulverise the senses into submission so that their behavioural state and actions of the visitors can be massaged into staying longer, and ultimately moving toward the cash register.

In order to cater for as broad an array of tastes and budgets as possible, the village of Montecasino is divided into seven different neighbourhoods.

> The Montecasino village has been painstakingly created, with various neighbourhoods and buildings aged and weathered to be an accurate representation of the structures as they have stood through the centuries in Italy itself. Seven different Tuscan neighbourhoods are represented at Montecasino, ranging from the elite uptown to the less affluent 'fishing' village. Throughout the property fountains, piazzas and cobbled streets bring the beauty of Tuscany to life. (Montecasino Website, 2009)

Despite claiming to be made up of seven different neighbourhoods, the only two that are mentioned are the “less affluent” fishing village, and the “elite uptown”. The five other neighbourhoods are not described in any of the Montecasino literature or marketing material, and it is left to the visitor to decide what they are, and where they begin and end. What is clear though is that the fishing neighbourhood is situated at the western end of the village, near the video arcade and foodcourt, while the more affluent neighbourhood is on the opposite side, closer to the Montecasino open air piazza.

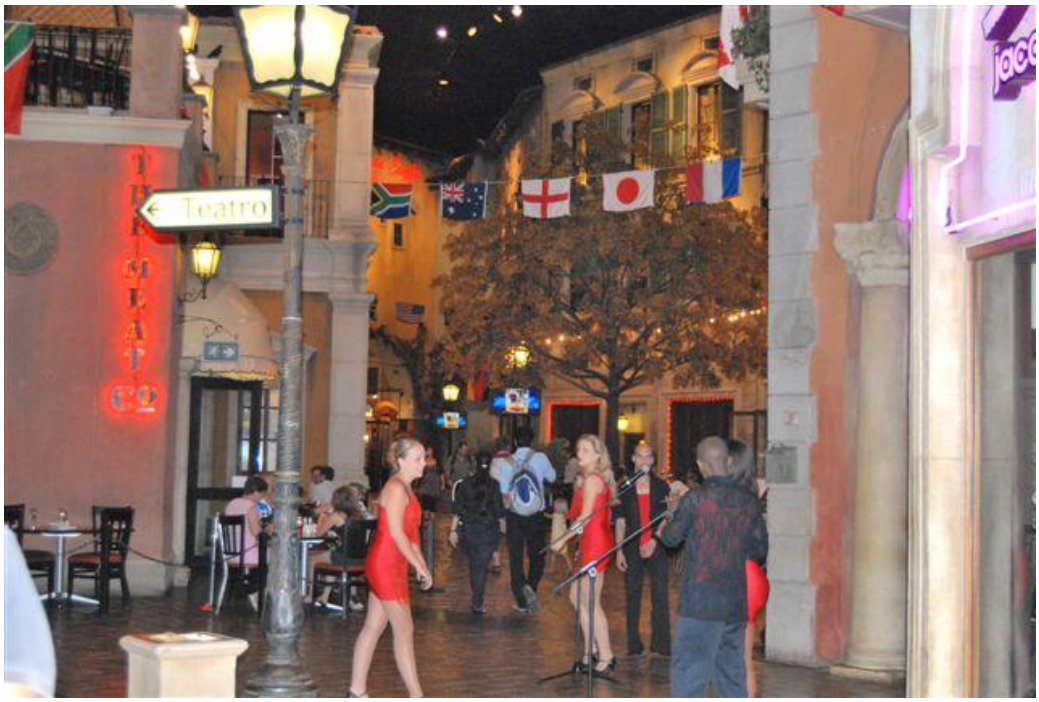


Figure 12: The elite uptown district with street performers (Image: author, 2009)

On the western side of Montecasino, significant amount of space is dedicated to the Nu Metro Cinema complex, although this is not apparent to the visitor who only has direct sight of the ticketing area, the cinemas and their volume being hidden behind walls covered in Movie advertising and neon lit boards displaying movie show times. The Nu Metro cinema complex, with the largest commercial screen (the 285m² “Il Grande” with 509 seats) in the world (Montecasino Fact Sheet, 2000), offers:

> Comprehensive family entertainment, including fifteen cinemas able to seat 3200 people at a time. (Montecasino Promotional Video, 2000).

The cinema complex at Montecasino is much like any other, although the Tuscan theme is carried through where possible via the same “stonework” and cobbled walkways where possible. In an area that thrives on deliver the latest and best that Hollywood has to offer, marrying the old with the new is made more difficult and

compromises must be made, whatever is in the interest of the paying public who want the latest movies, brought to them by leading edge technology in the familiar surrounds and atmosphere that only simulated centuries of history can provide.

Weekend queues snake back on themselves between plastic bollards joined by fabric belts, as people stand in line to buy tickets to the latest movie releases. Over the audio system, Nu Metro markets current and upcoming films in sync with large television screens projecting the corresponding images and movie clips. The smell of fresh popcorn fills the air, emanating from the snack counter where moviegoers purchase supplies for the two or so hours that lay ahead, soda drinks from the automated beverage dispenser, popcorn in cardboard boxes (used as advertising space) and often something sweet as an extra treat. Tall round tables stand like spice islands, where everything from sugar, to salt, butter and cheesy onion spice shakers are marooned, waiting to be sprinkled over freshly popped popcorn.

Between all the activity, cleaning staff quietly walk through the snack area and tables, collecting spilled popcorn in their extended dustpans and brooms. This is truly, the family area of the complex, and is filled with excitement as animated children run through groupings of people from the bathrooms back to their waiting parents. Their energy and anticipation is palpable, and for many, these are the brief moments in a frenetically paced life where the entire family is able to spend time together, ironically the bulk of it not talking to each other. There is a real sense of occasion, and this is confirmed by the visible effort that has gone into grooming and preparation for the evening. Teens are decked out in the latest fashions, seemingly competing on the basis of who has the latest, the best and the most expensive. White sneakers have been cleaned, shirts pressed and hair painstakingly straightened, gelled and ruffled in order to get the right look. On a trip to the bathroom, one will almost certainly see young teens touching up misbehaving fringes with hands dampened by the bathroom taps. While the adults too have made an effort, this is the space of the children and teens, which for the

latter is often a place where they can go unaccompanied by their parents to compete for the attentions of the opposite sex. Young girls stand giggling in groups, while the young guys stand together as nonchalantly as possible, with their hands in their pockets, both groups stealing glances at each other to see if the other is looking. The safety and security of Montecasino's highly monitored and controlled environment give parents the comfort that their children are safe within its walls, and many parents will drop their children off at the village, and particularly the cinema, when they start entering their teenage years and begin to seek greater autonomy.

For both groups of teens and families alike, a trip to the movies is often preceded or followed by a meal at a restaurant, or more likely, one of the culinary options on offer in Montecasino's foodcourt. The foodcourt is situated directly adjacent (on the eastern side) to the movie complex. It is constructed to resemble an Italian piazza, and is abuzz with activity over the weekends, particularly in the evenings. It is comprised of a large square which during the day is naturally illuminated by a large skylight in its centre. The natural light gives the visitor the impression of being outdoors in the middle of a town square, albeit that one is completely sheltered from the natural elements. The food court brings the outdoors inside, the warmth of the summer sun being felt by those that walk through the beams of light allowed entry. The cold, the wind and the rain, however, are barred and apart from the natural light, the carefully controlled climate is subjected to all the same strict guidelines that govern the elements within the wider village.

In the centre of the village square is a three-tiered water fountain, an attraction of particular gravity for small children who can often be seen asking parents for a coin to toss in. The white noise of the running water brings an element of calm to the square, drowning out the sound of cash registers tallying up fast food bills, orders being shouted through to the kitchens at the back of the food outlets, and the chatter of patrons who are enjoying their fast food take-aways. Situated uniformly

around the fountain are approximately sixty, four-seater wrought iron tables painted in a weathered looking matte green paint with their accompanying chairs. Between some of the tables are umbrellas, which shade patrons of the foodcourt from the natural light on particularly warm and sunny days. Facing the foodcourt, on each of the pillars that support the arches, are flat screen televisions that provide foodcourt patrons with a virtual tour of the complex as well as coming attractions.

Around the perimeter of the foodcourt, tucked behind large beige coloured arches are several fast-food outlets and two moderately priced family restaurants, the Spur and Ocean Basket. The Spur, with its own dedicated seating area, is a particularly popular option for families as it offers a broad and varied menu. The Spur's Wild West theme is aimed at "People with a taste for life", and the restaurant keeps children entertained with helium filled balloons, face painting and a dedicated play area which is supervised by dedicated restaurant staff. It has a special children's menu which offers smaller portions of adult dishes, as well as foods that appeal to younger patrons, like fish sticks, spaghetti and meatballs as well as toys that accompany certain meals. The Spur is also especially well-liked for family birthday celebrations, where those who celebrate their birthday receive a lit sparkler in their meal, and have Spur's own African brand of "Happy Birthday" sung to them by staff who gather round and chant and clap.

On the whole, the foodcourt offers a cheaper alternative to the relatively expensive restaurants in Montecasino, and presents the patron a variety of relatively inexpensive meals from different, well known South African Franchises. It also caters to different religious persuasions, where certain restaurants serve Halal and vegetarian meals. Music is often played in the foodcourt, particularly during busy periods, and is louder than in the rest of the complex, and of more contemporary genres. The tactic of using such music is a well known one, and one that is commonly employed in lower end restaurants and fast food chains. The idea is that the tempo of the music encourages people on an unconscious level to eat more

quickly and leave sooner, freeing up tables and chairs for the next paying customer. Fast food is a low cost, high volume business and relies on getting a steady stream of customers to pay, eat, and move on, something which is aided by another common ploy, that of making the seats uncomfortable (the wrought iron chairs have no padding and the table height is at an uncomfortable level) to discourage people from lingering.

After enjoying a meal or a movie, younger patrons often make their way to the Magic Company, a video game arcade and mini-amusement park for children and teens. The double storey arcade consists of all the latest electronic video games, as well as several pinball machines, shooting, driving and table games, in which the players can become immersed. Like the time spent at the movies, the arcade offers the younger visitor to Montecasino a chance to escape into a different world, a different, altered reality. It continues and promotes the idea of escape, those that play mesmerised and transfixed by their game where current reality is suspended and replaced with sights and sounds of another, virtual world where they can take on the persona of their video game character. Apart from the gaming aspect, the Magic Company also offers a crèche facility, where parents can, for a fee, leave their children under moderate supervision while they gamble or dine at one of the many restaurants available to Montecasino patrons in other neighbourhoods of the village. This last dimension echoes the Janus face of modern commercialism, one where everything becomes a linked commodity.

The retail segment of the village consists of sixty-nine retail outlets (Montecasino Fact Sheet) including restaurants. Retails stores to be found in Montecasino include toy stores, clothing, fashion, jewellery stores, novelty goods stores, art shops, a tobacconist and several shoe stores. The retail outlets in Montecasino are predominantly located on the western end of the complex, while the restaurants are situated toward the eastern side, Montecasino's more "affluent neighbourhood". Names such as Lo Prendo, Amici (fashion stores), Café Europa,

Café Principe, Monte Amare Jewellers and Merchant of Venice hint at the continuation of the Italian theme, and the infatuation with the Euro-styled way of life and café culture. Fashion boutiques and chic fashion franchises sell the latest European couture, Patrons can sit *outside* cafes sipping a cappuccino and eating a croissant.

Their gaze and attention is constantly drawn from spectacle to spectacle, their eyes darting left and right, up and down taking in all the novelty that the village has to offer. The small intimate avenues, along which the cafes and boutiques are situated, intermittently open into piazzas with fountains and benches, and lead patrons eastward toward the casino and toward the more "upmarket neighbourhoods" of the Tuscan village. It is in these neighbourhoods that the more expensive eateries and restaurants may be found.

In the central and eastern neighbourhoods of the complex, restaurants like Verdicchio, The Meat Company, Zenbu, Donatella's, and clubs like La Toscana Colosseo Revue Bar, Cobblestone's Irish Pub and Vacca Matta, provide guests with a variety of culinary and entertainment options. While retail outlets are predominantly positioned in the western section of the complex, there are several retail stores, including Italisti which sells Ducati and Ferrari (two iconic Italian motoring brands) merchandise, Earthstone, Fire and Ice which sells gemstones and crystal rock formations, and Railwoods and exclusive art and furniture store. The Teatro at Montecasino and the Pieter Torien Theatre are also located at the eastern end of the complex, and regularly hosts live theatre productions.

> The Teatro is acoustically designed for large scale musical productions and it can accommodate 1 870 people at full capacity. Despite the vast number of seats, the Teatro has an unmistakable intimacy and no seat is further than 33 metres from the stage. The Teatro was constructed at a cost of over R100 million by Tsogo Sun Gaming and is one of the 10 largest Lyric theatres in the world.

> The Pieter Torien Theatre at Montecasino is an independent private theatre that is both a platform and a theatrical home. It aims to give both new and established artists opportunities for new directions and growth. It is a place of fun as well as shocks, with always a respect for the integrity of the script and a constant pursuit of excellence. (Montecasino Website, 2009).

The Teatro at Montecasino is a more recent addition to the precinct, only opening its doors in May of 2007, but boasts impressive credentials. The exterior of the theatre was hand painted to depict old buildings in Tuscany, blending in with the existing facilities in the development. Just as a building of stature forms a focal point in Tuscan villages, the Teatro is an integral focal point in the village. It is a stately and dominant building within the 'village', creating interest in the Piazza. It is the largest theatre in Africa and amongst the top eight lyric theatres worldwide. This means that the Teatro is bigger than South Africa's State theatre, a full third bigger in fact. It is an eight storey lyric theatre which required particular acoustic and design treatment (Architect Africa, 2008). Due to the large volume of the auditorium, the air conditioning needed to be as quiet as possible, and massive ducts were installed to meet this requirement, while their placement was very carefully designed to provide comfort, but remain within acceptable volume levels. The principles of theatre design , from lines of sight to acoustic considerations made the construction of this project very complex, but the final results have drawn praise, both for design, as well as for what it has done for the promotion of the theatre and arts in South Africa.

> Guests are able to enjoy a state-of-the-art theatre experience in a contemporary space, looking out onto a picturesque Tuscan village. We (the designers) have focused on making the experience meaningful, creative, and cultural. (Architect Africa, 2008)

What makes this theatre so historically prominent is in remembering how all of the major theatres (but one, the Windybrow) of the so-called Golden City – which were located in or adjacent to the downtown core – had closed by the end of the 1990s.

The ironic significance here lies in the fact that it is only in the suburbs where a spectacular new theatre can be built.



Figure 13: Guests on their way to the Teatro are constantly reminded of the casino (Image: author, 2009)

In some contrast, the much smaller Pieter Torien Theatre has been a part of Montecasino since the complex opened. As the decentralisation of the Johannesburg central business district began to firmly take hold, Torien, “South Africa’s foremost theatre impresario” moved his Alhambra operation to the city’s northern suburbs, within Montecasino. Both theatres have hosted global, award winning shows such as Cats, The Lion King, Defending the Caveman, God of Carnage, High School Musical and Beauty and the Beast. The Teatro is specifically designed for larger productions, while the Pieter Torien Theatre hosts smaller productions of both emerging and established artists.

There are various other offerings at Montecasino of a more modest nature. While these are not the spectacles that dominate the complex, they are worth a brief discussion, as they play an important role in what the broader relevance of the complex offerings. Among these offerings is the Boogaloos Skate Park on the western side of the complex near the video arcade, which offers a variety of ramps and rails for those who wish to skateboard or rollerblade.

> The New Generation Skatepark at Montecasino, built to perfection by some of the world's finest skate park engineers. This skatepark is of International quality and will serve as perfect venues for International Pro tours to hit this country. This venue boasts a non-smoking, non-drug, non-alcohol environment with the inclusion of constant adult supervision. It's an ideal venue for skaters and non-skaters alike, serving as a venue for after-school activities, chill zones and kiddies parties. (Montecasino Website, 2009).

Further up the *street* from the casino is a Mangwanani Spa centre, which offers visitors head, shoulder and foot massages, as well as a host of Mangwanani branded body oils, creams and soaps. In the same vein as Mangwanani, but more informally housed behind a row of unceremonious screen doors, is a small Chinese Foot massage studio, where passersby can catch a glimpse of customers having their feet pampered and massaged with *Asian* oils as they lie back on reclining chairs. Directly adjacent to the foot massage studio is a fortune teller, where for a modest fee, Sasha, the Psychic Clairvoyant will allow you a glimpse into the future. On the eastern periphery of the village, is a formal ballroom, which is used for gala events and larger functions. An Outside Event venue which borders Witkoppen Road, played host to the South African Tennis Open in 2009, and will do so again in 2010. There is also a Comedy Club, "Parker's Comedy and Jive", which is:

> "South Africa's first purpose-built comedy club created by notorious comedy legend, JOE PARKER. Parker's Comedy and Jive guarantees a night out of non-stop laughter rolling into a wild 80's party. (Montecasino Website, 2009).

The club, which opened in December of 2008 aims to showcase the art of stand-up comedy, can accommodate two hundred and eighty guests, and offers a light snack menu during shows.

The Bambini crèche is a child care facility where parents can leave their children to be looked after by trained professionals, while they shop, dine or gamble. The crèche is filled with children's climbing apparatus and toys to keep them occupied while several minders watch over them. Stationed at the entrance to the crèche is the crèche manager, who welcomes the children to the facility, and accepts payment which is charged by the hour.

> Bambini Childcare facility at Montecasino is a fun and safe environment for children between the ages of 1 and 9 years of age. Security is a priority and access is controlled making it a safe and secure environment for your child. There are several experienced and trained child minders on duty at any given time, and kids have a ball with the range of activities designed to keep them stimulated, in a fully equipped fun and creative indoor playground. Activities include Jungle gyms, Jumping castle on weekends, Lego, drawing, reading, play centre, TV (cartoon network) and a sleeping room. (Montecasino Website, 2009).

On a recent Sunday afternoon trip in January of 2009, which I used to compare the precinct in its current form to what it was at the onset of the research, I was struck by just how busy the crèche was, leading me to wonder just how much Montecasino had truly transitioned into a family entertainment space. Montecasino has done an enormous amount or planning and marketing to change public perception of it being solely or primarily a casino. The extent of this transformation, however, is largely dependent on the people who use this space, for it is only as family-orientated as the guest wants it to be, and while for many it will be a place to gamble, for those looking for family entertainment, there is still a lot on offer.

Montecasino's Bird Gardens

The Montecasino Bird Gardens is part of the wider precinct's "leisure extension" and offers its visitors a serene and tranquil environment in which to take in its various wildlife attractions, from parrots and flamingos, to snakes, spiders and frogs. It is situated on the western side of the complex on a quasi-wildlife sanctuary. For an entrance fee of thirty-five Rand for adults, and discounted rates for children and pensioners, visitors can enter the idyllic gardens, which border the cinema complex to the right, and Witkoppen Road to the north. The arched, Tuscan styled entrance to the bird gardens, on its south facing wall a white mosaic with red border reading "Montecasino Bird Gardens", invitingly welcomes visitors and provides cover for the spectacles that lie hidden behind its walls, out of view for those who have not paid an entry fee. On either side of the semi circular arched entrance are two booths staffed by cashiers, who seemingly sit within its walls, behind a small window from where they welcome guests to the Bird Gardens and accept the payment which grants visitors entry. In turn, the visitor is issued with a small receipt, which has to be presented to security staff at the gate, between the two cashier booths.

Having presented proof of payment to the security staff, visitors are allowed to proceed into the actual Bird Gardens. Directly to the left is the Café Flamingo, with approximately twenty circular tables where visitors can order refreshments and light meals. The café also has a small, sand filled, amusement area for smaller children, with a slide, several swings and a chest high walkway bridge which joins the slide to a net which can be used for climbing. The ninety seater café gets its name from the flamingo pond which it overlooks, and is filled to capacity over the weekends between the "Flights of Fantasy" shows. The café also plays hosts children's birthday parties as an additional revenue stream.

Directly adjacent to Café Flamingo is one's first real exposure to the essence of the bird gardens, a large "interactive" aviary with a double door entrance (to prevent birds from escaping) for patrons who are encouraged to come inside to view and feed the various brightly coloured, tweeting and chirping Rainbow Lorikeets. The paths that meander through the bird gardens make their way past several enclosures, including those of the flamingos, an enclosed "Frog Room" containing various exotic frogs, tortoise and meerkat enclosures as well as several vibrant red and blue parrots. The walk-through aviary at the northern end of the bird gardens is the largest free-standing structure of its kind in Africa, and walking through it, one could quite easily be in a tropical rainforest, where tiny buck wander through the foliage, and various exotic birds fly several metres above your head. The sounds of motorbikes roaring past and cars hooting on Witkoppen road though are a quick reminder that you are indeed in Johannesburg and not some far flung exotic jungle. The bird gardens also boast the world's largest privately owned collection of African Cycads with 755 individual plants from 37 different species. One of the cycads on display is estimated to be over three thousand years old.

> Here, you can wander along enchanted walkways within magnificent gardens and marvel at a variety of colourful birds, mammals, reptiles and unusual animals from around the world. Our educational and entertaining bird shows take place in our spectacular Tuscan amphitheatre twice a day between Monday and Friday, and three times a day over the weekend and on public holidays.(Montecasino Website, 2009).

Located in the centre of the Montecasino Bird Gardens is the spatial jewel in its crown, a large sunken and terraced auditorium. True to the supremacy of theme, the open air amphitheatre which can accommodate several hundred visitors for each show who sit on thin wooden benches situated on each of the approximately ten terraces. At its focal point, the small stage introduces the stars of the "Flights of Fantasy show":

> The stars of the Montecasino Bird Gardens are the colourful and talented show birds which captivate audiences with breathtaking displays of unrestrained flight. (Montecasino Website, 2009).

From behind the concrete floored stage, handlers tease out the actors and actresses with small treats of fish and grain. Oliver, the Southern White Pelican is the lead character, and like many temperamental actors, often requires some additional persuasion, and coaxing to obey the commands of the presenter. Crowds are encouraged to cheer him on and clap wildly as he struts out onto the stage. Moholoholo, the Cape Vulture is another popular cast member as are several hawks, eagles, a Marabou Stork, a cheeky Toucan and a Barn Owl which makes its appearance from atop a smaller Bell tower directly above the stage. Children squeal in excitement and clap in awe as the birds fly one by one on cue from the handlers over the crowds toward strategically placed fruit and meat. The show is interactive, entertaining as well as educational. As each guest makes its way onto stage, a presenter informs the audience about the species as well as raises ecological and conservation awareness.



Figure 14: Guests are greeted by parrots trained to say "hello" (Image: author, 2009).

Ironically, the Montecasino Bird Gardens provides a sense of wonder and escape by using captured and captive animals. Granted the animals are well taken care of

and all appear to be in good health, but they, like visitors to the complex, are not in their natural habitat. They are formerly wild animals who have been trained for the purposes of entertainment, and do not have the option of leaving. Their wings are clipped and they are entirely dependent on their handlers for food, and thus their survival. This dependency is created to foster greater control, for Montecasino is a highly orchestrated, unnatural and controlled environment, where even the wild is tamed, made dependent and controlled for commercial purposes. Despite this, the Bird Gardens is an extremely popular venue, one that is family orientated and enjoyed by both young and old, families and school groups. The Montecasino bird gardens are another attraction, which, it was admitted to me by the Bird Gardens staff, was specifically constructed to soften the image of the casino, and it has certainly achieved this goal. Many of the visitors to the precinct come specifically for the bird gardens and its "Flights of Fantasy" bird shows. Montecasino has over the years since its openings, created several additional features and attractions in order both to draw attention away from the casino aspect of the venue, as well as make it truly a more "family orientated" leisure destination. Another of their successful and complementary developments is the open air piazza, which brings the social flânerie of European living to upmarket Johannesburg.

> Flânerie, in a narrow sense, refers to the act of idle strolling in nineteenth-century Paris, while visually collecting social artefacts of metropolitan life – the human sights and material culture of the urban crowd. In a wider sense, it is immersion in an anonymous, spectatorial gaze that gives license to wandering and observing. (Rief, 2008)

So, the contradiction between being idle or perhaps more precisely, free to take in the splendour, while at the same time being actively engaged, absorbed and immersed emerges, one of the "authentic representation's" many ironies.

The Open Air Piazza

> In Italy, a piazza is the centre of public life, and it's no different at Montecasino. It opens Montecasino out into Gauteng's magnificent climate, and is the perfect venue for outdoor activities and events including festivals, boxing, tennis exhibitions, open air banquets and product launches. Montecasino's Piazza, which is slightly smaller than a rugby field and modelled on a typical Italian piazza with a Bell Tower that chimes as its focal point, .features several restaurants where visitors can dine al fresco, and enjoy the mesmerizing musical fountain displays. The Piazza is surrounded by six restaurants, a theatre, banqueting facility and the SunSquare Hotel. It also features South Africa's biggest and most spectacular Musical Fountain, providing nightly entertainment to visitors. (Montecasino Website, 2009).

Montecasino's Open Air Piazza is another of the precinct's more recent additions, and opened to the public in May of 2007. The large piazza has become a very popular venue and has a relaxed and social atmosphere. Small children ride their plastic 'push' bikes among the people who stroll across the square, taking in all the sites and architectural accomplishments. Unlike the village's food court, which is also modelled on an Italian piazza, the main piazza is exposed to the elements. Here, visitors can enjoy Johannesburg's warm summer days and evenings, but will occasionally have to make haste for shelter if the Highveld thunderstorm arrives.

Situated round the southern periphery of the piazza are six restaurants, including the Mugg and Bean, John Dory's seafood restaurant, the Metropolis Lounge and Grill, Ciao Baby Cucina, @Monte Winebar and Mondovino. While the Mugg and Bean, as well as John Dory's are aimed at the middle market segment, the latter four are more upmarket and cater for the more discerning and younger crowd. Mondovino, on the western end of the piazza, is at the foot of the Sun Square Hotel which opens on to the piazza. Also accessed via the open air piazza, and situated in a 'side street' behind the row of restaurants that look onto the piazza, is the Teatro which opened at the same time. At the centre of the town square is Montecasino's musical fountains which jet water high into the air, synchronised to

the sounds of popular classical music, as well as “Vangelis” and Christmas tunes over the festive season. The fountains are particularly fascinating for young children, who gather around the circular, chained off area to get a view of the water spraying high into the air. Children jockey for a position at the front as the show starts every hour, and lasts approximately ten minutes. Enhancing the display at night, are coloured lights, which illuminate the streams of water, giving it the appearance of an aquatic fireworks display. Whether during the day or in the evening, the effect is the same: a sense of concocted wonder that readily overlooks the artificiality involved.

On the north eastern end, overlooking the piazza is the working bell tower, which stands tall against the Johannesburg sky. Beneath it is the piazza stage, which on the weekends is used by a host of singers and bands who sing adapted cover versions of popular tunes to entertain the public. Just to the right of the bell tower is an enormous television screen, which during the recent rugby world cup, televised live matches to a paying audience. The entire piazza was transformed into “Bok Town” and the South African Springboks debuted their new rugby jerseys at the piazza prior to leaving for the tournament. The atmosphere at “Bok Town” during the world cup was electric, particularly when South Africa was playing. Supporters were encouraged to come to the venue in their springbok jerseys to show their support for the national team. A sea of green and gold, cheered, screamed and shouted as they watched their team take world cup victory, and it is likely that Montecasino will again do the same with the 2010 Football World Cup which will be hosted in South Africa.



Figure 15: The open air piazza with water fountain and bell tower (Images: author, 2009).

In a country with a high crime rate, and an ever fearful and increasingly nervous public, the piazza provides the perfect solution for those who can afford to be there, for there are no benches or seating for the visitor, apart from the restaurants where seating is only for paying customers. The open-air piazza provides a safe and secure environment which is highly regulated and controlled. There are very few open air spaces left in Johannesburg that are truly public but more importantly, even less that are truly safe. The piazza at Montecasino is by no means a public space, but it is perceived and used as such. The village's surveillance mechanisms, its procedures for entry as well as its fortress- like design give people the comfort they desire, but cannot get from truly public places. It is perhaps this longing for security and regulation, as well as the certainty which it brings, that has made Montecasino, and places like it, so successful, particularly in South Africa, here entrepreneurs are quick to seize on an opportunity, even if created by their fears.

Security

On a warm spring evening on the 21st of October, 2007, punters and patrons were enjoying the last remaining hours of their weekend. Some families were leaving the complex after an afternoon lunch, while others were only just arriving for a family dinner before the start of the work week. Any expectations they may have had of a relaxed and tranquil evening evaporated with the first sounds of gunfire emanating from the VIP car park of the casino. A gang of heavily armed robbers were in the process of attempting a cash heist:

> The robbers, armed with an array of assault weapons, including AK-47 and R-5 rifles, fought a running gun battle with the casino's reaction unit at around 5pm on Sunday as they tried to break into one of the casino's vaults. The security guards and the robbers exchanged bullets for several minutes while panicked punters dived for cover. 'The reaction unit guys fought back bravely'. Others waiting to exit the parking smashed through the booms of the entertainment complex in Fourways, north of Johannesburg, to escape the chaos. According to a security guard, the robbers fired their weapons wildly when confronted in the parking lot by the reaction unit. The one guard shot two of the suspects in the parking lot, while another member shot a robber as he was fleeing." Another robber, whose gun jammed as he tried to shoot another security guard, was apprehended by members of the reaction unit. Hillie de Winnaar, her husband Wynand and their two young daughters were among those caught up in the gun battle. De Winnaar arrived at Montecasino just before 5pm and was waved through at the boom gates. As she parked, she heard the first gunshot. Then another. And then the battle erupted. Her husband immediately told her to "get the girls out of here". De Winnaar found a side entrance that led to a gym and took cover there. "I was very scared," she told The Star. "Telling your girls to get their heads down (in order) not to get shot is not a fun thing to do on a Sunday afternoon." (Consumer Line, 2007).

The events of the 21st of October 2007 were not the first instance of an orchestrated attack on the casino complex. Another highly publicised heist took place in 2001, while the complex was still in its infancy, when a gang of heavily

armed robbers attacked a jewellery store in Montecasino by driving their vehicles through the doors of the village and opening fire indiscriminately with assault rifles.

“I was here! It was terrifying. We were ducking for cover. Fortunately it was still early before most guys had opened up. It could have been a massacre. You see that painting behind you? A bullet went right through it!” said Lizette Els, the owner and manager of “The African Wine Bar”, an Italian restaurant and wine bar situated near the western entrance of the village. She vividly recounted her experience of that morning during an interview in which the topic of the heist came up only as one of the many interesting experiences she had as a tenant and business owner in Montecasino. Lizette was a heavy set woman, who, on the morning of the interview, wore a long black skirt and white blouse. We sat outside her restaurant at the only table that had been set especially for my visit. Our appointment was for half past nine in the morning and her staff were only beginning to set out the tables for the day’s business. She seemed rushed in the meeting, talking quickly and fidgeting with a sachet of sugar pulled from a white ceramic bowl that had been set on the table. Accepting an offer from Lizette for something to drink, she briefly interrupted our conversation by raising her hand and calling out to Bongani, one of waiters in her restaurant who was in the process of setting out the cutlery at a table close to the bar. “Bongani! Two cappuccinos please!” she called out, after which Bongani, with a nod, began to make his way behind the bar toward the cappuccino machine.

The blasé way in which Lizette recounted the events of the morning of the 2001 heist, was indicative of a broader sensory and emotional dulling to such events that develop over years of sensational media coverage and personal experience. That two such brazen heist attempts, and several other less prominent incidents (an armed attack at the Palazzo Intercontinental Hotel in November of 2009) have taken place at Montecasino, with its stringent security measures are demonstrative of how such places are targets for criminal activity, but more importantly in the

context of Montecasino, the importance of protecting patrons and punters through stringent measures, in order to give visitors the sense of security that would set the Tuscan Village apart from South African suburbs in which it is situated. Crime and miscreant activity at Montecasino is taken extremely seriously, both because of the risks to the safety of staff and visitors, but primarily because of the reputational risk posed by such incidents. These orchestrated strikes on the complex are as much an attack on the image of Montecasino as a safe, family friendly environment, as they are an attack on the patrons and treasures within the village walls. Indeed, insurance policies will cover loss, and valuables can be replaced, but a reputation and the broken trust of Montecasino visitors is immeasurably more difficult to repair. It is for this reason, that security and the safety it enables is central to what Montecasino is, and the very essence of what makes such complexes an appealing retail and entertainment destination. The sensitivity surrounding commercial reputation is, of course, doubly ironic here, for it marks out the fragility of belief that rests on the surface of any themed enterprise that is fundamentally removed in both place and time from historical reality.

Security and the South African Context

Whether a legacy of South Africa's so-called Struggle History, a consequence of dire poverty, or a product of contemporary materialism, crime and the security concerns it engenders have becoming deeply ingrained in the South African collective conscious. Much of South African discourse is tempered not only with stories of crime, but also with unconscious elements on how it has necessitated a shift in thinking and in the way many South Africans go about their daily lives Indeed business in the private sector have been quick to mobilise against the scourge of crime, forming publicity campaigns, think-tanks and funds / donations to support the government in their efforts to lower criminality (Singh, 2008).

In the 2009 Global Peace Index, South Africa dropped 15 places, ranked 123 out of the 144 countries in the index. The Global Peace Index was started in 2006 by Australian technology entrepreneur and philanthropist Steve Killelea, and forms part of the Institute for Economics and Peace, a global think-tank on the relationship between economics, business and peace. It is also supported by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

> This year, South Africa was ranked 123 out of 144 countries, obtaining unfavourable scores for violent crime; murders; access to weapons; organised internal conflict; perceptions of criminality; respect for human rights; and the likelihood of violent demonstrations. (News24, 2009)

The level of criminality in South Africa, and the violence with which it is often perpetrated has put South Africa in the company of Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, all of whom make up the bottom fifth of the index, and all of whom are considered to be at war, civil or otherwise. Interestingly, New Zealand was ranked as the most peaceful country for 2009, a country that often features on the list of possible South African immigration destinations alongside Australia and the United Kingdom. Similarly, a recent media article on security for the 2009 South African Football World Cup reported that the global security firm, Group 4 Securicor (G4S), would not operate at the event due to concerns around the competition's organisation and security planning:

> For G4S, South Africa was the most dangerous country in the world to work in -- ahead of Iraq and Afghanistan -- with around two staff fatalities every month. South Africa ... is a tough, tough place to do business. The whole society is different from anywhere else in the world. We do what we can in terms of protecting the crew, but they get attacked by 16, 17 people at a time sometimes. (News24, 2009).

The quote above from Nick Buckles, a South African Group 4 Securicor spokesperson, highlights how much more challenging the local context is in terms of providing security. The quote is all the more alarming considering that Group 4

Securicor's entire business model is dependent on there being a criminal element to guard against. The company's main business in South Africa, that of transporting cash from businesses to bulk cash centres, has come under immense pressure from highly organised, military styled gangs, who target the cash in transit vehicles, often resulting in a loss of life for the drivers and, in some instances, innocent civilians.

In much the same way as people in the United Kingdom are accused of having an obsession over the weather, South African dinner parties, meal times and indeed casual conversations are often dominated by stories and anecdotes of crime, usually with accompanying tales of personal experience. Crime and violence has become interwoven with the fabric of South African culture. It has irrevocably tainted the way in which many view the country and its future prospects. In a country where the sceptically viewed official unemployment rate exceeds twenty three percent, and poorly educated and unskilled South Africans have to compete with an influx of illegal foreigners for limited jobs and resources, many turn to criminal acts as a means of survival. The violence with which many crimes are carried out, however, points to a more sinister element, one which is not predicated merely on survival, but on brutal aggression and bitterness. Indeed, as Singh (2008) notes, South Africa's overall crime statistics compare favourably with those of developed western nations. Murder and assault rates, however, are significantly above international averages. Shaw (2002) also acknowledges that crime and criminality are an undeniable issue in South Africa, and how increasingly violent crime has contributed to the shaping of our society.

It is the competition for employment, resources and service delivery against a growing number of foreign immigrants who see South Africa as Africa's land of opportunity that has given impetus to South Africa's crime epidemic. Indeed many South Africans are of the belief that illegal immigrants are chiefly responsible for the country's rampant crime, and blame them too for occupying positions of

employment that they feel should be reserved for South Africans. In May of 2008, these frustrations boiled over and erupted in a wave of xenophobic attacks that made global headlines. Pictures of angry mobs, stoning, beating, shooting and even setting fire to the “makwerekwere” (a derogatory term for foreigners) were beamed across the world to a horrified audience. Once the situation had returned to calm, more than fifty immigrants had been killed and over sixteen thousand more displaced as they fled the township hotspots in search of refuge and protection at churches and police stations. The violent unrest and rage, directed primarily at Zimbabwean and Mozambican immigrants, is a perplexing problem in a country with a long liberation struggle, one in which many of our heroes had sacrificed so much, and indeed paid the ultimate price, in a bid to realise a society of equality for all.

Within the context of Montecasino, a complex that is for all intents and purposes foreign, and which welcomes locals who are in fact responsible for the vast majority of its patronage, the problem of our ongoing xenophobia (attacks directed at foreigners still occur regularly throughout the country) and our varied responses to otherness and difference are brought into question. The varied, often contrasting views on the Tuscan village can in a sense be seen as a mirror image of the xenophobic upheaval of 2008. Montecasino is embraced by many for its foreignness, the very essence of its being, particularly by more disadvantaged South Africans. Many of these South Africans, who like their foreign counterparts abandoned their country for brighter prospects, see our country’s little Tuscany as a land of opportunity and regularly visit the quant Italian village for a chance to change their fortunes or simply as an escape from our everyday struggles. Paradoxically, many more affluent, well educated and “*open minded*” South Africans who were revolted by the xenophobic scenes of 2008 heap scorn on Montecasino precisely for its foreignness, its carefully plagiarised architecture that some of them feel should have been more locally inspired and perhaps original in

design. As Calburn (2009) writes in her critique of South African architectural progression:

> From Tuscan villas to RDP houses, from gated housing developments to mall architecture and mock baronial office estates, the lack of an expressive and experimental architectural lexicon is visible across the board. If we are not condemned to brutally naked structure, we are beset by rapacious decoration. It neither actively encourages nor critically engages with the formation of an inclusive public domain. (Calburn, 2009)

In a country and society that strives for equality and acceptance of the foreign, the other, Montecasino too should be embraced, if not in terms of principle, then in terms of the opportunities it continues to offer. As garish and kitsch as Montecasino and other such destinations which rely on "heritage themes" may be, their functional purpose, and the undeniable void they fill, from "public space" to safety is an important contribution in the absence of something better.

While South Africans may disagree on many things, crime is a topic that resonates particularly strongly with most of the country's inhabitants, as many have, directly or indirectly, been affected by the scourge of this unsavoury element (Butchart, Terre Blanche, Hamber and Seedat, 2000). It is an indiscriminate scourge that crosses all racial, geographic and economic boundaries (Bornman, Van Eeden and Wentzel, 1998). The South African government's unwillingness to publish audited crime statistics on a regular and timely basis has only added fuel to the fire, and meant that many of the anecdotal stories of crime go unverified and unchallenged. Crime is a part of South African folklore, and as Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) notes, folklore is the body of expressive culture, an oral tradition that folklorist William Bascom (1973) believes allows for an escape from societal consequences and serves to validate a culture in addition to transmitting a culture's morals and values, or perhaps in this case, a lack thereof. So, the folklore of crime in South Africa provides impetus to the perception of a societal and moral

degeneration within the country, one that on the surface is not sufficiently probed and interrogated to drive at the broader underlying causalities which are many and varied, all of which require urgent address. Much of the discourse on crime in South Africa is anecdotal, but these are the stories that flesh out the statistics which Frederic, Vandome and McBrewster (2009) outline in their assessment of South Africa's criminal landscape. Crime is certainly a prominent, even sensationalised issue in South Africa. That it is a problem in the country (or any other country for that matter) is irrefutable.

Perhaps in part because of Johannesburg's suburban sprawl, but also because of an overriding fear of criminal elements, it is uncommon to see large numbers of families, and particularly individuals walking through the suburbs. That privilege is for the most part reserved for the tsotsis, those gangsters and thugs that prowl the streets looking for targets and their loot, usually a cellular telephone and wallet. Those that do venture out, particularly after nightfall will often walk in the company of their dogs, which they believe will act as a sufficient deterrent or protection against anyone wishing to dispossess them of their belongings. Strolling, or walking for leisure, is more often than not, a pleasure or luxury reserved for those who can afford to stay and stroll within the relatively secure confines of a gated community (Czeglédy, 2003), or shopping malls, where the sheer number of people, with the same purpose – that of shopping, walking and relaxing, make it less likely for criminal elements to pose a significant danger.

> Increasing levels of urban violence lead to a greater sense of insecurity for many urban people decreasing their use of local facilities such as parks, squares and urban transit systems, especially at night. The solution often sought to this problem is that of increased surveillance and the use of security systems linked to the police, private security companies or other agents of control. A further reaction is the shifting of activity away from the public places of the street to the more secure and controlled environment of the mall. (Thorns, 2002:170).

There is undeniably a significant lack of safe, public space in South Africa and entertainment complexes like Montecasino capitalise on this void, commercialising private space by creating the image of a ‘public’ place. Many themed casinos in the United States actively market their establishments to the elderly and infirmed as a safe, secure environment where they can not only take in the architectural wonders as well as a host of culinary offerings and activities (gambling, theatre), but also use the facility as a venue to get exercise in a controlled, safe and climatically ideal environment unaffected by the natural elements. As a recent article on the health and fitness orientated website, “Health 24” notes:

> Mall walking, or ambling around a shopping center for exercise, has become a major fitness option, and not just for senior citizens. Mall walking began when the first fully enclosed US mall, the Stockdale, opened in Minnesota in 1956 and local doctors counselled patients recovering from heart attacks to exercise there, away from the snow and ice of Minnesota's harsh winters. The Mall of America, in Bloomington, Minnesota, has been operating its mall-walking program, called Mall Stars, since opening in 1992.
>
> One interviewee responded:
>
> You don't have to worry about a dog slipping out. You always have a bathroom, and most malls have security. Even if you have a heart issue, they have defibrillators. (Health24, 2010).

It can rightly be argued that this offer of private space as public place comes with an ulterior motive, and indeed such private spaces have been purposefully designed to charm its visitors, first into observation of the spectacle, immersion in the culture and ultimately becoming active participants in the act of consumerism and consumption. The acceptance of these offers by retirement and nursing homes has been significant and many such facilities for the elderly regularly have outings to such venues. Indeed, many of these visitors themselves come from a themed retirement or frail care homes.

A mere ten kilometres from Montecasino, situated between Sunninghill and Midrand in Johannesburg's affluent northern suburbs is an eleven billion Rand development which claims to be the "Land of Promise". Waterfall City, a two thousand, two hundred hectare estate (approximately the size of the Johannesburg northern suburb of Bryanston) is the biggest property development in South Africa to date. Once complete, it will boast over twenty thousand apartments, five and a half thousand unit, affordable housing development as well as a "Gold Estate" with two thousand, six hundred homes with an accompanying private eighteen hole golf course. There will also be a second public golf course designed by Gary Player, presumably for those in the affordable housing development, a retirement village, Office space equivalent to about two-thirds of the Sandton CBD, one hundred and fifty thousand square metres of retail shopping, a one hundred and twenty unit equestrian estate, hotel, health clinic, schools as well as "Africa's largest cemetery, with five hundred thousand grave sites", presumably for those from the retirement village

> Apart from its size, the outstanding feature of Waterfall City is its unique blend of stern religious conformity with commercial exploitation, which will channel all of the owner's profits to the education of underprivileged children. (Waterfall City Website, 2009).

Ironically, this all encompassing, all inclusive estate, which uniquely and bizarrely brings together religion and "commercial exploitation", is situated on property owned by Witwatersrand Estates Ltd, a company formed in 1934 by Moosa Ismail Mia's as a vehicle to buy the 3000ha farm, Waterval (Afrikaans for Waterfall), because the Asiatics Tenure Act prevented him from owning property in his personal capacity. Not only this, but the Mia's Muslim faith bestows holy status upon the land. Devoutly Muslim, the development will prohibit the sale of alcohol in the precinct's restaurants, as well as any other activities that are contrary to the teachings of Islam.

> South Africans repulsed by the generic "villa" clusters spreading across the landscape will be delighted to know the developers have places a blanket ban on pseudo-Tuscan, Balinese, Georgian and French styles. Building materials are restricted to stone and other natural external finishes, plastered walls, and slate, ceramic tiles or iron roofs to create a restrained and timeless built environment. (Waterfall City Website, 2009).

Waterfall City's "lifestyle enhancing", mature lifestyle estate" (retirement village) will offer its residents "fragrant and tactile gardens" as well as a butterfly and bird garden. Inhabitants of this village will also benefit from a highly trained medical team at its frail care centre, bowls and putting greens, an arts and crafts studio as well as a greenhouse and weekly chess matches which will make them "wonder why they didn't retire sooner". No bingo though, as gambling is haram (prohibited by Islam), and prosperity must come from hard work. Fortunately though, like their American counterparts who are encouraged to use casino facilities for exercise, residents of Waterfall Hills will be able to use the village of Montecasino for their exercise regime should the amenities of the estate not prove sufficient.

Commercial Security

With a significant threat of criminality, and a large, affluent population of business professionals whose paranoia runs as deep as their pockets, South Africa has seen an explosion of growth in the private security sector from what was once only a cottage industry. Research firm, Who Owns Whom, estimates the South African Private Security industry to be worth R40 billion annually, with over 4,200 registered private security firms in operation.

> The private security sector is the second biggest employer after the mines, and is a major economic force in the South African economy. In real terms the private security industry contributes substantially to the economic growth of the country through giving employment to hundreds

> of thousands of people, presents lucrative opportunities for entrepreneurs and investors to be involved in a service for which there is a significant demand. There are more than three private security guards for every uniformed police officer. Guarding services is by far the largest employment sector with about 3 000 companies employing about 150 000 guards. The industry provides employment, training and a career-path for a great many initially unskilled people. South Africa spends 2% of GDP on private security. (Who Owns Whom, 2008)

From personal and asset protection and security training, to mercenaries, vehicle tracking and recovery, the entrepreneurial opportunities presented by the local private security industry have lured many to its ranks with the offer of employment.

> The private security industry in South Africa began developing during the 1980s due to a number of factors – the rise of insecurities associated with apartheid activities; the apartheid state's willingness to accept the security industry as an adjunct to the state police; and the apartheid state's attempts to professionalise the industry through the enactment of various pieces of legislation. Post-1994 has seen an especially significant rise in the size of the industry due to the entry of international conglomerates, the steady entry of ex-security personnel into the industry, and the rise of the crime rate and insecurities associated with post-transitional developments. South Africa's re-entry into the global arena has also led to a number of other developments associated with late or post modernity. Some of these developments taking place in a number of countries include changes in property relations due to the rise of mass private property and the need to secure this property; the identification of new insecurities and risks in the so-called 'risk society'; growing trends towards consumerism and the commodification of security – individuals are able to purchase their own security in the light of the state's inability to guarantee security; and the state's adoption of responsibilization' strategies to encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own security. As demands for security increase in an ever-fearful society, so the industry continues to grow and become more and more adaptable, offering a broad array of services. (Berg, 2007:4)

Through the process of normalizing South Africa's Police and Defence forces after the end of Apartheid, many white police officers and South African National Defence force veterans were displaced from their public protection roles, or left voluntarily. Many of these displaced individuals saw the rapidly growing private

security industry as an opportunity to find employment, whether through starting their own service providers, or through providing consulting services using their military or police training.

While the South African security landscape is unique, and indelibly defined by the country's past, it is by no means an isolated example. The need for security, and willingness to pay a premium for it, is as pervasive as the commodification of space and experience. As Davis (1990) writes of Los Angeles, and which could just as easily have been written about any one of South Africa's more affluent suburbs:

> The carefully manicured lawns of Los Angeles' Westside sprout forests of ominous little signs warning: "Armed Response" Even richer neighbourhoods in the canyons and hillsides isolate themselves behind wall guarded by gun toting private police and state of the art electronic surveillance… Welcome to post-liberal Los Angeles, where the defence of luxury lifestyles is translated into a proliferation of new repressions in space and movement, undergirded by the ubiquitous "armed response" This obsession with physical security systems, and collaterally, with the architectural policing of social boundaries, has become the zeitgeist of urban restructuring, a master narrative in the emerging built environment of the 1990's. (Davis, 1990:159).

The line between public and private security is a blurred one in the South African context, and the proliferation of security services as a result of the country's high crime rate has only further muddied the distinctions, leading to an issue of accountability and oversight.

In her paper on the South African Private Security Industry, Berg (2007) raises the important issue of the commodification of security. Commodification is, and has been a growing theme emerging from the need to not only derive a living from, but also attain and live a lifestyle prescribed by modernity. It is a phenomenon fostered and exploited by entrepreneurial opportunists who see the value in offering, for a price, a service or experience which ordinarily one should not need, have access to and certainly not pay for. This, however, is the fundamental principle of modern

commerce, and rather than rebuke it, must be seen in the context of the opportunities it allows. The very emergence and sustainability of this phenomenon is evidence enough as to its worth and place in modern culture. Within the context of Montecasino, it is in keeping with the what the complex offers, the Tuscan façade, the peddling of Italian towns and experiences, and the commodification of space, albeit private space. As Berg (2007) notes of private security and the authority of private security guards:

> Generally, depending on the context, private security personnel have the same powers as ordinary citizens, drawing most of their powers from the law of contract, the law of property and labour law. They are 'authorised', for instance, to make citizen's arrests, banish trespassers and deny entry, and search personal property by virtue of their status as agents of property owners, employers and 'other powerful persons and institutions in society. Apart from these legal 'tools' available to private security personnel in the performance of their duties, they also draw on their symbolic status or 'façade of power' and thus rely on public consent and compliance as well as 'public misunderstanding of the law'. Nevertheless, they are liable to face civil suits should their arrest or search prove to be incorrect. (Berg, 2007:11)

However contrived, commodified spaces and experiences create their own credence and credibility through simulated authority and a wider lack of questioning by those who come into contact with it.

> In the first place, the market provision of "security" generates its own paranoid demand. "Security" becomes a positional good defined by income access to private "protective services" and membership in some hardened residential enclave or restricted suburb. As a prestige symbol – and sometimes as the decisive borderline between the merely well-off and the "truly rich" – "security" has less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential, work, consumption and travel environments, from "unsavoury" groups and individuals, even crowds in general. (Davis, 1990: 160)

Security and protection, because of its cost has developed a certain social and economic cache, where the higher the wall, the more vicious the dogs or the more elaborate the "guard house", the more wealthy the individuals are assumed to be.

Ironically, it is widely believed that the more elaborate the security, the more there is to protect, and therefore, the more there is to steal. Thus in a game of one upmanship between the criminals and their intended targets, the greater the risk, the greater the reward. This scenario has brought about more novel approaches by criminals to crime, but it has also driven a sharp escalation in the level of violence with which these crimes are perpetrated. Applying this logic at Montecasino, with its very high levels of security, one could safely assume that an abundance of treasures lay behind the Tuscan façade, directly proportionate to the multi-layered security systems which protect its assets, patrons and reputation.

Security at Montecasino

Much of Montecasino's success lies in its ability to provide visiting patrons with a safe and secure environment, one that is, at least in the abstract or virtual sense, far removed from the very real dangers that present themselves beyond the walls of the themed complex. In South Africa, security adds to the sense of escape, of being in a different world where the labours, demands and concerns of reality can be left behind. The complex developers, decorators and managers are keenly aware of the critical role that this element plays in drawing patrons, and have not spared any expense on cultivating an atmosphere of safety. Montecasino capitalises on its patrons longing for a sense of freedom by playing on their fears, however justified. It does so by creating a highly controlled space that gives the illusion, at least once one gets past the initial security checks, a self regulating utopian environment where harmony and not commercial greed, is the dominant theme.

Procedures of Entrance

The issue of security is the pervasive, yet underlying bedrock on which the environment of escape is presupposed, and it becomes evident as one approaches

the spiked green palisade walls of the Montecasino complex. While these walls run counter to the premise of what Montecasino is, they are critical in making it the utopian space it is portrayed as, as these fences control access and deter would be intruders and undesirables. After all, Montecasino is not a public space and it reserves all rights of entry. As Calburn (2009) scathingly comments on the proliferation of palisade fencing in South Africa:

> The basic unit of urban strategy in Jo'burg seems to be the palisade fence -- considered acceptable because it is a "transparent" form of fortification. (Calburn, 2009)



Figure 16: Montecasino as seen from the outside through palisade fencing (Image: author, 2009).

Palisade fencing became the preferred criminal barrier for home and business owners in South Africa in the late nineties when it was marketed as a product that allowed those within the walled perimeter to see potential intruders who may be conspiring to penetrate the perimeter wall. The below extract is taken from the

website of a security fence producer in South Africa, on which they outline the benefits of palisade fencing over regular walls:

> There are many benefits of Palisade Fencing:
>
> - It is one of the most popular methods of fencing due to its affordability.
> - Palisade fences also offer a high level of perimeter security as intruders are unable to hide behind palisade fencing thus giving your property an unobscured view from almost any angle.
> - Palisade panels have a versatile aesthetic appearance as they can be painted to fit in with any exterior colour scheme.
> - Palisade fencing is one of the most difficult types of fencing to climb over or cut" (www.acfencing.co.za)

This is very much in line with what Foucault discusses when he refers to Bentham's panopticon. His notion of subversive control and a measure of self-regulation is one which is carried through to within the walls of Montecasino, and which will be discussed in further on in the chapter. While the primary goal of the palisade fencing is that of a form of access control, even a show of force at Montecasino, it serves another, equally utilitarian purpose, that of allowing those on the outside to see the world / village that awaits them beyond the security checkpoints. Thorns (2002) has noted a similar phenomenon in Los Angeles

> Such walls have increasingly appeared in cities in recent times with the growth of fragmentation in social relations and thus the breakdown in communal social life. People seek a sense of security behind the barricades of garden fences, security lights and alarms and through keeping guard dogs. The walled enclosures clearly separate those within the walls and those without and create a sense of "us" with and 'them' – potentially dangerous and untrustworthy outside. (Thorns, 2002:157).

It lures the outsider by permitting them to see the intriguing and appealing architecture, and draw them in either through curiosity or the longing for an escape from the realities of modern day South Africa. As such, the fence is designed to

deter would be wrong-doers, while at the same time reassuring those who come to Montecasino to enjoy the escapism it not only permits, but actively encourages.

By far the majority of visitors to Montecasino arrive via some sort of vehicle transportation, whether it be public or private. Visitors are channelled around the three traffic circles on Montecasino Boulevard, the only access road to the complex, into security controlled vehicle access points. The traffic circles are designed to direct traffic in a free flowing manner and rely on the principle of “right of way” and courtesy to a greater extent than traffic lights or stop streets. This provides an interesting parallel with what Montecasino provides the guest, in that the complex seeks to control and direct behaviour through subtle measures (such as the traffic circle) rather than imposing in an authoritarian style (such as stop streets or sets of traffic lights). Much like the security at Montecasino, which like any other complex cannot be all encompassing, this subtle approach relies to some extent on the integrity of the user / patron from whom they expect a moderate understanding of the rules and a modicum of observance to them. As Thorns (2002) noted of the Epcot Centre in the United Sates, and which applies equally to Montecasino and similar environments:

> The theme park here was an attempt to take us into the future so we could see what it was like and encourage us to aspire to this vision. In this vision, we find nature being ordered and controlled. It is not a free-flowing space but a very ordered one. There is a strict separation of people and traffic with circulation along organised and clearly demarcated paths. The suggested message is that the urban environment is controlled by the experts, the planners and technologists who provide the context for us to live out our lives efficiently and safely. It is a contrived world rather than one that encourages spontaneity. (Thorns, 2002:140).

The entrances are patrolled by at least one uniformed security guard at all times, who in the same fashion as the palisade fence, play the dual role of reassurance and deterrence. Once on the Montecasino premises, the vehicles of visitors are

directed into one of four lanes, which lead into the secure parkade. Each lane leads to a cashier's booth where an entrance fee must be paid. A flat rate of R5 is charged for open air parking while undercover parking in the parkade costs a further R5. The R10 flat rate for covered parking is reasonably competitive when compared with traditional malls which usually charge according to time spent in the parkade, but which do not charge for open air parking. Visitors are greeted by the parking cashier with a friendly, "Good evening Sir" or other suitable title, and once the transaction has been completed, are handed a receipt and wished a good day.

On the receipt, which reminds you that "Life Is Beautiful", is printed the receipt number, the method of payment, the value of the transaction, as well as the date and time of entry. Of greater interest, however, are the details of the vehicle, which are recorded by a small camera mounted on a white metal post directly behind the tollbooth. This camera is linked to a monitor in the cashier's booth and allows the cashier to see the vehicle registration number, which is then printed on the receipt. The colour of the car as well as the status of the occupants (e.g. "guest") is also printed on the receipt before it is issued to the driver. On the back of the receipt are the "Conditions of parkers/owners risk" which absolve Montecasino of any responsibility or liability for the custody of the vehicles or articles within them. While this level of indemnification is standard at all parking facilities, it is a quiet reminder that the utopian like-environment of such complexes are merely an illusion, and bound by the same realities of the outside world it seeks to keep at bay. In addition, it confirms the limits of accountability that are set by insurance coverage and litigation fears.

Once inside the parkade, uniformed security guards, who double as parking attendants, wave visitors to the complex in the direction of unoccupied parking bays, systematically filling each section of the parkade. At Montecasino, each parking level is only opened once the level below it is full. This maintains the illusion of full business. Consequently, vehicular visitors to Montecasino (almost all

are) are not simply allowed to park on any level of the parkade. Aside from their ushering duties, security guards also patrol the parkade in order to maintain a visible presence and deter any would-be criminals or vandals. This measure allows for a more concentrated security effort and the efficient allocation of security personnel and resources. Safe in the knowledge that one's vehicle is secure, visitors are pointed in the direction of the elevators, which transport guests from the parkade to the village complex.

As one leaves the parkade behind, and crosses the threshold of the retail and entertainment complex, one is transported to a different time and place. The entrances, however, provide the guest with one last reminder that they are still within the borders of a security obsessed country, this even though they are about to enter the relaxed and carefree environment of a Tuscan village. One male and one female security guard, whose duty it is to screen guests for any suspicious items, staff each entrance at Montecasino. They stand next to a waist high wooden table, set with a maroon tablecloth, the same colour as the blazers and hats they wear. Having security personnel dressed in blazers with contrasting slacks make the security guards more approachable and accessible, as they do to some extent play a limited public relations role (Alexander and Muhlebach, 1992). According to Brennan (1985:441):

> Security officers agree that properly designed and properly worn uniforms achieve three basic goals: enhanced image for the employer, enhanced self image of the guard, and enhanced security for the company. The message conveyed by a professional guard presence is that of a company that takes itself, its business and its customers seriously. Any customer will appreciate this attitude. Furthermore, Security guards who look good usually feel good about themselves and their job. As a result, guards do their job better. In addition to eliciting a positive image for the employer and a positive self image for others, professionally attired guards serve as a deterrent to crime.

In his assessment of the appropriate attire for security personnel, Brennan (1985) discusses uniforms as falling into one of three categories, each with its distinct profile.

The first is the “military look” which is much like that worn by army personnel, complete with military cap, navy blue pants, a white shirt, tie and black shoes. This form of attire is employed where a highly visible security presence is required. The second, the “security officer look”, comes across as less intimidating than the “military look”, and is more in line with the type of dress adopted by the police force, but which remains clearly distinguishable from public forms of security whose uniforms are not allowed to be replicated or imitated. The third and final style, one that is best suited to the security at the entrances to Montecasino, is what Brennan (1985) refers to as “the ‘soft look”.

> Such uniforms are usually employed at indoor posts where a harder look may not be appropriate (such as in hotels, casinos, hospitals and in corporate offices) and this uniform style typically consists of blue blazers with blue or gray slacks” The main advantage of this look is that it allows establishments to provide a non-intimidating approach to security. (Brennan, 1985:441).

The security guards positioned at the pedestrian entrances to Montecasino are among the first Montecasino staff to be encountered at the complex and generally set the tone for the guests because of their necessary aspect of direct confrontation. As such, it is of critical importance that they behave in a professional manner and are dressed appropriately.

> Protection officers are often highly involved in public relations / customer service… Some organizations such as shopping centers, hotel, and amusement parks utilize security personnel as customer service agents to a large extent. (Hertig, 2007:420)

The security staff at the entrances are courteous, friendly, and are unarmed (save for a walkie-talkie) so as not to suggest that the complex is unsafe (Jacobs, 1984).

Male guests, who are directed to the right-hand side of the entrance, and who are screened only by male security personnel, are expected to adopt a *scarecrow* stance as they are greeted by the security guard. The security guard then swiftly runs a handheld metal detector across the body and appendages of the guest. Any high pitched, rapid-fire beep emitted by the hand-held metal detector (usually as it glances across the pockets) prompts further inspection by security. Male guests who set off the alarm can be seen digging into their pockets, in order to produce the offending items, usually a wallet with coins, a watch or some other metal item not agreeable to the metal detector. The entire process takes approximately five seconds, a little under double that should the guest be asked to display the items in his pockets. Most guests remain compliant and understanding throughout the process, which on a busy night, can result in lengthy queues that run more than twenty deep. On such nights, however, the occasional “Is this really necessary?” or “Ag come on man” can be heard muttered under the breath of impatient patrons, none brave (or foolhardy) enough to make a scene and arise the suspicions of the guards, something which would only delay them further. Every visitor, without exception is scanned. All males, from toddlers to the elderly in wheelchairs on the right hand side, while all females are directed to the female security guard on the left.

Female visitors experience much the same, except that they are searched exclusively by female security guards. As many women carry their belongings in a handbag, rather than in their pockets, the female security always asks to see inside the handbag to ensure that no offensive objects can be brought into the complex. The security guard uses a wooden stick to move items around in the handbag in order to search it thoroughly, and thus her hand at no stage enters the handbag. The use of the wooden stick by female security guards to search handbags

provides an interesting metaphor for the internal security measures exacted at Montecasino. While security at Montecasino aims to be discreet and removed from direct involvement with the guest, it must inevitably be intrusive albeit impersonal. Just as the use of the wooden stick has the effect of diminishing the invasiveness of security measures, so too the simulacra acts as a veneer, concealing all the control exercised by the complex. Most women interviewed saw the process of having their bags looked through both inconvenient and impersonal, but understood it as a necessary irritation.

The process of searching through handbags after scanning the female guest takes longer than the brief “frisk down” the men experience, and as such, the female queue will often be longer than that of their male counterparts on the right. It is common practice in the security industry to have same gender screening as it promotes a greater degree of comfort among the people being screened, and avoids any inappropriate across-gender contact. The gender sensitivity at Montecasino is an important one as it

Robyn, who was a regular visitor to Montecasino’s restaurants and clubs, gave me her impressions after standing in a Friday evening queue for approximately five minutes.

> The security Checkpoint process feels a little overly dramatic. It seems as though it would be quite ineffective should the security actually discover someone trying to smuggle something in. They are not armed and back-up does not appear to be close by. It’s not your average Joe entering Monte who poses the security risk anyway. They are just keen to get inside, forget their woes and have a good time. It’s the organised gangs who pose the greatest risk to security. It seems like a bit of a farce and a time waster. It’s annoying to have your privacy violated when all you want to do is get inside and have some fun. (Personal communication with author, June 23, 2009).

She was dressed in dark blue jeans, a black, strapless top and black high heeled boots that that indicated she was “ready for a night out on the town”. Robyn was on her way to meet a group of friends for a girls night which would include dinner at one of the restaurants on the newly opened square, followed by dancing and socialising at “Café Vacca Matta”, one of Montecasino’s most popular clubs.

Robyn’s feelings towards, and impressions of the security procedures for entrance to Montecasino reflected the attitude of many others, both male and female alike. While ultimately intrusive and impersonal, the security checkpoints are a necessary inconvenience not only to protect patrons, but the reputation of the complex and establishments within it. Security acts as the filter between the natural and disorganised world outside, and the unnatural and controlled world inside. Their role is to act as the barrier, sanitizing all that enters Montecasino, so that it is unable to contaminate or corrupt anything within. They not only search for the obvious such as weapons like knives and guns, but also for patrons brining in their own drinks and food, alcohol, and the more sinister, drugs.

These filters are imperfect and cannot always keep undesirable elements at bay. In a recent highly publicised incident, two of South Africa’s top female disk jockeys and radio personalities spoke out of incidents in which their drinks were spiked with a substance thought to be the date rape drug, Rohypnol.

> Date rape has again been pushed into the spotlight this week after 5FM celebrity DJ Nicole Fox told listeners how she was drugged during a work function at a club in Montecasino in 2003. Fox said her symptoms were much more severe than a regular hangover. "The next day I was lying in bed, weak and vomiting for hours on end. I was too weak to go to hospital." Fox said she spoke to other female and male DJs, who told her that it had that it had also happened to them.
>
> Elana Africa, another 5FM DJ, whose drink was spiked at a work function in 2002, said: "I had spasms in my neck and couldn't keep anything down." (IOL, 2007).

Indeed, the incidents that affected these two high profile figures took place at the very club Robyn was going to spend her evening at with friends after their dinner. In most cases, clubs within Montecasino such as Café Vacca Matta have additional security at the club entrance which is manned by privately hired bouncers whose task is similar to that of the Montecasino security, except that they are meant to provide a greater physical presence that comforts visitors in respect of people like themselves (as opposed to the other of proverbial criminals). Not only do incidents such as these demonstrate that security simply cannot screen out every substance and item that is surreptitiously brought into the Tuscan Village, but also that security plays as important a role as a deterrent, as it does a physical barrier. It shows too, that these measures alone are not wholly effective, but nevertheless essential, for without them, there would be nothing to separate the ideals of the Tuscan styled village from the outside world that is its counterpoint.

The enormous amount of security that must be negotiated just to gain entry to the complex is by no means the only security precautions that are in place at Montecasino. To be more effective, the physical presence is supplemented with more covert forms of surveillance. Within the complex, the security is subtler than at the entrances and parkades, but just as ubiquitous.

The apparatus of observation

> The dialectic is repressed and stability and harmony are secured through intense surveillance and control. Internal spatial ordering coupled with hierarchical forms of authority preclude conflict or deviation from the social norm (Harvey, 2000:167).

One of the main features of malls and themed entertainment complexes is that they offer the visitor a safe and pleasant, if not somewhat predictable, experience. As Van Eeden (1999) notes, spaces of consumption rely on safety and predictability in order to create passive consumers. The issue of safety and

security also relates to the idea of escape already discussed in the previous chapter. In a country with one of a high prevalence of crime, Montecasino and similar venues provide some respite from the constant threat of danger posed in the outside world. Such complexes allow the guest to indulge in the liberties of public life in a free and unthreatening private environment. Creating such an environment, however, requires that many, if not most of these liberties are curtailed, and that the guest, who is under the impression of finally being "free", is in reality under constant scrutiny and control. Safety is one of the main priorities at Montecasino, not only to protect visitors to the complex, but also to protect the assets and reputation of the complex. Consequently, as soon as visitors enter the property of Montecasino, they are under constant surveillance and influence.

> What Foucault regards as "a panopticon effect" through the creation of spatial systems of surveillance and control is also incorporated into utopian schemes (Harvey, 2000:163).

"Montecasino's surveillance systems, both audio and visual, are among the most sophisticated in the world for this sort of environment. The security system is comprised of 720 cameras and 800 video recorders among other items" (Montecasino promotional video, 2000). These security attributes are used as a marketing feature in the Montecasino promotional video, demonstrating the way in which security, surveillance and control make for an appealing commercial environment. As the narrator of the Montecasino promotional video describes the sophisticated surveillance equipment, the camera passes through a passage lined with hundreds of video recorders, and pans across the central control room, showing a man seated at a desk with 20 monitors in front of him. These monitors provide the surveillance technician with a detailed picture of all the activity in and around Montecasino, and allow for a rapid and efficient response to any emergency.

> A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen, or to observe the external space, but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control - to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them (Foucault, 1991:172)

One of the main areas for the deployment of this sophisticated surveillance equipment is in the casino. Security is understandably extremely important in the casino as a preventative measure against cheating and fraud. The casino is also an area where an enormous amount of money changes hands, and is thus a vulnerable target for thieves. In the casino, gaming tables are situated underneath "faux" vineyards, with vines that twist around the wooden structures that support them. There are, however, no grapes on the vine. Instead, large round surveillance cameras hang like bunches of dark black grapes. The vineyard provides cover for security cameras, masking the true level of control and observation that takes place within the complex. As if this were not enough, springing up from the floral casino carpet[22] are several large oak trees, which provide a nesting spot for security cameras. Unlike the cameras of the vines, which monitor activity on the gaming tables, the cameras in the oak trees monitor movement on the casino floor and the behaviour of punters playing the one-arm bandits. Within the rest of the village, security cameras are cleverly concealed behind the pink petals of Bougainvilleas. They hang from the balconies and are able to pivot in order to follow patrons throughout the complex. Interestingly, the glass housing for the cameras is tinted black so that one is unable to see in which direction the camera is pointing, immediately raising ideas of the Foucauldian panopticon.

[22] Many casinos have some sort of floral décor on the dark carpets, dark so as to better hide stains and reduce maintenance costs.

> The panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power (Foucault, 1991:202).

While the cameras allow for surveillance, they are to a large extent obsolete if there is nobody to action a response to situations that may arise. This task falls on the various security personnel strategically deployed throughout the Montecasino complex. Most prominent among the security personnel are the uniformed guards who patrol the complex. They wear black trousers and shoes, a white shirt and a maroon blazer, making them immediately distinguishable as part of the security force. These guards are deployed throughout the complex, but not in the casino, (so as to not inhibit gamblers who might be sensitive to feeling monitored), and are each provided with a walkie-talkie in order to communicate with their supervisors and each other. There are, however, two other levels of security that are less prominent to the public, but who nevertheless play an equally important role in ensuring the safety of patrons and the smooth operation of the complex.

Firstly, there are the Men In Black (M.I.B.'s), a phrase adopted from the Hollywood movie featuring Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones. At Montecasino, the M.I.B's are security men dressed entirely in black. Black shoes, black polar neck shirts and black suits. They patrol all areas of the complex, including the casino, maintaining a visible presence. While they are less overt than their counterparts in blazers, the Men in Black are usually tall, well built men, with a serious demeanour and strong physical presence. They are set in the role of the Hollywood *heavies*, or *muscle* as they are commonly known in gangster films. Acting primarily as a deterrent to would be criminals and miscreants, the M.I.B's also monitor activity on the complex floor, ensuring that order and stability are maintained. These men operate at a higher level than the security posted at the entrances. They have the mandate to roam throughout the complex, both in the retail space as well as the casino. Uniformed officers are seldom seen in the casino space apart from when cash is being counted or removed from the slot machines. A uniformed presence lends

greater authority to the proceedings and acts as a significant deterrence to would be criminals. These uniformed officers, however will not be found in the casino area under normal circumstances as punters do not enjoy spending their hard earned money in the presence of an authority figure. The Men In Black, while still an authoritative figure, do not convey the same sense of formality and duty. Their dark suits allow them to blend into the crowd, keeping an eye on proceedings while not drawing the attention a uniform would command. In this way, the punters, many of whom are superstitious, are not distracted by a sense of scrutiny and surveillance, and this enables them to concentrate on gambling and escaping the realities of the outside world.

The security at Montecasino, while it aims to be discreet, is everywhere, operating on many levels, conscious and unconscious. It monitors, alters and controls the behaviour of all those who fall under its gaze. Not only does it serve to protect Montecasino, its patrons and their property, but the security acts as an attraction to guests who, because of the security concerns, do not feel the same levels of anxiety they often experience in the outside world. Ironically though, patrons are less *free* in Montecasino, a place where guests are led to believe that they are less constrained than ever before. Building on the concept of "McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 1993), Ritzer and Liska (1997:106) have gone so far as to liken places such as Disneyland and Las Vegas to Goffman's (1968) notion of a total institution. Albeit that the forces of persuasion and control exercised are hardly as overt as that proposed by Goffman's prisons and mental institutions, Foucault (1977) has demonstrated how more subtle forms of control can indeed be more effective, if not more disturbing (Ritzer and Liska, 1997). Such environments are as Zukin (1991) writes, "*Landscapes of Power*".

> The stage-set landscape is a liminal space between nature and artifice, and market and place. It mediates between producer and consumer, a cultural object with real economic effect (Zukin 1991:231).

While architecture and the idea of 'spectacle' play a vital role in attracting the guest and planting the seed of fantasy, it is through the finer measures of internal theming and simulacra that the idea of fantasy is reinforced and perpetuated.

Special Security

Apart from the cameras and patrols, there are several other layers of security measures that are in place at Montecasino, many of which go unnoticed, but which are integral to the functioning of the overall security network and system. For instance, either stairs, or steel bollards can be found at all pedestrian entrances, to ensure that rogue vehicles cannot be driven into the village in a repeat of the 2002 heist. One of the more covert measures, and one that is unknown to the majority of the people that stroll through the streets of the tranquil village[23], are the undercover security personnel. These highly trained guards both dress and act like any ordinary patron of the complex, but instead of participating in the amenities offered by the Tuscan village, they surreptitiously move through the crowds, monitoring behaviour.

Furthermore, on leaving the complex, patrons who are making their way out may randomly be requested to produce their parking receipt in order to prove that they are indeed leaving in their own vehicle. This is often again confirmed by security at the vehicular exits, where drivers are asked to stop by a uniformed guard and requested switch off the ignition of their car, and again switch it on while the guard peers down at the key being used in the ignition. The security guard is stationed at a set of bollards positioned diagonally opposite each other, preventing motorists from speeding through, as the layout forces drivers to carefully navigate their way through the bollards lest they want to damage their vehicle. This measure is

[23] I myself was completely unaware of these security guards until they were mentioned in an interview with Andre Hudson, Montecasino's security manager.

designed to ensure that cars have not been started without the proper keys and are not in the process of being stolen from the parkade.

Complex security also fosters strong working relationships with the tenants of the complex, and indeed the wider community. Working on the premises outlined by Kitteringham (2007), tenant and community relations are vital to the success of the broader complex.

> There are at least six reasons why the Security Manager / Supervisor should consider good tenant relations as a cornerstone of the site security program:
>
> 1. There will never be enough security staff available to help protect a site
> 2. Tenants, in a passive role, can be the eyes and ears of the security department and as there are many more of them than security staff, can provide considerable more information
> 3. Tenants can play an active role by keeping doors locked, challenging strangers, educating visitors of security rules and regulations, and helping out in extreme situations such as emergencies
> 4. Their presence alone is often enough to deter undesirable or criminal activity
> 5. Tenants often provide solutions to security and life safety issues that security personnel may not have thought of
> 6. Finally, tenants may own a considerable amount of property on site; therefore, they also have a personal responsibility to help protect it (Kitteringham, 2007:428)

Security guards, while seldom ever entering the retail stores in Montecasino, can often be seen greeting or waving to tenants of some of the restaurants and smaller stores that are owner run. They will often pass with a brief wave to confirm that all is in order as well as simply to greet.

> Just as police recognize the value of engaging the community in crime prevention strategies, so too should security professionals be willing to engage the discrete site community in the same strategies. Discrete sites are no different from the wider community other than the size of the geographic site boundaries or spatial definition of the location. The security model also calls for proactive problem solving focussing the local crime and disorder. Protection of assets requires

> security and tenants to work together as partners in reducing opportunities for crime to occur both from a physical and procedural perspective. (Kitteringham, 2007:428)

Montecasino has also established a satellite police station on Montecasino Boulevard:

> Montecasino was also responsible for the establishment of the Metro Police Station situated on Montecasino Boulevard and continues to support this by being responsible for the running costs and utilities. Montecasino further showed support of the SAPS with a R1 million investment in the upgrade of the Douglasdale Police Station. (Montecasino Website, 2003)

These measures are extensive, but cannot be completely comprehensive to the point that crime is neither attempted nor perpetrated. The main function of all these interwoven measures, subtle and overt, are designed to create an atmosphere of safety and harmony, one where the patron is made to feel at ease and one that fosters consumerism. They also foster an environment for patrons, which is unlike that of the outside world to which they are exposed. The aspect of security is thus in some respects, part of the novelty and part of the attraction.

Selling Fantasy

Managing perception – a village of illusion

> "Who lives in here?" (with a heavy French accent) was the question from Lorain, a member of the group of French academics visiting South Africa. We were at the time having lunch at Verdicchio (an Italian restaurant), and it was somewhat difficult to hear his question over the traditional Greek music playing in the restaurant. "Nobody," I replied, "its all just for show". He looked somewhat baffled and betrayed by my response, as if he had expected me to say that complex staff or the tenants occupied the apartments above the stores. "So nobody stays here?" he asked. I smiled at him and he shook his head and returned to his bowl of pasta. (Personal communication with author, 2003)

It is easy to believe that Montecasino is a fully functional village with inhabitants, who descend from their loft apartments to the streets below as they would in Italy. Above the stores, are small, shuttered windows with colourfully filled flowerpots suspended directly beneath them. Masses of purple, yellow and blue plastic flowers spring from these flowerpots which are filled with begonias. Bright pink and purple petals of bougainvilleas cascade down the corners of the “aged” Tuscan walls, whose dull hue serves only to further enhance the flower’s richness of colour. The darkly varnished wooden shutters of the windows are all open, allowing the passer-by a glimpse of what lies behind the walls. The lights are always on in these windows as if to indicate that there is always someone home, but this is like everything at Montecasino; an illusion, a simulation of reality which adds to the mythology of the venue.

Behind the façade is another “façade”. The windows above the stores are dressed with pots and pans, kitchen utensils and the “raw” ingredients for some of Italy’s most renowned dishes. In one window, Ronaldo’s yellow number ten Brazilian football jersey is hung in the window, as if the window to the room of a young football fan, his hero’s jersey showing his loyalty. Restaurants, cafes and retail stores are made to look like double storied Tuscan homes. Strung between the buildings are washing lines with garments hanging from them, several pairs of pants, shirts, stockings and underwear, giving the visitor the impression that ‘life is being lived” at Montecasino.



Figure 17: "Ornamental" washing hanging from the balconies (Image: author, 2009)

Television reception aerials adorn the roofs of the village, many of which have faux birds' nests precariously perched on them. These nests are guarded by large white storks, just one of several bird species which have made Montecasino their home. In Switzerland, the stork is a sign of good luck and many Swiss houses are adorned with ornamental storks. In Montecasino, storks carry a similar connotation, as they, together with the other plastic bird species aim to attract patrons to the complex. Pelicans, doves and cranes all stand poised in nests, on balconies and on ledges. These, however, are not the pesky, disease-carrying birds one would ordinarily find in the outside world. These are *Montecasino birds* whose behaviour (or lack thereof) is in strict accordance with the script written for the complex. As Bremner reminds us:

> Inside, its authentically fake ornamental landscape wraps us in a fun-filled, never-ending twilit utopia, where the pigeons don't shit and the roofs cast shadows on the sky (Bremner, 2002)

At several points in the complex, brass-plated intercoms, with the names of nonexistent dentists, doctors and residents, provide a sense that these people have made Montecasino their home. Italian icons, like the Vespa and an old red Fiat 500 are parked outside the residences of their imaginary owners. Pressing the intercom buttons, however, gives an indication of the emptiness and lack of life behind the façade. Like all the décor in Montecasino, the intercom buttons are frozen, suspended in time and unable to move. They cannot be depressed, and the inhabitants cannot be summoned. Just as the intercom buttons cannot be used, the doors to the cars cannot be opened, not because their owners have locked them, but because they have been welded shut to prevent anyone from climbing inside and vandalising the prop. Likewise, parked at the western end of the complex is another Fiat, a faded blue one with a blue light on top and "Polizia" written on the side. Like the red Fiat 500, the police car remains stationary and silent. No sirens and no flashing lights. There is no need for the police in the safe and serene environment of the Tuscan Village. Within Montecasino's Tuscan walls, visitors are safe and protected as the undesirables of the real outside world are excluded. Interestingly Setha Low (2003) draws a parallel between ancient walled towns (of which Montecasino is a reconstruction) and gated communities.

> Walls were used to protect against theft or destruction, but also to control entry and exit during peaceful times. Medieval town walls followed Roman tradition and included a wall, one to two meters thick and up to twenty meters high, a tower with openings for maximum field of crossfire, and a gate, where you waited for the guards to inspect goods and collect a toll. (Low, 2003:13)

The walls of which Low speaks are again demonstrative of the control exerted by Montecasino, only Montecasino masks this control by suspending belief (or rather disbelief). Edmund Batley has commented: "We can suspend their belief to a certain point, but obviously they're (the visitors) gonna know its fake". Despite a lot of guests knowing that the environment is fake, the falsehood is relegated to the far reaches of the mind where it is unable to vitiate the enjoyment of the experience.

While the simulated environment is patently false, guests at Montecasino and other themed entertainment venues buy into the “reality” of fantasy because, as Boddy (1992) has pointed out, people prefer simulation over reality. The idea of simulacra is a topic on which Jean Baudrillard (1996) has written extensively, expressing how society will continually absorb simulacra because of the preference for it over reality.

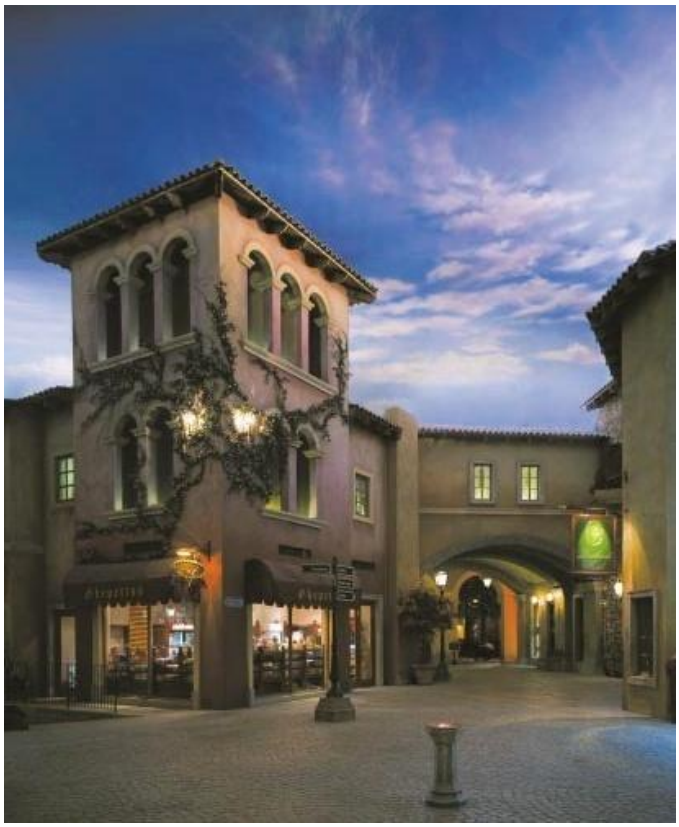


Figure 18: Another perfect day in Montecasino (Image: Illuminating Engineering Society, 2002)

There is a greater sincerity about reproductions or copies because of the fact that they do not try to hide the falsity. They openly proclaim to be better than the real thing as is demonstrated by the pay-off line of the Tuscan styled housing Estate, Monte Pollino which proclaims in its brochure that “Tuscany was never so perfect!” (Monte Pollino brochure, 2006). Authenticity has been overwhelmed and

surpassed by copies (MacCannell and MacCannell, 1993). Umberto Eco (1990) too believes that society is less concerned with the narratives embedded in such venues than it is with how well the copy imitates the original.

The creators of themed environments only need to suspend the visitor's disbelief in so far as it is required to motivate visitors into spending money, and it would seem that the creators of Montecasino have been successful in this endeavour. In an interview with Tubby, owner of the *Verdicchio* restaurant at Montecasino, he said to me in his soft, husky, Godfather-like voice: "Its easy to spot the first-timers. They are always pointing at everything [décor and architecture]". Tubby's observation was confirmed when in the course of fieldwork, I overheard a group of Afrikaans visitors to Montecasino, who were walking from the western end of the complex toward the casino. Pointing at the faux buildings inside of the complex, one of the women in the group remarked: "Kyk al hierdie mooi villas" (Look at all the lovely villas). Not only do the woman's comments indicate how visitors to Montecasino genuinely buy into the narrative of the theme on a conceptual level, but they also provide a glimpse of how reality is subverted by a more convincing, improved simulation. De Roos (1994) too notes how visitors to Disneyland's Jungle River Cruise are often unable to tell the difference between the real animals and the animatronic ones.

> But in Disneyland, it is sometimes hard to know where fantasy ends and reality begins (De Roos, 1994:62).

The simulation may be convincing, but it assumes a persona, and is materialised through people's willingness (or longing) to believe in the possibility of a utopian existence. For this to happen, simulacra must necessarily blur, fade into, and confuse reality. Time and space must collapse in on themselves, distorting perception and lending truth and credibility to the narration. Giddens (1990) believes that such a collapsing of time and space is not symptomatic of postmodernity, but instead, a consequence of modernity (Philips, 2001). Philips'

(2001) notion is endorsed by the view that such diversions are more inherent in today's urban, technological existence because it de facto removes people from their biologically normal natures. Indeed, entire industries have been spawned built on the notion of removing people from reality and the treachery of everyday life. Examples include fiction literature films and video games, all of which can become avenues of escapism.

> The dynamism of modernity derives from the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space 'zoning' of social life; the disembedding of social systems; and the reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups (Giddens, 1990:16).

Yoshimoto (1994:186), however, discussing the fantastical nature of Disneyland, asserts that:

> The paradox of this fantasy is that the more successful Disneyland is in its creation of fantasy space, the less conscious visitors are of its fantastic nature. Fantasy succeeds only when it is not perceived as such.

Thus for many who visit themed entertainment venues, while they may be fantastical places, they are not fantasy places as such. Instead, they are temporary realities enjoying the patronage of people desperate to escape the banality of everyday reality. Themed environments take advantage of, and play on the impressionability, vulnerability and idealism of visitors. As Eco (1989:203) writes:

> Kitsch refers to the kind of work that tries to justify its provocative ends by assuming the garb of an aesthetic experience, by palming itself off as art. (Eco, 1989:203).

Montecasino is art, the art of illusion and manipulation. Montecasino is the illusionist and hypnotist who, once one arrives for the performance, distracts the visitor from what is really happening with fantastical tricks. What is really

happening is that visitors are gently led, coaxed and massaged into the cycle of consumerism and the purchasing of temporary utopia, for the consumer thinking that they are free is the greatest illusion of all (Tomlinson, 1991). For those who accept Montecasino for what it is, it is a wondrous place filled with new and exciting experiences. It is perhaps this dichotomy that we need to better understand, rather than to simply dismiss it as an over-stylised, under-scrutinised phenomenon of the (post) modern era.

At Montecasino, old meets new in a village that aims to attract visitors with nostalgic reflections of a bygone time, and the promise of cutting edge entertainment technology and innovation. A bicycle with a baby chair on the back and two old Gilera motorcycles are parked at various points around the village, none of which will ever be used because Montecasino is a village designed exclusively for the pedestrian. Cars and motorcycles are relegated to décor and spectacle. Their inactivity sets the tone for the tranquil and serene environment the complex aims to portray as an antidote to the frenzy that exists on the outside. By presenting such items to the public, the decorators of Montecasino are personalising the complex, giving it a face, even if only in the imagination of the visitor. These props tell the story of village life, one that is care-free and without the constraints and fears found in modern cities. They speak to a simpler, idealistic period and place, and add to the mystique and romanticism of the venue.

It is a convincing aesthetic. The incredible attention to detail draws its visitors in, mesmerising them with quaint village exhibitions, all inanimate, but all incredibly lifelike and believable at the same time. In the window of one of the apartments in the fishing neighbourhood hangs a crab net. In the window of another apartment, a cat waits patiently over a small fishbowl in which a small orange goldfish is suspended, as if waiting for its chance to pounce. All the while, plastic pigeons watch visitors stroll through the streets from the balconies and ledges above. Montecasino is a photograph, a postcard made real, a snapshot of a Tuscan

village frozen in time and preserved for the curious visitor. The fishermen have abandoned their nets, the garlic and pans are never used to prepare a meal, and the cat keeps vigil day after day. Because, however, there is so much to see, and visitors cannot possibly take it all in, even over several village excursions[24], they perfectly serve the purpose of fantasy and spectacle. They provoke the curiosity and tell a story of a world and life that is unlike the real ones we lead outside the Tuscan façade. They conjure up their own narratives in the mind of the visitor, none of them exactly alike, but all idealistic and dreamy.

The carefully constructed scenes are more than simply visual spectacles of Italian iconography, rich colours and playful architecture. It is much more than that. There is a richness of textures to Montecasino, the way in which it "feels" to the visitor, both literally and figuratively. As one walks through the cobbled streets of Montecasino, which as Le Page (2001) comments, are "just uneven enough to fool the feet into thinking they're tripping alongside authentic Italian peasantry", one's ankles are constantly adjusting to the unevenness of the cobbled walkways. Each slightly raised cobblestone places the slightest pressure underfoot, with every step a new experience. The walls of the Tuscan villas are rough and weathered, with chipped off areas of plaster exposing bricks shipped in from Tuscany by the construction company. Montecasino is as much a tactile environment as it is a visually enchanting one. Indeed, Frederique is one of many who have been misled by the clever design which masterfully achieves its goal. Visitors can often be seen challenging and confirming their instincts and perceptions by touching the walls and trees to see if indeed they are real.

On a winter's morning during the mid-term school holidays, I sat observing and taking notes in the foodcourt. Just a few tables away from me, an elderly lady and what I assumed was her granddaughter were enjoying an ice-cream they had

[24] Having frequently visited Montecasino over a period of more than eight years, I would constantly observe new details that had been in place for years. The "displays" are rarely changed, and those that are, are the ones that are obvious to the visitor

purchased from Baglios at the eastern entrance to the foodcourt (because of the controlled climate in Montecasino, people enjoying ice-cream in winter is a common sight). The woman had chosen to have hers served in a cup and was running the tiny plastic spoon around the bottom of the cup as its contents neared their end, in an attempt to salvage the last remaining dollops. The young girl, who looked approximately eight years of age, had chosen a wafer cone with a flake in the centre of the ice-cream. The serviette which had been wrapped around the cone to prevent the ice cream from dripping on the floor had gotten soggy from the ice cream that had begun to melt. As they finished, they got up from the table to make their way to dispose of the cup and serviette in one of the bins stationed at the entrance. On their way, the woman stopped, changed course and walked over to one of the large maple trees adjacent to the fountain in the middle of the foodcourt and ran her hands across the tree's trunk to get a sensation of the bark. The young girl, only realising moments later that her grandmother had stopped, came to see what the distraction was. The elderly lady did this for nearly half a minute, while the granddaughter, who did not appear to be totally convinced by the tree's *inauthenticity*, began to knock on the trunk, as if knocking on a door, to check that the density and the acoustics of the fake tree were the same as the real ones found outside.

The granddaughter's attention was diverted by a dove sitting on a nest on one of the higher boughs of the tree and halted her inspection of the tree. Pointing it out to her grandmother, the two then debated whether or not the dove was real. They waited for a while to see if it moved and when it did not, they eventually made their way out of the food court, occasionally looking over their shoulder to see if the dove had changed position. What this example indicates is how convincing the simulation can be, and how it can assume a reality all its own. While many of the guests are aware of the apocryphal, the investment of effort and expense becomes itself the commodity or the attraction. In this sense, the simulation or the substitute is better than the real thing, thereby indicating that themed environments offer an

improvement on reality. The experience of Montecasino is everything it was intended to be, convincing. It is a mesmerising, immersing and fantastical escape, not to Tuscany, but from Johannesburg, and from reality. Montecasino does not necessarily succeed because it replicates Tuscany, but because it removes undesirable traits from our outside world. The chosen theme could have been different, but key to its persuasiveness is its foreignness, and thus its ability to transport visitors to a surreal space. It is in fact, designed to be better than the real thing, purifying, sanitizing and distilling the most revered elements of our world, and eliminating those from which we wish to escape.

The trees, as manufactured as they may be, have the look and feel of a real living organism, the rough bark abrasive as one pulls one's hand across it. In total, there are thirty five trees of different species in Montecasino. They have been meticulously crafted, first from steel rods and beams to create the framework, and then from fibreglass to enhance and enhance the structure. Various putties and resins were then layered on to the trunks and branches to provide texture, and each one of the one hundred thousand plastic leaves per tree were attached by hand (Montecasino promotional video, 2000). The large leafy vegetation adds to the park / village-like ambience. What this conveniently arrived at number of one hundred thousand leaves per tree indicates is an idealised sense of control, of mastery over the environment, of nature itself. This self-assured rhetoric is communicated to the guest in the Montecasino Fact sheet, which underscores the enormous effort and capital invested in the complex in order to ensure a novel and unparalleled leisure and entertainment experience for the visitor.

The healthy and well-foliated trees inside the complex, with their strong boughs and thick trunks, are far more convincing than the emaciated looking real saplings in the open parking area. While they may not be the real thing, they are better and more convincing. These are all props as if Montecasino were a stage show, where patrons and visitors of the complex are the actors and extras of this theatrical

performance. Here, there are no permanent inhabitants or locals, only tourists who come for a day of site seeing, to immerse themselves in the Italian “culture”, and to sample its dishes and way of life. By allowing visitors to Montecasino to peer into the windows of the apartments, the interior decorators are toying with the voyeuristic tendencies of the guests, letting them believe that they are seeing into another private world. Visitors will of course never catch a glimpse of the inhabitants of these apartments because they don’t exist. As Le Page sarcastically notes:

> The village appears lifelike, but the proper inhabitants are not there. They have fled before the invading army of tourists (Le Page, 2001).

Indeed, Montecasino has a tourist feel, with buses of real foreign tourists arriving each day to take in Johannesburg’s version of Tuscany, although the majority of tourists are from Johannesburg itself. First timers can be spotted, snapping away with their cameras, as if real tourists experiencing a taste of Italy for the first time. Even if many guests are aware of the fact that there are no real inhabitants, there are enough distractions and fascinations to occupy the imagination of the visitor and cast a shadow of doubt on their reflective sense of criticism. It is not only in Montecasino that this phenomenon of “dressing up” the city/village has occurred. In Christine Boyer’s well-crafted contribution to Sorkin’s *Variations on a Theme Park,* she describes how certain old sections of South Street Seaport in Manhattan are being revamped in order to attract businesses:

> …these newer sites laden with historical allusions to the traditional vision of the city: coherent place of intimate streets, lined with small scale facades and shopping arcades, ornamented with signs, punctuated by open spaces, trees, lampposts and benches. The aim is theatrical: to represent certain visual image of the city, to create perspectival views shown through imaginary prosceniums in order to conjure up emotionally satisfying images of bygone times. Architecture and the theatre use similar means to design places of pleasure and spectacle, manipulating scenery, ornaments and facades, to underscore the sentiment of their play. (Boyer, 1992:184).

In many respects, Montecasino is theatre. All the lavish and exacting props are set out, and the stage is set for consumption. There are, however, no real local actors. There is only an illusion of them in the material artefacts that really populate the setting. Instead, visitors to the complex become both the actors and the audience. Staff too play an important role in maintaining the illusion, and play a valuable role in fostering the fantasy and embedding the narrative within the psyche of the guest. This "cultural" inculcation was amusingly demonstrated to me on a Saturday evening when I arrived at Maestros in Montecasino for dinner with friends. Having announced our arrival to the maitre de, we were asked if we would like to sit next to the river. My friends, without any wry smiles, rolling of eyes or snide remarks, nodded and followed the gentleman who led us to a table next to the water-filled concrete partition that separates the casino from the retail section. Had we been anywhere else, this partition would have been referred to as a sloot or dike, but in Montecasino, it is a river. Similarly, the pleas of a young girl to her mother for money to throw into the river: *"Mommy, give me five cents so I can make a wish"* reveal the earnestness with which coins are lobbed into the simulated river, and gives an indication of how visitors to the complex buy into the surreality of Montecasino. Despite all the simulacra and all the falsehoods, the Tuscan Village is attributed a reality all its own, one that is not contingent on academic scrutiny and debunking. Montecasino, the village that *lies* under a painted sky, is a world apart from the one that lies outside its walls. These lies however are creatively covered.

The theming is omnipresent, and the visitor cannot escape the soothing embrace of Tuscany at any point in the village. In the river that separates the retail and restaurant component of Montecasino from the gambling section, families of ducks in a variety of poses, seem to gently bob in the water. Like their counterparts on the land (within the village), however, they too are inanimate, yet their bobbing action does lend them some of the credibility their terrestrial counterparts lack.

Some of the ducks, those that appear to be looking for food beneath the surface of the water, have no neck or head, just a posterior that protrudes in the air. Ducklings are tied with a thin piece of nylon cord (which in the correct light is invisible) to the mother duck (who is anchored to the riverbed), so that they do not get lost, or sucked into the water filtration system. In many respects, the half-ducks represent the half-truths that Montecasino narrates. As a visitor to Montecasino, we are only allowed to see what is on the surface, an intricately woven story, which on the outside seems quite plausible. Beneath the surface, however, the thin veneer of simulacra covers a falsehood of emptiness.

Concealing Reality – Preserving the Fantasy

> To create a space of fantasy, any elements which remind visitors of their daily life and the outside world are carefully excluded (Yoshimoto, 1994:186).

True to the traditions of themed environments everywhere, Montecasino too conceals from the visitor the machinations of industry and commerce that are the very essence of its creation. Any glimpse of this reality would immediately shatter the fantasy and ultimately destroy the seamless process of massaging and persuading visitors into the act of consumption. Instead, reality is subverted, hidden from the visitor so as not to burden them with trivial concerns that may detract from them indulging in consumerism. This repeated act of subversion has its costs. While the creators of Montecasino have gone to great lengths to portray a village of fantasy and illusion, equal effort has been invested in ensuring that the reality of the village is hidden from the visitor. As the Montecasino promotional video informs the viewer:

> In the basement beneath the village of Montecasino is a cleverly designed maze of tunnels, roadways and loading bays, storerooms, offices and other high quality staff facilities as well as five hundred and

> fifty parking bays for VIP punters, giving them direct access to the casino (Montecasino Promotional Video, 2000).

In much the same way:

> Almost all the workings of Disney World are hidden from the spectator, much as productive forces are concealed in the image of the commodity. Miles of underground corridors – “utilidoors” in Disney parlance – transport workers, supplies, utilities, and telecommunications to the various parts of the “Total Vacation Kingdom”. Staff cafeterias, laundries and dry cleaners, costume and dressing rooms, and storage facilities are all located underground throughout the site (Wilson, 1994:119).

During one of my early visits to Montecasino in 2003, I was taken on a tour of the complex in order to familiarise me with the people and places I would be interacting with. Having met me at the information booth as had become our tradition, Jenni, as a senior member of the Public Relations department and the gatekeeper for my research led me through the casino and through a door marked “PRIVATE PARKING”. The door was against the northern end of the gaming floor and access was granted to us by Jenni swiping her electronically encoded staff pass against a computerised access panel. Behind this door was a beige wingback couch, as if it were a reception area. There was no receptionist in this small room, just a coffee table with a book on South African wildlife and an elegant glass vase filled with water and white arum lilies. Adjacent to the metal doors of an elevator was a staircase that led down to the Private Parking of the Salon Privé parking for Montecasino’s most valued guests, as well as one that led up to the management offices of the Montecasino corporate staff. I had entered this restricted area several times for meetings with Jenni, Debbie and several other members of Montecasino’s office based staff who are based above the first floor. On these floors (two and three), behind the Tuscan façade, are a maze of passages, flanked on either side by small, cubicle-like offices. This is the inner sanctum of Montecasino, which is strictly off limits to the public. It is here where much of the control resides, and where the decision making takes place.

The office space is a hive of activity. Neatly dressed employers sit behind their desks typing furiously on their computers. Phones are constantly ringing and are politely answered by staff who conduct the day to day business of managing the complex, its image, evolution and functioning. The majority of the office space follows and open plan structure, with offices reserved for upper and middle management. Some of the vacant offices have been utilised as temporary storage rooms, which house gift packs, promotional material from past and upcoming events, as well as large boxes of files that contain marketing and financial plans. There are also several executive boardrooms as well as smaller meeting rooms for more impromptu meetings too large to take place in an individual's office.

Unlike the fancifully decorated windows that overlook the cobbled streets of the village, the windows that overlook the casino are those of rooms and offices that host real people who together ensure the smooth running of the complex. The desks, computers and workstations all serve their utilitarian purpose. Behind the scenes, backstage as it were, a somewhat chaotic and frenzied office environment lies in stark contrast to the serenity and equanimity of the village it overlooks. This is nothing like the surreal fantasy of the Tuscan village. This is the very real inner workings, the true heart of Montecasino, which unlike the village floor, has no theming or props. Here, there is no show and no spectacle. Everything is purely work, not leisure orientated. The mood too is vastly different to that of the various neighbourhoods of the village. It is a far more serious one, and one that can in no way interact with village, for to do so would contaminate the virtual ambience. As such, despite having the best view of the village from their elevated office space, there are no windows that look out over the streets and gaming floor, as visitors of the complex may spot corporate employees going about their daily work. The staff who inhabit these offices are also provided with a separate entrance so that they do not have any interaction with visitors to the village. The windows of the façade behind which the corporate offices are located are all shuttered. There are no

decorative props to lure the gaze of the guest. In fact, the intention is to prevent casino patrons from looking up, in much the same way as the vines over the gaming tables do.

As if to indicate levels of seniority, all corporate staff are housed on the second and third floors, while all the logistical, security and support staff are housed in the basement below the casino. This subterranean labyrinth is brightly illuminated by fluorescent lighting. The tiled passages are alive with movement. Security personnel, tradesmen and technicians all move throughout this underground network so as to have not exposure to the actual village, or more precisely, so that the fantasy is not compromised by exposure to reality. Deliveries are brought in to the complex through a rear entrance that links with the basement. The trolleys on which they bring in their goods are pushed through the underground warren, where they ultimately end up in the restaurants and stores. One of the main congregation areas in the basement is a large staff canteen with parquet floors and several small round tables with plastic chairs, where breakfasts and lunches are served for those where Montecasino is a place of work, not play. The seriousness of the basement activity is brought home when on one visit, I walked past a security centre with Jenni. The security point was nothing more than a small room adjacent to the passage. The room was, however, secured from the inside and separated from the passage by chest high counter with large round steel bars painted in a creamy white extending to the ceiling. Behind the counter was a uniformed security woman, whose role it was to sign in and out the shotguns and other weapons that rested on a gun rack behind her.

While the village is strictly a gun-free zone, the guns that are kept in the basement are primarily used for the transportation and movement of cash from the casino floor to cash in transit vehicles. This is a highly risky procedure in South Africa as cash in transit are frequently the targets of heist gangs. The security personnel who safeguard the cash during the process are heavily armed, both to deter would

be attackers as well as to provide security and protection. The rules of the village do not apply in the basement or the corporate offices for that matter. Here, it is back to the realities of the outside world, where crime and danger are all ever-present, and very much a part of the local psyche.

Also in the basement, but in a room I was not allowed to enter, is a security control room which is staffed by two personnel at all times. This security control room contains the monitors of all the closed circuit television cameras. Here, trained security personnel constantly monitor the transmissions of the surveillance cameras to look for any suspicious or criminal behaviour. From here, security staff on the casino and village floor can be covertly deployed to intervene or investigate further, thus ensuring that village life remains orderly and that visitors are never made aware of any concerns of criminal activity. All of the inner functioning of Montecasino is hidden from public view so that guests can focus on the spectacle uninterrupted and unhindered by a reality which would upset the fantasy on offer. Any break in this process would disturb the illusion of escape and potentially derail the act of consumption.

The façade behind the casino wall, both below and above the ground, is not the only area of the complex where reality is concealed. The windows above the shop fronts, which are dressed to simulate a look inside the typical Tuscan household, are only one metre deep. The apartment window displays of fishing baskets, football jerseys and cats watching over a tiny fishbowl, all hide a beige wall directly behind them. These are not apartments at all, but are in fact storerooms for the restaurants and retail stores. These rooms are primarily used for storing unsold stock that has just come off the shop floor, or stock that is about to be introduced to the visitors. Many also have a small office from where the store or restaurant manager can run the day-to-day operations of the outlet. So the reality of running a business is kept from the public gaze so as in no way to tamper with the illusion of a perfect and fantastical land. It is as if the logistical and supply chain component

of these operations do not exist, but rather that new offerings magically replace old ones overnight, with no human intervention. Montecasino is a place where work is hidden from the visitor so as not to remind them of their own realities, for this is a surreal village, where visitors come to escape the hardships of work and to indulge in fantasy and escape. This was clearly brought home to me when I was making notes on a bench at the eastern end of the complex during the World Summit on Sustainable development. As I sat jotting down observations with a pencil on my small A5 notepad, two Afrikaans speaking ladies walked past on their way to the casino. They looked surprised by my behaviour, and to them, I was clearly not behaving as one would in a place such as Montecasino. As they continued on their way, momentarily glancing back at me, I overheard one of the ladies comment to her friend:

> Moenie hier leer nie. Dit is die verkeerde plek. [English translation – "Don't learn here. This is the wrong place (for work and learning)."

Their reaction is indicative of how many perceive Montecasino and its purpose for them, that of escape. It is an environment where one can leave behind the duties, obligations and realities of the outside world. For them, to bring it (reality - work or learning as they saw it) within the hermetically sealed walls of the village was a contravention of some unwritten rule, one that contaminated the environment and acted as a reminder of all that they had come to Montecasino to leave behind outside. So all reminders of work, from the corporate employees and maintenance staff, to store operations are carefully concealed underground and behind Tuscan styled walls so as not to taint the leisure experience. Work cannot be veiled altogether though, as there must be individuals who wait and serve the visitors. Interaction with these individuals are fleeting and the reality of work is dressed more as service with a smile

Despite all the mechanisms in place to keep reality at bay, there are inevitably some unsavoury elements – or rather people - that infiltrate this fantastical space.

When this does happen, it too is managed in such a way that it is kept as far from the sight of the guest as possible, again not to hinder the leisure and entertainment experience. From its outset, Montecasino was positioned as an upmarket Tuscan escape for the more affluent communities of Johannesburg. The realities of the visitors, their varied social and economic backgrounds, have however been significantly broader than the initial target audience. Montecasino regularly conducts extensive and in-depth research in order to constantly monitor their client base as well as their spending patterns in an attempt monitor the demographics, spending power and buying patterns of their visitors, and remain abreast of market changes and demands.

Results from a study conducted between 2003 and 2005 by Dr. Dirk Prinsloo showed that the majority of visitors to the complex come primarily for gambling activities, this despite Montecasino being positioned as a family, retail and entertainment complex. Of greater interest, however, was the fact that more than 40% of the visitors to the village had a monthly household income of less than ten thousand Rand. Of the gamblers polled, nearly 30% were from households with a monthly income of less than five thousand Rand, falling into the lower Living Standards Measure (LSM) of between 1 and 5. Despite Montecasino adverts ending with the obligatory sentence of “Winners know when to stop”, which refers to the problem of gambling addiction, the average casino spend of these individuals was one and a half thousand Rand, more than thirty percent of their monthly income. No surprise then that study found the biggest gripe of gamblers to be insufficient casino payouts. Behind the flashing neon lights, the sounds of coins rattling against the metal slot machine reservoirs and marketing images of ecstatic and successful punters, lies a very real problem of habitual gambling, particularly amongst those who can least afford it. Taking a walk through the casino floor clearly brings these statistics to life, and fully exposes the human element behind the numbers.

While Montecasino is marketed to the more affluent inhabitants of Johannesburg's northern suburbs, shabbily dressed and dishevelled individuals who appear weary from their hours spent trying to change their fortunes can always be found in the casino, particularly at the slot machines. Despite the odds being heavily stacked against them, Montecasino remains a place of hope, where surely one day, their luck will change and their lives will be transformed from the daily struggle to a life of opulence and financial comfort through one single large payout. While winners may know when to stop, there are not many winners among these hopefuls, who knowingly or unwittingly create a chain of casualties, primarily among their direct dependents. Two encounters I had during my fieldwork drove home the scale of this affliction. First, was a chance conversation meeting I had with Florence, a short and stout domestic worker whom I met while sitting at one of the slot machines observing the behaviour of gambling patrons. Florence was in her mid forties and was dressed in a domestic worker's uniform with a headscarf tied neatly over her short hair. She was playing the fifty cent slot machine two machines away from the one at which I was seated. There was no rattling of coins coming from her post, just the polyphonic tones the machine made with each spin, every time devouring more of her money. Today was not her day, and she looked over at me with a resigned smile. Not knowing the appropriate response for someone who could clearly not afford to lose any more money, I simply smiled back. She stood up and walked the short distance to the machine next to mine and seated herself beside me to see if I was having any better fortune. I wasn't. While I was only gambling in order to remain seated and observe patrons, my luck was no better than hers.

Florence began lamenting the miserly ways of the machines and proposed to me a gambling business model that would pay out significantly more, and in so doing, attract more people to the gambling floor. The only flaw to her logic was that people, like herself, came to gamble and try their luck irrespective of the generosity, or lack thereof, of the casino. While clearly disappointed by her loss, Florence seemed resigned, but still cheerful, as if understanding the inevitability of

the outcome, yet amused by her continuous efforts to try and cheat fate. Florence was a Zimbabwean national who had come to South Africa legally in search of employment. This she had found in Craigavon, a suburb just north Montecasino, situated between Fourways and Dainfern.

> I work four days a week for a family in Craigavon. They let me stay there so its not far to come. I don't come here so much. Maybe three or four times a month. I am looking for work for the Wednesday (the day she was not employed by the family), but there is hard. (Personal communication with author, 2007).

Florence earned one thousand, five hundred Rand per month from the family, but did not pay rent to stay on their premises or pay for meals, most of which she prepared. She supplemented her income selling beadwork and other small crafts she made at informal markets in the city centre on the weekend. She would usually use the Wednesday she had free to come to Montecasino, very seldom coming on the weekends which she felt were too busy, and as a consequence, limited the chances of a winning payout even further. Florence was not married, and had a son, Simba, who stayed with her sister in Zimbabwe. Each month, she would send seven hundred and fifty rand home with fellow Zimbabweans making the trip back home, to help support her sister and her family, as well as her fifteen year old son who was still attending school. Florence would travel back to Zimbabwe approximately every three months, and would take back goods with her, simple commodities that were not available in her home country. While very grateful for the employment she had and the family for whom she worked, she told me that what she was earning was scarcely enough to support her family in Zimbabwe and send her son to school, something which she was not prepared to compromise on. Her trips to Montecasino she hoped would one day pay dividends so that she could move back to her family in Zimbabwe, but this had remained an elusive dream. She admitted that over the year she had been coming to Montecasino, she had been increasing her spend, initially fifty rand, but at the time of our interview, nearly three times as much. The money that Florence lost at Montecasino was money

which she admittedly could not send through to her family back home, but the lure of a lucrative payday was too much for her to resist.

There are many individuals like Florence who frequent Montecasino, some whose situation is far direr than hers. While the temptations of Montecasino's gaming floor was becoming more and more difficult for Florence to resist, the frequency of her visits, as well as the situations under which she gambled pale in comparison to some other regulars, and it is clear from the design of some of the village offerings that developers, designers and owners had foreseen the rise of these social issues. In stark contrast to the entertainment options offered throughout the complex, as well as the Bambini crèche facility, the "Waiting area", which is situated below the escalators leading from the Grand Entrance, offers patrons some respite from the relentless sensory indulgence. The waiting area, with sandblasted, patterned, mosaic glass doors at the entrance, and beige and charcoal coloured carpeting is much like an airport lounge, and is capable of seating approximately 80 people in two rows of back to back chairs. The monotony of chairs, which also line the beige walls, is broken up by small tables on which drinks or bags may be placed. Alongside seven floral paintings hanging on the wall are six television sets, all of which are showing "Cartoon Network" a children's channel which features various popular cartoons. There are also two vending machines, one selling potato crisps while the other sells a variety of soft-drinks. Nowhere in the Montecasino guide book or on its website is any mention made of the waiting area. The waiting area is also one of the few places in Montecasino that does not keep strictly to the Tuscan theme, and could quite easily have been lifted from any airport lounge. It is a refuge of last resort, for those that do not have the money to gamble or entertain themselves any further, and for those that cannot afford, or do not want the expense of paying for the crèche to care for and supervise their children. During peak times, entrance to the waiting room is controlled by Montecasino staff who sit at a desk at the entrance. Also at the entrance is a sign that reads:

> This area is for sole use by children and children accompanied by parents, the elderly and the disabled. Use of this area is limited to 1 hour only, and to be used at your own risk (Montecasino waiting area sign).

While the waiting area is never full, there are inevitably a handful of young, underprivileged children sitting in the waiting room chairs watching cartoons, along with one or two elderly patrons who are seeking to rest their weary feet. The reality is that children are seldom accompanied by adults.

On a Thursday evening visit to the waiting area, I met Thulani, a scruffily dressed young boy who appeared not to have with him the warm clothes needed for what was a cool August evening. There was no security staff on duty that Thursday night to monitor access. He was engrossed in an episode of Tom and Jerry showing on all of the television sets, which once finished, gave him an interlude while waiting for the next instalment. During the break he got up from his chair and walked over to me and sat just one chair away. I greeted him and he shyly smiled. English was not his first language, but during our brief conversation, he proudly told me that he was four years old. I asked him where his parents were, to which he responded that they were “playing” (gambling). He seemed entirely at ease with being left on his own, and this was clearly not the first time he had been to Montecasino’s waiting area while his parents gambled. While Montecasino markets itself to the more affluent, it will in reality welcome anyone who wishes to spend money, and is no judge of whether they are spending their money wisely or not. The waiting room’s purpose, like its theme, is not in keeping with the Montecasino experience, and it is a tacit and unconscious acknowledgment that beneath the gloss and flashing neon lights, behind the spectacle of glitz and razzmatazz, there are elements to the venue which are best hidden from public view (concealed behind sandblasted doors beneath the escalators), for they are a threat to the illusion of escape and fantasy.

Apart from the concealment of work, as well as any reminders of the undesirable element of the world outside, the internal environment of the village is a fully immersing one, not allowing its patrons any view of the precinct outside. From the outside, the faux shuttered windows of the façade are designed to stir curiosity and lure visitors in, serving only as a decoration to break the continuity of the outer village walls. On the inside, however, these very same "windows" are non-existent. At no point in the village, apart from the two pedestrian exits and the entrance to the outdoor piazza, can the visitor see outside, and only once at the very threshold of the village. Even the seemingly inescapable reality of time is manipulated, for there is not natural light to indicate the changing of morning to afternoon and afternoon to night. Montecasino is a timeless village trapped in a perpetual, romanticised twilight. Moreover, there are no clocks in the casino to indicate the passing of time. At Montecasino, time stands still when you're having fun. Protected from the elements, visitors are completely oblivious to the arrival of any inclement weather, as they are cocooned in a climate controlled environment where neither the passing of time nor the whims of Mother Nature can dampen the thrill of the experience. This manipulation of time and space shields village guests from the outside realities of crime, obligation and responsibility by enveloping them in a hyper-real state, where fantasy and possibility overwhelm the senses and emotions, and create an environment of escape and hope.

Reaching for a dream – *"Montecasino Cares"*



In early 2009, as part of Montecasino Mall's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, and part of a broader repositioning of the Montecasino brand, the complex changed its payoff line from "Life is Beautiful" to "We've got it". Montecasino also developed a new logo for its social development initiatives which refers to the mall's adoption of the Oasis Haven of Love Foundation, a home in Randburg for children who have been infected and affected by HIV-Aids. (BizCommunity, 2009). The redesign of the mall's brand promises to continue the same spirit of excitement and fantasy, of offering something that few others can. The "Montecasino Cares" logo speaks to the importance with which it views giving back to the community. The concept of "giving back" is a popular term used by many corporate entities when referring to their corporate social investment schemes, and ironically implies having taken something away, for one cannot give back something which one has not already taken. Perhaps it is a tacit acknowledgement of what it takes from its patrons, for this is the very reason for its commercial success.

Since the opening of the village, and as part of the Tsogo Sun Group, Montecasino has always been a conscientious corporate citizen which has participated in a variety of Social Economic Development (SED) initiatives. The Tuscan village will often play host to various charity functions that double as publicity events, and Montecasino's public relations department had established a good relationship with several charity organisations which assist the needy and underprivileged. During a warm December day in late 2005 I was invited to attend one of these events, which occur approximately once a month. I met Jenni at the entrance to the office suite and accompanied her to the location where the event was taking place. She was running late due to other work obligations which she had to meet and our walk was brisk, but we nevertheless had an opportunity to chat about the event as we made our way through the casino, and then the village streets toward the western pedestrian entrance of the complex.

> These are the ones (events) I really love. It makes it all worthwhile. It's also incredibly sad though, knowing what these kids are going through. The little guys today are mostly from "Bara" (Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital). (Personal Communication with author, December 17, 2005).

We were on our way to attend Montecasino's hosting of the "Reach for a Dream Foundation", a foundation which caters to the wishes and well being of children suffering from life threatening illnesses.

As we arrived, the welcoming and introductions by Steve Howell, the General Manager of Montecasino were already under way. Debbie Costello was standing beside him, in front of her, approximately thirty children that had applied to the foundation for a day away from their hospital beds. Many of the little ones seemed a bit bewildered by all the formalities and kept glancing over at a table that was covered with slices of cake, fruit juices and goodie bags filled with sweets. All of the children on this day were from an underprivileged background, but were at Montecasino not because of their poor background, but because all of them suffered from a terminal illness. As Steve Howell spoke about how honoured Montecasino was to be hosting their trip, photographers from Montecasino, the foundation and suburban newspapers took photos of the delegates and children gathered in front of them. While by no means an extravagant wish, a day at Montecasino could not have been more fitting with the purposes of the foundation's excursions, to create a different environment for the child so that they may realise their dreams and not have to live without hope. Montecasino may not be in Tuscany, but it is certainly a world apart from the hospital wards that these young children have endured, most of them because of AIDS and cancer.

Once the speeches had ended, Steve Howell handed over a donation to the Reach for a Dream Foundation and the children who had been sitting in front of the speakers, were invited to come up and enjoy the cake and take a goodie bag.

Their excitement was clearly evident, and their patience throughout the formalities was about to be rewarded. Once the lunch was over, the children were given a private Flight of Fantasy show at the Montecasino Bird Gardens. They were also surprised by “Father Christmas” who handed out presents donated by Montecasino and some of the foundation’s other corporate sponsors. Most of the children were far too young to understand and appreciate the architectural detail and Tuscan theming but they were fully engrossed in the spectacle. For them it was a day of pure escapism, where they were able to leave the constraints of their hospital beds, and forget about their concerns, their circumstances and the inevitability of their terminal illnesses. For the brief few hours these children spent at Montecasino, they got to indulge in another world, one where for those moments they could forget about being incurably sick, and immerse themselves in that fantasy. Their experience shows that Montecasino succeeds in escape and in fantasy, not necessarily because it removes visitors from their world to a Tuscan village, but because it provides something that is different, out of the ordinary and otherly. It amalgamates all the ingredients required for escape, diversion, distraction, “surreality” and hope, and this is what makes it a magical and fantastical place for young and old alike, those from affluence and those from terrible circumstances and dire poverty.

Another individual I met had come to Montecasino not for escape, but in search of hope and a better life. As I sat in the foodcourt on a Tuesday afternoon waiting to meet a friend for lunch, a young man approached the table at which I was waiting. As he drew nearer, he cupped his palms together as if he were praying. It was clear that he wanted to speak to me. In a timid and unassertive voice, he said:

> “Sorry Sir. I’m looking for a job”. I looked up seeing him with his hands pressed together. “I’ll do gardening, anything” he said out of what sounded like sheer desperation. (Personal communication with author, 2004).

I stood up from the table and extended my hand to introduce myself to the man. As was his custom, Paul averted eye contact with me and cupped his forearm when he shook my hand. I invited him to sit and he, seeming a bit surprised, obliged. Paul and I chatted for nearly twenty minutes, during which time he explained to me that he had been coming to Montecasino almost every day for the past six months in the hope of finding employment. He lived with his brother in Diepsloot, an impoverished informal settlement approximately thirteen kilometres north of Montecasino. Paul told me that both his parents had passed away two years ago and as the eldest brother and primary breadwinner, he had taken it upon himself to improve their situation. The small shack which he and his brother shared was small and frequently flooded in summer by thunderstorms. Paul's brother was still in school and Paul not only expressed his regret that he was not able to complete his schooling, but also his wish that his brother complete a high school education. During the evenings, Paul worked in Kyalami, a northern suburb of Johannesburg, as a chef at a pizza restaurant. He saw Montecasino as a place where he would be able to apply this experience and gain more meaningful daytime employment. Because Paul could not afford the approximately five Rand taxi fare from Diepsloot to Montecasino, he walks for nearly four hours to and from Montecasino for what had so far been a futile attempt at finding employment.

> (When I come here) I just go round and round and round and round marketing for a job… I'm suffering all over. (Personal communication with author, 2004).

Having left school after the tenth grade and speaking in broken English, Paul's prospects of finding stable employment were remote given the competitive job market, as well as the thousands of individuals in similar circumstances. Many of the restaurants within the village already had an established staff compliment, and while these are always fluid, Paul had not had any success in finding a job there, and had resorted to approaching patrons for whatever work they could offer. I myself was in no position to offer Paul any employment. The desperation of his

request was matched only be the despondency he displayed when talking about how difficult it has been to find work. While he still felt that Montecasino was “a nice place”, for Paul, life at Montecasino is not beautiful.

Like the many who visit Montecasino, Paul saw the complex as a means to an escape or a place where dreams come true, but for an entirely different reason. Paul’s hope was to make Montecasino a part of his reality by finding employment there. Because he was not there to spend money, because he did not have any money to spend, his presence at the complex was unwelcome. He told me that complex security had on several occasions asked him to leave the premises, as he had not been discouraged by the “No Jobs” signs outside some of the stores in complex. As my meeting with Paul drew to a close, I wished him good luck for the impromptu meeting he was to have with the unsuspecting manager of Zenbu, a Japanese sushi restaurant that also serves pizza. I arranged to meet him the following day to continue our discussion. He assured me that I would see him again, but he did not appear for our meeting. In the following months, I would visit Zenbu to see if he had been offered a job, but his relentless canvassing throughout Montecasino had yielded little fruit as there is no pizza chef named Paul at Zenbu.

The story of Florence and Paul, and that of Thulani’s parents, all of whom come to Montecasino as much to escape as they do to seek their fortunes and a better life, are much like those of most of Montecasino’s visitors. Not only are themed entertainment and leisure utopias a place of fantasy and escape, but for many they are also places of hope, a chance for a better life, even if only momentarily. While themed complexes instil in the imagination of the visitor a sense of escape and “otherworldliness”, they are in reality restrictive, prohibitive and homogenising spaces. Herein lies the paradox of escape.

The paradox of escape

In an age of consumerism, companies compete fiercely in order to lure consumers to their temples of trade. New ploys and gimmicks are constantly being dreamed up enticing the shopper to partake in the act of consumption which is more and more becoming a leisure activity. Themed entertainment complexes like Montecasino are peddlers of fantasy and masters of illusion. These shrines to consumerism and materialism instil in the imagination of the visitor a sense of escape and "otherworldliness". They transport their visitors to another time and place, one that is purposefully foreign and vague in its specificity. Because these places are timeless, their visitors are anonymous and exist as carefree individuals in this surreal state for as long as they choose to stay, where after they must leave this virtual no-mans-land and return to the reality of their lives outside the land of magic.

While fostering the sense of escape and freedom that eludes everyday life, such places are in reality restrictive, prohibitive and homogenising spaces. Themed environments succeed because they remove guests from the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the outside world, encasing them in a mythologized and romanticised space, devoid of danger and reality. They are narrativised spaces[25] and tell a story to eager and absorbing listeners, allowing people to temporarily suppress the concerns of their otherwise mundane existence. In order to achieve this, however, visitors must physically, mentally and emotionally surrender themselves to the control of the facade. The control that is imposed subtly and unconsciously implants in the visitor a sense of freedom and escape. This is both the reward and the price of submitting to the charms on offer.

[25] See Philips (2001) for an excellent discussion on the stories theme parks tell.

Control by Design

Physical acquiescence begins immediately upon arrival, where vehicular visitors to the complex are compelled to pay an entrance fee in order to make use of the parking facilities. Visitors are then directed where to park, by signs, security / traffic personnel, clearly marked parking bays, and bollards that prevent vehicles from entering a higher level until the lower levels have been filled. This allows for more effective policing and patrolling of the parking spaces. From there, all who enter are required to go through a security clearance procedure, where their person is scanned for any contraband and must allow security personnel to inspect their bags for the same. While individuals are at liberty to decline having their bag and person searched, to do so would only raise suspicions as to why they choose not to submit, and elicit further questioning. However public Montecasino may appear, it is truly a private space and the right of entry is reserved. Those who do not allow security to screen them can and will be denied access. Entry therefore is not a right at all, but a privilege bestowed only on those who comply fully with the laws of the village.

Signs at the entrance ways to Montecasino make it clear that the village is a smoke-free environment. Smoking, for so long part of Italian culture is not permitted “inside” the village. Smokers are accommodated by three smoking casinos, two just off the main floor and a more recently opened smoking area in the Salon Privé. Thus, to light up, one must enter the casino floor. For those smokers not wanting to gamble, smoking is permitted in the open air spaces of the village, in the main piazza as well as the uncovered pedestrian entrances, all of which have rectangular rubbish bins with a recessed brass ashtray filled with sand in which to extinguish exhausted cigarettes. Many of the restaurants in Montecasino also offer smoking seating areas and when approaching the maitre de, the first question one is asked is “Smoking or Non Smoking?” These smoking areas, like those of the smoking casino are cordoned off from the non smoking areas, usually by glass

partitions and have extraction fans to remove smoke in order for it not to permeate into the village.

Also at the entrances to the village are signs indicating that Montecasino is a gun-free zone. As one of its offered facilities, Montecasino has gun safes for all firearm carrying patrons, where their firearms can securely be stowed for the duration of their visit. In the outside world of danger, crime and violence, the firearm is used for defence and protection by licensed carriers. There is, however no need for them in Montecasino, as here, “life is beautiful”, orderly and controlled. In order to enter, all firearms must be declared and handed over to security for safekeeping, until the gun owner leaves the safety and security of the village, and again enters a world of uncertainty, where they again become responsible for their own protection and safety. Access will be denied to those who fail to comply with this procedure. In so doing, Montecasino takes away control from the gun owner and assumes responsibility for the safety of its patrons. Not only could gun carrying patrons potentially pose a significant danger to guests, but the sight of a holstered weapon strapped to a visitor would be the antithesis of what Montecasino is about. Despite several attacks on the casino and even the Palazzo hotel, Montecasino, by not permitting the entry of firearms, is reassuring the visiting public that here, in this Tuscan village, there is no need to worry about one’s safety, that there are enough controls in place to ensure that self defence will not be necessary.

Gun ownership in South Africa is a contentious issue, where the number of unlicensed firearms, illegally smuggled in from neighbouring countries (and stolen from licensed owners) far outnumber those that are carried with the consent of the law. Despite legislation around firearm ownership becoming ever more restrictive, more and more South Africans, who feel inadequately protected by the police and private security firms, are turning to gun ownership to protect themselves, their families and their possessions. A lack of control in the real, outside world has forced many to take matters of defence and protection into their own hands. At

Montecasino, that need, and that control is taken away, and thus control is imposed on the visitor.

Having successfully entered and already relinquished a measure of control, movement is restricted to certain areas through a variety of means. Visitors are “free”, indeed encouraged to wander the cobbled streets which direct movement through walkways, around fountains and past spectacle. Access to the cinemas, the theatres, the arcade, Skate Park and bird gardens are for paying customers only, and access is strictly monitored. Even the seemingly public piazza of the foodcourt, with its abundant tables and chairs have signs posted at all the entrances stating that the tables and chairs are reserved for patrons of the surrounding restaurants and fast food outlets only. So too the waiting room is for use only by children and the elderly. Signs throughout the complex clearly indicate what one can and cannot do, and which spaces may be used and by whom.



Figure 19: A sign showing the restricted use of the foodcourt for paying patrons (Image: author, 2009)

At the entrances to the casino, guards stand duty ensuring that only those who are old enough to gamble are allowed on to the casino floor. On a recent family excursion to Montecasino, my wife and I wanted to take a shortcut through the casino to the piazza. Accompanying us in her pram was our eleven month old daughter, Madison. I wanted to use the trip to make some final notes on the open air piazza and thought I would take the opportunity to again take in the sights and sounds of the casino through which I assumed we could pass. As I pushed my daughter's pram up the arched bridge, a security guard politely informed me that I was not allowed to enter the casino with my daughter. I explained to him that we merely wanted to use the casino as a shortcut to the piazza and promised him that I would not let my daughter gamble. This was not enough to convince him, and he again politely shook his head and pointed me to the village side of the bridge, from where we could make our way to the piazza. In controlling people, Montecasino is also controlling the public perception of itself, for they do not want the casino floor filled with children in prams alongside their gambling parents. Not only would this be socially unacceptable and constitute child neglect, but it detracts from the fantasy of escape, the relinquishing of duty and responsibility. Indeed the Bambini crèche as well as the waiting room are facilities that take on this responsibility in order to enhance the sense of play, of being liberated and unburdened, free to fully absolve oneself of everyday constraints and immerse fully into a surreal world of make believe.



Figure 20: An abandoned Police vehicle, a reminder of security and order (Image: author, 2009)

While the “polizia” have long since abandoned their squad car and taken to foot, their patrol vehicle, as well as the signs that are dotted around the complex in strategic locations serve as subtle reminders of the control, order and authority that exists within the village, and which will be escalated to a more overt form of power should it be necessary. Areas are patrolled, more frequently during busy periods, by a variety of security guards who, through their presence alone, discourage loitering and use of the facility by those that have not paid (through purchasing meals or items) to do so. Thus, controls are constantly in place, but only become explicit when rules and regulations are potentially threatened or transgressed. Through subtle expressions of control, Montecasino promotes escapism. It is precisely this control, order and predictability that set it apart from a highly unpredictable and dangerous outer world, allowing guests to renounce their hyper-vigilant states.

In many ways, Montecasino is the epitome of a totalitarian environment. At its core, totalitarianism seeks to regulate nearly every aspect of public and private life. Totalitarian regimes or movements maintain themselves in power by means of an official all-embracing ideology, regulation and restriction and the use of mass surveillance. While Montecasino may not strictly be the totalitarian regimes which

Aron (1965) or Arendt (1951) discuss, there are parallels with their fundamental principles which are undeniable. Montecasino's ideology is that Life is Beautiful and every aspect of its existence is devoted to creating this impression and embedding it in the minds of its visitors. It does so through both subtle and overt cues and monitors and controls behaviour through surveillance and design.

While visitors must fully relinquish control in order to take in the experience, they must not lose control, for there is a fine line between fantasy and hedonism. Montecasino is fantastical, but in no way hedonistic, and pleasure too must be moderated and controlled. Because Montecasino is a village of escape does not mean that it is one without consequence. Patrons are encouraged to "lose themselves" in the theme, the atmosphere and the care-free environment. They must, however, never abandon their sensibilities, for this village, like any other has its rules and "laws" by which inhabitants and visitors alike are expected to abide. Those that do transgress, the teenagers who try to sneak into the casino or into one of the many bars or nightclubs, the drunk and disorderly, the rowdy and reckless are all promptly confronted by security, who after a verbal confrontation, will physically eject uncooperative patrons unwilling to leave of their own free will. Montecasino is designed to be a self regulating society, one where pleasure, escapism and fun are pursued, but not at all costs, and certainly not at the expense of others trying to do the same.

> The keys to creating such a magical place lay in controlling the movements of people and in managing their interactions with each other and with their surroundings (Findlay, 1992:68)

Not only do the design and architecture allow for the management of patron's movements, thus controlling their behaviour, but it also assumes control on a mental and emotional level. Apart from the Tuscan theme, the internal structure of Montecasino is quite unlike that of the outer façade of the complex. While the outer façade may be interpreted as being, fortified and exclusionary, internally, the

village of Montecasino provides all the amenities and community comforts of a public place. Sidewalk cafes, boutiques and restaurants line the two and a half kilometres of cobbled streets, which open into no less than nine small piazzas, four of them with fountains and all with benches for the weary to rest their legs.

Above the streets, large pink and white clouds float in the Tuscan twilight, adding to the calming ambience designers try and impress upon visitors (see King, 1981:60). Montecasino's clouds are painted onto its 14 metre high ceiling, which through a clever manipulation of colours and lighting, make the complex appear to span three different time zones, one of the first indications of the compression of time and space[26], but more importantly, the control of the environment. While in some parts of the complex the ceiling is painted, above the main entrance a black material spans the main restaurant section of Montecasino, and is embedded with hundreds of recessed globes that are intended to look like stars.

Young couples sit outside the cafes, sipping espressos as they share sections of the daily newspaper. Families sit at tables under the shade of a tall leafy oak tree in the village square, enjoying an ice cream purchased from the "gelateria". In the centre of the square is a three-tiered fountain, from which the sounds of running water mix with the laughter and chatter of the people in the square. In many respects, Montecasino is a picture of public Tuscan village life. This, however, is like everything else at the complex, merely a simulation designed to provide the visitor with a novel experience and thereby stimulate consumption.

> The designers of malls and pseudopublic space attack the crowd by homogenizing it. They set up architectural barriers that filter out the "undesirables". They enclose the mass that remains, directing its circulation with behaviourist ferocity. The crowd is lured by visual stimuli of all kinds, dulled by Muzak, sometimes even scented by invisible aromatizers. This Skinnerian orchestration, if well conducted, produces

[26] See Morris 1993 for a discussion of the control of time and the environment.

> a veritable commercial symphony of swarming, consuming monads moving from one cash-point to another (Davis, 1992:179).

As the above quote from Mike Davis's *Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space* illustrates, it is through the manipulation and strategic management of the environment that mall and complex owners are able to influence guest's behaviour and entice them into spending money. As the guest gets closer to the heart of the complex, greater care has to be taken to maintain the illusion initiated by the external architecture. Creators, decorators and "imagineers" appeal to the senses of the guests, creating visually tempting attractions and aurally soothing sounds. Moreover, smells from the various restaurants permeate the air, tempting the guest to once again reach into their pockets and spend at their "leisure".

In an interview with Edmund Batley, one of the lead architects on the Montecasino design project, he explained the rationale behind some of the designs:

> We borrowed the spatial configuration principles from shopping malls and we treated the casino as the anchor tenant. The main architectural features are the entrances, the piazzas. The small piazzas are designed to circulate people. There are a lot of fountains. We wanted the water to be welcoming. Also, the tenants are encouraged to have seating outside their walls to create an energy. Everybody wants to people watch, be part of the action. (Interview with author, August 15, 2002)

While Batley admits that they (the architects) got the tenant / retail mix wrong, and that some mistakes were made in the layout of the zones, he is nonetheless satisfied with the final product. The correct tenant mix is essential in any retail complex because the amount of customers generated by these tenants will ultimately determine the success of the complex as a whole. Complementary store types are chosen and situated in ways so as to maximise the attraction of the entire venue (Alexander and Muhlebach, 1992:4-5). In this respect, Montecasino offers its guests a variety of culinary options, the majority of which are either

situated in the foodcourt (fast food) or on the eastern side of the complex, closest to the casino.

In contrast, retail stores are situated primarily on the western end of the complex, nearer the Nu Metro cinema. This is the marketing principle of *adjacent attraction* (Gruen, 1960), whereby non-salable objects and images are strategically placed next to commodities in order to stimulate interest in the commodity. Thus the casino and the cinema complex, the primary tenants, are intended to draw people to the complex where their interest will be aroused by the variety of stores and merchandise available there. The theme too plays an important role in drawing visitors to the complex. Not only does the Tuscan aesthetic gel well with the romanticised sentiment embodied in public life but it also allows for the architectural expression and creativity of this public life. Another important design feature of Montecasino, and one that is often overlooked by visitors who come not for the gambling, but for the other entertainment amenities, is that none of these amenities (The Teatro, the open air piazza, the bird gardens) can be accessed without walking through the enclosed village. This exposes visitors to the charms on offer as it forces them past the casino, shops and restaurants in the hope that this exposure will entice them closer and provoke their curiosity.

Using the experience gained in the design of shopping malls, which are more candidly commercial, Batley and his team were able to marry the principles of themed environments with malls in order to create a themed mall / casino. Premised on the notion that the longer the guest stays, the more money they are likely to spend, retail and themed complexes create a relaxing and inviting environment that is the foundation of the success of the venue. From the outside, the entrances to Montecasino form some of the main architectural features of the complex. With large carved wooden doors and the graceful steps leading to them, the entrances invite and entice the outsider in. Once inside, however, the entrance which are also the exit points, are discreet and to a large extent, out of sight. Of the

four entrances, only the grand entrance is prominently visible, but even this entrance is partially obscured by it being elevated above the floor level of the complex. The entrances / exits are also spread out so as to promote the circulation of people throughout the complex. With guests confronted by a maze of streets and the exits largely out of sight, visitors to the complex are encouraged to stay longer and spend more. The designers of such complexes want the guest to lose themselves, abandon their worries and participate in commercialism.

The cobbled streets of Montecasino meander through the complex, leading the visitors from one attraction to another. Only several strategically placed piazzas, designed to maximally circulate people throughout the complex punctuate the seamless flow of the streets. The piazzas, some with their calming and soothing fountains, present the visitor with a variety of directions to choose from. Every choice is rewarded with a plethora of shops, restaurants, spectacles and simulacra. For those unable to arrive at a consensus on which direction to take when presented with a piazza, or who would simply prefer to ease the feet that have carried them past the same shops several times, benches have been provided.

> Montecasino is true to Italian reality in another respect – it is easy to lose one's bearings in the maze of streets, a problem no doubt welcomed by the retailers who line them (Le Page, 2001).

During the course of my research, I would often see geographically disoriented groups of people unwittingly stroll past the same stores several times, each time commenting on something new they had seen. They would often not realise that they had walked past the same store only moments earlier. In part, this is as a result of the layout of the complex and the way in which the village's streets meander off from others, only to track back on itself and eventually converge again. Moreover though, it has to do with the sheer immensity of spectacle there is to take in.

Apart from the curious and awed visitors who snap away with their cameras, the theming of the complex, its architecture and ambience have also made it a popular venue for photography and video shoots. During the early years of the casino, the taking of photographs by patrons inside the village was strictly controlled and anyone brandishing a camera was quickly asked by security to desist. It was admitted to me by Debbie and Jenni that the image and images of the complex need to be controlled as far as possible in order for them to maintain a competitive advantage over other casinos for as long as possible. When asked about the use of photographs for this piece of research, they referred me to the Montecasino photo library where I could obtain images of the venue that had been screened and vetted by management as of a standard high enough for distribution in the public domain. As time has passed, management stance on this phenomenon has softened substantially, partly due to the fact that the complex is now more established and there are less people who are first time visitors and inclined to take photographs. Moreover, the recent proliferation of "camera-phones" has made it all but impossible to sufficiently police people who want to take photographs. To some extent, control has been lost with regard to photography by the paying public, but there remain strict rules and regulations in place for those who wish to use the venue and precinct as a whole for film and photography shoots. Apart from a ten thousand Rand location fee as well as a questionnaire which needs to be completed by those wishing to use the premises for a shoot, a copy of the "script" must be submitted to Montecasino management for inspection and approval and all aspects of the shoot and final product must be in keeping with Montecasino's positioning and corporate image. Furthermore, a brief description of the publicity opportunities that exist for Montecasino as a result of the shoot must be submitted to the public relations department and Montecasino reserves the right to cancel or reschedule the shoot at any time (See appendix 3). It is clear from these rules and guidelines which are posted on the Montecasino website just how critical control is within the boundaries of the village, not only from a physical perspective, but also in the way that the venue is publicly portrayed in the media. Furthermore, every

possible opportunity to gain positive public visibility is leveraged and complex management are meticulous in preserving the aura of escape and romanticism.

Perhaps the best indication of Montecasino's intense desire to control the minds and behaviour of its visitors, and the lengths to which they will go to achieve this, was their employment of a Mind and Mood Manager in mid 2005. After the legalisation of gambling in South Africa in 1996, and the significant growth of the industry and competition among companies within this landscape, Tsogo Sun quickly realised the need to gain a competitive advantage over similar sites vying for consumer attention and spend. As casinos have become part and parcel of the entertainment landscape in South Africa, new measures are required in order to differentiate competing venues. The role of the "Mind and Mood Manager" is to fully understand the behaviours, thinking patterns and desires of the visitors so that the village environment can constantly be adapted to maximise the guest experience. The ultimate goal is to create enduring, rewarding and profitable emotional bonds with visitors. Also referred to as sensory or experiential marketing, the job description of this role is, in short, to create "magic". While this phenomenon has been practiced at many themed complexes around the world, it is relatively new to South Africa, but the results it has delivered at Montecasino have led to Tsogo Sun rolling the practice out to several of its other casino and entertainment sites.

Montecasino's Director or Marketing, Noeleen Bruton, was recruited from MGM Grand South Africa, Tsogo Sun's gaming partner from where she has climbed the ranks to become group Director of Marketing. She has a passion for creativity and ingenuity, and has developed a reputation in the industry as being one of the most innovative marketers in the business. Montecasino is no ordinary leisure and entertainment complex, and Noeleen's role is unlike any other conventional marketing role. Her portfolio of responsibilities is as diverse as the array of spectacles on offer at the village. Noeleen spends a good deal of her time

travelling around the world visiting different leisure sites in order to keep abreast of some of the leading marketing developments in the industry, which she then brings back and adapts for deployment in Montecasino. At its very heart, experiential marketing aims to indulge all the senses of the visitor, sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. As discussed in previous sections, Montecasino has the sights and sounds of old world Tuscany in abundance, and its restaurants cater for almost any taste. It is also a tactile environment where the company employed to do the architectural lighting has commented in its newsletter:

> If you knock on the facades in most themed properties around the world, you're really thumping on GFRC, GRP and Drivit. You'll hear a hollow thud, sometimes even an echo, and feel flexing from the empty framed cavity beyond. Not at Montecasino. This Tuscan hilltop-themed multi-use complex is as hard as a rock – literally. Here, the walls are solid, the brick infill providing a base for sculpted concrete and mortar skilfully painted by local artists. The results are almost too real, as you begin to believe you really are in central Italy. (Illuminating Engineering Society, 2002).

Bruton's role is much like that of Disney's imagineers and acknowledges thinking of casino's as adult theme parks. She relishes the ability to bring together all the sensory elements available in order to create a holistic leisure and entertainment experience. Montecasino's sensory marketing strategy is as pervasive as it is subtle, many if not most of the visitors to the village never ever being aware of the ingenious techniques employed to enhance their experience. One such example was the manipulating the olfactory environment, a ploy learned from Harrah's Casino in Las Vegas which infused designated areas with a pleasant aroma, ultimately resulting a significant increase in patronage and revenue in these areas. Montecasino piloted this technique by having fresh and pleasant aromas permeate through the Salon Privé, the exclusive gaming area for higher end gamblers, and as Bruton noted, the results were encouraging. The successes of this initial trial were subsequently rolled out to strategic areas throughout the entire complex, and other scents that were, and continue to be, diffused into the air-conditioning system

include, the smell of fresh popcorn, roasted coffee beans and freshly baked bread. The sense of smell is a powerful one, and who would not be tempted by these aromatic scents to enjoy a cup of coffee with some freshly baked bread, or see a movie with a box of pop corn? These smells evoke a sense of homeliness, familiarity and comfort, and influence visitors on an unconscious level.

Sound is also an important sense in experiencing the village, and is constantly adjusted for different times of the day and different activities taking place within Montecasino. Moreover, different neighbourhoods have different sounds that are appropriate for their purpose. The music is varied, its tempo, beat and melody in sync with mood and feel of the environment. The sounds of a happy village at play, the jingle of coins from a winning slot machine, street entertainers and public address announcements are all meticulously crafted to enhance the already magical experience. Visitors to Montecasino are constantly fed a conscious and unconscious stream of sensory indulgences, from street entertainers on stilts, clowns blowing up balloons, the sounds coming from the Radio Jacaranda Studio on the eastern end of the complex, to a network of plasma screens informing and entertaining guests, all the while subtly massaging and influencing their behaviour.

The experiential marketing techniques are seamlessly brought together encompassing all the senses, particularly during themed events which are hosted by the village. Examples of these include the inaugural hosting of the South African Tennis Open in 2009, which combined a berry festival reminiscent of Wimbledon's famous strawberries and cream. Restaurants within Montecasino were encouraged to participate in the festival, updating their menus and offering a variety of berries served with ice-cream, in cakes and various other confectioneries. Brightly coloured and costumed berry characters danced through the Tuscan streets, appealing to children, while the smell of different berries permeated the air. The Berry Festival was again repeated with Montecasino's second hosting of the tennis event in 2010, with the Seattle Coffee Company adding berry syrups to their

milkshakes and coffees, Coco Bongo, La Scala and Café Vacca Matta offering new berry daiquiris and cocktails, while Beira Alta offered a Strawberry Fillet Steak. In total, fifteen restaurants took part in the Berry Festival, indicating how important and pervasive these media campaigns are. A similar event where sensory marketing was again deployed to its fullest extent was the St Patrick's Day celebration undertaking in partnership with Tourism Ireland. Green lighting was used to colour the complex in the Emerald Isle's National colour. The sounds of Irish Pipe Bands were played over the sound system, while visitors were given a *taste* or Ireland through the distribution of samples of Irish cheeses and salmon. Even the smell of freshly cut Irish grass was filtered through the air conditioning system to provide a complete sensory experience! Helen Stewart, Montecasino's Mind and Mood Manager acknowledges that these types of marketing strategies are designed to increase "quality footfall and repeat visits" by leading the visitor to form an emotional connection with the village. The experiential marketing system is managed by computers housed in a control room, and constantly reads and interprets an inflow of data from the village so that complex management can:

> subtly and synergistically adjust the offering to suit the occasion and the target market – with lighting, aromas, messages, and sound (Marketing Mix, N.d.)

As a venue where people come to escape the controls and constraints of their everyday reality, Montecasino paradoxically offers them more of the same, but to a far greater and more pervasive extent. To partake in this world of fantasy and surreality, visitors must submit to the controls of complex management and indeed the village, physically, by complying with the procedures of entrance and expected behaviour once inside, mentally through the bombardment of theming and visual spectacle, and emotionally, by submitting to the unconscious stimuli that is pumped through the public address systems and air-conditioning ducts. The village's strategy of control is comprehensive and dominating, while at the same time remaining discreet and unobtrusive. The trick in offering fantasy as reality lies in

allowing the guest to feel that they are in fact making up their own mind, and acting completely independently and of their own free will, all the while being unconsciously influenced by gently manipulative forces which they will neither see nor be aware of. The sounds and smells are disarming because they are comforting, familiar and reassuring, and thus they allow the visitor to let down their guard, truly a treat in Johannesburg's hyper-vigilant society, and further submit to the allure of escape and fantasy. Never though, are the guests more at the mercy of others and acting without free will.

> Imaginative free play is inextricably bound to the existence of authority and restrictive forms of governance (Harvey, 2000:163).

Harvey's (2000) quote neatly encapsulates the omnipresent powers of control that are at *play* in places of escape, and as such, there is nothing *free* about these private spaces of *imaginative free play*. As David Lowenthal (2002) further points out in his contribution to *Theme Park Landscapes: Antecedents and Variations*, these spaces come into being through opposing the "chaos or ruin of the untamed and untidy mess beyond" (Lowenthal, 2002:11). They foster in the mind of their visitors a sense of freedom while at the same time paralysing them and bombarding them with overwhelming sensory stimuli. In these places, there are no surprises, and nothing is allowed to upset the illusion of order (Cronon, 1995:41)

> "Montecasino imposes nothing on anyone. It is completely, exuberantly fake. And, as in Las Vegas, it is this fakeness that ensures its egalitarian popularity. Blacks and whites feel equally at home in this reassuringly bogus Tuscany. The price of democracy, it would seem, is inauthenticity (Steinglass, 2002).

The moral questions of principle and free will that this strategy raises are many. While contemplating the many criticisms of Montecasino and their validity, I had always maintained that people come to Montecasino, gamble, eat and spend of their own volition. Upon learning of the experiential marketing campaigns that have

been exacted within the village, however, I was forced to re-examine my stance. At Montecasino, visitors and guests are not free, and they do not escape. More importantly though, their ability to exercise free will is curtailed by the subterfuge of unconscious manipulation, physical, mental and emotional trickery. They visit the foreign in search of familiarity, comfort and escape, but this can never be achieved in a real sense, and instead relies on artificially manufactured stimuli to commandeer the senses and guide behaviour and perception.

By all accounts, the manoeuvres and strategies of the experiential marketing team have been enormously successful, increasing both footfall (visitor attendance) and spend (expenditure), and enhancing the visitor experience, or at least their perception of it. Unaware of the schemes employed to generate an escapist experience, Montecasino visitors, up to twenty seven thousand a day, come to partake in the "public" place and lifestyle they have sacrificed for modernity. This though, like many of the aspects of the village, is a façade, and Montecasino, while it may appear to be public, is indeed a private space, where the "right of admission is reserved".

Privatising the Public or Publicising the Private?

As more and more space is being appropriated by private individuals and privately owned corporations, the question of what is and what should be public space is increasingly being asked by social scientists, architects and town planners. Public Space is in its broader sense nothing more than space to which all citizens are granted some legal rights of access (Light and Smith, 1998:3). Rifkin (2000:207) notes how the activities that used to take place in the public arena have shifted to private spaces and have become commoditised. He cites the examples of festivals, ceremonies sports and entertainment as such instances which are seemingly better accommodated in private places than in the public arena. Among the

reasons for this is the need for safety, stability and predictability from public space (Ibelings, 1998:66) Thus, leisure, spectacle and entertainment are commercialised and commodified (Clavé, 2007). Paying for *public life* is what Mackenzie calls "privatopia", where social, economic and political dislocations are provoked by the creation of spaces cut off from their surroundings, the use of which requires a commercial transaction. When considering the design and appropriation of private place as public space, it is important to note Bauman's (2002) observation how a similar phenomenon seems to be occurring within our lifestyle. Increasingly, through technology, social media and reality television, our private lives (but more excitingly, those of others) are becoming increasingly public, in the same way as private space is being appropriated as public.

There are inevitably tensions between different groups of people within spaces, a contestation of power, authority and ownership. In Buildings and Power, Thomas Markus (1998) provides a framework for understanding power constellations among three categories of people that buildings serve to interface. His categorisations provide an insightful look at places of power, particularly in relation to Montecasino and similar environments, where private space exhibits many of the characteristics of a public place. Firstly, there are the inhabitants. These are the controllers who have rights to access and exclusion, and may be owners or otherwise empowered to exert exclusionary control over space. Then there are the visitors. These are the ones who are controlled. They enter "or stay as subjects of the system". They have rights to access for specific "appropriate" purposes, subject to approval by the inhabitants, and have no rights to exclusion. Finally, there are the strangers or the undesirables, who have no rights to either access or exclusion, and are themselves excluded by definition.

Markus' definitions of actors within space is a useful one in that it fits neatly with the level of power and rights held by each particular group of actors within Montecasino, and relates directly to the village theme. Montecasino management,

its staff and tenants in this example may be considered the inhabitants, as they control rights to access, not all necessarily to the village itself, but to individual sections, stores and restaurants. The guests of the village are by Markus' classification, the visitors. They have rights of access for specific and appropriate purposes, but do not themselves have the right to exclude others, as they are under control, and have relinquished power to the inhabitants who take responsibility for maintenance of the environment. Finally, there are those undesirables who both Montecasino management and guests would rather not interact with. These are the strangers, criminals, vandals and other disruptive forces that threaten the harmony of the village and must be excluded from the environment in order to maintain order. While Montecasino is for all intents and purposes a public space, the forces and relationships of power of which Markus writes are all very much at play, relationships much less likely to manifest in what is a truly public place.

One of the primary methods themed complexes employ to create a sense of escape is to exude the image of being a public space, even though the space is necessarily private in order to control the environment. Crilley (1993: 154) notes how the Corporate Producers of space tend to define the public as passive, receptive and refined. They foster the illusion of a homogenised public by filtering out the:

> social heterogeneity of the crowd, substituting in its place a flawless fabric of white middle class work, play and consumption with minimal exposure to the horrifying level of homelessness and racialised poverty that characterises the street environment. (Crilley, 1993:154).

In so doing, these dominated spaces become spaces of representation and places of exclusion. As Murray (2008) comments, places like Montecasino are the embodiment of the "post-public city", their walls and barriers forcing the adoption of new rules of inclusion and exclusion. Exclusivity becomes the mark of urban

distinction, what Fishman has labelled “bourgeois utopias”. They also mark the changing nature of public space in modern society, where privately owned and controlled places are displacing public space, taking over their functions and deciding who may and may not enter. Moreover, these spaces are increasingly becoming places of consumption (Urry, 1990:135).

Space is also socially produced with varying degrees of publicness. In Michael Sorkin’s *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992), the various contributors to the book describe how public space is being eroded, becoming exclusionist private enclaves. Sorkin (1992) has identified three trends that have emerged in the United States with the development of malls and similar spaces, which he believes are harming the quality of the urban environment and causing the built environment to lose its sense of place. First, there is what he describes as *ageographia*, where the physical form of one location is reproduced in another. Second, is heightened surveillance and control, and finally the emergence and creation of endless simulations (Sorkin, 1992). Sorkin’s concerns find resonance in the village of Montecasino, for this site brings together all of his fears for space and the built environment.

Montecasino is a distilled, sanitised version of Tuscany, a physical representation of a quaint Italian village seemingly lifted from Italy itself and relocated in the heart of Johannesburg’s northern suburbs. It epitomises a space of control and surveillance with permanently deployed security staff, over 720 security cameras and rigid controls, however unspoken and subversive. Montecasino is also the site of seemingly infinite simulations, created in exacting detail to be better than the real thing. These simulations offer guests what John Urry (1998:105) refers to as “The spectacularisation of life”, peddling fantasy as a temporary reality. There is no question that the erosion of public space is taking place on a broad scale, and that which is left is largely undesirable because of an inability to maintain control.

There is no lack of critical discourse surrounding this phenomenon of turning the mundane into the spectacular, partly through the reduction of public space. Many public and architectural theorists and practitioners have lamented the dissolution of truly public space. In an article published in the Mail and Guardian in 2009, architect Sarah Calburn goes so far as to suggest that “South African Architecture has hit a brick wall”. If this is so, it is equally true on a more global scale, where simulation is an ever growing phenomenon. She argues that privatised spaces like Montecasino and Melrose Arch:

> “stifle our potential as human beings participating in a democratic and public society. Melrose Arch is possibly the most cynical of these developments. Presented as "public urban space", it is essentially an unroofed and stylistically sanitised Montecasino. It is a theme park vision of Europe, a gated and exclusive alternative to the "dangerous" African CBD (Calburn, 2009).

In contrast, Matt Steinglass in an article on Montecasino entitled “Little Italy”, published in Metropolis Magazine (2002) argues that the casino “that looks like a Tuscan Village is one of South Africa’s most democratic spaces”.

> But what is most striking at Montecasino is that the customers are not overwhelmingly white. Disproportionately white, to be sure, but not overwhelmingly. Montecasino imposes nothing on anyone. It is completely, exuberantly fake. And, as in Las Vegas, it is this fakeness that ensures its egalitarian popularity. Blacks and whites feel equally at home in this reassuringly bogus Tuscany. The price of democracy, it would seem, is inauthenticity. (Steinglass, 2002).

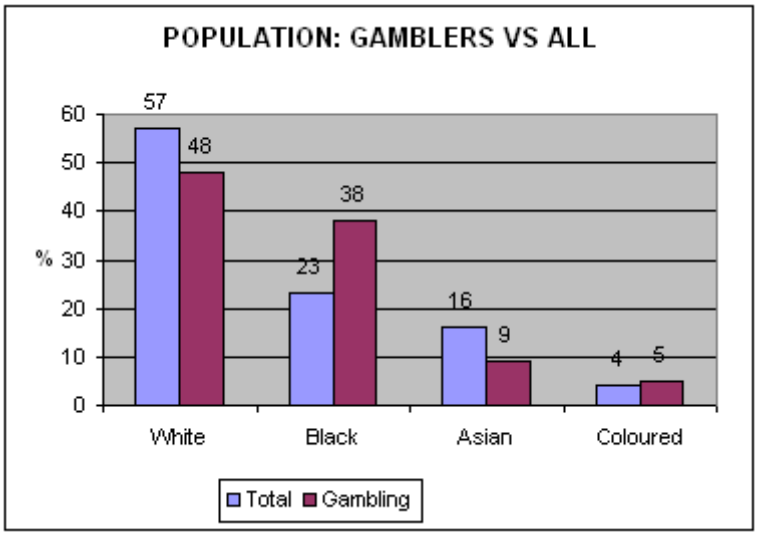


Figure 21: A demographic breakdown of Montecasino patrons from Urban Studies (Image: Urban Studies)

Steinglass's observations are borne out in the research conducted for Montecasino by "Urban Studies", where 57% of the patrons are white. The truth of Montecasino, if there is one in this fluidly fictitious village, probably resides somewhere between the diametrically opposed views of Calburn and Steinglass. Montecasino is not a hurdle to our participation in a democratic and public society as Calburn argues. It is perhaps directly the opposite. As Steinglass notes, it is more cosmopolitan and inclusive than many properly public places, and the demographic of Montecasino's population is more and more reflective of the suburb and surrounds in which it finds itself. Is there room for even greater levels of racial inclusion? There always is. To say that Montecasino imposes nothing on anyone, however, is not necessarily true given the levels of overt and sub-conscious controls that are exerted, consequently impacting on the degree of free will. Racial inclusiveness is not the defining characteristic of this democracy; spending power is. Because the cleavage between rich and poor in South Africa is so indelibly linked to the country's history of racial segregation, simplistically, affluence is the new white, and poverty the new black, and the rules of exclusion are not based on race, but on the ability to consume. Race by proxy then. Despite strides having been made to redress these

imbalances, much still needs to be done for places like Montecasino to become truly democratic and inclusive, for while those without spending power are not overtly excluded, they are certainly not made to feel welcome.

As Collins (1995:42) notes:

> These people, so-called "shoppers" but in reality a heterogeneous crowd with diverse purposes, are not actors paid to simulate the interaction of a public space. While an urban built-environment can be simulated in plaster and plastic, social centrality only occurs if a space is appropriated as public by people. (Collins, 1995:42).

As such, Collins is in agreement with Shields (1992) who believes that there is nothing to fear or lament about such spaces as ultimately they are fundamentally public places by the very nature that they are appropriated as such[27].

Langdon Winner (1992:51), who conducted an ethnography of Silicon Valley and the social and economic disparities between rich and poor there, notes how in this region of California, the malls are the only public gathering places left, and they are not even publicly owned. Likewise, Mike Davis (1992:154) examines the increasing privatisation of space in Los Angeles, which he claims is institutionalised in the limiting and discriminatory structure of urban space[28]. Wealthy inhabitants (and corporations) of Silicon Valley and Los Angeles are buying land and excluding those who cannot afford to pay to be there. Their wealth and (political and economic) influence allows them to further ostracise the already marginalised majority and perpetuate a cycle of discrimination that is no longer based on race or creed, but on the geography of economics. Shopping centres, malls, parks and even public streets are becoming a new means of exclusion.

[27] See Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" for an analysis of the appropriation of different types of spaces.
[28] See Setha Low (2003) for a comprehensive discussion of gated communities in America.

> Today, urban places respond to market pressures, with public dreams defined by private development projects and public pleasures restricted by private entry (Zukin, 1991:41).

Arguably one of the most pervasive features of capitalism, privatisation still receives significant criticism for allowing the privileged minority to further their own ends at the expense of the public majority. In South Africa, particularly among leftist trade unions (and the working class these unions primarily serve), the term “privatisation” has come to be viewed with a great deal of scorn and mistrust. In a country which continually endeavours to bridge the divide between the haves and the have-nots, a dialectical terminology that connotes taking away or making inaccessible to the people is seen as antithetic to the struggle against Apartheid. Privatisation has become the new institutionalised bias of a newly democratic South Africa. While this dissertation is not the appropriate forum to debate the merits of privatisation in the *New South Africa*, raising the point here does provide an interesting adjunct to the topic at hand. Montecasino is a privately owned company that owes its existence to its patrons appropriating it as a public space. Being a (Black Economic Empowerment) BEE owned company, Montecasino is on the one hand recognised as a significant step toward redressing the imbalances of the past. On the other hand, it may be critiqued for falling into the capitalist trap of self-enrichment at the expense of the greater good of the public it claims to be uplifting.

Paul’s story brings home the reality of places like Montecasino, which while exuding the image of public space, are highly regulated private places. As the young man who used Montecasino as a place to find employment, but did not have the money to partake in its offerings, Paul was frequently ejected from the premises for no other reason than disturbing the illusion, and potentially bothering patrons and tenants. As a private place, Montecasino and the security it employs were legally within their right to eject him and refuse him further entry. The popularity of privatising previously public space lies in the ability to exert greater

control and influence on such space, while still enjoying the benefits of a public place. As Shields (1992:1) has commented of malls; they are developed as privately owned public space, and as such, visitors to this space are subject to the rules of the owners who are at liberty to place various restrictions on people. Montecasino is no different. Ironically, these restrictions are imposed on patrons who are attracted by the promise of escape and freedom (Jacobs, 1984:68).

In order to manufacture fantasy (Wasko, 2001), amusement parks and themed complexes create an autonomous space that is cut off from the rest of society (Yoshimoto 1994). Findlay (1992) asserts that much of the success of Disney's theme parks lies in their ability to control people and the internal environment. For the construction of Walt Disney World, the Disney Corporation acquired 43 square miles of undeveloped real estate in Florida, and "set out to develop the site in ways that ensured complete control over the built and natural environments" (Findlay 1992:109). To build this revolutionary themepark (EPCOT Centre), however, the builders required a license not granted to traditional city planners, and Disney requested to be exempted from the existing building codes and regulations.

> Florida granted the company the autonomy it wanted in designing, constructing and policing its new park. It was allowed to devise its own building code, for example, thereby exempting Walt Disney World from existing regulations and reducing interference from bureaucracies and unions (Findlay 1992:111).

By providing the ideal suburban model, themed complexes assume many of the functions previously fulfilled by what are now, in many instances, defunct downtowns. They are the new pedestrian meeting place, public square, and city park (Findlay 1992). To some extent, the informal appointment of social responsibility roles to such private complexes by the public, has been assisted by the privatisation of public space and the failure of the inner city to provide the public with safety and security. To another extent, it is emblematic of the shift in general social attention to consumption, in parallel with the modern and even

postmodern emphasis on consumption. If, however, as Urry (1995) and Shields (1992) assert, consumption is social and an important facet of the public domain, the question must be posed: Is public life privately controlled, privately owned and manipulated? Moreover, what are the wider implications of the answers to this question? Are themed / fantasy environments a genuine response (not solution) to the urban malaise of contemporary cities, or are they merely a temporary commercial exploitation of the inability of the city to fulfil the social and gregarious needs of the public?

Themed environments and complexes are in a very real sense, an attempt to correct the mistakes made in the real cities of the world, many of which are plagued by slums, homelessness, poverty and crime. Indeed, the entire Disney concept evolved out of Walt Disney's dissatisfaction with what he perceived as the anarchy and disconnectedness of many Californian cities. Characterised by a sense of order, convention and communal living, Disneyland succeeded because it allowed visitors to retreat from the instability and unpredictability of the world outside the themepark (Wasko, 2001). Themed environments do not burden the guest with the seriousness of reality (Boyer, 1992). Instead they emphasise the values of community, courtesy and utopia[29] at the expense of reality. At least this has been the formula used by the majority of themeparks.

"Habitat for Humanity", a nongovernmental organisation whose goal it is to provide houses for the worlds homeless, opened a "third world, slum themepark for poverty" near its international headquarters in Americus in south west (Atlanta) Georgia (Herald Sun, 2003). Built to create an awareness of the plight of the homeless throughout the world, the 6 acre themepark boasts vignettes of slums from all across the globe, complete with makeshift furniture, leaky roofs and earthen floors. While this "themepark of destitution" (Dodero, 2003) does not

[29] The word "utopia" is of Greek origin and means "no place" (Kurtti 1996:19). In many respects, themed entertainment complexes strive for utopia as they attempt to divorce their guests from the real world.

provide your average family entertainment, it demonstrates the problems facing many cities today. Because Habitat for Humanity's themepark was constructed to create an awareness of the problems facing many cities, it can at the same time be seen as the antithesis of conventional themeparks, which go to extraordinary lengths to exclude reality. Overcrowding, homelessness, unemployment and chronic poverty, are all symptoms of urbanisation, and none of these problems will be found in conventional themed entertainment parks and complexes.

At the same time, just such a themepark represents the increasing familiarity of spatial and contextual dislocation – a phenomenon well-known in the Victorian world of ethnographic freak shows purporting to be transposed cultural vignettes – and the circus/carnivals of the 20th century. Now it seems that the stage show of the carnival is bigger than ever before, more ambitious in its provision of a simulacrum, and just as adept at finding the postmodern suckers born every minute! (a la P.T. Barnum). While not quite the bearded ladies, African Pygmies and Hottentot Venuses of the Victorian freak shows (Lindfors, 1999), themed complexes present a similar stereotyping vulgarisation of a foreign "reality". Lost Jungle Kingdoms (Sun City and The Lost City), ancient Roman Coliseums (Caesar's Palace), Slum Villages (Habitat for Humanity) and romantic Tuscan Villages are the new freak shows, and we are still just as content to pay the admission fee as were our predecessors to see physical aberrations and anomalies.

While private ownership allows for a greater degree of policing, control and autonomy, commercial success is predicated on the social centrality of the space, and the space being appropriated as public. Shopping centres, malls and themed environments all rely entirely on the patronage of the public. Indeed it is the very reason for their existence. Privately owned complexes such as Montecasino, malls and themed complexes actively cultivate a sense of publicly owned space, in order to draw people to the venue. Once the public have been enticed to visit the

complex, the other charms and attractions of the venue can be unveiled in order to draw visitors into the realm of consumption. Not only do such complexes adopt the guise of a public space (through architecture and theming) but they also take over its social roles. As Urry (1990) pertinently reminds us:

> Malls represent membership of a community of consumers. To be in attendance at the court of commodities is to assert one's existence and to be recognized as a citizen in contemporary society, that is, as a consumer. (Urry, 1990:133).

A Village in Flux

> Fun- value must be kept fresh and replenished constantly, in ever more attractive forms, as it needs to fight the inevitable devaluation through familiarity and boredom. (Bauman, 1993:179).

A great deal has changed over the years I have visited Montecasino, the physical structure and offerings, the people, and the perceptions. It is a village that is in a constant state of flux, continually morphing and reinventing itself to provide a more holistic leisure and entertainment experience. Montecasino has been incredibly successful in many regards. The precinct averages twenty seven thousand visitors per day and is considered one of the Top 10 tourist attractions in the province of Gauteng. In 2009, it was awarded Best Casino, Best Cinema Complex, Best Place to Take Out-of-Towners in Jozi, Best Entertainment Complex and Gauteng province - Business Sector: Leading Casino / Entertainment Centre. Having started its life as what was fundamentally a casino with several peripheral attractions, Montecasino has gone to great lengths to "soften" its image and make the precinct a more family orientated space. This was done to draw attention away from the casino element, which in South Africa has received negative publicity for not doing enough to eradicate compulsive gambling. The diversifications of offerings also appealed to a larger target audience, and as such, generate new revenue streams for Tsogo Sun. The addition of several facilities, the Teatro, the Montecasino Bird

Gardens, the Skate Park and the Open Air Piazza have all led to the venue being viewed in a different, less critical light. In a recent discussion with a colleague who lives in Fourways near Montecasino, Michelle admitted to me that her view of Montecasino had changed dramatically over the nearly ten years it has been in operation.

> "Look, it's always been one of the better casinos, for sure. I mean if you go to places like Carnival City, you see these old women in their gown and slippers with curlers still in their hair. That is really rough. Montecasino has never been like that, but we don't even think of it as a casino anymore. Sometimes Russ and I go for a little gamble, but usually we are there to meet friends for dinner or a show." (Personal communication with author, 2009)

Michelle's response is indicative of the achievements made by the complex to draw attention away from gambling and on to more socially acceptable, family orientated pastimes. On another score, however, the complex has been less successful. Whilst it succeeds spectacularly as a Casino, a leisure and Entertainment Complex, Montecasino has ultimately failed as a retail space, and the reasons for this are several fold. In the tracking research that Montecasino commissioned, three primary types of visitors were addressed to understand their visiting behaviour and spending patterns whilst at the precinct. The research findings confirmed that Montecasino is not viewed as a retail space, as only 1% of respondents indicated that they visited Montecasino for the purposes of shopping. Interestingly though, 4% responded that their primary motivation for coming to Montecasino was to "browse", indicating that there is a very low level of conversion from browsing to actively shopping. One of the aspects most disliked about Montecasino, apart from what are perceived to be poor payouts from the casino, is that the shops are viewed as being too expensive. To a large extent, this is as a result of Montecasino's upmarket positioning. At inception, Montecasino was designed to appeal to Johannesburg's more affluent residents in the northern

suburbs. The retail component was as such similarly positioned, selling high end items such as jewellery, fur coats, cigars and upmarket fashions.

As I learned in an interview with two tenants, the shops were designed to be aspirational. Tubby[30], was the short and portly Greek owner of Verdicchio and Ian was the casual, slender new age owner of the novelty shop, Sins, situated directly adjacent to Verdicchio. Our meeting had been arranged by Jenni who had met me at the information centre to walk me the ten steps (across the "street") to Verdicchio and introduce me. Both Ian and Tubby warmly welcomed me as we sat down to a table inside Tubby's restaurant. Jenni briefly outlined my objectives and before leaving, reminded both gentlemen as well as myself that the topic of conversation was to concentrate on the village and their experiences within it, and not on any internal politics, a phrase which I had heard many times in previous interviews. The topic of internal politics was clearly an important one as our conversation, under the guidance of Tubby and Ian, ultimately gravitated toward some of the gripes they had with management and the complex as a whole, which made me uneasy. I understood, however, that as a "hot topic" they felt that I could potentially channel some of their grievances and concerns to the correct people in order for them to be addressed, and allowed the conversation to proceed naturally.

> **Tubby** - "For us, its (circumstances) different. My restaurant is doing well and so is Ian's shop, but some of the other guys (retailers) are taking strain. When we first got together, we were all given a presentation about Montecasino, the design, the type of people that were going to come here. We sat and watched this video and were amazed. I mean, it looked incredible. How could you go wrong? It hasn't all turned out like that and there are a lot of guys who are not happy and battling to hang in there. The rent is crazy. You know how much we have to sell just to cover the rent?"
> **Ian** – "Like Tubby was saying, the people that they said they would come here and spend are not coming and not spending. They put these fancy shops in here because they want people to gamble in the hope that they win and can afford to buy from these places. The people who

[30] "Tubby" was a nickname given to the owner of Verdicchio because of his short, stout stature.

> can actually afford to buy from these shops would rather buy when they travel overseas." (Interview with author, 2002).

The reality though is that because of the historical dominance of the casino and gaming component, the precinct drew a far more varied and economically diverse audience. As a result, the retail component of Montecasino has not been the success it was intended to be, and the retail mix is constantly shifting. Because of the high rental costs associated with tenant occupation, and the underperformance or unwillingness of visitors to spend in the stores, the centre has been plagued by high tenant turnover, with several vacant stores a common site at Montecasino. While the upmarket stores were designed to be "aspirational" and attract well-heeled clientele, the reality is that visitors are more willing to consume the idea and experience of fantasy, rather than to purchase a real world, high-end commodity, the consequences of which become very real once they leave the utopian environment. Retail stores that have fared better are those that sell small trinkets and memorabilia, book stores and mid-range clothing stores. The idea of escape seemingly works only insofar as visitors remain within the bounds of the surreal environment, for they are all too aware of the reality that awaits them once inserted back into their real world.

> Malls attract their share of 'post shoppers', people who play at being consumers in complex, self conscious mockery. Users should not be seen simply as victims of consumerism, as 'credit card junkies', but also as being able to assert their independence from the mall developers. This is achieved by a kind of tourist flânerie, by continuing to stroll, to gaze, and to be gazed upon. (Urry, 1990:135).

In order both to remain competitive with the offerings of similar sites like Melrose Arch, as well as to give greater emphasis and credence to its retail / shopping component, the Montecasino precinct is undergoing further development and change. In 2009, ground broke on a joint venture between Tsogo Sun and Abland, capitalising on the prime real estate of Montecasino. The new offering named "The Pivot", will offer work space, accommodation and significantly more retail space,

attracting and appealing to a new consumer base and becoming a more inclusive retail destination in its own right, rather than simply a high-end, *exclusive* retail offering. In acknowledging the evolution of Montecasino, and in an admission of the precincts gambling orientated beginnings, Kevin Page, Tsogo Sun's director of development said in an interview:

> We want to maximise the full potential of the node by creating the ultimate Montecasino precinct.. By adding a new hotel we can bring in new business. It's a desirable place to be. "Montecasino is no longer just about the casino element. It encompasses retail, entertainment, restaurants and is the complete package. The Pivot will be an extension of that complex. (Eprop, 2009)

The constant evolution of Montecasino, its need to regularly reinvent itself is in part due to growing competitive forces, but more importantly, it is the acknowledgment of fundamental shifts in consumer trends, desires and needs. Just as its transient visitors come and go, so too do their expectations of escape and fantasy shift. Montecasino will continue to reposition itself, reinvent and adapt to market forces, for while its inhabitants control the internal environment, it is the visitor / consumer who ultimately holds control over the way in which the environment is appropriated and assembled.

Conclusion

The discourses of Montecasino provide an indication of the way in which simulacra is internalised and "realised" in themed environments. Guests are encouraged to believe that the village is real, and to buy into the Italian lifestyle, ideals and romanticism of a utopian environment. Indeed, this is how commercialism works, by encouraging the visitor to subscribe to the apocryphal, to abandon their critical and questioning stances, and to surrender to the allure of fantasy and escape. This enculturation of the guest is further entrenched through interaction with Montecasino staff, who are required to greet visitors with a cheerful "Bon Giorno". While this does not always happen, Montecasino staff are actively encouraged, even required to maintain the Tuscan/Italian theme, and provide the guest with a "magical" experience. This is borne out in Montecasino's "company culture", which states that "Our village culture is entrenched in all of our villagers (staff) through the following:

Montecasino Credo

- *Life at Montecasino will be a little more beautiful today… because of me*
- *This is my moment to make a difference*

Montecasino's Purpose

- *To enchant our guests at every turn…*
- *By providing an entertainment experience within a Tuscan village fantasy*
- *Our success will result in the enrichment of ALL Montecasino Stakeholders (Montecasino website, 2003).*

A look at Montecasino's credo and purpose as expressed on its website outlines the essence of what Montecasino aims to achieve. While designed for the purpose of internal consumption by Montecasino staff, the credo and purpose statement were initially public documents available on the corporate website, and embody its

culture of fantasy, escape and enchantment. Ultimately, these values can only be achieved insofar as they are lived and internalised by those who make Montecasino the magical place that it is. While it could easily be dismissed as the impassioned jargon of an internal service drive, it also encapsulates my experience of Montecasino, the people who work there and those for whom it is a place of escape. In Montecasino's parlance, themed environments are about making life more beautiful, and about making a difference. They achieve this sense of wonder, of making life magnificent by providing a counterpoint to reality, one that is stable and predictable. Above all though, it is achieved by a single, underlying motif, not of making a difference but that of being different, mythical, fantastical, immersive, engrossing.

Montecasino's credo invites its employees to be a part of the magic in much the same way as Disneyland's employees are encouraged to embrace and live the values and spirit of fantasy. It is the culture of enchantment, as if there is a reality to characters of a fairytale that is embedded in the very essence of themed environments. These narratives suspend reality and transcend real world concerns as they temporarily displace that reality with a universe of dreamlike wonder. By buying into, and acting out this credo, Montecasino's inhabitants perpetuate the theatricality of the utopian environment, convincing visitors of the Montecasino reality which is vastly different from the world outside the village walls. While Montecasino is unapologetically fake and manufactured, the ways in which this space is perceived and appropriated is not. However, kitsch or stereotypical places like Montecasino may be depending upon one's perspective, and whether or not their visitors buy into the simulacra is largely irrelevant. What truly matters for both Montecasino and its visitors alike is the way in which the space is given life and meaning, and how it is readily consumed as such.

Montecasino's mission to *enchant guests at every turn* speaks to the pervasiveness of theming and simulation, from the Tuscan façade, to the ambience

and even the smells and sounds. In these terms, Montecasino is not a place. It is a destination. Moreover, guests do not simply visit Montecasino. They experience it. They live it. Every Montecasino communication, every action and bit of theatre is given mythical weight and substance in the mind of the visitor. Montecasino's invitation to its visitors to escape and abandon real world concerns is anything but a selfless and altruistic drive to better the lives of its visitors, and the economic motives are betrayed by the final bullet of the Montecasino credo. The very foundation of every action is rooted in the benefit (primarily financial) of all Montecasino stakeholders, and by providing a more immersive environment, visitors are more easily able to abandon their real world concerns and indulge in consumption.

In understanding what makes places like Montecasino so popular, it is important to take cognisance of the broader socio-cultural and economic circumstances in which they exist. South Africa in particular is a country where crime and violence are very real concerns for the vast majority of its inhabitants. With these concerns come an element of fear and insecurity. The unpredictability of our lives, the hyper-vigilant states in which we exist in response to real or perceived external threats are all excluded from such utopian spaces. These themed spaces provide stability, predictability and control. From the compression of time and space, to the manipulation of the climate and patron behaviour through subtle cues, Montecasino provides a sense of order, where the fear and uncertainty so prevalent in our outside world are removed. In visiting such sites, guests are unconsciously surrendering the control they so dearly seek in their outside world, and are allowing themselves to submit to the subtle suggestions of consumerism. The irony of having to surrender control in order to experience what they feel is an environment where they have greater control is one of the many paradoxes of places like Montecasino. As Young (2002:4) notes:

> Theme parks attract so many people because they have become major pilgrimage sites within today's mass cultures. Like other tourist attractions, they have grown into anodyne places where modern people can alleviate the anxieties in their lives and the crises in their societies. Such stresses develop whenever the prevailing sense of order is disturbed by intentional or accidental changes, which are common and normal in any complex society. To reassure "pilgrims" and create a haven away from the crisis, the causes of change are typically central to their experience of a pilgrimage site. Theme parks grew increasingly popular during the twentieth century as the world became more secular, the size and complexity of societies increased, and change became more prevalent and pervasive. (Young, 2002:4).

Themed leisure and entertainment spaces are assemblages of many of the best elements of our worlds, both near and far, an amalgamation of the old and the new, sanitised and packaged for the purposes of consumption. As such, visitors to such complexes come in search of comfort, solace and refuge from the unpleasant elements of their reality. They also come for hope, not only of that elusive casino win, but to renew their belief that there is a better way. In the same way as Paul and Florence visited Montecasino in search of employment and financial gain respectively, so too the thousands that walk its cobbled streets come in the hope of experiencing escape from their current circumstances. Whether it be a brief meal, a movie or a theatre performance, Montecasino allows its guests to absolve themselves of real world anxieties, and for a few brief moments, experience the flicker of a better vision.

From the millionaires, celebrities and VIP's who come in search of privacy and anonymity, to the poor and unemployed who come in search of an improvement in circumstance, Montecasino is a place of escape and hope. They are a temporary reprieve from the anxieties that are so much a part of our modern lives, and offer a glimpse of a simpler time devoid of crime, poverty and unemployment. These utopian spaces of *hyperreality* (Eco, 1987) succeed not because they transport their visitors to worlds afar, but because they remove them from that which is near. South Africa has therefore proved very receptive to themed environments of

escape, where our history of social and political upheaval, coupled with contemporary paranoia and fear, make places like Montecasino ideal refuges from reality.

Montecasino is perhaps not everything to everyone, but it is certainly many different things to many different people – and aims to be more still. In a bid to constantly reinvent itself and develop new ways of enrapturing its guests, new offerings are constantly being dreamed up, new chances to win prizes and become an instant millionaire. In a Montecasino radio advertisement that was broadcast on Highveld Stereo in January of 2010, the advert identified with parents who were feeling the pinch of the global, economic recession, a new year of school fees and uniforms amid the post-Christmas financial hangover. It then positioned Montecasino as offering them the opportunity to make all of these concerns dissolve in an instant should they be the winner of a new gambling promotion. However morally reprehensible this approach may be, and however remote the gambler's chances, the advertisement is an illustration of the promise of a better life that such places extend, how they offer a chance to erase real life concerns by substituting them with a temporary, altered reality. Escape, wonder and hope, however, are fleeting, and like the façade, a veneer which when peeled back reveals far less dreamlike qualities than perhaps expected.

Reality is ultimately inescapable though, and as one peers behind the flashing neon lights of the slot machines and jackpot counters, as the white noise of a happy village at play are filtered out, images of anguish and tribulation emerge. From the many failed retail ventures and spiked drinks, to the young children left in the waiting area by their gambling-addict parents, reality ultimately creeps in threatens to shatters the carefully maintained façade. As such these elements are painstakingly concealed so as to preserve the illusion. That which threatens to destabilise the image is as a result of Montecasino losing control, and this

perpetual battle for control between those who create the illusion and those who threaten to destroy it, is, like the village, constantly evolving.

Welcome to an experience like you've never had before,
one that will stay with you for the rest of your life.
Welcome to a world where life is beautiful.
Where excitement and fun reign supreme.
A world of make-believe that's completely real.
Welcome to the village of Montecasino. Or as they say in Tuscany;

Benvenuti a Montecasino
(Montecasino Brochure)

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire and Consent Form (Montecasino Visitors)

My name is Jason Muscat and I am doing a research project for a PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand. I wish to examine the links between retail and entertainment within a themed environment. This is an invitation for you to participate in the study by answering a few questions, which should take about 10 minutes. Participation is voluntary, and if you decide not to participate, there will be no personal or professional repercussions. Information used for the research dissertation will use pseudonyms (false names), so confidentiality is assured. If you agree to participate, please sign below.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Questions

1) What is Montecasino?

_____
_____

2) What do you think of the name “Montecasino”?

_____
_____

3) Have you ever been to Montecasino and if so, for what purpose?

_____
_____

4) How long did you spend at Montecasino and would you go again?

_____
_____

5) If you have not been to Montecasino, why have you not gone?

_____
_____

6) Is Montecasino a public place and why?

_____
_____

Appendix 3 - Montecasino Location Agreement Form

The following guidelines set the parameters within which all photographic and film shoots held at Montecasino must be conducted. By completing points 4 and 5, you are confirming your ability to comply with points 1, 2 and 3.

1. GENERAL GUIDELINES

1.1 No shoot will take place without written permission from Montecasino Management.

1.2 All shoots held must be in line with the Montecasino's positioning and corporate image.

1.3 Montecasino Management reserves the right to charge a location fee for the shoot. Charges may be wagered at the discretion of Montecasino's Management.

1.4 Should the required location involve any other parties i.e. Montecasino Retailers, prior consent from the third party will also need to be obtained.

1.5 Montecasino's and all staff thereof, will not be held responsible for any damage, loss or harm to persons during the shoot.

1.6 All equipment brought onto the property for the shoot will be removed immediately thereafter.

1.7 Use of models, extras and props will be at the expense of the Production House / Agency / Photographer.

1.8 No member of the public may be viewed in the shoot material without their prior consent in writing.

1.9 The shoot material may only be used for the purpose as detailed below. No further usage of the material is permitted without the consent of Montecasino's Management.

1.10 Wedding photo shoots will only be allowed at Montecasino's if they are staying in-house or the reception is taking place on the premises.

2. PHOTOGRAPHIC SHOOT GUIDELINES

2.1 Lighting or any other photographic equipment may not be erected in any manner that could cause damage to Montecasino's property.

3. FILM SHOOT GUIDELINES

3.1 The Production Company must ensure that comprehensive insurance is taken out in the event of any damage to Montecasino as a result of negligence on their behalf. Proof of such insurance is required.

3.2 A copy of the script must be submitted to the Public Relations Manager together with the shooting schedule.

4. SHOOT DETAILS

Please note that full details need to be supplied in order for the application to be considered.

Production House / Agency / Photographer:

Contact Person:

Contact Number:

Email address :

Shoot type (film or photographic):

4.1 Please give a brief description of the purpose of the shoot:

4.2 Shoot location: (which areas within Montecasino are you interested in)

4.3 Proposed date of shoot and duration: (please specify times)

4.4 Estimated amount of crew:

4.5 Equipment / Power requirements:

4.6 Additional requirements:
.

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5. PUBLICITY OPPORTUNITIES

Provide a brief description of the publicity opportunities that exist for the Montecasino as a result of your shoot:

6. LOCATION FEES

R10 000 is the standard fee for location fees, but this may vary depending on nature of shoot

7. CONTACT DETAILS

Jacqui Mabuza - Public Relations Manager, Montecasino

Tel: (011) 510 7329

Fax: 0865018216

Email: Jacquim@tsogosun.com

PLEASE FAX THE COMPLETED FORM TO THE ABOVE FAX NUMBER.

PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF THE SCRIPT, IF APPLICABLE

Montecasino reserves the right to evaluate each request in line with the guidelines set out in this document, within 5 working days from receipt of completed application.