This chapter is devoted to the three basic and interrelated theoretical perspectives that inform this book. The first is the approach of Karl Marx and neo-Marxian theory (including the early work of Jean Baudrillard, a theorist whose ideas will play a prominent role in this analysis). Marxian and neo-Marxian theory is the origin of the concept “means of consumption.” In addition, that theory highlights the fact that the success of modern capitalism and the cathedrals of consumption is highly dependent on the control and exploitation of the consumer.
The second perspective is Max Weber’s work on rationalization, enchantment, and disenchantment. Rationalization helps to transform the cathedrals of consumption into highly efficient selling machines, thereby enhancing their ability to control and exploit consumers. However, rationalization tends to lead to disenchantment and, therefore, to cold, inhuman settings that are increasingly less likely to attract consumers. Weber saw little possibility of enchantment in the modern world, but the neo-Weberian, Colin Campbell, extended Weber’s ideas to include the possibility of such enchantment. Walter Benjamin’s neo-Marxist work on the Parisian arcades is discussed in this context, especially his view that they are “phantasmagoric.” The work of Rosalind Williams and Michael Miller demonstrates that the early French department stores were both highly rationalized and enchanted “fantasy worlds.” The theory of the relationship among rationalization, enchantment, and disenchantment highlights the difficulties faced by the cathedrals of consumption in attracting and keeping large numbers of consumers. This is related to Marxist theory in the sense that to be controlled and exploited, consumers must be attracted, and continually return, to the cathedrals. Enchantment and rationalization help to bring large numbers of consumers to these settings, but their attractiveness to consumers is continually threatened by the prospects of disenchantment.

Marxian and Weberian theories are modern perspectives; the third theoretical orientation is postmodern social theory, especially ideas drawn from the later theories of Baudrillard. The ideas of the postmodern theorists are especially helpful in explaining how the new means of consumption overcome the problems associated with disenchantment and attain the reenchantment needed to continue to lure, control, and exploit ever-increasing numbers of consumers. We will see that, paradoxically, at least one of the postmodern processes leading to reenchantment (“implosion” into the home) is posing a profound threat to the nature, if not existence, of most of the new means of consumption. Consistent with the contradictory character of postmodern society, the new means of consumption are both bolstered and threatened by postmodern developments.

MARXIAN THEORY AND THE MEANS OF CONSUMPTION

The German social theorist Karl Marx developed his ideas in the 1800s in reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the early, highly exploitive days of capitalism. Marx wanted to understand better the workings of capitalism, but he was most concerned with explaining the source of what he perceived to be its evils and helping to bring about the downfall of capitalism. In the more than 120 years since Marx’s death in 1883, capitalism has undergone
many changes, and Marx’s disciples have sought to use his theories as a base to analyze and criticize these changes. However, such theorizing had little long-term effect on capitalism, which is now triumphant on the world stage. Furthermore, most of the Communist regimes that were erected, at least in part on a base of Marxian ideas, have collapsed. Given capitalism’s unparalleled position of preeminence today, some think it is more important than ever to analyze it from a Marxian perspective.

Animating Marx’s original interest was his distress over the fact that the capitalists’ ownership of the means of production allowed them to control and exploit the proletariat (the worker). To work, the proletariat had to have access to the means of production such as tools, machines, factories, and raw materials. Knowing this, at least subconsciously, the capitalists were able to pay them far less than they should have, given the value of what the workers produced. In fact, in the Marxian view, the proletariat deserved just about all of the money earned by the capitalists because all value is derived from labor.

Like most other modern theorists, Marx focused mainly on production—that is, he had a productivist bias. Given the realities that he was dealing with (the early days of the Industrial Revolution and capitalism), a focus on production in general, and the means of production in particular, was sensible. However, in recent years, to the degree that production and consumption can be clearly separated,1 production has grown increasingly less important (e.g., fewer workers are involved in goods production), especially in the United States, whereas consumption has grown in importance. In such a society, it makes sense to shift our focus from the means of production to the means of consumption. However, this is not to say that production, the means of production, and those who work in them are unimportant. Among the issues of concern in production are: What is the source of wealth in a society that produces less and less? What is the fate of a society in which far more is invested in the means of consumption than the means of production? And, what is the likely fate of already exploited workers when production grows increasingly less important to the society as a whole?

Within the general framework of production, Marx actually had a great deal to say about consumption, especially in his well-known work on commodities. Much less well known and visible is the fact that Marx (following Adam Smith, as he often did2) employed the concept “means of consumption.”

Marx defined the means of production as “commodities that possess a form in which they . . . enter productive consumption.”3 That is, the means of production—labor-time, tools, machines, and so on—are used and used up, in the process of production. To Marx, the means of consumption are “commodities that possess a form in which they enter individual consumption of the capitalist and working class.”4 Thus, here we are in the realm of
the kind of consumption—"individual" as opposed to "productive"—that will be discussed in this book. Under the heading of individual consumption, Marx differentiates between subsistence and luxury consumption (Adam Smith made a similar distinction). On the one hand are the "necessary means of consumption," or those "that enter the consumption of the working class." On the other are the "luxury means of consumption, which enter the consumption only of the capitalist class, i.e., can be exchanged only for the expenditure of surplus-value, which does not accrue to the workers." Basic foodstuffs would be subsistence means of consumption, whereas elegant automobiles would be luxury means of consumption.

However, there is a logical problem in the way Marx uses the concept of the means of consumption, especially in comparison to the paired notion of means of production. The means of production occupy an intermediate position between workers and products; they are the means that make possible both the production of commodities and the control and exploitation of the workers. In contrast, the way Marx uses the idea, the means of consumption are not means but rather the end products in his model of consumption; they are those things (either subsistence or luxury) that are consumed. In other words, there is no distinction in Marx’s work between consumer goods and what I see as the means of consumption (e.g., shopping malls and cruise ships). To put it another way, in his work there is no parallel in the realm of consumption to the mediating and expediting role played by the means of production.

In this book I distinguish the means of consumption from that which is consumed. Fast food restaurants are different from the hamburgers we eat in them. The means of consumption will be seen as playing the same mediating role in consumption that the means of production play in Marx’s theory of production. That is, just as the means of production are those entities that make it possible for the proletariat to produce commodities and to be controlled and exploited as workers, the means of consumption are defined as those things that make it possible for people to acquire goods and services and for the same people to be controlled and exploited as consumers.

The concept of the means of consumption appears, at least in passing, in various other works, but most notably in one of Baudrillard’s early books, The Consumer Society. At this point in his career Baudrillard was still heavily influenced by Marxian theory, although he was to break with that approach a few years later en route to becoming today’s preeminent postmodern social theorist. Baudrillard does not define the concept, but the way he uses it makes it clear that (unlike Marx) he is not conflating the means of consumption with the commodities to be consumed but is following the definition I am using. Baudrillard’s paradigm of the means of consumption is the Parisian “drugstore”: 
Any resemblance to an American pharmacy is tucked into one small corner. The rest of this amazing establishment is more like a mini-department store with everything from books to cameras, toys, French and foreign newspapers and magazines, clothing, and a booming takeout business in carved-on-the-spot sandwiches, salads, and soft drinks as well as caviar, pate de foie gras, and elaborate picnic hampers. Le Drugstore’s outdoor cafe offers what it claims is an “authentic” American menu.

The Parisian “drugstore” is clearly a means of consumption in that it is a social and economic structure that enables consumers to acquire an array of commodities. Baudrillard goes on to talk about an entire community as the “drugstore writ large.” In this context he describes a community, Parly 2, with its shopping center, swimming pool, clubhouse, and housing developments. The shopping center and at least a version of the kind of community described by Baudrillard (the elite gated community) are, as noted in Chapter 1, examples of the new means of consumption. Other examples discussed by Baudrillard are holiday resorts and airport terminals.

Baudrillard was prescient in writing about the significance of these new means of consumption in the late 1960s. However, he did little with the idea and related phenomena. Furthermore, he erred in focusing on the Parisian drugstore because of its limited impact on the rest of the world. In fact, today that drugstore has been swamped by the importation of the kinds of means of consumption that occupy our attention: fast food restaurants, chains of all sorts, Euro Disney, and so on. Nonetheless, Baudrillard’s sense of the means of consumption is the closest in the literature to the way the concept is employed in this book.

Exploiting and Controlling the Consumer

Marx’s theory, especially as it relates to the means of production, focuses on the control and exploitation of workers (the proletariat), as discussed previously. In 20th-century capitalism, the focus shifted increasingly from production to consumption, resulting in a parallel shift from control and exploitation of workers to that of consumers. Consumers could no longer be allowed to decide on their own whether to consume, how much or what to consume, and how much to spend on consumption. Capitalists felt that they had to devote more time, energy, and money in an attempt to influence, if not control, those decisions. This idea is explicit in Baudrillard’s early work. He views consumption as “social labor” and compares its control and exploitation to that of productive labor in the workplace. Capitalism has created a controllable and exploitable “consuming mass” to complement the control and exploitation of the “producing mass.”
The Marxian theory of the exploitation of workers was clear-cut because all value came from the workers. If they got anything less than everything, they were being exploited (when in fact they received barely enough to subsist).

In what sense can the consumer be said to be exploited? There are many ways to respond to this question. For example, advertisements are designed to lure people into buying things they might not otherwise consume. And it is the consumers who must ultimately pay for the cost of the advertisements as part of the purchase price of goods or services. In fact, as neo-Marxists Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy showed long ago, capitalists prefer competition on the basis of advertising campaigns (and other sorts of sales competition) to price competition because it enables them to keep prices high and to pass the costs of advertising campaigns on to consumers. However, our focus is not on the way advertisements are used to exploit consumers, but on how the new means of consumption perform a very similar function.

At one level, the new means of consumption are set up to lead people to consume more than they intend and perhaps more than they can afford. At another level, the sometimes astronomical cost of constructing and maintaining the cathedrals of consumption leads to high prices that are driven even higher by the desire of those involved in the cathedrals to reap large profits. Credit cards aid the ability of the new means of consumption to exploit consumers by leading them to buy more. Furthermore, credit cards are exploitative in themselves in the sense that people are lured into debt that many find it difficult to extricate themselves from and into paying usurious interest rates on balances that serve to stretch indebtedness out for years, if not decades. Consumers can be said to be exploited by the new means of consumption by being led to buy more than they need, to pay higher prices than need be, and to spend more than they should.

It is true that it is far harder to argue that the consumer is exploited than it was for Marx to contend that the proletariat was exploited. The proletariat had no choice. If they wanted to work, they had to sell their labor-time to the capitalists in exchange for access to the means of production and ultimately a subsistence wage. In contrast, the consumer appears to have the option of avoiding the new means of consumption and obtaining goods and services in other ways (e.g., making commodities themselves or using older means of consumption). However, the fact is that the proliferation of the new means of consumption is making it more difficult and less attractive for consumers to obtain goods and services in other ways. It is increasingly the case that if consumers want to consume, they must use (“labor” in) one of the new means of consumption. In a sense, consumers must give the capitalists their “consumption time” in exchange for access to the means of consumption. Consumers are then able to get goods and
services only by placing themselves in a context in which they are likely to buy more, to pay higher prices, and to spend more money than they intended.

In a similar way, consumers are not forced to use credit cards. They could pay in cash and avoid many of the problems associated with credit cards. However, in the case of an increasing number of transactions through, for example, cybermalls or home shopping television networks, it is almost impossible to consume without credit cards. Furthermore, the need to create a credit record to obtain other kinds of credit (e.g., mortgage loans) serves to force people into credit card use. Even in the many cases that consumption can be accomplished in other ways, the credit card proves to be an irresistible lure.

So although the analogy between workers and consumers is far from perfect, there is a sense in which both have become “exploitable masses.” With the proliferation of the new means of consumption, the choices open to consumers are, at least in some senses, declining. Although they may not be subject to much, if any, overt coercion, consumers are the objects of a variety of softer, more seductive controlling techniques. And such techniques are one of the defining characteristics of a postmodern society. Consumers can still choose venues other than the new means of consumption; they can opt not to pay exorbitant prices and not to buy things that are not absolutely needed; but at the same time we must not forget that enormous sums of money are spent on advertising and on the new means of consumption (among other sales mechanisms) to get people to buy and pay more. On balance, the evidence seems clear that this money is well spent and people often do what is expected of them.

Take the case of the lottery, a new means of consuming gambling that is traceable to Colonial America but which boomed in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of state government efforts to raise money. Jackpots have reached astronomical levels and a wide array of new games have proliferated, most notably the multistate Powerball where one can win $100 million or more. Outlets that sell lottery tickets tend to be concentrated in poor areas and to target those with lower incomes and education. Heavy players may gamble as much as 10% or more of their annual income on the lottery. A great deal of money is spent in advertising lotteries and luring people into playing for the first time or to continue being regular players. Advertisements are clever and target specific groups such as low-income players who tend to prefer specific types of games such as Keno, the superstitious with the Lucky Numbers game, and the more affluent players with games based on themes, such as “Star Trek.” Players are often ill-informed about payout percentages and the incredibly slim chances of winning. For all of these reasons, and more, it could be argued that the lottery is an exploitative means of consuming gambling.
Nevertheless, the analogy between the exploitation of workers and consumers is far from ideal. However, various neo-Marxists have offered us a different way of looking at the analogy between the capitalist’s treatment of workers and consumers. They contend that the real focus in contemporary capitalism is no longer the exploitation of workers, but rather their control. If control is the central concern as far as contemporary workers are concerned, then that must certainly be the case for consumers. We are on far firmer footing simply arguing that the new means of consumption concentrate on the control of consumers to get them to spend as much as possible. This allows us to skirt the bothersome issue of exploitation without losing any of the focus and power of our argument. And we can retain at least a partial theoretical footing in (neo-) Marxian theory.

WEBERIAN THEORY AND ENCHANTMENT, RATIONALIZATION, AND DISENCHANTMENT

German-born Max Weber (1864–1920) did his most important work in the three or four decades after the death of Marx. Although Weber shared Marx’s interest in capitalism, he came to see it as just one of a number of developments that were unique to the Occident. Just as Marx believed that capitalism created a number of social advances, Weber noted the positive contributions of the Western institutions of interest to him. And like Marx, Weber was deeply concerned with the problems created by these changes. However, whereas Marx was a radical hoping for a revolution that would overturn capitalist society, Weber was much more pessimistic about doing anything significant about the problems associated with the distinctive set of Occidental institutions.

The key factors in Weber’s theorizing are enchantment, rationalization, and disenchantment. His argument is that the modern process of rationalization in the Occident, as exemplified in capitalism and in the bureaucracy, has served to undermine what was once an enchanted (i.e., magical, mysterious, mystical) world. Rational systems in general, and the bureaucracy in particular, have no room for enchantment. It is systematically rooted out by rational systems, leaving them largely devoid of magic or mystery.

Rationalization

Weber delineated four different types of rationality and argued that rationality takes different forms in different social settings. Practical rationality is a mundane form in which people seek in their day-to-day activities the best means to whatever end they seek. Theoretical rationality is cognitive
rather than practical and involves an effort to master reality through increasingly abstract concepts. Substantive rationality involves a choice of means to ends guided by, and in the context of, larger social values. Formal rationality involves a similar choice of means to ends, but this time guided by universally applied rules, laws, and regulations. It is formal rationality that is the distinctive product of the West.

In spite of Weber’s effort to distinguish among these types of rationality, and to see them operating differently in various institutions, one emerges from a reading of his work with a clear sense that there is an overall trend in the West in the direction of the increasing domination of formal rationality—rationality as an “iron cage.” This idea is clear, for example, in Weber’s conclusion that socialism would not eliminate or reduce the possibility of such a future: “Not summer’s bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness, no matter which group may triumph externally now.” It is phrases like “polar night,” “icy darkness” and “hardness” that convey such a disenchanted, frigid, nightmarish image when the new means of consumption are thought of in terms of Weber’s theory of rationalization.

Authority Structures

The trend toward increasing formal rationalization is found in Weber’s work on authority. Here Weber differentiated among three types of authority by specifying the way in which each is legitimated. Traditional authority exists when the leader rules on the basis of a claim to, and a resulting belief on the part of the followers in, the sanctity of age-old rules and powers. In the case of rational-legal authority, the leader rules and has the ability to issue commands on the basis of legally enacted regulations. Followers accept that right and those rules and therefore follow the leader’s dictates. Finally, charismatic authority is based on the devotion of followers to the exceptional sanctity, exemplary character, heroism, or special powers (e.g., the ability to work miracles) of the leader, as well as to the normative order sanctioned by the leader.

All three types have existed throughout history, but Weber argued that in the modern West we are witnessing the triumph of rational-legal authority and the progressive elimination of the other two types as legitimate bases of authority. For one thing, fewer people are inclined to accept the authority of someone (say, a king or queen) who rules on the basis of tradition. For another, as rational-legal authority becomes more firmly entrenched, it is less and less vulnerable to overthrow by charismatic leaders and their followers. As is the case for rationality in general, formal rationality eventually comes to reign supreme in the realm of authority.
The demise of tradition and especially charisma as ways of legitimating authority is of particular interest. Both traditional and charismatic authority can be seen as involving an enchanted relationship between leader and followers. In one case the enchantment comes from a belief in the way things have always been done, and in the other it comes from a belief in the leader's extraordinary qualities. Their demise implies the end of enchantment, at least in such a relationship. It is clear that the relationship between rational-legal leaders and followers is not enchanted; there is no mystery why some lead and others follow.\textsuperscript{21}

It is also the case that Weber sometimes uses charisma in a broader sense to denote not just leaders but anyone with extraordinary abilities. Such individuals can be seen as enchanted, certainly in comparison to those who staff such rational-legal systems as the bureaucracy. In a rationalized world there is less and less room for such individual charisma, and therefore less room for enchantment.

\textit{Bureaucracy}

The bureaucracy embodies Weber's thinking on rationality, authority, and the iron cage. First, bureaucracy is the epitome of formal rationality. As Weber put it, "From a purely technical point of view, a bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings."\textsuperscript{22} Second, bureaucracy is the organizational structure that is associated with rational-legal authority and its triumph over other forms of authority. Indeed, one of the key reasons that rational-legal authority wins out over the others is the superiority of its characteristic bureaucratic form in comparison to the organizations associated with traditional and charismatic authority. There really is no other option if the objective is mass administration. Third, the bureaucracy is itself an iron cage in terms of those who function in it. More generally, as more and more sectors of society come to be characterized by bureaucracies, they tend to form one enormous iron cage.

Although Weber praised the bureaucracy on a variety of grounds, he was also critical of its constraints on people. He described bureaucracies as "escape proof," "practically unshatterable," and among the hardest institutions to destroy once they are established. Along the same lines, he felt that individual bureaucrats could not squirm out of the bureaucracy once they were "harnessed" in it. Weber concluded,

This whole process of rationalization in the factory as elsewhere, and especially in the bureaucratic state machine, parallels the centralization of the material
implements of organization in the hands of the master. Discipline inexorably takes over ever larger areas as the satisfaction of political and economic needs is increasingly rationalized. This universal phenomenon more and more restricts the importance of charisma and of individually differentiated conduct.23

The bureaucracy, and formally rational structures in general, must be seen as objective structures that constrain people in very material ways. Rules, offices, hierarchies, and the like constrain people so that although they are enabled to do certain things, they are forced into doing others.

Capitalism

Weber conceived of capitalism as another formally rational system, and he offered an extraordinarily clear image of its material, cage-like character:

Capitalism is today an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalist rules of action.24

The image that is being conveyed is well-reflected in the fiction of Franz Kafka, especially The Trial.

To greater or lesser degrees, most of the new means of consumption are objective structures25 (often themselves bureaucratic structures or a part of larger bureaucracies) that exert constraint on those people who are lured into them. This constraint is important in itself, for its relationship to exploitation, and also because it makes possible the systematic extraction of enchantment from these structures.26

Disenchantment

It is from Friedrich Schiller that Weber derived the notion that as a result of rationalization the Western world has grown increasingly disenchanted.27 It relates to the displacement of “magical elements of thought.”28 As Mark Schneider puts it, “Max Weber saw history as having departed a deeply enchanted past en route to a disenchanted future—a journey that would gradually strip the natural world both of its magical properties and of its capacity for meaning.”29 Or,

In the face of the seemingly relentless advance of science and bureaucratic social organization, he believed, enchantment would be hounded further and further from the institutional centers of our culture. Carried to an extreme, this process
would turn life into a tale which, whether told by an idiot or not, would certainly signify nothing, having been evacuated of meaning.30

The theme of disenchantment recurs in many places in Weber’s work, but especially in his sociology of that most enchanted of domains: religion.31 For example, he saw a historical process of rationally and professionally trained (and, therefore, disenchanted) priests gaining ascendancy over magicians who acquired their positions through irrational means and who clearly have a more enchanted view of, and relationship to, the world than priests. Weber argued that in the modern world, “One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed.”32

Prophets, who as a group are more enchanted than the priests, receive a personal calling and engage in emotional preaching. They are either the founders, or the renewers, of religion. Weber differentiated between ethical (e.g., Muhammed and Christ) and exemplary (e.g., Buddha) prophets. Ethical prophets believe that they have received a commission directly from God and they demand obedience from followers as an ethical duty. Exemplary prophets demonstrate the way to salvation to others by way of example. Both types are useful in creating a group of followers, but once they have succeeded in creating such a group, they tend to be replaced by the disenchanted priests who are far better than either type of prophet at the pastoral, day-to-day affairs of managing such a group. In the process, religion begins to lose its enchanted character and comes under the sway of the rationalized church that houses the priests. The priests derive their authority from their position within the church, whereas prophets derive theirs from their service to a sacred (and enchanted) tradition.

Weber also argued that the Protestants, especially the Calvinists, developed an idea system, the “Protestant ethic,” that helped give birth to the spirit of capitalism. Weber is here working at the level of ideas rather than material structures. Weber depicted a world that is, at least initially, enchanted. The Protestant ethic sprang from the Calvinist belief in predestination. Believing that whether or not they were saved was preordained, the Calvinists looked for particular signs as a way of indicating whether or not they were among the saved. The most important of those signs became economic success. The Calvinists came to work hard and to reinvest profits in their businesses, to help ensure that they would, in fact, see the signs of their salvation. This was clearly an enchanted world. That is, the Calvinist was making decisions on the basis of mystical ideas (“signs,” “salvation”) rather than rational, matter-of-fact principles and procedures.

The capitalist economic system eventually lost all vestiges of enchantment and came to be a highly disenchanted world without room for ideas
such as predestination and salvation. In fact, it became inhospitable to the Calvinists, indeed to all religions, because of the tie between religion and enchantment. There was little patience in the rationalized and disenchanted world of capitalism for such enchanted worlds as religion.

Enchantment

Weber's thinking on magicians, prophets, the Protestant ethic, and charismatic and traditional leaders had a great deal to do with enchantment. However, his thinking on more recent developments, especially in the West, had much more to do with rationalization and disenchantment, enchantment having been largely driven out by the machine-like bureaucracy and rational-legal authority. A formally rational world is a disenchanted world. In a modern context it is not unusual to associate Weber with the imagery of disenchanted and rationalized iron cages, but it is unusual to link him to the idea of enchantment. However, such a connection has been made by Colin Campbell, who has extended Weberian theory, at least as it relates to the Protestant ethic thesis, in such a way that it is able to encompass the ideas of enchantment, dreams, and fantasies.33

*The Romantic Ethic*

In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism,*34 Campbell does not contest Weber's basic argument about the central role of early Calvinism in the rise of capitalism, but merely contends that Weber did not take his analysis far enough. That is, Weber analyzed the Protestant ethic up to approximately 1700, but it continued to evolve after that point and began to move in a very different direction. Although Campbell pointed out that there was more emotion35 in early Calvinism than Weber recognized, he argued that later Calvinism became even more accepting of emotion. In other words, there were elements of enchantment in later Calvinism.

Although the early Calvinists required signs of success to help them to determine whether they were to be saved, later Calvinists sought evidence of their good taste. Good taste was linked to beauty and beauty to goodness. The Calvinist who demonstrated good taste simultaneously displayed goodness. In other words, pleasure-seeking came to be linked with the ideals of character. An easy mechanism for demonstrating that one had good taste was to show that one was in fashion. The later Calvinists grew “eager to ‘follow fashion’ and hence to consume ‘luxury’ goods with avidity.”36

The later Protestant ethic led, albeit unintentionally, to the spirit of modern *consumerism*. Defining this spirit was what Campbell called
“autonomous, self-illusory hedonism.” This hedonistic spirit stood in stark contrast to the asceticism of the early Protestants as well as of the spirit of modern capitalism. It also was individualistic and involved illusions, daydreams, and fantasies; in other words, it was a world of enchantment. The key is individual fantasies because, as Campbell pointed out, fantasies can be far more important and rewarding than reality. In fact, he argued that disappointment inevitably occurs when people are able to fulfill their fantasies, especially with a variety of consumer goods and services. Each time they venture forth into the marketplace, people delude themselves into believing that this time it is going to be different; the material reality is going to live up to the fantasy. These fantasies, rather than material realities, are crucial to an understanding of modern consumerism because they can never be fulfilled and are continually generating new “needs,” especially for consumer goods and services.

Although Weber saw the spirit of modern capitalism leading to rationalized, disenchantment, for Campbell the spirit of modern consumerism leads to romantic, enchanted capitalism. Weber’s capitalism is a coldly efficient world virtually devoid of magic, and Campbell’s “romantic capitalism” is a world of dreams and fantasies. Although production is accorded central importance in rational capitalism, it is of secondary importance in romantic capitalism taking the form, for example, of the production of arts and crafts by Bohemians. What is of central importance for romantic capitalism (and for Campbell) is consumption. And, within the realm of consumption, Campbell accorded great importance to fantasies, especially the fantasizing of consumers. However, Campbell focused on the fantasies of individual consumers.

In this book, I extend Campbell’s work by focusing on the enchanted aspects of the new means of consumption. We will see that these not only are increasingly fantastic in themselves but also are involved in generating fantasies about consumption among consumers. Despite Weber’s pessimism, enchantment persists. As Schneider puts it, “Enchantment . . . is part of our normal condition, and far from having fled . . . it continues to exist.”

I draw on both Weber and Campbell in my conceptualization of the cathedrals of consumption as not only rationalized and disenchantment but also enchanted. Much the same thing could be said of the cathedrals associated with organized religions.

Perhaps religious structures seem rather removed from our concrete concern with the enchanted and disenchantment aspects of the new means of consumption. Much closer is work on the major precursors of the new means of consumption, such as the Parisian arcade of the late 1700s and early 1800s and the French department store of the mid-1800s.
The Parisian Arcade

Walter Benjamin’s recently translated work, *The Arcades Project* (*Der Passagen-Werk*), is a major resource for thinking about the enchantment of the new means of consumption. This fragmentary, unfinished undertaking focuses on the 19th-century Parisian arcades, which were, in their time, seemingly as little grist for the scholarly mill as fast food restaurants or discount department stores are today. However, Benjamin used the arcades as a lens to gain greater insight not only into the era in which they flourished but also into the time in which he wrote (roughly 1920–1940). Benjamin’s work on the arcades not only serves as a model for this work, but the arcades themselves were forerunners to many of the means of consumption discussed in this book.

One key difference between the two works is that Benjamin was looking back to phenomena (the arcades) that, by the time Benjamin wrote, had lost their central place in the process of consumption in France to later developments such as the department store. In contrast, in this work we are examining phenomena that have only recently attained center stage in the world of consumption or, in some cases (e.g., cybermalls) are only beginning to acquire centrality. However, we should keep in mind that the newer means of consumption, like the arcades and even the department stores that eventually triumphed over them, will eventually recede and be replaced by as yet unknown, even newer means of consumption.

The arcades were essentially privately owned covered city streets lined on both sides with shops of various sorts. The streets were closed to vehicular traffic allowing consumers to wander from shop to shop in order to buy or merely window shop. (Fremont Street in downtown Las Vegas has a canopy that has made it into a kind of arcade except that it is lined more with casinos than shops.) Here is a description of the arcades used by Benjamin himself:

> These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-walled passages cut through whole blocks of houses, whose owners have combined in this speculation. On either side of the passages, which draw their light from above, run the most elegant shops, so that an arcade of this kind is a city, indeed, a world in miniature.

The arcades had their origin in Paris of the late 1700s. While London had broad streets with sidewalks that came to be lined with shops, Paris had narrow streets that lacked sidewalks and therefore could not easily accommodate shoppers. Hence there was a need in Paris for arcades that provided a public area for strolling and shopping. The first arcade, the Palais Royalem,
developed in the 1780s; between 1800 and 1830 Paris witnessed the creation of 17 arcades. Additional Parisian arcades were built in subsequent years, and the arcade spread to other cities including London, Brussels, Milan (Galleria Vittorio Emanuele; see Chapter 7), Berlin (Kaisergalerie), Moscow (GUM), and even Cleveland in the United States. Toward the end of the 19th century, the arcade disseminated still further to places such as Melbourne, Johannesburg, and Singapore.

As a neo-Marxian social theorist, Benjamin was not satisfied with merely describing the arcades as a new social phenomenon. Benjamin is critical of the arcades and what they represent and a critical perspective, while not mainly animated by a Marxian perspective, also informs this book, at least in part. The following excerpt from a 1929 book (A Walk in Berlin by Franz Hessel) offers a critical, even nightmarish, view of Berlin’s Kaisergalerie, which was modeled after the Parisian arcades:

I cannot enter it without a damp chill coming over me, without the fear that I might never find an exit. I am hardly past the shoeshine and newspaper stands under the lofty arches of the entrance, and I feel a mild confusion. A window promises me dancing daily and that Meyer without whom no party would be complete. But where is the entrance? Next the ladies’ hairdresser there is another display: stamps and those curiously named tools of the collector: adhesive pockets with guaranteed acid-free rubber, a perforation gauge made of celluloid. “Be sensible! Wear wool!” demands the next window of me . . . I . . . almost stumbled over the peep shows, where one poor schoolboy stands, his school bag under his arm, wretched, immersed in the “scene in the Bedroom.”

I linger over . . . Knipp-Knapp cufflinks, which are certainly the best, and over the Diana air rifles, truly an honor to the goddess of the hunt. I shrink back before grinning skulls, the fierce liqueur glasses of a white bone cocktail set. The clowning face of a jockey, a handsome wooden nutcracker graces the end of the musical toilet paper holder.

The whole center of the arcade is empty. I rush quickly to the exit; I feel ghostly, hidden crowds of people from days gone by, who hug the walls with lustful glances at the tawdry jewelry, the clothing, the pictures. . . . At the exit, at the windows of the great travel agency, I breathe more easily; the street, freedom, the present!42

While the goods and services might be different today, a critic might offer a very similar description of more modern means of consumption such as the shopping mall or the casino. Such a critique might focus on such issues as the difficulty in getting out once one wanders in, the proliferation of useless commodities, and the orgy of consumerism to which today’s means of consumption contribute.
Putting it in its broader Marxian context (and picking up on the theme of enchantment), Benjamin sees the arcade as “the original temple of commodity capitalism.” It was the immediate precursor of other temples for the consumption of commodities—the department store and the international Exposition. (The arcades themselves, of course, had predecessors such as the church—arcades were often shaped like a cross—and Oriental bazaars.) More important, they were the precursors of even later means of consumption, the modern temples of commodity capital that concern us here. Also anticipating later developments, the arcades were not just about buying goods. They also offered food, drink, gambling, entertainment in the form of vaudeville, and even prostitution.

What were originally confined to the arcades later burst out of those confines and flooded Paris “where commodity displays achieved even grander, even more pretentious forms.” Benjamin accords an important role here to the architect Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann, who created in Paris the new urban phantasmagoria... railroad stations, museums, wintergardens, sport palaces, department stores, exhibition halls, boulevards—that dwarfed the original arcades and eclipsed them. These once magical “fairy grottoes” that had spawned phantasmagoria went into eclipse.

Still later, of course, commodity displays came to inundate the rest of France and much of the developed world.

In focusing on the arcades, Benjamin was examining the debris or residue of the mass culture of the 1800s; these leftovers were the most mundane, the most banal of everyday sites. But he specifically chose such sites because they permitted him to relate an interest in the everyday world with more academic and political concerns. Benjamin believed that the study of such phenomena would permit the “dialectics of seeing” and lead to “both metaphysical and political illumination.” And the latter, given Benjamin’s Marxist orientation, would lead to historical awakening, social change, and perhaps social revolution. In effect, Benjamin sought to do for consumers in the world of consumption, what Marx had hoped to do for the proletariat in the world of production. Involved in this is an implicit recognition by Benjamin of the fact that the essence of capitalism was already beginning to shift from production to consumption. Therefore, if a revolution was to be mounted, it had to be in the world of consumption and the consumer and not, as Marx believed, in the realm of production among the proletariat.

Paralleling Benjamin’s work on the arcades, at least in part, this book seeks not only to illuminate the nature of the means of consumption themselves, as well as the ways in which they interrelate and interpenetrate, but also to elucidate the consumerism (the “fetishization of commodities”) that
increasingly goes to the heart of modern society. It is easy to accept Benjamin’s goal of illumination and even of social change, although we must bear in mind that the modern world has produced temples of consumption and a cornucopia of consumer goods and services that would be the envy of the denizens of every other era in human history. Yet the means of consumption, as well as the consumerism that they help fuel, have more than their share of problems. Thus, at the minimum, one might want to offer changes that retained the best of the consumer society while coping with some of its worst excesses. One thing, though, that is almost impossible to accept, in this post-modern era following the death of communism, is Benjamin’s Marxist-inspired hope for social revolution.47

However, Benjamin’s major attraction to us in this context is the fact that he sees the arcades not only as disenchanted, reified structures but also as enchanted storehouses of dreams and fantasies. The arcades and their goods are seen as commodity fetishes, but ones that are used to evoke dreams, especially the “collective dream of the commodity phantasmagoria.”48 In general, in the process of commodification the “wish image congeals into fetish.”49 These wish images can also be said to petrify or solidify into “fossils,” or in this case, commodities and the structures in which they are sold. More specifically, the arcades are seen as “houses without exteriors” themselves “just like dreams.”50 The arcades can be seen as having “housed the first consumer dream worlds.” And more generally, Benjamin was interested in the “mass marketing of dreams within a class system.”51

The idea of a phantasmagoria is crucial to understanding the new means of consumption as enchanted worlds. On the one hand, it implies a cornucopia of goods and services that offers the possibility of exciting and satisfying people’s wildest fantasies. The dream here, and one that is played to by most of the new means of consumption, is to be immersed in a world filled with everything one could ever imagine, with all of these things there for the taking. It is akin to the childhood dream of finding oneself in a land in which everything is made of candy and all of it is within reach.

On the other hand, phantasmagoria also implies a negative side of enchantment—a nightmare world filled with specters, ghosts, and a profusion of things that seem simultaneously to be within one’s grasp and impossible to obtain. William Leach describes the turn-of-the-20th-century means of consumption as “the sometimes dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish world of modern merchandising.”52 More contemporaneously, the modern mall, for example, is both a dream world filled with a cornucopia of goods and services and a modern nightmare for many of us since while we might be able to afford to buy a few of those offerings, most of them remain beyond our reach. Of course, this is far from the only nightmare associated with the mall. Another might be one in which we come to the realization that all of
our needs and abilities have atrophied because of our single-minded effort to acquire all that the mall has to offer. Thus, just as we are destined to live out some of our dreams within the mall, we are also simultaneously doomed to nightmares involving frustration and failure. The same can be said of our involvement in all of the new means of consumption.

In integrating a concern with enchanted dreams (and nightmares), Benjamin was influenced by the surrealists (e.g., the art of Salvador Dali) and their “fascination with urban phenomena,” which they experienced both as something objective and as something dreamt. The surrealists questioned the prioritization of material reality by the realists and sought instead to focus on the subconscious, unconscious, irrational, and dream-like. The vantage point of the surrealists also allows us another way of seeing that what are described as dreams can just as easily turn into nightmares. While the surrealists offered an attractive theoretical orientation, and one that is helpful in this book as well, Benjamin was critical of them for their lack of a practical interest in awakening people from the reverie that is being created for them by these structures.

This leads us to the point that while dreams are usually thought of in positive terms, they also can be interpreted negatively not only as nightmares but also in the sense that they tend to lull people into a reverie that blinds them to the material realities that surround them. In other words, they can be conceived of as a kind of “opiate” of the masses. Williams (see below) uses such notions as “numbered hypnosis” to describe consumers. Thus, the dreams created by the new means of consumption can be seen as creating a “false consciousness” among consumers in much the same way that such a consciousness was created among the proletariat in the heyday of producer capitalism. Adrift in a dreamworld of consumption, people are unable to see what is happening to them as well as the realities of the economic system in which they are immersed.

The French Department Store

Rosalind Williams sees settings like the early French department store as enchanted “dream worlds.” She focuses on such things as the use of decor to lure customers to the stores and to “imbue the store’s merchandise with glamour, romance, and, therefore consumer appeal.” The stores were in the business of enchanting and seducing their customers. In these settings, consumers could live out many of their fantasies by either purchasing goods or merely imagining what it would be like to own them. In other words, the early French department stores strove mightily to be enchanted worlds.

Although Williams has done relatively little with the rationalized, and therefore disenchanted, characteristics of the early French department stores,
that issue gets much more attention in Michael Miller’s study of Bon Marché. The early Bon Marché, was a fusion of the emerging rationalized world with more traditional elements of French bourgeois culture; over the years it moved increasingly in the direction of becoming a rationalized, bureaucratized structure. That is, it encountered “an incessant push towards greater efficiency.” Among the rationalized elements of the store were its division into departments; its partitioning of Paris for the purposes of making deliveries; its files and statistics, records and data; its telephone lines, sliding chutes, conveyor belts, and escalators; and its “blanc,” or great white sale, “the most organized week of the store.”

Taken together, the work of Williams and Miller indicate that the early French department store, like contemporary cathedrals of consumption, was both enchanted and disenchanted. Perhaps the most general conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is that enchantment and disenchantment are not easily distinguished from one another; one does not necessarily preclude the other. There is a reciprocal relationship. Fantasies draw people into the new means of consumption, and those fantasies can be rationalized to further draw people in and to reinforce the cage. The cage quality of the new means of consumption can itself be a fantasy—the fantasy of being locked into one of those cages with ready access to all of its goods and services. In fact, Campbell concluded his work with just such an image: “Modern individuals inhabit not just an ‘iron cage’ of economic necessity, but a castle of romantic dreams, striving through their conduct to turn the one into the other.”

Marxian theory leads us to see the new means of consumption as oriented to, and based on, the control (and exploitation) of the consumer. Weberian theory points us toward some of the problems involved in being able to control consumers. Enchanted settings would seem to be well-suited to controlling consumers by luring them into a dream-like state so that it is easier to part them from their money. However, in the long run, to service and control large numbers of consumers, the cathedrals of consumption are forced to rationalize, and rationalization leads to disenchantment and the decline in the capacity to continue luring consumers or to create the dream-like states needed for hyperconsumption. The cathedrals of consumption, therefore, are faced with a seemingly unresolvable dilemma. However, a third, very contemporary resource—postmodern social theory—suggests a way out of this dilemma.

POSTMODERN SOCIAL THEORY AND REENCHANTMENT

It is almost impossible to summarize postmodern social theory in a section of a book devoted to so many other matters, but I can offer a brief
introduction to the theory as well as its role in this analysis. Postmodern social theory is premised on the idea that in various ways we have moved beyond the modern world into a new, postmodern world that is very different socially and culturally from its predecessor. New, postmodern theories and ideas are required to analyze this new world.

Both modern social theory and modernity itself were closely tied to the idea of rationality. Theorists (including Marx and Weber) were urged to think rationally about that world, and when they did, they discovered that it was a world that was best characterized as being rational. Although acknowledging the advantages of rationality, they were also highly critical of it on various grounds.

Postmodern social theory rejects the idea of rationality and is associated more with the ideas of nonrationality or even irrationality. This means that postmodern social theorists reject the careful, reasoned style of modern academic discourse. The author’s objective is often more to shock and startle readers than to win them over with logical, reasoned argument. Postmodern social theory also tends to be more literary than academic in style. In fact, thinkers associated with this perspective reject not only the idea of drawing a clear line between academic scholarship and literature but also, as part of a modern way of thinking, most or all efforts to draw boundaries.

Postmodern theory is of obvious relevance to this work because of its association with consumption and the idea that the postmodern world is defined by consumption (rather than production). As Eva Illouz put it, we are dealing with a world “in which economy has been transmuted into culture and culture into the transient and disposable world of goods.” One of the leading postmodern thinkers is Baudrillard, whose contribution to our conceptualization of the means of consumption we have already encountered.

More important, postmodern thinkers also reject the idea that society is highly rational. Although postmodern society may have some rational elements, it is even more likely to be characterized by “emotions, feelings, intuition, reflection, speculation, personal experience, custom, violence, metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, magic, myth, religious sentiment, and mystical experience.” Rather than discuss this in general terms, I will focus on an idea, “symbolic exchange,” associated with the work of Baudrillard.

To Baudrillard, symbolic exchange involves “taking and returning, giving and receiving . . . [the] cycle of gifts and countergifts.” Baudrillard developed his notion of nonrational symbolic exchange as a contrast, and alternative, to the highly rational economic exchange that characterizes modern capitalist society. For example, although economic exchange produces such things as goods and services, as well as profit, symbolic exchange is nonproductive. Economic exchanges tend to be limited to a specific exchange of, for example, goods and services for money, and symbolic exchanges occur
continually and without limitation. In societies characterized by symbolic exchange, economic exchanges (considered to be of preeminent importance in modern societies) tend to be only a small portion of all exchanges. Baudrillard privileges nonrational symbolic exchange and associates it with primitive societies. He uses the idea of nonrational symbolic exchange to criticize modern societies, which are dominated by rational economic exchange. Baudrillard argued that contemporary society was on the verge, or in the midst, of the transition to the postmodern. However, this newly emerging society offers powerful barriers to symbolic exchange. Although he develops a postmodern theory, Baudrillard ends up being a critic of both modern and postmodern society.

Two of Baudrillard’s specific ideas—implosion and simulations—will play a prominent role in this book, as will other ideas closely associated with postmodern social theory such as spectacles, time, and space. Later, I will define and deal with these concepts. However, we must not forget that the greatest significance of postmodern social theory is its emphasis on enchantment, the lack thereof in the modern world, and the continuing need for it. For Baudrillard, the enchanted world of symbolic exchange continually haunts, and poses a threat to, the modern disenchanted world of economic exchange. There is no possibility of returning to the primitive society dominated by symbolic exchange, but there is the possibility of such exchange reasserting itself. In other words, postmodernists hold out the possibility of the reenchantment of the world.

Zygmunt Bauman accords great centrality to this process of reenchantment:

Postmodernity . . . brings “re-enchantment” of the world after the protracted and earnest, though in the end inconclusive, modern struggle to dis-enchant it (or, more exactly, the resistance to dis-enchantment, hardly ever put to sleep, was all along the “postmodern thorn” in the body of modernity). The mistrust of human spontaneity, of drives, impulses, and inclinations resistant to prediction and rational justification, has been all but replaced by the mistrust of unemotional, calculating reason. Dignity has been returned to emotions; legitimacy to the “inexplicable,” nay irrational . . . The postmodern world is one in which mystery is no more a barely tolerated alien awaiting a deportation order. . . . We learn to live with events and acts that are not only not-yet-explained, but (for all we know about what we will ever know) inexplicable. We learn again to respect ambiguity, to feel regard for human emotions, to appreciate actions without purpose and calculable rewards.

To take a specific example, Baudrillard argued that “seduction” offers the possibility of reenchanting our lives. Rather than the complete clarity and visibility associated with modernity, seduction offers “the play and power of illusion.”
The introduction of the concept of reenchantment allows us to create an expanded model of Weber’s theory. Weber offers a theory of the relationship among enchantment, rationalization, and disenchantment. We have seen that some neo-Weberians (Campbell, especially) allow for the possibility of enchantment in the contemporary world, but the postmodernists offer a stronger thesis. Postmodern thinkers such as Baudrillard tend to think of reenchantment as either a possibility within modern society or the basis of a future alternative to modern society and its numbing disenchantment. However, in this work, reenchantment will be viewed as an ongoing and very real development within the contemporary cathedrals of consumption. It constitutes the way out of the dilemma posed by the disenchantment of the world in general and of the means of consumption in particular. To continue to attract, control, and exploit consumers, the cathedrals of consumption undergo a continual process of reenchantment. Of course, those efforts at reenchantment may, themselves, be rationalized from the beginning. Even if they are not, with reenchantment the stage is set for the entire process to recur.

Postmodern theory offers us three other perspectives that are crucial to this analysis. First, postmodern theorists tend to see the contemporary world as both exhilarating and threatening. Most of the processes associated with the reenchantment of the cathedrals of consumption can easily be seen as quite exhilarating in reviving and reinvigorating those cathedrals. And many of those same processes are also quite threatening, even to the very existence of those cathedrals.

Second, postmodern theory offers a useful corrective on the idea that the means of consumption control and exploit consumers. Although there is control and exploitation in the sense that people are led to buy and to spend too much, the fact is that people are not, in the main, being coerced into doing so, but are quite eager to behave in these ways. As we have seen, this is not only true of American consumers; much of the rest of the world seems intent on consuming like Americans. Most consumers do not see themselves as being controlled and exploited and would vehemently reject the idea that this is what is taking place. Whatever the objective realities (if one can even speak of such realities in a postmodern world) of prices paid and quantities purchased, most consumers seem willing to pay the prices and would, if anything, consume even more if they could.

There is an even stronger point to be made about postmodern consumers. Rather than having their consumption orchestrated by people such as advertising executives and directors of cathedrals of consumption, it may be that it is consumers who are in control. It is the consumers who demand reenchanted cathedrals of consumption, and those demands must be met if their business is to be retained. However, once one setting has been reenchanted, competitors must follow suit or risk the permanent loss of business.
The means of consumption are in constant competition with one another to see which one can be most responsive to the demands of consumers for (re-)enchanted settings in which to consume. In fact, it could be argued that consumers are forcing the means of consumption into a reckless and potentially destructive war to see which one can offer the most (re-)enchanted setting. This is nowhere clearer than in contemporary Las Vegas where old hotels have been torn down and enormously expensive new ones constructed with ever more enchanted themes and settings.

Third, modern social theory tends to focus on agents and their intentions. Postmodern social theory, however, seeks to decenter the analysis by abandoning such a focus. This is one of the reasons why this book does not focus on consumers as agents, but rather on the settings in which consumption occurs. In addition, this postmodern perspective leads us to the view that the processes involved in the reenchantment of the means of consumption are only in part a result of the intentions of the agents operating on behalf of the cathedrals of consumption (see Chapters 5 and 6).

CONCLUSION

In the end, this is not a work in postmodern theory, or any other theory for that matter. The goal is to gain a greater understanding of the new means of consumption and to that end theoretical tools that work will be employed, whatever their origin. To create the theoretical framework for this book, I have borrowed the ideas of exploitation, control, rationalization, phantasmagoria, and disenchantment from modern social theory and the notion of reenchantment (as well as implosion and simulation) from postmodern social theory. This book offers what the postmodernists call a “pastiche” (a mixture of sometimes seemingly contradictory ideas) of modern and postmodern ideas in order to analyze the cathedrals of consumption. The latter, of course, are themselves combinations of modern, postmodern, and even premodern elements. Both the subject matter and the theoretical perspective of this book stand with one foot in some of social theory’s oldest ideas and the other in some of its most contemporary thinking.