Schools in Sin City:
The Las Vegas Education Machine and Its Operations in the Casino-Oriented Environment

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INTRODUCTION

A little more than a couple decades ago, *Time* magazine featured Las Vegas on its cover page, enthroning the city as “The New All-American City.” A few years later, another magazine, *Sporting News*, labeled Las Vegas “the nation’s new capital” (Rothman, 2001:630). Along with the tantalizing growth of the Strip, Las Vegas had indeed become a new model for American urban success at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Its rapid and vigorous economic growth contributed to a switch in the nation's perception of the city; Las Vegas, which was once a pariah, “has become a paradigm of the postindustrial economy” (Rothman 2003:31). Even though Nevada was once the only place in the United States with casinos and legal gambling, now commercial casinos and gambling activities can be found throughout not only North America but also the entire globe.² It is within this context that Rothman declares that the rest of the United States has become more and more like Las Vegas (Rothman 2002:331). Indeed, the significance of the Las Vegas case goes beyond its regional boundary.

In the 1970s, Venturi, Brown, and Izenour (1972/1977) argued in *Learning from Las Vegas* that the modern architects should learn from Las Vegas about the revolutionary aesthetics and design of the buildings in the Strip. Four decades later, Marshall (February 9, 2015) challenged urban planners to, again, learn from Las Vegas, in particular, again, from the Strip for the recent spatial transformations that promote its urbanistic features. Nonetheless, writers and journalists who came from outside have often failed to accurately depict the city of Las Vegas, for they barely knew anything beyond the glitter of the Strip: “. . . the city these outsider observers see is a reflection of themselves. It is not the local’s town, not where Las Vegans live.

² See Thompson (2010) for detailed description and discussion on the subject.
To these writers, Las Vegas is little more than a canvas on which to paint their fantasies” (Rothman and Davis 2002:14). In fact, when it comes to education, the city of Las Vegas presents a case that is both complex and perplexing. While its model of urban development is praised as the future paradigm for successful growth and adopted, although with adjustments, by the rest of the world, the current condition of its education is deemed to be a failure due to its low high school graduation rate, teacher shortages, inadequate funding for schools, and so forth. Provided that, can we learn from Las Vegas with respect to education?

This study takes Rothman’s challenge seriously and looks at Las Vegas not from a semiotic but more practical and material standpoint. Instead of relying on outsiders’ prejudicial conception of Las Vegas, whether it is a denunciation of it as “Sin City” or an acclamation toward the city’s dazzling economic expansion, I have strived to portray the city qua city. In particular, I have done so through the lens of its local education, not only because the educational system in Las Vegas is an relatively underexplored element of the reality of the city but also the state of an educational system is, in general, closely related to the overall state of the society in which it operates. Indeed, the interaction and inter-relatedness between the broader society and its educational system have been among the major themes of educational studies. For example, John L. Rury's Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling (2009) offers an exemplary analysis on how American society and education have exchanged influence. In addition, Deacon (2006) suggests that “conventional explanations of the rise of mass schooling” incorporate broader social factors including “the interests of capitalists, the needs of national states, the struggles of workers, the arguments of educational reformers or the general progress of society,” and adds the spread of disciplinary technologies throughout the
society to the list (178). In other words, to investigate how the local education in Las Vegas operates is to explore the composition and operation of the city in general.

Simply put, the current study is only a preliminary attempt to “map” or lay out more clearly the entanglement of various entities that collectively mediate the relationship between Las Vegas casinos and schools. More generally, it proposes and experiments with a particular approach to the investigation of a social reality, which incorporates notions such as subject machine, environment, translation and flow. These notions will be explain in the second and third parts of this paper. Specifically, the goal of this study is threefold: firstly, to illustrate how a system of education operates given its particular context, i.e., the Las Vegas metropolitan area with the predominant presence of its casino-entertainment industry; secondly, to provide a portrait of Las Vegas qua city that is not misrepresented by stereotypical images that the fantasies of its non-local observers have generated; and lastly, to suggest a way of examining a social reality with a different set of vocabulary. To serve these goals, I have chosen a particular understanding of social reality presented in the works of Gille Deleuze and Felix Guattari as well as the works of Levi Bryant, of which the most important notion is that of machine. It may first seem to defy our commonsensical perception of reality to explain social entities in terms of machine. In order to argue for the relevance of such a theoretical framework, therefore, the following part of this paper explicates in detail the notion of machine and the ontological argument based on it. The third part of the paper describes and analyses Las Vegas education as a machine on the basis of what is discussed in the previous part. The fourth part is the analysis of Las Vegas education as a machine and the influence of casino-entertainment industry on its operations. The focus of this analysis is to show how the local education in Las Vegas experiences or translates in its own terms the presence and operations of the casino-
entertainment industry. Then follows a short discussion of Las Vegas education’s responses to such stimuli. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings and implications of this study. The Appendix includes certain details on the interview participants in order to help contextualize the quotes from their interviews.

MACHINE AND MACHINIC INTERACTION

How can we best understand the interaction between schools and casinos in Las Vegas? In this research, I have chosen an analytic framework that conceptualizes the world in terms of machines, which is based on Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical enterprise. As demonstrated in the following pages, this particular framework is capable of conceptualizing an object that is placed within the network of connections and relationships. The basic premise of this approach is that "everything is a machine" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:1). Yes, but in what sense? Oxford Dictionary definition tells us that a machine is "an apparatus using or applying mechanical power and having several parts, each with a definite function and together performing a particular task.” Bryant accepts Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis and uses the term machine as an "all purpose term for being or entity," and extends the dictionary definition of machine by noting that "mechanical energy is only one type of energy machines use to function or perform" (2015, June 16). If everything is a machine, there are machines that do not operate based on mechanical energy—a flower, for example, is fueled by chemical energy that is converted from light energy by the process of photosynthesis.

To Deleuze and Guattari, the fact that “everything is a machine” is “not a metaphor” (1983:41), whereas to Bryant, the language of machine is an rhetorical choice to emphasize the importance of operation as regards ontological understanding of any machine—or being, body, entity, event, object, occasion, etc. (2015, June 16). Bryant states that this framework encourages
one to ask questions such as: “what is it producing?, what are its operations?, what is it acting on?, and what is its output? […] What flows do they act on? How do they transform that upon which they act?” (Bryant 2014, September 16). Whether machine is a metaphorical term or not, I accept Bryant’s assertion that one can only study an object properly, whatever that may be, by paying attention to how the given object operates, functions, performs tasks, and interacts and engages with other objects. This is to say that, in the context of the current study, examining the local education in Las Vegas has to begin with analyzing how it operates as it relates to its environment.

Then, how does a machine work? It produces. But, how? Deleuze and Guattari tell us that the “immanent principle” of such production is desire, which “constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows” (1983:5). Here, the partial object refers to any machine that constitutes an assemblage; from the assemblage’s perspective, it is a “partial” component. It must be added that Deleuze and Guattari’s desire is neither a common-sensical human affect nor the psychoanalytical effect of Freudian-Lacanian lack. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari’s desire is a productive force: “desire produces reality . . . . It is not possible to attribute a special form of existence to desire, a mental or psychic reality that is presumably different from the material reality of social production” (1983:30). In other words, desire that “causes the current to flow . . . and breaks the flows” comprises the most fundamental principle of any production. And it is precisely in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari regard every machine as machine désirante, or desiring-machine; it is a machine that produces through the way of desire.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, there are three sorts of productions that are distinct yet related to each other in the following way:
Production is immediately consumption and a recording process … without any sort of mediation, and the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself. Hence everything is production: production of productions, of actions and of passions; productions of recording processes, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; productions of consumptions, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced (1983:4; emphases mine).

In his dissertation on Deleuze and Guattari, Kim (2013) contends that *The Anti-Oedipus* must be read in terms of ontology. Kim illustrates that the each mode of production is related to a mode of synthesis: “the connective syntheses of partial objects and flows, the disjunctive syntheses of singularities and chains, and the conjunctive syntheses of intensities and becomings” (Delueze and Guattari 1983:338, also cited in Kim 2013:157). The final products of these syntheses are “subjects” that are “points of relative stability resulting from connection, what Deleuze refers to as ‘larval subjects’” (Colebrook 2010:80). In other words, “subject” is the name for the product of these syntheses, rather than the agent of will or intentionality, which persists not by being itself but constantly becoming itself. Every such subject is an unending process, and Las Vegas education is no exception. As a subject, Las Vegas education is in the process of constant becoming, which is sustained by its daily operations. Furthermore, Ian Buchanan argues that, “It is only with the concept of passive synthesis in place that desire becomes an analytic concept, a concept capable of generating concrete social and political critique” (2008:51). In agreement with Buchanan on the centrality of the syntheses in understanding desire and desiring-production, which constitute the sine qua non of machines and their operations, the following paragraphs provide a brief summary of Deleuze and Guattari’s three forms of synthesis.

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3 It must be added that Buchanan (2008) gives me an impression that he effectively equates the three stages of the syntheses with Marx’s general formula of capital, M-C-M’ (Buchanan 2008:54-64). Although capitalism is one of the central themes in *Anti-Oedipus*, I agree with Kim (2013) on that Deleuze and Guattari’s work must be understood as a work of ontology. Nevertheless, here it is enough to stress the importance of the three syntheses in understanding Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical assemblage even though “very few of their commentators have latched onto” such notions (Buchanan 2008:51).
Kim (2013) stresses the temporality of production and synthesis as he discusses the relations between productions and synthesis. The first and the most fundamental form of production is that of production in form of a connective synthesis, which, in turn, produces the other two kinds of production, one of recording processes and the other of consumptions (Deleuze and Guattari 1982:7; Kim 2013:158). In this basic mode of association, there is an energy-source-machine and an organ-machine; “the [former] produces a flow that the [latter] interrupts” (Deleuze and Guattari 1982:1). It is in this temporal process of connection, or coupling, that two machines generate a flow. In doing so, they simultaneously become partial objects of this new assemblage. One of the examples Deleuze and Guattari use to illustrate this process is the pair of two machines, mother’s breast and baby’s mouth. The mother’s breast contains milk in itself, which has a preexisting channel of flow. Then a suckling’s mouth interrupts that flow of milk by coupling with the breast. At the moment of this interruption, these two now connected machines generate another flow that goes from the breast to the mouth. Here, the breast operates as an energy-machine and the mouth, an organ-machine.

However, no machine is an absolute energy-source-machine that contains a flow or an absolute organ-machine that interrupts that flow. Rather, each becomes and establishes itself as such at the moment of cut, or coupure-prélèvement, of a flow—this is how connection is achieved. (Kim 2013:160). In the breast-mouth assemblage, for example, it is only through this cutting that the mouth becomes a milk-sucking mouth and the breast becomes a milk-releasing breast. Kim suggests that prélèvement concerns the function of selecting and picking out as if a gold miner digs a gold from a mine (2013:163). Kim refers to the following paragraph:

Doubtless each organ-machine interprets the entire world from the perspective of its own flux, from the point of view of the energy that flows from it: the eye interprets everything—speaking, understanding, shitting, fucking—in terms of seeing. But a connection with another machine is always established, along a transverse path, so that
one machine interrupts the current of the other or "sees" its own current interrupted (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:6, cited in Kim 2013:164, emphasis mine).

Kim adds that an eye is a machine that performs the *coupure-prélèvement* of seeing, and everything exists in terms of vision from an eye’s standpoint (2013:165). Likewise, an eye only exists as an eye, i.e., a machine that sees, insofar as it exercises this *coupure-prélèvement* of seeing.

The second kind of synthesis, disjunctive synthesis, concerns recording. Here, recording refers to the process in which machines as partial objects are distributed on the body without organs, or “the way in which they are attached to the body without organs” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:12). Here the important notion of body without organ must be examined in ontological terms. As Kim stresses, Deleuze and Guattari tell us that the body without organs is a product of the first connective synthesis as a third term: “It is produced, at a certain place and a certain time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of producing and the product” (Deleuze and Guattari 1982:8). In other words, the body-assemblage is more than the sum of its parts. It is also “an incomprehensible, absolutely rigid stasis’ in the very midst of process, as a third stage” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:8). Kim explains that the body without organ is a stoppage or a break; it is a snapshot of the universe on which various desiring-machines appear to be distributed. This, Kim adds, is “a state in which the preexisting code is deconstructed and consequently all code is lost even though it will soon proceed to a next state in which the new code is given” (2013:185, my translation). Deleuze and Guattari define code as follows:

This code is inseparable not only from the way in which it is recorded and transmitted to each of the different regions of the body, but also from the way in which the relations of each of the regions with all the others are recorded (1983:38).
Since the body only arises as a result of the connective synthesis of machines as partial objects that thereby form an assemblage, the code may be understood as the system that transpires with this formation of an assemblage and regulates the operation of the assemblage as a machine.

The disjunctive synthesis is then the process in which a body with one code, in the passage of time, relates to the same body with a new code. At each given moment, we find a body without organs that is a snapshot. Here, desiring-machines, which have undergone a connective synthesis, appear to be recorded or inscribed on the body without organs, “marking the surface off into co-ordinates, like a grid” (Deleuze and Guattari 1982:12). It must be noted that this stoppage presents a possibility that the established connection can fall apart. In this sense, the body without organs is the model of death. This death, this disintegration of the given code is the second form of cut, namely, coupure-détachement or detachment. However, Kim adds, such death constitutes a necessary part of every becoming “because a beginning, a birth, a novelty, a creation is not possible without a death, a break, a cut. Death sits on the heart of becoming” (2013:188, my translation). Desiring-production continues and, at the next moment, we find another distribution on yet the same body without organ. Of course, the new distribution may be the exact same one, but in a temporal sense, they are still distinguished from each other. In terms of time, these two bodies are differentiated, disparate and disjunctive, but in terms of process, they are nonetheless held by the same body—the disjunctive synthesis is precisely and only in this sense a synthesis (Kim 2013:191-194; Kim 2005). Therefore, the disjunctive synthesis is “the production of a series of differences” (Colebrook 2010:79) and “the genealogy of desire” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:13).

The third kind of synthesis, the conjunctive synthesis, follows the disjunctive synthesis. Here, the production of consommation (i.e., consumption or consummation) follows the
production of recording. It is in this last stage where one producing cycle is completed (consummated) and, simultaneously, is exhausted (consumed). And the resulting product of the conjunctive synthesis is a subject. However, this is not a typical subject:

It is a strange subject, however, with no fixed identity, wandering about over the body without organs, but always remaining peripheral to the desiring-machines, being defined by the share of the product it takes for itself, garnering here, there, and everywhere a reward in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:18).

Deleuze and Guattari add that “the subject is produced as a mere residuum alongside the desiring-machines” and the form of this last synthesis is, "So that's what it was!" (1983:17-18). Kim (2005) illustrates this moment of consommation in terms of affirmation or enjoyment of the production. However, subject does not affirm or enjoy the process of becoming thus far; on the contrary, it is that affirmation or enjoyment of “So that’s what it was!” that constructs a subject. Therefore, the subject can be equated with neither the desiring-machines nor the assemblage they constitute. It is the enjoyment of desiring-production which is an excess to the production itself—this is the third cut, the coupure-reste (the residual break). For the subject to persist, the affirmation must be made time and again: It must be “reborn with each new state” that is disjunctively put together. For example, as a subject, Las Vegas education must be affirmed as such at every moment despite the changes in its details. For every new school year, it receives new students, new teachers, new administrators, new computer labs, and sometimes even new schools. Nonetheless, the local education remains as such as it traverses the gap between its past and now, and this traverseness puts them together, disjunctively.

In sum, the machinic operation is the production that is characterized by desire, which interrupts and thereby generates the continuity of flows: “A machine may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks (coupures) . . . . Far from being the opposite of continuity, the break or interruption conditions this continuity: it presupposes or defines what it cuts into as an ideal
continuity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:36). The entire cycle of desiring-production follows three forms of synthesis—connective, disjunctive, and conjunctive. The fundamental mode of production is that of connection: one machine connects to another. Within this assemblage, each machine becomes a partial object of the assemblage. In this process, the body of organs arises, which appears to be the site on which all partial objects are distributed. The disjunctive synthesis then refers to the persistence of this assemblage in the passage of time. Then comes the conjunctive synthesis, in which a subject transpires as a result of an affirmation of the production the assemblage has undergone thus far. This suggests that examination of the local education and the gaming-entertainment industry in Las Vegas in terms of machines—i.e., their operations—must begin with investigating the process of production each “subject” has experienced.

Now, let us turn to the nature of machinic interaction. In this section, I will briefly compare theoretical frameworks of Deleuze and Guattari and Bryant, and also assess the relevance of their notions to the current study. With respect to interactions among machines, one of the most important concepts of Deleuze and Guattari is that of coupure-prélèvement, which is the very mechanism of the connective synthesis as described above. The coupure-prélèvement always involves another kind of cut, namely, coupure-détachement (detachment):

> Cutting into the flows (le prelevement du flux) involves detachment of something from a chain; and the partial objects of production presuppose stocks of material or recording bricks within the coexistence and the interaction of all the syntheses. How could part of a flow be drawn off without a fragmentary detachment taking place within the code that comes to inform the flow? (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:40).

In other words, these two cuts are always coupled. A current is first detached or cut off from its original system, and then interrupted by another system so that a new flow is generated.

This pair of coupures can be compared with the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In a nutshell, the former coincides with coupure-détachement that severs a flow from its original context. In Parr’s words, to deterritorialize is “to free up the fixed relations
that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organizations” (2010:69). Of course, this is what the body of organs as a break illustrates. On the other hand, the latter is coupure-prélèvement, or the selective inclusion or interpretation of the flow in the new context of, in eye’s case, seeing. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the operations of deterritorialization and reterritorialization with the case of the wasp and the orchid:

How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:10).

Here it is clearly stated that deterritorialization and reterritorialization are “always connected” just as two cuts are mutually involved. Also important is that as two machines interact with each other, both machines go through deterritorialization and reterritorialization. If we go back to the earlier example of the eye, the same story can be translated in the following terms. In this translated picture, I would add another element, a blue mug, which is an object of seeing from the eye’s standpoint. At the moment of interaction, the blue mug is first deterritorialized or detached from its preexisting context and lays itself as a free-floating entity. The eye then interrupts the mug in a specific manner, i.e., the way of seeing, and reterritorializes the mug in terms of the source of the electromagnetic radiation. However, simultaneously, the eye is deterritorialized and reterritorialized so that it operates as a machine of seeing in this particular instance. But is the eye not already and always a machine of seeing? Not at all. Rather, the eye can be interpreted in many different ways—from the standpoint of the blood that circulates throughout the body, the eye is simply another channel the blood passes through; an eye doctor encounters the eye as an object of ophthalmological attention; and the brain finds the eye as one
of the numerous organs that sends neurological signals. And at each incidence, the eye turns into a new partial object within the newly formed assemblage.

This, then, resonates with Bryant’s understanding of how machines interact with one another as illustrated in *The Democracy of Objects* (2011). In Bryant’s vocabulary, each machine interacts with other machines in indirect and selective manners. On one hand, it is indirect because the operation of another machine B on the machine A—this is called perturbation—is always translated in terms of machine A. In other words, a machine can only be influenced by other machines within its own context—this is called translation. For example, when a dog owner is talking to her pet, the dog is likely to hear largely meaningless string of sounds because the owner’s speech is translated as such in the dog’s context. On the other hand, it is selective because not all operations of other machines may perturb a machine: “A machine is only selectively sensitive to flows; which is to say that machines aren’t receptive to *all* flows” (2012, June 21, emphasis original). Each machine, due to the way it is arranged or assembled, only responds, or is open, to a limited set of stimuli. For example, human ears as machines in general only respond to the audio frequency within the so-called hearing range, which is commonly from 20 to 20,000 Hertz with some individual variations. For each machine, the set of other machines to which the machine in question is selectively open or perturb-able comprises its environment. In Deleuze and Guattari’s language, “each organ-machine interprets the entire world from the perspective of its own flux, from the point of view of the energy that flows from it: the eye interprets everything . . . in terms of seeing” (1983:6).

The difference between Bryant and the other party is nuanced but real. Bryant is more insistent on the “operational closure” of a machine at any given instance of interaction, whereas Deleuze and Guattari see each “connection” or interaction between machines as a moment in
which a new assemblage emerges—hence the term connective synthesis. Bryant sees such an instance as a manifestation of a machine’s operational capacity, or a “local manifestation,” which he sharply distinguishes from “the virtual proper being” of a machine that consists of all the present yet un-actualized capacities of the machine. Bryant argues that all objects are:

split between their virtual proper being and their local manifestations. The virtual proper being of an object is its endo-structure, the manner in which it embodies differential relations and attractors or singularities defining a vector field or field of potentials within a substance. The local manifestation of a substance is the actualization of a point within the phase space of this vector field in the form of actualized qualities (2011:114, emphases mine).

On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari, every machine continually must undergo a continual series of three syntheses to persist, and there is no sign of pre-configured “virtual proper being” hidden in each machine. Although a machine is given a code, it may vary from this moment to another—the machine stays as such only thanks to the body without organs and the disjunctive synthesis. However, the body without organs cannot be the virtual proper being that possess the machine’s operational capacity; the body without organs is only a shadow that arises after the connective synthesis is complete and possesses no positively productive power. In short, what Bryant considers an actualization of the virtual capacity of a machine is a new connection in which two machines are actively engaged and interrupt each other.

Despite such a difference, I suggest, both parties are envisioning by and large the same kind of reality in which various entities are interacting and engaging with one another in a particular, selective fashion. Furthermore, the discussion hitherto on machine and machinic interaction suggests that, in order to measure the gaming-entertainment industry’s influence upon the local education, we must first examine what operations constructs the local education as an assemblage and how it is selectively open to, or connects with the gaming-entertainment industry that constitutes an important part of its environment.
THE SUBJECT MACHINE

Based on the theoretical perspective presented in the previous part, the current research has a subject machine to be analyzed: the schools in Las Vegas or, more precisely, the local education system that serves Las Vegas. The term "subject machine" stresses the fact that it is a machine that is a subject in Deleuze and Guattari's sense—the identity that is given, yet not identical to an assemblage as a result of the conjunctive synthesis. In other words, Las Vegas education is a machine that is always in the process of becoming itself. It is also a subject in a phenomenological sense as the center of its own world. Las Vegas education as a subject machine experiences its environment, which of course consists of a set of many other machines that it relates to, as it translates and registers the inflow of various stimuli from outside its own boundary. It must be added that Las Vegas education does not encounter its environment as a whole. This encounter is always mediated through certain flows to which specific partial-objects of the subject machine respond.

On various levels, the subject machine largely corresponds to Clark County School District (CCSD) although the school district has little direct influence on private schools. The Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV Metropolitan Statistical Area, or simply the Las Vegas metropolitan area, is geographically coextensive with Clark County. CCSD is currently responsible for total 218 elementary schools, 57 middle schools, and 50 high schools, that are distributed in sixteen different Performance Zones. In addition to that, fourteen charter schools are currently registered in CCSD. In the 2013-2014 School Year, CCSD served total 314,636 students in the community, which amounted to approximately 70% of all students in Nevada.

The organ-machines that comprise the assemblage of Las Vegas education are as follows: students, teachers, administrators, principals, staff members, caterers or contractors for cafeteria
services, CCSD Police Department, school buildings, computers, printers, textbooks, desks and chairs, light bulbs, sewage system, electricity supply system, protocols and procedures, the bureaucracy of each school, the bureaucracy of Clark County School District, the superintendent and the board of trustees.

As the subject of its own world, the Las Vegas education machine encounters its unique environment. This environment, of course, consists of numerous other machine-assemblages that operate on their own ways. Two points to be re-emphasized: first, not all elements have the same influence on the subject. Some exert a greater degree of impact than others. Second, the subject does not encounter any of the elements of its environment as such. In case of this study, the subject machine of the local education in Las Vegas relates to each component of its environment according to its own fashion, via its particular “sensory” organs, or its organ machines that directly connect to the incoming flows. Therefore, the focus of the present study, the interaction between casinos and schools in Las Vegas, can be restated as follows: the ways the Las Vegas educational system as a subject machine translates the operations of the gaming-entertainment industry as a particular element of its environment and how the latter shapes the operations of the former.

There are three main flow types among others to which the subject machine attend: people, capital, and information. The flow of people consists of students and employees including teachers, principals, administrators, bureaucrats, and staff members. It must be noted that students also comprise the principal product of the local-education machine in form of graduates or, in a certain context, an educated labor force. Capital takes various forms including the operating fund, real estate, school buildings, chairs and tables, textbooks, and so on. Lastly, information refers to all sorts of data—words, numbers, graphs and images—that are produced
by and fed into the subject machine in storable and transferrable form, papers, computer documents, or web pages.

The present study considers four particular flows as it examines how the subject machine of the local education in Las Vegas encounters the casino-entertainment assemblage. These flows include 1) people as students, 2) people as teachers and educators, 3) capital as resources, and 4) information relevant to its operation. The subject machine translates or experiences these four flows in its own terms. Therefore, the first flow is experienced as the large enrollment of students from particular backgrounds and with specific needs; the second flow is experienced as a shortage of qualified teachers; the third flow is interpreted as insufficient resources or funds to support its operation; and the last flow presents itself as little appreciation and negative assessment, locally and nationally, toward the local education system in Las Vegas and its operations (See Figure 1.).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Las Vegas education as the subject machine and the incoming flows from its environments as translated from the subject machine’s perspective.*

In addition to personal observations, news articles, public records, and scholarly literature, the present research relied on a series of in-depth interviews in order to gather relevant
information, especially local students’ and teachers’ characteristics, experiences, and operations within the assemblage. Most interviews were conducted in a semistructured fashion with an interview guide⁴, and each interview lasted between thirty to sixty minutes. The interview guide included a set of interview questions chosen to help the interviewer to carry out the conversation relevant to the current research’s subject matter. The interviewees were recruited by the means of convenience sampling and snowball sampling due to practical limitations. The small number of samplings and the particular mix of sampling technique limit the scope of the current study’s findings. Nonetheless, such limitation is partly justified by the fact that this study aims only to offer a preliminary understanding instead of an exhaustive explanation for the examined subject.

LAS VEGAS EDUCATION AND THE FOUR FLOWS

Here I examine each flow and its character shaped by the environment of the subject machine. It must be stressed that each flow is also interacting with each other. For instance, we will find below that large enrollment and insufficient resources contribute to the teacher shortages, while the insufficient funding is related to the overall little appreciation of the subject machine in the local community. Therefore the actual diagram would look more like a highly complex network between flows and their sources. Unraveling this complex web of flows and machines will be done with a focus on the role played by the casino-entertainment assemblage in Las Vegas, for the current research ultimately seeks to map out how the operation of the subject machine is influenced by the casino-entertainment assemblage.

However, it is necessary to clarify in what environment the subject machine is located before discussing the four flows that the subject machine of Las Vegas education relates to. Most notably, southern Nevada experienced a tremendous economic growth in the 1990s and early 2000s, mostly thanks to the rapid growth of the casino-driven entertainment industry. Las Vegas

⁴ See Chapter 9 in Russel (2006) for more on semistructured interviewing.
historian Hal Rothman calls this period of prosperity “the Mirage Phase,” which started in November 22, 1989 with the opening of the Mirage Hotel and Casino, a mega-casino resort with 3,044 rooms on the Las Vegas Strip. Rothman stresses that the Mirage’s opening was the beginning of the massive and luxurious reinvention of the Strip: “the Monte Carlo, New York New York, Mandalay Bay, Paris, Bellagio, the Venetian, and on and on all opened and instead of bust, we got more of everything, more visitors, more hotels, more restaurants, more shopping, more shows” (2007:86). It is during the Mirage Phase that Las Vegas established itself to be “the New All-American City” as the cover of the *Time* magazine in January 1994 proclaimed.

Roughly during the same time period, the off-Strip area in Las Vegas also experienced a great expansion of its casino amenities including “the Orleans (1996), Gold Coast (1986), Rio Suites Hotel (1990), Hard Rock Hotel (1995), Arizona Charlie’s (1988), the Santa Fe (1991), the Resort at Summerlin (now the Regent Las Vegas) (1999), and other properties” (Moehring 2000:265).

Although these off-Strip resorts, as well as a smaller casinos and slot machines in neighborhood, mostly catered to the local residents rather than the tourists, they also contributed to the growth of local economy based on the entertainment industry.

The thriving gaming industry created a unique labor market where a great demand existed for “low-skill” labors in the service sector, such as waiting staff and hotel housekeepers.\(^5\)

The category of Leisure and Hospitality has remained the top employer, accounting for close to or more than 30% of the entire employment in Clark County. The relevant statistics for the last decade shows that the leisure and hospitality industry has always accounted for more than a third of the total private employment, except for a couple years in the mid-2000s when the

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\(^5\) The label, “low-skill” labors may do injustice to many workers under such a category. Gray’s study quotes the Chief Operating Officer at the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas, who stresses that “housekeeping is not low skilled work,” for the job requires a worker to “clean sixteen rooms in eight hours” and “make a bed in three minutes” (13). Perhaps the only common factor for all “low-skill” jobs is that the traditional higher-education institutions do not provide relevant training for such professions.
construction industry grew in its employment with the local housing boom. Especially after the economic crisis in 2008, a greater degree of economic diversification has become an important theme of Las Vegas’s urbanism, but its economic composition has little changed (Wargo 2011, January 3; Skancke 2015, June 17). The most recent figures for 2013 suggest that the leisure and hospitality sector hired 35.8% of the total workforce in the entire private sector. Meanwhile, labor unions, including the Culinary Union that organized hospitality workers in most mega-casino resorts in the Strip, successfully ensured the “low-skill” workers to earn a middle-class wage. In other words, as Gray and DeFilippis (2014) underline, the favorable labor market “landscape” that is central to the majority of economic opportunities for the incoming workers does not stand solely on the success and growth of casino businesses.

Consequently, the city’s expansion is largely characterized by a great and sustained influx of people. In the 1990s, for example, “the population grew by 468,000, almost a 45 percent increase in one decade” (Rothman 2007:152). This tremendous increase in population is spurred by the incredible economic growth on the Strip, which “added more than fifty thousand hotel rooms” within a decade (Rothman 2007:152). The metropolitan area’s growth continued in the twenty-first century. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Clark County population grew from 1.375 million in 2000 to 1.951 million in 2010, again more than 40% growth in a single decade. The population estimate for the following years suggests that the Clark County population first surpassed 2 million in 2012 and kept growing although at a rather modest rate. This growth in Las Vegas’ new residential population was driven by, on one hand, “low-skilled” workers for the expanding industries, which have always been in short of labor (Rothman 2007:214), and, on the other hand, “waves of retirees” came to Las Vegas in search of entertainment (Rothman 2007:152; also see Moehring 2000:265).
With this increase in population came various businesses catering to the local residents. With this respect, Mr. B offers a highly perceptive summary of the “unique” history of the growth of Las Vegas:

This area was unique in the sense that [...] the city began focused around the gambling area, and that became bigger. There were more people employed by the gambling areas and hotels as that became busier and more popular. So with that growth, these people needed some place to live. They needed to have support services that everybody who lives some place has, which is gas, electric, water, heat, and air conditioning. Then they needed to have insurance. Then they needed to have schools if they had children. So as result of the tight beginning of the gambling—the Strip if you are willing, the downtown area, as they grew and more people became involved in making that happen, needed more services and more things. So businesses opened catering to that and the city started here, and just grew outward. And it continued to grow outward and filled the valley.

In brief, the expansion of Las Vegas was resulted from the popularity and subsequent expansion of gaming business in the area. The real estate industry also took appropriate steps to respond to, as well as take advantage of, the great increase in the local population. Both Moehring (2002) and Rothman (2003; 2007) agree that the land developers, with the remarkable expansion of the urban landscape in southern Nevada over the last few decades, have established themselves as a influential interest group that can compete with the casino owners who comprise a more traditional power in the area. In fact, the beginning of the Mirage Phase for the gaming industry almost coincides with the prosperous years for land developers, for whom “the late 1980s were a heady time” (Rothman 2003:269). The vigorous real estate development in southern Nevada resulted in new suburban areas including Green Valley, in Henderson, and Summerlin, in Las Vegas. Therefore, Mr. B asserts, “the mere fact that this house is here is all because of the entertainment, the gaming industry.” Along the same line of reasoning, “the mere fact” that the subject machine of this study, the local education that serves the area, exists is “all because of the entertainment, the gaming industry.”
With their marvelous growth in revenue, the casino-led entertainment and land development industries gained great influence over the local political system. Moehring clearly states the relationship between the successful local businesses and their increased power over the local affairs:

The spectacular growth of Las Vegas has strained local services, spawned a major infrastructure crisis, and, most significantly, enthroned a powerful elite of casino executives, Steve Wynn and Sheldon Adelson among them, who attempt to shape public policy by actively bankrolling candidates for office. All three of these issues are interrelated, because the interests of the gaming industry often diverge from those of the city, county, and state. (2002:79)

Moehring adds that the casinos, which have traditionally been the principal contributors of political campaigns, “always had the ears of these governors, as well as of most state legislators” (2002:80). Sometimes the gaming industry took a largely direct means to influence over the local affairs. For example, Robert Joseph “Bob” Miller, the twenty-sixth Governor of Nevada who served from 1989 to 1999, came from “a ‘well-connected’ gaming family in Las Vegas, and enjoyed political support from nearly every major casino owner in the state” (Moehring 2002:81).

The result of the gaming industry’s continuing influence over the politics is reflected in their contribution to the overall state revenue, which declined in 1990s despite the ongoing prosperity of gaming industry (2002:82). The tax structure in Nevada, which has developed under such circumstances, stresses the importance of success and expansion of the casino resort businesses. Nevada’s tax structure, characterized by its heavy reliance on sales tax and lack of income tax, puts the state revenue into a highly unstable position and compels the local administration to serve the interest of the industry.

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Bernhard, Green, and Lucas indicates that the interests of these two industry do not always coincide. “Although developers and casino owners both push for growth, they are often interested in different aspects, leading to political conflict. Casino owners seek to maximize the tourist trade and want local government to support tourist infrastructure . . . Real-estate developers, on the other hand, seek government infrastructure improvements for residents” (Bernhard, Green and Lucas 150).
The relatively low cost of living has become another characteristic of the city. The cost of living, especially rent prices, in Las Vegas is lower than that in many other major cities. Numbeo (http://www.numbeo.com), a major online database for cost of living in cities, shows that rent prices in New York City is 262.56% higher than in Las Vegas. The rent prices in Los Angeles, the closest major city to Las Vegas, are more than twice the price in Las Vegas. The local purchasing power in Las Vegas appears lower than that in many other major cities including New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia. In brief, it is much more feasible to “get by” in Las Vegas with a lower salary.

In sum, the real estate development that supplied affordable houses to accommodate the growing population has contributed with two other elements, the expanding casinos that created jobs and the decent payment to the workers ensured by strong unions, to the making of Las Vegas as “the Last Detroit, the last place where you can be unskilled, make a middle-class wage, and have it mean something in America” (Rothman 2007:214). All these factors resulted in a continual influx of a particular population, which largely consists of retirees and low-educated workers, who are often immigrants. And this constant growth, expansion, and development then contributed to the high mobility and transiency of the Las Vegas population.

Flow 1: People as Students

The first flow is that of people as students, which the subject machine of Las Vegas education selects and draws from the Las Vegas society. When “the Mirage Phase” first began in the late 1980s, the rapid growth in Las Vegas population propelled by the expansion of casino-entertainment industry presented itself above all as soaring student enrollment that surpasses the school district’s projections (Carl, Gallifent, Peters, and Watson 2009:108). In addition, CCSD had to compete with “the major casinos and developers for construction companies, workers, and
suppliers in the Las Vegas building boom” for building new schools (Carl, Carl, Gallifent, Peters, and Watson 2009:108). In the meantime, the school district suffered from insufficient resources. With the rising cost of land acquisition and construction cost, it was unable to create the promised number of schools to meet the educational needs of the growing student body, which “tripled from 100,000 children in 1988 to more than 300,000 in 2008” (Milliard 2012, September 24).

Among others, the overwhelming size of student body means the high student-teacher ratio. The average class size in Nevada is the largest in the nation. According to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the average class size for high school in Nevada is 31.2 while the national average is 24.2 in the 2011-12 School Year. The average class size for middle school in Nevada was 31.8, whereas the national average is 25.5. The most ghastly comparison is the average class size for elementary school: the average is 54.4 students per class in Nevada, which is over twice the national average (National Center for Education Statistics 2013; See Table 7. Average class size in public primary schools, middle schools, high schools, and schools with combined grades, by classroom type and state: 2011–12). Students translate this into their interaction with teachers who are overwhelmed by workload and lost their motivation. Piper, who mostly attended “regular” classes in high school, testifies that many teachers she had were often “overwhelmed and irritated” by a large number of students. In such classrooms, teachers could not pay enough individualized attention to students and sometimes failed to grade the assignments in time. Some teachers communicate their frustrations. According to Piper,

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7 After 2008, CCSD’s student enrollment decreases for a few years as the national economy suffers from the 2008 Financial Crisis and its consequences. It is only in 2012 when the student body started to grow again (Budget Department 2015:176).

8 All school classes are categorized into regular, honors and Advancement Placement classes, of which the last is the most challenging.
They’ll let you know, “I’m not getting paid for this. I’m doing it because I want to do it and I want to help you guys.” Some teachers want to make themselves look a little better. Like, “I want to help you. I’m here for you. Blah blah blah.” Then you get the hint.”

Tina also offers a similar account in which teachers say, “There are so little of us and so many of you that I don’t have the time. I physically do not have the time to do it.”

Nonetheless, the large student body and the low quality of the curriculum do not equally impact every student. Private schools that can control the admission of students are less likely to confront the issue of the large student body. In the public realm, Whitaker (2015, March 10) reports that schools in poorer areas suffer more critically from teacher shortages and the large class size. Even within the same school, the contrast between advanced classes and regular classes is striking. For example, Red Rock High School’s regular classes have often more than 40 students per class while Advance Placement (AP) classes had much fewer students. According to Cher, the difference in class size offers “a different learning experience.” More specifically, in regular classes, “teachers are more irritated and they cared less about [students].”

Anthony, who graduated from the same high school, admits that he was “privileged” because “there were fewer children in those [AP] classes.” Anthony adds, “I was very fortunate with all of my teachers being very caring for their students, all wanting us to succeed, always taking more time out of their days, to be open to helping us.” Again, the contrast is apparent.

The high transiency of people in Las Vegas adds to the plight of Las Vegas students, who translate such a trend into their educational experience characterized by discontinuity. Especially in the 1990s and the early 2000s when the city was expanding rapidly, many Las Vegas residents took their chances to move up and the school district built many new schools. In Mr. B’s words,

[People would rent and then move away, or people would move in when it was cheap and then get out to move to somewhere else, move up to the next house. You are to just stay here for couple years. So, that was prevalent here.]
Naturally, a student would transfer to another school when his or her family moved to another neighborhood. Furthermore, as new schools continually appeared, sometimes students who attended one school moved to a newer school in the next year. Besides the internal movement of Las Vegans, there is a constant influx of people, as well as students, from outside the city. Unfortunately, the transfer of new students is not always executed in a timely manner. As James once experienced as a teacher in a public elementary school, the educators can hardly attend a new student’s needs when the student comes close to the end of the school year. Of course, such a student is very unlikely to find his or her school experience favorable.

It is not only students who move. Teachers and administrators also show a high turnover rate for their own reasons. The educators’ mobility further contributes to the fragile and superficial relationship between students and educators. New teachers need some time to understand their pupils and the school curriculum while students also need time to understand the personality and pedagogy of their new teachers. In Cher’s case, her guidance counselor in high school, who was a replacement for his predecessor that retired early, failed to recognize the needs of his students and became “absolutely useless.”

In addition, the demographic composition of Las Vegas population, resulted from the expansion of the casino-entertainment industry, presents itself as a student body with low educational capital in the subject machine of Las Vegas education. As suggested earlier, many of those who moved into Las Vegas in search of economic opportunities were not required to hold a college degree. This argument is supported by the latest Census data: Only 22.0% of Las Vegas residents in the age group from 35 to 44 years old hold bachelor’s degree or higher, which is over 10 percentage points lower than the national average. The disparity is even greater for the age group between 25 to 34 years old: 18.7% in Las Vegas versus 31.9% on the national level.
(United States Census Bureau N.d.). In other words, Las Vegas students in general have few chances to learn the benefits of education and the know-how of navigating and succeeding within the educational system from their parents and older siblings. Instead, students are familiar with models of success with low education. A significant number of Las Vegas locals are those who are employed in the casino-entertainment industry without much experience in higher education. Furthermore, as Brian who has taught in Las Vegas over a decade observes, people who made successful careers in the casino-entertainment industry do not feel ashamed to be, for example, dancers who perform in casinos and strip clubs. Instead, they form a community in which they can take pride in their life and ability to successfully raise their families. Likewise, some of the wealthiest families in Las Vegas are those who own casinos and, as Brian and Rebecca suggest in their interviews, do not consider education a necessary factor in their success. ⁹

On the other hand, if students come from more humble backgrounds, they face the urgency of non-educational issues such as needs to contribute to their family economy while their families offer little pressure for the students’ educational achievement. With respect to this, Kate made a very noteworthy observation when she was involved in a special program called Student Teacher Enlistment Project-Undergraduate Program (STEP UP) sponsored by Nevada State College. The program recruited high school graduates from the lower socioeconomic group and offered them all sorts of support, both financial and institutional, to attend college and get trained to be teachers. However, the outcome was highly unsatisfactory. James, who successfully finished the program, testifies that out of 230 participants in his STEM group, only two

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⁹ A quote from Brian’s interview: Here, and it’s a small group, but they are remarkable and present, are people who literally, their ranch became a casino and now they’ll never work again or for their generations to come. And they will say things to you that you can’t fathom, which are like, “Whatcha your reading fer?” This notion of, “I never learned to spell. Why does my kid have to?”

A quote from Rebecca’s interview: The people who are of the casinos names, like the Fertitas, the Boyds—they don’t necessarily value education because they are like, “I’m just going to the casino business.”
graduated from college. Having acknowledged the low rate of participation and completion, Kate and her colleague conducted a study on the participants and concluded that the participants, who are mostly first-generation college students, did not have proper familial support. In Kate’s words, “It came down to the fact that as they were growing up, they never heard college. They didn’t know college.” She adds,

They didn’t know the constructs of college. […] They didn’t advocate for themselves because they never had a role models in their family that said, You need to finish this, or, Here is how to do college. Not having that as part of their family makeup, they didn’t have the right support to see it through, and they didn’t have the stamina to finish.

In addition to this, Kate says, such students “have family members that they have to take care of.” In other words, a student cannot pursue academics when his or her parents say, “You’ve got three sisters at home and we need you to babysit them right now.”

Meanwhile, students encounter the casino-entertainment complex as an alternative career path on one hand, and a source of entertainment and distraction on the other hand. First, the relatively low cost of living and the labor market dominated by the casino-entertainment industry offers Las Vegas students a good chance of getting by without much education. Students who lost their motivation for educational attainment for the aforementioned reasons see this as an alternative career choice. Brian finds “people who didn’t finish their school because they are making $180,000 a year waitressing in a nightclub” while working “three days a week and four days off.” He adds, “It’s a long shift and it hurts to walk in high heels, but, my God, that’s really a good deal!” Rebecca also witnessed kids in her daughter’s middle school who “drop out . . . work at Little Darlings,” which is a famous strip club. Rebecca further points out,

[I]f you do fall out and you get involved in that scene, it’s so huge here! It’s not like being in Pennsylvania where like, “What? There is no strip club here.” You know what I mean? It’s right here, in your face, 24/7, all the time. It’s advertised on the Strip, and kids find that fast money to be great and fascinating especially if they don’t do well in school and they are struggling and they don’t see the point.
It must be noted that such opportunities do not always have the same impact on all students. Cher, whose comes from “a family culture of women who are expected to be very smart and very educated,” sees the possibility of working in a strip club as a potential trap rather than an opportunity. The following quote captures the gist of her view on the strip club:

I had two friends that I spent most of my classes with, since we always had the same homework, or doing the same projects, we’d be in a group chat. We’d go, “You know, I’m going to drop out today. I think I’m going to go down to Little Darlings just put in a resume. I’m not going to school anymore. I’m going to stay home, and be a stay-at-home mother. Let’s start a pregnancy pact. I’m dropping out of school.” Then we’d come around after we’d humored ourselves and go, “I guess I’ll do this assignment. It’s 10pm, I’ll start.”

In brief, students who are provided with little resources and encouragement to move on to higher education are more likely to consider getting a job in the casino-entertainment industry as a viable alternative to attending college.

In addition, the casino-entertainment complex offers Las Vegas students entertainment as well distraction from school. As depicted by Rowley (2011) as well as Baynes (2011), local casinos play a central role in the everyday lives of Las Vegas residents. Particularly, as Mr. B explains, casinos have adapted to cater to minors by building “bowling alleys and movie theatres, and other gaming, non-gambling gaming, like video games, into casinos.” Accordingly, Anthony, Cher, and Tina could all go to nearby casinos to “hang out with friends” and watch movies as high school students without feeling awkward. They are, in Anthony’s words, “used to casinos being around.” Not only that, the prominent presence of casinos presents Las Vegas teenagers very specific sorts of diversion, or ways to “get in trouble.” Because of the prevalent casino-entertainment complex in the area, students are able to be “down on the Strip partying” instead of doing their homework, which is out of question for students in most other parts of the country because they not only lack the infrastructure but also fail to conceive such a notion at all. It is only a student in Las Vegas, such as Cher, who can regard casinos to be “a source of constant
temptation” and ask oneself “Should I do my homework, or should I go out and party [on the Strip]?” Sometimes, as Rebecca illustrates, they “drop out, go down to the drug path, become Internet porn sensations, work at Little Darlings.” And the large casino-entertainment complex facilitates that because “that scene, it’s so huge here!”

Under these circumstances, the operation of the subject machine results in a large number of students dropping out of the system, which is captured by the continually low graduation rate. More specifically, the CCSD graduation rate for 2014 was 70.9 percent, a slight decrease from 71.5 percent in the previous year (Clark County School District, January 22, 2015). This is still a significantly better figure than 62 percent in 2012 and 59 percent in 2011. However, it must be noted that the great increase in the graduation rate from 2012 to 2013 was achieved by an adoption of the new graduation rate formula that omits adult education students from the database (Milliard, March 9, 2014). In 2012, CCSD ranked 29th among 39 major urban school systems throughout the country while it had the third highest number of "non-graduates" who failed to graduate in four years. It must be added that the graduation rate can differ based on its measures and the reporting entities. One research body observed that "a 20% gap between rates reported by the state, the federal government, and an independent source" (Tyler and Owens 2012:6). More precisely, Nevada State reported 68% while an independent entity reported 47% as the state’s graduation rate.

Flow 2: People as Teachers

The second flow, people as teachers and educators, is mostly coming from outside Las Vegas, but it is influenced by Las Vegas environment once it enters the city’s range of influence. Because so few of them are native Las Vegans, many teachers who are outsiders come with certain pre-conceived notions about Las Vegas. Rebecca, for example, recalls that when she first
got her position in CCSD, one of her friends asked, “Who do you teach? Strippers’ kids?” On a slightly different note, Brian responded, “Ugh! Really? There is nothing interesting happening in Las Vegas in the world of education,” when he was first offered a position in his current workplace fifteen years ago. Whether or not such preconception is true, teachers begin with a conceptual burden that may discourage them to remain enthusiastic about their occupations, especially when they confront with difficult and demanding work conditions.

In addition, most educators in Las Vegas are drawn by the lower level of competition in the local job market. In other words, many of the educators in Las Vegas are those who may have little chance of getting jobs in more competitive markets in other parts of the country (e.g., in the East Coast or Midwest). Kate compares Las Vegas with Ohio, which is “extremely education-centered.” In Ohio, “one of the leading states for teaching preparation colleges,” the employers are “at a real advantage” and able to “hire the best because for any job that is posted you are looking at 200 resumes immediately.” This enables them to “glean and cultivate faculties that are highly skilled [and] very articulate.” In contrast, in Las Vegas that has one of the biggest school districts that starts “every school year at a deficit,” the focus is changed. Instead of choosing among well-qualified candidates, the school district is “trying to convince and recruit, and say, ‘Please come here, let me tell you why you should come here.’” Rebecca tells a similar story when she compares the East, where there is “a surplus of teachers coming out off all the state colleges, and Nevada, which is “hiring about 1,000 teachers because [it keeps] growing at such an enormous and alarming rate.” And the same trend in Las Vegas job market for educators has survived to this day. In 2014, CCSD started its school year “with 600 vacancies” (Nordli 2014, August 13), and as of July 23, 2015, the school district expects “to start school year [at least] 700 teachers short” (Morton 2015, July 23). This repeating pattern of teacher shortages has
resulted in a generally lower quality of educators in the area, as the desperate school district is, in
Brian’s words, “vacuuming up every living certified body from every state in the union.” Brian
adds:

We are getting whoever we can get. And we have a percentage, I don’t know, that aren’t
going to be a good teachers. And we’ll fill entire schools with them because we can’t get
enough bodies. That’s not a model for sustainability. That’s not a model for excellence.
[...]When you are dropping off new schools and jamming them full of anyone you can
grab, it’s not a surprise.

When the insufficient bodies of educators meet a growing student enrollment, the
outcome is overwhelming to individual teachers. As described earlier, the average class size in
Nevada is the nation’s largest, and Las Vegas teachers do not respond positively to that state of
affairs. Given the situation, as Piper observes, individual teachers “overwhelmed and irritated”
Rebecca’s following testimony supports aforementioned Piper’s, as well as Cher’s, observation:

You see 210 students a day, tell me, after seeing so many kids, are you really going to
remember Johnny in the third row who couldn’t remember to capitalize something?
That’s a lot. And that’s a lot of grading. If you assign a ten-page paper times 210 kids?
Do you really want to sit and grade all those? That’s too bad because it’s really doing a
disservice.

Along the same lines, Kate argues that “[i]f kids are in the classroom with 35 or 40 kids, it is
really hard for the teacher to make that experience meaningful and relevant to kids.” When
students cannot find meaningful school experience, as Piper’s description of regular classes
illustrates,10 they lose their interest in class and education in general. Such unmotivated students
then add to their teachers’ unfavorable teaching experience.

Worse, the unique environment of Las Vegas education contributes further to the
stressful work condition of its employees. In addition to the large class size and unmotivated
students, there are frequent transfers of students, insufficient resources, frequent transfers of

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10 A quote from Piper’s interview: “But all the kids say regular classes are joke classes, especially if the teachers
don’t have any discipline and let the kids run free.”
teachers themselves, and little appreciation of their work from the local community. James’s one year of teaching experience in CCSD exemplifies the dire plight of teachers. After his graduation from STEP UP program in Nevada State College, James was assigned to be in the fourth grade in an elementary school. As he was starting the school year, all teachers in his school received $200 each to purchase school supplies for the year. Then James was told, “You need to buy three notebooks for each child, you need to purchase pencils and markers, all these supplies that the school doesn’t provide.” Of course, $200 was not enough to provide his students with all the needed materials. A few months later when James established connections with his students and colleagues, he was transferred to another school by the school district to teach the fifth grade, because the second school had job openings due to an unexpectedly student high enrollment for the school year. Therefore, James had to “set it all back up and start from scratch.” James adds that the school district “would only do this the lowest [most recently hired] teachers. The lowest on the totem pole. […] In Vegas, there’s a constant movement of people.” However, such “shuffling of teachers” does not only occur to first-year teachers. James recalls that some of his colleagues in their “third or fourth year” were not exempt from such displacement. In such an unstable environment, teachers are likely fail to build meaningful communities and collegiality among themselves.

The mobility of students also posed challenges to James in his second school. The following two accounts from James’s interview detail such challenges:

1) When I was in fourth grade, I started off with 24 students. By the time the school year ended, I had half a new class. Just kids leaving and new kids coming in. Some came in with special needs, different needs and accommodations that they have, and they come in late and you don’t find out that information until the previous school sends [their information]. Then you have to get accommodations and shuffle the resources that you do have at your school to meet the new kid’s needs. It takes so much time that it didn’t happen sometimes and it was really disheartening.
2) I had some families leaving in January, in April. I had a new kid at the end of April. I said, “We only have one month of school. What do you want me to do with this student?” The student was coming in from Mexico and he only spoke Spanish. While I could provide some accommodation, we had already covered so much and he was coming in at a lower level. I said, “This student is starting fifth grade next year and they have so much more intense testing. How can I meet the needs of these kids?”

In brief, Las Vegas teachers experience the high transiency of Las Vegas population in terms of the impossibility of building meaningful relationship with their students as well as unanticipated needs and demands that calls for teachers’ greater input. Transiency on the level of school administration is another obstacle. Brian’s and Tina’s interviews illustrate that changes in administrators are common events.\textsuperscript{11} James explains that when a new principal comes to a school, teachers have “another person [they] have to prove [themselves] to.” In addition, having new principals can generate favoritism issues. James argues that new principals often bring “their people” and existing teachers find themselves “stuck with other duties that the new teachers might not get […] on top of some of the other things that are already piled on [their] plate.”

Perhaps James’s example does not represent the average teacher experience. Nevertheless, his example is not wholly disconnected from the general trends. According to Clack County School District Teacher Attrition Information (Campbell and Diaz, 2008), the dissatisfaction with teaching assignment accounted for 32.6% as the top reason for a teacher to leave CCSD, which is double the national average of 16% (See Table 4. Listing of key items across three surveys). In addition, CCSD teachers who leave the district mostly choose so very early in their career. Cambell and Diaz (2008) show that over 90% of teachers who were leaving CCSD had worked 10 years or less while hardly anyone had stayed in school for 21 years or more before they quit. In contrast, nationally almost 40 percent of teachers had served for 21 years or more.

\textsuperscript{11} A quote from Brian’s interview: “You know, they [CCSD] are hiring seventeen principals a year. A half of them were never been principals before.”
A quote from Tina’s interview: “We usually get new administration. In the past couple of years we’ve gotten new principals and vice principals and I think they’re trying to fix the problems.”
before leaving their school districts (See Figure 1. Years of teaching prior to leaving in Cambell and Diaz 2008). Such a high attrition rate then contributes to the very reason for leaving the school district, \textit{i.e.} the dissatisfaction with teaching assignment. In other words, Las Vegas education’s teacher shortages are “due to job’s demands” (Bencivenga, Schillmoeller, and Cloud 2015, May 31). When teachers leave the school district, they naturally aggravate teacher shortages, and individual teachers who remain in school are then compelled to cope with more assignments. In addition, teachers outside CCSD are further discouraged to join the school district as they witness such failures of the education system. Provided that, many educators do not consider Las Vegas as their final destination. When better opportunities are presented to them, many educators are willing to leave. As shown in the trends in CCSD teacher attrition, younger teachers such as James who have not fully settled down and do not have a family to raise are more likely to leave the school district and build their careers in other fields or places.

In the meantime, some Las Vegas educators experience the city’s peculiar environment and its casino-entertainment complex as a source of distraction, although to some people the casino-entertainment complex may be an attraction as well. While Brian has seen teachers who “indulged” themselves into the prevalent gaming opportunities, he also met a teacher who decided to take a job offer in Las Vegas because she “won a BMW in slot machine” and had to take delivery of the prize within six weeks. The relatively low cost of living is also a positive element. Nevertheless, it is apparent that CCSD is still finding it difficult to hire enough educators to provide its students with quality school experience.

\textit{Flow 3: Capital as Resources and Flow 4: Information as Local Opinion}

In this part, I will only briefly enumerate and explain the characteristics of the last two flows, the flow of capital as resources extracted from the capital of local industries and residents
through the local tax system and the flow of information as opinions and assessments with respect to the local education. This is because the previous discussions on the first two flows also include how the last two flows are experienced by the subject machine of Las Vegas education.

As discussed earlier, the prominence of the casino-entertainment industry in Las Vegas led to the industry’s disproportional political influence. The political pressure from the casino-entertainment industry then contributed to the forming of Nevada’s particular tax structure, which includes the lack of property tax, etc. This tax system is translated into the small budget for the local government and, therefore, insufficient resources for Las Vegas education. In addition, the low tax rate led to an influx of particular kind of people who sought for the low tax payment, who came to constitute the local taxpayers and constituents that are opponents of raising the tax rate. In particular, the retirees from other parts of the country form a relatively affluent group of people in the local demographics. Without children to be educated, they have little incentive to invest in education and, consequently, are hardly willing to finance CCSD with public resources. As shown above, both students and teachers suffer from insufficient resources.

On the other hand, the negative assessment of Las Vegas education discourages teachers who, in Brian’s terms, do not want to be part of the failing system. This not only contributes to the overall teacher shortages, but also many teachers’ choice to leave the district after being assigned to low-performing schools. James made the same choice when he found an opportunity at his current workplace. Moreover, the negative assessment of Las Vegas education, expressed in forms of the low graduation rate, etc. leads the local residents to doubt the local education’s capacity to serve the purpose. Such suspicious view, then, can be translated into the opposition to investing in Las Vegas education, especially in the public sector. Meanwhile, administrators of individual schools and the school district leadership are under the constant pressure to improve
the quality of Las Vegas schools. Although such a pressure may motivate the leaders of the local education to devise genuine solutions to the existing problems, it may as well lead them to rely on allopathic solutions.

RESPONSES FROM LAS VEGAS EDUCATION

The subject machine of Las Vegas education responds to the stresses generated by the incoming flows and adjusts its operations. The following paragraphs provide a non-comprehensive list of such responses and briefly discuss each item. First of all, shuffling students and teachers, directed by CCSD, is one of Las Vegas education’s responses to the negative assessment and overcrowding schools. Rebecca attests that CCSD “rezone[s] the highest kids to a lower economic school” and buss the brighter kids to their newly assigned school, in order to improve the school’s test scores. Also, as mentioned earlier, the school district moves teachers from one school to another to meet the fluctuating needs of schools based on their student enrollment and student performances. New administrators for schools comprise another option. In 2014, CCSD gave three “persistently poor-performing” schools the “turnaround” label and received extra funding to improve “student standings” (Milliard 2014, February 24). As part of the “turnaround” package, new principals came to the schools with “the freedom to replace the entire school administration and also 10 to 15 teachers and support staff” (Milliard 2014, February 24). In 2015, five more “underperforming” schools joined the list of CCSD’s “turnaround” schools (Whitaker, 2015, February 10).

Also, seeking to accommodate the increasing student enrollment, Las Vegas education built new schools. For instance, more than 60 elementary schools, ten middle schools, and ten new high schools opened since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Wikipedia 2015; also see Carl, Gallifent, Peters, and Watson 2009). In addition, Las Vegas education often relied on
issuing bonds to cope with its insufficient resources since “voters don't like increased taxes” (Carl, Gallifent, Peters, and Watson 2009:107). In fact, most of the funds for building schools after 2000 came from the 1998 bond issue that amounted to $3.5 billion (Carl, Gallifent, Peters, and Watson 2009:131). It must be added that issuing a bond cannot always be a reliable source of capital. Rebecca argues that once a bond passes, “they [CCSD] invest the bond or they try to make more money off the bond in the Clark County School District […]. So you really don’t ever see what’s promised from the bond until probably three years after that’s passed.”

In order to fight teacher shortages, Las Vegas education employs “a variety of marketing tools: posting recruiting posters in airports, setting up video conferences with teaching colleges throughout the country, and setting up a recruitment website.” Its “Teach Vegas” campaign is but another means to attract more teacher candidates (See Figure 2.). In addition, CCSD has rehired already retired teachers to fill vacancies and trained uncertified bodies to be teachers through its alternative route to licensure programs (Millard 2014, August 28; Whitaker 2015, April 13).
A growing number of “magnet schools” and charter schools, in addition to the aforementioned “turnaround” schools, are Las Vegas education’s response to the insufficient public resources and the negative assessment of its school system. Magnet schools refer to “free public elementary and secondary schools of choice” that have “a focused theme and aligned curricula in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Fine and Performing Arts, International Baccalaureate, International Studies, MicroSociety, Career and Technical Education (CTE), World Languages (immersion and non-immersion) and many others” (Magnet Schools of America N.d.). Rebecca, whose both daughters attended magnet schools, points out, “All magnet schools have a ton of money” because they “have gotten either federal grants […] or are funded by all the business people.” Therefore, magnet schools are better equipped to serve their students. Currently in CCSD, there are eight elementary schools, nine middle schools, and eight high schools that offer “magnet programs.” Charter schools also contributed to the locals’ more positive opinions on Las Vegas education. Brian observes, “Charter schools have caused everyone to raise their bar a little bit. […] It has raised and created more possibilities for the students who can take advantage of it.”

Las Vegas education’s other efforts to counter the stresses include expanding AP classes and running year-round curriculums. More specifically, CCSD was “named a College Board Advanced Placement District of the Year” for expanding AP courses as well as improving students’ AP Exam performance (CCSD 2015, Feb 11). Moreover, CCSD has adopted the track system in which students are divided into different tracks and with different school attendance calendars, in order to run the school throughout the entire year and mitigate the overcrowding.
issues. In the 2015-16 School Year, eleven more elementary schools will join other thirteen schools to use the year-round academic calendar (CCSD 2015, March 6).

What has been enumerated in this section comprises only a partial list of the responses from the local education in Las Vegas vis-à-vis its current stressful circumstances. Nonetheless, it clearly illustrates the creativeness as well as limitations of Las Vegas education’s means to address the issues relevant to the four sorts of flows it selects and draws from its environment.

CONCLUSION

This research is a response to Rothman’s challenge to perceive Las Vegas not as a tourist fantasy but as a particular urban space. As stated in the introduction, the current study is only a preliminary step toward mapping the web of relations and operations that involve and constitute the local education in Las Vegas. Borrowing from the theoretical vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as of Bryant, the local education system is conceptualized as a subject machine, which encounters everything else as its environment in its own terms. Also identified are four specific flows—people as students, people as educators, capital as resources, and information as appreciation and assessment—on which the subject machine of Las Vegas education exercise the coupure-prélèvement, or the practice of selective inclusion and interpretation within the subject machine’s own context. Overall, it is manifest that all the four flows are directly and indirectly influenced by the casino-entertainment industry and, most notably, its splendid expansion since the Mirage phase started in late 1980s in particular. Simply put, it is Las Vegas’s rapid urban growth propelled by the success of the casino-entertainment complex that played the most significant role in shaping Las Vegas education today. Nevertheless, the close analysis of the four flows illustrates that they constitute a highly complex web of relations which together poses significant challenges or stresses to which Las Vegas education must adjust its operations. The
low graduation rate of Las Vegas high school students and significant teacher shortages are only the most visible part of the struggles that Las Vegas education experiences today. Apparently, the subject machine responds to these issues in various but rather ineffective ways.

The findings of this study are by no means indicative of Las Vegas’s continual failure in fostering its education machine. One of the implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical framework is that no machine is guaranteed to maintain its current state in the future. Any machinic assemblage is always in the process of becoming and, therefore, is always at the risk of disintegration and deterioration. From a slightly different angle, the risk simultaneously presents possibilities for changes that are hitherto unexplored and unrealized. The production of the same subject is not a given fact. Most importantly, Las Vegas is still a young metropolis that experienced a surge in population over the last two and a half decades. Referring to the opening of the Smith Center for the Performing Arts, Brian remarked, “It’s 2012 and we finally have a cultural venue. So it’s not surprising that we don’t have an education infrastructure that supports 1.6 million people.” Just as the city’s unparalleled rate of growth in recent years was largely unanticipated, the future of its educational machine, as well as of the environment it faces and the characteristics of the flows it draws, cannot be fully determined by the status quo.
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Appendix: Participants

Over the course of the present study, total nine participants were interviewed. Appendix A offers the profiles of all participants with a brief note on each participant in order to better contextualize the findings from the interviews. All names, both people and places, are pseudonyms. Every participant was given a chance to choose a pseudonym for oneself and some picked their own. It must be noted that the participants are of a very narrow pool largely due to this study’s way of finding new participants. Among the participants, four were males and five were females. There were one Hispanic participant and one African American; the rest were Caucasians or whites.

All participants are listed below in the chronological order of interviews conducted:

**Participant 1**, interviewed on June 9, 2015 at his house

Name: Anthony

Age: Teenager

Gender: Male

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Anthony is currently a student attending a private university outside Nevada. He was born and had lived in Las Vegas for his entire life until he started college. He attended a local private school, Summer Valley Academy, for his K-8 education. Then he proceeded to a large public school, Red Rock High School, and graduated a few years ago. In Red Rock High School, Anthony took mostly Advanced Placement courses with a small group of students and was actively engaged in the school’s theatre program. He has two siblings who also went to college outside Nevada. Anthony will be graduating from college in a few years and is planning to go to
graduate school. His parents have been highly supportive of Anthony’s pursuit of higher education.

**Participant 2,** interviewed on June 16, 2015 at a coffee shop

Name: Cher

Age: Teenager

Gender: Female

Race/ethnicity: African American

Comment: Cher recently graduated with high honors from Red Rock High School. In Red Rock High School, Cher mostly took Advanced Placement and Honors courses and participated to the theatre program for four years. Cher’s family lived in southern California until they moved to Las Vegas in the early 2010s when she was still in middle school. Many of her family members, especially on her mother’s side, are highly educated and Cher grew up with an expectation that she would earn at least a master’s degree. She is currently interested in going to a law school.

**Participant 3,** interviewed on June 18, 2015 at her office

Name: Kate

Age: In her mid-forties

Gender: Female

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Kate is the head of the elementary school at Summer Valley Academy, a private institution. She is originally from Ohio and first started teaching in the early 1990s. She taught in Ohio and California before coming to Las Vegas fifteen years ago. She taught in Summer Valley
for several years and left Summer Valley to join Nevada State College. In Nevada State College, Kate assumed various positions as an educator. She returned to Summer Valley a few years ago to take the current position.

Participant 4, interviewed on June 22, 2015 at his house

Name: Mr. B

Age: In his early sixties

Gender: Male

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Mr. B was born and raised in the state of Massachusetts. He has established his career in the film industry in Los Angeles. After his marriage, Mr. B and Mrs. B moved to Las Vegas in the early 1990s as they were starting a family. They have raised all three children in Las Vegas and the youngest recently graduated from Red Rock High School. The family moved to the current house in the mid-1990s located in a neighborhood that is a non-gated community. Mr. B commutes from Las Vegas to his workplace in Los Angeles on a weekly basis.

Participant 5, interviewed on June 24, 2015 at a coffee shop

Name: Tina

Age: Teenager

Gender: Female

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Tina is a rising senior in Red Rock High School. Tina was born in Oregon and her family moved to Las Vegas about shortly after her birth. She has two siblings who also
graduated from Red Rock High School. She took a few Advanced Placement courses and many Honors classes. She is involved in the theatre program as her extracurricular activity. Her life is greatly shaped by her and her family’s Mormon faith. Only one of her parents received higher education. Tina is planning on attending college after her graduation.

**Participant 6**, interviewed on July 7, 2015 at her friend’s house

Name: Piper

Age: Teenager

Gender: Female

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Piper recently graduated from Red Rock High School. She is currently living with her father in Florida and working in a fast food restaurant. Piper has few family members with college experience and Piper does not have a plan to attend college in near future. However, one of her relatives received higher education in her forties and Piper may want to follow her example.

**Participant 7**, interviewed on July 9, 2015 at her house

Name: Rebecca

Age: In her mid-forties

Gender: Female

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Rebecca is a teacher at Summer Valley Academy. Rebecca is originally from Philadelphia, PA where she earned her degree to be an educator. She moved to Las Vegas in the
early 1990s and started her teaching career in Clark County School District (CCSD). She has taught in public schools as well as private schools. Her husband is also an educator who taught in Summer Valley and currently serves in a leadership position at another private school in the area. There are four children in her family and the oldest recently graduated from UNLV.

**Participant 8**, interviewed on July 17, 2015 at his office

Name: Brian

Age: In his early forties

Gender: Male

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian/white

Comment: Brian is an administrator at Summer Valley Academy. Before coming to Las Vegas, Brian was involved in his family’s business of running experiential education summer camps based in New York City. While he was trying to find a right job for him, Brian met the founder of Summer Valley and joined him in building the school about fifteen years ago. He currently serves as the Head of Experiential Education at Summer Valley. Brian is married and has two children. The oldest is attending a boarding school outside Nevada after graduating from Summer Valley and the youngest is attending Summer Valley.

**Participant 9**, interviewed on July 20, 2015 at his office

Name: James

Age: In his mid-twenties

Gender: Male

Race/ethnicity: Hispanic
Comment: James is a teacher in Summer Valley Academy. In his high school years, James participated to the Student Teacher Enlistment Project-Undergraduate Program (STEP UP) sponsored by CCSD and Nevada State College. STEP UP was devised to provide CCSD high school students with opportunities to start college in the junior year to be trained as teachers and serve the local community. After finishing the program, James taught in a public high school in CCSD for one year and joined Summer Valley Academy.