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The Postmodern Ballpark as a Leisure Setting: Enchantment and Simulated De-McDonaldization

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As ballparks have grown in size to accommodate ever larger crowds, they have become increasingly rationalized or McDonaldized. However, rationalization brings with it disenchantment, that is, when they are rationalized, stadiums and other sites of consumption can lose the magical qualities that attract consumers. Recently, in an effort to attract larger crowds, ballparks have undergone a process of reenchantment whereby the magical allure of the ballpark is simulated to increase the consumer appeal of a rationalized setting. This article explores the applicability to contemporary ballparks of the various mechanisms involved in reenchantment, including such postmodern techniques as extravaganzas, simulations, implosions, and manipulations of time and space. We show that the evolution of the ballpark not only supports the reenchantment thesis, but also underscores the increasing commercialization of leisure. We also argue that the apparent de-McDonaldization that accompanies reenchantment is largely superficial and artificial; it is simulated de-McDonaldization, which remains rational at the core.

Keywords consumption, enchantment, McDonaldization, baseball, stadiums, postmodernism, simulation

It has always been nearly impossible to draw a clear line between leisure sites and consumption settings. Visiting a leisure site always involved the consumption of things like the leisure site itself, the activities, food, souvenirs, and so on. However, in the past, a visit to a leisure site was mainly about leisure, and the consumption that occurred there involved mainly the site and the activities that transpired in it. Today, however, the vast majority of leisure sites involve the consumption of a wide array of goods and services. Conversely, visiting a consumption site in the past mainly involved obtaining goods and services; leisure time activities were secondary. However, many of today's consumption sites have internalized elements of once fairly distinct leisure sites. Thus people now go to consumption sites to engage in leisure-time activities and consumption itself has become the major leisure-time activity for many people. In theoretical terms, whatever boundaries existed between leisure and consumption have "imploded," as have those between the settings that we think of as being devoted to each.[1]

This article follows the logic of *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (Ritzer, 1999), but with a particular focus on one type of leisure setting—baseball stadia, or ballparks. At an early point in their history, ballparks were rather enchanted, magical settings. As they grew in size to accommodate ever larger crowds, they grew increasingly rationalized or McDonaldized. McDonaldized systems are characterized by their efficiency, predictability,

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calculability and replacement of human with nonhuman technology (Ritzer, 2000; Ritzer, 1998). These characteristics serve to make McDonaldized means of consumption highly effective "selling machines." However, rationalization brings with it disenchantment; that is, when they are rationalized, stadiums and other sites of consumption can lose the magical qualities that attract consumers. Recently, in an effort to attract larger crowds, ballparks have undergone a process of reenchantment, whereby the magical allure of the ballpark is simulated to increase the consumer appeal of a rationalized setting. This article explores the applicability to contemporary ballparks of the various mechanisms involved in reenchantment.[2] We will show that, the evolution of the ballpark not only supports the reenchantment thesis, but also underscores the increasing commercialization of leisure. As a result of reenchantment, the new ballparks have helped bring something of a renaissance to major league baseball after years of declining attendance (the record-breaking home run binges of Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa have also played an important role). In addition, we will show that, paralleling the gentrification of our cities, the spectacle of the new ballpark is becoming regressive and exclusive due to the increasingly prohibitive cost of attending a game. Finally, it will be demonstrated that the apparent de-McDonaldization that accompanies reenchantment is largely superficial and artificial; it is simulated de-McDonaldization.

The increasing commercialization of ballparks is nothing new, but it has reached a fever pitch in the last decade or two (and will undoubtedly reach still greater heights in the decades to come). It is part of a broader commercialization of leisure associated with the industrial revolution. Some see the late nineteenth century as a turning point for the United States. It was then that the growth of corporate capitalism led to an increase in wages and a decrease in working hours for a broad stratum of American workers and, at the same time, to the development of a mass market for consumer goods (Butsch, 1990, p. 15). With more free time and higher discretionary incomes, people began to spend their leisure time on costly pursuits such as travel, collecting, and golf rather than on less commercial leisure activities like dancing, gardening, and card playing.

A closely related change, also furthering the commercialization of leisure, was widespread urbanization, encouraged by industrialists in need of cheap labor for their factories. "Urban masses, missing the rustic pleasures of hunting and fishing, were won to the support of commercialized entertainment and spectator sports" (Betts, 1953, pp. 231–232). In this milieu, with the nation undergoing a sweeping transformation from a rural-agrarian to an urban-industrial society, are found the origins of America's national pastime. Baseball became popular in the northeastern United States during the 1850s. The same improvements in transportation and communication that knit the nation together also laid the groundwork for a national pastime. Baseball clubs were formed in major cities that were linked by railroad, making it relatively convenient for team members to travel. The invention of the telegraph concurrently enabled baseball box scores and game reports to be shared among the metropolitan dailies whose circulation was on the rise as print technology improved (Betts, 1953).

With baseball, ballparks soon arrived on the scene. In 1867, between two and three thousand spectators received free admission to the first game played in the first ballpark at the Union Grounds in New York City. "[By] 1868, the move toward professionalism, spurred by intercity rivalry and paid admissions, had become inexorable" (Gershman, 1993, p. 16). Almost from the outset, ballparks were more than simply places to play or comfortable settings in which to watch a game. Club owners sought to make not only the team, but also the grounds, attractions that drew people to the box office (Gershman, 1993). From as early as the 1870s, parks featured music, fireworks, fountains, beer, ice cream, fantastic architecture, pennants and flags. Ballparks rapidly became spectacles. Sportsman Park in St. Louis, for example, added a grandstand elevated on six enormous arches as well as a

roller coaster. Such developments were intended to increase revenue, as the less attractive tall walls and barbed wire were designed to keep out free riders. Thus, as is the case with the other new means of consumption (e.g., enclosed shopping malls, chain stores), recent developments in the enchantment and commercialization of ballparks are nothing new, but represent dramatic accelerations of tendencies that were in existence as early as the 1800s.

This article employs a typology of America's ballparks that corresponds roughly to the period in which they were built. This typology highlights three epochs in the development of the contemporary ballpark:

- **The early modern ballpark.** The era of the early modern ballpark began with the construction in the early 20th century of what are now regarded as classic stadia such as Boston's Fenway Park (1912), Chicago's Wrigley Field (1914), Philadelphia's Shibe Park (1909–1970), Brooklyn's Ebbetts Field (1913–1957), and the Bronx's Yankee Stadium (1923). These ballparks were, and those that continue to exist still are, dear to fans. While these ballparks were rationalized, at least by the standards of the day, they were rapidly transformed, largely by the heroic events that took place in them, into thoroughly enchanted settings in which to watch a ballgame.
- **The late modern ballpark.** This period, roughly the mid-1960s through the 1980s, involved the construction of much more rationalized, multiuse stadiums characterized by synthetic grass, fixed roofs as shelter from inclement weather, and huge seating capacities. Included here are the Houston Astrodome (1965–1999), Busch Memorial Stadium in St. Louis (1966–2000), Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium (1970), Cinergy Field in Cincinnati (1970), Veteran's Stadium in Philadelphia (1971), Olympic Stadium in Montreal (1976), Seattle's Kingdome (1976–1999), the Metrodome in Minneapolis (1982), and Toronto's Skydome (1989). These parks are (were) models of rationalization and economies of scale, but they have not been notably successful as evidenced by the closing of two, the Astrodome and the Kingdome, after only several decades in existence and moves to shutter others. Thus, they supply considerable evidence of the irrationality of rationality.

  Attendance at ballparks fell drastically in the late 1980s and through the early 1990s. Fans were disenchanted with the players' high salaries and lack of team loyalty. They were tired of the greed and villainy of the owners who blackmailed municipalities with threats to relocate if they were not granted new ballparks built with public funding. They were fed up with the disenchanted homeliness of the late modern, multiuse parks. Further, young people simply didn't relate to the idyllic pace of baseball and the subtleties of the game. Basketball, which features many more highlights per game, super athletes, and hard-fought rivalries, was more in tune with the hyperkinetic mood of television and popular culture.[3] All of these forces came to the fore during the strike of 1994–95, after which 58% of fans said that they were disgusted with major league baseball (Dortch, 1996). Based on an analysis of attendance in 1995, Dortch found fans in cities with either winning clubs or new ballparks were the quickest to win back their fans. "It's clear that baseball fans were quicker to forgive a team that had a new ballpark. This hasn't escaped the notice of major league owners" (Dortch, 1996, p. 26).
- **The postmodern ballparks.** Beginning in the 1990s, and in light of the problems discussed above, a number of fun ballparks were built including Camden Yards in Baltimore (1992), Jacob's Field in Cleveland (1994), the Ballpark at Arlington (1994), Coors Field in Denver (1995), Turner Field in Atlanta (1997), Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix (1998), Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco (2000), Enron Field in Houston (2000), Comerica Park in Detroit (2000), and Safeco Field in Seattle (2000). The vast majority of these stadia have simulated some of the surface charm of the classic parks and have added a

range of amenities in an effort to coax disenchanted fans back to the ballpark. Said New York Yankee manager Joe Torre of these new stadia in comparison to those of the late modern era, "Now at least you know what city you're in. For a while, they all seemed to be cookie-cutter ballparks" (Howard et al., 2000, p. 6).

Given this typology, the remainder of this article will analyze several related phenomena that deal, in one way or another, with the production of spectacles in order to attract baseball fans, especially those able to pay the high prices for preferred seating. First, we will briefly discuss an array of extravaganzas created quite consciously by those who control the new ballparks. Second, we will analyze a number of less conscious postmodern processes that serve not only to create spectacle, but also to reenchant the new ballparks. These include:

- The implosion of a variety of other new means of consumption into the ballpark creating the spectacle of many attractions (and ways to spend one's money) in one setting.
- The effort of the new ballparks to simulate elements of the classic fields, perhaps with the intention of capturing some of the magic of a Fenway Park. The recycling of old forms raises the complicated issue of the relationship of authenticity to enchantment.
- The manipulation of time and space in order to create spectacle. In terms of time, there is the effort to create a sense that one is watching a ballgame in a setting that could have existed a century, or more, ago. Spatially, the new ballparks attempt to differentiate themselves from others and to localize by offering regional foodstuffs and incorporating local identity into the park.

Third, although rationalization (or McDonaldization) remains a prominent feature, the new ballparks provide evidence, at least on the surface, of "de-McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 1998). For example, fields are no longer being built with some of the highly visible nonhuman technologies (nonretractable domes, artificial turf) that characterized the late modern ballparks. Taken together, these trends could call into question the fatalism of theories of rationalization and McDonaldization. The capitalists who run major league baseball are willing to sacrifice rationalization, at least on the surface, in order to increase profits. A more Marxian perspective is buttressed by the fact that the postmodern ballparks are moving up-market and the cost of attending a ballgame is increasing. A major reason for gutting late modern stadia and replacing them with postmodern parks is the ability to add many more corporate luxury boxes and other upscale amenities. Baseball is abandoning its working class fan base in order to increase revenue and profits.

However, while there is some truth to the Marxian perspective, beneath their de-McDonaldized exteriors, the new ballparks are far more McDonaldized than their late modern predecessors. What we see is a veneer of de-McDonaldization to enchant the fans, but just below the surface is an unprecedented level of McDonaldization. We propose the idea of simulated de-McDonaldization to capture the essence of what is happening on the surface to the postmodern ballparks. However, at a deeper level McDonaldization proceeds apace, thereby supporting the Weberian perspective and its pessimistic view of the future.

Extravaganzas

Many of the postmodern ballparks seek, very consciously, to create extravaganzas that often have little or nothing to do with baseball itself and are designed to attract and entertain fans who may have only a minimal interest in the game. Although such extravaganzas have been part of ballparks from their earliest years, they have grown far more pervasive and spectacular. A few examples are useful.

- Most of the new parks have huge, electronic, ultra-high-tech scoreboards. The largest, at the moment, is at the Detroit Tigers' Comerica Park. It is topped by twin tigers with flashing eyes, each 40 feet long, 27 feet high, and weighing 5,000 pounds.
- Pac-Bell in San Francisco sports an 80-foot Coca Cola bottle that comes to life during the game through the use of lighting that makes it appear to empty and fill. There is also a 27-foot-tall, 20,000-pound steel and fiberglass mitt carefully constructed to resemble on old-fashioned, fat-fingered and weathered glove associated with baseball's early years.
- At the recently renovated Edison Field in Anaheim, the team's owner, the Disney Corporation, has installed in centerfield a Disneyfied (Bryman, 1999) "California Coastline" landscaped with rocks and waterfalls. Home team home runs are greeted by geysers that shoot water as much as 80 feet into the air and are accompanied by music and fireworks. The entrance plaza has goofy, oversized caps and bats, as well as a true-to-scale infield where fans can run the bases or stand on the pitching mound imagining themselves to be Nolan Ryan.

Many other examples of such self-conscious extravaganzas are discussed here in more theoretical contexts. The point is that, in order to draw fans, many with little interest in baseball per se, team owners are creating increasingly elaborate extravaganzas.

Implosion

If modernity is characterized by progressive differentiation and increasingly specialized spheres, as in Durkheim's division of labor, postmodernity tends to reverse the trend through the implosion of boundaries and the creation of novel combinations. As boundaries are blurred, an assortment of new hybrid forms of leisure and consumption are created, forms such as the shopping mall-theme park in the Mall of America, the theme park-shopping mall at Disney World, the casino-theme park-shopping mall at the MGM Grand, and the cruise ship-casino-shopping mall on board the Destiny. In these new means of consumption, implosions serve to maintain or to increase consumer demand. Among other things, the implosion of leisure and consumption stimulates the imagination of consumers by creating a spectacle that combines the fantastic qualities of the leisure industry with the commodities of the consumption industry. Such settings are more magical, more enchanted than those that are either purely about leisure or consumption.

There is a long list of things that have imploded into the postmodern ballpark in order to make it more spectacular and enchanted. Among them are the following.

- Shopping malls and concourses, sometimes with well-known chain stores.
- Food courts, often with the best-known national and international fast-food chains (McDonald's, Blimpie, Little Caesar, and so on), as well as local restaurants and food.
- Breweries, beer gardens, and bars to keep fans in the mood to spend.
- Video arcades and interactive video attractions.
- Museums that offer things like team memorabilia, sounds of imaginary baseball games, radar speed guns, batting simulations, and exhibits on loan from the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Safeco Field is studded with art work of various types.
- Amusement parks like Coca Cola FanLot at Pacific-Bell which offers climbing structures and a miniaturized playing field for kids. At Comerica there is a 50-foot-tall Ferris wheel with cars shaped like baseballs behind the third base area and behind first base there is a carousel featuring 30 hand-painted tigers. The Ballpark at Arlington is adjacent to the Six Flags Over Texas amusement park. The Disney Corporation pulled no punches when it

said of its renovated Edison Field, home of the Anaheim Angels, "There's a Brand New Theme Park in Anaheim" (Peters, 1998).
- Plenty of ATMs to pay for all of this.

In sum, the postmodern ballparks encompass many other new (and old) means of consumption where co-existence in the ballpark serves to make it seem more magical.

Authenticity and the Enchantment of Rationalized Settings

> Children remember the Green Monster the way they remember their first look at the Grand Canyon or the Golden Gate Bridge. Size matters. The Green Monster is impossible to ignore or forget. –Dan Shaughnessy
>
> Fenway Park is a lyric little bandbox of a ballpark. Everything is painted green and seems in curiously sharp focus. –John Updike

Only two of the early modern ballparks, Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, are operational today, and they have a good deal in common. (Although efforts are underway to replace it, Yankee Stadium remains in operation, but it was so thoroughly remodeled that its character has been greatly altered.[4]) First, they are small, in fact the two smallest parks in the majors. Fenway seats only 33,000 fans and Wrigley Field 38,000. By comparison, most of the new ballparks seat 42–48,000 fans and the big stadiums of the late modern era could seat 70,000. This means that the fans have a better view of the game than in most late modern ballparks. Second, the parks are quirky. The 37-foot-tall left field wall makes Fenway into a home run hitter's park and a left fielder's nightmare. In Chicago, the variable winds off Lake Michigan can turn home runs into fly balls and fly balls into homers. Third, they each have an iconic feature. Fenway's towering left field wall inspires fans and sports writers, such as those represented in the epigraphs which introduce this section. Wrigley Field's ivy-covered outfield wall holds a similar place in the hearts of Chicagoans. Batted balls sometimes get entangled in the ivy making it difficult for outfielders to retrieve them. Fourth, they are located in urban settings. Fenway on the Fens in Boston; Wrigley in North Chicago in a neighborhood now commonly called Wrigleyville. When the game is over, fans do not exit into a cavernous parking lot to search for their automobiles. Rather, fans in these parks exchange the stadium for the pulse of city streets, allowing them to momentarily retain the magic of the game. Fifth, they are historical in at least two senses. Historical because so many great baseball moments have taken place on these fields. And historical insofar as the architecture and built environment inspire nostalgia for the events that transpired in their confines.[5]

The appeal of the early modern ballparks may be understood partly in terms of patina.

> Patina is, first of all, a physical property of material culture. It consists of small signs of age that accumulate on the surface of objects . . . As these objects are minutely dented, chipped, oxidized and worn away, they begin to take on 'patina'. In Western societies, this physical property is treated as a symbolic property. (McCracken, 1988, p. 32)

A patina confirms the status of the possessor of an object by suggesting the length of time one has held that status thereby differentiating between old and new status. The tenure of symbolic status is taken as an indicator of the legitimacy and propriety of that status (McCracken, 1988, p. 41). Patrons take the patina of an early modern ballpark as a mark of status, a reminder of the century-long history of baseball in Boston and Chicago. Indeed

patina is cherished beyond any rational end. Fenway, for example, suffers from a fair number of structural problems that flood the field, allow rats to occasionally delay games, and may cost fans an entire inning to buy refreshments or to use the restroom. The ownership has proposed a new stadium but has met resistance from city officials and the public. Economies of scale dictate that the replacement of a classic park means higher revenue because there are more tickets, especially those associated with expensive luxury boxes, to sell. Yet fans have organized a Save Fenway campaign to prevent the club from relocating to a new park.

Fans tend to cherish early modern ballparks and despise late modern multiuse stadiums for clear reasons. The new ballparks try to recreate the aura of the classic parks. One of the ways in which this is accomplished is through a process of simulation. Simulation is the use of unreal, inauthentic objects to imitate genuine, authentic objects (Best and Kellner, 1997). Baudrillard (1976/1993) calls such an artificial world hyperreal—a world with not only simulations, but also the arenas in which simulations thrive, a world where fashion, media, and consumption dominate social life. There are many examples of simulations in the postmodern ballparks.

The simulation of a classic ballpark includes the choice of a downtown location that, where possible, uses the city as a backdrop for the stadium, bricks and steel for building materials, a smaller capacity, asymmetrical dimensions, intentionally singular playing fields, a grass playing surface, and sundry cosmetic touches ranging from the seat-backs to the paint scheme. Baltimore's Camden Yards includes the remains of an old warehouse that provides part of the backdrop for the stadium. Most of the warehouse is unused and it is now merely a simulation of the thriving warehouse that it once was. In addition, a simulated portion of Eutaw Street was extended into the park and it is used as a fan concourse lined with settings in which to consume. Houston's Enron Field exploits its proximity to Union Station, and the nostalgia associated with old train stations, by allowing fans to enter through the archways of the station. A simulated train rolls on a track behind left field. Many of the postmodern parks are studded with displays that remind fans of the teams' most notable accomplishments, and of those of their legendary stars. The hope was that by simulating the attractive qualities of the early modern parks, the postmodern ballparks could increase ticket sales and avoid the fate of the late modern stadiums. The lesson, as Dortch appropriately noted, of the baseball strike was that a fun ballpark could draw fans, and fun ballparks are easier to build and rebuild than championship teams.

Although early modern ballparks with their patinas retain the highest status cachet with fans, postmodern ballparks are thought to be much more authentic than the late modern stadiums. This fact allows for at least two interpretations. On the one hand, it can be argued that any distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic that may have once existed has been blurred in the era of hyperreality. As a result, fans are unable or unwilling to make distinctions between what is real and what is simulated. On the other hand, it can be argued that fans are cognizant of the difference between authentic and inauthentic but are willing to navigate this terrain with a light heart and a playful spirit. The first interpretation corresponds to the position of critics of the postmodern condition who bemoan the loss of authenticity. The second corresponds to the attitude of the fans who are less concerned with the genuineness of a park than they are with the pleasures it can afford. Fans think of the new parks as blending the best of the old and the new. Although the early modern parks that remain have a cachet of status that can be attributed to their patina, fans recognize that these parks lack desired amenities. While a trip to Wrigley Field may have a strong flavor of authenticity, part of what makes it authentic is also inferior to the rationalized settings of the late modern and postmodern parks—the concourses are narrow and crowded, the lines are long, toilets are cramped and unappealing. It seems clear then that enchantment can be

produced not only in authentic settings, but in simulated settings as well. This raises some difficult questions. Is simulated enchantment as gratifying as authentic enchantment? Can we even ask such a question in light of postmodern developments and postmodern social theory, which undermine any distinction between real and unreal?

Time and Space

Time is manipulated to mitigate the adverse effects of rationalization. The new means of consumption display an indifference to historical time that is manifested in nostalgia and in the recycling of old forms. The postmodern departs from the modern because it de-emphasizes the cutting edge and the avant-garde and allows forms from a variety of eras to commingle. Much of what is highly modern is either hidden from view or subordinated to those things that give the parks an aura of the old. Manipulation of time in the new ballparks takes the form of repeated reference to the era of the classic ballparks. Thus, the modern experience of time as linear and progressive is transformed into a temporal pastiche. For example, in the rebuilt Yankee stadium, the aura of the old stadium is retained in remnants of the famous old facade that defined that stadium for decades. The huge mitt at Pac-Bell was carefully crafted to have the appearance of an old-fashioned baseball glove. The train at Enron evokes memories of the bygone era of train travel.

In terms of space, it can be argued that the postmodern is the era of heterogeneity and localism. The new ballparks seek to capitalize on the regional identity of their fans. As we have seen, the centrality of regional identity is nothing new in spectator sports. From its earliest moments, baseball was teeming with intercity rivalries. Today, the particular character of a region is codified in its ballpark. The architecture of the new ballparks is not only intended to invoke the classic ballparks, it also showcases regional individuality. For example, the warehouse at Camden Yards hearkens back to Baltimore's maritime history as an important port of trade. In San Francisco's Pacific Bell Park, this principle is applied to the natural rather than the built environment. San Francisco Bay is prominent behind the right field wall and especially long home runs plop into the water and are retrieved by people in small boats.

The same principle that is found in the architecture, can also be found in the concessions at the postmodern ballparks. In addition to the expected fare (hot dogs, Cracker Jacks), the new ballparks serve regional specialties. Camden Yards sells crab cake sandwiches that are reflective of its base in Maryland and its proximity to Chesapeake Bay and the eastern shore of Maryland. Camden Yards also features Boog's Barbeque on the concourse in right field. While the barbequed ribs and beef are not unique to Maryland, its proprietor, the former star of the Orioles, Boog Powell, is.

The new ballparks also incorporate iconic quirks on the model of the early modern parks. These idiosyncrasies give the parks a distinctive personality and make them into readily identifiable spaces. The best example may be Pacific Bell Park's view of the Bay and the public promenade beyond the left field wall. Another good example is the tall right field wall at Enron Field. Then there is the purple stripe running through the upper deck at Denver's Coors Field that symbolizes one mile above sea level and reminds fans that they are in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Ballparks Go Upscale

The new ballparks are part of a transformation of baseball and other spectator sports from a relatively accessible mass form of leisure to an increasingly exclusive, capital-intensive form of leisure that is symptomatic of the increasing commercialization of leisure in consumer society. The transformation of the ballpark parallels the process of gentrification in urban areas.

The postmodern ballparks feature higher ticket prices, many more luxury boxes and other exclusive seating arrangements, expensive foods, and more opportunities for peripheral consumption of not only souvenirs, but also a wide variety of goods and services. The new features reveal both the economic needs and profit motives of the team owners (who must pay the increasingly astounding salaries of star players) and the status anxieties of middle class fans. Many of the new stadiums have reduced the number of bleacher seats in order to increase sales of more expensive tickets.[6] The average cost for a family of four to attend a game is more than $100 and when food and souvenirs are included the cost can easily exceed $200.

> Today baseball is a sport for the well-off. The likelihood of attending a baseball game increases steadily with household income. Twenty-one percent of adults with household incomes of $75,000 or more attend baseball games, making them 72% more likely than average to do so. (Dortch, 1996)

Such high prices are an indication that baseball is abandoning its working class fan base.

Many fans, of course, are disappointed with the greed and affluence on display at the new ballparks. One fan wrote to the *Atlanta Constitution* of the prices at Turner Field.

> I'm appalled at the prices at Turner Field now, not only for the tickets but mainly the food concessions. And I think that's terrible. And I've been a fan since the Braves moved to Atlanta. I was a fan in those stands when there would be three and four thousand people there. But I absolutely refuse to go to the ballpark now, as much as I love the game. (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1997, p. E2)

Even Ted Turner, the owner of the Braves, was shocked when he learned that a soft drink at the new park cost $3.50.

Interestingly, the team owners rarely pay for new postmodern ballparks (Pac-Bell is an exception). Instead, the cost is borne by local governments and taxpayers. Therefore, since the owners have not paid for the new parks, it could be argued that the ballparks are little more than excuses to greatly increase revenue through the addition of preferred seating of all types and the dramatic increase of all other ticket prices. It seems clear that higher ticket prices are also traceable to the economics of the game, at least from the perspective of owners. To win and to continue to attract fans after the luster of a new stadium wears off, teams must have star players and their salaries have skyrocketed. It is not unusual for such stars to sign multiyear contracts that will pay them over $100 million. Alex Rodriguez recently signed a contract worth about $250 million. While the stars profit, we must not ignore the fact that the owners of the most successful teams profit as well. This is reflected not only in the year-end profitability of at least large market teams, but also in the increasingly inflated prices being asked when such teams are put up for sale.

The upscaling of the postmodern ballparks parallels the gentrification of urban areas. Gentrification is the process whereby upscale businesses and real-estate developers colonize inexpensive working class urban neighborhoods and transform them into yuppie havens or tourist traps. On the surface, the process usually results in a rejuvenation of sorts—the neighborhood becomes cleaner and more economically dynamic. But gentrification pushes lower-income and working-class people out of neighborhoods. It also destroys the social fabric of the neighborhood. Clothing stores associated with upscale chains and fashionable bistros replace local shops. The process of gentrification can be seen in the Disneyization of New York's Times Square and the transformation of downtown Baltimore into a waterfront tourist trap dominated by national franchises.

Although the postmodern ballparks involve a host of superficial improvements over the late modern stadiums, they do so at the expense of working class fans, many of whom have

an increasingly difficult time affording tickets. The model for such a transformation is the fun ballpark at Camden Yards in Baltimore. Before Camden Yards, the Orioles played in dilapidated Memorial Stadium in front of a heavily working class crowd. Today, Camden Yards attracts many more well-heeled fans and is the cornerstone of an extensive urban renewal program that includes a new neighboring stadium for the Baltimore Ravens of the National Football League (NFL), the Inner Harbor recreation area, and several dozen blocks of gentrified row houses. Yes, the park looks great, even to a baseball purist. And yes, the team is making money. But baseball will be changed forever by the new ballparks. Instead of an all-American pastime, it increasingly will be the pastime of corporations with their luxury boxes and of yuppies with their credit cards.

De-McDonaldization

Weber (1921/1968) believed that the process of rationalization (or McDonaldization) involves an irreversible progression that gradually colonizes modes of thought, organization, and action. A capitalist economy is one of the main forces behind the growth of rationalization due to the affinities between efficiency and profits. Within a competitive economy, formally rational systems simply outperform alternate arrangements. For this reason, the most common models of rationalized processes develop in production settings, such as Taylorization and the assembly-line on the factory floor and bureaucracy in the corporation. Yet, rationalization can also be an end in itself, especially when an ideology defined by such things as efficiency and calculability begins to diffuse. Segments of social life that may not benefit intrinsically from rationalization nevertheless become increasingly rationalized. A good example is the rationalization of child-rearing practices epitomized in B. F. Skinner's ideas. Because of the inroads that rationalization made in his lifetime, Weber was notoriously pessimistic about the future of rationalization and saw no way to break free from its grip.

The introduction of rationalized processes to the spheres of consumption and leisure, where rationalization sometimes seems to work against profit maximization, complicates Weber's prediction. In the sphere of production, employees are to a certain extent yoked to the rationalizing inclinations of their employer. But in leisure settings control is tacit. When rationalized processes are introduced to leisure settings, they need to meet the demands of consumers who are free to choose how to spend their leisure time. In such settings, certain elements of rationalization may be desirable, for example, speedy checkout lines. Others may be tolerable, for example, assigned seating. And others are off-putting and undesirable for their cold inhumanity, for example, electronic customer service. But few choose how to spend leisure time based on the rationality of a setting and some people may find rationality off-putting. Thus, the leisure and consumption industries often choose to mask these processes with gambits like theming (Gottdeiner, 1997) or multimedia spectacles that can distract from the cold inhumanity of rationalization. But in some cases, so long as profits remain high and firms competitive, the preferred strategy is simply to de-McDonaldize.

De-McDonaldization is evident in the new ballparks. The late modern, multiuse stadiums fell out of favor in part owing to the fact that naked rationalization was unpopular with fans and in part because owners learned that they could accumulate high profits from intensive exploitation of corporate buyers of season tickets and relatively affluent middle-class fans. The postmodern ballparks have tended to conceal rational structures and processes, or to put the process of rationalization in reverse, reintroducing traditional and irrational elements to the ballpark. In what follows, we review several de-McDonaldized elements common to the new ballparks: smaller size, genuine grass, open-air, quirky structures, and greater luxury.

One principle of McDonaldization is that quantity is more important than quality. This is certainly the case in the gargantuan, late modern, multiuse stadiums that, because of their enormous seating capacity, offer only a limited number of premium seats. Moreover, because the stadiums are multiuse, the parks are often configured to allow for the greater playing area required by football. This means that at baseball games fans are forced to sit further away from the diamond than is absolutely necessary. As a result, multiuse stadiums accommodate loads of fans but only at the expense of their viewing pleasure, a point that is obvious to anyone who has ever sat in the bleachers at such a stadium. The postmodern ballparks seat far fewer fans. They are also arranged to provide the best possible view of the field with seats that are angled toward home plate, a narrow foul territory, and steeply inclined stands so that even those in the back rows feel close to the field. Because the postmodern ballparks are substantially larger than the snug early modern parks, they represent a compromise between quantity and quality.

Predictability is also an important feature in the late modern, multiuse stadiums. Domes and synthetic grass reduce the risk of having to cancel a game because of poor weather and can increase attendance and comfort in the heat of summer. With a fixed dome, synthetic grass is a necessity. But many stadiums used synthetic grass even if they didn't have a dome because it was easier and less expensive to maintain than natural grass. Fans are critical of both nonretractable domes and synthetic grass because they can detract from the aesthetic experience of the ball game. Who wants to watch a game indoors when the sun is shining or on a nice summer night when the stars are out? Who wants to watch the ball bounce around on synthetic grass when they can see a game played on a manicured natural field? The new stadiums, cognizant of fan distaste for artificiality, have done away with fixed domes and synthetic grass, despite the threat of delays and cancellations due to inclement weather.

Another element of predictability that was introduced with the late modern, multiuse stadiums is the standardization of the ballpark. For a time, major league baseball supported this effort, dictating that all parks were to be 325 feet down the lines with a curved outfield wall. The new parks have backed away from this homogeneity and symmetry, preferring instead the thrills that come with an asymmetrical field. These include the tall right-field fence reminiscent of Fenway at Pacific Bell Park, an uneven outfield wall in Pro Player Stadium (due to the positioning of the bleachers), and an incline in center field at Enron Field. These new ballparks promise to bring more triples and inside-the-park home runs, two of the most exciting plays in baseball, back to the game. Like the early modern stadiums, the postmodern ballparks have chosen quirks and action over consistency.

Multiuse stadiums operate year round, making efficient use of the grounds. They play host not only to baseball, but to football, concerts, and revivals. The postmodern ballparks create better views for fans, but it is at the cost of inefficiency—the stadia can usually only be used about six months a year during the baseball season.

Finally, there is some indication that the new ballparks operate on a principle of luxury, even if comes at the cost of reduced efficiency. Although the late modern stadiums were stripped-down to maximize their ability to handle huge crowds, the new ballparks offer a range of amenities. Among these are sit-down restaurants overlooking the field, corporate luxury boxes, club seating, field boxes, and even a swimming pool that can be rented for parties in the outfield of the Bank One Ballpark. There are foods of all kinds: Mediterranean catfish, kangaroo fillet, grilled salmon, blue crab, Hawaiian pizza, toasted ravioli, clam chowder and cheese steak (King, 1998, p. 51). All of these things may seem inefficient from the perspective of the ultra-rationalized late modern ballparks, but they offer more luxury to the high rollers and greater variety and distraction to the working-class fans.

While a great deal of de-McDonaldization is associated with the postmodern ballparks, we should not ignore the fact that when one looks beyond and beneath their surface changes

and their retro-appearance these ballparks are highly McDonaldized. Indeed, it is the combination of the retro with rationalization, a pastiche of the two, that makes these parks postmodern. For example, the new ballparks place a premium on efficiency of fan movement, something that was difficult in the cramped early modern ballparks. The postmodern ballparks contain many more restrooms and concession stands than the classic parks, thereby reducing long lines and crammed concourses.The threat of missing the action while waiting for a hotdog is lessened because most concession stands contain video monitors and some have views of the field. Indeed,"Fans may soon be able to order snacks during the game by using a credit card swiper, which will be located on each seat" (McGraw, 1996, p. 46).

Some of the new ballparks use automatic ticket readers, instead of ushers, at the main gates to keep fans moving steadily through bottlenecks. But efficiency of movement also means control of movement, a feature that the new ballparks have mastered. Legions of ushers and security guards insure that fans are in their proper seats, and "moving up," if a better seat is vacant, is prohibited. Similarly, access to the clubhouse and luxury areas of the ballpark is strictly controlled.

Another example of rational processes in the postmodern ballparks is the replacement of humans with nonhuman technology. Despite their simulation of the classic parks, the new ballparks rely heavily on nonhuman technology. For example, the classic ballparks had manual scoreboards—Fenway still does[7]—but both the late modern stadiums and the postmodern ballparks have replaced the manual scoreboard with electronic scoreboards. Similarly, most parks now pipe in rock music and various sound effects to stimulate the fans, taking the place of things like fan-led pep bands that were once fixtures in the classic stadiums.

In sum, the postmodern ballparks combine superficial de-McDonaldization with basic operations that are highly McDonaldized. The fans are presented with simulated de-McDonaldization designed to enchant them and attract them to the game. While they enjoy luxuriating in the ballpark's de-McDonaldized elements, they do not want to put up with inefficient, non-McDonaldized procedures and services. Thus, the new parks provide at one's fingertips, or within a short stroll, all sorts of highly McDonaldized services and shops, kiosks, and souvenir stands, dispensing goods in a highly efficient manner. Fans seem to want it both ways. They want the illusion of being in a classic ballpark, while utilizing highly McDonaldized procedures and processes. Simulated de-McDonaldization allows them to have both.

In this, they are like the visitors to Frontierland at a Disney theme park or New York, New York in Las Vegas. That is, they have the illusion that they have ventured back into the past (albeit a simulated past), but it is a past that runs on the basis of highly McDonaldized principles and technologies. Few are willing to venture back into anything that smacks of the past, or into any alternative world, without those principles and technologies.

Following this logic, it could be argued that the late modern ballparks are really baseball theme parks.[8] The theme happens to be baseball, but the ballparks run in much the same way, and on many of the same principles, as Disney World and its many clones. Just as many of us prefer to travel to exotic locales in theme parks or Las Vegas casinos like Mandalay Bay, many prefer to see their baseball games in the new postmodern ballparks with their simulated de-McDonaldization. It's certainly attractive and comfortable, but is it Mandalay Bay? Is it baseball?

Conclusion: Baseball with a Baseball Theme

We have argued that the new ballparks have transformed the experience of a ballgame into a more consumer-friendly experience. This transformation is achieved through the integration

of consumption venues in the ballpark setting. It is furthered by the selective rationalization of key consumer-related processes. It is tempered by simulated de-McDonaldization, whereby a few elements of the new ballparks have been strategically derationalized to make the ballpark more comfortable for spectators while the consumption elements continue to be highly rationalized. At the same time, the ballparks are brimming with spectacles and themes to keep restless fans interested and paying. Although few of these changes have had any discernible impact on what happens on the field, the experience of attending a game has been greatly transformed. Attending a baseball game offers a broader variety of activities than keeping a scorecard, debating strategy and eating hot dogs. Moreover, the people who attend games have moved upward in social class as ticket prices and peripheral expenses have increased. Attendance at a baseball game is increasingly a leisure time pursuit that is restricted to the privileged members of consumer society. We have suggested that this situation begs the question of whether the new ballparks are baseball or baseball theme parks.

We have tried to place the evolution of the modern ballpark into the postmodern ballpark into the context of the development of consumer society. We observed the progressive rationalization of the modern ballpark, culminating in the domed multiuse stadia of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The abrupt turn in the design of ballparks in the 1990s can only be read as a sign of the times. The massive, disenchanted stadia are being rapidly replaced with the smaller, enchanted ballparks that we have described. Nostalgia for the more intimate and less rationalized early modern ballparks was paired with spectacles and techniques developed in consumer settings to create a formidable leisure setting in which the idyllic and the spectacular commingle. What of the quality of leisure in the new ballparks? The qualities that made baseball attractive to previous generations are no longer very much in evidence. The ballpark is no longer an oasis as it was for turn-of-the-century fans who sought respite from urban-industrial society. It has been colonized by the consumer culture that has become the most prominent characteristic of our society. The game is more and more a sideshow for the contract bickering, off-hand comments, and scandal that fill the newspapers. Our main fear is that when leisure and consumption are integrated, the leisure element is overshadowed by the consumption element. This is certainly the case in the new ballparks where as much attention is accorded to facilitating consumption as to the game itself.

Leisure has an escapist quality. Although leisure remains enmeshed in social processes, it should be subject to fewer social controls than the workplace. Yet in the new ballparks, the escapist quality of leisure is sacrificed to the gods of consumption. Instead of leisure, a visit to the ballpark turns out to be just more of the same consumption work that takes place in shopping malls, theme parks, casinos, and online. Thus, consumer society has thoroughly colonized leisure settings.

Consumer society is responsive to the qualities of leisure; it tries to reproduce them as faithfully as possible in the service of consumption. Yet strenuous efforts to manufacture leisure tend to pervert it. When leisure is mass-produced, manipulated, rationalized, simulated, and commodified it seems clear that, however authentic, there is something intrinsically constraining about postmodern leisure. We believe that the enchantment of leisure settings displaces authentic, unalienated leisure with unreal manufactured leisure that has negative consequences for our leisure time.

At the new ballparks, baseball is played but the parks themselves simulate a ballpark. Through the techniques that we've described, the new ballparks layer the baseball theme over the same rationalized and commodified core processes that characterize all of the new means of consumption. The result is not quite baseball and not quite a shopping mall but something in between. America's two great national pastimes, baseball and consuming, have joined forces in the new ballparks.

Notes

1. In fact, Ritzer (1999) deals with a number of "leisure settings" under the heading of the "means of consumption."

2. Other leisure settings to which the logic applies are museums, casinos, cruise ships, and amusement parks.

3. Even basketball has had trouble keeping pace with the highlight film, especially as scoring has plummeted through the 1990s. The NBA is tinkering with ways to make the game faster and the scoring higher; until then, most arenas have installed Jumbotron screens that entertain fans with replays and highlights during timeouts.

4. When the park was torn apart for renovation, the Yankees sold the fetishized remnants, including bleachers, turnstiles, lockers, and lavatory signs, for more than $300,000 (Gershman, 1993, p. 206).

5. Interestingly, the origins of baseball as a pastoral surrogate for an industrializing society are paralleled by the post-industrial nostalgia for the bricks and steel of classic ballparks.

6. This trend has culminated in the development of luxury boxes, premium corporate seating areas. Most of the new ballparks have seventy or more such boxes.

7. Dan Shaughnessy has observed that, "when there's a pennant race and the fans are rooting for the Sox to overtake the Yankees, there can be quite a bit of suspense when the kids behind the green door take down a zero and put up a number to show that the Orioles have just scored against the New York Yankees in Yankee Stadium. No electronic message board can duplicate this thrill" (1999, p. 14).

8. Theming continues to expand throughout the world of leisure and consumption. We are beginning to see more themed shopping malls such as Opry Mills in Nashville, Tennessee. Recently opened in the Baltimore, Maryland, area is Arundel Mills which will feature several "neighborhoods" with themes mirroring various areas in the state: Charm City, the nickname for Baltimore, will have simulated row houses; the Ocean City boardwalk; and Chesapeake marshes complete with giant dragonflies hovering overhead. See Martha M. Hamilton,"Mills Corp. Draws Crowds to Unusual Shopping Environments," (2000, pp. E1, E8).

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