

Landscapes of Consumption: Image and Place in Consumer Culture

by

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Requirements for the Degree of

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LANDSCAPES OF CONSUMPTION: IMAGE AND PLACE IN CONSUMER CULTURE

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Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
of**

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

This paper addresses the nature of place within consumer culture. It argues that as a consequence of the dominance of the consumer ethos, reflected in the popular representation of landscape and in the nature of contemporary urban form, the sense of place in our culture has been weakened. Consequently, this paper argues that design should respond as a form of resistance to consumer culture. The paper is divided into three chapters, each one of which addresses a different element in the discussion. Chapter One, *Images of Place*, examines landscape imagery from advertising in an attempt to understand how landscape is represented in contemporary consumer culture. Chapter Two, *Places of Images*, investigates the physical manifestation of consumer culture in the postmodern cityscape. Chapter Three, *Reclaiming Place*, argues for a renewed sense of place in contemporary culture. The final chapter argues for a fundamental change in the current social and political structures as a precursor for the emergence of a new urban design. *Reclaiming Place* concludes by proposing how design can emerge as a form of resistance to consumer capitalism based on challenging contemporary approaches towards place.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of place within consumer culture. This investigation seeks to understand how landscape is both represented and manifest within contemporary consumer capitalism. Following an examination of landscape imagery from advertising, and an investigation into the nature of contemporary urbanity, the discussion concludes by proposing how design should respond as a form of resistance to consumer culture.

In addressing both the representation of landscape and the contemporary cityscape, this work follows a long established tradition in landscape studies of examining landscape from two different perspectives: the image and the built environment. Landscape imagery has long been deeply reflective of people's attitudes towards the natural world. Similarly, the makeup of the urban landscape has revealed much about the dominant culture. Together, both these perspectives offer an insightful commentary on contemporary cultural attitudes towards landscape and our place within in it.

In the first chapter, *Images of Place*, I address the representation of landscape in contemporary consumer culture. In this chapter, I argue that advertising has become fundamentally reflective of our cultural identity. Consequently, advertising imagery provides a valuable insight into prevailing cultural approaches towards landscape and place. In the second chapter, *Places of Images*, I investigate the physical manifestation of consumer culture in the postmodern cityscape. An examination of the nature of contemporary urbanity reveals how the urban forms of the cityscape are deeply reflective of the core values of consumer culture.

Having established how landscape is both represented and physically manifest within consumer culture, in the third and final chapter, *Reclaiming Place*, I argue for the need of a renewed sense of place in contemporary culture. I argue the need for deep systematic changes in the structure of contemporary society as a precursor to the emergence of a placemaking freed from the power of the market. I contend that reclaiming place, in the context of contemporary capitalism, must involve presenting alternatives to the consumer

vision implicit in our capitalist system. As such, I propose that design should emerge as a vehicle of resistance to consumer capitalism based on developing alternative approaches towards place.

The manner in which landscape is both represented in advertising and manifest in contemporary urbanity is increasingly extolling a consumerist vision of life. As will be shown in Landscapes of Consumption, reclaiming a sense of place within contemporary consumer culture ultimately involves challenging this consumerist vision itself.

1

Images of Place

"...images of the landscape reflect not just an artistic pedigree...but also the concerns of the day."

Stephen F. Mills. The American Landscape (Keele University Press: Edinburgh, 1997), p.117

The idea of examining landscape in imagery is a significant part of modern landscape studies. As Stephen Mills notes in The American Landscape "...images are important: with the power to re-create surroundings comes the opportunity to impose certain images upon the world to the exclusion of others."¹ Landscape imagery has long provided significant insights into how human cultures have viewed the natural world. From the earliest Neolithic cave paintings to the work of the Hudson River School, landscape imagery has illustrated the approach of various peoples to their natural environment. Today, the representations of our consumer culture provide an equally valuable insight into how contemporary culture views the natural world. As we increasingly move towards a global environmental crisis, it becomes more important than ever to understand how our culture perceives the natural world around us. Contemporary imagery provides a useful vehicle for such an exploration. As shall be shown, in contemporary culture our portrayals of landscape and place are reflective of a consumptive approach to the natural world that is fundamentally shaped by a consumer ethos. I argue that such an approach underlies many of our environmental problems and, consequently, these representations need to be explored and analyzed. Within our consumer culture, advertising has emerged as a central vehicle for the dissemination of imagery. The content and form of the increasingly pervasive advertising image is profoundly reflective of how our contemporary culture views the world. As James Twitchell observes in his book Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture, "...what is carried in and with advertising is what we know, what we share, what we believe in. It is who we are. It is us."² Advertising imagery provides a window, not only on the workings of the advertising industry, but on the ideas and values of contemporary culture itself. With this in mind, this chapter will investigate landscape imagery from advertising in an attempt to understand how landscape is represented in contemporary consumer culture.

¹ Stephen F. Mills. The American Landscape (Keele University Press: Edinburgh, 1997), p.10.

² James B. Twitchell. Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture (Columbia University Press: New York, 1996), p.4

Entering the 21st century, the dominion of the image is everywhere apparent. The average adult in North America is exposed to three thousand advertisements each day.³ Collectively, North Americans are exposed daily to 12 billion display advertisements and 200,000 TV commercials.⁴ We are living, as graphic designer Bruce Mau points out, in a "global image economy."⁵ In an increasingly fast paced world, one in which we are exposed to greater and greater amounts of information, images are quickly surpassing the written word as the preferred medium for rapid communication. Images flood us from every conceivable realm in both public and private life. As W.J.T Mitchell writes in Picture Theory, "...we live in a culture dominated by pictures, visual simulations, stereotypes, illusions, copies, reproductions, imitations and fantasies."⁶ Evidence for Mitchell's remarks can be seen in the results of a study that found people today able to recognize 1000 corporate logos but fewer than ten plants.⁷ Contemporary culture is quickly emerging as a culture of imagery. As Mitchell notes "The fantasy of a pictorial turn, of a culture totally dominated by images, has now become a real technical possibility on a global scale."⁸ The trend towards the use of imagery in all forms of public discourse and communication began in earnest in the United States during the early part of the 20th century.⁹ Since then, the image has emerged in contemporary culture as a new form of language. As Neil Postman writes in his book Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology:

...the photograph and other iconographs brought on a massive intrusion of images into the symbolic environment: photographs, prints, posters, drawings, advertisements. The new imagery, with photography at its forefront, did not function as a supplement to language but tended to replace it as our dominant means for construing, understanding and testing reality.¹⁰

³ Ibid., p. 2

⁴ Adbusters, no. 28 Winter 2000, p.28

⁵ Bruce Mau, Lifestyle (Phaidon: New York, 2000), p.5

⁶ W.J.T Mitchell, Picture Theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1994), p.2

⁷ Adbusters June/July 2000, p. 2

⁸ Mitchell, p.15.

⁹ Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture (Basic Books 1999), p.xxx

¹⁰ Neil Postman, Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1992), p. 68.

The technological shift from the printed word to the image has had a significant impact upon how our culture perceives the world. W.J.T Mitchell argues that the technological shift from print to imagery has resulted in "a culture of spectatorship."¹¹ Increasingly, what we know of the world comes from observing images and not from reading or from being directly engaged with the world. As our culture becomes increasingly dependent upon representations and simulations to make sense of the world, the significance of imagery becomes even greater in our lives. In their book Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen write that "The image...reaches out to sell more than a service or product; it sells a way of understanding the world...Mass imagery...creates for us a memorable language, a system of belief, an ongoing channel to inculcate and effect common perception, explaining to us what it means to be part of a modern world."¹²

In North America, contemporary culture is overwhelmingly a consumer culture. Whereas other cultures in human history have been defined by their spiritual or political beliefs or by their form of social organization, contemporary North American culture can be roughly defined by our desire to buy things. As the author Bill McKibben comments "The central fact of our time, the only fact that really matters if you're trying to understand who we are, is that we live in the most developed consumer society there ever was."¹³ Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen write that in our culture "Consumption is our life."¹⁴ James Twitchell writes "We live in the age of advertising, and in the spirit of the endeavor I call this new culture Adcult...increasingly world culture is carried on through the boom-box noise and strobe lights of commercialism."¹⁵ In his book The Greening of America Charles Reich observes that consumption is the most characteristic element of our culture. He writes "The most powerful, the loudest, and the most persistent command in our society is the

¹¹ Mitchell, p.3

¹² Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness (McGraw-Hill Book Company: New York, 1982), p. 42

¹³ Bill McKibben "Cult of the Weird", Adbusters no. 33 (Jan/Feb 01), p.20

¹⁴ Ewen, p.42

¹⁵ Twitchell, p.1

command to buy, to consume, to make material progress, to "grow".¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard in his book, The Consumer Society, concludes "...consumption is an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and to the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system."¹⁷

Entering the 21st century, contemporary culture in North America has been permeated by commercialism to an unprecedented degree. As James Twitchell remarks "There is barely an empty space in our culture not already carrying commercial messages."¹⁸ The vehicle responsible for bringing us this plethora of messages is advertising. Advertising is so prevalent in contemporary culture that critics, like James Twitchell, claim advertising has become our culture. The images and messages brought to us by advertising are no longer solely external exhortations to consume but have become deeply reflective of our cultural identity. As Twitchell comments "Much of what we share, and what we know, and even what we treasure is carried to us each second in a plasma of electrons, pixels, and ink...."¹⁹ As noted earlier, we are bombarded daily with enormous numbers of advertisements. Advertising has soaked into the collective consciousness of North Americans to a greater and greater degree with the result that, as commentators like Twitchell claim, it has fundamentally shaped our culture. Along with television, print is the dominant medium for the transmission of the advertising message. For the purposes of this paper, however, this investigation will be limited to an examination of imagery from the print media. In light of this work's format, the print media provides more numerous and easily reproducible images for examination. It should be noted that this work does not purport to offer a comprehensive examination of advertising imagery from the print media. It will, however, provide a critical analysis of the imagery with the intent of illustrating how landscape is represented in the imagery itself.

¹⁶ Charles Reich. The Greening of America (Random House: New York, 1970), p.165

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard. The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures (Sage Publications: London, 1998), p. ix

¹⁸ Twitchell, p.2

¹⁹ Ibid., p.1

The terms landscape and place are central to the following discussion and, as such, need to be defined. Landscape has a wide variety of connotations. As Stephen Mills points out, there are two main interpretations of the term landscape: one approach views landscape as synonymous with the whole of the natural environment while the other sees landscape as a product of human activity.²⁰ In my investigation of landscape imagery, my use of the term landscape follows the approach that views the landscape as being primarily synonymous with the natural world. At the same time, however, I acknowledge extensive human influence upon the landscape. For the purposes of my work, equating landscape with the natural environment facilitates identification of our particular cultural approach to the natural world as expressed in the advertising imagery itself. I also employ the term 'place' from time to time in the discussion. My use of the term place follows Lucy Lippard's approach to the concept. She identifies place as the result of the union of space and culture. As she writes "If space is where culture is lived, then place is the result of their union."²¹ My intention with my usage of the term 'place' is to highlight the complex merging of environment, perception, and experience that creates a sense of place. I use the term to offset the reductionist, simplification of place that, as will be shown, is so prevalent in advertising landscape imagery.

Before beginning an analysis of imagery from contemporary sources it is perhaps helpful to provide some context for the discussion by very briefly investigating the representation of landscape from earlier periods. Although represented in other art forms, landscape has been primarily portrayed through painting. The genre of landscape painting created powerful images of the natural world throughout cultures the world over. Whether the creation of Neolithic cave painters or Renaissance landscape artists, landscape imagery speaks of a particular culture's approach towards the world around it. An overview of the representation of landscape in imagery reveals not only an increasing level of

²⁰ Mills, p. 6

²¹ Lucy Lippard. The Lure of the Local: Senses of place in a multicentered society (The New Press: New York, 1997), p. 10

sophistication in the techniques of representation but also the degree to which these works are deeply reflective of humans' changing attitudes to nature.

From the earliest periods of human history people have used pictures as an elementary way to record and transmit information. Visual communication emerged with these early images. Historians believe that the first landscapes consciously conceived by humans appeared in cave paintings in Spain and northern France sometime between 30,000 and 10,000 B.C.²² As the centuries passed, humans were able to represent their surroundings with increasing exactitude and skill. Throughout the world, human societies began to portray the natural environment in various art forms such as sculpture, painting, and pottery. Through these art forms, most notably in painting, human cultures reflected their diverse views and attitudes about the natural world. The early cave artists were already expressing their relationship with the world around them by painting the animals that they depended on for food. In China, inspired by the Taoist philosophy of humans living in harmony with nature, the new art form of landscape painting first appeared during the 10th century A.D.²³ Taoist landscape painting later emerged as one of the highest expressions of Chinese art.²⁴ By the 14th and 15th centuries a tradition of landscape painting developed in Japan strongly influenced by the Taoist Sung landscape artists of China.²⁵ Japanese landscape painters were predominantly Zen Buddhists and their art was deeply reflective of their philosophy. In the Islamic world, the ban imposed on image making meant that a tradition of landscape painting did not develop as in other parts of the world.²⁶ However, miniature paintings as illustrations in books allowed for landscapes to be represented in Persia and in India under the Mughal emperors.²⁷

²² Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day. (Thames and Hudson: London, 1995), p. 14.

²³ Ibid., p.91

²⁴ Hamlyn Books. Art Treasures of the World (Hamlyn: London, 1970), p. 87

²⁵ Ibid., p.98

²⁶ Konstantin Bazarov. Landscape Painting. (Octopus Books Limited: London, 1981), p. 21

²⁷ Ibid.

In Western culture the tradition of landscape painting arose in Europe during the Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries.²⁸ Freed from the background of religious paintings, landscape emerged as a separate branch of painting and developed as one of the major genres through which modern Western art can be traced.²⁹ A strong tradition of naturalistic landscape painting developed in Holland in the 17th century where artists like Hercules Seghers and Jacob Ruisdal painted the wide flat expanses of the Dutch countryside.³⁰ Throughout Europe, landscape was increasingly represented in the works of painters of various nationalities. Distinct schools of representation developed in conjunction with the Enlightenment and later Romanticism, each reflecting particular views of the natural world. The tradition of landscape painting spread to North America in the 19th century. Influenced by Romanticism and ideals of nature mysticism, American landscape artists attempted to capture the mysterious energies of nature that they perceived in the unspoiled American wilderness. The rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization in America alarmed many American landscape artists whose images of the vanishing wilderness helped create the conservation movement. Landscape painting would emerge in the late 19th century as the main form of artistic expression in America – most notably in the work of the Hudson River School.³¹

Up until the late 19th century landscape had been represented solely in the arts and most notably in painting. In the absence of other media that would allow for the reproduction of imagery, the representation of landscape was confined to the realm of fine art. By the early 20th century, however, advances in printing techniques allowed for the reproduction of images in large numbers for commercial purposes. As Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson note in their book Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising by the 1920s “the technologies of mechanical reproduction, print and photography reached

²⁸ Ibid., p. 20

²⁹ Nicholas Green “*Looking at the Landscape: Class Formation and the Visual*” in Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon eds. The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space (Clarendon Press: Oxford: 1995), p.31

³⁰ Hamlyn, p.204

³¹ Bazarov. p.140.

a level of technical sophistication that permitted mass-produced advertising images to be nationally circulated.”³² Later, computer technology would spur even greater development in the production and reproduction of imagery. In the early 20th century, influenced by modern artistic developments, the emerging advertising industry in the United States brought together individuals trained in artistic standards to work in close collaboration with factories producing goods.³³ The ensuing marriage between art and commerce quickly lead to the development of modern advertising techniques and the ensuing emergence of the image in North American popular culture. The advertising industry successfully “seized upon the power of the artist to say things which could not be said in words” in order to create powerful, new images that would drive people to buy goods.³⁴

Advertisers quickly turned to nature for meanings and imagery to use in promoting commercial products. Goldman and Papson write that from the outset modern advertising “used nature as a referent system from which to service signifiers for constructing signs. Nature’s landscapes were used to signify experiences or qualities that urban-industrial everyday life failed to provide.”³⁵ Images of landscape, consequently, began appearing for the first time in commercial art and advertising in the early 20th century. As Goldman and Papson note:

A familiar theme in 1920s advertising was “The Parable of Civilization Redeemed.” This scenario identified civilization with “images of sloth or decadence,” work with drudgery, and modern existence with “nerves” and anxiety. Advertising located the solutions to these ills in commodities aligned with meanings associated with nature: essence and purity. Advertising suggested that civilization’s deficiencies could be ameliorated by consuming commodities that contained the essence of nature.³⁶

In the 20th century, technological development led to the mass production of images for commercial purposes. As commercial images quickly became all pervasive throughout

³² Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson. Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising (The Guilford Press: New York, 1996), p.188.

³³ Ewen, p.45

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Goldman and Papson, p.191.

³⁶ Ibid.

North American society, advertisers appropriated meanings and imagery from both culture and nature and used them in the promotion of consumer products. In so doing, more and more of the world has become material for advertisement campaigns. As Bruce Mau observes " We live in a twenty-four hour market world where less and less terrain remains unregulated. Less terrain falls outside of the regime of the logo and its image."³⁷ The power to represent the world around us is no longer the exclusive domain of the fine artist. Technological development has allowed for the creation and manipulation of imagery in infinite ways. The power of this imagery has been successfully appropriated by the advertising industry to promote an endless stream of products. In the same way that the advertising industries have mined culture for new meanings with which to promote consumer products so too have the same industries increasingly turned to the natural world around us, the landscape in effect, for meanings and images to be used in its ongoing message of consumption.

In addressing landscape imagery in advertising we need to understand the narrative that the images are telling us. I argue that it is a narrative primarily of commodification. Involved in this narrative are elements of simulation, fantasy, misrepresentation, and suppression. However, the story that is being told is a story that has, at its core, the idea that landscape is merely another commodity within the economic sphere. The story suggests that landscape, like any other commodity, can be traded, bought, developed, sold, shaped, morphed or gutted of any inherent meaning by the marketplace. If that is the case then, so what? Some may argue that we live in an economic system that is based on generating wealth from the world around us. Why then, the argument could be made, should the natural world not be viewed as just another commodity within the economic system? The answer is clearly visible in the world around us. We face an ecological crisis of unprecedented proportions. The seriousness of the world's ecological crisis was highlighted in a statement released by the Union of Concerned Scientists in 1992. In his book The Sacred Balance, David Suzuki quotes the World Scientists' Warning to Humanity

³⁷ Mau, p.41.

issued on November 18 1992 and signed by 1600 senior scientists including over half of all living Nobel Prize winners. It reads, in part:

Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about.³⁸

As various commentators have made clear, the prospect of global ecological and economic collapse is imminent unless the rates of our material consumption, and resource and energy usage are brought down to sustainable levels.³⁹ The ecological crisis that we face is a product of an economic system that is transforming, at an ever-increasing rate, the elements of the natural world into commodities for the global marketplace. The idea of the natural world as a wellspring of limitless resources for our consumption is rapidly destroying the earth's ecology. Such thinking has underpinned the accelerating pace at which we have depleted the natural world and threatens the future of life on this planet. Within the context of contemporary capitalism, the commodification of the natural world has deprived it of any real meaning or value outside of the marketplace. I argue that it is this type of thinking that is responsible for our current ecological crisis and that these same ideas are clearly manifest in the images of landscape that I will address.

"Introducing the island assortment. How many would you like?" So begins an advertisement for the British Virgin Islands. *"Destination Paradise"* reads another, trumpeting the virtues of a holiday in the Caribbean. *"Choices, Choices"* a headline reads, extolling the variety of country estates available in rural Colorado. *"The Answering machine for the call of the Wild"* reads the text underneath an image of a Toyota SUV parked shining in a forest glade. This is the sort of material that can be found in the myriad of

³⁸ David Suzuki and Amanda McConnell. The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature (Greystone Books: Douglas and McIntyre Vancouver 1997), p.4

³⁹ Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows and Jorgen Randers. Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse Envisioning a Sustainable Future, (McCelland & Stewart: Toronto, 1992), p.xii-xvi

advertisements that incorporate elements of landscape into the advertising message. These advertisements illustrate, to varying degrees, the commodification of landscape and place. These examples show quite clearly, in the interplay between text and image, the reduction of landscape and place into mere commodities. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines commodification as "the action of turning something into or treating something as a mere commodity."⁴⁰ A commodity, the dictionary defines, is "an article that can be bought and sold."⁴¹ In Jean Baudrillard's insightful analysis of contemporary Western culture, The Consumer Society, he writes "anything can become a consumer object" as a result "consumption is laying hold of the whole of life."⁴² Advertising is the primary vehicle for the expression of this process. Consequently, imagery in advertising both promotes and bears witness to the commodification of culture and nature.

Before we get immediately into an examination of the imagery itself, we need to explore some concepts that will help in interpreting how landscape is being represented in advertising imagery. Commodification – the action of turning something into or treating something as a mere commodity – can be viewed as an element within a larger framework of consumption. Jean Baudrillard, one of the foremost critics of western consumer culture, believes that a discourse or a language of consumption characterizes our consumer society.⁴³ In this language of consumption, commodities have value as signs. In his introduction to Baudrillard's book The Consumer Society, George Ritzer explains:

When looked at from a structural perspective, what we consume is signs (messages, images) rather than commodities...Commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify. And what they signify is defined by not what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Katherine Barber ed. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (Oxford University Press: Don Mills, Ontario), p.286

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Baudrillard. p.15

⁴³ Ibid., p.6

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.7

As Baudrillard himself explains "The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods, and signs/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses. Such is the structure of consumption..."⁴⁵ In this discourse of consumption, signs are made up of signifier (an object, image, sound) and signified (its concept or meaning).⁴⁶ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson contend that advertising is all about the process of constructing these signs. They write:

Stripped of its glamour, advertising is a kind of cultural mechanics for constructing commodity signs. Advertisements are structured to boost the value of commodity brand names by attaching them to images that possess social and cultural value: brand-name commodity + meaning of image = a commodity sign. Constructing this currency of commodity images requires that advertisements take the form of semiotic equations into which disconnected signifiers and signifieds are entered and then recombined to create new equivalencies. Advertisements invite viewers to perceive an exchange between otherwise incommensurate meaning systems, and they must be structured to steer interpretation in that direction if they are to fulfill their purpose.⁴⁷

The logic of the system of sign value means that advertising must continually appropriate meanings in its drive to create commodity signs. As Goldman and Papson note "Like any system of currency, sign values only exist in relation to other values. Because sign values are constructed out of meaning, they must be articulated with reference to another system of value – a meaning system that is external to, and different from, the product."⁴⁸ Consequently, advertising engages in an unending quest for new meanings – from both culture and nature – which it can then use to create sign value for commodities. According to Baudrillard, the manipulation of commodity signs is central to consumption in our consumer culture. He comments "Consumption, in so far as it is meaningful, is a systematic act of the manipulation of signs."⁴⁹ The advertising industry is

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 79-80

⁴⁶ Chris Horrocks and Zoran Jevtic. Baudrillard for Beginners (Icon Books Ltd: Cambridge, 1996), p. 35

⁴⁷ Goldman and Papson, p.2

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.10.

⁴⁹ Baudrillard, p. 33

the mechanism that creates the value of these signs. I argue, following Baudrillard's mode of analysis, that landscape, like any other commodity is subject to this manipulation as part of the continuing discourse of consumption in our culture. I will then present images from contemporary advertising to support my argument.

Along with the idea of the sign value of commodities, Baudrillard introduces the idea of simulation into his analysis of western consumer culture. Baudrillard claims we are living in an age where instead of reality, people are treated to simulations involving the constant recombination of various signs.⁵⁰ We are living, he argues, in a world increasingly dominated by simulations. In a world where signs and meanings are continually in flux, authenticity is lost. Signs and simulations soon replace the original. And, as Goldman and Papson comment, "...in the age of simulation and simulacra, the original becomes increasingly unrecognizable."⁵¹ As shall be shown, this notion of simulation is key towards understanding how landscape is represented in advertising. In The Consumer Society George Ritzer clarifies Baudrillard's thinking on the idea of simulation:

The concept of simulation makes sense when one looks at it in light of Baudrillard's thinking on symbolic exchange and the privileging of primitive society. For example, in primitive society nature is seen as an original and specific presence which stands in contrast to culture. However, in the modern world nature has tended to be reduced to something carefully groomed, managed, policed and tailored to the needs of humans. Nature in this form is a simulation of what it is in primitive society. It has become a sham; simulations can be defined as 'sham objects' and it is such objects that define our consumer society. They are objects that offer an abundance of signs that they are real, but in fact they are not.⁵²

The concept of simulation is central to Baudrillard's analysis of modern consumer culture and it is readily visible in the way in which landscape is portrayed in advertising imagery. In his own words, Baudrillard explains the idea of simulation as it relates to nature:

...the 'rediscovery' of Nature, in the form of a countryside trimmed down to the dimensions of a mere sample, surrounded on all sides by the vast fabric of the city, carefully policed, and served up 'at room temperature' as

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 12

⁵¹ Goldman and Papson, p.15

⁵² Baudrillard, p.12

parkland, nature reserve or background scenery for second homes, is, in fact a recycling of nature. That is to say, it is no longer an original, specific presence at all, standing in symbolic opposition to culture, but a *simulation*, a 'consommé' of the signs of nature set back in circulation – in short nature recycled.⁵³

Baudrillard writes "To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have."⁵⁴ This idea, as will be shown in the images presented, is a salient point in regards to how landscape is represented in imagery from advertising. The simulation of landscape in advertising imagery masks the absence of any real substance to the idea of place. Such images play at being an appearance but in reality mask nothingness. Further, these images often have no relation to reality whatsoever: in Baudrillard's words they are "pure simulacrum."⁵⁵

Taking the concepts of sign value and simulation as guides to understanding how landscape is represented in advertising imagery, let us now turn to an exploration of the imagery itself. The related themes of fantasy, misrepresentation and suppression are all important elements of the analysis and will be explored in turn. To begin our investigation, I shall explore the ubiquitous automobile advertisement. The image of a truck, car or SUV framed against a natural background of some sort is familiar to all of us. Whether in television or in print advertising, automobile advertisements make ample use of landscape imagery. A quick review of any magazine will reveal images of automobiles perched on rocky cliffs, driving up mountains, quietly parked in forest clearings or framed against a brilliantly setting sun. Landscape images provide commodity sign value for the automobile. Moreover, landscape imagery as a fundamental signifier of authenticity is a common thread throughout automobile advertising. However, in the process of appropriating signifiers from nature, automobile advertisements leave in their wake a hollowed out version of landscape depleted of any real authenticity. It is indeed ironic that what these advertising images remove from landscape – a sense of authenticity – is what propels the

⁵³ Ibid., p.100-01

⁵⁴ Jean Baudrillard. Simulacra and Simulation (The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1994), p.3

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 6

advertising industry to look to nature in search of signifiers that will resonate with the public. Increasingly, landscape imagery has been appropriated by the advertising industry in its ceaseless search for authenticity. Automobile advertisements, and travel advertisements (to be discussed later) are the advertising genres most reflective of this process. The search for the authentic in nature is one of the primary drivers behind advertising's appropriation of landscape images. As Goldman and Papson explain:

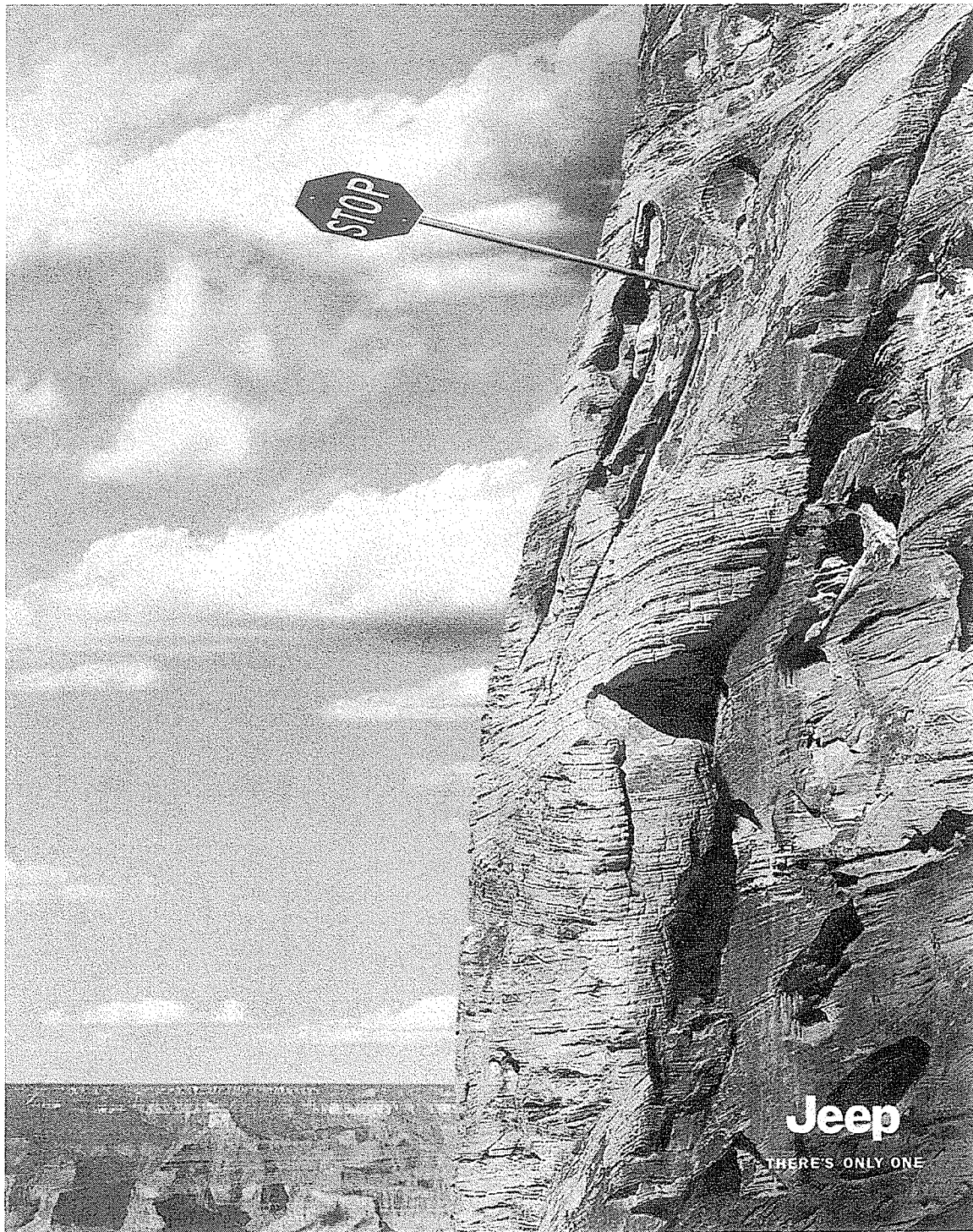
Extending commodity relations and instrumental rationality into all spheres of society has diminished the social places where authenticity can be experienced. This has happened because commodity practices reorganize nature itself. The historical result of organizing nature to support the commodity system has degraded nature as a space in which signs of the authentic can be accumulated. As noncommodified, natural spaces become scarcer, the sign of nature has been made a fundamental sign of the authentic or respect for authenticity.⁵⁶

The first automobile advertisement that I'll investigate – figure 1 – is an advertisement for Jeep's Grand Cherokee. A stop sign sticks out of a canyon cliff wall. There is no vehicle in the image and no text with the exception of "*Jeep – There's Only One.*" A small line of text sits below the image providing Jeep's contact information. The viewer is left with the image itself to draw conclusions about the vehicle. With a sweeping canyon panorama in the background and a rocky canyon wall in the foreground the image suggests the grandeur of unspoiled nature. With the insertion of the stop sign into the canyon wall, however, another narrative enters the image. This narrative suggests Jeep's mastery of nature. The landscape suddenly ceases to be untamed space and becomes a playground for human intervention. Nature is under control. In this advertisement Jeep clearly appropriates meaning from the landscape – the authentic experience of nature – and attaches it as sign value to its vehicle. Landscape is stripped of meaning – its authenticity expropriated and re-applied to Jeep's product line.

Honda uses an approach similar to Jeep's in its advertisement for the Honda Odyssey and CR-V. In figure 2, the advertisement shows a fiery red canyon cliff crowned with two

⁵⁶ Goldman and Papson, p.156

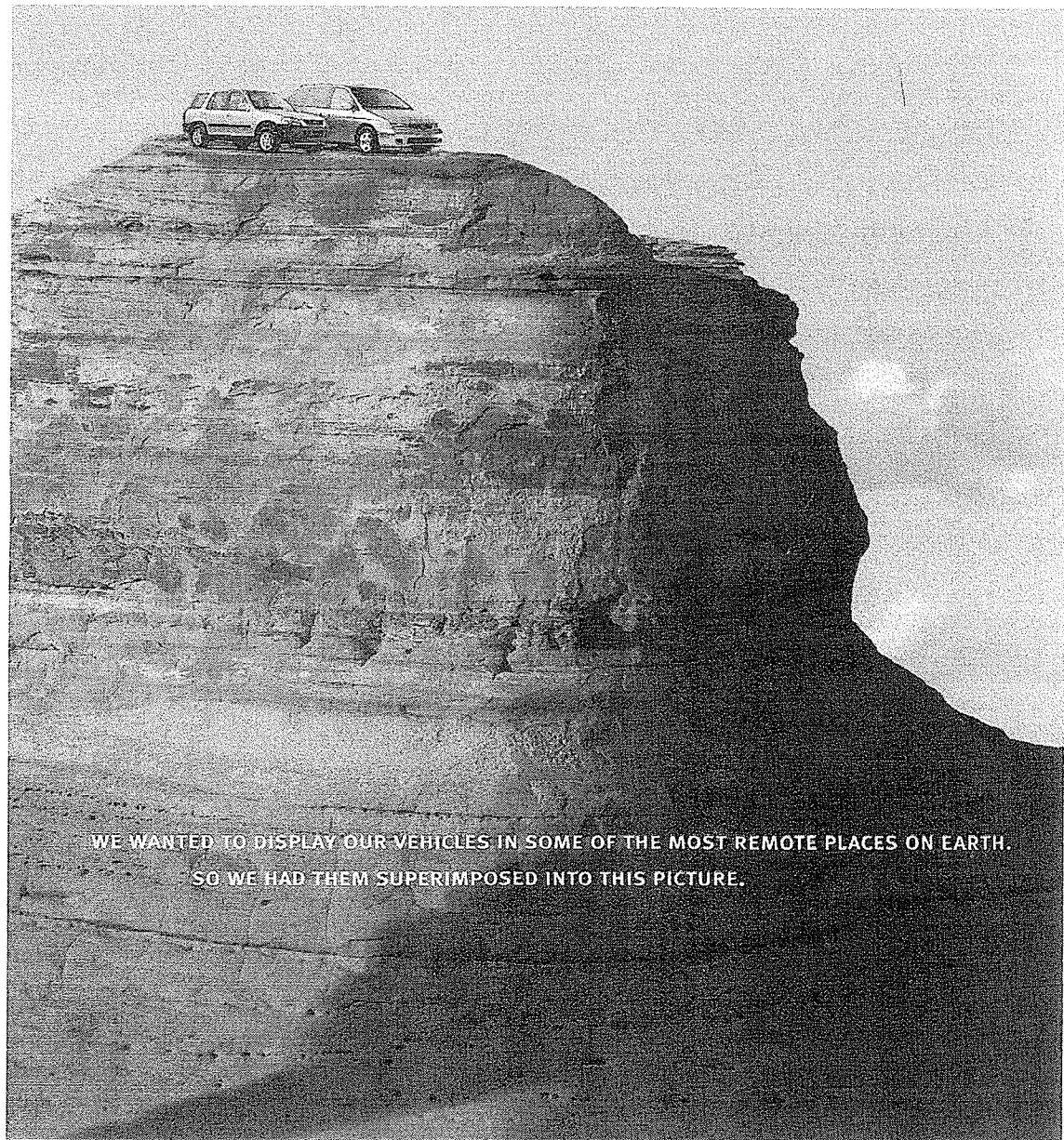
Figure 1



To find out just how far you can go in a Jeep Grand Cherokee call 1-800-361-3700 or visit us at www.daimlerchrysler.ca.

source: *Macleans* August 13, 2001.

Figure 2



WE WANTED TO DISPLAY OUR VEHICLES IN SOME OF THE MOST REMOTE PLACES ON EARTH.
SO WE HAD THEM SUPERIMPOSED INTO THIS PICTURE.

It isn't likely you're going to the far corners of the earth anytime soon. But we thought you might like to see what your Adventure Vehicles would look like there. You see, we had the real world in mind when we designed our Honda Odyssey and CR-V. But should they ever hold a pee-wee hockey tournament in the sandstone canyons of Moab, Utah, you'll be ready.

ADVENTURE VEHICLES FOR THE REAL WORLD. 

For more information or a Dealer near you, call 1-888-9-HONDA-9, or visit us at www.honda.ca

source: *Canadian Geographic* Nov/Dec, 2000.

Honda vehicles parked on its summit. The text reads *"We wanted to display our vehicles on some of the remotest places on earth. So we had them superimposed into this picture."* Beneath the image and several lines of supporting text reads Honda's advertising slogan *"Adventure Vehicles for the Real World."* As in the Jeep advertisement, Honda's placement of its vehicles at the cliff's summit implies a conquering or mastery of nature. Landscape is relegated to a commodity providing the space in which Honda's customers can roam unfettered in their gleaming SUVs. The advertisement's landscape imagery and Honda's slogan *"Adventure Vehicles for the Real World"* evoke a sense of the authentic. The advertisement appropriates the authenticity inherent in nature and recontextualizes it as sign value for the Honda vehicles. Honda's vehicles, the advertisement's narrative implies, will allow its customers to have an authentic experience of nature while at the same time retaining mastery over the landscape. The advertisement's irony, however, is perhaps lost on its creators. As at the same time the advertisement evokes the authentic in nature it degrades it by its manipulation of the landscape imagery. Landscape is again relegated to the status of a backdrop for human activities.

In figure 3, Lincoln takes a slightly different approach in an advertisement promoting the Lincoln Navigator. In its advertising image the vehicle is framed by the last light of a brilliant sunset. In the image, above the vehicle a single line of text reads *"Tread Luxuriously"*. Playing upon the environmentalist idea to "tread lightly on the earth", Lincoln twists it around to promote its latest luxury SUV. According to the supporting text below the image it is possible to tread *both "lightly and luxuriously"* upon the earth while safely ensconced in the comfort of Lincoln's SUV. This advertisement contains some implicit messages about the natural world. As in the other automobile advertisements discussed, in this advertisement landscape provides the setting for human pleasure. The Lincoln Navigator 2000 becomes the vehicle through which we experience nature; however, it is an experience mediated by the comfort and security of a luxury SUV. Implicit in this story are issues of control and domination. In this narrative, humans have dominion over the natural world and the landscape is there to be trodden upon.

Figure 3



THE 2000 NAVIGATOR

Tread lightly and luxuriously in Lincoln Navigator, an impressive 300 horsepower full-size luxury SUV. Tread spaciously, too. Navigator has room for seven in three rows of leather-trimmed seats. Call 1-800-387-9333, visit www.lincolncanada.com or see your Lincoln retailer.

 **LINCOLN**
American Luxury.

source: *Time*, October 16, 2000.

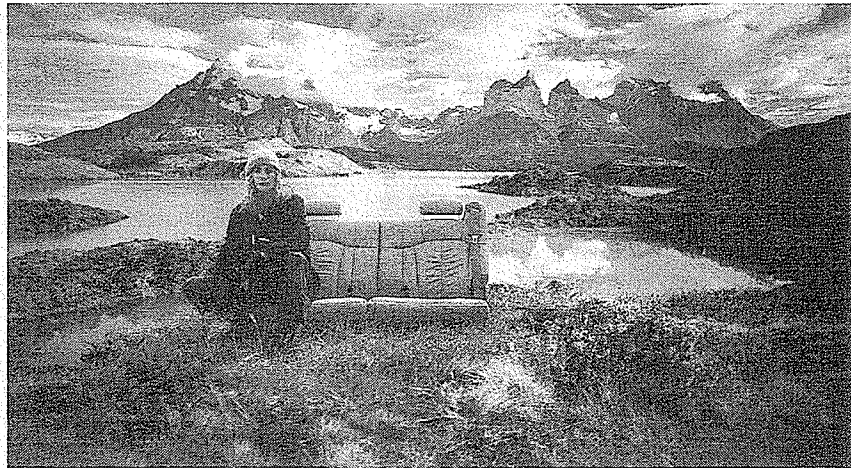
The final automobile advertisement that I'll explore is Chevrolet's advertisement for its Tahoe SUV. In this advertisement, shown in figure 4, Chevrolet equates the attributes of the wilderness with the features of its Tahoe SUV. A woman dressed for the outdoors sits on the edge of a removable seat that is set down in front of a mountain lake. A dramatic mountain panorama extends out in the background. Above the image a line of text reads *"There's something to be said, for the pristine rivers, the breath-taking views and the removable split third-row seat."* Chevrolet presents the landscape as if it were another feature of its SUV. This advertisement suggests that elements of the wilderness – pristine rivers and breath taking views – are as much a part of the Chevy Tahoe as is the removable seat. The narrative established implies human mastery over the natural world. The authentic essence of the landscape – in this case pristine rivers and mountain views – is rendered into commodity sign value for the Tahoe SUV. In so doing, landscape is once again deprived of original meaning and represented merely as an extension of our consumer world.

Similar themes are visible in the way in which landscape is represented in the imagery throughout automobile advertisements. As demonstrated in the advertisements that I have explored, the concept of authenticity in nature is perhaps the meaning most commonly appropriated by the advertisers. Whatever value or meaning the advertisers extract from nature, they leave behind a nature stripped of its original essence. Landscape is commodified; its essence appropriated and re-applied to promote automobiles. Narratives of mastery and control over the natural world are also implicit in these advertisements. The representations of landscape that we see in these advertisements are simulations of an original presence. Authenticity is lost and replaced by signs and simulations.

I'll now turn to another form of advertising that shows more evidence of this process: travel advertisements. Pristine nature, a landscape free of human intervention, is a classic theme that advertisers have commonly incorporated into their messages. The image of wild nature – an undisturbed place – has been appropriated by advertisers to sell everything from cars to shampoo. In print advertising, travel advertisements make frequent

Figure 4

THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR
THE PRISTINE RIVERS, THE BREATHTAKING VISTAS,
THE REMOVABLE SPLIT THIRD-ROW SEAT.



The new Chevy Tahoe has an optional third-row seat that's easy to put exactly where you want. Nowhere near anything. Each half section weighs just over forty pounds, has handles and is on rollers, so it's easy to take out or put back in. And when you aren't carrying nine people, each half flips and folds out of the way for extra cargo space. Chevy Trucks. The most dependable, longest-lasting trucks on the road. 1-800-GM-DRIVE or gmcanada.com



TAHOE

LIKE A ROCK

MORE POWER, MORE ROOM, MORE SUV!

*Dependability based on longevity. 1981-1999 full-line light-duty truck company registrations. Excludes other GM divisions. Versic 1999 model.

use of seemingly undisturbed pristine landscapes to pitch vacation destinations to a weary public looking for a relaxing holiday. As capitalist development separated nature from everyday life in modern industrial societies, nature has increasingly been represented as a last remaining haven free from the constraints of modern society.⁵⁷ As Goldman and Papson write:

...nature has been socially reconstructed as a landscape uncorrupted by civilization, as a space where experiences of intensity, authenticity and spontaneity can be located. When nature as an experiential realm disappears and society is experienced as overrationalized, nature is transformed into a representation that signifies a realm of freedom unencumbered by the constraints of civilization.⁵⁸

As the exploration of the imagery will make clear, travel advertisements put forward an idealized representation of nature in their pitch for consumer dollars. These advertisements also play with elements of fantasy as they present images of landscapes that respond to the desire for a place uncorrupted by modern life.

Almost as ubiquitous as automobile advertisements are the travel advertisements extolling the virtues of exotic vacation destinations around the world. The images of perfect sand beaches, clear blue waters and cascading waterfalls are familiar to all of us. In these advertisements beautiful landscapes entice the consumer with notions of freedom, ease, luxury and authenticity. These images project a vision of pure and untrampled places. In doing so, however, they commodify the natural world by turning the very elements they are promoting – purity and authenticity – into commodity sign values for industrial tourism. To begin our exploration of the travel advertisement I'd like first to look at an advertisement for the British Virgin Islands. The main image in the advertisement, shown in figure 5, depicts a couple – the woman seated and the man standing – gazing out upon the water. A small table, set with drinks, and two chairs are placed along the water's edge in the foreground while islands rise offshore in the distance. The text along the bottom of the image reads *"To be spoiled on our unspoiled islands, visit bvitouristboard.com. The last great*

⁵⁷ Goldman and Papson, p.156

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Figure 5

Mega-views: 3,482. Mega-malls: 0.

To be spoiled on our unspoiled islands, visit bvitouristboard.com *The last great undiscovered place.*

THE
BRITISH
VIRGIN ISLANDS
NATURE'S LITTLE SECRETS

source: *New Yorker*, Nov. 5, 2001.

undiscovered place. The British Virgin Islands – Nature’s Little Secrets.” Above the main image there is a set of three smaller snap shots of island life with the caption underneath *“Mega-views: 3,482. Mega-malls: 0.”* This advertisement portrays the British Virgin Islands as a last haven of undisturbed nature. It presents an idealized conception of place: a destination free from the influence of modern society (no mega-malls) where humans can still experience nature in its wild state. The landscape imagery evokes an idyllic life in which people can live luxuriously in harmony with nature. The advertisement appropriates meanings from a seemingly virgin landscape – purity, and authenticity – and re-applies them to its promotion of the vacation experience. One would never know from the advertisement’s imagery that in 2000 the British Virgin Islands received an estimated 267,000 visitors.⁵⁹ The idea of *“the last great undiscovered place”* is pure fantasy and the advertisement’s landscape imagery supports this misrepresentation. The landscape – both its imagery and meaning – have been cleverly manipulated to attract the consumer dollar.

In figure 6, a similar approach is taken in a travel advertisement for Barbados. In the advertisement, footsteps fade into the distance along a perfect sand beach. Pristine blue waters lap along the shore. The text asks *“Did you ever put one foot ahead of the other without the slightest notion where you are going?”* Below the image the text reads *“Venture. Barbados. Just beyond your imagination.”* The representation of the landscape in the advertisement portrays Barbados as some sort of earthly paradise. The aquamarine waters, empty beach and luxuriant vegetation suggest an idyllic destination. The advertisement’s text supports this representation by implying that Barbados is an as yet undisturbed realm. The reality of the situation is, in fact, quite the opposite. In 2000, Barbados received an estimated 697,000 tourists and there have been concerns expressed that the country’s carrying capacity for tourism may soon be surpassed.⁶⁰ In light of these facts, how do we interpret the advertisement? The advertisement’s creators have cleverly represented Barbados as something that it is clearly not. The

⁵⁹ The Economist Intelligence Unit Special Report No. R455 p.128

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Figure 6



source: *New Yorker*, Sept. 18, 2000.

advertisement's landscape imagery responds to a romanticized conception of nature and place that has more to do with fantasy than reality. The landscape has been manipulated to suggest a conception of place that is inaccurate if not entirely false.

The next advertisement that I explore, in figure 7, is a tourist promotion for Thailand. Entitled *'What's New'* the advertisement extols the country's adventure attractions. *"Visit Amazing Thailand, make a trip of unforgettable experiences and challenging adventures. Be transported into a world of discovery...whether by land or by sea there's an activity for everyone."* The advertisement's text promotes a range of activities in Thailand: *"Ultimate Rock Climbing -Conquer steep limestone cliffs"*, *"Hiking - Tremendous Treks"*, *"Elephant Trekking- A jungle adventure from a new perspective"*, *"Deep Diving- Mysterious encounters under the sea"*, *"Rapid Riding- Battle raging rapids"*, *"Sea Canoeing- Explore recesses of hidden caves"*. The advertisement incorporates images of Thailand's natural diversity into the layout of the page. In promoting Thailand as a destination, the advertisement uses nature to construct a world of excitement, intensity and adventure. As Goldman and Papson note, this process is a common theme in travel advertisement imagery:

Nature, pure and primitive, provides a source of signifiers for appelling the bourgeoisie...These advertisements picture beautiful people who "thirst for adventure" while they encounter nature's wildness. They master nature's elements (wind, ocean, surf, desert) and then lean back to take satisfaction from the off-the-beaten-track beauty they have conquered. These texts address the young and wannabe bourgeoisie: the gods and goddesses who find themselves by exploring a pure and untrampled world.⁶¹

In promoting experiences of adventure and excitement, however, this advertisement furthers a consumptive approach to the natural world. Thailand's natural features are presented in commodity fashion. The style and form of the advertisement could just as easily be used to sell shoes as it is used to sell a destination. Landscape is commodified; its value dependent upon the adventure experience it imparts to the intrepid consumer.

⁶¹ Goldman and Papson, p.157

Figure 7

WHAT'S NEW

Visit Amazing Thailand, make a trip of unforgettable experiences and challenging adventures. Be transported into a world of discovery... whether by land or by sea, there's an activity for everyone. Rest assured that a visit to Thailand will take you well beyond your expectations, leaving you exhilarated, and yearning for more.

EXTREME THAILAND

ULTIMATE ROCK CLIMBING

Conquer steep limestone cliffs

Face with an intensive rock climbing experience in Krabi.

one of the hottest locations in the world. Be thrilled and exhilarated by the challenging climb, then relaxed and rewarded by

the 360-degree view of the Andaman Sea when they finally reach the 100-meter pinnacle.

HIKING

Tremendous Treks

Trek through the dense tropical rainforest. Venture up to remote hill tribe villages. Experience the unique way of life and culture of real mountain spirits in person. Hikers in Thailand will enter a fascinating world of discovery with every new step they take.

ELEPHANT TREKKING

A jungle adventure from a new perspective

Ride on the world's largest land animal while in Kanchanaburi or the northern provinces of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Experience an enchanting view of the tropical wildlife, see menacing tigers, playful deers and over 3,000 species of flora found in Khao Yai, Thailand's first national park.

DEEP DIVING

Mysterious encounters under the sea

Visit one of the world's best dive sites. Explore a house reef and hundreds of untouched coral reefs that are home to an abundance of fascinating and colourful marine creatures in the Similan Islands. From Manta Rays to Whale Sharks, every dive into the Andaman Sea will impress and live up those log books.

RAPID RIDING

Battle Raging Rapids

From the mighty rivers of Pai in northern Thailand to the roaring rapids of the Mae Klong river, there's a white water haven perfect for everyone! The magnificent waterfalls and hot springs liven up each ride, impressing enthusiasts far beyond their expectations in Umpang, Tak Province. The competitive prices make Thailand one of the best places in the world for an exhilarating white water holiday.

SEA CANOEING

Explore recesses of hidden caves

Take a leisurely paddle in an eco-friendly kayak. Weave through coastal mangrove forests and explore the hundreds of tiny islands that dot the Southern provinces of Krabi and Phuket. Skirted by white sand beaches, the islands tempt you to enter their hidden caves.

Contact: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Los Angeles, 611 North Larchmont Boulevard, 1st Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90004 Tel: (323) 461-9814 Fax: (323) 461-9834 E-mail: tata@is.meteom.com
 New York, 1 World Trade Center, Suite No. 3729, New York, N.Y. 10048 Tel: (212) 452-0433 Fax: (212) 912-0920 E-mail: taty@nol.com or 1-800-THAILAND Internet: www.tourismthailand.org

The final travel advertisement – figure 8 – that I'll explore is an advertisement for the international hotel chain Ritz Carlton's Caribbean destinations. In the advertisement, Ritz Carlton entices us with an idyllic representation of place. A couple embrace in a tropical lagoon. In the background, seemingly uninhabited hills fade away into the distance. Above the image the text reads *"In the Caribbean there are many aphrodisiacs. Oysters. Caviar. Air."* Beneath the image the advertisement reminds us that *"You can choose where you go. But occasionally, where you go, chooses you. Whether it's the energy and flavor of Cancun, the tropical splendor of Jamaica, a private oasis in St. Thomas or the boundless hospitality of San Juan, your very own experience is waiting for you."* The advertisement's text and imagery suggest an individualized paradise in waiting for the consumer. The advertisement's narrative is one of freedom and luxury in undisturbed nature. The landscape is portrayed in such a way – through the use of a soft focus and muted colors – as to evoke an idealized conception of nature. It is these qualities – purity, freedom and authenticity – associated with nature in a pristine state, that Ritz Carlton then appropriates to distinguish its destination. The landscape provides commodity sign value for an international hotel chain trying to create identity and meaning for its resorts. Landscape and nature are once more placed in the service of commerce.

The way in which landscape is represented in travel advertisement imagery has more to do with the successful marketing of a destination than with an accurate portrayal of place. The values and emotions associated with pristine nature – purity, freedom, excitement, authenticity – are appropriated by the advertisers to sell their destinations to the consumer. Sophisticated techniques involving a subtle interplay between text and image create representations of place that respond to the desire of the modern consumer for an experience free from the constraints of civilization. Fantasy takes precedence over reality. I shall now turn to an exploration of real estate advertisements to see whether some of these same themes are visible in the way in which place and landscape are represented.

Figure 8

In the Caribbean, there are many aphrodisiacs.

Oysters. Caviar. Air.



The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas

You can choose where you go. But occasionally, where you go, chooses you. Whether it's the energy and flavor of Cancun, the tropical splendor of Jamaica, a private oasis in St. Thomas or the boundless hospitality of San Juan, your very own experience is waiting for you. For reservations, call your travel professional or The Ritz-Carlton at 1-800-241-3333, or visit www.ritzcarlton.com.



*The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun
Mexico*

*The Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall
Jamaica*

*The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan
Hotel, Spa & Casino
Puerto Rico*

*The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas
U.S.V.I.*

Advertisements for real estate commonly incorporate landscape imagery since what they are selling is, in fact, the landscape itself. Whether these advertisements are promoting a residence or property, they often use images of the local landscape in their advertising. Not only do these advertisements clearly indicate how the natural world has become just another commodity within the capitalist economy, they are also examples of how the landscape can provide commodity sign value to a particular development. Advertisements for individual houses, vacation homes, or country estates frequently appropriate signifiers from the local landscape and use them in the marketing of their properties. As will be shown in the imagery that I shall explore, advertisers use landscape to impart two central meanings to their properties: authenticity and distinction.

In figure 9, the first advertisement that I examine is for an “exclusive” condominium in Idaho. The advertisement’s imagery consists of an image of the building beneath two images of the area’s natural attractions. Across the image two lines of text read *“Mountain High. At Play in the West.”* Beneath the image the advertisement provides further information on the development pointing out that world class ski slopes are *“at the doorstep”* and the neighboring *“clear blue waters of Lake Pend Oreille are a sparkling showcase for water sports.”* In the imagery, the landscape is represented as a playground for human activities. The advertisement attempts to attach an “authentic” experience of nature – skiing in the *“pristine”* mountains or sailing in the *“sparkling showcase”* that is Lake Pend Oreille – to the condominium development. The condominiums are presented to potential buyers as *“a congenial mountain home”* evoking visions of an idyllic life in harmony with nature. In this advertisement, as in many other advertisements involving landscape imagery, meanings and emotions associated with an experience of nature are lifted out of their context and re-applied to the promotion of a commodity. The landscape is represented in such a way as to provide a source of authenticity for the condominium development itself.

In figure 10, the next advertisement that I explore is for an upscale residential development in Florida. The advertisement is predominantly rich black with some text and

Figure 9

MOUNTAIN HIGH

AT PLAY IN THE WEST

SANDPOINT

INSPIRED BY the pristine natural beauty of the surrounding Selkirk Mountains and beautiful Lake Pend Oreille, White Pine Lodge offers luxury life near Sandpoint. In winter, the world-class ski slopes of Schweitzer are at the doorstep. In summer, the clear-blue waters of Lake Pend Oreille are a sparkling showcase for water sports. Born with the purpose of being "a congenial mountain home that draws families together," White Pine Lodge, with its luxuriously furnished settings—and ski-to-the-front-door excitement—is fast becoming just that. FROM \$220,000 TO \$650,000 FURNISHED, JANEK COMPANY, TIFFANY MAGNUSON, SCHWEITZER MOUNTAIN DISCOVERY CENTER, SANDPOINT, ID 83861 TEL: 208.255.5183, 888.300.1686. **LE**

Figure 10

A gated sanctuary of 180-acres in historic Windermere, Florida, for eighty-two species of birds, eleven types of fish, thirteen varieties of plant life, thirty-one classes of wildlife and a select few humans seeking the ultimate refuge.



THE SANCTUARY
at
❁ Lake Butler Sound ❁

For the better part of your life.

One to three-acre lakefront and lakeview *Reserve* homesites from \$275 thousand to \$2 million, with custom homes starting at \$1 million. Half-acre *Estates* homesites from \$125 thousand to \$175 thousand, with custom homes starting in the high \$600 thousands. And Mediterranean style *Villas* starting in the \$400 thousands.

For a free 16-page brochure, please contact Lake Butler Sound Realty:

phone: 407.523.1501 • toll-free: 1.866.609.7779 • Web site: www.lakebutlersound.com

 Pullco Development
A Division of PHC
A New York Stock Exchange Company
Prices subject to change without notice.

a small image of the site at the centre of the page. At the top of the advertisement a line of text reads *"A gated sanctuary of 180-acres in historic Windermere, Florida, for eighty-two species of birds, eleven types of fish, thirteen varieties of plant life, thirty-one classes of wildlife and a select few humans seeking the ultimate refuge."* Beneath a small aerial image of the local landscape, there's the development's golden emblem and its advertising pitch *"The Sanctuary at Lake Butler Sound. For the better part of your life."* The overall look and feel of the advertisement – a field of rich black, a gold emblem and the restrained text – suggest privilege and wealth. The landscape is represented in such a way as to support this idea of distinction. A sweeping aerial image shows the location's isolation from urbanity. The text, with its references to *"a gated sanctuary"*, a *"refuge"* and the variety of plant and animals that live in the area, elicits a sense of distinction and luxury. In its representation of place the advertisement presents a picture of Nature as a sort of last haven from modern life for the privileged few. The landscape is used to evoke a sense of distinction for those privileged enough (and wealthy enough) to afford the experience at Lake Butler Sound.

I will now turn to a genre of advertising that I believe may be the most odious form of representation that I have yet explored. In fact, these particular images that I'll explore could easily be considered propaganda. I refer to, what has been termed, legitimization advertising. Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson explain what has prompted the emergence of this particular form of advertising:

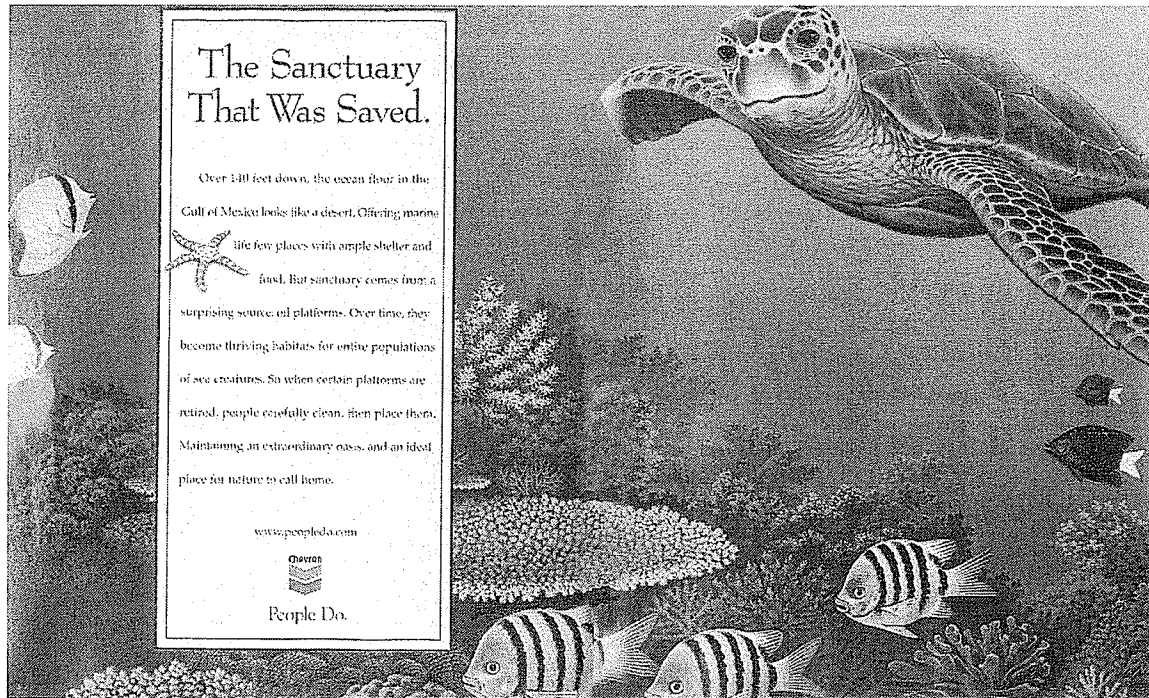
Prompted by the growth of the environmental movement and an awareness that overconsumption contributes to environmental destruction, mounting criticism has been directed at advertising. Advertising has responded by developing what has been known as "green" or environmental advertising. By appropriating signifiers from nature and transforming them into commodity signs, advertising repositions "thoughtful" consumption as a solution to encroaching environmental disasters...environmental marketing relegitimizes consumption by buffering corporate practices from criticism and by alleviating the guilt associated with overconsumption by creating a distinction between good consumption and bad consumption.⁶²

⁶² Goldman and Papson, p.188.

Corporations concerned with mounting criticism about the environmental impacts of their operations have developed advertisements with environmental messages that aim to legitimize their activities. In these advertisements images of the natural world are used to convince the public of the environmental benefits of corporate activity. These advertisements illustrate, to a degree like no other form of advertising that I have yet explored, the misrepresentation of reality and the suppression of information vital for those concerned about the environment. As will be shown, in these advertisements landscape is represented in such a way as to promote the corporate agenda.

The multinational petroleum corporation Chevron has produced a series of print advertisements that promote the environmental benefits of its energy exploration activities. I shall investigate one advertisement in particular that concerns Chevron's oil drilling activities in the Gulf of Mexico. The advertisement, shown in figure 11, consists of a large image of a marine turtle and tropical fish swimming across a coral reef. A box of text is headlined *"The Sanctuary That Was Saved"*. The remainder of the text presents Chevron's claim that its drilling activities actually benefit the marine life in the Gulf of Mexico. It reads as follows *"Over 140 feet down the Gulf of Mexico looks like a desert. Offering marine life few places with ample shelter and food. But sanctuary comes from a surprising source: oil platforms. Over time they become thriving habitats for entire populations of sea creatures. So when certain platforms are retired, people carefully clean, then place them. Maintaining an extraordinary oasis, and an ideal place for nature to call home."* In the advertisement the landscape is portrayed as if in a pristine state. There are no signs of human intervention in the image just marine life in a seemingly undisturbed environment. The advertisement, through its representation of the landscape (or marinescape in this case) and the supporting text, portrays Chevron's oil exploration activities in the Gulf of Mexico as benign or even beneficial to the environment. The reality of the situation is, however, quite the opposite. The oil and gas industry has been identified as one of the dirtiest and

Figure 11



source: *New Yorker*, June 19, 2000.

most destructive industries on the planet.⁶³ As the Florida Public Interest Research Group (Florida P.I.R.G.) reports "Offshore drilling and offshore rigs produce substantial "routine" pollution, including discharging thousands of tons of toxic drilling fluids, cuttings, and "produced waters" directly to the marine environment."⁶⁴ Chevron, in particular, has a terrible environmental track record in the Gulf of Mexico and in other parts of the world where it operates. In the United States, Chevron has paid more than \$70 million U.S. in fines, settlements, and penalties stemming from environmental violations.⁶⁵ Florida P.I.R.G. outlines Chevron's environmental record in the Gulf of Mexico:

Between 1956 and 1995, Chevron-offshore rigs in the Gulf of Mexico have experienced at least:

- 10 gas blowouts, and an additional 5 blowouts of oil or a combination of gas, oil and condensate. Several resulted in substantial damage, including the complete destruction of rigs and equipment and oil spills; one blowout took over 40 days to bring under control and released 30,000 barrels of oil into the Gulf.
- 65 fires and explosions, of which at least 28 originated from natural gas or natural gas equipment on the rigs; several fires and explosions, resulted in fatalities.
- 14 of what the federal government terms "significant pollution incidents," and 40 "major accidents," resulting in at least 19 fatalities in addition to those already noted.
- 5 pipeline breaks or leaks.⁶⁶

Clearly, the representation of Chevron's activities in the Gulf of Mexico as being benign or environmentally beneficial are highly inaccurate, if not entirely false. Evoking a pristine representation of the marine environment, Chevron attempts to deflect criticism of its activities in the Gulf of Mexico. In this advertisement, the landscape imagery is manipulated to mislead the public and suppress the actual facts. Landscape, or in this example, the marine environment, is represented in a particular manner that furthers Chevron's corporate agenda.

⁶³ Athan Manuel. U.S Public Interest Research Group. The Dirty Four: The Case against letting BP, Amoco, Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Phillips Petroleum Drill in the Arctic Refuge March 2001 p. 3

⁶⁴ Mark Ferrulo, Florida Public Interest Research Group Chevron: An Almost Unbelievable Pattern of Pollution September 1999 p.4

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.5

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.7

In figure 12, Phillips Petroleum employs a similar strategy in an advertisement concerning its drilling activities on Alaska's North Slope. The advertisement's central image shows a polar bear and her cub resting on the Arctic tundra. Beneath the image the text reads *"Anyone can get oil out of the North Slope. The trick is to leave everything else."* At the top of the advertisement, several lines of text explain Phillips' attempts to protect the polar bears during its drilling operations. The advertisement reads *"To go deep into the North Slope where the oil is, you need a lot of heavy equipment and, of course a road to run it on. So we use the water and ice already there to build one. But long before that we use infrared technology normally used to monitor pipelines to look for polar bear dens. And when we do find them we go elsewhere, leaving mothers and cubs snug in their beds. In four months the cubs venture out. The ice road melts. Its spring in Alaska again. And its like we've never been there at all."* The image of the polar bear cub snugly asleep on the back of its resting mother, along with the supporting text, suggests that Phillips' oil exploration activities in the Arctic are relatively unobtrusive and have minimal environmental impacts upon the local wildlife. The image portrays the landscape of Alaska's North Slope as being undisturbed by any industrial activity at all. In reality, however, oil exploration and development activities on Alaska's North Slope has "permanently altered more than 400 square miles of former pristine wilderness, and there are more than 1,500 miles of roads and pipelines and thousands of acres of industrial activities."⁶⁷ Furthermore, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group reports:

A 1988 Fish and Wildlife Service summary of impacts from oil drilling on the North Slope found that destruction of habitat has led to more than 15,000 birds killed or displaced, and that an undetermined number of polar and grizzly bears have been killed as "nuisances" ...⁶⁸

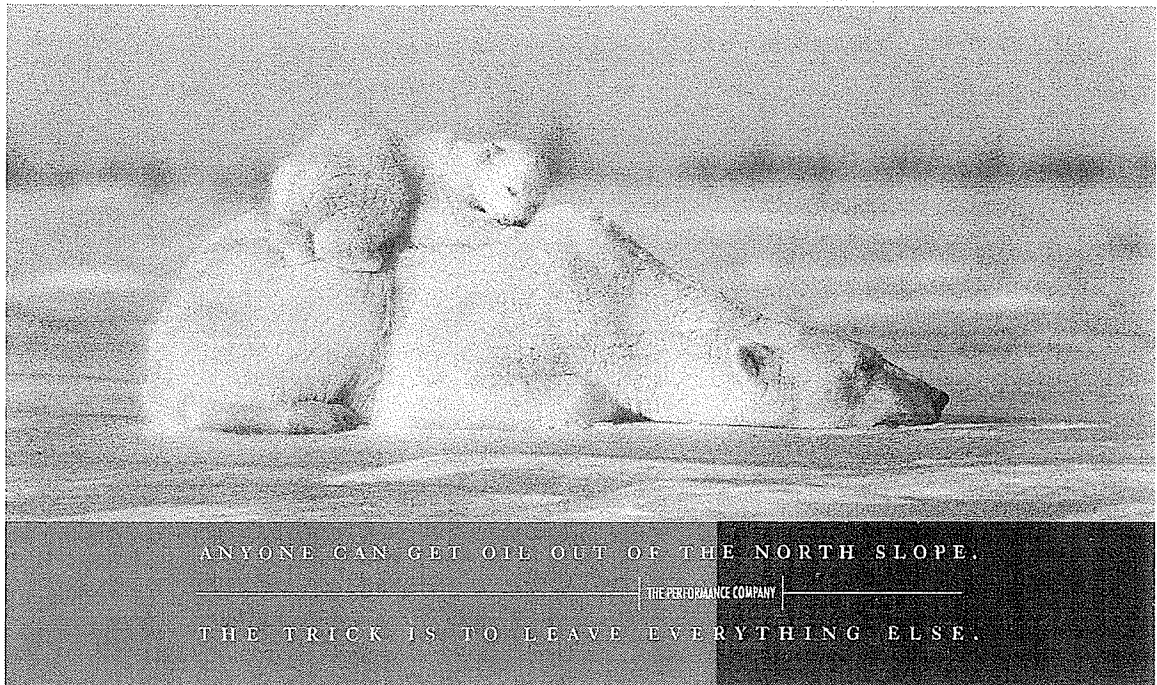
As one of four energy corporations operating on the North Slope, Phillips Petroleum is in part responsible for this situation. In addition to the destruction of habitat and wildlife, nearly 400 spills occur annually from oil industry activities in the North Slope oil fields and

⁶⁷ Athan Manuel, p.10.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Figure 12

TO GO DEEP INTO THE NORTH SLOPE WHERE THE OIL IS, YOU NEED A LOT OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT AND, OF COURSE, A ROAD TO RUN IT ON. SO WE USE THE WATER AND ICE ALREADY THERE TO BUILD ONE. BUT LONG BEFORE THAT WE USE INFRARED TECHNOLOGY NORMALLY USED TO MONITOR PIPELINES TO LOOK FOR POLAR BEAR DENS, AND WHEN WE DO FIND THEM, WE GO ELSEWHERE, LEAVING MOTHERS AND CUBS SNUG IN THEIR BEDS. IN FOUR MONTHS, THE CUBS VENTURE OUT, THE ICE ROAD MELTS, IT'S SPRING IN ALASKA AGAIN, AND IT'S LIKE WE'VE NEVER BEEN THERE AT ALL. philips66.com



ANYONE CAN GET OIL OUT OF THE NORTH SLOPE.

THE PERFORMANCE COMPANY

THE TRICK IS TO LEAVE EVERYTHING ELSE.

source: *New Yorker*, Nov. 5, 2001.

the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.⁶⁹ Most recently, on April 15, 2001, Phillips Petroleum spilled more than 92,000 gallons of salt water and crude oil at its Kuparuk oil field on Alaska's North Slope.⁷⁰ It is clear, upon an examination of the facts, that the impacts of Phillips' activities on the Alaskan landscape are far from minimal. As in the Chevron advertisement, the use of pristine landscape images to suggest otherwise presents a story that is highly misleading, if not entirely untrue. Once again, with the objective of promoting a corporate agenda, the landscape is represented and used in such a way as to mislead and misinform.

In concluding, we live in a world driven by imagery. This world has been defined, respectively, as a "global image economy"⁷¹ and a "society of the spectacle"⁷². In an increasingly fast-paced world, images are rapidly becoming the principal way that ideas are communicated for public consumption. As has been discussed, these images transmit much of how we view the world. Landscape has been represented in imagery from the earliest periods of human history. As human culture evolved so too has the ability to represent our surroundings. The manner in which humans chose to represent the landscape has deeply reflected the way those cultures have viewed the natural world. From the early cave paintings of Neolithic cultures, to the Taoist landscape paintings of China, to the paintings of the Hudson River School, representations of landscape have illustrated human thinking about our relationship with nature. With the emergence of new technologies that facilitated the creation and reproduction of imagery, the power to represent the world around us no longer resided exclusively with the fine artist. With the development of the modern consumer society, the image became a central element of modern advertising. Advertisers quickly incorporated landscape images into their advertisements. As various commentators have pointed out, modern advertising is profoundly reflective of our cultural identity. Furthermore, modern advertising provides

⁶⁹ Trustees for Alaska, Anchorage, AK. Oil in America's Arctic: Impacts of Oil Development on Alaska's North Slope <http://www.trustees.org/FSSpills.htm>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mau, p.5

⁷² Guy Debord. The Society of the Spectacle (Zone Books: New York, 1995), p.5

telling insights into how contemporary culture views the world. What then has our examination about the representation of landscape in modern advertising shown us?

The way in which landscape has been represented in contemporary advertising is profoundly shaped by the ideology of consumption. I argue that the manner in which landscape is represented in advertising is deeply reflective of a larger cultural perspective towards nature, the landscape and our conception of place. This worldview suggests that our primary identity is that of a consumer and that the natural world is merely another commodity within the marketplace. Within the framework of our consumer culture, where all of life is potentially a consumer object, landscape is transformed into just another commodity. The idea of place – denoting a complex interaction of environment, perception and experience – is simplified and reduced in this process of commodification. Within contemporary consumer culture, commodities have important sign value: that is they impart meaning to the consumer experience. As a commodity, landscape's symbolic value is appropriated by advertisers through a variety of means and used to promote the consumption of other commodities. The conception of place and the nature of landscape are manipulated to support a lifestyle of consumption. As I have shown in the analysis of the advertising imagery, elements of fantasy, misrepresentation and suppression all play a role in this process. Our culture has entered an era of simulation: we are presented with the signs of nature but, increasingly, in this process the original is being lost. As nature has been increasingly removed as a significant element in the everyday experience of most people in modern western culture, our culture – the “society of the spectacle”⁷³ substitutes representations of the natural world for direct experience. Our ideas of place and of the nature of the world around us are shaped by these representations and as such deserve to be carefully scrutinized. As we will see in the next chapter, *Places of Images*, the same values that underlay the representation of landscape in consumer culture are reshaping the nature of place in the postmodern city.

⁷³ Ibid.

2

Places of Images

" The contemporary spectator in quest of public urban spaces increasingly must stroll through recycled and revalued territories...city tableaux that have been turned into gentrified, historicized, commodified and privatized places. "

Christine Boyer "*Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport*" in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space (Michael Sorkin ed. Hill and Wang: New York, 1992), p. 204

As we enter the 21st century, the forces of consumerism have clearly left their mark upon the landscape of the North American city. In *Places of Images*, I investigate the physical manifestation of consumer culture in the postmodern cityscape. I argue that the same forces that have shaped the representation of landscape, as outlined in *Images of Place*, are at work re-shaping the very nature of the landscape in the postmodern urban setting. North American society is witnessing a re-structuring of urban form within the postmodern city. Public spaces – once important expressions of collectivity and democracy – are being increasingly eroded within this emerging urban realm. The ascendancy of private commercial interests, accompanied by an ideological refabrication of urban life, characterizes this new city. Increasingly, this new urbanity advances images and simulations in place of an authentic urbanity. This emerging urban realm can be viewed as “places of images” where traditional notions of urbanity have been replaced by a sophisticated manipulation of the popular imagery of city life. The city as a place of interaction, participation and diversity is being transformed into a “theme park” realm of consumption. I argue that this transformation is an imprinting of our capitalist, consumer culture upon the cityscape of urban areas across North America. In *Places of Images*, I will address these issues and their causes as I examine the mark left by our consumer culture upon the urban landscape.

The erosion of public space in the North American city provides evidence of the re-structuring of the urban realm that is taking place within cities across the continent. James Howard Kunstler argues that public space – what he refers to as the public realm – in America’s cities has been steadily eroded. He writes in *The Geography of Nowhere* that the root cause of this process lies in a belief that the landscape was first and foremost a commodity for capital gain.¹ With the ascendancy of free market economics and accelerating consumerism, this idea has been given renewed prominence in North American society. In his book *Variations on a Theme Park*, Michael Sorkin examines the

¹ James Howard Kunstler. *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1993), p.26

end of public space in the North American city. Sorkin argues that consumer culture – what he refers to as a “new world order bent on a single citizenship of consumption”² – has fundamentally transformed the nature of our cities. He writes:

...recent years have seen the emergence of a wholly new kind of city, a city without a place attached to it. This ageographical city is particularly advanced in the United States. It's visible in clumps of skyscrapers rising from well-wired fields next to the Interstate; in huge shopping malls, anchored by their national-chain department stores, and surrounded by swarms of cars; in hermetically sealed atrium hotels cloned from coast to coast to coast; in uniform “historic” gentrifications and festive markets; in the disaggregated sprawl of endless new suburbs without cities; and in the antenna bristle of a hundred million rooftops from Secaucus to Simi Valley, in the clouds of satellite dishes pointed at the same geosynchronous blip, all sucking Arsenio and the A-Team out of the ether.³

In Sorkin's view consumer culture has manifested itself in ways that have destroyed the traditional functions of urbanity. In place of genuine public spaces that historically have encouraged community and interaction within the urban realm, our consumer culture has created places devoid of an authentic urbanity. Not only has consumer culture and its concomitant systems of economic production and technology destroyed traditional public spaces in the city, it has also led to an emergence of an entirely new urban form. This new urban form, argues Sorkin, emphasizes uniformity, security and simulation in place of authentic public space.⁴ The title of his book, Variations on a Theme Park suggests that contemporary North American cities are akin to the theme park in as much as they involve the substitution of the fake – the characteristics of the new city – for the authentic – real public spaces.

How has the present condition of the urban realm in North American cities come about? Before discussing the processes responsible for the deterioration of public space in the urban context, we need to first establish a definition of the public realm. In his book

² Michael Sorkin ed. Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space p.xiii

³ Ibid., p. xi

⁴ Ibid., p. xiii-xiv

Home From Nowhere, James Howard Kunstler uses the terms public space and public realm interchangeably. He defines the public realm as follows:

The public realm is the connective tissue of our everyday world. It is made of those pieces of terrain left between the private holdings. It exists in the form of streets, highways, town squares, parks, and even parking lots. It includes rural or wilderness landscape: stretches of the seacoast, national forests, most lakes and rivers, and even the sky. The public realm exists mainly outdoors because most buildings belong to private individuals or corporations. Exceptions to this are public institutions such as libraries, museums, zoos, and town halls, which are closed some hours of the day, and airports and train stations, which may be open around the clock. Some places, while technically private, function as quasi-public realm – for instance, college campuses, ballparks, restaurants, theaters, nightclubs, and, yes, shopping malls, at least the corridors between the private shops. Their owners retain the right to regulate behaviour within, particularly the terms of access, and so the distinction must be made that they are only nominally public. The true public realm then, for the sake of argument, is that portion of our everyday world which belongs to everybody and to which everybody ought to have equal access most of the time. The public realm is therefore a set of real places possessing physical form.⁵

For the purposes of this paper, I shall examine the nature of public space within the urban realm, leaving aside a discussion of what is happening to public spaces outside of the postmodern city. Kunstler, like Michael Sorkin, argues that the public realm in American society has been fundamentally degraded and destroyed. While the evidence for his position is perhaps more visible in the U.S.A, a deterioration of public space is increasingly evident within Canadian cities. What is responsible for the accelerating deterioration of public space throughout North America? The ascendancy of free market economics in the 1980s marked the beginning of a process that has subsequently redefined the role of government in civic life. U.S and Canadian administrations embraced free market ideologies and implemented deregulation and privatization policies that were to have significant impacts on public life. As Naomi Klein writes in her book No Logo:

In Canada under Brian Mulroney, in the U.S under Ronald Reagan and in Britain under Margaret Thatcher (and in many other parts of the world as well), corporate taxes were dramatically lowered, a move that eroded the tax base and gradually starved out the public sector...the political climate

⁵ James Howard Kunstler. Home From Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World For the Twenty-First Century (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1996), p. 36

during this time ensured that there was almost no vocabulary to speak passionately about the value of a non-commercialized public sphere.⁶

Along with free market economics there emerged a hyper acceleration of consumerism with an accompanying transformation of the role of the citizen into that of a consumer. This fundamental shift has had a dramatic impact upon how North American society perceives the common good. As James Howard Kunstler remarks "Consumers, unlike citizens, have no implicit responsibilities, obligations, or duties to anything larger than their own needs and desires, certainly not to anything like the common good."⁷ Kunstler argues that public spaces are the physical manifestation of the common good.⁸ Consequently, the weakening of the common good within North American civic life has been reflected physically in the deterioration of public spaces. With a decline in concern for the common good, accompanied by a reduction in the role of government in civic life and an emphasis on privatization, public spaces in North American cities have been increasingly subject to the forces of commercialization. The global spread of capitalism – globalization – has also introduced technologies and new modes of production that have impacted the traditional form of public spaces in the urban context. In addition to all of these factors, North America's embrace of an ever-intensifying consumer culture has allowed a commercial presence to intrude into public spaces hitherto off limits to the commercial message. In the hyped up consumer era initiated by the free market economic ideologies of the 1980s, the idea of public space as an important expression of democratic life in the urban context has been sacrificed.

With the deterioration of public space in North American cities, a new form of urbanity has arisen. Contemporary urbanity can be characterized by a decline in the quality of the public realm and by the ascendancy of private, commercial interests. This new city, argues Michael Sorkin, involves a vision of urbanity that presents uniformity, surveillance and

⁶ Naomi Klein. No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies (Vintage Canada: Toronto, 2000), p. 30.

⁷ Kunstler. Home From Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World For the Twenty-First Century p. 38

⁸ Ibid.

control, and simulations as a substitute for a democratic public realm.⁹ Sorkin outlines the three salient characteristics of this new city form: "The first [characteristic] is the dissipation of all stable relations to local physical and cultural geography, the loosening of ties to any specific space."¹⁰ According to Sorkin, the second characteristic of this new city form is "...its obsession with "security," with rising levels of manipulation and surveillance over its citizenry and with a proliferation of new modes of segregation."¹¹ And lastly, Sorkin characterizes the new city as " ...a city of simulations, television city, the city as theme park."¹² As will be shown, the new emerging urban form that Michael Sorkin describes entails a radical transformation in the character of the city. In the traditional city, public spaces were important expressions of collectivity and democracy. As Sorkin writes "The familiar spaces of traditional cities, the streets and squares, courtyards and parks, are our great scenes of the civic, visible and accessible, our binding agents."¹³ As these spaces are increasingly eroded in the postmodern city, we are losing important elements crucial to a democratic civic culture. As James Howard Kunstler comments " The common good demands a public realm in which to dwell. It can't sustain itself merely in our hearts or memories."¹⁴

As discussed earlier the transformation in the nature of the postmodern city that we are witnessing throughout North America – most notably visible in the deterioration of traditional public spaces – has been spurred by economic, political and cultural forces. I argue that these forces are a manifestation of our capitalist, consumer culture and that they are fundamentally imprinting their presence upon the cityscape of urban areas across North America. In the same way that the representation of landscape, as examined in *Images of Place*, reflect the "concerns of the day"¹⁵ so too can the postmodern cityscape

⁹ Sorkin p.xv

¹⁰ Ibid., p.xiii

¹¹ Ibid., p.xiv

¹² Ibid., p.xiv-xv

¹³ Ibid., p.xv

¹⁴ Kunstler. *Home from Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World for the Twenty-First Century* p.57.

¹⁵ Stephen F. Mills. *The American Landscape* (Keele University Press: Edinburgh, 1997), p.117

be seen as "texts written in the language of the concrete-views made apparent."¹⁶ In his essay "*The American Ideology of Space*", Leo Marx writes that the overall direction in the treatment of the American landscape has been heavily influenced by market forces and a commodification of the environment.¹⁷ I argue that, fueled by a rapidly globalizing capitalist system, this process is accelerating throughout both Canada and the United States. The juggernaut of modern capitalism, along with the accompanying consumer culture that it has created, is increasingly re-shaping the nature of our cities in ways that clearly reflect its dominance as the prevailing ideology of North American society. As Sharon Zukin writes in Landscapes of Power:

New architecture and urban forms are...produced under nearly the same social conditions as consumer products. They increasingly follow similar patterns of both standardization and market differentiation...it has become practically impossible to separate the perception of urban form from the effects of internationalized investment, production and consumption.¹⁸

To comprehend the imprint of our capitalist, consumer culture upon the urban landscape we need to look closely at what is happening to the urban realm and, most notably, to understand how public spaces are being transformed in this process. We also need to interpret the underlying messages that are implicit within the forms of this new modern urbanity as these messages are clearly reflective of the core values of consumer culture. Michael Sorkin's analysis of the new city provides a ready framework for this discussion.

Ageographia, the 'placeless' place, the replacement of diversity and particularity with a uniform sameness, is increasingly the condition of urban centers in the United States and Canada. As Sorkin writes:

The new city replaces the anomaly and delight of such places [the traditional city] with a universal particular, a generic urbanism inflected only by applique...This "place" is fully ageographic: it can be inserted equally in an open field or in the heart of town...Obsessed with the point of production and the point of sale, the new city is little more than a swarm of

¹⁶ Ibid., p.121

¹⁷ Leo Marx. "*The American Ideology of Space*" in *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams eds (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 74

¹⁸ Sharon Zukin. Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1991), p. 43

urban bits jettisoning a physical view of the whole, sacrificing the idea of the city as the site of community and human connection.¹⁹

With the global spread of capitalism and accompanying consumer culture the 'placeless' place is evident in urban centers the world over. Sharon Zukin, writing about the effect that these processes have had upon the American landscape observes " [the] American landscape is a series of unbounded spaces where mass production and mass consumption reproduce a standardized, quasi-global culture. It takes an effort of imagination to distinguish among the "non-place places" in such a landscape."²⁰ Michael Sorkin points to the uniformity of modern urban centers in North America as a consequence of " globalized capital, electronic means of production, and uniform mass culture."²¹ Global capital and its concomitant systems of production and technology require standardization and uniformity in order to maximize efficiency and return. At the same time, consumer culture necessitates similar forms in which to manifest itself all over the globe. The corporate franchises and chain stores which dot the urban landscape worldwide clearly exemplify the standardization and uniformity demanded by a globalizing capitalist system (figure 13). As Zukin notes " McDonald's and Benetton epitomize the connections between international urban form and internationalized production and consumption. Their shops are ubiquitous in cities around the world..."²² In his book The Seduction of Place, Joseph Rykwert writes about the effect that these processes have had upon traditional public meeting places in the postmodern city. He comments:

Many of the restaurants and bars have by now been turned into nearly identical fast-food franchises...which are distinguishable from each other by only their shrill trademarks and advertising, and are designed for quick turnover and takeaway...The homogenized nature of the fast-food franchises means that their outlets can never be site-specific, nor can they offer alluring points of reference, since only the abstraction of their logos marks them. As in most of the institutions of late capitalism, unvaried

¹⁹ Sorkin. p.xiii

²⁰ Zukin, p.20

²¹ Sorkin, p.xiii

²² Zukin, p. 20



Figure 13: Standardization and uniformity in the capitalist landscape photos: by author

repetitions convey the message that space has been standardized, that its inflections and associations have been ironed out...²³

Before examining the nature of the urban forms that are emerging out of our capitalist, consumer culture, the term 'place' needs to be defined as it is central to the discussion. The concept of place has a variety of different connotations. My usage of the term is based upon Lucy Lippard's approach to the idea, as outlined in her book The Lure of the Local. She defines place in the following terms:

Inherent in the local is the concept of place — a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. Most often place applies to our "local" — entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.²⁴

Place has both psychological and social ramifications. It not only refers to a physical setting but also to the complex relationship between people and their surroundings in a particular location. The idea of 'placelessness', then, evokes a sense of emptiness; a void in the relationship between people and their particular environment. As Lippard writes:

"Someplace" is what we are looking for. "No place" is where these elements are unknown or invisible, but in fact every place has them, although some are being buried beneath the asphalt of the monoculture, the "geography of nowhere." "Placelessness," then, may simply be place ignored, unseen, or unknown.²⁵

As Michael Sorkin has made clear, the postmodern city is increasingly characterized by the emergence of places that have very little real connection to the local setting (figure 14). He refers to this new kind of city as "a city without a place attached to it."²⁶ Public spaces

²³ Joseph Rykwert. The Seduction of Place: The City in the Twenty-First Century (Pantheon Books: New York, 2000), p. 133

²⁴ Lucy Lippard. The Lure of the Local: Senses of place in a multicentered society (The New Press: New York, 1997), p. 7

²⁵ Ibid., p. 9

²⁶ Sorkin, p. xi



Figure 14: A Landscape of Placelessness: Commercial and residential landscapes in the postmodern city. photos: by author

which have traditionally imparted identity, character, nuance and history to the city are being eliminated by the homogenizing forces of production and consumption. These spaces are being replaced by the 'placeless' places of the new city manifest in its shopping malls, suburbs, emerging edge cities and electronic cultural space.

The shopping mall is perhaps the quintessential landscape of consumption. As Margaret Crawford notes in her essay "*The World in a Shopping Mall*" whether in the form of the ubiquitous suburban neighborhood mall or the megamall, "the message conveyed is the same – a repeated imperative to consume."²⁷ In the North American city the shopping mall has increasingly assumed the role of the traditional city square. Although the shopping mall cloaks itself with signifiers from city life in order to create the illusion of public space, the mall remains essentially a private realm of consumption (figure 15). As Jon Goss comments in his essay "*The Magic of the Mall*":

The shopping center appears to be everything that it is not. It contrives to be a public, civic place even though it is private and run for profit; it offers a place to commune and retreat, while it seeks retail dollars; and it borrows signs of other places and times to obscure its rootedness in contemporary capitalism.²⁸

Shopping malls have replaced the traditional public spaces of the city as the center of public life in the modern urban context. As James Howard Kunstler writes:

The mall commercialized the public realm...What had existed before in an organic state as Main Street, downtown shopping districts, town squares, hotel lobbies, public gardens, saloons, museums, churches, was now standardized, simplified, sanitized, packaged and relocated on the suburban fringe in the form of a mall.²⁹

The traditional functions of public spaces are, however, inconsistent with the essentially private domain of the shopping mall. Activities fundamental to political expression but

²⁷ Margaret Crawford "*The World in a Shopping Mall*" in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* Michael Sorkin ed., p. 11

²⁸ Jon Goss "*The 'Magic of the Mall: An Analysis of Form, Function, and Meaning in the Contemporary Retail Built Form*" in *Undoing Place?: A Geographical Reader* ed. Linda McDowell (John Wiley & Sons: New York, 1997), p. 278

²⁹ Kunstler. *The Geography of Nowhere* p. 119.



Figure 15: The Shopping Mall: Although it cloaks itself with signifiers from city life (ex. the town square clock) in order to create the illusion of public space, the mall remains essentially a private realm (ex. the video camera) of consumption. photos: by author

deemed detrimental to consumption, such as handbilling, picketing and demonstrations, are banned within the mall's private realm. Despite a facade of authentic urbanity, the shopping mall is not open to the range of activities or people consistent with public space.

As Goss writes:

The idealized public street is a relatively democratic space with all citizens enjoying access, with participatory entertainment and opportunities for social mixing, and the shopping center re-presents a similarly liberal vision of consumption, in which credit-card citizenship allows all to buy an identity and vicariously experience preferred lifestyles, without principles of exclusion based on accumulated wealth or cultural capital. It is however, a strongly bounded or purified social space that excludes a significant minority of the population and so protects patrons from the moral confusion that a confrontation with social difference might provoke. Suburban malls, in particular, are essentially spaces for *white* middle classes.³⁰

The shopping mall is exclusionary; despite its attempts to present itself as a community space it remains fundamentally "a celebration of consumption."³¹ As such, it can never fully replace the role played by traditional urban public spaces as an important expression of collectivity and democracy. A ubiquitous presence in the North American urban landscape, the shopping mall is illustrative of the ageographia and uniformity demanded by our capitalist consumer culture. To disguise its fundamental 'placelessness', the mall employs clever devices to evoke identity and meaning from other times and other places. Despite presenting itself as an authentic place – through sophisticated planning and design – the shopping mall remains an artifact of consumer culture. As Jon Goss notes "It [the shopping mall] is a representation of space masquerading as a representational space; that is, a space conceptualized, planned scientifically and realized through strict technical control, pretending to be a space imaginatively created by its inhabitants."³²

³⁰ Goss, p.272

³¹ Pamela Shurmer-Smith and Kevin Hannam. Worlds of Desire, Realms of Power: A cultural geography (Edward Arnold: London, 1994), p.190.

³² Goss, p. 278.

The suburb, well established in North American life since the 1950s, perhaps reflects to a degree unlike no other feature of North America city life the idea of the 'placeless' place. The physical setting, described by James Howard Kunstler as a "...cartoon landscape of car-clogged highways, strip malls, tract houses, franchise fry pits, [and] parking lots..."³³ characterizes much of suburbia in both Canada and the United States. Increasingly, its homogeneity makes one suburb indistinguishable from another (figure 16). Kunstler writes that suburbia is "...an idea of a place rather than a place. The way you can tell is because so many places in this country seem like no place in particular..."³⁴ Lucy Lippard, commenting on the homogeneity of suburbia, writes "The loss of contrast, of different histories, settlement patterns, and cultural markers results in undifferentiated sprawl and a supremely disorienting landscape..."³⁵ The homogeneity of the suburban landscape expresses in built form the drive towards uniformity and standardization inherent in capitalist economic forces. Sharon Zukin notes that the emergence of the suburban landscape was closely tied to the workings of the consumer economy. She writes:

...opening the suburbs to massive residential development spatially defined a new market culture. Suburbia's socio-spatial patterns typically anchored in *place* the *market* arrangements of the postwar period. Moreover, mass suburbanization offered a macroeconomic solution to prewar problems of underconsumption. Buying a house, at least one car, and domestic equipment integrated households into a national landscape of mass production and consumption.³⁶

The suburbs developed, in effect, as a consumer landscape. As David Harvey remarks in The Urbanization of Capital "...suburbanization is actively produced because it sustains an effective demand for products..."³⁷ Harvey adds "We can thus interpret the preference for

³³ Kunstler, Home From Nowhere p. 17

³⁴ Ibid., p. 17

³⁵ Lippard, p. 231

³⁶ Zukin, p. 140.

³⁷ David Harvey. The Urbanization of Capital (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd, 1985), p. 122



photo: by author



source: Peter Blake. God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape
Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York, 1964.

Figure 16: Suburbia: A homogenous consumer landscape.

suburban living as a created myth, arising out of possessive individualism, nurtured by the ad-man and forced by the logic of capitalist accumulation."³⁸ Commenting on the origins of the suburb, Kunstler notes "From its inception the chief characteristic of the American suburb was not of an organically real town, nor a civic place, but a place of fantasy and escape."³⁹ The suburbs, referred to by Leo Marx as "...a simulacrum of genteel rusticity", reflect a consumer ethos of individualism and detachment from social responsibility.⁴⁰ As Kunstler notes "...the motive force behind suburbia has been the exaltation of privacy and the elimination of the public realm."⁴¹ The end result of suburbanization has been "a sprawling dormitory landscape of detached and privately owned homes, a culturally homogenous and "consumerist" suburbia...".⁴² Since its inception in postwar America, the suburb has continued to remain "the homogenized mass-cultural image of how we should live."⁴³

The continued growth of the suburbs has been accompanied in the last two decades by the development of a new kind of settlement pattern along the suburban perimeters of large urban centers. Referred to as the edge or outer city, this emerging form is most visible along the outer perimeter of large American cities.⁴⁴ Just as post war economics stimulated the development of the suburbs, so too have new developments in capitalist economics led to the emergence of the edge cities. Globalization, technological development and economic re-structuring have facilitated the move of economic activities out of the city's core and into the city's periphery.⁴⁵ As Edward Soja writes:

Deindustrialism has emptied out many of the largest urban-industrial zones ...while postfordist reindustrialization has concentrated high-

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kunstler, *Home From Nowhere* p. 32

⁴⁰ Leo Marx. "The American Ideology of Space" in *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, p. 74-75.

⁴¹ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere* p. 189.

⁴² Edward W. Soja. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000), p. 240.

⁴³ Lippard, p. 231

⁴⁴ Leo Marx. "The American Ideology of Space" in *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, p. 75

⁴⁵ Saki Sassen. "Cities in the Global Economy" in *Open City* John Knechtel ed. (House of Anansi Press Ltd: Concord, Ontario), p. 172

technology industries in new industrial spaces far from the old downtowns. These "greenfield" sites, the urban equivalent of Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) in the global economy, are not just satellites but have become distinctive cities and gravitational nodes in their own right.⁴⁶

These newly emerging edge cities are indicative of the changing form of the capitalist cityscape. Not only are they reflective of a re-structuring of the capitalist economic system, they also embody the consumer lifestyle. As Soja observes "The most successful have spawned and sustained the mall-centered hives of consumerism that are the popular hallmarks of the postfordist, postmetropolitan Outer City."⁴⁷

Like the suburbs, the edge cities are distinguished by a ubiquitous 'placelessness'. Edward Soja refers to the edge city as *exopolis* "the city without, to stress their oxymoronic ambiguity, their city-full non-city-ness."⁴⁸ The pattern of settlement characteristic of the edge cities emphasizes individuality over any sense of community. As Leo Marx writes "The prevailing mindset here is privatism, with its atomized anti-city cultural life centering upon "family values" a reliance upon the electronic media, chiefly television, for contact beyond the family...The prevailing political ethos seems to be antiliberal, antigovernment "interference" or "regulation", or, in short, Reaganism."⁴⁹ Like suburbia, the edge cities are a consequence of capitalist market forces. The form of these emerging centers, described by Edward Soja as "amorphous replacements of suburbia"⁵⁰, runs counter to traditional notions of urbanity that fostered community and interaction. As in the suburbs, public spaces are downplayed, if not sacrificed entirely, in favour of a decentralized, non-communal pattern of settlement.

Electronic cultural space – television and the internet most notably – are increasingly replacing traditional public spaces as a medium for interaction between individuals and communities (figure 17). These electronic 'places' substitute for those rapidly dwindling

⁴⁶ Soja. *Postmetropolis* p. 242

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Edward W. Soja "Inside Exopolis: Scenes from Orange County" in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* Michael Sorkin ed., p. 95

⁴⁹ Marx, p.76

⁵⁰ Soja. *Postmetropolis* p. 242

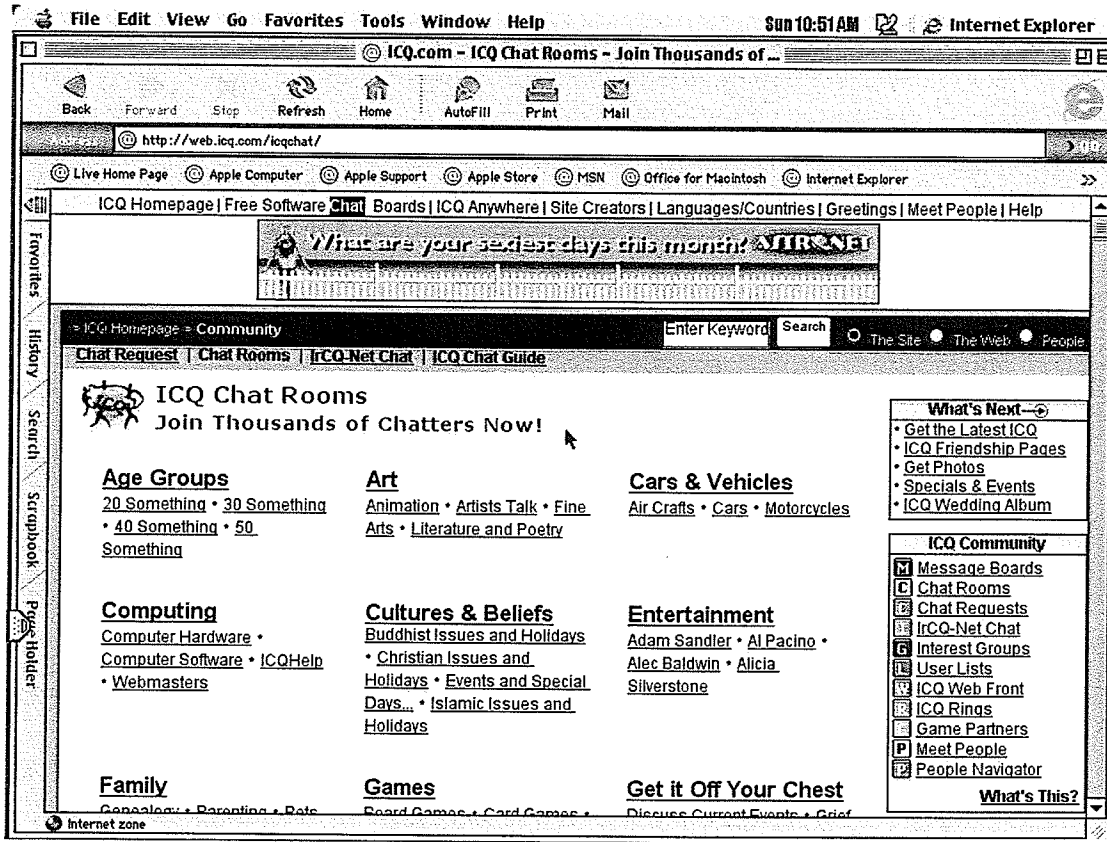


Figure 17: Electronic cultural space: The chat room photo: by author

public spaces that once allowed for interaction, debate and participation. James Howard Kunstler notes that in suburbia, in the absence of real public spaces, television has emerged as the public realm for children.⁵¹ Michael Sorkin writes that the ageographia of the new city is as much reflected in its built forms as it is in its embrace of the electronic cultural realm manifest in "the antenna bristle of a hundred million rooftops" and in "the clouds of satellite dishes."⁵² Dominated by a homogenous popular culture, electronic cultural space is reflective of the 'placelessness' so characteristic of the new city. Rather than promoting diversity and a range of expression, the electronic cultural realm – television in particular – reinforces the hegemony of a globalizing consumer culture. Private commercial forces threaten to limit expression within electronic cultural space. As Lucy Lippard observes, the 'places' of the electronic cultural realm are subject to a control and scrutiny not consistent with traditional public spaces. She writes:

Is the World Wide Web a place? And if so, is it public or private? What about all those "home pages" where the "visitors" are avidly courted and counted? Such intangible "places" are all the more susceptible to control- for example, the ongoing, but losing, struggle for public control of public-access TV. Stanley Aronowitz has suggested that talk radio is the new public space, but it too is firmly controlled: dissenting callers are screened or jeered off the air. In a real public space you can debate and communicate with those on the soapboxes. There are no "moderators" except for what unspoken custom and courtesy are left.⁵³

The electronic cultural realm provides a poor substitute for those real public spaces that were fundamental to a democratic civic culture in the traditional urban center. As Trevor Boddy points out "The rapidly evolving cultural space of television, computers, and the new communication technologies will never replace the information and economic system which is the vital public street."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Kunstler, *Home from Nowhere* p. 55

⁵² Sorkin, p. xi

⁵³ Lippard, p. 248

⁵⁴ Trevor Boddy "Underground and Overhead: Building the Analagous City" in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* Michael Sorkin ed., p. 151

One of the most characteristic features of the postmodern city is, as Michael Sorkin points out, its ubiquitous 'placelessness' or ageographia. The shopping mall, the suburb, the emerging edge cities and the realm of electronic cultural space are all illustrative of the ageographia so commonplace in the modern urban context. I argue that the ageographia so characteristic of the postmodern city is deeply reflective of the imprint of our capitalist, consumer culture upon modern urbanity. The erosion of public spaces and a diminishing sense of place in the postmodern city can be tied to the impact of the homogenizing and privatizing forces of contemporary consumer culture. The intrusion of private commercial forces into the city's public realm has had another consequence: an increasing obsession with security in the postmodern city.

The privatization that has swept through civic life in both Canada and the United States is increasingly manifesting itself in the cityscapes of North America. The embrace of free market economics and neo-liberalism – foundations of our modern capitalist, consumer society – has emphasized privatism and exclusion within the postmodern city. The unavoidable consequence of this process has been an aggressive expansion of security measures in the city (figure 18). Michael Sorkin writes that the obsession with security is one of the salient characteristics of the new city. He notes that the postmodern city is increasingly marked by "rising levels of manipulation and surveillance over its citizenry and...[by] a proliferation of new modes of segregation."⁵⁵ Edward Soja writes that the postmodern cityscape has "become filled with many different kinds of protected and fortified spaces, islands of enclosure and anticipated protection against the real and imagined dangers of daily life."⁵⁶ While these measures are most highly developed in large American urban centers, they are rapidly becoming more visible in cities across North America. The gated community, for example, once non-existent in the cityscape of large Canadian centers is now a feature of Canada's urban landscape. The postmodern city's

⁵⁵ Sorkin, p. xiii

⁵⁶ Soja. Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions. p. 299.

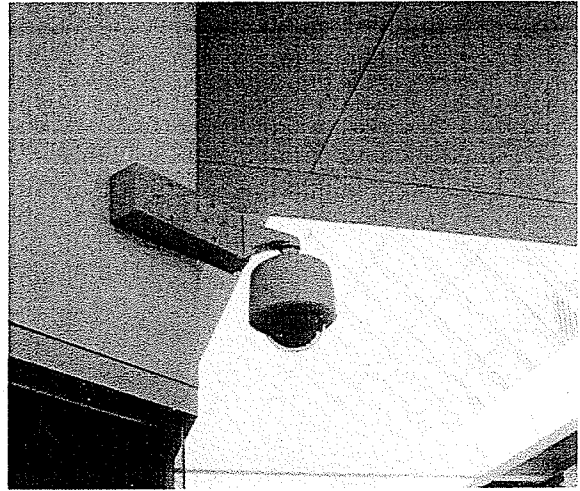
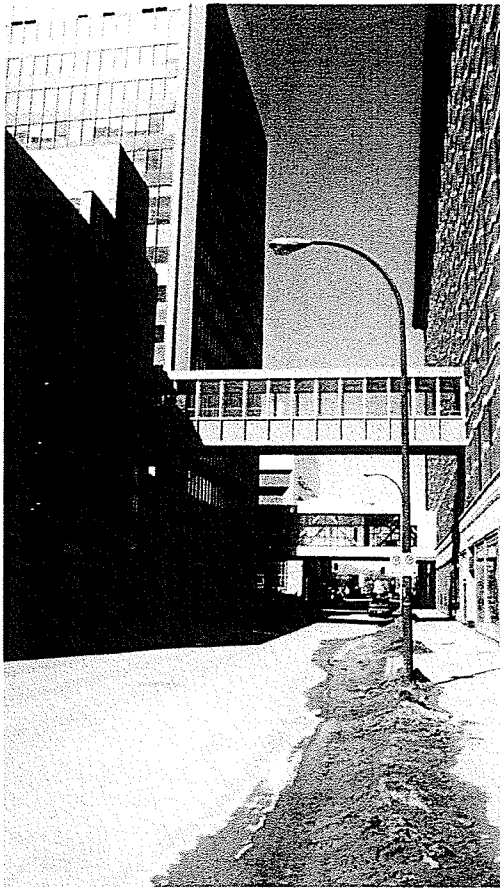


Figure 18: Manifestations of security: Surveillance, segregation and exclusion in the new city.
photos: by author

obsession with security is visible in the measures designed to monitor and segregate the population. As Sorkin writes:

The methods are both technological and physical. The former consist of invasive policing technologies – domesticated versions of the “electronic battlefield” – and a growing multitude of daily connections to the computer grid, ranging from encounters with the automated teller to the full-blown regulatory environment of the electronic workplace. The physical means are equally varied: parallel, middle-class suburban cities growing on the fringes of old centers abandoned to the poor; enclaved communities for the rich; gentrification; the globe-girdling cocoon that envelops the business traveler as he or she encounters the same airport, hotel, and office building from Denver to Dubai; the lacework of overhead and underground circulation systems imposed in Minneapolis or Edmonton to permit shoppers and office workers to circulate in climate-regulated security through threatening urban territory.⁵⁷

Trevor Boddy argues that these measures, the pedestrian networks in particular, are not only mechanisms of security, but are also reflective of a larger social agenda which is changing the very nature of the city. He writes “There is ample reason to suppose the new downtowns of tunnels and bridges have specific urban and social agendas...they accelerate a stratification of race and class, and paradoxically degrade the very conditions they supposedly remedy – the amenity, safety and environmental conditions of the public realm.”⁵⁸

Mike Davis has written extensively about the increasing focus on security within the postmodern city. Davis argues that the drive to secure the city sacrifices the very idea of accessible public space. He writes:

The universal and consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space. The American city is being systematically turned inward. The “public” spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity. Inside malls, office centers, and cultural complexes, public activities are sorted into strictly functional compartments under the gaze of private police forces. This architectural privatization of the physical public sphere, moreover, is complemented by a parallel

⁵⁷ Sorkin, p.xiv

⁵⁸ Trevor Boddy “Underground and Overhead: Building the Analagous City” in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space p. 124.

restructuring of electronic space, as heavily policed pay-access databases and subscription cable services expropriate the invisible agora.⁵⁹

As Davis writes, the focus on security in the modern urban context is inextricably bound up with issues of public space and privatization. He argues that the end result of this process has been the destruction of earlier ideals of public space. Davis comments "In either guise, architectural or electronic, this polarization marks the decline of urban liberalism, and with it the end of what might be called the Olmstedian vision of public space..."⁶⁰ Writing about Los Angeles, Davis describes a re-developed downtown district shaped by an emphasis on security: "The new Downtown is designed to ensure a seamless continuum of middleclass work, consumption, and recreation, insulated from the city's 'unsavoury' streets. Ramparts and battlements, reflective glass and elevated pedways, are tropes in an architectural language warning off the underclass Other."⁶¹ Although Davis writes about Los Angeles in particular, his analysis is applicable to urban centers across the continent. As Edward Soja comments, Davis' writings make "...the harsh particularities of the Los Angeles case relevant to a more general and comprehensive understanding of contemporary urban life everywhere."⁶²

As has been discussed the postmodern city is characterized by ageographia and an increasing emphasis on security and control. Lost in the emergence of this new urbanity has been the idea of the public realm. Battered by ideological, political, economic and cultural forces, the notion of public space as a democratic binding agent for civic life in the postmodern city is being lost. In its place, the postmodern city re-presents itself through sophisticated allusions to times past and to other places. As Michael Sorkin comments "this new realm is a city of simulations, television city, the city as theme park."⁶³ This new urban realm involves a "restructuring of the urban imaginary, our situated and city centric

⁵⁹ Mike Davis "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space" in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space Michael Sorkin ed. p. 155.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 161

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 159

⁶² Soja. Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions. p. 302.

⁶³ Sorkin, p.xiv

consciousness" as it skillfully manipulates popular images of cityspace to create meaning and order.⁶⁴ Playing upon our cognitive mappings of urban reality, the new city is emerging as "a new urban hyperspace of invisible cities, postmodern urbanism, electronic webs, virtual communities, nowhere geographies, computer-generated artificial worlds, Cybercities, Sim-cities, Cities of Bits."⁶⁵ Edward Soja addresses this blurring of the boundaries between the "real" and the "imagined" that is ingrained within the emerging form of the new city. He writes:

Involved in almost every aspect of the changing urban imaginary has been the realization that it has become more difficult than ever before to tell the difference between what is *real* and what is *imagined*, what can reliably be identified as fact as opposed to what must clearly be labeled fiction... we are increasingly immersed in a sea of "real-fakes" and "absolutely fake cities," reconstructed fantasy worlds that are "more real than reality." Whole new cyber-worlds are being created out of "virtual reality" and "artificial intelligence" and "digital community." Foreign policy, political campaigns, controversial court cases, even wars are being conducted with increasing attention to public and private imagery, vicarious impressions of what is happening as opposed to accurate knowledge of the actual facts.⁶⁶

Jean Baudrillard has written extensively about the replacement of the "real" world by simulated representations or images. Everyday living, Baudrillard claims, has become permeated with an unending sequence of simulacra where exact copies or representations of reality substitute for real life itself. He claims that the highest expression of this process can be seen in the cities of southern California.⁶⁷ Writing about the edge city of Orange County, what he refers to as the Exopolis, Edward Soja observes:

The Exopolis itself is a simulacrum: an exact copy of a city that has never existed. And it is being copied over and over again all over the place. At its best, the Exopolis is infinitely enchanting; at its worst it transforms our cities and our lives into spin-doctored "scamsapes," places where the real and the imagined, fact and fiction, become spectacularly confused, impossible to tell apart. In many ways, Orange County is the paradigmatic Exopolis, a simulated county-city-state of mind that is infused with and

⁶⁴ Soja. Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions. p. 324

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 325

⁶⁷ Jean Baudrillard. Simulacra and Simulation (The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1994), p.13.

diffuses ever-encompassing ideological hyperrealities such as "small government is good government," "the taxpayers' revolt," "the magic of the market," "electronic democracy," "the end of history," "triumph of capitalism."⁶⁸

The new city is increasingly advancing simulations as replacements for what is being lost in the new urbanity (figure 19). This realm of simulations is apparent in the city's many urban forms. As Trevor Boddy notes:

The controlled simulation of urban life extends to instant suburban "town centers," refashioned metropolitan civic centers, and the ersatz visuals and activities of far too many historic districts. In all these cases, the messy vitality of the metropolitan condition, with its unpredictable intermingling of classes, races and social and cultural forms is rejected, to be re-placed by a filtered, prettified, homogenous substitute.⁶⁹

As Soja comments the city is being recomposed into "divertingly packaged hyperreal worlds of simulated cultures, urban communities, lifestyles and consumer preferences."⁷⁰

This process – a kind of "disneyfication" of city life - is what prompted Michael Sorkin to title his book about the American city, Variations on a Theme Park. Commenting on the impact of "disneyfication" upon urban life, Edward Soja draws parallels between an experience in Disneyland and how citizens of the theme-parked city choose a place of residence:

They choose, [the residents] if they can afford to, a symbolic site that simulates a particular theme or site-image package [figure 20]. Searching for a place to live and to participate in the creation of community increasingly mimics a visit to Disneyland, where one can choose to enter Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland, Tomorrowland, Toon Town; or to Disney World...⁷¹

The simulated urbanism that arises from the theme-parking of urban life is visible in a host of urban features, but most notably in its architecture. As Sorkin writes:

⁶⁸ Edward W. Soja. Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Blackwell Publishers Inc. Cambridge, Mass., 1996), p.19.

⁶⁹ Trevor Boddy "Underground and Overhead: Building the Analogous City" in Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space Michael Sorkin ed., p. 126

⁷⁰ Soja. Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions. p. 341

⁷¹ Sorkin. p.xiv-xv



source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment Autumn 1998 No. 23

Figure 19: Simulation: A manufactured indoor tropical environment substitutes for the removal of nature from much of everyday urban life.

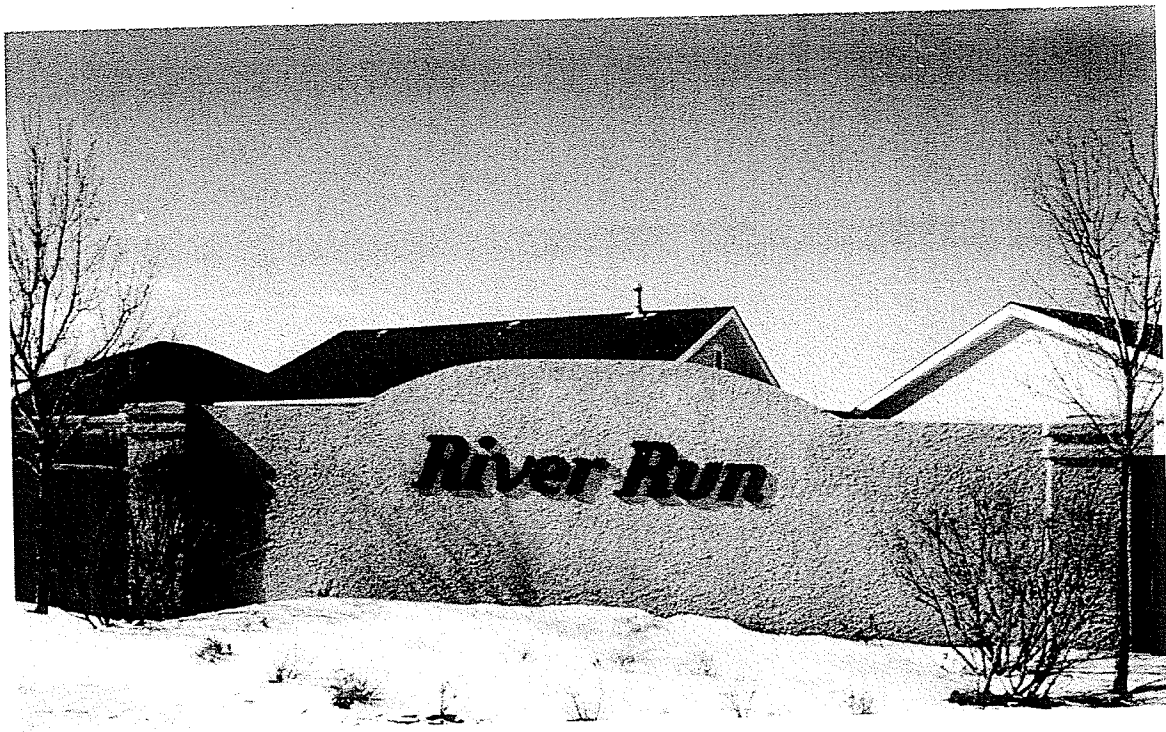


Figure 20: The Site-Image Package: A residential development along the intersection of two busy suburban streets is packaged as “River Run” despite being located nowhere near a river.
photos: by author

This is nowhere more visible than in its architecture, in buildings that rely for their authority on images drawn from history, from a spuriously appropriated past that substitutes for a more exigent and examined present...Here is urban renewal with a sinister twist, an architecture of deception which, in its happy-face familiarity, constantly distances itself from the most fundamental realities. The architecture of this city is almost purely semiotic, playing the game of grafted signification, or generic modernity, such design is based in the same calculus as advertising, the idea of pure imageability, oblivious to the real needs and traditions of those who inhabit it.⁷²

The theme-parked city involves a fundamental re-structuring of the urban realm. As the traditional notions of urbanity are laid waste by the simulations and manipulations of the new city, what is being lost is increasingly coming to the attention of critical observers. In his book Postmetropolis, Edward Soja quotes humanities professor Thomas Bender's commentary about the impact of the theme-parked city – *City Lite* – upon the historical city. Bender observes:

As we approach the end of both a century and a millennium, a century of cities in the United States and a millennium of cities in the West, those of us who love the historical city wonder whether it will survive into the next era of American life...It seems as if our best middle-class vision of the city today is that of an entertainment zone – a place to visit, a place to shop; it is no more than a live-in theme park...This amounts to Urbanism Lite. This new urban recipe is insidious, for it pretends to offer what it is not. Such pseudo-city culture offers scenes of city life, not the city itself. The City Lite is safe, orderly, simplified...Advocates of City Lite reject the gifts of the historic city: juxtaposition of peoples and events, engagement with and recognition of the unfamiliar, the risk of understanding and the excitement of invention. The City Lite is a place of easy entertainment...It devotes itself to consumption, not creativity...Life in the City Lite reveals no passage of time, no history. The City Lite does not age; it is consumed and replaced. It is any time and any place – it no longer holds culture nor provides an orientation to past and present for its residents.⁷³

The city as a theme park: this has increasingly been the response of urban planners, developers and politicians to the demise of a genuine public realm in the postmodern city.

As Sharon Zukin notes:

Their blueprint for growth is often limited to constructing a microcosm of the past or a panorama of the future, and presenting this landscape by techniques of historic preservation or futuristic new construction that are

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Soja, Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions. p. 247

completely detached from specific places. Without a specific social and material context, the organizing principle in these landscapes is simply a visual *theme*.⁷⁴

While this trend is most apparent in the large urban metropolitan centers of the United States, the pattern is becoming characteristic of urban development around the world.⁷⁵ A consumerist lifestyle supported by a sophisticated manipulation of popular images of urban life is being held up as a substitute for traditional urbanity. The themed-parked city decontextualizes past and future as it turns the cityscape into a landscape of consumption. This new city represents an ideological refabrication of urban life that reflects the dominance of capitalist, consumer culture (figure 21). As Michael Sorkin concludes, the manipulation and simulation inherent in the theme-parked city presents a challenge not only to the traditional notions of urbanity but to democracy itself. He writes:

The theme park presents its happy regulated vision of pleasure – all those artfully hoodwinking forms – as a substitute for the democratic public realm, and it does so appealingly by stripping troubled urbanity of its sting, of the presence of the poor, of crime, of dirt or work. In the “public”, spaces of the theme park or the shopping mall, speech itself is restricted: there are no demonstrations in Disneyland.⁷⁶

In concluding, the postmodern city is being re-shaped by consumer culture. This transformation is most visible in the erosion of public spaces in the urban realm. The ascendancy of free market economics and neo-liberal ideology – fundamentals of our capitalist, consumer culture – has had dramatic impacts upon civic life in both Canada and the United States. As a result of this process, there has been a general weakening of the common good within North American civic life. Public spaces – the physical manifestation of the common good – have been steadily deteriorated and increasingly vulnerable to the forces of commercialization. A globalizing capitalist system, supported by an accelerating consumer culture, is bringing powerful privatizing forces to bear upon the cityscape of

⁷⁴ Zukin. Landscapes of Power p. 20.

⁷⁵ Sorkin. p. xv

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. xv



source: Financial Post April 2, 2001.

Figure 21: A Cityscape of Consumption: The new city of perpetual shopping.

North American cities. Increasingly, public spaces are being lost as a consequence and replaced by the urban forms of a new emerging city.

I argue that the characteristics of the emerging urban realm are profoundly reflective of our capitalist, consumer culture. This new city involves an ascendancy of private commercial interests at the cost of an authentic public realm. Public spaces that once encouraged interaction, participation and diversity are being replaced by the privatized and commodified spaces of the new city. The spaces of the public realm – the city's streets, squares, and markets – are being destroyed as expressions of democracy and collectivity. In their place the new city puts forward urban forms that strengthen private, commercial control over civic life in the city. The urban forms of this consumer landscape are characterized by an ubiquitous 'placelessness' that is a consequence of the dominance of consumer culture in North America urban life. The shopping mall, the suburbs, the emerging edge cities and the realm of electronic cultural space reflect the ageographia so characteristic of the new city. The forces of commercial culture that have swept through the postmodern city have brought an increasing emphasis upon security and control. This focus is rapidly polarizing the urban realm as it gives form to exclusion and segregation within the new city. The drive to secure the city is inevitably sacrificing the very idea of accessible public space. In an attempt to create meaning and order to the urban realm, the new city re-presents itself through a sophisticated manipulation of popular imagery of city life. The traditional characteristics of the historical city are being replaced by a simulated urbanity that reinforces a consumer lifestyle. As I have shown, the forms and characteristics of this new urban realm are far from being value-neutral. They deeply reflect, in fact, the values inherent in our consumer culture. Notions of privatism, exclusion, escapism and social detachment are built into the very nature of this emerging urban realm. Our cities are being re-shaped into landscapes of consumption that extol the consumerist vision of a new urbanity. As will be shown in the next chapter, reclaiming a sense of place within postmodern society involves challenging this consumerist vision itself.

3

R e c l a i m i n g P l a c e

" The dissolution of place amounts, then, to a loss of identity. It suggests a fundamental spiritual alienation from environment and self that demands remedial measures..."

David Harvey. Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference (Blackwell Publishers Ltd: Oxford, 1996) p. 308

As discussed in *Images of Place*, there is an overriding consumerist vision manifest in the landscape imagery from contemporary culture. Furthermore, as outlined in *Places of Images*, this consumerist vision is also clearly visible in the nature of contemporary urbanity. As a consequence of the dominance of the consumer ethos, reflected in the popular representation of landscape and in the nature of contemporary urban form, the sense of place in our culture has been weakened. The commodification and homogeneity inherent in consumer culture has worked to destroy traditional connections to place. Increasingly, consumer culture presents a simulacrum of place as a substitute for a genuine connection with local places. The mediated messages implicit in landscape imagery and in urban form put forward themes that are a deceptive substitute for a real connection to place. In *Reclaiming Place*, I argue the need for a renewed sense of place in our culture. In so doing, I investigate what constitutes an 'authentic' place and examine the nature of authentic placemaking. I investigate contemporary approaches to place, New Urbanism in particular, in an attempt to evaluate the nature of contemporary placemaking within consumer culture. I then argue the need for a fundamental change in the current social and political structures as a precursor for the emergence of a new urban design. I conclude the chapter by proposing how design can emerge as a form of resistance to consumer capitalism based on challenging contemporary approaches towards place.

As suggested in the discussions from the previous chapters, a sense of place involves a complex merging of environment, perception and experience.¹ A sense of place, though, is more than just an attachment to a particular setting. It is based upon a deep, personal connection with the local geography and incorporates both psychological and social elements.² As Edward Relph writes in his book *Place and Placelessness*, a sense of place transcends mere belonging to incorporate larger issues such as identity. He writes:

The most meagre meaning of 'sense of place' is the ability to recognize different places and different identities of a place...In fact there exists a full range of possible awareness, from simple recognition for orientation, through the capacity to respond empathetically to the identities of different

¹ Stephen F. Mills. *The American Landscape* (Keele University Press: Edinburgh, 1997) p. 1

² Lucy Lippard. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of place in a multicentered society* (The New Press: New York, 1997), p.9

places, to a profound association with places as cornerstones of human existence and individual identity.³

Lucy Lippard argues that a sense of place, which she notes is increasingly absent in contemporary life, arises from a deep connection with one's surroundings. She writes "A sense of place is a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and a topographical intimacy that is rare today..."⁴ Lippard sees the development of a sense of place as being an important bridge between human society and nature as well as between human cultures. She writes "...senses of place, a serial sensitivity to place, are invaluable social and cultural tools, providing much-needed connections to what we call "nature" and, sometimes, to cultures not our own."⁵ However one chooses to define a sense of place – I envision a sense of place as being a product of both the physical setting and human experience – a sense of place, as a complex expression of the personal and the local, is fundamental to human communities. As such, it has been a cornerstone of personal and community identity throughout human cultures.

In light of the importance of a sense of place to both individuals and communities, the weakening of ties to local places in contemporary culture is of real concern. Lucy Lippard observes that in contemporary cultural life there is an "absence of value attached to specific place."⁶ We are, increasingly, a "disoriented culture"⁷ stuck in a geography absent of history or of meanings visible to us. The spread of a global consumer culture has weakened local distinctiveness and identity.⁸ As examined in Chapter Two, globalized capital and mass consumer culture have replaced the particularity and diversity of places with a uniform sameness. As David Harvey writes in his book Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference "Place is being destroyed...rendered "inauthentic" or even

³ Edward Relph. Place and Placelessness (Pion Ltd: London, 1976) p.63

⁴ Lippard, p. 33

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lippard, p.5

⁷ Ibid, p. 15

⁸ Sharon Zukin. Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1991) p. 12

"placeless" by the sheer organizational power and depth of penetration of the market."⁹ As a consequence of this process, the unique identity of local places and their accompanying sense of place is diminished. As Relph comments:

There is a widespread and familiar sentiment that the localism and variety of the places and landscapes that characterized preindustrial societies and unselfconscious, handicraft cultures are being diminished and perhaps eradicated. In their stead we are creating... 'a flatscape', lacking intentional depth and providing possibilities only for the commonplace and mediocre experiences. C.W Moore has written that "the richly varied places of the world...are rapidly being obliterated under a meaningless pattern of buildings, monotonous and chaotic", and Gordon Cullen suggests..."we appear to be forsaking nodal points for a thinly spread coast-to-coast continuity of people, food, power and entertainment; a universal wasteland...a chromium-plated chaos". Such comments indicate the possibility of a placeless geography, lacking both diverse landscapes and significant places, and also imply that we are at present subjecting ourselves to the forces of placelessness and are losing our sense of place.¹⁰

The impact of the loss of a sense of place in contemporary culture is increasingly coming to the attention of critical observers. Lucy Lippard notes that present-day life can be characterized by an "...alienated displacement from and longing for home."¹¹ David Harvey, commenting on the impact of the spreading placelessness in contemporary life, writes:

...there is a much deeper crisis of homelessness to be found in the modern world; many people have lost their roots, their connection to homeland. Even those who physically stay in place may become homeless (rootless)..."The rootedness, the autochthony, of man is threatened today at its core." If we lose the capacity to dwell then we lose our roots and find ourselves cut off from all sources of spiritual nourishment. The impoverishment of existence is incalculable.¹²

The cultural and geographical uniformity visible in contemporary life is not an entirely new development in human history.¹³ What is different, as Edward Relph points out, is the

⁹ David Harvey. Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference (Blackwell Publishers Ltd: Oxford, 1996) p. 302

¹⁰ Relph, p. 79

¹¹ Lippard, p. 20

¹² Harvey, p.301

¹³ Relph, p.79

breadth and the particular nature of the phenomenon: "What is new appears to be the grand scale and virtual absence of adaptation to local conditions of the present placelessness, and everywhere the shallowness of the experience which it engenders and with which it is associated."¹⁴ Relph points to an inauthentic attitude towards place – which he argues is deeply present in contemporary culture – as being responsible for the development of placelessness in our society. Inauthenticity, Relph observes, is "an attitude which is closed to the world and to man's [sic] possibilities."¹⁵ He notes "It is clear that inauthenticity is the prevalent mode of existence in industrialized and mass societies, and it is commonplace to recognize that mass values and impersonal planning in all their social, economic and physical forms are major manifestations of such inauthenticity."¹⁶ Inauthenticity, then, is subsequently manifest in the nature of the places that our culture creates. Relph defines an inauthentic approach to place in the following terms:

An inauthentic attitude to place is essentially no sense of place, for it involves no awareness of the deep and symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of their identities. It is merely an attitude which is socially convenient and acceptable – an uncritically accepted stereotype, an intellectual or aesthetic fashion that can be adopted without real involvement. In inauthentic experience places are seen only in terms of more or less useful features, or through some abstract *a priori* model and rigid habits of thought and behaviour; above all such experiences are casual, superficial, and partial. Inauthentic attitudes to place may be unselfconscious, stemming from an uncritical acceptance of mass values; or they may be selfconscious and based on a formal espousal of objectivist techniques aimed at achieving efficiency.¹⁷

The places that emerge from our consumer culture reflect an inauthentic attitude towards place. As discussed in Chapter Two, consumer society produces a standardized culture that is illustrated in the uniformity and homogeneity of the urban realm. Diversity and local identity is buried beneath the mass values and contrived fashions of contemporary consumer culture. The inauthenticity of contemporary cultural attitudes toward place, Relph argues, has resulted in "a placeless geography in which different

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Relph, p. 80

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 82

¹⁷ Ibid.

localities both look and feel alike, and in which distinctive places are experienced only through superficial and stereotyped images, and as 'indistinct and unstable' backgrounds to our social and economic roles."¹⁸ The imagery of the postmodern city replaces a genuine experience of urbanity with a shallow, plasticized version of urban life. In contemporary culture, the commodification inherent in the consumer ethos strips place of any real meaning or identity outside of its role as a marketable commodity. As David Harvey notes, the attitude our culture takes towards creating places is fundamentally reflective of a consumerist approach:

...much of postmodern production in, for example, the realms of architecture and urban design, is precisely about the selling of place as part and parcel of an ever-deepening commodity culture. The result is that places that seek to differentiate themselves as marketable entities end up creating a kind of serial replication of homogeneity.¹⁹

The inauthenticity of our prevailing cultural attitudes to place is clearly illustrated in the consumerist approach to placemaking. The nature of the places that arise from such an approach is indicative of the lack of meaning and depth characteristic of an inauthentic attitude towards place.

Reclaiming a sense of place means rejecting inauthentic attitudes towards place making. The creation of authentic places, Relph argues, is based upon adopting an authentic attitude towards place. The superficiality and lack of meaning inherent in an inauthentic approach towards place is replaced by a genuine response to the identity of places. As Relph writes:

An authentic attitude to place is thus understood to be a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places -not mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be, nor following stereotyped conventions. It comes from a full awareness of places for what they are as products of man's [sic] intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities, or from a profound and unselfconscious identity with place.²⁰

¹⁸ Relph, p. 118

¹⁹ Harvey, p.298

²⁰ Relph, p.64

An authentic approach to place, Relph contends, establishes the framework for creating places in which people can have a genuine sense of place. How then does an authentic approach towards place translate into authentic placemaking? And what forms do these 'authentic places' take?

Much of the commentary surrounding the idea of authentic placemaking makes reference to pre-industrial or 'primitive' communities. Bernard Rudofsky's Architecture without Architects provides numerous examples of places he claims exemplify vernacular or anonymous architecture.²¹ Such architecture and community building, Rudofsky argues, illustrates a genuine connection with the particular qualities of the local environment. Pre-industrial vernacular architecture can be characterized by its adaptation to local conditions and by its genuine response to the needs of its inhabitants (figure 22). As Rudofsky writes "The untutored builders in space and time ...demonstrate an admirable talent for fitting their buildings into the natural surroundings. Instead of trying to "conquer" nature, as we do, they welcome the vagaries of climate and the challenge of topography."²² Rudofsky notes, that the responsiveness to local conditions aside, what really distinguishes this form of architecture is its responsiveness to people. As he writes "Above all, it is the humanness of this architecture that ought to bring forth some response in us."²³ Within pre-industrial, vernacular placemaking the needs of people are paramount and never made secondary to arbitrary social and intellectual fashions. As Rudofsky observes "Not only is the need for confining the growth of a community well understood by the anonymous builders, it is matched by their understanding of the limits of architecture itself. *They rarely subordinate the general welfare to the pursuit of profit and progress.*" [my italics]²⁴ The harmony and functionality of this form of placemaking consequently ensures its permanence over time.

²¹ Bernard Rudofsky. Architecture without Architects (Doubleday & Company, Inc.: Garden City, New York, 1964) p. 2.

²² Ibid., p.5

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p.8

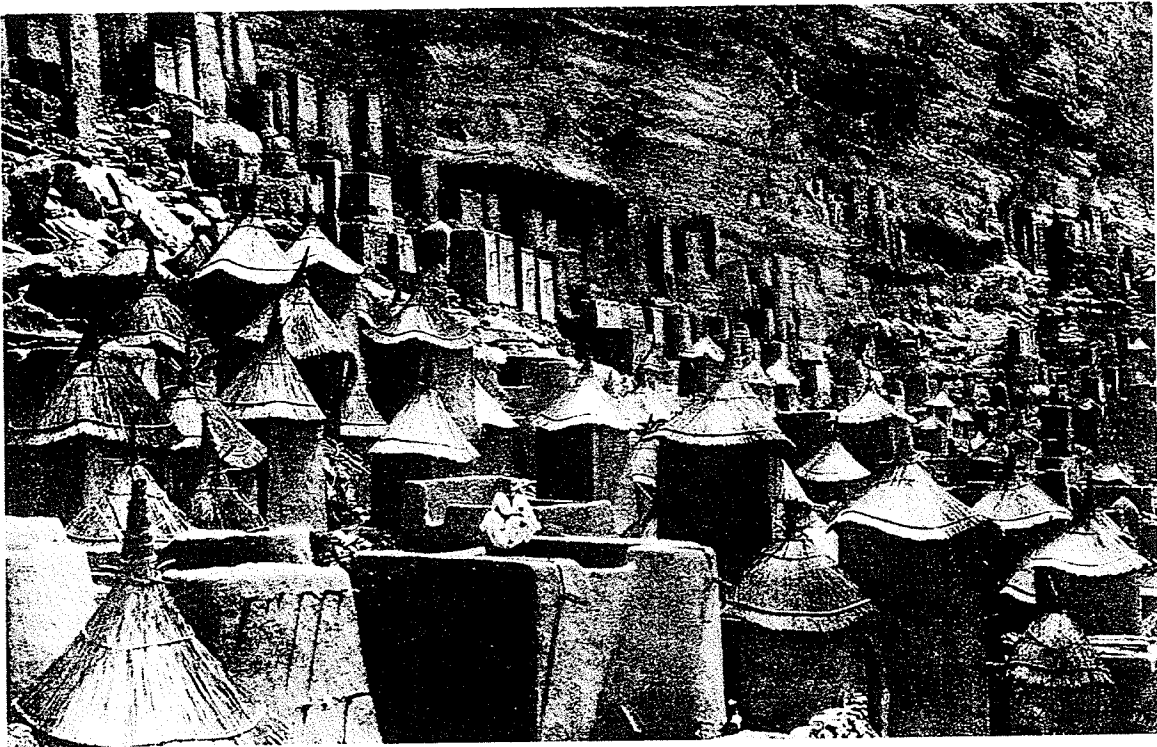


Figure 22: Pre-Industrial Architecture: A Drogon village in Africa (top) and Italian hill town (bottom).

source: Bernard Rudofsky. Architecture without Architects Doubleday & Company, Inc.: Garden City, New York, 1964.

As Rudofsky concludes, "Vernacular architecture does not go through fashion cycles. It is nearly immutable, indeed, unimprovable, since it serves its purpose to perfection."²⁵

The placemaking that is characteristic of 'primitive' or vernacular cultures is reflective of an authentic approach towards place. The buildings and communities that arise from such a process are a product of an unselfconscious design approach which is based upon the use of traditional solutions to traditional problems.²⁶ As Relph notes, this design process "...tends to give rise to places that reflect the total physical, social, aesthetic, spiritual and other needs of a culture, and in which all those elements are well adapted to each other."²⁷ The anonymous or vernacular architecture of pre-industrial cultures is not consciously designed to create a genuine sense of place; an authentic sense of place emerges as a consequence of the approach. Such placemaking is illustrative of Christopher Alexander's "timeless way of building" in which communities and buildings genuinely emerge from the lives of their inhabitants. As Alexander explains, this form of placemaking is "...a process through which the order of a building or a town grows out directly from the inner nature of the people, and the animals, and plants, and matter which are in it."²⁸

The search for 'authentic places' inevitably seems to lead back to pre-industrial or 'primitive' cultures. Such places – reflecting the totality of their inhabitants needs as well as a harmonious integration within the landscape – are noticeably absent from contemporary western society. While individual buildings and small traditional communities may still exemplify such an approach to placemaking, much of contemporary placemaking, as discussed earlier, can be characterized by its acceptance of mass values and its disregard for the genuine identity of local places. As Relph notes, the authentic place has become an anachronism within contemporary life:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 1

²⁶ Relph, p. 67

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Christopher Alexander. The Timeless Way of Building (Oxford University Press: New York, 1979) p. 7.

...in North America the only instances of authentically yet unselfconsciously created places are peripheral to the main thrust of the society, for instance the anachronistic and traditional societies of the Hutterites or Amish, and possibly some 'back-to-nature' communes and some street markets. In Europe authentically created landscapes and places are essentially relict features of former craft cultures. In both continents such landscapes have acquired nostalgic value and are zealously being preserved or even recreated, hence guaranteeing their inauthenticity.²⁹

It would be inaccurate to describe all places that emerge from a contemporary approach towards place as being completely inauthentic. Authenticity, even if it is absent in the initial design of a place, can arise from peoples' life experiences within the place itself. As Relph writes, "Even though the founding of a place may be its most dramatic and significant event, placemaking is a continuous process and the very fact of having been lived in and used and experienced will lend many places a degree of authenticity."³⁰ However, while places may acquire some degree of authenticity over time – through the lives and experiences of the inhabitants – the depth of such authenticity falls well short of those places that arise from an authentic approach towards placemaking. As Relph observes "...such 'authentification' can never be complete for it can never reach the deepest levels of sense of place. The difference is like that between your own painting and acquiring a reproduction which you then frame – there may be some sense of personal achievement and involvement but it can never be total."³¹

I would like to now address the response of current design approaches to the lack of authenticity in contemporary placemaking and the subsequent diminishing sense of place within our culture. There has been a recognition in recent years amongst design professionals and critical observers that, within North America, contemporary placemaking has failed to create genuine communities endowed with a strong sense of place. As alluded to earlier in this discussion, and as shown in Chapter Two, prevailing approaches to community building have resulted in a ubiquitous placelessness. In response to this

²⁹ Relph, p. 68

³⁰ Relph, p. 71

³¹ Ibid.

phenomenon, the urban design movement known as New Urbanism has emerged in North America as an alternative to contemporary placemaking approaches. Based on the principles of creating a sense of community, New Urbanism seeks to re-capture the essence of traditional American town-making.³² As Peter Katz writes in his book The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community "It [New Urbanism] addresses many of the ills of our current sprawl development pattern while returning to a cherished American icon: that of a compact, close-knit community."³³ New Urbanist design principles aim to re-assert the primacy of public over private values as part of creating a genuine sense of community.³⁴ Like its counterpart, Neotraditional Town Planning which arose concurrently in Great Britain, New Urbanism draws inspiration from the past in an attempt to address the failures of conventional community design.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the New Urbanist approach as a response to the inauthenticity of contemporary placemaking, it is necessary to examine the nature of those communities designed according to New Urbanist principles. A brief overview of the New Urbanist towns of Seaside and Celebration – Disney's New Urbanist-inspired model community – provides an insight into the character of New Urbanist development. Foremost amongst the New Urbanism's projects has been the town of Seaside, Florida. Initiated in 1981, Seaside has been held up as the most successful model of New Urbanist community design (figure 23). Built on an 80-acre site along the Florida coast, Seaside was designed by the architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. In Seaside, Duany and Plater-Zyberk pioneered the Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), a concept which attempts to create communities that have the same character and appeal as small traditional towns and villages. As Nan Ellin explains:

In contrast to the conventional suburban development...the TND is designed with people in mind rather than cars through the elaboration of design guidelines (or urban codes). In place of "pods" of housing

³² Bettina Drew. Crossing The Expendable Landscape (Graywolf Press: Saint Paul, 1998) p. 191

³³ Peter Katz. The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community (McGraw-Hill, Inc.: New York, 1994) p.ix

³⁴ Todd W. Bressi "Planning the American Dream" in The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community. p.xxx

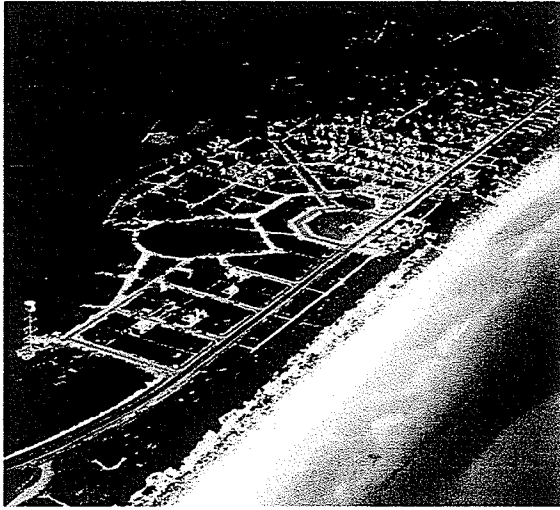


Figure 23: Seaside: A New-Urbanist community.

source: Peter Katz. The New Urbanism: Towards an Architecture of Community
McGraw-Hill, Inc: New York, 1994.

"clusters," office "parks," and shopping "centers" assembled along "collector roads," the TND is based on grids of straight streets and boulevards (instead of highways) which are lined by buildings in order to generate clear and enclosed public spaces.³⁵

Peter Katz writes that Duany and Plater-Zyberk, "...pursued one overriding goal in the conception of the town – that of fostering a strong sense of community."³⁶ In order to bring about this sense of community, the designers proposed that Seaside would consciously assert the primacy of public space over private space.³⁷ The public space of the street and the square was re-introduced as the basic matrix of the town.³⁸ Through the use of a coding strategy, Seaside's designers maintained an emphasis upon public spaces throughout the town's design. The scale of the community was designed to promote pedestrian access and casual social encounters. Community interaction was fostered by ensuring that peoples' daily needs could be met within a five-minute walk of their residence.³⁹ With a projected eventual population of 2,000, Seaside was designed to be comparable in size to the typical American small town of the 1920s or 1930s from which it draws much of its inspiration.⁴⁰

Seaside has been heralded as a new model for American urbanism. Selected by *Time* magazine as one of its "Designs of the Decade", Seaside has garnered both public and professional acclaim by those who view the community as providing a new basis for urban design. Seaside's success has propelled its designers, Duany and Plater-Zyberk, into the forefront of New Urbanist design. They have since worked on a variety of commissions throughout North America including roles as early advisors in the development of the Disney Corporation's new town of Celebration. Located on 4,900 acres of Disney property in Florida, Celebration, like Seaside, attempts to instill a sense of community into its residents through its design approach (figure 24). Like the Traditional Neighborhood

³⁵ Nan Ellin. Postmodern Urbanism (Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, Mass., 1996) p.75

³⁶ Katz, p.4.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ David Mohney and Keller Easterling. Seaside: Making a Town in America (Princeton Architectural Press, 1991.) p. 55

³⁹ Katz, p.4

⁴⁰ Ibid.

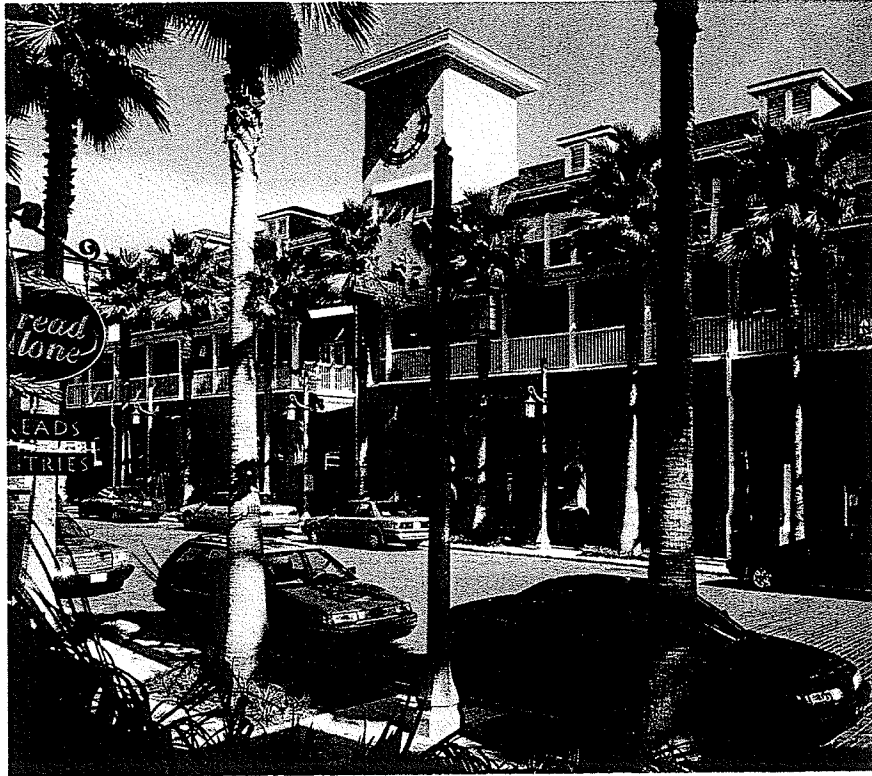


Figure 24: Celebration: Disney Corporation's model community.
source: John Beardsley. "A Mickey Mouse Utopia" Landscape Architecture
Feb. 1997. p. 76-93 photography by Eric Dusenbery

Development (TND) concept pioneered in Seaside, Celebration is designed to create opportunities for social interaction amongst its residents. As John Beardsley writes "Houses are close together and close to the street to foster neighborliness and to encourage walking; most have front porches or verandas to bridge the private and public zones. Many of the neighborhoods are organized around shared squares, lawns, and playgrounds; the streets are lined with shade trees."⁴¹

Adopting much of the New Urbanist design approach to Seaside, Celebration's main architects Robert Stern and Jacqueline Robertson have created a community in the image of an American pre-war town. As Bettina Drew writes:

Like American towns before World War II, Celebration has tree-lined streets and houses with front porches; parks, a school, and a downtown shopping district are all within walking distance. The homes, linked to the school and businesses by fiber-optic network, are a blend of traditional American styles, and there are townhouses and apartments, as well as a golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts, and a health care center devoted to wellness.⁴²

Particular attention has been paid to make Celebration a "real" town. Designed to function as a complete community with a population of 20,000, Celebration has a downtown, a health center, school and office park. In addition, Celebration incorporates a particular concern for the quality of the public environment. As Beardsley observes "Disney is banking on these amenities – health, education, and the enhanced public environment – to give Celebration an edge over other upscale developments."⁴³ Unlike Seaside, which permits architectural variation within the parameters of its design code, Celebration limits its residents to a choice of single-family homes in one of six architectural styles.⁴⁴ Single family residences are grouped as town homes, cottage homes, village homes or estate homes and priced in ascending order in relation to the degree of luxury. Inaugurated in 1996, Celebration was an immediate marketing success. As Drew notes " The idea of

⁴¹ John Beardsley. "A Mickey Mouse Utopia" in Landscape Architecture February 1997 p.79

⁴² Drew, p.174

⁴³ Beardsley, p.92

⁴⁴ Drew, p. 175

Celebration alone was so popular that, at first offering, three times as many buyers came as there were lots to be sold, and Disney had to devise a lottery to accommodate them."⁴⁵

In light of positive public and professional response to the New Urbanist communities of Seaside and Celebration, it is important to critically evaluate the effectiveness of New Urbanism as an alternative to conventional placemaking approaches. While acclaimed by the popular media and much of conventional professional opinion, New Urbanism has been criticized by contemporary observers as presenting an exclusionist, middle class ideal of community. Edward Soja characterizes New Urbanism as "...a peculiar postmodern combination of historical urban nostalgia and present-day postsuburbia."⁴⁶ As he comments:

The New Urbanism is essentially a contemporary historicist transmogrification of the New Town ideal, packaged with nostalgic references to the small towns-cum-urban villages of early America and poured into the Outer and Inner Cities of today. Added to the olio are the peopled public places and car-less pedestrian life romanticized by Jane Jacobs in her old Greenwich Village neighborhood, the anti-crime "defensible space" designs of Oscar Newman and others, and the soft environmental socialism of Ebenezer Howard's old-New Towns.⁴⁷

Soja dismisses New Urbanism as "...opportunistic interventions marketing hypersimulations of urban utopia to a middle-class population battered by economic restructuring, fearful of crime and hungry for new and better images of postmetropolitan life."⁴⁸ New Urbanism has been criticized for turning away from the challenges of the present era and being fundamentally motivated by "...loss and nostalgia and the urge for fusion and harmony with like-minded others..."⁴⁹ In response to the complexities and challenges facing contemporary urbanism, New Urbanism looks to the past for design solutions to today's problems. However, in seeking to bring about a sense of community

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.174

⁴⁶ Edward W. Soja. Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000) p. 248.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.249-250

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Leonie Sandercock. Towards Cosmopolis: Planning For Multicultural Cities (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998) p. 194.

strictly through a design approach, New Urbanism disregards larger social and political realities. As Leonie Sandercock notes:

It seeks to create instant community through design. But it conspicuously lacks any class, race, or gender analysis of its own assumptions. Its most famous built example, the suburb of Seaside, Florida, is a homogenous white middle-class community which would typically take a two-income household to make it affordable, leaving little time for anyone to sit on the front porch chewing the fat with neighbours.⁵⁰

In an article deeply critical of Disney's Celebration, John Beardsley argues that the New Urbanist communities offer no real alternative to conventional development. He writes:

Celebration, like the DP-Z [Duany/Plater-Zyberk] development Kentlands in the Washington, D.C., suburbs, strikes me as the same old sprawl tarted up in an old-fashioned disguise. While Celebration and Kentlands are better than the average subdivision, they still gobble up vast quantities of land, leaving little for such prior uses as farming. They stress traditional notions of community, but they turn their back on older settlements in favor of imitations. Rather than seek out opportunities to fill in near existing transportation nodes, utilities, and services – building on the infrastructure of the past – they pursue a model of development that exerts a high impact on the threatened open space of exurbia. Despite being a pedestrian-friendly environment, Celebration – again like Kentlands – fails to dislodge the automobile from its tyranny over suburban life. Cars may be parked in alleys, but you still have to use them to get pretty much everywhere.⁵¹

The New Urbanist communities of Seaside and Celebration reflect the emergence of 'community' as a marketable commodity. The idea of community has been commodified; transformed into a consumer good directed towards a middle-class eager to buy into New Urbanism's nostalgic vision. As Sandercock observes, the residents of Seaside and Celebration are "...exclusive communities of like-minded people seeking in some cases literally, a return to the imagined world of their childhoods."⁵² New Urbanism's professed environmentalism – manifest in its green spaces and pedestrian walkways – is shallow at best and fails as a response to the environmental challenges facing contemporary

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Beardsley, p. 93

⁵² Sandercock, p. 194

urbanism. Seaside and Celebration advance an image of community, but not community itself. As John Beardsley remarks, what is being celebrated in Celebration "...includes the triumph of the simulated over the real, of illusion over substance, and of instant and – so far – ersatz history and community over the admittedly problematic but vital traditions of civic life."⁵³ New Urbanism, as manifest in Seaside and Celebration, fails as an alternative to contemporary urbanity. As Neil Smith concludes regarding Seaside "...Seaside reminds me of nothing more than the suburbs of capitalism...Looking at Seaside, it is no longer a question of working within the 'belly of the beast'. Seaside is not the compromise that results from an effort to work within the belly of the beast; Seaside is the belly of the beast!"⁵⁴

Upon critical inspection, New Urbanism, as a solution to the inadequacies of contemporary placemaking, begins to unravel. The popular and professional acclaim which New Urbanism has received is, perhaps, more reflective of the desire for alternatives to conventional approaches to place, rather than a real reflection of the value of New Urbanist design. New Urbanism does not address the complexities of urban life – sharpening economic and social divisions, automobile dependency, ecological sustainability, privatism etc... – nor does it reflect a genuinely authentic approach towards place. What New Urbanism succeeds at doing is evoking powerful images of an urban utopia. New Urbanism presents a simulacrum of place as a response to peoples' desire for genuine community. As a response to placelessness and the need for community, New Urbanism manifests a particular postmodern approach to urban design. The evocation of a urban utopia based on borrowed ideas from the past bespeaks a profound dissatisfaction with the present and reflects an inability to fully address the wide spectrum of issues involved in contemporary placemaking. The generation of evocative images of an urban utopia visible in both Seaside and Celebration, is characteristic of the centrality of imagery to contemporary life. In this regard, New Urbanism reflects the postmodern condition of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Neil Smith "Reasserting Spatial Difference" in *Any* July August 1993 Number 1 p. 22

attachment to surface and the ascendancy of image over substance. As such, New Urbanism is truly a product of its time. As David Harvey observes about contemporary cultural production "...there has emerged an attachment to surfaces rather than roots, to collage rather than in-depth work, to super-imposed quoted images rather than worked surfaces, to a collapsed sense of time and space rather than solidly achieved cultural artefact."⁵⁵ New Urbanism, as a form of contemporary placemaking, emerges from this particular cultural approach. Consequently, an attachment to surface replaces authenticity within the idealized artificial constructs of Seaside and Celebration.

As illustrated in New Urbanism, prevailing cultural and social values permeate approaches to contemporary placemaking. The values that inform prevailing approaches to place in Western culture arise from contemporary capitalist society. In particular, the postmodern cultural expressions visible in New Urbanism – an attachment to surface and image, the borrowing of ideas from the past – can be seen as a manifestation of late capitalist development. As Harvey comments "Postmodernism... signals nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over the whole range of cultural production."⁵⁶ As an approach to placemaking, New Urbanism reflects much of what Harvey defines as being characteristic of postmodernism. He contends that postmodernism is distinguished by "...concerns for the signifier rather than the signified, the medium rather than the message, the emphasis on fiction rather than function, on signs rather than things, on aesthetics rather than ethics..."⁵⁷ Following Harvey's analysis of postmodernism as a capitalist phenomenon, what we see upon close inspection of the New Urbanist approach to placemaking is the degree to which New Urbanism, as a response to place, is fundamentally reflective of contemporary capitalist values. The nostalgic references to an imagined past, the evocation of urban utopian imagery, all support the characterization of New Urbanism as a postmodern response deeply rooted in

⁵⁵ David Harvey. The Condition of Postmodernity (Basil Blackwell, Inc. Cambridge, Mass, 1990) p. 61

⁵⁶ Ibid., 62

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 102

contemporary capitalism. As Peter Eisenman comments about Seaside "...in its style it makes damn good ideology."⁵⁸

Recognizing the rootedness of contemporary approaches towards placemaking in capitalism is vital as a first step in advancing solutions to the lack of authenticity in conventional approaches to place. New Urbanism, promoted as a viable alternative to conventional placemaking, is as reflective of contemporary capitalist values as the mode of development it purports to replace. What a critical examination of New Urbanism reveals is the need for new values to inform design. I suggest that within contemporary capitalism, characterized by an accelerating consumer culture and the omnipresence of market forces, authentic approaches towards place, as a basis for conventional design, are an impossibility. Placemaking must be informed by a system of new values that allow for the expression of human needs and ecological sustainability. The search for authenticity in placemaking leads inevitably to the call for social and political change. As Lebbeus Woods writes in his book Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act :

It is not possible to cooperate with the present economic and political systems for the design and construction of architecture. The relentless commercialization characteristic of these systems works against the realization of an architecture initiating change in exactly the same ways as it does against change itself: by its appropriation as a new status quo. An architecture of the new must grow from a new conceptual ground, one having to do with the dramatic and sometimes violent changes that mark the present era. A new architecture for an era of radical changes in private and public life must actively participate in the establishment of new economic and political systems for the design and construction of buildings, and for the continued transformation of human activities around the world.⁵⁹

Woods' thoughts are echoed in the work of Manfredo Tafuri who argues that there can be no qualitative change within urban design or architecture without a total revolutionary and systemic transformation of capitalist society.⁶⁰ Tafuri, as Fredric Jameson writes, maintains

⁵⁸ Peter Eisenman. "Post (Debate) Scripts" in Any July/August 1993 Number 1, p. 37

⁵⁹ Lebbeus Woods. Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1992) p. 12

⁶⁰ Fredric Jameson "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" in Architecture, Criticism, Ideology Joan Ockman ed. (Princeton Architectural Press, Princeton: 1985) p. 68

that "...the practicing architect, in this society and within the closure of capitalism as a system, cannot hope to devise a radically different, a revolutionary, or a "utopian" architecture or space..."⁶¹ Tafuri's position, while not a renunciation of political action in contemporary society, recognizes, like Lebbeus Woods, the need for fundamental change as a precursor for the emergence of a new urban design.

The need for deep systematic changes in the structure of contemporary society, as a precursor to the emergence of an urban design freed from the power of the market, is evident upon close investigation of the nature of contemporary placemaking. Place construction has become fundamentally shaped by the mediating power of money. The development of places, expressive of values other than money and commodification, requires a revolutionary transformation of the prevailing political economy. The search for authenticity in placemaking must involve challenging the prevailing capitalist values fundamental to our consumer culture. The struggle for authenticity of place becomes, at its root, a social and political struggle against the present political and economic systems. Part of this struggle involves the search for an alternative to contemporary capitalism. While it is not the intention of this study to investigate possible alternatives to capitalism, it is fundamental to the discussion to identify the need for an alternative to the current political and economic systems as a necessary step towards returning to authenticity in placemaking.

At present, in light of the absence of an alternative paradigm to inform conventional placemaking, how do we respond to the challenges of place construction? I argue that design, consequently, should respond as a form of resistance to contemporary capitalist values. Reclaiming place, in the context of contemporary capitalism, must also involve presenting alternatives to the consumer vision implicit in our capitalist system. Resistance then, in terms of reclaiming place, involves two components: an active refusal to adopt conventional approaches to place based upon the values of the dominant system and, secondly, a proactive movement to promote an alternative placemaking grounded on

⁶¹ Ibid., p.53

values alternative to those of the current paradigm. What forms, then, does such resistance ultimately take? As Steve Pile notes in his book Geographies of Resistance, resistance can manifest itself in many ways:

Potentially, the list of acts of resistance is endless – everything from foot-dragging to walking, from sit-ins to outings, from chaining oneself up in treetops to dancing the night away, from parody to passing, from bombs to hoaxes, from graffiti tags on New York trains to stealing pens from employers, from not voting to releasing laboratory animals, from mugging yuppies to buying shares, from cheating to dropping out, from tattoos to body piercing, from pink hair to pink triangles, from loud music to loud T-shirts, from memories to dreams – and the reason for this seems to be that definitions of resistance have become bound up with the ways that people are understood to have capacities to change things, through giving their own (resistant) meanings to things, through finding their own tactics for avoiding, taunting, attacking, undermining, enduring, hindering, mocking the everyday exercise of power. That people can create their own ways of living – their own meanings and capacities – has forced a recognition that resistance can be found in everything.⁶²

As illustrated in Pile's approach to resistance, there are limitless ways of expressing one's resistance to the dominant ideology of consumer culture. Identifying which ways to manifest resistance is ultimately the choice of the individual but the fundamental element that links all forms of resistance is the refusal to accept the values of the present organization of power. This resistance to power ultimately expresses itself as a search for places free from the domination of the prevailing ideology. As Pile writes

...the central strategy of authority is to force people to play its game, to make sure that the game is played by its rules, then people find innumerable ways round this ... they continually seek to find their own places: they rat through the labyrinths of powers. From this perspective, resistance is less about particular acts, than about the desire to find a place in a power-geography where space is denied, circumscribed and/or totally administered. The implication is that resistance comes from a place outside of the practices of domination.⁶³

Resistance involves a reactive struggle against domination but at the same time it also incorporates a proactive creation of an alternative vision – an alternative place. As Piles

⁶² Steve Pile, "Opposition, political identities and spaces of resistance" in Geographies of Resistance Steve Pile and Michael Keith eds. (Routledge: New York, 1997). p. 14

⁶³ Ibid, p.15

concludes "Resistance, then, not only takes place in place, but also seeks to appropriate space, to make new spaces..."⁶⁴

In seeking spaces free from the domination of consumer ideology, we are effectively reclaiming a sense of place in our contemporary world by re-storing meaning to the idea of place. Resistance, in whatever form, provides a channel to express opposition to the hegemony of consumer capitalism. This "counterhegemony", as Fredric Jameson defines it, involves "...the elaboration of a set of ideas, countervalue, cultural styles, that are virtual or *anticipatory*, in the sense that they "correspond" to a material, institutional base that has not yet "in reality" been secured by political revolution itself."⁶⁵ The diffusion of 'counterhegemonic' values, as promoted in this "enclave theory"⁶⁶, facilitates the eventual adoption of an alternative to capitalism. As Jameson writes:

...the emergent future, the new and still nascent social relations that announce a mode of production that will ultimately displace and subsume the yet still dominant one, is theorized in terms of small yet strategic pockets or beachheads within the older system. The essentially spatial nature of the characterization is no accident and conveys something like a historical tension between two radically different types of space, in which the emergent yet more powerful kind will gradually extend its influence and dynamism over the older form, fanning out from its initial implantations and gradually "colonizing" what persists around it.⁶⁷

Resistance in this view, and in the context of reclaiming place, involves the creation of alternative approaches to place – based on values counter to those of consumer capitalism – that eventually serve as the basis for a new form of placemaking.

Design, as a form of resistance to consumer capitalism, must embody more than just design interventions. As Lebbeus Woods implies, designers have a larger social and political role to play in the creation of new approaches to the design of human communities than their traditional roles in the design profession may suggest. I contend that designers must engage in resistance against the hegemony of contemporary capitalism on three

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.16.

⁶⁵ Fredric Jameson "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" in *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology* Joan Ockman ed. p. 69

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.70

⁶⁷ Ibid.

fronts: 1) challenging existing representations of place 2) confronting the existing cityscape 3) placemaking. Contemporary representations of place, as discussed in *Images of Place*, are of immense importance. The representation of place has material consequence, as how we relate to the world is often highly coloured by the way in which it is represented. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, prevailing popular representations of place are increasingly being mediated through the lens of consumer culture. Consequently, we experience place within the framework of the consumerist vision implicit in these portrayals of place. As part of rebuilding connections to place in our culture we need to actively challenge the consumerist vision implicit in the prevailing representations of place.

Images provide a framework for interpreting the world and, as shown in *Images of Place*, they are becoming the principal way in which ideas are communicated to the public. In light of this development, imagery emerges as an effective form of resistance to contemporary consumer capitalism. Through the use of imagery, we can challenge existing representations of place and transmit ideas and values that provide an alternative to a consumerist vision of life. As W.J.T Mitchell writes in his book *Picture Theory*, "... we have moved into an era when the point about pictures is not just to interpret them, but to change them."⁶⁸ The power of imagery as a form of resistance to the dominance of consumer, capitalist ideology has been recognized by the founders of *Adbusters*. The Canadian-based magazine uses imagery as a central element in its ongoing critique of consumer life. An examination of images from various issues of the magazine demonstrates the effectiveness of imagery as a form of resistance to capitalist and consumer values. Incorporating the tools and techniques of the advertising industry, *Adbusters* uses the power of design to subvert the advertising message. Its use of imagery exemplifies the idea of diffusing 'counterhegemonic' values and is indicative of the potential of imagery to challenge the present organization of power. The majority of the images that I will examine

⁶⁸ W.J.T Mitchell. *Picture Theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1994) p.369

are selected from *Adbusters*, as the magazine is unique in its ability to present these types of messages to a mass audience.

The first category of images that I would like to address involves a critical commentary on the nature of place in the contemporary world. A series of three images accompanied an article by Bob Rich entitled "Absolutely Exhausted" in the winter 2000 issue of *Adbusters*. The fictional story concerns the life of a typical office worker who comes to realize the futility of his consumer-based existence. The images, accompanied by short phrases that tie the imagery into the narrative of the story, present a powerful critique of conventional life (figure 25). If place is viewed as the union of space and culture, then these images speak directly to the nature of place in consumer capitalism. The first image presents a sea of vehicles stuck in highway traffic with the accompanying text "The Cars, The House, The Things". The image cleverly creates an association between the immobilized traffic and consumption itself. The image evokes a sense of entrapment and futility that, consequently, becomes a commentary upon the larger experience of consumption. The message of the image suggests that, contrary to what our culture tells us, material acquisition does not bring happiness. As consumption is at the root of our consumer culture, this image provides an effective critique of the values fundamental to contemporary capitalist society.

The second image that accompanies the article consists of an aerial view of an enormous tire dump with the text "I'm One of Them". The innumerable used up tires become a metaphor for the central character in the story: the exhausted office worker. The image of the tire dump itself, with two islands of vegetation surrounded by an ocean of discarded tires, is a damning indictment of our approach to the natural world. Together these two themes reflect the consequence of conventional attitudes towards place: a disregard for human needs and ecological sustainability. The third and final image in the series shows a sprawling highway interchange accompanied by the phrase "Poor Little Buggers". Breaking out of his consumerist existence, the story's central character finds freedom in a life outside of mainstream consumer culture. "Poor little buggers" – bespeaks

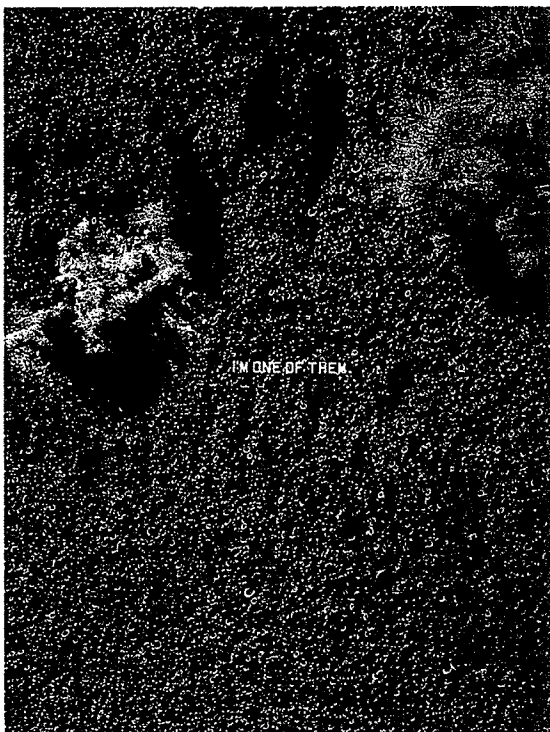


Figure 25: Imagery as a commentary on the nature of place in consumer culture.
source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment Winter 2000 No. 28

his recognition of the nature of life of those trapped in the consumerist vision. The image, in conjunction with the accompanying text, is a powerful denunciation of our contemporary approaches to place. The grids of identical housing, the overwhelming dependency on the automobile, the homogeneity and standardization of the landscape is all visible in the image. As such, this image, like the others, fundamentally challenges the consumerist vision of life as put forward by contemporary capitalism.

The second series of images from *Adbusters* I would like to address focus on the impact of digital technology on our culture. The magazine's spring 2001 issue featured an article by Richard Degrandpre entitled "The Great Escape" and much of the issue's imagery illustrated the ideas expressed in the feature article. While at first glance the emergence of a virtual world may seem to be somewhat removed from our discussion about place, our culture's embrace of powerful digital technologies can be directly related to the nature of contemporary places in our society. For, as Degrandpre writes, "...the ultimate reason we're apt to be taking flight from material reality is to escape the expanding unpleasantness of our inner and outer lives – a mélange of boredom, restlessness, malaise, anxiety, and depression. The virtual life isn't the opium of the masses, it's the anesthesia."⁶⁹ I argue that it is a direct consequence of the failure of our culture to create places that respond to people's needs that has resulted in a cultural escape from reality as manifest in our society's embrace of a virtual world.

The first two images that I'll examine are a commentary on this particular cultural approach to the world around us (figure 26). The first image shows a man seated in front of a computer; the image on the computer's screen is of dense vegetation. The word "control" is located in the bottom corner of the image. The second image shows the same figure - this time standing outside directly in front of a real tree - accompanied by the word "chaos". Together these two images comment on contemporary attitudes towards the natural environment and our place in it within the context of our digital world. The simulated world, as represented by the image of nature controlled via the medium of the computer, is held

⁶⁹ Richard Degrandpre. "The Great Escape" in *Adbusters* Mar/April 2001 p.31

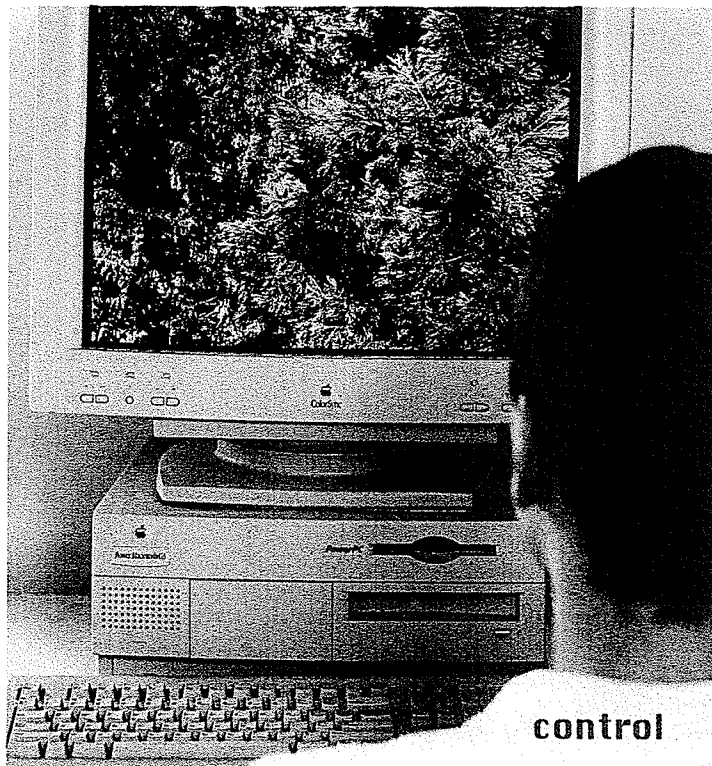
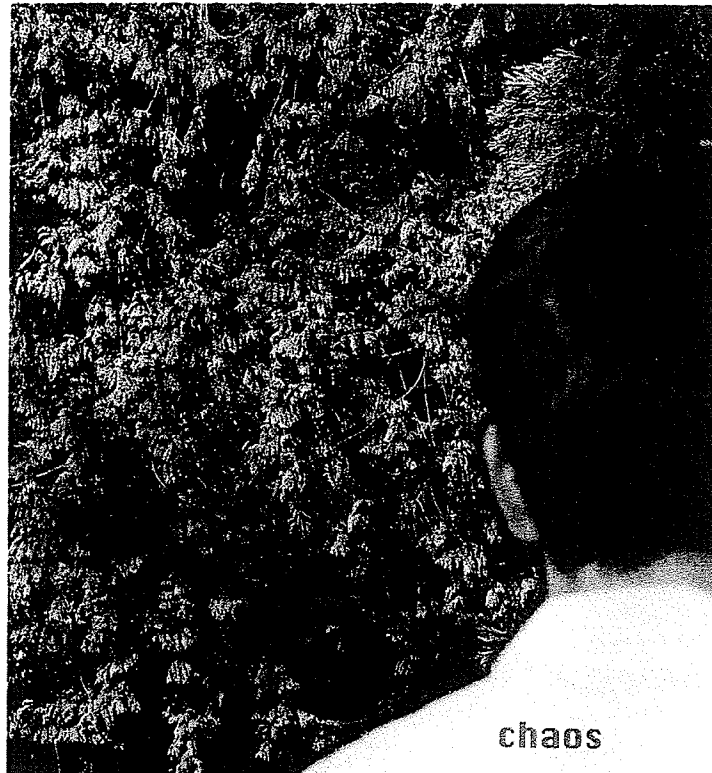


Figure 26: Imagery as a commentary into the nature of simulation.
source: [Adbusters](#) Journal of the Mental Environment Mar/April 2001 No. 34

up as a preferred alternative to the perceived chaos of the actual physical environment. These images offer an insightful commentary into the nature of simulation and are particularly relevant to the discussion about place in light of the degree to which contemporary urbanity is characterized by simulation. The embrace of a simulated world has profound implications for real places in our society. The virtual world allows us to turn away from the real world and embrace a virtual reality; in effect to present a simulacrum of place as a replacement for real places. In addressing this phenomenon, these images are an effective counterattack against the underlying attitudes that inform a significant element of conventional approaches to placemaking.

The third set of images from *Adbusters* that I address is a response to the generic quality of much of our built environment (figure 27). The images ran as an opening series of images to the magazine's spring 2000 edition. The first image shows the silhouette of a generic couple posed in front of a typical suburban home. The text, written in the bright yellow often associated with generic supermarket brands, runs across the couple's silhouette. It reads "Neighbors – Charles & Allyson Double-Lot". The use of the blue and yellow colours associated with generic brand advertising is a commentary on the standardization and homogeneity of the suburban landscape. The image uses the faceless silhouette, overlaid with the generic title of neighbours, to suggest the absence of authenticity in suburban life. Through its incorporation of the generic "look" superimposed over the background of a conventional subdivision, the image provides an insightful analysis into the nature of place within consumer culture.

The second image in the series adopts the same approach in a critique of the shopping mall environment. Two silhouettes of a bench and a large indoor plant are superimposed into the interior of a mall. The silhouette of the bench is overlaid with the phrase "Bench – The Pause that Refreshes 5 minutes" while the silhouette of the plant is overlaid with "Nature – Hawaiian Ficus 1 pot". Using the generic colours of yellow and blue, the image evokes the artificiality and contrived nature of the shopping mall. As in the first image, superimposing the generic "look" into the indoor environment of the shopping mall

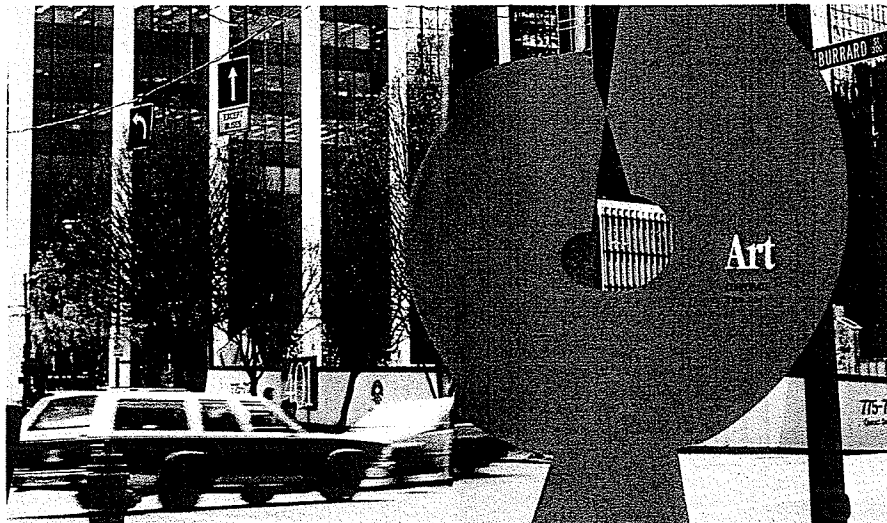
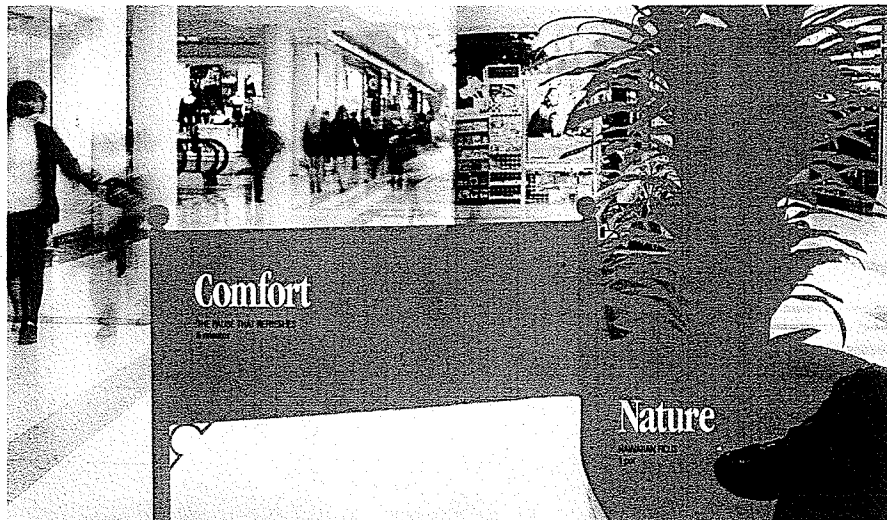
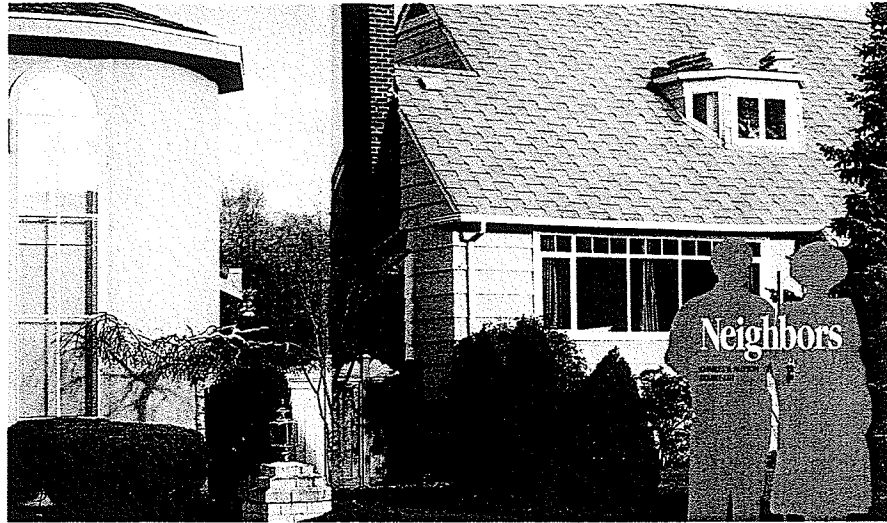
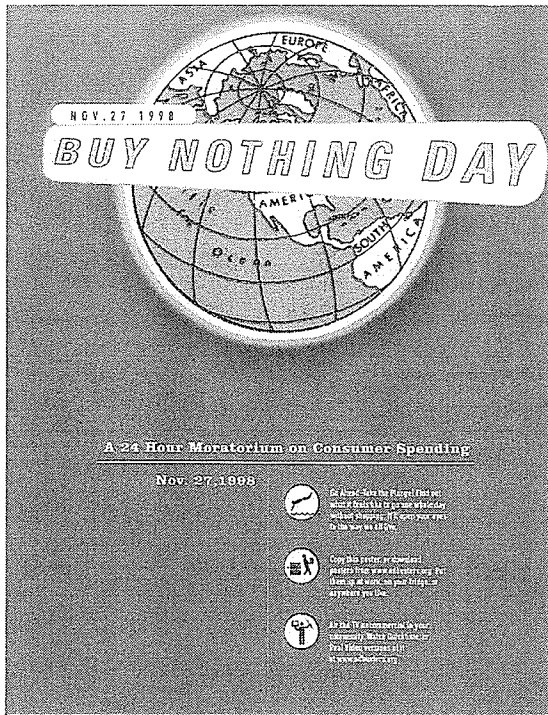


Figure 27: Imagery as a commentary on the generic quality of the consumer landscape.
 source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment Spring 2000 No. 29

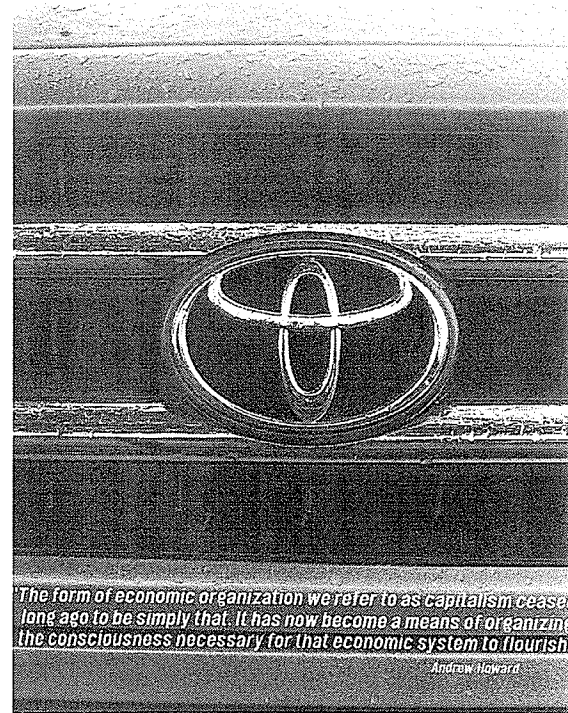
immediately reveals the inauthenticity of the shopping mall environment. The final image in the series takes aim at the homogeneity of the cityscape. Superimposed onto an image of a downtown street scene is a large silhouette of an outdoor art piece with the phrase "Art Corporate 1 ton" overlaid. The image portrays the corporate art piece as an interchangeable element within a larger context of standardization and absence of authenticity. As a critique of contemporary places, the generic silhouette effectively illustrates the homogenous nature of much of the capitalist cityscape.

While not primarily presenting a critical commentary on the nature of place within contemporary culture, the next body of images that I present involve a critique of some of the values that inform conventional approaches to place within consumer culture. These images challenge, in an insightful manner, the values fundamental to a consumerist way of life and in doing so, suggest an alternative set of ideas and countervalues (figure 28). As the struggle for a new approach to place rests upon the emergence of new ideas and values to inform design, this type of imagery is an effective tool in ultimately promoting an alternative approach to the world around us. The images that I present are a sampling of *Adbusters* imagery that mainly address the issue of consumption. Consumption, and the values that ultimately flow from it, is manifest in much of contemporary cultural production including, as shown in Chapter Two, the urban design approach to our cities. While I will not examine these images in any great detail, I put them forward to demonstrate the effectiveness of imagery as a form of resistance to the values that underlay prevailing approaches to place in our culture.

The first image takes an American icon – the Statue of Liberty – and morphs it into a bloated version of its former self. The image, with its accompanying text "Boycott America – The country of overconsumption" transforms a symbol of freedom into a symbol of unbounded consumption. The second image overlays a product barcode over another American icon – Uncle Sam. Playing upon the traditional patriotic appeal of Uncle Sam, the text reads "I want you to curb your consumption – Thanks!" The next image is a poster for "Buy Nothing Day" – an international event which promotes a 24-hour moratorium on



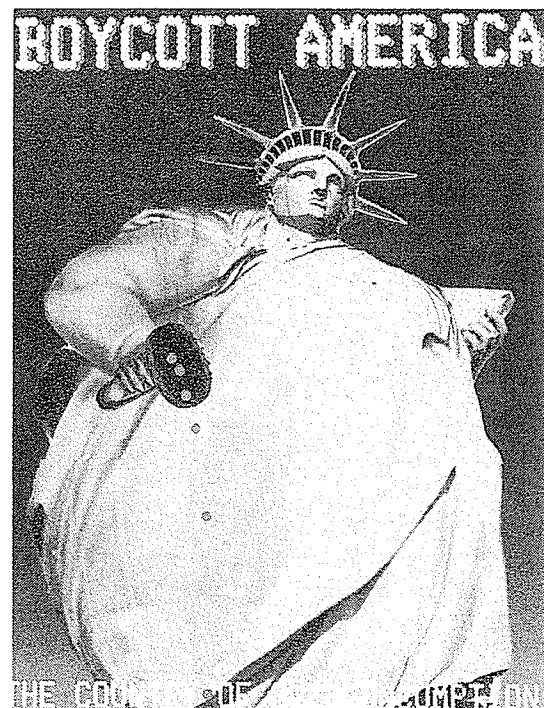
source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment Autumn 1998. No. 23.



source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment Sept/Oct 2001. No. 37



source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment March/April 2001. No. 34.



source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment Jan/Feb 2001 No. 33 .

Figure 28: Imagery as a critique of consumerist values.

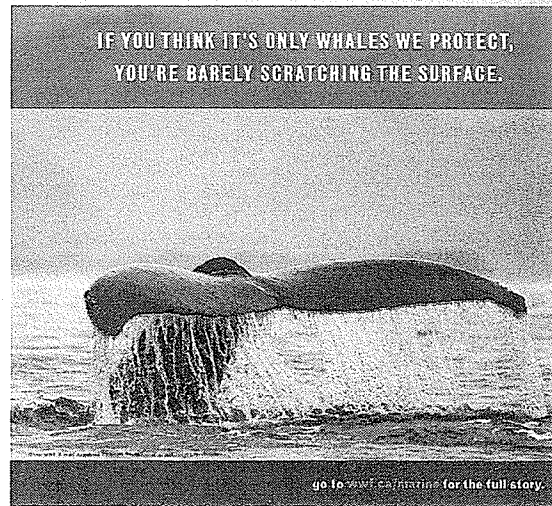
consumer spending. As the supporting text reads "Go ahead – take the plunge! Find out what it feels like to go one whole day without shopping. It will open your eyes to the way we all live." The subsequent image that I present incorporates a close-up photo of a luxury car logo overlaid with a quotation regarding the emergence of capitalism as a form of collective indoctrination.

The last category of images that I examine consists of examples of more conventional uses of imagery in the form of advertisements created by environmental organizations (figure 29). While not as openly critical of consumer values as the *Adbusters* imagery, these images, nevertheless, suggest an alternate way of approaching the natural environment. As such, the imagery argues for a new set of ideas and values that runs counter to the prevailing values that inform conventional attitudes about place. The first image that I present is the poster for the first ever Earth Day held on April 22, 1970. While not an advertisement in the conventional sense, this image marks an important milestone in the development of an environmental consciousness and the significant role that imagery has come to play in this process. The poster features a sepia-toned image of a bald eagle imposed over a collection of assorted images of environmental destruction. The juxtaposition of environmental devastation and wildlife imagery effectively communicates a powerful message about the nature of the dominant economic system.

Turning to contemporary examples of 'environmental advertising', I'll now examine images from advertising campaigns undertaken by environmental groups. The World Wildlife Fund's campaign to protect marine life incorporates an image of a whale's tail dipping below the surface accompanied by text reading "If you think it's only whales we protect, you're barely scratching the surface." While not as visibly anti-consumerist as the *Adbusters* imagery, the WWF advertisement does imply the presence of an agenda that runs counter to the environmentally exploitative practices of contemporary capitalism. Similarly, an advertisement for the Nature Conservancy promotes a national initiative to preserve wildlife habitat. While not openly decrying the values of consumer capitalism, the advertisement promotes an alternative set of values – emphasizing preservation and



source: Liz McQuiston. *Graphic Agitation*
Phaidon Press Ltd: London, 1993.



Canada boasts the longest coastline and most freshwater in the world. Under the surface, there are thousands of diverse species. How are they doing? They're being devastated by pollution, over-fishing and habitat destruction. Which is why at WWF Canada, we're fighting to protect key areas. Kelp forests, feeding grounds for endangered species, spawning grounds, deep sea corals—they all need to be protected. Desperately. We're pushing government and industry to take action. But we need your help. Call 1-800-26-PANDA or visit www.wwf.ca/whales. We're fighting to protect all species. Including yours.



source: *Macleans* August 13, 2001.

WE MADE SURE THE ONLY THING THAT WILL EVER CHANGE HERE IS THE SEASONS

Shampers Bluff, New Brunswick is a magical place. Aesthetically the Saint John River, it is home to an extraordinary array of rare plants and wildlife. Until recently, the property belonged to renowned nature photographer Freeman Patterson. He has loved Shampers Bluff since he was

child and wanted to preserve and share with others its remarkable beauty and natural diversity. So Freeman donated his land to the Nature Conservancy of Canada, ensuring it would remain a protected place forever.

Shampers Bluff contains a remarkable diversity of habitats: meadow, wetland, forest, open fields, sandy beach and rocky shoreline. There's also wildlife in abundance, from mice to moose, from sparrows to eagles, which makes Shampers Bluff a perfect place to teach kids about nature. Interactive trails that don't compromise



Habitats used through the property:

Generations to come will walk the land as did the generations before us. The Nature Conservancy of Canada has been passionately dedicated to preserving places like this since 1962.



Shampers Bluff is a remarkable place, home to a variety of rare plants and wildlife. It is a perfect place to teach kids about nature.

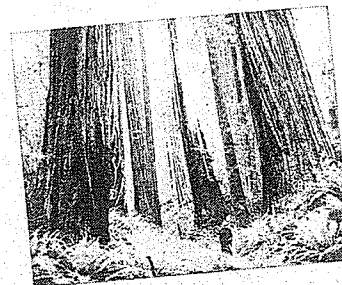
In that time, we've saved over 1.6 million acres of disappearing habitat, from coast to coast, and helped Canadians protect our most precious places.

But there's so much more to do. If you'd like to help us, become a member, or simply learn more about the work we have quietly carried on for almost 40 years, please visit our web site or call us at 1-800-563-6629.

**NATURE
CONSERVANCY**
Protecting Precious Places
www.natureconservancy.ca

source: *Elm Street* summer 2001.

We're not trying to save
all the ancient redwood forests.



96% of them are already gone.

source: *Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment* Autumn 1998. No. 23

Figure 29: Imagery suggestive of an alternative approach to place.

stewardship – which are fundamentally at odds with the operations of a globalizing capitalist economy. Lastly, an advertisement created by the Environmental Protection Information Centre in California argues for the preservation of the surviving redwood forests. The advertisement responds to industry criticism that the environmental movement is trying to preserve all of the redwood forests by very clearly pointing out that over 96% of the forests are already gone. This image, in particular, is a good example of how imagery can be used to educate a mass audience while, at the same time, dislodging public misconceptions.

Taken in their entirety, the images that I have presented are reflective of the power of imagery to critique, agitate and educate. In an increasingly image-driven world, such imagery can play a significant role in developing an alternative set of values and ideas that can challenge the hegemony of consumerist values. As has been discussed, the process of reclaiming place within contemporary culture involves the creation of new values and ideas to inform placemaking. Imagery, as shown in the examples from *Adbusters* and the other sources, can involve both a critical commentary on the nature of place as well as an analysis of the deeper values that inform contemporary approaches to place in consumer culture.

Having explored how we can challenge existing representations of place, and the deeper values that inform contemporary placemaking, we need to now look at how we can confront the existing cityscape. Contemporary urbanity, as examined in Chapter Two, is profoundly shaped by the forces of consumerism. Consequently, resistance against the hegemony of consumer capitalism must include actively engaging the postmodern cityscape. As part of this engagement, I suggest that designers must resolutely oppose prevailing capitalist architecture and urban design. As Manfredo Tafuri argues, within the capitalist system the designer's role must involve a "vigilant denunciation of existent or historical architectural ideologies."⁷⁰ In confronting the existing cityscape, the designer has

⁷⁰ Fredric Jameson "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" in *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology* Joan Ockman ed., p. 53

a role to play in not only providing a critique of capitalist urbanity, but also in presenting alternative ideas for the future of urbanity. I contend that one of the critical roles of the designer within the context of the existing cityscape is to struggle against the homogeneity, uniformity and commercialization of the city. In doing so creatively, the designer can give voice to an alternative urban vision.

Place-jamming is an attempt to critique the nature of contemporary urbanity while at the same time suggesting an alternative vision for the city. By intervening in the cityscape – or “jamming” –, the essence of places can be subtly altered to suggest a place based on ideas and values that run counter to the prevailing fundamentals of consumer capitalism (figure 30). Place-jamming can either be an individual or a community expression against the capitalist values inscribed in the cityscape. As such, the range of possible expressions is endless extending from posting hand written signs warning traffic to slow down to the development of community gardening initiatives. As Jeremy Lundholm observes “Guerrilla gardening, restoring native plant communities, media-free space, quiet zones, dark zones, car-free areas, green mapping – all these efforts fit within the place jamming ethic.”⁷¹ As both a critique of the cityscape and an illustration of an alternative conception of urbanity, place-jamming gives physical form to resistance against the hegemony of consumer capitalism.

Much of current place-jamming focuses on restoring nature to the city. The introduction of nature into places within the city where it is absent or degraded challenges the consumerist values that underpin the existing cityscape. As Lundholm explains:

Place-jamming is the creation of physical space where nature can re-enter our perception. The not-so-subtle subtext of consumer capitalism is, of course, that nature is just stuff to be consumed. Within this grand narrative, simpler myths are accepted with easy familiarity: that front yards must be monocultures; that engine noise and neon skylines are measures of progress and cultural achievement. Nature itself, in the city, remains as distant and uninteresting as a couple of dirty pigeons on a balcony...If more of us are exposed to the possibilities of living with nature rather than against it, it may be possible for more than a minority to imagine alternatives to consumer culture. As the manufactured desire to consume

⁷¹ Jeremy Lundholm “*Place-Jamming*” in *Adbusters* May/June 2001 No. 35 p. 57-58

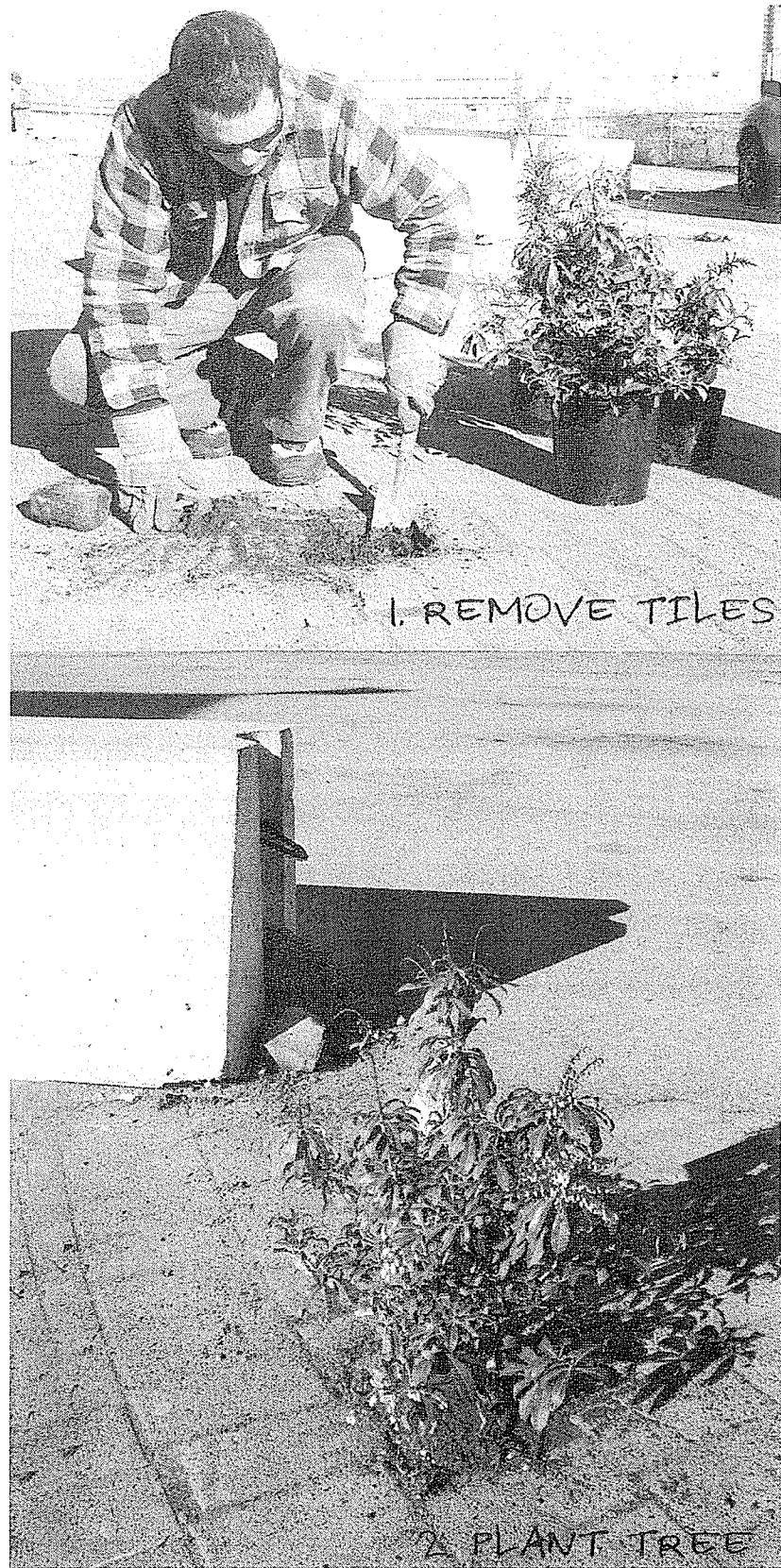


Figure 30: Place-jamming: A suggestion of an alternative vision for the city.
source: Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment May/June 2001 No. 35

is replaced with something more authentic and healthy, more people, are likely to support the political struggle of environmentalists...⁷²

As the cityscape is increasingly reflective of a consumerist vision of life, re-introducing nature into the city becomes an act of resistance. As Lundholm writes "As corporate logos invade more and more of our shared space, the side of a building covered with vines is an increasingly radical statement."⁷³ However, place-jamming is more than just a symbolic act. While actions such as growing vines along the sides of a building may appear to be primarily symbolic, they do provide a practical illustration of a new approach towards urban places. Additionally, such interventions allow for people's involvement in the life of the places in which they live. Consequently, place-jamming is not only illustrative of alternative ideas about urbanity but reflects as well, the democratic expression of individual citizens in the creation of their urban environment.

In the context of reclaiming place within contemporary culture, place-jamming is part of a long-term process that aims to shift the collective consciousness towards a new approach towards place. The process of reclaiming places free from the dominance of consumer capitalism is what defines a 'Third Space' – a place where people and community prevail over the power of the marketplace. Kalle Lasn envisions that a movement to re-claim urban spaces would create these 'Third Spaces' throughout the urban fabric of the city. Lasn writes "The whole tone and rhythm of the city will lighten as little non-commercial islands of what sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls "Third Space" – places for social interaction that are neither home nor work – pop up. Within these exuberant, inclusive spaces, we will all live free again."⁷⁴ As part of reclaiming place, place-jamming involves contesting space; that is re-asserting people's control over the urban environment. In this regard, place-jamming can be understood as one tactic in a larger strategy that aims ultimately to re-invent the city. As Lasn observes:

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Kalle Lasn. "Reclaiming Urban Space" in *Adbusters* Spring 2000 vol 8 no. 1, p 36

What we are building has never existed: it is the everyday city of the future. This place needs its shock troops, people who are willing to live, at whatever cost, in the landscape of the imagination...This, ultimately, is what urbanism is about: *living change*. Cities should be places of expression, so our paint-filled eggs turn billboards into outbursts of colour, and our cities should be places where we meet, so we call a party for rush hour on the busiest bridge, and our cities should be places where we feast, so we tear up the asphalt and plant a garden, and our cities should be places where we explore, so we empty out an office block and let it slowly slide into ruin.⁷⁵

Place-jamming exemplifies what Fredrick Jameson calls "counterhegemony"⁷⁶ – the elaboration of a set of values and ideas that correspond to a future institutional base that will one day offer an alternative to capitalism. As a form of resistance to consumer capitalism, place-jamming allows for the expression of ideas and approaches towards urban life that run counter to those of the present organization of power. In so doing, place-jamming provides an effective critique of contemporary approaches to place while at the same time suggesting a way forward towards an alternate urbanity.

In addition to challenging existing representations of place and confronting the existing cityscape, I suggest that designers must engage in resistance against consumer capitalism within placemaking itself. As has been shown in the examination of contemporary approaches to placemaking, much of conventional urban design and architecture is deeply reflective of the values associated with a consumerist vision of life. As David Harvey comments "...place construction is now complicitous (directly or indirectly) with the universalisms of money, commodity, capital and exchange..."⁷⁷ Lebbeus Woods and Manfredo Tafuri argue that an alternative approach to the design of human communities is ultimately dependent upon the emergence of a new set of ideas and values to inform placemaking. Both Woods and Tafuri contend that a revolutionary transformation in the present social and political systems must first occur for a new architecture to emerge.

⁷⁵ Kalle Lasn. "Contested Space" in *Adbusters* May/June 2001 No. 35 p. 52

⁷⁶ Fredric Jameson "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" in *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology* Joan Ockman ed. p. 69

⁷⁷ David Harvey. *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* p. 314

While I agree that deep structural transformation must first occur in order for mainstream placemaking to be shaped by non-capitalist values, I believe, at present, that an alternative placemaking can still exist upon the individual level. While the overall thrust of conventional approaches to place may still be dominated by the ethos of consumer capitalism, the possibility still exists for individuals, albeit to varying degrees, to influence the nature of the places in which they live and which they create.

Placemaking, broadly defined, is the manner in which humans shape the places in which they find themselves into places in which they live.⁷⁸ Consequently, it is a fundamental human activity. As Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley write in their book Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities, placemaking encompasses a range of activities:

It includes building and tearing buildings down, cultivating the land and planting gardens, cleaning the kitchen and rearranging the office, making neighbourhoods and mowing lawns, taking over buildings and understanding cities...Placemaking consists both of daily acts of renovating, maintaining, and representing the places that sustain us...It can be done with the support of others or can be an act of defiance in the face of power.⁷⁹

As Schneekloth and Shibley note, placemaking is a broad activity that allows for a range of expression. Most importantly, as Schneekloth and Shibley recognize, placemaking can be an act of resistance against the existing structure of power.

Place construction can allow for the expression of values other than those found in our highly materialistic and monetized culture. In so doing, placemaking becomes a defiant act and emerges as a form of resistance against a consumerist vision of life. Placemaking, as an act of resistance, attempts to impart meanings – reflecting an alternative vision of life – to places (figure 31). Not only does such placemaking offer an alternative approach to places, it also provides the space in which to create new relationships between people. As Schneekloth and Shibley observe:

⁷⁸ Lynda H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley. Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities (John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1995) p.1

⁷⁹ Ibid.



Figure 31: Placemaking: An attempt to impart meanings – reflecting an alternative vision of life – to place.

source: *Adbusters Journal of the Mental Environment* May/June 2001 No. 35

The making of places – our homes, our neighborhoods, our places of work and play – not only changes and maintains the physical world of living: it also is a way we make our communities and connect with other people. In other words, placemaking is not just about the relationship of people to their places; it also creates relationships *among* people in places.⁸⁰

In influencing how we both relate to places and to other people, placemaking is an effective vehicle not only for the expression of resistance against consumer capitalism, but also for the advancement of a progressive alternative to it.

The penetration of commodification and market values into all realms of cultural life, David Harvey contends, has fundamentally degraded contemporary approaches towards place. Harvey argues that, in response, an alternative approach towards placemaking must seek to rediscover the art of dwelling. He writes:

Dwelling is the capacity to achieve a spiritual union between humans and things. From this it follows that "only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build." Indeed buildings "may even deny dwelling its own nature when they are pursued and acquired purely for their own sake."...The problem, therefore, is to recover a viable homeland in which meaningful roots can be established. *Place construction should be about the recovery of roots, the recovery of the art of dwelling.*⁸¹ [my italics]

In this context, an alternative placemaking involves a return to rootedness and authenticity. I suggest that, despite existing within the enclosure of capitalism, individuals are still free to create places upon a personal level that are reflective of this search for authenticity. Such individual placemaking is to a very large degree, however, dependent on one's resources and skills and is perhaps not a viable option for most people. As Edward Relph notes, "In contemporary society such authentic and selfconscious placemaking seems to be reserved largely for inspired individuals; most of us are condemned to live in other people's houses and machine-made places."⁸² Nevertheless, I believe that such individual attempts at place construction can be an effective illustration of an alternative placemaking. Such attempts at place construction are a valuable expression as they give form to values and

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ David Harvey. *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* p. 301

⁸² Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness* p. 77

ideas that can offer an alternative to the consumerist vision of life implicit in contemporary approaches towards place.

Within the framework of reclaiming a sense of place in consumer culture, placemaking as a form of resistance involves searching for alternative approaches to place. As David Harvey observes, this process is currently visible in contemporary society as a response to the omnipresence of market forces in present-day life:

...the increasing penetration of technological rationality, of commodification and market values, and capital accumulation into social life together with time-space compression, will provoke resistances that increasingly focus on alternative constructions of place. The search for an authentic sense of community and of an authentic relation to nature among many radical and ecological movements is the cutting edge of exactly such a sensibility.⁸³

As Harvey notes, the search for alternative approaches towards place is at the root of much ecological thought. By promoting a relationship to place that is not embedded within the values of the marketplace, but based upon ecological principles, an ecologically focused placemaking provides a clear alternative to conventional placemaking. Radical ecological thought, such as Deep Ecology, is one philosophical framework amongst a range of ecological and social positions in which to construct an alternative placemaking. An ecological approach to the design of human communities has the potential, as the radical architect Paolo Soleri argues, to play a powerful role in the ultimate transformation of societal values. Soleri suggests that architecture acts a form of information within contemporary culture and that by re-ordering the nature of our built environment in ecologically progressive ways we are then able to transmit new ideas into cultural discourse.⁸⁴ As Timothy Luke writes in Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, the Economy, and Culture "Most significantly, it [architecture] can lead to an ecological revolution, because it is an informational process rather than a material activity. Each edifice in the man-made environment ultimately operates as an actor, "that is to say, it is

⁸³ Harvey, p. 302

⁸⁴ Timothy W. Luke. Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, the Economy, and Culture (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1997) p. 157

actually information in and of itself instead of being a remote presence.”⁸⁵ By adopting this perspective, an alternative placemaking emerges as a conduit for the expression of what Fredric Jameson terms “counterhegemonic” values. The way in which we inhabit and construct the places we live in ultimately allows for an expression against the ideology of consumer capitalism. While the impact of such expressions may be somewhat muted due to the lack of resources that individuals may have access to, the simple act of living in a place creates a space in which we can generate an alternative vision as to what might be possible.

As the purpose of this discussion has not been to specifically define what form an alternative placemaking should adopt but, rather, to identify the space that exists upon an individual level for an alternative approach towards place, I have not presented a specific plan for a radical place-making. The form that an alternative construction of place would take is ultimately dependent upon the personal expression of the individuals involved. What is of primary importance, within the context of reclaiming place in contemporary consumer culture, is to identify the opportunity that placemaking provides for individuals to rebuild a connection to place. Moreover, identifying the opportunity that placemaking affords to the individual, as a vehicle of expression and resistance, is a fundamental step in understanding how people can ultimately manifest their struggle against capitalism and its corresponding values.

In conclusion, contemporary life has witnessed a deterioration in traditional connections to place. Reclaiming place, as a response to this phenomenon, attempts to restore our relationship with place. A sense of place has long been a cornerstone of both individual and community identity throughout human cultures. The decline in a meaningful sense of place within contemporary culture can be traced to the inauthenticity of much of conventional placemaking. Within our consumer culture, mainstream approaches towards place can be characterized by an acceptance of mass values and a disregard for the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

identity of local places. The places that consequently emerge from such an approach have come to form a placeless geography. As an attempt to rebuild a genuine sense of place, reclaiming place promotes authenticity in placemaking. In contrast to an inauthentic approach towards place, authentic placemaking stems from a deep awareness of the identity of local places and a recognition of place as a meaningful setting for human activities. Pre-industrial or 'primitive' architecture is often held up as an example of an authentic placemaking that reflects an adaptation to local conditions and a genuine response to the needs of its inhabitants. Current responses to the lack of authenticity in contemporary placemaking, and the subsequent diminishing sense of place within our culture, has led to the emergence of New Urbanism. As a form of placemaking, New Urbanist design seeks to create a sense of community through a design approach that draws inspiration from traditional American town-making. However, as a response to the failure of contemporary approaches towards place, New Urbanism falls short of offering a real alternative to conventional development. A critical examination of New Urbanism clearly reveals the need for new values to inform design.

The first step in advancing solutions to the lack of authenticity in contemporary placemaking lies in recognizing the rootedness of present-day approaches towards place in capitalism. Placemaking, consequently, must be informed by a system of new values that allow for the expression of human needs and ecological sustainability. Reclaiming place within consumer culture inevitably leads to the call for fundamental change in the current social and political structures as a precursor for the emergence of a new urban design. At present, in light of the absence of an alternative paradigm to inform conventional placemaking, design needs to respond as a form of resistance against contemporary capitalism. The power of design can be brought to bear upon consumer capitalism and its corresponding values that inform contemporary approaches towards place. Designers, and other individuals, can resist the hegemony of consumer capitalism by challenging the representation of place, confronting the nature of contemporary urbanity and in developing an alternative form of placemaking. Developing an imagery that promotes an alternative to

the consumerist vision of life is an effective act of resistance within a culture in which images increasingly provide the framework for interpreting the world. Place-jamming allows for a personal response against the nature of contemporary urbanity while at the same time suggesting an alternative vision for the city. By imparting meanings – reflecting an alternative vision of life – to their own places, placemaking affords the opportunity for individuals to manifest their resistance against contemporary consumer culture. By challenging not only the form of contemporary placemaking, but also its underlying values, reclaiming place, as an act of resistance against consumer culture, can play a powerful role in the development of new approaches to the design of human communities.

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