**ARTH 398 - Las Vegas: Fine Art and Architecture and the Spectacle of Populist Art take home exam (40%)**

deadline via Moodle submission, **December 20** 11:55 pm. No extensions.

**Answer TWO questions**. Each essay should be a **minimum of three, no more than four pages**.   The exam must­ be typed, double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman type, standard one-inch margins, in WORD format. Include a title page with: 1) your name and your student id # and the two questions you answered. See Moodle worksheets: How to write an art history paper; How to analyze a work of art; How to write about buildings; How to analyze a photograph; How to analyze an image; How to analyze a film; How to analyze a scholarly reading. Images: Copy and paste the images in WORD at the end of each essay with the image citations. Indicate the particular image (Fig. 1) you are discussing in your paper.

Base your responses on the lectures and readings *but be sure to include your own opinions and analyses to show that you have engaged with the images and texts*. Keep quotations from the readings to one to two sentences. Indicate the author and page number of the readings that you have summarized or quoted in your text like this: (Al, 153). For each answer consider:***ONE TO THREE readings*** ***and FOUR to SIX images from the lectures and readings***. The images you discuss in one essay must be different from the images you select for the second essay. *The images you discuss cannot be the same ones you wrote about in your major research assignment.* *Include only readings from the syllabus. NO additional readings.*

1. Vernacular architecture is a term encompassing a range of building forms, types, and styles. It can refer to traditional buildings by people with no formal architectural training, ordinary buildings, and architectural studies that examine the relationships between everyday life and people. Explore the vernacular architecture of the Las Vegas region including the buildings of the Southern Paiute, adobe buildings such the Las Vegas Mormon Fort, the buildings of mining towns, and Las Vegas housing developments. **1,2,3,4**

2. Since the late 1950s, the Nevada Test Site has been the subject of criticism, protest, and civil disobedience. It is easy to characterize these demonstrations as being specific to the Nevada Test Site (NTS). However, since the dawn of the nuclear age, dissent has taken place within the larger context of national and global debates about the danger, necessity, and morality of nuclear weapons. Consider protest art relating to the nuclear age from the 1950s into the present time. **7, 8, 18**

3. In Casino Architecture Wars" Stefan Al states that the “Las Vegas Strip has for decades been an important laboratory of architectural design....Architecture was used as a way to distinguish the companies offering similar services — gambling, accommodation and entertainment” (1). Discuss some forms of architectural experimentation in Las Vegas considered by Al in this article as well as others you consider to be equally important. **9, 13, 14, 22**

4. Karin Jaschke writes in "Casinos Inside Out" that "[g]ambling’s transgressive and contradictory nature produces heterotopic spaces. According to Foucault these are real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. In contrast to utopias, these places which are absolutely other with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias” (Jaschke, 136). Simpson in his discussion of “tourist utopias” also refers to Foucault’s heteroropia. He writes: “The tourist utopia is a paradox: a nexus of decentred capital; a space of exception embedded in the state; a site of productive consumption; a laboratory of urban futures; a conflicted and overdetermined Arcadia. These topoi are both utopian and dystopian, perhaps best understood as heterotopias, the deconsecrated other spaces of global capitalism" (Simpson, 36). Discuss how Jaschke and Simpson have interpreted Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. **31, 32, 14**

5. In "Mobilizing Visions: Representing the American Landscape” Katherine Smith focuses on the “aesthetic strategies from Pop Art that influenced Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour’s own images of architectural forms and urban spaces” (99). Discuss the interrelations of Pop Art, architecture, and design as envisioned by architects and artists during this era. **11, 12**

6. Mikesch Muecke in his 2001 conference presentation titled “Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas: Contestations from Gambling to Water Rights” states that it is no longer possible to occupy a neutral position on Las Vegas. Provide a critique of Las Vegas that considers issues such as prostitution, homelessness, gambling addiction, social inequality, segregation, over-consumption and high water use. **26, 24, 27, 28, 29**

7. While all-you-can-eat buffets continue to be "loss leaders" due to high food costs, they remain an iconic part of the hotel-casino scene, a Nevada casino calling-card that continues to grow as tourists flock to Las Vegas. Upon viewing the video *BUFFET: All You Can Eat Las Vegas* by Natasha Dow Schüll to frame your discussion consider issues relating to addiction and excess discussed in the one to three readings by Schüll, Karin Jaschke and, or Gabu Heindl. The video is available in the Visual Collections Repository (VCR), room EV 3.705. There is no need to make a reservation. You show up with your student ID card during opening hours Monday to Friday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.(Note: VCR closes at 5:00 after December 15). **30, 31, 24**

8. Explore the visual imagery of Las Vegas in works of art, public sculpture, spectacles, events and sites that have focused on Las Vegas as home as compared to Las Vegas as a tourist destination. **15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28**

9. Few casino builders or operators have had a greater impact on their industry, and especially on contemporary Las Vegas, than Steve Wynn. Compare and contrast casino hotels built by Wynn including for example, MGM Grand, Treasure Island, Bellagio, Wynn Las Vegas, Encore Las Vegas and Wynn Macau. **13, 14, 32**

10. Consider how the megaresorts in Las Vegas that tap into the touristic desire for fantasy and reflect another place and time connect with consumer culture.

**9, 10, 13, 14, 22, 23, 32**

11. In what ways have architects, designers and artists responded to the desert landscape of the Las Vegas region? **5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 23, 29**

12. In "Casino Capers" Mary Stokrocki writes: "Casinos are fast becoming sites for display of new Native American Arts. In such a context, casinos re-represent themselves and their communities through various visual forms and thus change their meanings" (8). With this in mind, discuss the art and design of casinos on Indian reservations in the United States. In your discussion include, by way of comparison, some mention of the visual imagery of Las Vegas casino resorts that have focused on a Wild West frontier theme. **34, 10**

13. Martin Hall and Pia Bombardella in “Las Vegas in Africa” discusses various casinos: The Lost City (1979) which opened at a time when institutionalised racial segregation existed in South Africa and casinos such as Montecasino, GrandWest and Gold Reef City that opened after the era of apartheid ended in the 1990s. The aim of these resorts, in partnership with international interests that include Las Vegas-based multinationals is to “reinterpret heritage to provide themed entertainment for the post-apartheid middle-class consumer” (5). Discuss how some of these casinos emulate the theming of Las Vegas casino while others, also themed, have attempted to mythologize South Africa's past or provide partial reconstructions of South Africa’s history. Include in your discussion the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, that is part of the Gold Reef City complex. **33, 32, 13, 14, 22**

Readings:

**Week 2, September 13: Las Vegas as a Frontier Town**

1) Kelly, Isabel T. (Isabel Truesdell), "Houses and Other Structures." *In Isabel T. Kelly's Southern Paiute Ethnographic Field Notes, 1932-1934*

2) Kuranda, Kathryn M. "Images of the Nineteenth-Century Agricultural Landscape.... "*Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 31 no. 4 (Winter 1988): 259-275.

3) Limerick, Patricia Nelson, and Mark Klett. "Haunted by Rhyolite: Learning from the Landscape of Failure." *American Art* 6, no. 4 (1992): 18-39.

4) Pasquale, Verona and Cheryl Rose Crockett. "The End of the Line? The Railroad Cottages..." *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 27 no. 4 (Winter 1984): 269-277.

5) Rolle, Andrew F. "Two Explorers on the Trail to California: Carvalho and Frémont." *California History* 73, no. 3 (1994): 182-87.

**Week 3, September 20: Las Vegas and the Hoover Dam**

6) Arrigo, Anthony. “Imaging Labor.” In *Imaging Hoover Dam: The Making of a Cultural Icon*, 172-214. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014.

**Week 4, September 27: Las Vegas, City of the Atomic Age**

**7)** Decamous, Gabrielle. "Nuclear Activities and Modern Catastrophes: Art Faces the Radioactive Waves." *Leonardo* 44, no. 2 (2011): 125-40.

8) Houston, Donna. "Environmental Justice Storytelling: Angels and Isotopes at Yucca Mountain, Nevada." *Antipode* 45, no. 2 (March 2013): 417-435.

**Week 5, October 5: Las Vegas Strip**

9) Al, Stefan. “Casino Architecture Wars....” *Center for Gaming Research Occasional Paper Series* 30 (October 2014): 1-9.

10) Jones, Karen."‘The Old West in Modern Splendor’: Frontier Folklore and the Selling of Las Vegas." *European Journal of American Culture* ...

**Week 6, October 11: Learning from Las Vegas**

11) Smith, Katherine. "Mobilizing Visions: Representing the American Landscape.**"** In *Relearning from Las Vegas*, 97-128. University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

12) Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977, 152-163.

**Week 7, October 18: Theming Las Vegas**

13) Al, Stefan. *The Strip: Las Vegas and the Architecture of the American Dream*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017, pp. 161-167.

14) Chaplin, Sarah. "*Heterotopia* Deserta: Las Vegas and Other Spaces." In *Architectural Histories and Critical Theories...*

**Week 8, October 25: Art in Las Vegas**

15) Estep, Jan. "Three's a Shroud: Jeffrey Vallance, God, and You." *New Art Examiner* 27, no. 6 (March 2000): 24-29.

16) Joyce, Julie. "Yek at Post." *Art Issues* no. 58 (1999): 48.

17) Kihm, Christophe. "Le Révérend Ethan Acres pour l'humour de Dieu / The Reverend Acres: Laughin' for the Lord." *Art-Press* no. 291 (June 2003): 47-50.

18) Kilker, Julian. "Annie and the Shaman: Exploring Data via Provocative Artifacts." *Leonardo* 50, no. 2 (2017): 186-187.

19) Lillington, David. "The Magic Hour: The Convergence of Art and Las Vegas..." *Art Monthly* no. 252 (December 2001): 27-29.

20) Pistolesi, Edie. "The Elvis Icon." *Art Education* 55, no. 3 (2002): 40-46.

21) Risatti, H. "Michael Heizer’s Double Negative'," *Sculpture*, 22, 10 (2003): 18-19.

**Week 9, November 1: Las Vegas and the Fantasy of the Simulated City**

22) Bieger, Laura. "Architectures of Immersion: The Material Fictions of the 'New' Las Vegas. In *Immersion and Distance....*.

23) Francaviglia, Richard V. "Lands of Enchantment: The Modern West as the Near/Middle East." In *Go East, Young Man...*

**Week 10, November 8: Real Las Vegas**

24) Heindl, Gabu. "Bin City, Las Vegas." *Journal of Architectural Education* 59, no. 2 (November 2005): 5-12.

25) Illia, Tony. "Imagination Unleashed." *Architecture Las Vegas* 12 (2017): 22-29.

26) Muecke, Mikesch. "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas: Contestations from Gambling to Water Rights," 2001. *Architecture Conference Presentations*

27) Pierson, Frank. "What Happened in Vegas: Battling Nevada's Underage Sex Trade." *Commonweal* no. 15 (2015): 19-22.

28) Roth, Moira. "Suzanne Lacy: Social Reformer and Witch." *TDR* 32, no. 1 (1988): 42-60.

29) Thompson, Jonathan. "Aqua Viva Las Vegas!" *Alternatives Journal (AJ) - Canada's Environmental Voice* 40, no. 5 (September 2014): 40-49.

**Week 11, November 15: Las Vegas as a Casino City**

30) Schüll, Natasha Dow. "Interior Design for Interior States: Architecture, Ambience and Affect." In *Addiction by Design* *[electronic resource*

31) Jaschke, Karin. "Casinos Inside Out." In Jaschke, Karin and Silke Ötsch, *Stripping Las Vegas: A Contextual Review of Casino Resort Architecture*, 109-131.

**Week 12, November 22: Las Vegas Elsewhere**

32) Simpson, Tim. Tourist Utopias: Biopolitics and the Genealogy of the Post-world Tourist City." *Current Issues in Tourism* (March 2015): pp 1-33**.**

33) Hall, Martin, and Pia Bombardella. "Las Vegas in Africa." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5 (February 2005): 5-24.

34) Stokrocki, M., with Castillo, B., Delahunt, M., Eldridge, L., and Koreck, M. "Casino Capers...*.*" *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* no. 30 (2010): 83-97.

**14. LAS VEGAS ON FILM**: Answer this ONE question for the final exam. The essay should be a minimum of SIX, no more than EIGHT pages. Analyse the trailers of SIX to EIGHT films from the **Las Vegas Films PowerPoint Final Exam** on Moodle in conjunction with SIX to EIGHT images from the lectures. Use the text below to frame your discussion. R*eadings from the weekly lectures are* ***optional*** *for this answer.* A film trailers excerpt is available in Visual Collections Repository (VCR), room EV 3.705.  *There is no need to make a reservation.* You show up with your student ID card. Opening hoursMonday to Friday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.(Note: VCR closes at 5:00 after December 15). For group viewing contact Charlie Ellbé,Moving Image Coordinator, charlie.ellbe@concordia.ca

(from: Baldwin, Edward E. "Las Vegas in Popular Culture." PhD dissertation, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997, see appendix on Las Vegas films).

What film provides is a visual depiction of Las Vegas.... Of the one hundred or so films which deal with Las Vegas, only a few are of major importance in expressing aspects of the city through the visual medium; many films use the city merely as a backdrop, as Las Vegas provides a "set" unlike any other place and thus provides a great deal of color, activity, and interest for the filmmaker to capture. However, examining a handful of these films is useful for exploring the added visual dimension that they bring, beyond what is possible in print.

Each decade brings more films set—either in whole or in part—in Las Vegas, or which involve the city in some other important w ay. Like New York and Los Angeles, Las Vegas is a popular urban setting for films; unlike most films set in those East and West Coast capitals, though, Las Vegas films rarely depict actual residents or long-time inhabitants. The city is usually treated as a tourist destination so that people have to go out of their way in order to get there, and this aspect of Las Vegas as either a destination or a way station makes the city particularly suitable for whatever kind of symbolic reflection of American society is required for the film. The depiction of Las Vegas in films can be categorized into several different, and often overlapping, modes of interpretation, depending on how the city is used as a metaphor in each work. Using Las Vegas in films conjures up strong associations in the audience, and the city can serve as a kind of visual shorthand for certain themes which the filmmakers wish to explore. These themes include: -the apocalyptic destruction of the city as punishment for its transgressions; -the satirical exposure of Las Vegas (and American) values; -the temptation of big money; -the desire to escape from reality; -the use of gambling as a metaphor for chance; -the portrayal of Las Vegas as the city most representative of the American Dream.

The impulse to destroy Las Vegas is one of the responses that filmmakers have had to this desert city. As we have seen in fiction, Las Vegas holds an attraction for some artists as a place where destruction on a Biblical or apocalyptic scale can take place. At the beginning of the film "Wargames," the teenagers played by Ally Sheedy and Matthew Broderick are trying to think of a city which would be a suitable target to begin their gam e of global thermonuclear war. "Who should we nuke first?" asks Broderick, and it takes only a second before Sheedy gleefully answers, "How about Las Vegas?" "Las Vegas? Great," replies Broderick, as they both smile and laugh. The implication, of course, is that Las Vegas is a perfect place to attack with nuclear bombs, and that anyone—even a teenager—w would recognize that it is only fitting this should be so. W hat is interesting in this brief exchange is the unspoken feeling, which the audience is expected to recognize and to share with the characters, that Las Vegas should be wiped off the face of the earth.

"Wargames" is not the only film in which the annihilation of Las Vegas is envisioned. In Tim Burton's "Mars Attacks," the city plays a prominent role in the action w hen the Martians land in nearby Pahrump and go on to destroy everything in their path. The Landmark hotel-casino, here called the Galaxy, is used for its implosion at the end of the film, with actual footage from the demolition intercut with scenes of the actors. This scene points to another interesting aspect of Las Vegas on film: just as the demolitions of hotels such as the Dunes, Hacienda, and Sands are staged as real-life spectacles for tourists on the Strip, so are they used in films as exciting tableaux of destruction. The 1997 film "Con Air" uses a similar technique w hen it stages a climactic plane crash into the lobby of the about-to-be-imploded Sands. In a way, these films preserve and commemorate a past Las Vegas which exists otherwise only in peoples' memories. Burton dearly enjoys the destruction of Las Vegas, showing a number of scenes of the entire Strip going up in flames, and cranking up the kitsch factor by having Tom Jones sing "It's Not Unusual" onscreen while the aliens attack his audience. That Burton simultaneously revels in the tackiness of Las Vegas and delights in the leveling of it is characteristic of the ambivalence with which the city is often viewed: on the one hand, it can be a lot of fun, but on the other, it can be seen as a giant cultural sinkhole.

As inhabitants of this sinkhole, Jack Nicholson, as Art, the Galaxy's owner, and Annette Bening, as his wife, personify the cultural and intellectual aridity of Las Vegas. Nicholson (here looking and sounding remarkably like the professional wrestler Macho Man Randy Savage) captures the extreme tackiness and white-trash qualities of the city, with Art's house a masterpiece of bad taste, and Bening portrays a New Age airhead who welcomes the Martians and rails against people like her husband whose greed, she says, is "destroying the earth." There is a sense, then, that Las Vegas is getting w hat it deserves when it is attacked. Stephen King's television miniseries "The Stand," for example, establishes Las Vegas as the headquarters of the personification of evil and nukes the city off the map at the end, and the TV-movie "Flight of Black Angel" depicts an Air Force pilot who believes that it is his mission to drop a bomb on the city, since Las Vegas is too sick to be worth saving.

Besides being blown up in various ways, Las Vegas has also come under satirical attack in some films. The satire usually takes the form of treating Las Vegas as the quintessential American city, the one which, more than any other, exemplifies the values and characteristics of our society. This form of representation is followed in "King Ralph," which depends for its hum or on the contrast between boorish American behavior and proper English manners. When the entire royal family of England dies in a freak accident, the closest heir to the throne is found to be an American lounge singer in, of course, Las Vegas. Our first look at this unknowing heir consists of John Goodman in an electric blue tuxedo singing 'Tiny Bubbles" and watching a football game on television, all of this intended to emphasize the culture shock in store for both Ralph and for the English.

Bankrupt American culture is also satirized in "Beavis and Butt-Head Do America." Here, the uncouth cartoon protagonists encounter a busload of senior citizens on their way to Vegas, a context which affords opportunities for multileveled humor. First, on the sophomoric level, old people are depicted as out-of-touch and physically decrepit, and second, on a slightly more advanced level, Las Vegas as a favorite destination for the elderly is cleverly lampooned. These two scenarios are entwined w hen Beavis, mishearing the old woman seated next to him on the bus when she mentions playing the slot machines, remarks that he too is "looking forward to doing some sluts in Vegas." The woman assures him that there are plenty to go around. Once the boys get to town, they enjoy the visceral pleasures which Vegas offers everyone, but they express their pleasure in their own inimitable ways. When confronted with an Egyptian-type figurehead on a reed boat decorating a Luxor-style casino, the boys gape in amazement at the comically enormous breasts on the statue, and when the obligatory dance sequence occurs, it is in a cheesy lounge dominated by a seventies-type band playing "Love Rollercoaster." The satire here is actually rather sophisticated, as these Las Vegas cliches are only slightly m ore exaggerated in the cartoon than they are in real life.

Another potentially (but probably unintentionally) satirical film is "Honey, I Blew Up the Kid," in which a toddler becomes gigantic when he is exposed to the energy fields surrounding the millions of lights in the city. As the child stomps down Fremont Street, the visual cue points us to films such as "Godzilla" and "The Amazing Colossal Man," but the scene also suggests another possibility. It is not the obvious one, that Las Vegas is turning into another Disneyland, but it is the more insidious notion that the availability of instant gratification on which the city was built reduces all of us to big children, demanding that our every need be taken care of regardless of the destruction that this may cause to us or to our surroundings. In this case, the satire exists in the mind of the observer and most likely not as a result of the film makers' intentions.

If Las Vegas is not being physically or satirically attacked in the movies, it is often being plundered. With all of that money circulating, Las Vegas is in many ways the perfect location for a crime movie, especially in the sub-genre of the heist film. One of the best of these, indeed one of the all-time greatest Las Vegas films, is "Ocean's Eleven." In this film, the Rat Pack gets together as a former Army unit set on knocking out the power and robbing five Strip casinos on New Year's Eve. The plot, though, is largely an excuse to showcase the style with which the performers carry it out. This style, including Sammy Davis Jr. as a singing garbage man, is incomparable, and the entire film is a good-spirited laugh, with the added bonus of seeing early 1960s Vegas in all of its swanky, retro glory. Another, less amusing heist film is "They Came to Rob Las Vegas," in which a gang of thieves attacks an armored car full of money and buries it out in the desert. Martin Scorsese's "Casino" is, in its own way, a heist film, as it details the mob-run skimming operations of the 1970s. The brazen nature of the skimming, among other things, eventually led to the downfall of the mob's control of casinos. The film is a relatively accurate, if artistically bloated, depiction of these events, with heavy doses of 1970s style in its clothes, music, and overall design. Finally, "Diamonds are Forever" brings James Bond to Las Vegas to investigate a diamond-smuggling ring; this film has plenty of location shots so Vegas circa 1970 can be seen to good effect, although the extension of the International Hotel (now the Hilton) is a little startling, looking like a futurist experiment. W hat these heist films have in common is the audacity of the crimes they depict; as Las Vegas itself is an outrageous entity, so must any attempts to steal some of its luster be outrageous as well.

The city's position as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world makes it an ideal setting to represent an escape from the reality of everyday life. Films in this genre range in tone from irrepressibly upbeat to incredibly depressing. Examples of the former include the musicals "Meet Me in Las Vegas" and "Viva Las Vegas," and of the latter, "Leaving Las Vegas" and "Aria." "Meet Me in Las Vegas" is a romantic musical comedy featuring cowboy Dan Dailey and dancer Cyd Charisse, who can win jackpots if they simply hold each other's hands while betting. On gorgeous sets, filmed in blazing Technicolor, after much singing and dancing, the two fall in love. Similarly, in "Viva Las Vegas," Elvis Presley plays a race car driver who falls in love with a dancer (Ann-Margret), and the film is one of the happiest and most entertaining looks at Las Vegas as a place largely exempt from the pressures of real life. There is no illness here, and if money is lost it is only temporary; the whole place is drenched in bright colors and warmth.

This same motif of escape is put to good use in some considerably darker films as well; "Leaving Las Vegas" treats the story of a suicidal alcoholic and his companion, a hooker with a heart of gold, as if it were operatically tragic In a practical sense, Ben, the character played by Nicolas Cage, is only in Las Vegas because the bars w would always dose on him in Los Angeles. In a metaphorical sense, though, the city is a perfect place to escape from life as it is lived everywhere else, in reality as well as in film, it can be quite easy for life in Las Vegas to slide imperceptibly into a wash of colored lights, the night fusing into the day in an otherworldly haze. It makes sense, then, that when Ben is asked a t the beginning of the film what he is going to do after being fired from his job, he replied that he is headed for Las Vegas. This is an ironic inversion of the "I'm going to Disneyland" line spoken by members of w inning sports teams. When the name of Ben's motel appears to read "The Hole You're In" rather than "The Whole Year Inn," the audience gets a sense of the appropriateness of the city as a place in which to spiral into oblivion. The segment of "Aria" directed by Franc Roddam also uses Las Vegas as a tragic last stop for a young man and woman who drive in from the desert, make love in a downtown hotel room with neon lights pouring through the window s, and then slit their wrists in the bathtub, all to the accompaniment of Wagner's 'Tristan und Isolde." In all of these films, then, Las Vegas represents escape, either as an act of happiness or of desperation.

The presence of gambling on a huge scale gives Las Vegas a built-in, all-purpose metaphor, especially w hen the city is used as a symbol of the vagaries of chance. The most extravagant use of this motif is in "Destiny Turns on the Radio," in which Quentin Tarantino plays Johnny Destiny, who is described by a character named Thoreau as a "manitou," an "animistic spirit" who rises out of the swimming pool of the Marilyn Motel because the "gambling ritual conjured a deity" to represent the forces of chance. Johnny Destiny thus personifies the possibilities inherent in Las Vegas, and his interactions with the other characters reflect the surprising tricks that fortune can play on people.

The complementary films "Honeymoon in Vegas" and "Indecent Proposal" also deal with the effect that fortune can have on ordinary people. In the comedy "Honeymoon in Vegas," Nicolas Cage loses his fiancée, Sara Jessica Parker, to James Caan as repayment on a $65,000 debt incurred in a high-stakes poker game. In the drama "Indecent Proposal," after losing all their money gambling, Woody Harrelson then loses his wife, Demi Moore, to Robert Redford in exchange for $1 million, in both films, the male character is consumed by regret and jealousy, the female is dazzled and manipulated by the wealthy older man, and the older man is forced to give u p the woman because it is not right that they should be together. Love conquers both the whims of chance and the hum an frailties of greed and envy, but the endings of the films differ. In "Honeymoon in Vegas," the complications are resolved in a vast display of Vegas style: Cage is in his Elvis jumpsuit, Parker in her showgirl outfit, and their entire wedding chapel is populated by the Flying Elvises (Utah chapter). "Indecent Proposal," a moodier, more ponderous film, ends with the couple on a foggy pier in California, worlds away from the influence of chance, symbolized by the two-headed coin that Demi Moore holds in her hand. For the comedy, then, chance as symbolized by Las Vegas can be embraced for its ability to produce happiness, but for the drama the city must be abandoned in order to escape fortune's pernicious influence.

Closely related to the notion that chance is the governing force of Las Vegas is the idea that the city represents a version of the American Dream. Films in this genre depict Las Vegas as an arena in which, regardless of history, the individual can make a fresh start, follow his or her dreams, and become a success in one way or another. One of the strongest expressions of this notion is "Bugsy," which manages to simultaneously follow the general thrust of historical events and also to mythologize these events in such a way that the gangster Bugsy Siegel becomes a new Gatsby, gaining an inspiration in the midst of the desert which leads to the construction of the first great luxury resort, the Flamingo. Like Gatsby, Bugsy is martyred for his dream, but the film 's conclusion vindicates him when the camera glides up the present day Strip and shows how reality has surpassed Bugsy's vision. The theme of personal validation is often expressed better in images than in words; the scene where Bugsy walks into the desert and lifts his arm s in an ecstatic vision of a new Las Vegas evokes both the longing of the dreamer and the hubris of the gangster. Likewise, the scene in "The Electric Horseman" in which Robert Redford rides his light-festooned horse out of Caesars Palace, up the Strip, and out of town, expresses the frustration of Redford's character, a former rodeo star, at being packaged as a commodity in his capacity as a spokesman for a cereal company.

Even the otherwise-terrible "Showgirls" comes through w hen it wants to express the notion of individual freedom and personal potential. The best scene in "Showgirls" is, not surprisingly, one entirely without dialogue: Elizabeth Berkley as Nomi Malone sits atop the parking garage of the Barbary Coast eating a ham burger. The camera rises up behind her, showing us the lights of the Flamingo Hilton next door, then it swings around to show Caesars Palace across the street and, in the distance, the sun setting behind the Spring Mountains. This scene symbolizes Nomi's unquenchable individualism and her refusal to abide by any rules but her own, since she has been ordered by the people who run the show in which she dances to eat only brown rice to keep her figure. Surrounded by the gaudy trappings of Las Vegas, Nomi (whose very name evokes self-knowledge: "know me") asserts her own unique identity, so that when she is asked at the end of the film, "W hat did you win?" she can answer "Me." These films, then, express the American dream of succeeding by bettering one's self without compromising one's principles, and Las Vegas is used either as the symbol of the artificiality which must be overcome or of the personal freedom which allows the city to thrive, or as a combination of both. Either way, self-determination triumphs.

The depiction of Las Vegas in films shows a multiplicity of interpretations. These interpretations make use of the city's major characteristics of wealth, transience, and chance, and the films are able to add a visual dimension to these characteristics which the written word can only approximate.