

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: EASTON: A 21ST CENTURY (R)EVOLUTION IN
CONSUMPTION, COMMUNITY, URBANISM, AND SPACE

John Michael Ryan, Masters of Arts, 2005

Thesis directed by: Dr. George Ritzer, Distinguished University Professor
Department of Sociology

This research was designed, planned, and implemented with three overarching and interrelated objectives in mind – to apply existing theoretical knowledge on consumption, community, urbanism, and space to the specific case study of Easton Town Center; to enhance, contribute, and extend the research and literature surrounding these four areas; and to flesh out the paradigm of Easton into a more coherent, comprehensive theory with potential applications for future social scientific inquiry.

EASTON: A 21ST CENTURY (R)EVOLUTION IN CONSUMPTION, COMMUNITY,
URBANISM, AND SPACE

By

John Michael Ryan

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Advisory Committee:

Distinguished University Professor George Ritzer, Chair
Professor David Segal
Associate Professor Joseph Lengermann

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Chapter I: An Introduction to Easton

Innovation, consumption, and trend-setting are probably not the first three terms that come to mind when one thinks of Columbus, Ohio. However, it is just these three words that most aptly describe its revolutionary new landscape - Easton Town Center. That there is something new here is reflected in the fact that observers are struggling to come up with a new name for Easton and what it represents. Easton is being hailed as “a Disney Land for shoppers” (Moss 2001), Columbus’ “most lucrative crop yet” (Mander 2001), a “21st Century Village” (Blackford 1995), a “new urban retail project” (Steiner website), a “neo-village mall” (Underhill 2004), and “a small town paradise” (Reynolds interview). There are a lot of “new” ideas being turned into realities at Easton that have the potential to revolutionize the way we shop, eat, are at leisure, and live. In fact, our conceptions of shopping malls, communities, urban design, and space are being called into question by Easton.

Easton Town Center is a 7 million square-foot entertainment, retail, residential and workplace destination located 5 minutes from the Port Columbus airport and 10 minutes from downtown Columbus at I-270 and Easton Way in the northeast quadrant of the city. It was constructed at a cost of over \$300 million (to date). The Center is primarily owned and operated by Steiner + Associates, The Georgetown Company, The Limited Brands (formerly known as The Limited, Inc.), and California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Two of these investors, Steiner + Associates and Limited Brands are also based in Columbus.

Although the developed area of Easton will eventually be over 12 million square feet of office, hotel, residential, and retail space, the main focus of the town, the

“downtown” so to speak, is the 1.5 million square foot retail area. This downtown is composed of an indoor shopping area known as Easton Station and 6 city blocks of outdoor “small town” shopping designed to be reminiscent of a typical American small town from the 1950’s. There are currently over 160 tenants (over 30 of which are brand new to the Columbus market - for example, Virgin Records, Nordstrom, Smith & Wollensky, Anthropologie, The Container Store, Z Gallerie, Brio Tuscan Grille, The Cheesecake Factory, and set to open in March 2005, Crate and Barrel) drawing in excess of 30 million visitors in 2003 (up from 18 million in 2002). The Center has already been the recipient of a number of honors and awards including the 2000 International Council of Shopping Center’s award for Innovative Design and Construction of a New Project and the 2003 Business First Corporate Caring Award for small businesses in the Health & Human Services category for their nearly \$130,000 in cash donations along with another \$32,000 in in-kind donations and open venue for over 20 non-profit events.



So what is it that makes Easton unique? How is it different from traditional shopping centers? The answer lies more in design and function than label and size (although these too set it apart). Easton was designed to resemble a small town and

function not only as a commercial outlet but also as a community center. Further, Easton can arguably be seen as its own self-contained, fully functional community. Although it is not officially its own town (a point to be discussed in more detail in chapter III), and it may not be as large as what we typically consider a town (although there are certainly towns in the Midwest that are not as large), Easton still looks very much like its own independent municipal center. This paper will seek to explore some of the reasons Easton can, and should, be considered a 21st century revolution in consumption, community, urbanism, and space.



Left: The north fountain. Right: A view down the main street in the upscale North District.

Why Columbus?

Given the growing appearance of lifestyle centers all over the country (Staff2 2003), and indeed the world, why would the paradigm of innovation appear in the middle of Ohio? A closer look at some vital characteristics of the city offers some insight. Table 1 gives a snapshot of the population by race, age, household, income, and sex.

Table 1: Columbus Ohio at a Glance¹

Population	711,470
Population density	3,383.6/mi ²
Racial Demographics	
White	67.93%
Black	24.47%
Asian	3.44%
Hispanic	2.46%
Native American	0.29%
Pacific Islander	0.05%
Other races	1.17%
Two or more races	2.65%
Age demographics	
Under 18	24.2%
18 to 24	14.0%
25 to 44	35.1%
45 to 64	17.9%
65 or older	8.9%
Median age	31
Females to males	100 : 94.6
Households	
w/ children under 18	28.0%
Married couples living together	36.1%
Female householder with no husband	14.5%
Non-families	45.2%
Individuals	31.4%
65 or older living alone	7.0%
Gay and lesbian couples ²	
Number of families	165,240
Average family size	3.01
Income	
Per capita	\$20,450
Median household	\$37,897
Median family	\$47,391
Males	\$35,138
Females	\$28,705
Below poverty line	14.8%
Families below poverty line	10.8%

¹ All information is based on the 2000 Census.

² I include this line in the table because I think it is a relevant statistic to include. Unfortunately, the United States Census does not yet include any means of accurately, or even satisfactorily determining this information.

In addition to the above, Columbus is the largest city in Ohio when measured by city borders (212.6 square miles) and is located at the very heart of the state along interstates I-70, I-270, I-670, and I-71. In addition to being the state capital, it is also the 24th largest metropolitan statistical area in the country with 1.84 million residents. There are four airports, two of which – Port Columbus and Rickenbacker – are international. Many national and international businesses are headquartered there including Nationwide Insurance, Abercrombie & Fitch, White Castle, Wendy's, Cardinal Health, Huntington Bancshares, Red Roof Inns, Borden Inc., and Limited Brands –owners of Victoria's Secret, Bath and Body Works, The Limited, Express, Express for Men, White Barn Candle Company and Henri Bendel. Bank One and CompuServe (although owned by outside companies now) also have their roots in Columbus. J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., UPS, McGraw-Hill Inc., Budweiser, and Chemical Abstracts Service are also major presences in the city. In addition, Honda has its North American auto plant just outside Columbus where all of the Accords, Civics, motorcycles, and many of the Acura models are made for the North American market.

Columbus is home to the second largest single college campus in the country, Ohio State University (with over 50,000 enrolled students), as well as Capital University, Dennison University, Franklin University, and Otterbein College, among others. Columbus also boasts a number of entertainment and cultural facilities including PromoWest Pavillion, the Schottenstein Center, the Wexner Center, Nationwide Arena, and the Ohio Stadium (with a capacity of over 100,000). The city is home to the 2002 NCAA Champion football team – the Ohio State Buckeyes – as well as Columbus Crew (Major League Soccer), Columbus Clippers (minor league baseball), Columbus Blue

Jackets (National Hockey League), and Columbus Destroyers (Arena Football League). Famous people from Columbus include, musicians Little Bow Wow and Dwight Yoakam, Prescott Bush (grandfather of George W. Bush), boxer James “Buster” Douglas, golfer Jack Nicklaus, racecar driver Bobby Rahal, actress Beverly D’Angelo, actor Tom Poston, aviator Eddie Rickenbacker, and author R.L. Stine.

If the above breakdown of all that is going on in Columbus doesn’t answer the question of why Easton would choose to be located in Columbus, then one need look no further than one man – business mogul Leslie Wexner. Wexner’s Limited Brands had the foresight to realize the potential value of their planned warehouse space and transform it from isolated farmland into Columbus’ “most lucrative crop yet: a nearly \$2 billion midtown” (Mander 2001). It is also assumed that the proximity of one of Columbus’ wealthiest suburbs – New Albany (home to Wexner, racecar driver Bobby Rauhaul, and now deceased Wendy’s founder Dave Thomas) – and its potential customer base also helped in making the decision.

Another reason for the choice of Columbus is purely demographic. Although the population of the Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MS, NE, OH, WI) grew at a rate of only 7.2% (compared to the national average of 13.1%) during the period from 1990-2000, bringing its population to a total of 63 million, there is another more important shift occurring that makes this part of the country prime ground for retail innovation. The smaller and middle-sized cities are growing at phenomenal rates as the large rural population of these areas moves into the nearby urban centers. This population increase and lack of retail saturation in most of these markets makes them prime locations for retailers to gobble up fresh market space (Gose 2002).

There can be drawbacks, however, as the lure of a fresh market draws many predators. Such is the case in Columbus, where with over 25 square feet of gross leasable area (GLA) per person (the national average is 19.9 square feet (Palmieri 2003)), it is already the most retail- saturated major city in the Midwest. It added 3 million square feet of new retail space in 2001, and 2.4 million square feet a year of new retail space in 1998, 1999, and 2000.

Yaromir Steiner, developer and founder of Steiner & Associates, recognized that the Columbus market was already saturated even before he began his ambitious project at Easton, but he argued that an increasing population justified the new endeavor:

“We don’t need more stores, and that’s more than true in Columbus. But by the same token, we don’t need more clothes, yet we buy them to replace something older. We also lose sight of the fact that we grow by 10 million people every three years in America. That growth justifies some construction, and projects that meet my three criteria [outlined below - better designed centers, reintroduction of leisure-time uses, and strongly branded retailers] will do very well while others will disappear” (Palmieri 2003, 46).

Perhaps Steiner is right. Maybe the growing population of Columbus can support such large-scale projects as Easton based on population growth alone. The state of Ohio has a total population of 11.4 million and grew by 4.7% during the 1990’s. Columbus itself grew by 14.5%, 1.4% above the national average, during the 1990’s and over 3 times the growth rate of the state as a whole (Gose 2002). Regardless of the state of affairs of other consumption settings, Easton seems safe as indicated by its phenomenal growth in both size and attendance as well as its seemingly top-notch appeal (Howell Interview; Beaton Interview; Hobson Interview; Reynolds Interview).

Relationship with Columbus

The presence of Easton has unquestionably had an impact on the city of Columbus as a whole. Over 25,000 jobs have already been created by this undertaking and it is projected that over 40,000 will be linked with the Center by 2010 (Easton Website). The projected tax revenue over 30 years is estimated at \$1.5 billion (Blackford 1995). It has also brought many new retailers to the area and in this way helped to diversify the Columbus market. In fact, some shoppers even cite their inability to find certain stores anywhere else in the Columbus market as the primary draw of Easton (Reynolds interview; Beaton interview; Howell interview).

Local shoppers would not be enough to keep such a huge endeavor running and Easton Town Center well understands the need to draw customers from far and wide to their stores. They have wisely created a number of incentives for visitors and tourists. The most basic of these is a special page on their website dedicated to “Tourist Information”. There one can find hotel listings (three are even on site), directions, maps, parking information, a special “Visit Columbus” page, and even a link to a form to fill out that entitles those who drive from more than 50 miles away to a special coupon booklet (Easton website).

In addition to what is available on the website, there is also an “Experience Easton” tourist package available to those wishing to make this a vacation getaway. In partnership with several local hotels, Columbus Center of Science and Industry (COSI), the Columbus Motor Coach Council, and the Greater Columbus Convention Center and Visitors Bureau, Easton Town Center offers The Hilton Columbus Shopping Getaway

package. This deal includes overnight accommodations at the on-site Hilton, full breakfast for two, free parking, a “special gift package” from Easton merchants, an Easton Town Center guide, and a coupon booklet, all for the cost of \$169 (Easton Website – Experience Easton). These incentives seem to be working - it is estimated that 13% of those visiting Easton are from outside its trade area³ (ICSC Brochure).

Shoppers from all over Ohio, the Midwest, and beyond are moving Easton up on their list of travel destinations. One visitor remarked, “It takes us an hour to get here each way but its better than shopping around home.” Another group of five women who were former roommates at OSU take an annual shopping trip somewhere. Even though they now live all over the country, they chose Easton as their destination in 2001. That puts Easton in such company as San Francisco which was their choice in 2000 and Disney World which was their choice for 2002 (Gebolys 2001).

Drawing over 30 million visitors a year, which is roughly 2 ½ times the population of the entire state of Ohio and nearly 40 times the population of the city of Columbus itself, Easton is clearly bringing in people from somewhere. A Buckeye State Poll conducted in January of 2002 revealed that Easton was the second most popular place for locals to take their out-of-town guests when they visited. It trailed the Columbus Zoo, reputed to be one of the best in the country, by only 4% (Easton Website – Experience Easton). It seems only a matter of time before Easton will become Columbus’s and then Ohio’s biggest tourist attraction (if it isn’t already).

In addition to drawing outside dollars, Easton is also motivating many who already live in Columbus to stay in Columbus to spend their money. It is succeeding in

³ The trade area of Easton includes a population of 310,007 with 128,346 households with an average income of \$58,991. (<http://steiner.com/portfolio/eastontowncenter/demographics.cfm>)

complementing its far-flung attractiveness with local retention – a task few towns or tourist spots are able to do. Duane Reynolds, a graduate student at Ohio State University, “Why travel anywhere else when everything we could ever want is 15 minutes away?”.

Easton has also been successful in drawing a large number of conventions to Columbus, a city that used to pride itself on being one of the convention capitals of the United States (Hunker 2000; Howell interview). Even local organizations are having their conventions at Easton instead of using their own facilities. OSU, for example, holds many of its large meetings at the Hilton at Easton instead of on their campus just a few miles away (Howell interview).



Left: Signs point visitors to the parking garages on the edge of town indicating how many spots are available at each. Middle: One of several directories around town. Right :A sign indicating a stop for the town trolley.

Although it does lend credence to the argument for Easton as a social hub, the presence of conventions there does not make it truly unique. What makes it unique, however, is the attendance at those conferences. Many who have chosen to hold their meetings at Easton have remarked that when they had them there, they were their best attended. The reason is that people are able to bring their families and the attendees

themselves are more drawn to the small town environment. While one spouse is in a meeting, the other is free to go shop or stroll around the town while the children can be entertained at GameWorks, one of the 30 screens in the movie theatre, or by the guest magician at McDonalds. “It is the possibility of a total family experience that makes them want to come here. Some of them even skip the meetings altogether just to enjoy Easton” (Howell interview).

The previously mentioned hotel space has enjoyed as much success as its residential and commercial counterparts. According to Mr. Alan Howell, the general manager of the on-site Hilton, the average annual occupancy rate at his hotel is 84.7%, compared to roughly 60% for the city of Columbus as a whole. Their reservation center received over 7,000 calls in October 2003 alone. The hotel has also been able to save money on advertising, relying instead on the draw and promotional effect of Easton. In fact, his location has one of the top revenues per room of any of the Hilton hotels (Howell interview).

Easton as Test Market

Aside from being a new development itself, Easton has also turned into a test market for many new retail and eating establishments. McDonalds has opened its second largest franchise outlet in the country and its first town center prototype at Easton. The 210-seat, 11,500 square-foot restaurant features a playhouse complete with mock drive-thru for kids, a karaoke station to record CD’s, a merchandising counter where one can

purchase McDonalds kitsch, a McTreat counter featuring deserts, a coffee bar, and even a mural of the Columbus skyline (Barnet 2002)

Other stores using Easton as a test market include Abercrombie & Fitch (another Columbus-based corporation) which opened Hollister Co., their new surf concept store; Goldmark, a jewelry store targeting teens; and Mish-Mash, a new lifestyle store for teenage girls. In addition, Limited Brands makes use of its 15,300 square-foot dual-gendered Express store at Easton as a testing ground for the company's line of clothing and apparel. Merchandise is showcased at the Easton store for 60 days before it is released to the market at large, assuming that the product goes over well (Staff 2002).

The well-known department store, Lazarus, also chose Easton as a testing ground for what they call their "store of the future". The 240,000 square-foot retail ground is home to a day spa, a supervised children's play area, plasma television screens, a cyber cafe, a mammography center, a lounge, personal shoppers in both the men's and women's sections, and even a Starbucks. In addition, they are testing a new Gen-Now department which is a blend of young men's and juniors' sections (Groeber 2002).

In November 2004, Germain Motor Company, whose annual sales are expected to top \$1 billion by the end of 2004, broke ground for their new "automotive town center" at Easton. Steve Germain, president and CEO of the company stated, "This sets the stage for a unique 'town center' setting that will match the qualities of Easton Town Center and showcase the very best-in-class automobiles" (Easton-Germain).

"This is definitely not your typical auto mall," said Germain. "Folks will quickly realize this is a completely new experience – an automotive town center. We are excited to now offer three unique upscale brands to suit the luxury car buyer in Central Ohio."

Reflecting the vision of Easton Town Center, the automotive town center described by Easton and Germain Motor Company will include several buildings totaling 150,000 square feet, and break the mold of ordinary automotive dealership concepts by its unique focus on pedestrian traffic and public amenities, including fountains and green space (Easton-Germain).



Left: McDonald's second largest US franchise also serves as its town center prototype. Right: The largest dual-gender express in the country is at home in Easton – both are owned by Columbus local Les Wexner.

One of the reasons for using Easton as a testing ground, aside from the novelty of the location and the large volume of customers it attracts, is the perceived “normalcy” of the typical Ohio shopper. Paul Raffin, executive vice-president of merchandising for Express feels that Easton is a good location because it gives “a good profile of our customer” (Palmieri 2003, 46). Yaromir Steiner, master planner of Easton stated that, “Columbus is always a test market. The mix is typical America, and retailers want to experiment someplace that is not too exotic” (48). Further, Jeff Roberts, senior operations consultant for McDonald’s validated that company’s selection of Easton as a test market for the prototype town center franchise by saying, “Columbus is a well-known test market and we’re proud to have developed this unique family destination here” (48). Ron

Klein, CEO of Lazarus, also remarked on the utility of Easton as a testing ground: “This is a laboratory for Lazarus to test many ideas” (48).

Ohio as a whole is often seen as a testing ground for a variety of purposes - everything from airplanes to cars to potato chips (El Nasser 2003). Many view this part of the country, “middle America”, as representative of the entire nation. The Ohio accent is the one taught to newscasters (Smith 2004) and there was a television show in 2000 starring John Goodman called “Normal, Ohio”. The license plate slogan - “The Heart of it All” – seems to say it all too. Mayor Michael Coleman has even remarked, “It’s representative of the rest of the nation when it comes to consumer interests, voting interests” (El Nasser 2003). Further, it can be no accident that 8 of the country’s 43 Presidents have been elected from Ohio. In fact, current Ohio governor Bob Taft is the great-grandson of former president William Howard Taft. Ohio is often used as a political testing ground for both Democrats and Republicans (Neidowski 1998), a point even more evident after the 2004 Presidential election.

Study Objectives

This research was designed, planned, and implemented with three overarching and interrelated objectives in mind – to apply existing theoretical knowledge on consumption, community, urbanism, and space to the specific case study of Easton Town Center; to enhance, contribute, and extend the research and literature surrounding these four areas; and to flesh out the paradigm of Easton into a more coherent, comprehensive

theory with potential applications for future social scientific inquiry. A discussion of the methods employed for this study can be found in Appendix A.

Anticipating criticisms, some might assert that studying Easton is a trivial endeavor, that it is just another mall and hence there is nothing new to be learned. However, the history of the sciences, both natural and social, “shows that documenting the obvious is a valuable function of any science” (Babbie 2001, 27). This study uses Easton as a paradigm of innovation not only to discover idiographic explanations but also to begin to explore nomothetic ones. The insight and implications of this study will provide a valuable contribution to the research and literature on consumption, community, urbanism, and space.

The presentation of this study has been divided into three separate, yet interrelated, chapters. Each chapter will be written with the hopes of contributing to the particular literature to which it is most attuned. The goal of each will be a publishable paper and an addition to the existing body of literature.

Chapter II, “The Rise of Consumption Settings and Their Associated Mentality,” will focus on the relationship of Easton to consumption. I will begin by examining the history of consumption settings starting with the agora and marketplaces of ancient Greece and Rome to the markets and fairs of the medieval ages to the early arcades of Paris to the first enclosed shopping center in North America to the Mall of America and the major revolutions in consumer settings in between. These advances in consumption settings will mark what I argue are four distinct periods in the history of consumption. The goal will be to demonstrate that Easton is an innovation in consumption settings, one

that builds on the history of these locations yet takes it one step further and marks a new era in consumption.

The second part of Chapter II will focus on Easton as an evolution in the geography of consumption settings. This section will trace the history of consumption settings by drawing largely on the work of George Ritzer. Ritzer has done much to theorize the (r)evolution of consumption settings through his work on McDonaldization (2004), the means of consumption (2005), and most recently nothing and something (2004). I will draw especially from his notions of “cathedrals of consumption” and “landscapes of consumption” to theorize a new consumption geography – a *community of consumption*. Thus, this latter half of the chapter will make the same argument as the first half - that Easton is a new development in the history of consumption settings. Each argument can be used as a supplement of the other. Both point to the same conclusion – consumption settings are achieving a full vertical integration of our daily lives.

Chapter III, “Easton: From Urbanism to New Urbanism and Beyond,” will demonstrate the potential changes Easton represents from the point of view of the history of urban development. In order to fully appreciate Easton as an innovative new urban form, it will be necessary first to revise a few of the voluminous ideas on the history of urbanism. A brief outline of the general evolution of the urban form will be sketched through an examination of the ideas of David Thorns, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja. Next, a discussion of suburbanization will help us understand one of the key factors in the rise of the true focus of this chapter, the development of urban planning. A history of important milestones in the development of planned communities will culminate in a discussion of one of the most recent, and arguably the most influential, of these

techniques – New Urbanism. After outlining the key tenets of New Urbanist philosophy, a closer look at three critical prototypes of this type of development - Seaside, Florida, Celebration, Florida, and Kentlands, Maryland – will lead to a discussion of Easton in the context of the history of urban development. The concept of “Eastonism”, one coined here for the first time, will help me to argue that Easton is, in fact, something new in the history of urban planning and represents a distinctly new form in the history of urbanism.

Chapter IV, “Eastonism: Towards a Spatial Analysis of Consumer Culture,” will serve as a meta-analysis of the preceding two and introduce a critical new aspect to our understanding of both – space. Drawing largely on the work of Henri Lefebvre, I will argue that Easton is the paradigm of a new type of space – *produced space*. This will allow for the beginnings of a critical new insight into capitalism in the context of produced space. Overall, the introduction of a spatial analysis will help tie together the previous arguments and present a more coherent picture of the grander implications called forth by Easton.

Chapter II: The Rise of Consumption Settings and Their Associated Mentality

Consumption is any activity involving the selection, purchase, or use of a good or service⁴. A consumption setting, therefore, is any location which facilitates the selection, purchase, or use of a good or service. The history of, and innovation in, consumption settings has been a topic of interest for many in sociology and beyond (Baudrillard 1970; Benjamin 1999; Cohen 2003; Kowinski 1985; Ritzer 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Ryans, Donnelly, and Ivancevich 1970; Underhill 2004; Zukin 2003). The interest in these settings, and consumption more generally, can be traced to the early days of sociology in the work of such classical theorists as Georg Simmel (1904/1971), Thorstein Veblen (1899/1994) and Walter Benjamin (1999). However, the rise in interest in consumption and the settings in which it takes place has most paralleled the rise of interest in postmodern social theory (Baudrillard 1970; Bauman 2000). Indeed, consumption is often seen as the defining characteristic of postmodern society. Even following the death of postmodern social theory, however, the interest in consumption has continued to increase (Gottdiener 2000).

Why study consumption? Daniel Miller et. al. (1998, 2-3) suggest four main reasons why consumption came to the foreground of interest for many researchers:

First, a whole new landscape of consumption was coming into view: not just the supermarket but the retail warehouse park and the shopping mall. Second, there was the implicit opposition to production....Third, and relatedly, consumption was a way of gently introducing concerns about culture into social sciences still often dominated by approaches based on political

⁴ Jean Baudrillard (1970, 93) would object to this definition claiming that “consumption is defined: not any longer (1) as a functional practice of objects – possession, etc., or (2) as a mere individual or group prestige function, but (3) as a system of communication and exchange, as a code of signs continually being sent, received and reinvented – as *language*”. He later defines consumption as “*a process of absorption of signs and absorption by signs*” (191).

economy.....Fourth, consumption, and especially advertising, provided a playground of interpretation for intellectuals in the humanities, who, through the medium of cultural studies, were moving into the social sciences.

Why study consumption settings? In recent years many mega-corporations have emerged, the best example being the world's largest corporation, Wal-Mart, that have become nearly ubiquitous features in the lives of many. For most, they are a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life. Even more taken for granted are the key activities they are built to facilitate – shopping (Wal-Mart), tourist attractions (Disney World), gambling (New York, New York hotel and casino in Las Vegas) - and related consumer-oriented activities. These activities, however, are playing an increasingly pivotal role in the lives of many (Ritzer 2005). Shopping, for example, provides employment to 20% of the United States workforce, generates \$3 trillion in business annually, has the power to shape our identity, and serves to “recharge the engine of capitalism” (Satterthwaite 2001). Clearly the sites in which such an activity occurs merit attention, detailing, and concern.

This chapter will trace the history of consumption settings (see Table 1). A description will be offered of the most significant innovations in this area including thirteen critical innovations in the history of consumption settings – bartering in Mesopotamia, the Greek agora, the Roman forum, markets and fairs, shops, arcades, specialty stores, chain stores and franchises, department stores, regional shopping centers, the mall, the mega-mall, and Easton. Radical transformations can be seen as taking place in the context of four general epochs – the Era of Social Trading, the Era of Production, the Era of Consumption, and the Era of Ubiquitous Consumption - demarcated by key socio-historical events – the Industrial Revolution, World War II, and the beginning of the 21st Century. Each era is dominated by a particular method in which socio-economic

life is organized – bartering, mass production, mass consumption, and full vertical integration.

The second half of this chapter will focus on more recent innovations in the geography of consumption settings. I will draw largely on Ritzer's (2005) notions of the "cathedrals of consumption" and "landscapes of consumption" to lay the foundation for what I argue is the next advancement in consumption settings – *communities of consumption*. This argument combined with the previous one will demonstrate a general transition from societies based on finite times and places dedicated to facilitating consumption to societies with a more ubiquitous integration of consumption settings.

Era of Social Trading

The Era of Social Trading began with the earliest form of trade and ended around the time of the Industrial Revolution. Bartering served as the dominant mode of exchange in the absence of a unified currency during much of this timeframe. Although money was in use in Ancient Greece and Rome, and certainly by the time of the Industrial Revolution, its use served more the purpose of another item of barter than the abstract symbolic token that it has become today (Giddens 1990; Simmel 1978).

While bartering was the most distinctive economic feature of this era, consumption settings during this time also served the function of key communal settings. It was in such places that townsfolk and outsiders would gather to trade news, stories, and gossip. They were public places where private worlds merged in order to strengthen ties, relay information, and lastly to engage in economic transactions.

Early Bartering

The study of the earliest consumption settings has not been widely undertaken by many sociologists. Although recent years have seen a proliferation of inquiries into the most recent innovations in consumption settings, few have traced the origins of these settings back to the earliest days of civilization. Although “cavemen”⁵ probably also engaged in barter and trade, the earliest consumption settings were likely random meeting points scattered throughout the Fertile Crescent⁶. Clay tokens have been discovered indicating that trade was occurring in what is commonly regarded as the first city, Ur, around 4000 B.C. The dominance of the Phoenician culture on both land and sea would suggest that it was the earliest trading civilization and the dominant force in this area until the rise of Greek civilization (Satterwaite 2001).

Across the ocean, consumption activity was also occurring in North America among prehistoric Indians. Although it is unlikely they had formal establishments for trading, the exchange of goods and materials among the earliest people in the Western Hemisphere is still noteworthy (Ryans et. al. 1970). The ideological and social value of barter and exchange seems to have appeared independently around the world during this time although few, if any, formal settings for such exchange were likely in place.

Greek Agora

The agora served as the center of Greek urban life. “Agoras were centrally located, usually on flat open spaces with available water and drainage and often near

⁵ This term is somewhat outdated in modern anthropology. The term here is meant to imply the earliest forms of modern man.

⁶ Although there is some debate as to the actual origins of civilization, for purposes of this paper it is assumed that it began in the region known as the Fertile Crescent.

public buildings and shrines” (Satterthwaite 2001, 14). They served as the center of political, social, religious, and commercial activity (Owens 1991). The latter, however, was viewed ambivalently by many, including Aristotle, who advocated the separation of trade from the agora. “The upper agora we devote to the life of leisure, the other is intended for the necessities of trade” (quoted in Satterthwaite 2001, 14). Thus, although the agora was where commercial activity took place, for many ancient Greeks this was something to be tolerated, not encouraged.

One reason for the disdain in which many held consumption activities is the social position of those engaged in its pursuit. While the King stood at the top of the social ladder, merchants, traders, and bankers were at or near the bottom. They were often looked down upon and the government imposed multiple restrictions and heavy taxation on them (Satterthwaite 2001). Dealing with those who engage in commercial activity was viewed as a necessity, not a luxury, and spending time in consumption settings was seen as a chore rather than a vocation (or even a vacation as it has also become for many!).

Roman Forum

The equivalent of the agora in the Roman world was the forum. The Roman Empire, however, did not hold the same contempt for commercial activity as did the Greeks. In fact, it was then and there that retailing first began to take hold as an activity in which many willingly engaged. “The earliest shopping dates back to ancient empires, when the density of residents, division of labor, and economic surplus in towns enabled them to establish marketplaces for exchanging the products of local farmers, urban

artisans and craftspeople, and long-distance traders” (Zukin forthcoming). The importance of consumption began to be taken more seriously.

Shops were established typically with a room for sales in front, production in back, and a residence for the shopkeeper above. Even a few settled consumption settings were established such as the Via della Foce in the port city of Ostia, where one of the walls has been dated to the second century B.C. (Satterthwaite 2001). The Roman Empire itself made many political, social, and military gains thanks, at least in part, to their acceptance of commercial activities. For example, many early Roman cities were built to be not only administrative centers of the Empire but also to serve as commercial centers. In fact, the level of consumption proficiency attained by the Romans was not to be seen again until the end of the 18th Century (Owens 1991).

Thus, the forum is markedly different from the agora in a number of ways. Most importantly, whereas consumption was a secondary activity in the agora, the forum was a true commercial center as evidenced by the prominence of consumption settings found within it. Additionally, whereas the agora was considered a largely open space, the forum “surrounded by shops, offices, and porticoes, evolved as an enclosed area” (Owens 1991, 154). It is here that we begin to see the importance of consumption settings in urban locales and the development of private spaces in public centers.

Markets and Fairs

After the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D., the history of the Western world fell into what is commonly referred to as the “Dark Ages” (Morris 1979). It was during this time that few, if any, serious innovations were made in many social fields, including

consumption settings. The fall of Rome left a commercial vacuum that was not filled for many centuries. The spirit of consumption, however, is obstinate and so beginning again around the 1400s and the time of the Enlightenment, consumption settings once again became important social arenas.

The return of a growing consumption mentality (although it arguably never left, its growth simply atrophied during the Dark Ages) was instantiated in local markets and regional fairs across Europe. These were held in set locations and took place on a regular schedule – usually one day a week. They were set in the open and were comprised of numerous vendors in stalls selling everything from food to shoes to jewelry. Like the agoras and fora of centuries past, the local markets also became social hubs. It was here that people saw many of their friends, made business deals, and caught up on the latest gossip (Langman and Padawangi forthcoming). It was also here that the democratization of consumption took place. The rich and the poor both attended the local market and were treated much the same by the market vendor as long as they had enough money to purchase his wares (Satterthwaite 2001).

The local markets, however, did not satisfy all the desires of the expanding consumer market and thus regional fairs emerged. Although they took place only once or twice a year, these fairs were larger, more extensive, and more encompassing than the local markets. Some of them even became the basis of permanent consumption settings (Satterthwaite 2001).

The growth of markets and fairs also marked an increase in the specialization of production and consumption settings. Guilds began forming composed of artisans with expertise in a particular handicraft or service. Sections of cities became specialized in

terms of what they offered for sale. Meat markets, fish markets, and garment districts began springing up around the major European cities. Even cities specialized; throughout England and Wales, “300 of the 800 market towns were devoted to single trades by the seventeenth century” (Satterthwaite 2001, 21). A growing interest in retail and its settings combined with an increasing specialization of consumption to further spur the growth of consumption settings.

The Industrial Revolution⁷

The Industrial Revolution began in England around 1750. It was beginning then that capitalism took hold on a wide scale and accompanying it was industrialism, or “the process of manufacturing goods in large quantities for mass consumption” (Macionis and Parrillo 2004, 244). Although both had existed for centuries prior, neither had taken hold to any significant degree. The advent of both, however, spawned not only a new age in industrialism, but correspondingly a new age in the locations in which these “large quantities for mass consumption” were to be sold.

One of the most important creations during this time was the factory (Macionis and Parrillo 2004). The factory as a location for organized, centralized, routinized work became the dominant setting of work life for many throughout Europe. The major cities of Europe came to be dominated by industrial settings and work became the focal point of life. The change signaled an end to the reign of the Church as the central arbiter of urban and social life. “The church declined as the focal institution of society; in the place

⁷ It would have been equally viable to denote this section as the rise of capitalism, or urbanism. However, I believe that “Industrial Revolution” is a more apt description of the temporal characteristics I am attempting to describe and also includes the alternatives as subsidiaries.

of spires appeared smokestacks, and the public plaza became a growing central business district” (Macionis and Parrillo 2004, 245).

Capitalism and industrialization brought about another drastic change in the social geography of many parts of Europe and the United States – urbanization (Morris 1979; Wirth 1975). The populations of many cities swelled dramatically as those from the countryside came in search of work in the factories. “The city grew into a crazy quilt of packed humanity. The industrial slums became the new pattern of the city” (Gruen and Smith 1960, 19). Capitalism, industrialism, and urbanism had brought about a new way of life for many and ushered in an era to be dominated by production and the continued growth in size, splendor, and purpose of consumption.

Era of Production

The Era of Production began with the Industrial Revolution and extended through the end of World War II. This was the time of mass production. Henry Ford, Frederick Taylor, George Pullman, and James Watt are but a few of the notable men who defined this period. Emphasis was on the production of goods in more efficient, more predictable, more calculable, more technologically sophisticated (in short, more “rationalized” [Weber 1921] or “McDonaldized” [Ritzer 2004b]), and most importantly, more abundant ways. The role of production in the proliferation of goods greatly outweighed the role of consumption, although the latter was growing increasingly important.

Consumption settings during this time were becoming more permanent in both space and time. No longer were traveling markets and fairs or the special days and times

of the agora restricting the desire and need to consume. Consumption settings fixed in one specific locale with set hours of operation became the dominant mode of retail. This fixation also encouraged a growth in size as these settings became both larger and more numerous.

Prices were also becoming fixed (Williams 1982). Whereas haggling had been a social form in earlier days, it was increasingly becoming a disreputable activity^{8 9}. The cost of an item or service was now posted for display and remained the same regardless of who purchased it. Concurrently, the consumption setting as a social setting began to disappear. There was less exchange of news and gossip and service was increasingly less personalized (Satterthwaite 2001).

The appearance of middlemen was also on the rise during this Era. Producers no longer needed to tend to their own sales and a growing class of non-owning shopkeepers and shop workers emerged. Producers and consumers were separated as some of the former as well as many who owned the shops became an “idle class” engaged in more luxurious pursuit with greater social recognition accompanying their growing wealth (Veblen 1899/1994).

Lastly, although consumption was becoming increasingly depersonalized and less social, it was simultaneously becoming more important to more people. No longer was it just the King and the Court who were engaged in the pursuit of fashion and other consumption objects, but a larger and larger percentage of the population now also had

⁸ It is important to note here that haggling is still important in many parts of the world today and that the attempt here is to describe a general trend rather than a universal system or law.

⁹ It should be noted that haggling is still an expected form of price negotiation even in industrialized countries for certain products – for example, homes and automobiles. Although, even this practice is circumvented at many automobile dealerships such as Saturn and CarMax.

access to these things as well. They were becoming “democratized” and slowly making their way down the social ladder.

Shops

The rise of guilds and the increasing quantity and concentration of the population in cities gave impetus for the development of shops. “Throughout Europe the medieval pattern of shopping at markets and fairs was being replaced by a new type of guild-controlled urban shopping, producing a new pattern of permanently concentrated shops” (Satterthwaite 2001, 21). Various kinds of shops began appearing in greater quantity throughout urban centers making the city a concentrated marketplace.

Shops are permanent locations with somewhat regular hours of operation where goods and services are bought and sold¹⁰. Their appearance marks the first true example of a more permanent consumption setting. Unlike fairs and markets, shops display goods for sale in an indoor environment free from the whims of weather and landscape (Benjamin 1999). They also operate with a greater temporal regularity, being open more or less set hours on set days rather than simply once a week or a few times a year.

The appearance of shops and shopping was not a welcome advance to all. Many local farmers and artisans who had prospered at the local markets were being driven out of their livelihoods by urban shopkeepers. These shopkeepers, in turn, were beginning to form a semi-capitalist class. Shops also represented a critical shift in the process of consumption – buyers and producers no longer interacted directly but instead through a middleman, the shopkeeper. These shopkeepers formed an idle class who made their

¹⁰ Although “bought” and “sold” are, in fact, two sides of the same retail coin, it is important that they are kept distinct. The act of purchasing a good or service and the act of selling a good or service are very distinct processes.

living off the work of the producer and the profit from the consumer. Further, shopping became less and less a social activity. Shops were not as conducive as markets to social interactions and gossip exchange (Satterthwaite 2001). Overall, the process of consumption was beginning to take on some of the rationalized aspects of production.

Arcades

The proliferation of shops of all kinds created the need for a single location in which to house them. And because of this need, among others, the arcades were born. Walter Benjamin was the theorist most responsible for bringing the arcades to social scientific light and one of the earliest academics to give credence to consumption settings. In his most famous work, *The Arcades Project* (1999, 15), he quotes an *Illustrated Guide to Paris* in his description of the arcades:

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

The first arcade, the Palais Royalem, opened in Paris in the 1780's. Paris was a leading center of commercial activity and, much like many other European cities, had had shop-lined streets for many decades. Unique to Paris, however, were narrower streets and a lack of sidewalks for pedestrian travel. Thus, the enclosure of entire streets to facilitate leisurely shopping¹¹ was born there. "The streets were closed to vehicular traffic allowing consumers to wander from shop to shop in order to buy or merely window shop" (Ritzer 2005, 61).

¹¹ This type of leisurely shopping is most closely associated with Benjamin's (1999) *flaneur*. For more on this, see *The Arcades Project*, convolute "M", pp. 416-455.

The arcades represented several important shifts in the way consumption settings were designed, built, and operated. They furthered much of the rationalization process that had begun with the appearance of shops. The location of consumption was now even more settled in time and place. There were set geographic locations and set hours of the day (and night) when one could engage in consumption activities. There was also far less bargaining as money became an increasingly dominant medium of exchange (Simmel 1978). Bauman (1993, 153) describes money as a means whose users are “guided in their expected and actual behavior solely by the shared consideration of quantity, rather than by inevitably unique, subject-bound qualitative values”. The producer and consumer were also becoming even more distant from one another. It was not only the shopkeeper who stood in the middle ground but now many of the people working in the shops were hired by the shopkeepers. Thus, the producer and consumer were separated by the shopkeeper and often by his employees as well.

Most importantly, shops had lined the streets of many European cities for decades before the opening of arcades, but never before had they all been united in one architectural setting. It is this enclosure that gave those consumption settings within the arcade a sense that they were part of a single enterprise; bonds and synergies of consumption interests emerged. It is also the enclosed nature of the arcades that protected shoppers from the unpredictability of nature. The arcades were the first places where gas lighting was used, thereby eliminating the (un)predictability of darkness¹² (Benjamin 1999). Thus, the process of rationalization was marching triumphantly forward for consumption settings.

¹² The arcades were actually the first locations for many other technological innovations as well as some of the first settings to make use of new materials such as steel (Benjamin 1999).

Specialty Store

The specialty store grew out of the increasing specialization and division of labor that was taking place in the early 19th century. Factories and their workers were becoming increasingly skilled and focused in the production of a single product or line of products (Ryans et. al. 1970). Consequently, consumption locations that also specialized in a single product or line of products seemed the natural extension.

Specialty stores began to emerge in the eastern United States during the eighteenth century (Ryans et. al. 1970). Early examples include bakeries, cobbler shops, and tobacco shops. Unlike the French arcades and other previous types of consumption settings, specialty stores did not market themselves as places where one could find a wide range of goods, but rather offered the greatest variety and abundance of a single type of good (Ryans et. al. 1970).

Specialty stores did not disappear with the advent of further innovations in consumption settings but rather remain today mainly in the form of superstores. “The distinguishing characteristic of a superstore is that it carries an extraordinary number and range of goods within a specific retail category” (Ritzer 2005, 15). Contemporary examples include Lowe’s (home improvement), Victoria’s Secret (lingerie), Bed, Bath & Beyond (bedding), and IKEA (home furnishings). These superstores, although they have their roots in the specialty store, are often blamed for being “category killers” and driving the earlier, smaller specialty stores out of business (Ritzer 2005). This trend of one consumption setting cannibalizing another is one that shows up again and again throughout the history of such settings. The constant drive towards bigger and better is the guarantee that all consumption settings will eventually themselves be outdone.

Chain Store & Franchising

The chain store can be defined as “one of a group of retail stores of essentially the same type having a common ownership and management with some degree of uniformity of operation” (Ryans et. al. 1970, 18). This definition leads to four basic characteristics of chain stores – “(1) central ownership, (2) central management, (3) similarity of stores, and (4) two or more units” (p 6). Many chain stores were started as the lower-class alternative to the more upscale arcades that had opened in the downtowns of many larger cities. The chain store aimed at the more general public and thus a democratization of the retail experience. By focusing on low costs, large volume, and rapid turnover, entrepreneurs in this genre were able to make profits rivaling and exceeding those of the more upscale consumption settings.

The first major example of a successful chain store is the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) began in 1859. A&P stores became common fixtures in many towns and by 1923 they were in operation in more than 10,000 locations (Satterthwaite 2001). Another early example of a highly successful chain store is the still well-known, though largely defunct, Woolworth’s. This chain was begun in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1879 and by 1919 was operating over 1,000 stores in several states (Ritzer 2005, 10; Satterthwaite 2001, 42). The company’s offices were housed in the Woolworth Building in New York City – which at one time was that city’s tallest skyscraper.

The “chain era”, or the greatest growth in this type of consumption setting, took place between 1918 and 1929 when the number of chain stores grew from 29,200 to 87,800 (Ryans et. al. 1970, 6). By 1947, chain stores “managed by out-of-town

corporations with the ability to undercut the locally operated store, had captured almost 40 percent of the country's retail trade" (Satterthwaite 2001, 41). Although the earliest examples of successful chain stores are no longer present on urban street corners, the chain store is alive and well. Today, the world's largest corporation and private employer – Wal-Mart¹³ – is an example of a chain store. Other well-known examples include CVS, Sears, Abercrombie & Fitch, Starbucks, and Kroger.

Closely related to the idea of a chain store is the franchise. Franchising is a system in which "one large firm...grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade name and processes to a number of smaller firms...franchise holders, although legally independent, must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company" (quoted in Ritzer 2004b, 39 from Dicke 1992, 2-3). Franchising began in the middle of the 19th Century and as of 2004 there are over 320,000 small franchised businesses in the United States doing over \$1 trillion in sales annually and employing more than 8 million people (International Franchising Association Website). This constitutes over 8% of businesses and almost half of all retail sales in the United States (Ritzer 2005, 10).

Ritzer (2004b) has taken particular interest in McDonalds as a successful model for franchising and the paradigm of a much larger process he terms McDonaldization. McDonaldization is defined as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (1). These principles include greater efficiency, calculability,

¹³ Wal-Mart is also an example of the type of consumption setting known as a discount store. Discount stores are not discussed in this analysis because although they represent an innovation in consumption settings, they do not necessarily entail a (r)evolution. For more on discount stores see Birkin et. al. 2002; Ritzer 2005; Ryans et. al. 1970; Satterthwaite 2001.

predictability, and control through nonhuman technologies. Ray Kroc, the mastermind behind McDonald's great success, "took the specific products and techniques of the McDonald brothers [the original founders of McDonalds] and combined them with the principles of other franchises (fast food and others), bureaucracies, scientific management, and the assembly line" (39). Hence, although Kroc added his own strong ambition and drive to the recipe, the principles he employed had been tried and tested independently of one another for some decades. "McDonald's and McDonaldization, then, do not represent something new but, rather, the culmination of a series of rationalization processes that had been occurring throughout the twentieth century" (39). In much the same way, the success of specialty stores and franchises do not represent something new, but rather, a parallel culmination in the design, implementation, marketing, and use of consumption settings.

Department Stores

The earliest department stores grew out of the idea of the general store¹⁴. The American general store was the most important consumption setting in that country during the early to mid 1800s. It was here that locals (a term sometimes encompassing people from many miles away) could come and purchase needed wares (Ryans et. al. 1970). It was also here that they could catch up on the latest news and see the latest merchandise for sale. The general store, however, was not enough to satisfy the growing hunger to consume felt by many consumers and larger and grander consumption settings emerged.

¹⁴ Some also argue that the forerunner to the department store was the *magasins de nouveautes*, literally fabric store (Williams 1982, Benjamin 1999). These were, "the first establishments to keep large stocks of merchandise on premises" (Benjamin 1999, 15).

Department stores represent a huge triumph of rationalization in consumption settings. “They were the first big, multi-floor stores, and were usually located in the busy centers of cities’ commercial districts, close to mass transit lines” (Zukin forthcoming). This new locale of consumption was distinct from previous forms in a variety of ways. Most notable among these was the division of goods into departments. Goods were organized by category and the store was run by departments more than as a unitary endeavor (Ryans et. al. 1970). Prices were also fixed universally and bartering now came to be seen as uncivilized. This was “a natural culmination in the evolution of shops and shopping” (Satterthwaite 2001, 29).

Although the great boom of department stores came between the 1870s and the 1920s, the first department store, the Bon Marche, opened in Paris in 1852 (Miller 1981; Williams 1982). The Bon Marche was the creation of Aristotle Boucicaut, who in an effort to complement Haussmann’s attempts at making Paris “into a grand and noble city”, sought to also turn Paris into a “pilot plant of mass consumption” (Satterthwaite 2001, 31). The Bon Marche represented the height of rationalization, at least at that time and in consumption, for a number of reasons including “its division into departments; its partitioning of Paris for the purposes of making deliveries; its files and statistics, records, and data; its telephone lines, sliding chutes, conveyor belts, and escalators; and its “blanc,” or great white sale” (Miller 1981, 71).

There were a number of technological advances that preceded the department store and facilitated its creation (downtown history website). The elevator, for example, stimulated the growth of taller buildings and hence the density of downtown populations (i.e. a local customer base). Escalators also added to the rationalized design of department

stores. “Escalators brought them [shoppers] up to less-traveled departments, giving them a view of merchandise on each floor as they passed by” (Zukin forthcoming, 6).

Improvements in gas lighting meant more reliable and more visible times and places that shopping could take place (Benjamin 1999). And general increases in transportation (trains, coaches) and communication (newspapers) meant the heightened accessibility and awareness of such locations.

Perhaps more important than the technological advances of the day were the social changes beginning to take place. An ethic of consumptionism was taking hold, especially in American society where shopping was increasingly seen as a duty and a means of celebrating the economic success of the country (downtown history website). The term “consumptionism” was coined by Samuel Strauss, a journalist and political philosopher, in 1925. “Consumptionism involved a commitment to produce (and consume) more things from one year to the next. All other values were subordinated to emphasize one’s standard of living” (Ritzer 2005, 31). The widening range and availability of consumer goods appealed to a vast audience of consumers hungry for the latest round of merchandise offered for sale. The department store particularly catered to the emerging middle class by adding “style – and much needed respectability – to shopping” (Satterthwaite 2001, 29).

In addition to the emerging buying power of the middle class, the most important social change fueling the department store (and arguably being inversely fueled by it) was the growing power and liberty of women. “The changing role of women, brought about by their increased leisure, money, freedom of movement, and interest in fashion and style as a direct product of the rising middle class, fueled many changes in retailing,

of which the department store is one of the most important” (Satterthwaite 2001, 29). Middle-class women in particular were becoming status symbols of their husbands’ success and wealth (Cohen 2003; Veblen 1899/1994). Eager for independence, however, these women sought refuge in retail. “While women pressed for greater independence and the right to vote, department stores offered them a safe public space that they could use without being accompanied by men” (Zukin forthcoming).

The French department store represented a break with earlier forms of consumption settings in that it was one of the first to have to combat the disenchantment resulting from its high levels of rationalization (Ritzer 2005; Weber 1998). These stores borrowed “theatrical techniques” to lure and seduce the shopper (Zukin forthcoming). They sought to create what Rosalind Williams (1982) has called “dream worlds”, or environments that sought to entice customers with dream-like images and promises of a better reality. This attempt at re-enchantment has itself become rationalized (discussed below), but its effects at the time were enough to make department stores leading centers of not only commercial, but also social and sometimes political life as well.

In a parallel argument, Baudrillard (1970, 27) argues that it is the French drugstore, and not the department store that is most emblematic of the emerging new consumption settings.

The drugstore (or the new shopping centre) achieves a synthesis of consumer activities, not the least of which are shopping, flirting with objects, playful wandering and all the permutational possibilities of these. In this respect, the drugstore is more representative of modern consumption than the department stores. There, the quantitative centralization of the products leaves less margin for ludic exploration, the arrangement of departments and products imposing a more utilitarian path on the consumer.

Regardless of whether it is exemplified by the department store, or the French drugstore, it is clear that the days of markets and simple shops was quickly falling victim to the steam engine of increasingly complex and rationalized consumption settings.

Regional Shopping Centers

Two of the most important historical factors leading to the development of the shopping centers were the growth of early suburbs and the advent of automobile travel (Satterthwaite 2001). The growth of cities had eventually led to the budding of new residential areas outside of the city – suburbs (more on this below). The residents living there often did not want to travel to the downtown in order to enjoy the bliss of consumption. Suburbanization, combined with the rising availability and use of automobiles, stimulated the growth of consumption settings in the areas outside of cities and led to the birth of the regional shopping center (Longstreth 1997).

Porterfield and Hall Jr. (1995, 128-29) identify a typology of shopping centers consisting of three general types: neighborhood centers, community centers, and regional centers. They also list a series of elements which are common to all shopping centers.

This list includes:

- “unified architectural design and treatment
- unified site either under single ownership or a development group
- possess on-site parking for customers and are designed to be accessed primarily by automobile
- to a greater or lesser degree all have pleasant surroundings, are generally safe in design, and contain some protection from the weather for the customer
- all depend on automobile access for their success
- most provide a single land use opportunity – retail” (128-129)

While this list is incomplete it does give some insight into the defining characteristics of the shopping center.

A more detailed look at the individual types of shopping centers will yield further insight into their evolution in terms of size and trade area¹⁵. Neighborhood centers are “small centers designed to meet the day-to-day or immediate needs of a limited residential trade area of 2500 to 40,000 people” (126). They average is 50,000 square feet but can range up to 100,000 square feet and normally require 3 to 10 acres of land. Community centers “contain all the services offered by a neighborhood center, plus a junior department store, discount store, and usually several more out-parcels than the smaller neighborhood centers” (127). These centers can contain up to 300,000 square feet of gross leasable area (GLA) covering up to 30 acres and serving a trade area of up to 150,000 people. Regional centers contain “a full complement of goods and services...and include full-line department stores as major anchors” (127). They can contain up to 1,000,000 square feet of GLA on 50 or more acres and servicing a trade area of over 150,000 people within 10-15 miles of the site (128).

According to the National Register of Historic Places, the first planned outdoor shopping center in the United States was Market Square. Market Square was built by Arthur Aldis in the well-to-do Chicago suburb of Lake Forest in 1916. Richard Longstreth (1997, 152) notes the importance of the vehicle in the formation of this early shopping center – “The automobile was a central factor in this planning, since most Lake

¹⁵ Goldstucker et. al. (1978) argue that there are 7 main factors which affect the size of a retail trading area – 1) existing competitive alignment, 2) population density - city size, 3) accessibility (travel time and type), 4) income, 5) image of the facility (advertising, type of goods, price, quality perception, etc.), 6) location (physical condition, compatibility, traffic flow, synergy with nearby), and 7) attraction/resistance factors where attraction is the availability of merchandise, price advertising, “specials”, physical comforts, parking and resistance is traffic friction.

Foresters had cars at an early date. Market Square was perhaps the first business district to be laid out specifically to accommodate motor vehicles”.

The first regional shopping center, Country Club Plaza, was opened by J.C. Nichols in 1924 in the outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri (McGoldrick and Thompson 1992). This was the first consumption setting built according to a unified plan and operated by a single owner. It was also Nichols who would make the term “shopping center” popular to describe commercial environments built to cater to the automobile (evolution website). Country Club Plaza was built as the centerpiece to the Country Club residential development also undertaken by Nichols who sought to use consumption settings to enliven community¹⁶. Victor Gruen (to be discussed more below) describes shopping centers as providing “an environmental climate and atmosphere which in itself becomes an attraction for the inhabitants of a region;...they could become shopping towns” (cited in Satterthwaite 2001, 48). Indeed, it was the hope of Nichols, Gruen, and others that consumption settings would be attractors to and of the growing suburban community population.¹⁷

¹⁶ Although this concept is similar to Easton there are a number of differences – Easton is larger and relies more heavily on its status as a destination and tourist attraction to draw consumers than did Country Club Plaza; Easton was designed primarily as a consumption setting to which residences were later added whereas Country Club Plaza was built to meet the needs of existing residents; and Easton attempts in its entirety to resemble a community while Country Club Plaza attempts to function as a part of a community.

¹⁷ It is worth mentioning since the focus of this paper is Easton Town Center that in 1928, just four years after the opening of Country Club Plaza, Don M. Casto opened the Bank Black Building in the Columbus, Ohio suburb of Grandview Heights. It was “a then new linear suburban commercial strip that attempted to accommodate the automobile” (Hunker 2000, 86).

Suburbanization¹⁸

Suburbia has been called an “increasingly ubiquitous physical, social, and cultural space that lies in that middle landscape between urban and rural life [and] is the dominant American icon of lived space” (Rees 2003, 93). The suburbs began developing at nearly the same time as urban centers but have since outgrown their urban cores. There are two key moments in the history of the suburbs that mark their dynamic growth – the end of World War II and the construction of Levittown, New York.

It was largely after the end of World War II that the population began moving in droves to suburbia and by the early 1970’s more than half of all Americans lived in the suburbs (McGoldrick and Thompson 1992). A large part of this drive was the postwar desire for private home ownership, but a larger ethic was also increasingly coming to dominate the American mindset – consumerism. According to Daniel Bell (1976, 70) “The culture was no longer concerned with how to work, and achieve, but with how to spend and enjoy....by the 1950s American culture had become primarily hedonistic, concerned with play, fun, display, and pleasure”. The long years of despair and destitution brought on by the Depression and World War II were now alleviated with the postwar economic boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Lizabeth Cohen (2003, 195) notes that the link between “mass consumption and suburbanization was broadly recognized in postwar American society, as suburbia became the distinctive residential

¹⁸ Another important trend that was occurring in the post World War II era was the feminization of consumption (Cohen 2003). Given the interest on settings, however, suburbanization will be the focus of this research. For more on how feminization impacted these settings and consumption in general, see Cohen 2003. Baudrillard (1998, 98) also argues that “what we are seeing very generally today is the extension of the feminine model to the whole field of consumption”.

landscape of the Consumers' Republic, that commitment to rebuild the American economy and society after World War II around the mass consumer market".

The early to mid 1940's saw the United States with a serious housing shortage at a time when "the center of Americans' vision of postwar prosperity was the private home" (Cohen 2003, 73). The solution came through the construction of mass suburban developments where home ownership was becoming increasingly available. Abraham Levitt and Sons pioneered the pinnacle of rationalized suburban construction with their Levittown, New York development built in 1946. "As the single largest housing development ever undertaken in U.S. history, Levittown is the standard model for American suburban housing" (Pardee forthcoming). This development consisted of 17,400 detached single-family homes built on 4,000 acres on Long Island, New York. It was achieved by employing the highest levels of Taylorist rationalization and Fordist mass production principles so that the company was able to build more houses, faster, and cheaper than any of its competitors (Gans 1967).

Other influences also helped shape the growth of consumption settings in the suburbs. Advertising became increasingly advanced and important in drawing potential customers out of their homes and into the shopping centers (Satterthwaite 2001). The federal highway program brought to fruition under Eisenhower in the early 1950s spurred enormous highway construction efforts making transportation to and from suburban shopping centers easier (Cohen 2003). And, of course, the increasing rates of automobile ownership and the pleasure derived from driving them led many to out-of-town shopping (Longstreth 1997).

Lizabeth Cohen (2000) argues that with the growing size and wealth found in American suburbs in the post World War II period there was a shift from town centers to shopping centers. She notes that although between 1947 and 1953 the suburbs grew at a rate of 43% compared to a general population increase of just 11%, few of the new suburban home developers were concerned with meeting the commercial needs of the burgeoning suburban population. Those who did extend commercial locales into the suburbs did so in the form of “strips” that were easily accessible by the favorite mode of transportation – the automobile. The mid 1950’s, however, saw an important shift in the ways in which shopping centers were constructed. Now, for the first time, there was also an emphasis on providing a place of community for shoppers, another aspect of downtown life that was often lost in the massive suburban sprawl. These regional shopping centers were intended to meet both the consumption and the community needs of their guests. Thus, Cohen concludes, “Here was the “new city” of the postwar era, a vision of how community space should be constructed in an economy and society built on mass consumption” (247).

The shift from downtown to suburban shopping centers had three major effects on the postwar American community. First, by making public space more commercial, it brought a more integrated market segment into community life. In other words, an increasing number of civic activities were taking place in the context of mass-consumption centers. Victor Gruen, one of the most well-respected developers of shopping centers, referred to these locations as “crystallization points for suburbia’s community life” (248).

The second effect of the suburban shift was the privatization of public space meaning that the rights and wishes of private property owners came to hold greater weight than those of traditional community forums. One of the goals of owners and developers of these locations was to exclude all those who had previously been a problem in the downtown shopping districts – prostitutes, homeless, minorities, and the underclass. Thus, the creation of public spaces located in privately owned shopping centers meant “constructing community experiences around the cultural tastes of white middle-class suburbanites” (254).

The third effect of this shift was a general feminization of public space as women gained a greater foothold in the suburban landscape and enjoyed increased power and control in the realm of consumption. Since women were the primary shoppers, shopping centers were planned, designed and marketed to a primarily female audience. Even parking spaces were purposefully made larger to make it easier to park and thus accommodate women – many of whom were new drivers. The widespread use of the credit card by the late 1950’s and early 1960’s (Manning 2001; Ritzer 1995) also gave women increasing control as they were now in charge of not only present, but also future, family finances.

Overall, the growth of the suburbs and regional shopping centers meant an end to many of the traditional joys and woes associated with the downtown shopping experience. The resulting segmentation of the population and tightened control over “public” civic activities held at these private centers also represented a shift in the way community and public space was thought about more generally. This new type of landscape quenched the thirsts of many while leaving others to starve in the dust of the

dying urban centers. Cohen concludes that, “the landscape of mass consumption created a metropolitan society in which people were no longer brought together in central marketplaces and the parks, streets, and public buildings that surrounded them but, rather, were separated by class, gender, and race in differentiated commercial sub-centers” (260).

It turned out that the more traditional urban downtown had some merits after all. But now people, jobs, and businesses were already moving to the suburbs and a return to downtown seemed unthinkable, especially to the big businesses that were profiting so heavily from the waves of inhabitants flocking to the suburbs. In the early years following the end of World War II, shopping centers began to spring up wherever suburbs began to take hold (Sternlieb and Hughes 1981). These settings soon began to lead residential centers in their growth in the suburbs. In other words, the classic trend of shopping following residents had been reversed and during the 1960s residents began to follow retail (Muller 1981). Shopping, and not religion, seemed to be becoming the new opiate of the masses.

Era of Consumption

The Era of Consumption – the time of mass consumption - began at the end of World War II and ran through the advent of the 21st Century. Victor Gruen, Ray Kroc, Sam Walton, and Walt Disney are but a few of the more notable names of this period. Having made great strides in the rationalization of production, capitalism now turned its gaze increasingly toward the consumer for ways to increase profitability (Ritzer 2004b);

for ways to produce the consumer. Consumption settings began to outweigh production settings, at least in the United States, in terms of importance, visibility, and increasingly employment and time spent. The drive to consume and the places in which one could consume became increasingly ubiquitous.

It was during this era that consumption truly came to lead housing developments. Examples include Orlando, Florida and Disneyworld, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and Dollywood, Branson, Missouri and country music, and Las Vegas, Nevada, and the Strip. All of these towns rely for their livelihood heavily, if not entirely, on the consumption settings that are situated in them (Ritzer 2005). Consumption settings increasingly came to be located either in the suburbs outside of central cities with declining downtowns or to dominate the central city itself such as in Branson, Las Vegas, and Pigeon Forge (Hunker 2000). In both instances, they continued their growth in size and number.

Another important shift occurring at this time was the implosion of entertainment into the world of retail (Bryman 2004). Consumption settings were no longer simply places to purchase goods and services, but also places to find a good restaurant, take in a movie, or even play a round of miniature golf or ride a roller coaster (Ritzer 2005). And it was not just entertainment but a whole variety of services that had now become part of the central consumption setting. One can get their pet groomed, have their teeth checked, get a haircut, watch the latest Hollywood blockbuster, buy a new GAP sweater, and have laser eye surgery all while the kids are entertained at the malls' daycare center or video arcade.

Consumption of an increasing number of goods, especially those not directly related to day-to-day survival, also trickled further down the social ladder during this

time and were now available to much of the developed world. Even less financially well-to-do people in the United States frequently have cable television, a home computer, Nike sneakers, and one, or often many, credit cards. Few had been left outside the reach of consumption settings and fewer still were unable to access their glorious offerings. Consumption had become increasingly democratized (at least in the developing world and among the wealthy in the developing world) and, more importantly, legitimized.

Malls

The word “mall” originated from the name of the British game “pall-mall”. Pall-mall is similar to croquet using a mallet to hit a ball down an open fairway – known as a “mall” (Kowinski 1985). The first consumption setting to use this term was Northgate opened near Seattle in 1947 (Ritzer 2005). Northgate consisted of a Bon Marche department store (though one different from the original in Paris) and 800,000 square feet of shops located along a central corridor – or mall (history.net). The most common definition of “mall” today is actually that of a shopping mall, or “a large, often enclosed shopping complex containing various stores, businesses, and restaurants usually accessible by common passageways” (dictionary.com).

There are nearly 1,200 regionally enclosed malls in the United States today¹⁹ (Underhill 2004). More than 200 million people visit a mall in an average month and more than 10 million, or 8% of the non-farm workers are employed there (Ritzer 2005). In 2004, malls accounted for 14% of U.S. retailing, excluding car and gasoline sales, and

¹⁹ Much of the discussion from this point onward will focus on the United States and North America. It is here where consumption has made its most dazzling innovations in recent decades (Birkin et. al. 2002; Kowinski 1985; McGoldrick and Thompson 1992; Satterthwaite 2001; Underhill 2004).

over \$300 billion in annual sales (Underhill 2004). The United States has even been described as “the world’s biggest shopping mall” (Fisher 1997).

One of the most important names in the early history of shopping malls is Victor Gruen. Gruen, an Austrian-born architect who came to the United States in 1938, was known for both his passion and his creativity. In 1954, he was commissioned to build Northland, what was then the world’s largest shopping center at just under 1.2 million square feet. Northland, just outside Detroit, was particularly innovative in that it located stores on two levels, a heretofore unheard of move in shopping center design. The success of this risky venture, however, quickly changed conventional designer wisdom about the willingness of customers to traverse two levels (Kowinski 1985).

Gruen made perhaps his most important innovation with the Southdale Center Mall, opened in Edina, Minnesota on October 8, 1956. Southdale was the world’s first fully enclosed shopping mall (Ritzer 2005). Again, this defied the conventional wisdom that it was more expensive to build enclosed malls. In fact, it turned out to be more cost-effective to owners in terms of construction and more profitable to them in terms of revenue (Kowinski 1985). This fully enclosed model quickly became the standard by which malls proliferated all across the country, and the world. Especially during the period of the 1960’s to the 1980’s the “mall of America” took place at incredible speeds (Kowinski 1985). It seemed that the latest form of consumption setting was, thus far, its most successful.

Or was it? Malls became so ubiquitous and so frequented, that they seem to have enjoyed their heyday in the early 1980s and have been on a downward spiral since that time (Ritzer 2005). Visits to the mall have declined by 50% since that time and as many

as 140 regional malls have been termed “dying” (meaning their sales per square foot have dropped below \$150, or 1/3 that of a successful mall) and 250 more are thought to be headed in that direction (Max 2003). Some experts even claim we are moving into a “postmall world” (Underhill 2004).

But not to fear – shopping malls and consumption settings will not be put to death without a fight. Three strategies, in particular (although there are many more), have been undertaken by the mall in order to keep itself alive and well – the creation of outlet malls, supercenters, and mega-malls.

Outlets were originally connected to the mills of New England fabric companies (Ritzer 2005). Outlet malls are a particular type of mall that specialize in discounted, often “post vogue” merchandise at cheaper prices. The first outlet mall opened in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1970. Today, outlet malls account for \$18 billion in annual sales and have become top tourist attractions and weekend destinations all across the country. However, like their doppelganger, the traditional mall, outlet malls have seen a decrease in numbers – from over 350 in the mid-1990’s to 265 in 2003 (Ritzer 2005).

Supercenters are large merchandising establishments that sell a mixture of traditional merchandise, food, and other non-perishable goods. They took hold most successfully in the United States in the mid-1990’s and can be seen as “just one more example of the trend towards ever larger format retailing” (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 82). The most important of these is the Wal-Mart Supercenter, the first of which opened in 1988. Wal-Mart, the world’s largest corporation and private employer, operates over 1,093 Wal-Mart Supercenters in addition to their 503 Sam’s Club, a large discount warehouse (Wal-Mart website). Other examples of large supercenters include those

operated by Target and Meijer. Even these supercenters, however, face difficulties. Given their large size, typically over 190,000 square feet, they are difficult to operate very far from a major urban center and also face difficulty in obtaining zoning permission in many markets (Wrigley and Lowe 2002). The latest, as yet undeveloped, trend is towards “small marts” or neighborhood centers capable of infiltrating even the smallest centers of population.

The third adaptation of the mall in a postmall world is the advent of the mega-mall. This type is so telling, however, that it deserves its own section as it marks the next major step in the evolution of consumption settings.

Mega-malls

Mega-malls are intemperate versions of even the most extravagant of malls, truly “the apotheosis of the mall” (Goss 1999). These settings use increasingly fantastic displays and spectacle to draw customers and tourists alike (Ritzer 2005). Their market range extends far beyond the confines of their local geography as they set out to become destinations in their own right. The Mall of America, for example, is the number one tourist attraction in the United States drawing over 40 million visitors a year – more than Disneyland, Graceland, and the Grand Canyon combined (Underhill 2004). The largest tourist attraction in Canada is similarly the West Edmonton Mall (WEM website). And, one of Washington D.C.’s top tourist spots is the nearby outlet mall, Potomac Mills, which, in 1995, drew over 4.5 million visitors – more than Arlington National Cemetery, Colonial Williamsburg, or Mount Vernon (Ritzer 2005).

One thing that all mega-malls have in common is their incorporation of entertainment. This form of “hybrid consumption” is employed to entice people to stay and shop longer (Bryman 2004). If people are drawn to the consumption setting by entertainment, or remain there because of entertainment, then they are more likely to purchase something as well (Ritzer 2005). The longer people stay in consumption settings, the more likely they are to let loose of their dollars. Hence, mega-malls, in order to compensate for the decline and increasing “boredom” felt at many traditional malls, incorporate an entertainment aspect to lure and hold customers.

A closer look at two of the most notable examples of mega-malls – West Edmonton Mall and Mall of America - will help illustrate this case.

West Edmonton Mall (WEM) “is the world’s largest and probably best known shopping centre development” (McGoldrick and Thompson 1992). WEM is situated on 110 acres, the equivalent of 48 city blocks, just outside of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. It opened in 1981 and contains over 5.3 million square feet of space, employs 18,000 people, contains nearly one-quarter of the total retail space in Edmonton, has 58 entrances, and is open 365 days a year, even Christmas and New Year’s (Hopkins 1990). The mall is home to over 800 stores and services, 110 eating establishments, two auto showrooms, the world’s largest parking lot with over 20,000 parking stalls, a seven-acre indoor waterpark, a professional size skating rink, an 18-hole miniature golf course, a 360 room “Fantasyland” hotel featuring themed suites, a scaled replica of Columbus’s Santa Maria, 26 movie theatres, and the world’s largest indoor amusement park featuring over 25 rides and attractions. It has been described as “the only mall of its kind - both a

shopper's dream and a world of excitement and adventure” and the "8th Wonder of the World" (WEM website).

The Mall of America (MOA) is the number one tourist destination in the United States. It even has its own tourism department and six MOA giftshops. It represents “the clever combination of a retail and a tourist destination” (Wrigley and Lowe 2002, 180). MOA opened in 1992 in Bloomington, Minnesota, on the 78 acres of land formerly occupied by the historic Met Stadium and not many miles from the site of another innovator in retail, Southdale. With over 4.2 million square feet of space, it is home to more than 500 stores, an indoor aquarium, Underwater World, the Lego Imagination Center, an 18-hole miniature golf course, and a seven-acre theme park - Knott’s Camp Snoopy - with over 25 rides. The Mall as MOA is often called for short (much like New York City is often called simply “the City”), has been visited by over 100 million people, 30,000 organized tour groups, and even hosted more than 2,600 weddings in the Chapel of Love, “the nation’s first wedding chapel/retail store”²⁰. Developed by the Ghermezian Brothers, the same designers of WEM, it employs more than 12,000 people and has parking spots for over 15,000 vehicles. “Mall of America has simply changed the way we shop. It has become the model for combining signature attractions with retail to create an outstanding entertainment venue” (MOA website).

The 21st Century

The beginning of the 21st century is a wonderful time to be a consumption setting. In fact, rapid advances in communication and transportation have made consumption

²⁰ Ironically, 11 states just saw the passage of laws banning recognition of same-sex marriage in order to protect the “sanctity” of marriage. 40 states, including Minnesota, now have such laws.

possible in nearly every setting. In the United States in 2001, 58% of the population had a home computer, 99% had color television sets, and 75% had cable television service (Time Almanac 2000). Travel is becoming more of a pastime than a luxury. Many Westerners have been on a plane and many more have ventured beyond their immediate geography via some engine-driven form of transportation.

Another phenomenon arguably of increasing importance in recent, and more especially in coming, years is globalization²¹ (Ritzer 2004a; Ritzer and Ryan 2003; Sklair 2001; Appadurai 1996). Globalization can be defined as “the worldwide diffusion of practices, expansion of relations across continents, organizations of social life on a global scale, and growth of a shared global consciousness” (Lechner 2004). Consumption settings and their associated mentality are now being exported around the globe, largely from their frequent birthplace – the United States (Sklair 2001). For example, the Mills Corporation has recently opened outlet malls in Spain and companies such as Coca-Cola and Nike have been active on a worldwide level for decades. Some scholars even argue that it is the capitalist class created through business and consumption that has replaced the state as the ruling body of the world (Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001)

Era of Ubiquitous Consumption

We are presently in the early stages of what I call the “Era of Ubiquitous Consumption” which began at the end of the last century and whose end is unknown. I call it the era of “ubiquitous” consumption because its demise will likely come about only

²¹ Some scholars, such as Roland Robertson (2001), would argue that globalization is not something new in itself but rather is new only as a topic of serious inquiry for the social sciences.

through a radical change in social mentality and the end of the dominance of consumption in general – an emptying of the meaning and worlds of consumption. This Era is just beginning to see notable figures emerge as its heroes – Bill Gates, Leslie Wexner, and Yaromir Steiner are but a few who have potential legendary status.

This era of ubiquitous consumption is marked by an increased vertical integration of consumption settings and their associated consumer mentality²². In other words, these settings and their associated consumer mentality have become commonplace in an increasing number of aspects of our daily lives. Consumption has become the dominant mode of thought and practice for many in the West (Baudrillard 1970; Bauman 2000; Cohen 2003; Ritzer 2004a; Schor 1998). We go to work in order to make enough money to consume an increasing number of goods, vacations, services, and entertainment (Schor 1998). We spend our weekends and holidays at the malls and mega-malls surrounding us instead of at the historical and cultural centers increasingly removed from our vacation agendas (Ritzer 2005). We throw ourselves into debt in order to buy, buy, buy and then buy again (Manning 2001; Ritzer 1995; Schor 1998). Consumption has become not just *a* way of life but rather *the* way of life.

This era is likely to see an increasing number of people, dissatisfied with living any distance at all from a consumption setting, literally moving into such settings. No longer content to be next door or within a short drive of the nearest place to consume, they will begin moving directly into these settings. Although the previous era was marked by towns which came to be dominated by consumption settings (Branson, Pigeon Forge, Las Vegas), in this era it is consumption settings that will actually be towns.

²² For more on the “mental evolution” of consumer society, see Williams 1982.

There will, of course, remain those locations where people are not actually living in the shopping mall, but even then consumption has already infiltrated much of their lives. Our homes are now also consumption settings in their own right (Ritzer 2004b). Surrounded by advertisements and opportunities to consume via the television, telephone, cell phones, and the internet, there is no longer any bastion of non-consumption to which we can safely retreat. Not even time will afford us sanctity as 24/7 has become the standard operating hours of consumption settings on the internet and beyond (Ritzer and Ryan 2004). We no longer consume to live, but rather we live to consume.

Easton

Easton Town Center has already been described in some detail in the first chapter. There are, however, more specific characteristics of Easton that make it the Promethean paradigm of a new epoch in the history of consumption settings. For example, people are now making their homes here; implosion has extended to include all facets of life, not just entertainment; simulation of an idealized small town conceals the fact that that type of lifestyle may have never existed; and the thirst for consumption is still seeking to drink the blood of social life itself. Hunker (2000, 97) has suggested that with the appearance of Easton, “a new era of shopping is about to begin in Columbus”. In fact, this “new era” will be about more than shopping and extend far beyond Columbus.

First we must ask what it is about Easton that makes it sufficiently unique to draw customers from other retail outlets in the already saturated Columbus market. Why is it any different than the approximately 1,200 existing regionally enclosed malls already in existence in the United States? Steiner asserts it is because Easton is the paradigm of

what he believes are the “three fundamental trends that developers must respond to today” (Palmieri 2003). These three trends are 1) shoppers desire for a pleasing and well-designed center, 2) increasing the availability and visibility of the leisure-time use facility promoting a more social atmosphere, and 3) the increasing importance given to branded retailers, those retail facilities that are immediately recognizable and desirable because of their brand name or image (Palmieri 2003).

The issue of intent in design is a critical one in distinguishing Easton. Wexner had planning and design at the top of his list when he first approached partners to undertake the project. “I spend so much time in cars visiting cities and shopping centers all over the country, and you see this endless amount of just really poorly planned, not-integrated-into-a-community kinds of development, and you say ‘It shouldn’t have to be this way’” (Blackford 1995). Steiner agreed noting that “You can’t just put up a Sears and a J.C. Penney and expect people to come. You have to do quality projects because today’s shopper wants a pleasant, well-designed center” (Palmieri 2003, 46).

The incorporation of leisure-time activities is another trend Steiner believes is shaping the future of retail²³. This is evidenced by the growing number of “leisure-time centers” that have popped up all over the country in recent years (Shopping Center World 2003). The presence of tenants such as Aveda, GameWorks, Shadowbox Cabaret, and several bars proves that people are coming to Easton to do a lot more than just shop. In fact, Steiner has estimated that 50 percent of all those who visit Easton are there to do something other than shop (Palmieri 2003, 46). Clearly the synergy of leisure and retail activities has proven successful for the burgeoning retail center.

²³ The definition of leisure here is a common sense one – one that stands in opposition to work. Baudrillard (1998, 155), however, would argue that leisure is, in fact, “the very ideology of alienated labour”.

The third trend outlined by Steiner is the strength of brands in drawing visitors. Unlike most traditional malls that rely most heavily on anchor stores, Easton relies more on heavily branded tenants such as Abercrombie & Fitch, the Gap, and Banana Republic to attract visitors²⁴. This is unlike most malls in that their “anchor” is not a large



department store, but a series of smaller retail settings that sell largely one brand or product. The lack of large department store anchors looming over other shops is a big part of helping Easton feel more like a small town. Further, Easton itself is coming to develop a “brand” of its own. Features such as a guardrail made of the word “Easton” and pop machines stating “Drink Pepsi-Cola at Easton” have helped create a material sense of an Easton brand. There is even an Easton brand color – navy blue (supposedly chosen because it is Wexner’s favorite (Beaton 2004)) – that is associated with the town.

In addition to the three trends outlined by Steiner, Easton also creates a kind of *spectacle* to attract consumers and residents. Debord (1995,12) states that “the spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification”. The “spectacle” at Easton is created through the implosion of a diversity of previously discrete social and cultural forms, the manipulation of time and space, and simulation. While other consumption settings, most notably mega-malls, have also attracted consumers through the implosion of various elements, the difference at Easton is that it

²⁴ Although many traditional malls are now moving in this direction, Easton still remains a notable exception as a consumption setting that began without the need of anchor stores.

extends far beyond leisure-time activities. The 12 million square foot complex also includes residential, office, and hotel space, which are rarely included in other settings. Thus, the limits of implosion are greatly extended at Easton.

The manipulation of space is another distinguishing feature of Easton. Easton seeks to simulate a small town environment and also draws on the outdoors to create the primary basis of its appeal²⁵. This is nothing new. “Designers bring the outdoors inside, unite it under a common theme, and thereby generate great energy and attachment to the space” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). Kozinets et. al (2002), identify “landscape” themes as one of four principle techniques employed by branded retailers to attract customers. Some examples include Bass Pro Shops, which feature indoor stocked fishing pools, and REI (Recreational Equipment Incorporated) outlets, which feature artificial rock-climbing walls. Ritzer et. al. (2005) state:

Similarly, large malls such as the Mall of America simulate urban settings using park benches, stylized hand-railings, and urban facades. West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton Canada features a replica of Bourbon Street, New Orleans (including statues of street prostitutes and revelers), as well as an upscale shopping area, Europa Boulevard, modeled after European fashion districts. In these instances, the spectacle resides in the hyperreal quality of the interior landscapes.

Easton is distinctly different, however, in that there, the artificially imposed limits of indoor spectacle are overcome as the indoor environments co-exist with the surrounding countryside and overhead sky. In fact, the former relies on the latter to give it more of a small-town feel.

In this respect, another of the things that is distinctive about Easton is that, although its enormous size attracts consumers, it more importantly seeks to underwhelm

²⁵ While it might seem that the rather unfriendly Ohio winters would decrease revenue or attendance during the winter months, Howell (interview) claims that Easton is “no less active in winter”.

rather than overwhelm the visitor. The goal is to make the space seem manageable, alluring, and as it would have been in the 1950's American small town. To this end, the streets are short and easy to walk (thus, like other lifestyle centers, it has "walkability" [Barbaro 2003]), encouraging pedestrian, as opposed to vehicular, mobility. The building heights are also limited to two stories (with the exception of the central Easton Station) and the store ceiling heights are restricted to around 13 feet. "Cobblestone brick streets, stylized lighting and telephone booths combine with many other carefully planned architectural elements to create a 'sense of place' -- the feeling that this is a distinct, memorable environment" (Steiner Website, Easton photo tour). The big box stores (e.g. Target, Wal-Mart, Best Buy), drive-thru fast-food restaurants, and large parking lots are all relegated to the edges of the development so as not to disrupt the small town simulation. Time is also a victim of Easton. The simulation created at Easton seeks to tap into the American collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Zerubavel, 1996) of small-town life. It serves as a further example of what Baudrillard (1970, 99) refers to as cultural consumption, "the time and place of the caricatural resurrection, the parodic evocation of what already no longer exists – of what is not so much 'consumed' as 'consummated'". The particular manipulation of time in order to create a desired social experience is something that has been practiced by marketers for



many years. Many consumption settings, for example, Disneyworld have drawn on the theme of Main-street USA to evoke “the ideology of pedestrian, city life”

(Gottdiener, 1998: 40). Even Wal-Mart has attempted to overcome its image as a company that destroys

communities by drawing on the idea of an American mainstreet organization (Arnold et. al. 2001). Despite *Above: The only clock in Easton at the top of Easton Station.* their best efforts, most of these attempts to recreate a simulated Main-street environment fail. “In the Mall of America, Main Street USA is indoors, and a shopping destination at a clear distance from everyday life. And in the case of Wal-Mart, the main-street USA image is a semiotic achievement, not embodied in a geographic main street” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). Easton, however, triumphs over these previous consumption settings in this regard as well. It is able to offer visitors a real three-dimensional experience of a main-street and surrounding town environment. Further, it is able to offer potential residents the possibility of actually living in this falsified nostalgic setting. In this regard, Easton is distinct from previous consumption settings in that it seeks to be a *spectacular reality* rather than a *spectacled hyperreality*. In other words, it attempts to create an everyday reality, albeit one full of spectacle, rather than a spectacle so grand it appears as more real than reality itself. While previous consumption settings have, for many, made the

spectacular become the mundane experience of everyday life, Easton has made the mundane experience of everyday life become spectacular.

Perhaps the most important distinction at Easton is its incorporation of residents into its design. Whereas previous consumption settings relied on simulation, implosion, and grand scale to lure consumers (Ritzer 2005), Easton relies on the concealment of these aspects to also lure residents. It not only seeks to offer an experience separate from the realities of everyday life, it also offers residents the chance to make that experience their everyday life. This is aligned with what Sandikci and Holt (1998) have referred to as the “commodification of the social” (334). They believe that this technique, one which seeks to turn even social experiences into commodities, will be one that increasing numbers of retail environments will factor into their



Left: Easton Commons in the distance right across the street from the South District. Right: Easton Commons.

designs. Easton also seeks to make a commodity of everyday living - one akin to an era gone by whose existence itself is questionable. Thus, many of the retailers throughout Easton use nostalgic appeal to promote a commodified social experience. For example,

“the McDonald’s built its restaurant in the style of its 1950s hamburger joints, and there is also an old-time ice cream shop” (Mander 2001) The retailers, entertainment venues, and even “public spaces” offered throughout Easton commodify the social experience of a particular theme - nostalgia for the perceived American small town of the 1950’s²⁶.

All of this points to the fact that Easton represents the denouement of the history of consumption setting. Simultaneously, it has led to the promotion of a more fully integrated consumption mentality. Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 73-4) has stated that, “the code in which our ‘life-policy’ is scripted is derived from the pragmatics of shopping”. Those living at Easton cannot escape the confines of consumption. Consumption is no longer content to be an activity of questionable social worth and confined to restricted time and space as it was in the earliest days of bartering, nor to be held to the downtown urban centers and available only to the middle and upper class as it was during the era of production, nor even to be available to everyone and leading residential areas out beyond the cities limits as it was during the last half century. The unquenchable aspirations of consumption have made yet another advance – they have sought to commodify life itself.

The Settings of Consumption: Cathedrals, Landscapes, and Communities

This section will trace the history of consumption settings by drawing largely on the work of George Ritzer. Ritzer has done much to theorize the (r)evolution of consumption settings through his work on McDonaldization (2004b), the means of

²⁶ The specific time period of the attempted recreation is important. It is not a contemporary small town that Easton wishes to simulate (Baudrillard 1983). In fact, the lived reality of many of the visitors to Easton is that of one of the many neighboring small towns. Instead, Easton strives to recreate a town from a particular time period – the 1950s – and fill it with the most contemporary alternatives for hyperconsumption.

consumption (2005), and most recently *nothing and something* (2004a). I will draw especially from his notions of “cathedrals of consumption” and “landscapes of consumption” to theorize a new consumption geography – a *community of consumption*. Thus, while the previous section argued that consumption settings have evolved from ancient times to a modern attempt at ubiquitous vertical integration (as explained earlier) with social life, this section will make the same case using a different strategy – that consumption settings have evolved from cathedrals (places to visit on special occasions) to communities (places in which we make our homes). Each argument can be used as a supplement of the other. Both point to the same conclusion – consumption settings are achieving a full vertical integration of our daily lives.

Cathedrals of Consumption

Ritzer (2005) critiqued the traditional Marxian definition of the means of consumption to develop his own definition as “the settings or structures that enable us to consume all sorts of things” (6). These new means of consumption are “part of a broader set of phenomena related to goods and services: production, distribution, advertising, marketing, sales, individual taste, style, and fashion” (6). Thus, they are concerned not just with shopping but also “include the consumer’s relationship with not only shops and malls but also theme parks, casinos, and cruise lines, and other settings including athletic stadiums, universities, hospitals, and museums, which surprisingly are coming to resemble the more obvious new means of consumption” (6). Examples include shopping centers such as West Edmonton Mall or the Mall of America, themed restaurants such as

the Rainforest Cafe, and “brandscares” such as Chicago's Nike Town (Sherry 1998). Such settings are considered important not just for their changing role as consumption settings but also the ways in which they are altering consumption more generally and the role many of them play as powerful American icons in the world setting.

An interchangeable, and more oft-used term to describe these settings, is Ritzer’s “cathedrals of consumption”²⁷. These are self-contained consumption settings that utilize postmodern techniques such as implosion, the compression of time and space, and simulation to create spectacular locales designed to attract consumers. They can be considered cathedrals, because much like their religious counterparts they “are seen as fulfilling people’s need to connect with each other and with nature, as well as their need to participate in festivals. [They] provide the kind of centeredness traditionally provided by religious temples, and they are constructed to have similar balance, symmetry, and order” (8). Thus, they are the empyrean form of a consumption setting. Kowinski (1985, 218) also favors this implication that consumption has replaced religion as the dominant distraction of the masses.

In past ages, when religion dominated even civic life, the churches were often the most sensually satisfying social gathering places in the community – which may be one reason people went there. They not only saw their friends and promenaded in their Sunday best, but where else could they get elaborate architectural effects, stained glass, candles, incense, costumes, oratory, and singing, save Westminster Cathedral? Now it’s more likely to be Westminster Mall.

²⁷ Although Ritzer is the theorist most responsible for popularizing this phrase, it had been used at least since Kowinski (1985, 218) who stated that “malls are sometimes called cathedrals of consumption, meaning that they are the monuments of a new faith, the consumer religion, which has largely replaced the old”.

Landscapes of Consumption

Ritzer (2005) has taken the concept of cathedrals of consumption to the next level to describe what he terms “landscapes of consumption”, or “geographic areas that encompass two, or more, cathedrals of consumption” (149). This definition can be extended to define landscapes of consumption as *locales that encompass two or more cathedrals of consumption that allow, encourage, and even compel people to consume*. The prototypical example of this would be the Las Vegas strip – an area where multiple cathedrals of consumption exist side-by-side in the same geographic settings and entice consumers not only through their individual appeal but also through the techniques made possible by their synergistic proximity.

Sharon Zukin (1991) has also contributed much to the idea of landscape. She uses the term landscape to describe a configuration of material geographic surroundings and their related social and symbolic practices. She argues that landscape is the major cultural product of our time and that landscape and power are deeply and intricately connected. Through this, large-scale, bureaucratic, economic structures attempt to impose a new order upon an existing geographic location. Although there is sometimes resistance to these attempts, ultimately capital wins out and landscapes are imposed. Zukin also argues that landscapes, contrary to the assertions of many postmodern social theorists, tend towards “repetition and singularity” and not towards ephemeral aestheticism.

Although Zukin’s work is certainly of great interest in understanding landscapes, there are a number of ways in which her concept is not of optimal use for this study. First, she still retains a largely productivist bias. Second, she often blurs her use of the terms

“landscapes of power”, “landscapes of production”, and “landscapes of consumption” so that it is difficult to tell what is meant by each. Third, her ideas on “structural coherence” pertaining to landscapes seem inaccurate and outdated. Although there is certainly a drive towards predictability in these settings, it is achieved largely through rationalizing unpredictability and the postmodern techniques described above.

Consumer researchers have developed their own, broader sense of landscape. For example, Mark Gottdiener (1998) has noted a shift in how shopping malls are designed. While they were at one time constructed to maximize efficiency and functionality, they are now designed largely to create spectacle and attract, and re-attract consumers. Other consumer researchers have developed terms to help describe these settings such as “servicescape”, “brandscape” and “retroscape”. John Sherry (1998), in his analysis of the brand outlet “Nike Town Chicago,” argues that what he calls the brandscape (an example of the broader concept of servicescape) is “not merely a product of designer intention and spatial layout, but that its meaning and form also rely upon the activity of consumers who imaginatively and viscerally experience the brand as it is laid out in geographical space” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). While the concept of a brandscape, and a servicescape more generally, are valuable, both focus largely on interior “landscapes”. While these can also be instructive, this research will focus more generally on exterior settings.

Stephen Brown (2003) uses the concept of “retroscape” to describe consumer environments (including cathedrals of consumption such as themed Irish pubs and landscapes of consumption such as Huntington Beach) that are unified under nostalgic themes. Retrosapes are able to draw consumers and visitors by playing on a nostalgic appeal of a supposedly better time and place. Some of these even give patrons the

opportunity to seemingly step out of the contemporary world and into a bygone era. Specifically, many essays found in Brown and Sherry's (2003) *Space, Time, and the Market: Retrospectives Rising* analyze local communities and entrepreneurs that have designed settings that have been successfully attracted consumers. For example, Historyland in Hayward Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Dells Amusement Park, have both drawn large numbers of visitors, and their dollars, to Wisconsin. Similarly to Soja, Lefebvre, and Zukin, these arguments prioritize space and spectacle over time and history.

Communities of Consumption

The modern day cathedrals of consumption (and by extension landscapes of consumption), as exemplified in the shopping mall, owe much to Victor Gruen, one of their principal designers and innovators (Kowinski 1985). The malls however would prove to be Gruen's Frankenstein, a ghoulish monster that animated itself in ways far removed from its original intent and purpose. Gruen had originally designed shopping malls as places of community (Gruen 1964; Gruen and Smith 1960). He was concerned with the issues surrounding increasing automobile use and suburban sprawl in the early 1960s and saw the shopping mall "as a centralizing influence, an organizing principle, as well as an adaptable mechanism for creating community centers where there were none" (Kowinski 1985, 120). He believed that "in order for communities to work they must provide places for people to be together face-to-face, not isolated in cars, housing tracts, and office buildings" (118). Gruen seems almost to be describing Easton when he speaks

of his hopes for shopping centers to provide “the needed place and opportunity for participation in modern community life that the ancient Greek agora, the medieval market place and...town squares provided in the past” (Gruen and Smith 1960, 22).

Gruen’s dream did not become a reality. As soon as capitalists understood the great profit potential that could be realized from manufacturing community itself, there was no stopping their quest to extract profits from this ideal. It was not long before malls were built with goals of profit and concern for trading areas prioritized over any interest in local residents, history, or community. Edgardo Contini, a partner of Gruen’s, stated that “whatever has been done has been motivated by making money, no shopping center is designed because it should be designed that way” (quoted in Kowinski 1985, 123). Gruen himself “criticized the lack of innovation and community concern, the dependence on pseudoscientific market surveys instead of creativity” (122). The mall had been created with the hopes it would revive suburban community, but what it had become was another means of profit for capitalistic entrepreneurs. Gruen, in fact, became so disenchanted with how his ideas were being implemented in the construction of suburban malls that he moved back to his native Austria where he died in 1980.

The cathedrals of consumption, and even more so the landscapes of consumption, coming to dominate the worldwide geography today, are places where locals, visitors, and tourists all flock to consume. Yet, they still lack one key aspect of a more fully integrated consumption mentality – residents. Easton has overcome this final obstacle and so stands as the paradigm of a “community of consumption”, *a geographic locale which is based on consumption, is home to full-time residents, and attempts to revive traditional community.*

I have chosen Easton, not only because it exemplifies the more general principles of a community of consumption, but because it a kind of consumption geography that I predict will become more prevalent in coming years. The management team that designed and runs Easton has already planned similar structures such as Greene Town Center in Dayton, Ohio and Bayshore Mall in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Although a few other developers are already also following this model, I expect that many more will be doing so in the coming years.

Easton was clearly not built in isolation in the world of consumption, but rather alongside the already existing cathedrals and landscapes of consumption. In fact, as noted previously, it was constructed in an environment (Columbus, Ohio) that was already considered by most to be saturated with retail and consumption opportunities. Easton, however, attempts to assert itself as the dominant consumption setting by overcoming many of the limitations and failures of its contemporaries. Easton does this by creating new forms of spectacle through the synergy of multiple cathedrals and landscapes of consumption thereby fostering a heightened level of consumption, of hyperconsumption (Ritzer 2001). This sense of hyperconsumption is reflected in the fact that Easton does more business per square foot (in excess of \$400) than most traditional malls (\$361.09) (Palmieri 2003).

Easton is undoubtedly a location of consumption, but is it also a community? Steiner's design team would certainly like one to think so. Reminiscent of the plans outlined by Gruen for consumption centers to also act as community centers, the Steiner website states:

Steiner developments act as civic centers – places designed to meet community needs and act as a center for community activity. As part of its commitment to partnering with the communities in which it develops new town centers, Steiner’s pre-development process includes town meetings and open dialogue with community members directly affected by the development’s life cycle. Unlike the traditional interior mall development process which often requires clearing attractive surroundings to make way for asphalt parking lots; a new town center seeks to sustain or even add ‘*greenspace*’ to the landscape. Trees, plants and water features are integral to the center’s design sensibility. The surrounding landscape remains intact to the greatest degree possible...The social aspect of a Steiner new town center focuses on developing a sense of community. There is a true commitment to achieving measurable community impact. As Steiner has done at [Easton Town Center](#), the establishment of a community foundation has been executed at Zona Rosa [a recent Steiner development discussed more below]. The awarding of scholarships at nearby high schools, charitable contribution of revenues from the on-street parking meters and the hosting of major community events on the Town Square all support the community in meaningful ways.
(<http://www.steiner.com/portfolio/zonarosa/communityrelations.cfm>)

Even assuming that Easton is indeed attempting to act as a community, what exactly is a community? The classic work on this question is Ferdinand Tonnies’ (1887/1963), *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* roughly translates to community. It is characterized by intimacy, familiarity, sympathetic ties, mutual interdependence, traditional values, and an overall shared social consciousness and desire to work together for the common good. This sense of “we-ness” is typified in the notion of a traditional small town. In contrast, *gesellschaft*, which roughly translates as society, is characterized by casual, transitory relationships, a futuristic orientation, a waning of affect, a diverse population, and a general sense of self-interest. This sense of “me-ness” is typified in the notion of a stereotypical large urban metropolis.

Given Tonnies notions of community and society, Easton would undoubtedly fail the test as a community and would, instead, be classified as a society. However, although

Tonnies work on community is perhaps the most famous, and arguably influential, in sociology, there are many who disagree with his ideas. Almgren (2000, 362) notes that:

The definition of community in sociology has been problematic for several reasons, not the least of which has been nostalgic attachment to the idealized notion that community is embodied in the village or small town where human associations are characterized as *Gemeinshaft*. . . According to this traditional concept of community, the requirements of community or communal existence can be met only in the context of a certain quality of human association occurring within the confines of limited, shared physical territory.

The definition of community is clearly a widely contested, researched, and debated term (see, for example, Calhoun 1980; Hillery 1955; McMillan 1996; Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 1998). However, for purposes of this research, “community, as a concept, can be interpreted as a sense of belonging, a way of life, and diversity with a common purpose” (Porterfield and Hall 1995, 8). Given this definition, Easton would indeed be considered a community. It is certainly a place providing a sense of belonging. As Bauman (2000, 99) suggests, “Inside their temples the shoppers/consumers may find, moreover, what they zealously, yet in vain, seek outside: the comforting feeling of belonging – the reassuring impression of being part of a community”. Easton is also certainly paradigmatic of an emerging way of life. As shown in the previous section, an increasing number of people are beginning to call consumption settings their homes and the consumer mentality is taking a greater hold on people everywhere (Schor 1998). Finally, Easton is certainly diversity with a common purpose. “The crowds filling the corridors of shopping malls come as close as conceivable to the imagined ideal ‘community’ that knows no difference (more exactly no difference that counts, a difference that requires confrontation, facing up to the otherness of the other, negotiation, clarification and agreement on *modus vivendi*)” (Bauman 2000, 100). Again, Bauman

supports the claim that we are turning towards communities of consumption. “All in all, a trip to ‘consumer spaces’ is a voyage to the badly missed community which, like the shopping experience itself, is now permanently ‘elsewhere’” (100).

It has been suggested that although ideas of what community meant were at one time more stable and universally applicable, in today’s society of an increasingly fragmented consumer culture, new forms of community, especially consumer communities, have begun to take hold (for example, see Kozinets 2001). Thompson and Holt (1996, 204) argue that new human desires have begun to take hold that cannot be satisfied by traditional communities. People have turned their attention increasingly towards pleasure and a hedonistic “privatized consumer lifestyle”.

One of the distinguishing features of a community of consumption is that it seeks to simulate the idea of the ideal community, one which supposedly existed in years gone by. Easton seeks this simulation in the image of a small-town America of the 1950’s, a clear alternative to the overwhelming spectacles associated with the mega-malls and the Las Vegas strip. While cathedrals and landscapes are forced to continually change, expand, and modify their spectacle and keep well hidden the instrumental rationality at their base (Ritzer 2005), Easton is able to draw on its mundane, seemingly non-rational simulation to overcome the necessity of extravagant spectacle. Thus, Easton attempts to provide an array of activities commonly associated with small-town life. For example, in the summer there are outdoor music concerts, art shows, and even a farmers’ market. During the Christmas season there is a parade and a ceremony to light the town Christmas tree, Santa is on site to meet the children, over 400 feet of model train track is displayed in the Children’s Park in the North District, horse-drawn carriages are available

to take you all around the town (for a small fee of course), and carolers in period clothing as well as local school and church choirs roam the premises which are lit by over a half million white lights. All of these are designed to foster a heightened sense of community among



consumers and residents at Easton. The management has undertaken further steps by setting aside a community room on the premises available for use by local groups and even a mobile community booth used to give local groups public exposure. Easton also sponsors a scholarship program for local high school students and a Change for Charities program which has, to date, donated over \$160,000, a portion of the revenues generated by the parking meters and tickets, to area non-profits. Steiner + Associates said of the program:

The innovative concept of helping the local community via parking meters and parking tickets, truly reflects the vision of Easton Town Center. Even when a customer is dropping a quarter into a meter, that customer becomes part of the experience and makes a difference in the community (Easton Website 2).

It's all part of the Easton Community Foundation – a comprehensive program that focuses on providing meaningful support to Central Ohio youth and their families. The foundation is funded through several mechanisms, including

direct gifts from Easton's developers and proceeds collected from the Easton Town Center parking meters, parking tickets and water fountains.

We consider it a partnership between you and Easton, and one that benefits all of Central Ohio, especially kids and families. You can see the impact in the organizations we support (Easton Website 3).

Ritzer et. al. (2005) have recently undertaken an analysis to demonstrate how Easton goes beyond a landscape of consumption. Analyzing many of the 'community' features of Easton outlined above, they conclude that "these, and other activities "brand" Easton as a small town that enables a certain kind of lifestyle—a desire for the past, a desire for community". They draw on the work of O'Guinn and Muniz (2005) to conclude that "the desire for community is alive and well in contemporary consumer society. Further, they [O'Guinn and Muniz] demonstrate that consumers can be quite creative in realizing community through branded commodities". Ritzer et. al's conclusion, however, is more daunting. "What we want to emphasize is that even as certain commodities, brands and spectacular environments can become a source of meaning in contemporary life, these activities remain caught up in the web of rational techniques used to design places like Easton". Thus, despite the effort to distinguish itself as something unique, Easton too remains a rationally designed space, and as such it embodies contradictions and is vulnerable to the same weaknesses as other cathedrals and landscapes of consumption. The paradoxes that persist from previous cathedrals of consumption are exacerbated by the fact that even though it was initially designed as a consumption setting, Easton has also become a place in which people live.

One of the most striking contradictions is that even though Easton aims to simulate a small American town from an era gone by, one in which everyday life and consumption, indeed hyperconsumption, are integrated, it is designed from the top-down.

In contrast to smaller neighborhoods in which shops and entertainment facilities emerged in response to the needs of residents (see, for example, Ray Oldenburg's [1987] *The Great Good Place* in which he describes local taverns and cafes that were closely related to the needs of everyday life), in Easton the lay-out and design of the landscape is conceived as an experiment in urban design (see next chapter for more on this), the ultimate aim of which is to increase profitability. Little that is unexpected happens here. Since all the land in the town is owned by a single entity (really a conglomerate of corporations), there is no possibility of a spontaneous business or entertainment endeavor springing up without the planning and approval of a central authority. In Easton, the development of residences, the promotion of community events, and even the size and position of "public" spaces are calculated on the basis of their ability to draw consumers and direct foot traffic. For example, describing plans for future developments, Steiner writes:

Based on our experiences at Easton, our newest developments will feature revised land planning and some exciting and calculated "experiments" in entertainment and residence. The great popularity of Easton's public space leads us to increase the relative size of the "central square" in our next developments -- which will accommodate more people more comfortably, have the ability to host larger-scale events and improve on what we have learned about directing consumer traffic from the "central square" to retail, restaurant and entertainment tenants. Whenever possible, we will also acquire sufficient land to build one and, if possible, two hotels at each project.
(Steiner Website – News)

Thus, Easton is not a spontaneous, organic community but rather one which is a simulated space that ultimately serves the goals and interests of the capitalists and entrepreneurs that control it. Precisely because Easton is designed from the top-down, it is unable to reproduce the organic relationship that, at least in its idealized form,

characterized those earlier times and places. Hence, even as Easton strives to distinguish itself as a unique locale, it still does so through the commercially nearly ubiquitous processes of rationalization. James Scott (1998), though writing from another perspective, provides extensive historical evidence which shows that top-down community and urban design is always devastating to the people who live in these areas. In *Seeing Like a State*, he argues that communities are only able to thrive when there is a close relationship between the design of place and the practical knowledge acquired in everyday life, a practical knowledge, drawing on the Greek, that he calls *mētis*. Thus, even as Easton strives to simulate the community atmosphere of small-town America, its very rationality threatens to destroy the kind of community building efforts it is attempting to simulate.

This raises one last paradox of interest. Cathedrals of consumption are generally only able to maintain their spectacle, and hence their appeal, by remaining at a distance from the mundane realities of everyday life. Their appeal lies in providing an escape to some place or some time spectacular and distant. Indeed, when cathedrals of consumption become too familiar they begin to lose appeal and hence must continually update and change. This reflects a more general logic found in consumer culture based on novelty and the constant need to resuscitate desire (Ritzer 2005). “Indeed, the greatest spectacles of our time are the vacation spots, such as Disney World and Las Vegas, that most people can only afford to visit once, or a few times, in their lives” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). Thus, because they are so far removed from everyday life, the rationalization at the base of these consumption settings remains largely hidden from consumers. But what of the people who actually work in such settings? These “cast-members” (a term used by

Disney to describe its employees) can become quickly disenchanted with such consumption settings as it is they who are operating the rationality at their core. “They come to see that despite the magic on the surface, these kinds of spectacle and simulation depends upon rational systems that are largely devoid of meaningful content” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). Thus, employees at, or even regular visitors to, cathedrals and landscapes of consumption are prone to becoming disenchanted by them. This leads to the obvious conclusion that it would not take long for one living in such a setting to also become disenchanted with their surroundings as they discover the rationalization at its base.

Nothing at Easton

Ritzer (2004a) has recently once again contributed to the literature on consumption and the rationalization of society (to say nothing of globalization) with his work on “nothing” and “something”. He defines “nothing” as “generally centrally conceived and controlled social forms that are comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content” (xi). In contrast, “something” is a social form “that is generally indigenously conceived, controlled and, and comparatively rich in distinctive substantive content” (7). For example, a GAP sweater is an example of nothing. Further, GAP sweaters are closely linked to other forms of nothing. The people who sell the sweaters (non-people), the way in which the sweaters are sold (non-services), and the countless stores in which they are served (a non-place), are all centrally conceived (even their layouts and mannequin outfits), controlled (from a central office) and devoid of

distinctive content (with little exception they all look relatively the same and sell relatively the same goods).

So given the seemingly constraining nature of nothing, why, as Ritzer argues, is it coming to increasingly drive out something? One reason is because nothing can be relatively easily reproduced through mass manufacturing and exported. In this respect, the spread of nothing is closely linked to cultural homogenization, making it increasingly difficult for social forms characterized by something to gain or maintain a foothold. As forms of nothing spread across the globe, cultures and communities previously distinct from one another will come to resemble one another more and more closely.

One aspect of nothing is the idea of a non-place. Marc Augé (1995) agrees with Ritzer that the contemporary world is increasingly characterized by “non-places”. For Augé, non-places are void of historical content and meaning, disembed individuals from particular locales, create an ever-changing symbolic universe, and lead to heightened individualism. This stands in contrast to the kinds of places that were central to previous eras. These “places” were “stable settings that symbolically embodied a continuous relationship to the past (monuments and architecture reminded community members of their position within a shared time), and allowed the formation of deep and meaningful relationships” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). Augé writes: “If place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (78). In Augé’s work, examples of non-places include airport terminals, subways, automobile highways, grocery stores, shopping malls and more generally many of the rationally designed settings that would be considered by Ritzer as cathedrals and landscapes of consumption.

Even though non-places are frequently (perhaps even more frequently than places) occupied by many people at once, the individuals that inhabit these non-places remain largely isolated from one another. They remain fixated on the built environment around them and the commodities that it offers for sale, rather than the people with whom they are sharing the place and the experience. In a line of reasoning supportive of the previous argument regarding spectacle, Augé argues that in response to the proliferation of non-places, our culture collectively struggles to fill them with memories, so that the present meaninglessness and emptiness of non-places is hidden from view.

The designers, owners, and managers of Easton have sought to create a *place*, and hence a form of *something*. It is even arguable that the simulation of place is the fulcrum around which all other aspects of Easton revolve. This simulation attempts to evoke a rich imagery of place and substance (one that arguably never really existed). Although one must travel through non-places to get to Easton (major interstates, highways), once there, it seeks to offer a something at the end of the nothing rainbow. The main point of interest at Easton is that people need no longer even seek to get over the rainbow if they are among the increasing number of residents already living in Easton.

Easton's simulation of the American past is characteristic of the kind of emptiness that Augé and Ritzer argue are characteristic all non-places²⁸. As discussed above, many brand name retailers such as Lazarus, Express, and McDonald's have used Easton as a testing ground for innovations in their retail strategies, content, and layouts. However, this should not be understood as a "real" return to small-town America and obviously cannot be seen as a return to the 1950's. Thus, even as Easton aims to distinguish itself

²⁸ Baurdillard (1970, 193) takes an even stronger stand regarding this emptiness claiming that "If the consumer society no longer produces myth, this is because *it is itself its own myth*".

from other consumption settings, especially non-places, it is, at base, still a rationalized space, and hence a non-place itself. It is not endowed with meanings and histories shared by members of a community nor does it generally cause those who are there to focus on their fellow human beings rather than the built environment and weekly sales. Rather, the meanings contained at Easton are generated by the designers, planners, and managers of the many brand name shops found there.

Non-places, by virtue of their emptiness, evoke in those who frequent them memories and symbols of substance; efforts to transform them into places. Thus, nostalgia for the past combats postmodern (or in Augé's language -- supermodern) dislocation, by offering a space that seems continuous with times in which place actually was central to everyday life. Non-places (and other forms of nothing more generally) can often come to have great meaning for people despite their lack of distinctive and meaningful content. Indeed, it is because of this emptiness that the various forms of nothing encourage people (and sometimes even non-people!) to take "various actions to change them so that they can be more laden with content, and therefore meaningful" (Ritzer, 2004, 154). Thus, a non-place like Easton offers a rich set of opportunities for people to restore a kind of meaning to their lives, to create forms of something that were once supplied by the kind of stable, organic communities, in other words, *places*, simulated at Easton Town Center.

Social forms characterized by nothing are insidious because they link together a whole range of social activities, demanding that they conform to the principles of rational design and control. Thus, it is not only particular places that are emptied of distinctive content but also people, things, and human relationships that are emptied of content and

ultimately meaning. Non-things are for sale everywhere in Easton; the products offered in most Easton stores are not local, indigenous creations, but the same homogenized commodities sold in countless other locations. Non-services are also found throughout Easton in its ATMs, department stores, and restaurants. Perhaps the most distressing “nullity” found at Easton is the presence of non-people. Ritzer defines a non-person as someone “who does not interact with others as a person, and perhaps more importantly is not treated by others as a person” (59 -60). Non-personhood most often emerges in the context of non-places, non-services and non-things, most usually because they promote behavior that is highly standardized and scripted. Thus, despite the attempts to recreate small-town America, presumably a context in which everyone knows nearly everyone else, Easton abounds with non-people who engage in scripted encounters void of meaning. The presence of nullities, especially non-people, alone does not make Easton any different from other cathedrals and landscapes of consumption. What sets Easton apart is the possibility that the *residents* of Easton are increasingly being transformed into non-persons. Given that they are constantly surrounded by these nullities, especially when they are out and about in their “hometown”, it is conceivable and, in fact, probable that the residents of Easton will eventually become non-people. In other words, since Easton is primarily a non-place filled with non-things and non-services, and hence a space which does not focus or promote substantial, meaningful relationships between people, then it seems likely that the people who live there will by necessity come to develop the characteristics of non-personhood that pervade non-places.

Drawing on the previously discussed ideas of community and place, Calthorpe and Fulton (2001, 31) have suggested the term “community of place” to describe

“complex, human-scaled places that combine many of the elements of living: public, private, work, and home”. Communities of place mix different kinds of people and activities in close physical proximity thereby providing places for them to interact. They allow for the everyday as well as random casual meetings that foster a sense of community. They create unique, shared places and help to shape a social geography intimately known only by those who live or work there. Accordingly, “they are hard to design but easy to design away” (31).

Easton would not qualify as a community of place given this definition. Although it is a “complex, human-scaled place” and it does combine elements of public, work, and home, there is a notable lack of truly private space. As discussed above, even the private is public at Easton. City residents are to civil space what consumers are to the public spaces at Easton. Further, Easton also does not “create shared places that are unique to each neighborhood” since many of the facilities found throughout Easton can also be found in any number of other consumption settings. Additionally, it does not “shape a social geography intimately known only by those who live or work there” since the customers, visitors, and vacationers to Easton are able to enjoy much the same experience as the residents. The problem with a loss of communities of place in lieu of communities of consumption is that the former “are essential to our well-being-not just in times of crisis, but also in living our everyday lives” (31).

So does Easton really need residents to be a community of consumption? It is arguably more important to Easton that it maintain physical residences, even if not the people who inhabit them, if it is to retain its image as a small town community. “While Easton, no doubt, heavily relies upon its landscape to simulate small-town America, the

presence of residences as physical structures, regardless of the people who actually inhabit them, contributes to the general atmosphere and feeling that this is a “real” town” (Ritzer et. al. 2005). It is even conceivable that Easton would not want residents to live in these residences. It is the residents of Easton that are most likely to see through the attempts at enchantment (particularly the nearly ubiquitous rationality) and to become disenchanted. Thus, the presence of residents places an even greater pressure on the management to continually change and introduce new kinds of spectacle. Since there are, to date, relatively few residents of Easton, this has not yet become a major problem or concern of the management. However, the management team is still oriented to the persistent introduction of new kinds of spectacle. The real question is whether Easton, like other cathedrals and landscapes of consumption, will reach a limit in its ability to up the ante on spectacle. If Easton fails in this effort, it is highly likely that not only visitors but also residents will begin to consume and move elsewhere.

This last point raises a potential warning flag - what if by the time residents figure out the spectacle, there is no place “real”, no “somewhere”, left to go? Baudrillard (1998, 29) argues that “we are here at the heart of consumption as total organization of everyday life, total homogenization, where everything is taken over and superseded in the ease of translucidity of an abstract ‘happiness’, defined solely by the resolution of tensions”. Easton creates a spectacular reality unavailable to everyday experience by ironically portraying itself as the mundane everyday experience and by designing an environment that appears more real than reality itself – one that is hyperreal. With simulations and reality imploding, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between that which is real and that which is

simulation. Baudrillard (1983) argues that we live in an “age of simulation” where simulacra are becoming the dominant sign in a world based on signs. Since simulations often seem more real than reality itself, they come to dominate society and people are left without reality, with only hyperreality. At first, these simulacra are reproductions of actual objects or events. For example, Easton simulating a small town. Eventually these simulacra come to mask and pervert a basic reality such as the simulation of a small town from the 1950’s, but one that also serves as a wireless internet hotspot and accepts credit cards in contemporary, globally recognized retailers. Then, simulacra come to mask the absence of a basic reality – what will happen if places like Easton replace all the “real” small towns. Finally, simulacra come to bear no resemblance at all to anything existing in reality. This is what could happen if society is too late in realizing the hyperreality of such simulations. The simulacra come to refer only to themselves and other simulacra and put "an end to meaning absolutely" (11).

The ubiquity of consumption settings also threatens the visibility of other social problems. Such settings censor out racism, homophobia, homelessness, poverty, starvation, and the vast range of contemporary social dilemmas under a smokescreen of consumer bliss and commodity fetishism. “In this respect the whole city is assuming the character of an environment of mass consumption. In the day as well as at night, the illusions of these environments divert attention to merchandise of all kinds and away from other things, like colonialism, class structure, and visual disasters” (Williams 1982, 89).

With the advent of communities of consumption, a ubiquitous vertical integration of our lives has occurred via an even more encompassing consumption setting. We are now born into, live through, and die in a shopping mall, or at least in structures which increasingly resemble them. Whatever non-consumption activities we used to partake in (i.e. useful production, social engagement), have been washed away to a large degree by a tidal wave of consumption frenzy. Bauman (2000, 73-4) put it best when he said:

If 'shopping' means scanning the assortment of possibilities, examining, touching, feeling, handling the goods on display, comparing their costs with the contents of the wallet or the remaining credit limit of credit cards, putting some of them in the trolley and others back on the shelf – then we shop outside of shops as much as inside; we shop in the street and at home, at work and at leisure, awake and in dreams. Whatever we do and whatever name we attach to our activity is a kind of shopping, an activity shaped in the likeness of shopping. The code in which our 'life policy' is scripted is derived from the pragmatics of shopping.

A revision of Descartes 'I am, therefore I shop'. Or better yet, 'I shop, therefore I am'.

Future Research

Although Easton has been used as the paradigm for the arguments made throughout this chapter, it is increasingly clear that what is happening at Easton is also beginning to happen elsewhere. Mega-malls are no longer enough and communities of consumption are becoming increasingly visible in the geography of consumption. Two examples – Zona Rosa and Project CityCenter in Las Vegas – exemplify this point.

Zona Rosa is another Steiner & Associates development opened on May 19, 2004 in Kansas City, Missouri. It is located on 93 acres in the city's Northland district and currently comprises nearly 1.2 million square feet of retail, restaurants, entertainment,

office, hotel, and residential space. Like Easton, it was designed with a sense of community in mind and makes many of the same attempts at community establishment and integration. It also has a Change for Charities program, local high school scholarships, offers “public” squares and pedestrian friendly streets, and offers music and performance in the open-air atmosphere. In addition to Zona Rosa, the company also plans to open similar establishments in Dayton, Ohio and Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2006.

MGM Mirage unveiled plans in November 2004 for a new multi-billion dollar “urban metropolis” to open on the Las Vegas strip. The development, known now as Project CityCenter, will cover 66 acres between the existing Bellagio and Monte Carlo hotels. “The 18 million-square-foot first phase of the project calls for a 4,000-room hotel and casino, three 400-room boutique hotels to be operated by internationally recognized companies not currently in Las Vegas, 1,650 luxury condominium-hotel units and 550,000 square feet of retail, dining and entertainment space” (Review Journal Online). The first phase is set to open in 2010 at a cost of \$3-\$4 billion and bringing with it the creation of 7,000 construction jobs. Although this first phase will be the most significant, more phases will follow, including an additional 2,500 residential units in the second phase. Clearly this mammoth project involving consumption settings, office space, and residential units, will represent a community of consumption. A potential particularity here is the possibility of transforming cathedrals and, more significantly, landscapes of consumption into communities of consumption.

Overall, the implications of a transition to the Era of Ubiquitous Consumption are numerous. This research has only touched on the “where” of this transition by arguing that consumption settings have moved from finite destinations and times to infinite

enclosure. However, many other questions remain. “What” is answered by a process – from production to consumption – but is there something beyond consumption? “Who” is answered by identity²⁹ – from worker to consumer and from a process affecting only the elite (Kings, Pharaohs) to a “democratization of luxury” (Cohen 2003). “When” is tied up with the where – from occasional ventures to round-the-clock processions. “Why” is answered by function – from survival to fashion to identity creation. “How” is answered by means – from trade to money to credit. It is my hope that this research will encourage others to take up these questions and further the understanding of the integrated world of consumption in which we live.

Perhaps the greatest impetus to research can be stimulated by the knowledge that consumption settings such as Easton are going to be with us for a long time. “The most compelling statement that can be made about a Steiner development is that its founding principle is ‘*sustained use*’. The fully-realized town center with its shopping districts, park and community areas is intended to survive not just a few decades but for future generations” (Steiner Website-Community Relations). It is for this reason, more than any other, that we should direct our attention at better understanding these settings and their implications for our lives, our mentality, our society, and our future generations.

²⁹ Miller et. al. (1998, 185) argue that even identity is often bound up with place. “...the very materiality of place itself becomes a medium for objectification of ethnic, gender, and other forms of identity under certain conditions”.

	4000 BC	---	Bartering is common method of trade
	500BC - 400AD	---	Greek agoras dominate Mediterranean commercial life
	100BC - 476AD	---	Roman Forums are leading centers of commercial activity
	1400's	---	Markets become centerplace of trading
		---	INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
	1780's	---	Palais Roaylem opens in Paris as the first arcade
	1852	---	Bon Marche opens in Paris as world's first department store
	1852	---	Marshall Fields opens the first major department store in the USA
	1859	---	A&P opens as the first chain store
	1880's	---	Speciality stores emerge
	1916	---	Market Square opens in Chicago
	1923	---	Country Club opens in Kansas City, Missouri
	1924	---	A&W opens first food service franchise
	1940's	---	Hotel-casinos begin to appear on "strip" in Las Vegas
	1945	---	END OF WW II
	1946	---	Levittown founded on Long Island, New York
	1947	---	Northgate opens in Seattle, Oregon
Era of Social Trading			
			Era of Production
			Era of -

1949	---	Diners Club issues first universal credit card
1954	---	Northland opens outside of Detroit, Michigan
1955	---	McDonald's begins franchising
1956	---	Southdale opens in Edina, Minnesota
1957	---	First Superstore opens as an ancestor to Toys 'R Us
1960's	---	Malls precede residences
1970	---	First Outlet Mall opens outside of Reading, Pennsylvania
1981	---	West Edmonton Mall opens in Canada
1985	---	Home Shopping Network is launched
1988	---	First Wal-Mart Supercenter opens
1992	---	Mall of America opens in Bloomington, Minnesota
1996	---	Wal-Mart opens first cyber-mall
1999	---	Easton opens Phase I in Columbus, Ohio
2000	---	21st CENTURY BEGINS
2003	---	Easton draws over 30 million visitors
2004 and beyond	---	?
Era of Consumption		
Era of Ubiquitous Consumption		

Chapter III: Easton: From Urbanism to New Urbanism and Beyond

In the previous chapter, it was shown how consumption settings have come to play an increasingly ubiquitous role in our lives. The example of Easton can further demonstrate how consumption settings are also coming to play an increasingly ubiquitous role in our urban ideologies and material realities. Thus, we can fuse the previous argument of Easton as a revolution in consumption settings with an argument that Easton represents a new urban form to better understand the potential new form of lived experience offered at Easton.

The concept of “urban” brings a similar image to the minds of many. “Derived from the word *urbanus* – meaning characteristic of, or pertaining to, the city – *urban* essentially holds that same connotation to most people” (Parrillo forthcoming). However, there are a wide range of different opinions as to the particulars of what this term means empirically depending on the specific theoretical, analytical, or national lens through which the concept is applied. In general, these opinions differ along the commonly accepted aspects of urban – administrative function, economic characteristics, functional nature, and population size or density (Parrillo forthcoming). Thus, in order to qualify as urban, even at a minimal level, Easton should meet these four basic criteria. Easton does have an administrative function. Its visitor and resident policies, bureaucratic underpinnings, and use of management on site all indicate an administrative aspect to the Center. It also certainly has economic characteristics. Over 160 businesses, many large office centers, and millions of dollars in annual revenue all support this claim. Easton also has a functional nature. There are paved streets, electricity, a water supply, sewage,

and even wireless internet access. These first three characteristics, however, could also be used to classify countless other consumption settings. As mentioned previously, what truly distinguishes Easton is the presence of residents. With this population, Easton meets all four of the basic criteria and could thus be classified as urban.

One of my central arguments about Easton is that it is a paradigmatic representation of what I hypothesize will be the next trend in urban developments – a new urban revolution. “Urban Revolution” is a term coined by archeologist V. Gordon Childe (1950) to explain the ways in which cities developed. More generally, the term “refers to the emergence of urban life and the concomitant transformation of human settlements from simple agrarian-based systems to complex and hierarchical systems of manufacturing and trade” (Gotham forthcoming). One of the goals of this chapter will be to argue that Easton represents the next stage in this transformation, the latest urban revolution.

In order to fully appreciate Easton as an innovative new urban form, it will be necessary first to revise a few of the voluminous ideas on the history of urbanism. A brief outline of the general evolution of the urban form will be sketched through an examination of the ideas of David Thorns, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja³⁰. Next, a discussion of suburbanization will help us understand one of the key factors in the rise of the true focus of this chapter, the development of urban planning. A history of important milestones in the development of planned communities will culminate in a discussion of one of the most recent, and arguably the most influential, of these techniques – New Urbanism. After outlining the key tenets of New Urbanist philosophy, a closer look at

³⁰ While there are certainly many other social theorists, sociologists, historians, and urban planners whose ideas might have been useful, Thorns, Lefebvre, and Soja, at least in the opinion of this author, offer the most paradigmatic views in this area.

three critical prototypes of this type of development - Seaside, Florida, Celebration, Florida, and Kentlands, Maryland – will lead to a discussion of Easton in the context of the history of urban development. I will argue that Easton is, in fact, something new in the history of urban planning and represents a distinctly new form in the history of urbanism.

The History of Urban Life

In order to understand and appreciate the innovative character of Easton, it is important to have at least some familiarity with a general history of urbanism. Given the grand breadth and depth of this topic, however, it is understandably the case that academics have taken a wide variety of approaches in outlining the genesis and transformation of urban life (Wirth 1975). Thus, we must work within the methodology of what Foucault (1970) defines as “historicism”, “a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences.” (372). Regardless of their variations, each of these theories has the potential to contribute to a general understanding of the impetus and cultivation of city life.

Most of those who study the history of cities, no matter how unique their own perspective might be, accept a conventional sequence of urban development (Soja 2000). It is generally assumed that human beings first started organizing themselves collectively in bands for purposes of hunting and gathering. These bands usually consisted of about 25-30 people and were nomadic by nature on the near-constant prowl for sustenance. Then, about 40,000 years ago, agriculture and animal husbandry first started being

developed and the hunters and gatherers were able to form relatively more permanent settlements. Improvements in these two areas, along with forms of writing, a rise of religious activities, and a host of other factors led to defined permanent settlements around 10-15,000 years ago. These villages slowly, and in some cases quickly, grew to become cities. These cities incorporated a more political and territorial directive to become city-states, and finally clearly defined states were formed. It is the overlay and demarcation of simultaneous occurrences of these generally accepted factors that differentiate the various theories of urbanization.

What was it that originally gave rise to cities? What caused human beings to first even consider building permanent settlements? The answer to both has often been explained by synekism. Synekism (also spelled synoecism [Owens 1991]) is “the process whereby a new town was artificially created or an existing city was increased in size by the influx of the local population” (Owens 1991, 7). It was considered mainly a political act in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, although it often carried an economic or strategic advantage as well. Most often the towns were created by troops who founded them as they marched through the territory. In ancient Greece, synekism also referred to the clustering of several smaller settlements around one central city. This regional network of cities existed in a sort of symbiosis with the “mother city”. “Synekism thus connotes, in particular, the economic and ecological interdependencies and the creative – as well as occasionally destructive – synergisms that arise from the purposeful clustering and collective cohabitation of people in space, in a “home” habitat” (Soja 2000, 12).

David Thorns (2002) sketches a very general outline of the transformation of cities. He traces the origins of urban life to the Nile Valley and the Fertile Crescent

starting around 3000-4000 BC. He argues that agricultural surplus led to the creation of a class system within the city and consequently a new form of social organization. Hence, the rise of governance and commerce. The rise of the Roman Empire marked a great height for urban life as the Romans used cities as means to govern their vast territory and population. Consequently, the fall of the Roman Empire also saw a temporary demise in the importance of cities. Due to a general decline in the number of advances in several fields during the Medieval Ages, it was “some centuries later when it [the city] started to become again a centre of trade, commerce, and political power” (3).

According to Thorns, the greatest impetus to urban life came during the nineteenth century with the advent of rapid industrialization. Industries needed urban centers to supply their most important resource – human labor power. Thorns argues, however, that industrial capitalism no longer serves as the basis of urbanization, but rather it is the rise of knowledge and information industries that have determined the appeal and hierarchy of cities. Thus, the latest transformation in urban life “is from the industrialized modern system of cities based around wealth created from large-scale commodity production for a mass market place to a new system based around the generation of wealth from information services which are globally rather than nationally organised” (4). This shift has meant increasing attention to the service industry, for both producers and consumers, and has placed a heavy value on ‘consumption spaces’. Thus, since around the 1980s, we have witnessed “the growth of urban as spectacle, the greater concentration upon urban place making the inter-urban competition over the new growth agenda of consumption spaces – casinos, malls, towers, sports stadia, convention centres, and so on are placed at the centre of the analysis” (6).

Henri Lefebvre (1996; 2003) following the conventional sequence already outlined, accepts that humans first gathered in bands of hunters and gatherers, then formed villages, and eventually concretized an early urban form. At this point, however, he takes a markedly different approach in his outline of the history of urbanization. Lefebvre delineates the transformation from a total lack of any urban development, the purely natural, to the completed process of urbanization, “the urban reality”, by means of an axis ranging from 0 to 100%. He notes four particular city forms that mark this transition – the political city, merchant city, industrial city, and the “critical point”. Each of these is paradigmatic of an era of urban evolution and transition.

The political city is the earliest form of urbanization. It is represented by the oriental city (associated with the Asiatic mode of production) and the antique city (associated with slavery in the Greek and Roman empires). Essentially, the political city “organizes an agrarian environment by dominating it” (1996, 122). The growing use of laws and taxation also make it “inconceivable without writing” (2003, 8). The monarchy and priesthood become the central figures of ownership and social life and the central part of the city was reserved as an open space for discussion and forum with the market relegated to the periphery.

The beginning of the fourteenth century saw the rise of the second paradigmatic urban form in Western Europe – the merchant city. The rise of this city form is marked by expanded communication, the increasing use of money as a medium of exchange, and a growing network of trade and travel. The representative form of a merchant city is the medieval city, one “in a complex situation embedded in feudal relations but struggling against a landed feudalism” (1996, 65). At this time, mercantile exchange became of

crucial importance as the open air of the marketplace replaced the open political space of the forum.

It is at this point along the axis that Lefebvre (2003, 11) marks “an event of great importance”— the reversal in importance of the city and the countryside. Up to this point, the countryside had remained the dominant form of life with the city often viewed as “an urban island in a rural ocean” (11). At this critical point, however, the situation was reversed and the city became the focus of social life with the countryside now acting as little more than a backdrop, an “environment”, against which the town was set. It was during this time that the “image of the city” came into being. This breaking point was primarily the result of the merchant city and served as a critical moment in the passage to the industrial city.

It was, however, the appearance of industrial capital that led to the formation of the industrial city, “often a shapeless town, a barely urban agglomeration, a conglomerate, or conurbation like the Ruhr Valley” (2003, 14). The Industrial Revolution helped push production to towering new heights with the birth of steam power, factories, and new techniques of production. However, all of these advances still required labor power. Thus, industry turned to the city “in search of capital and capitalists, markets, and an abundant supply of low-cost labor” (13). It was during this time that there was a rapid swelling of the urban population and the rise of great global cities (Thorns 2002).

The fourth period, the critical point (also translated by Robert Bononno as the “critical zone” in *The Urban Revolution* [2003]) is marked by the rapid expansion of the city into the countryside by way of suburban growth. At the same time, exchange is increasingly done on a global level and decreasingly done as a simple transaction

between two individuals. “The double process (industrialization-urbanization) produces the double movement: explosion-implosion, condensation-dispersion” (1996, 123).

Therefore, it is around the theme of the critical zone that the current problems of the city and urban life revolve. “During this period of generalization, the effect of the process – namely the urban reality – becomes both cause and reason” (2003, 14-15).

Edward Soja takes a decidedly postmodern approach to his studies of cities. He begins his work, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (2000), by outlining what he calls the “geohistory of cityspace” (3). It is specifically a geohistory in that it prioritizes spatial geography over temporal history. Soja’s exceptional contribution to the explanation of city development is that he reinterprets the geohistory of cityspace through three distinct urban revolutions centered around three epochal moments. His goal is not only to outline the history of cities, but more importantly “to initiate through this excursion back in space and time a more intrusive rethinking of the ways scholars have written about cities and the role of the urban condition in the historical development of human societies” (4). Thus, Soja reinvents the development of urbanization in order to reveal the potential of alternative urban histories.

One of Soja’s most controversial assessments is related to the first Urban Revolution. He pushes the origins of urbanization back to at least ten millennia ago, far earlier than most believe city life began. Thorns (2002), for example, argues that cities began around 3000-4000 BC (also see Sjoberg 1973). Soja challenges yet another commonly held assumption about the origins of city life – that it began largely as a result of advances in agriculture and animal husbandry (for more on this point of view, see Thorns 2002). Instead, he puts “cities first” and argues that it was the spatial specificity

of urbanism, “the particular configurations of social relations, built forms, and human activity in a city and its geographical sphere of influence” (8), that gave rise to the Agricultural Revolution. Thus, Soja is, from the onset, challenging, both literally and figuratively, traditional claims to urban history.

According to Soja, the second Urban Revolution occurred around 3000 BC, roughly the time that most archaeologists claim the first Urban Revolution occurred. It is commonly associated with the invention of writing (which is believed to have taken place in Uruk in the Middle East) and the development of a specific form of “societal governmentality” (55) - the city-state. This Revolution is closest to what Lefebvre called the political city. Thus, issues of kingship, class, property, slavery, patriarchy, bureaucracy, and empire arise for the first time as new forms of social organization and control were instituted. Advances in agriculture, a declining portion of the population needed to grow food, and an expanding trade network all led to the freedom of more people to engage in culture-building and culture-enriching endeavors. Thus, “the greatest innovations of the second Urban Revolution revolved not so much around social production as societal *reproduction*, the creation of institutional structures that could maintain in place political, economic, and cultural continuity” (55).

For Soja, the third Urban Revolution began somewhere between the mid 18th and mid 19th centuries and is most clearly marked by the Industrial Revolution. Rapid industrialization brought with it rapid urbanization as production became increasingly concentrated in urban centers. The rise of the industrial-capitalist city has been most commonly associated with the rise of modernity and the transition to a modern society.

Various cities, most notably Manchester, Chicago, and Paris, have served as paradigms of this Revolution and its impact.

Soja documents what he believes are notable changes in the situation of urban environments since the urban crisis of the 1960s. Although he does not yet proclaim a fourth Urban Revolution, he does lean towards the viewpoint that “what happened to cities in the late twentieth century was the onset of a revolutionary change” (xii). He coins the term “Postmetropolis” to describe these changes and outlines other scholars’ representations of the situation in six categories:

(1) a flexibly specialized Postfordist Industrial Metropolis; (2) a globalized city-region or Cosmopolis; (3) a postsuburban Exopolis or megacity; (4) a Fractal City of intensified inequalities and social polarization; (5) a Carceral Archipelago of fortified cities; and (6) a collection of hyperreal Simcities, where daily life is increasingly played out as if it were a computer game (xvi).

The postmetropolis is best understood as a combination of all six of these, while maintaining the possibility that other methods of understanding the situation might also be valuable contributions in the future.

From City to Suburb

No matter how the history of cities is addressed or outlined by various authors, there seems to be an increasing convergence of opinions surrounding the appearance,

rapid growth, and effects of the suburbs starting in the early part of the 20th century. It was around that time that “the definition of suburban changed into that of a third entity, an alternative to urban and rural” (Parrillo forthcoming). Prior to the advent of the automobile, most communities had been built with the idea of keeping all the necessities of life within walking distance of one’s residence (Davis 2000). Neighborhoods were built close to the downtown areas of cities and were usually extended along main lines of public transit (Bressi 1994). The revolutionary invention and brilliant marketing scheme of the automobile, however, changed everything. Cars gave people, especially middle- and upper-class people, the freedom to escape many of the problems found in the city centers – crime, pollution, homelessness, drugs, and even disease. “Cars provided an unprecedented level of mobility, freeing people to determine their own travel patterns, and strengthened the suburbs’ middle-class nature by excluding those who could not afford purchase and maintenance costs” (Bressi 1994).

Victor Gruen (1964) describes the advent of the automobile and other transportation technologies as the “Transportation Revolution”. Whereas the previous Industrial Revolution stimulated a population shift from countryside to city, the Transportation Revolution has stimulated a population shift from city to suburb. Gruen (1964, 134) notes the two main features of the Transportation Revolution and describes their paradoxical implications:

- (1) *Mass transportation by rubber-wheeled vehicles* (the automobile, the truck, and to a minor degree the bus), which because of their conspicuous land consumption are tearing the urban pattern to shreds and creating in their wake the molestations and dangers of congestion, poisonous fumes and obnoxious gases; and
- (2) *The desire to flee from the transportation-created havoc*, a desire that can be fulfilled, at least up to a certain breaking point (the point of no

return), through the even more extensive usage of individual transportation carriers.

The more land is gobbled up by the refugees from congestion, the greater is the need for even more transportation with all its auxiliary facilities and wherever or whenever new transportation and the nuisances that attend it reach the saturation point, new flight patterns spread and new refugees start the outbound track.

Thus, the problems created in the cities were solved, at least for some, by the creation of the suburbs. However, ironically this only exacerbated the original problems and hence a vicious circle of problems-escape-problems-escape was begun fueling the increased usage of “rubber-wheeled vehicles” and the continued growth of the suburbs.

Although many suburbs were originally designed to serve only as bedroom communities, “where inhabitants typically lived in one-family houses, but worked, shopped, and enjoyed leisure activities in the city”, they soon came to incorporate many of the functions formerly found in the downtown centers (Parrillo forthcoming). Jobs and commercial interests followed their workers and customers into the suburbs in a search of proximity, cheaper rents, and locations more easily accessible to the growing number of automobiles. The American Dream blossomed in the collective conscious of the nation as the white picket fence surrounding a two-story detached family home and the almighty automobile become communal icons (Bressi 1994).

The cookie-cutter design of the new suburbs left many with a feeling of intense placelessness (Calthorpe 1994; Congress for New Urbanism 1996; Southworth 1997). Homes were built to allow for privacy, not encourage community and isolation and loneliness left children and housewives with a “suburban neurosis” (Friedan 1963; Hayden 1980). Pollution and congestion from their beloved automobiles left many

suburbanites feeling angry and frustrated (Thorns 2002). Suburbs had been built with the idea of fulfilling the American Dream but instead had created, at least in the view in some, the American Nightmare³¹.

The Origins of City Planning

Many of the problems associated with cities during the mid- to late-19th century were thought to be related to their unbridled and unplanned growth. “The growth of large cities constitutes the greatest of all problems of modern civilization. It is the problem of dwindling district schools, of labor disputes, of the tenement houses, of municipal transit, of agrarian reforms, of the “destitute” country village – in short, it underlies most of the practical questions of the day” (Adna Weber 1963, 2). The rapid rise of industrialization was draining the population from the countryside to the city and many of the urban centers were ill-built and ill-equipped to deal with the incoming hordes. Many around this time, especially utopian idealists and social reformists, sought to discover ways to bring the city into a more harmonious balance with its surroundings and to provide greater comfort for its population. Thus, central planning became a popular solution.

“Planted towns”, those that are purposefully and carefully designed and built came to be seen as the solution to the dilemmas of “organic towns”, those that had developed of their own accord without any central guidance or management. More particularly, “planned communities” came to be the paradigmatic planted towns. A planned community refers to “any relatively autonomous community of limited

³¹ I, along with many scholars, fully recognize that many still consider the suburbs to be emblematic of the American Dream, however, as the previous paragraph indicates, most of them turned out to be far from the image they were meant to embody.

population size planned under the direction of a single entrepreneur or development agency as a total unit which contains housing, community services, and amenities, as well as employment adequate to support a socially and economically diverse population” (Corden 1977, 15-16). The planned community, unlike the existing suburbs, creates not only a physical landscape but also a sociological community (Corden 1977). Thus, planned communities, and the related enterprise of community planning, represent an important turning point in the history of urbanism – the invocation of intention, control, and purposeful community.

One of the first movements to develop planned communities came with the creation of “company towns”. Company towns are towns created and owned largely by a single company for the purpose of providing residences for their employees. One of the first of these towns was developed in the mid 1850’s by Sir Titus Salt in England. Saltaire, the name of Salt’s town, was considered a great success and a leading example of industrial philanthropy (Corden 1977). Another British entrepreneur, George Cadbury, also created his own company town, Bournville. Cadbury, however, took his philanthropy one step further than Salt and 30 years after the formation of Bournville renounced all financial interest in the endeavor turning it over to a trust in the name of the city with all profits going to improve the city itself.

In the United States, other industrialists also sought to develop company towns. The most famous of these, Pullman, Illinois, was developed by George M. Pullman, the man who developed the railroad sleeping car. Pullman, the city, was home to 12,000 employees / residents. Pullman, the entrepreneur, retained full ownership of the town and all its facilities. The success of the town quickly turned sour, however, when the Pullman

employees went on strike in 1894. The town itself became a symbol of employee discontent with the company and came to be seen as an example of “un-American paternalism and benevolent feudalism” (Corden 1977, 37). Pullman was seen as a failure, “above all, due to its oppressive policies imposed by its benevolent but authoritarian creator and sole owner” (Tehrani 1995, 109).

The great success of the company town in England compared with its dismal failures in the United States can be traced to a more general difference in culture. Given England’s feudal history and more sociable community tendencies contrasted with a general fear of paternalistic influence and a drive for individuality and self-determination in the United States, it is of little wonder that company towns had greater success in England.

Company towns, however successful, still faced one central problem in the eyes of many of their critics – they were owned by individual entrepreneurs and companies. A handful of city planners, especially those associated with the utopian or socialist movements, sought to create planned communities that were owned by the people. The most notable of these was Sir Ebenezer Howard, a socialist stenographer and author of *Tomorrow: The Real Path to Social Reform* (1898) which was re-titled to its more commonly known name for the 1902 edition, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Tehrani 1995). Howard (1902/1966, 127) sought to cure many of the ills he saw plaguing the cities of industrial England at that time and through his efforts inspired an entire urban reform movement:

My proposal is that there should be an earnest attempt made to organise a migratory movement of population from our overcrowded centres to sparsely-settled rural districts; that the mind of the public should not be confused, or the efforts of organisers wasted in a premature attempt to accomplish this

work on a national scale, but that great thought and attention shall be first concentrated on a single movement yet one sufficiently large to be at once attractive and resourceful;...".

Thus, the Garden City Movement was born and the first meeting of the Garden City Association was held on June 10th, 1899 (MacFadyen 1970). Those who supported this movement generally accepted a series of propositions about the existing social and urban order:

1. The cities were terribly overcrowded.
2. The countrysides were rapidly shrinking.
3. It is desirable to attract people from places of overcrowding to places where more population is needed.
4. The combination of town and country life would be valuable.
5. Towns should be carefully planned.
6. It would be advantageous to attract industries from the city to the cheaper countryside.
7. It would also be important to attract people of all classes and walks of life.
8. The government can not be expected to take responsibility for such an endeavor, but rather it should be a group of people who are strongly committed to its cause and purpose.
9. A Joint Stock Company would be the most feasible way to begin such an endeavor.
10. Rapid town growth would promote a rapid rise in land values and thus provide security for invested capital.
11. Investors should limit their dividends and excess profits should largely go to the community itself.
12. In time, the shareholders would sell out and the town would become communally owned by residents, not shareholders (MacFadyen 1970; 69-71).

These propositions, in turn, led to four guiding principles for the Garden City.

1. "The limitation of population size and land area.
2. Growth by the creation of new and separate garden cities (ten of these separate garden cities would be organized in a system linked by a transportation network resulting in what Howard called "the social city").
3. The balance between economic opportunities and social advantages.
4. The control of the land in the public interest" (Corden 1977; 41).

Howard was an advocate for neither the country nor the city independently, but rather their fusion or what he called the city-country or "third magnet". "He imagined it

to be composed (like a complex biological cell) of many discrete settlements occupying a regional garden, and kept apart by the countervailing force of legislation” (Krieger 1991, 12). Thus, garden cities would be discrete settlements of approximately 30,000 inhabitants on 1,000 acres of land and surrounded by ample agricultural land. Further, groups of such discreet cities would be linked to each other and around a central “social city” with a population of around 58,000 that would house the larger cultural and municipal holdings (Howard 1966). Thus, “A Garden City is a town designed for healthy living and industry, of a size which makes possible a full measure of social life, but not larger: surrounded by a rural belt: the whole of the land being in public ownership or held in trust for the community” (quoted in MacFadyen 1970, 109). Lee and Ahn (2003, 53) have described Garden Cities in the following way:

In his [Howard’s] vision, the Garden City was self-contained. Garden City residents would not have to commute; a majority would have the opportunity to work within a few minutes of their homes. . . . Education, recreation, shopping, and civic facilities would be located near residential areas. No resident would live more than a third of a mile from the community’s center, making the proposed Garden Cities eminently walkable. Large, public open spaces, at the center and on the periphery, would provide healthy recreational opportunities and promote civic spirit. Howard did not specify street standards or building form, although his diagrams suggest large blocks and a hierarchical street plan.

Howard had philanthropic intentions when he set about designing his vision. “The essential aim of the Garden City as conceived in my mind was this: it was to unite people of good will, irrespective of creed or party, in a worthy purpose – the building of a city on juster, saner, healthier and more efficient lines than the cities of the old order” (MacFadyen 1970, 69). He was especially concerned with improving the plight of the working class poor and rebuilding the bonds of urban community that he saw as being largely deteriorated by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of his age. “Above all,

the allure of the garden city resided in its promise to redefine and strengthen community in a modern world that challenged and reduced community significance” (Buder 1990, ix).

The Garden City model also found admirers in the United States. In 1923, the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) was founded by a group of planners, most notable among them being Lewis Mumford, who admired Howard’s design principles. Thus, the American Garden City movement was born. The RPAA, however, was faced with the problem of increasing vehicular traffic and how to resolve the conflict between automobiles and pedestrians – a problem that had not been such an issue when Howard first set down his design principles. To resolve this, the American Garden City movement added a series of their own design principles to those of Howard’s. These principles are summarized by Stein (1957) in Lee and Ahn (2003, 54) as follows:

1. Use of superblocks and the integration with Perry’s neighborhood unit concept (3 or 4 superblocks constitute a neighborhood unit).
2. Hierarchical street system, in which each type of street has its own specialized functions, including service lanes, secondary collector roads around superblocks, main thoroughfares to link the traffic to various sections, and highways to connect to outside communities.
3. complete separation of pedestrian and vehicle paths by using cul-de-sacs and pedestrian-only paths in a superblock
4. Interior parks (at the center of superblocks) as the backbone of pedestrian movement, jointly forming continuous park systems.
5. Houses turned around to make living rooms and bedrooms face toward pedestrian paths and parks and service rooms face service lanes.

Overall, these additional guidelines were laid out to help deal with what would become the most influential factor in any urban plan – the automobile.

The American Garden City movement might have enjoyed a longer heyday and have had more influence were it not for a series of economic failures in their trial towns. Additionally, the Depression of the late 1920’s and early 1930’s came at the time when

many American Garden Cities were being constructed. Consequently, this movement largely faded away although many of its principles would appear again in the 1990's with the advent of the smart growth agenda and New Urbanism (to be discussed later).

Two other town planning principles are of note from the last century – the City Beautiful Movement and the Modernist approach. They are worth only a brief mention, however, as neither is in much use today. The City Beautiful Movement drew from the System of Parks methodology established by Frederick Law Olmsted, the man generally regarded as the first city planner in North America (Lejeune 2002). This movement also sought to ameliorate the ills of urban life. They believed that by making the cities beautiful once again many of the social ills that plagued them would be eradicated, that an overall beautification of the city environment would lessen moral deviance, bring American cities on par with their European counterparts, and attract the middle and upper classes back into the city center (City Beautiful Movement Webpage).

The Modernist approach, associated largely with French socialist planner Tony Garnier, segregated uses (residential, commercial, industrial, leisure), relied heavily on the automobile (although there were also pedestrian walkways), and valued private over public space (Calthorpe 1994). These techniques, in turn, isolated neighbors, broke down the relationship between public and private, gobbled up the landscape, increased pollution and clogged the ever growing number of roadways with automobile traffic. Environmental groups, inner-city activists, and historical preservationists all leveled critiques of this movement, led most notably by Jane Jacobs (1961; 1969) and William Whyte (1968; 1980). Fortunately for the vitality of the cities and their inhabitants, the Modernist movement is now generally seen as being in remission (Calthorpe 2000).

The last several decades have seen the rise and growth of another urban design movement that shows some promise – the smart growth agenda. Thorns (2002, 223-24) cites the American Urban Land Institute (1996) and outlines some of the key tenets of smart growth development, taking place mainly in the United States:

- development that is economically viable and preserves open spaces and natural resources;
- land-use planning which is comprehensive, integrated and regional;
- collaboration of public, private and non-profit sectors on growth and development issues to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes;
- certainty and predictability inherent in the development process;
- infrastructure being maintained and enhanced to serve existing and new residents;
- redevelopment of infill housing, brown-field sites, such as former industrial areas and obsolete buildings, being actively pursued;
- urban centres and neighbourhoods as integral components of a healthy regional economy;
- compact suburban development being integrated into existing commercial areas, new town centres and / or near existing or planned transport facilities;
- development on the urban fringe which integrates a mix of land uses, preserves open space, is fiscally responsible and provides transportation options.

These prescriptions for urban design are made with an emphasis on sustainability, more efficient use of land, and reinvigorating urban cores. The smart growth agenda has been more formalized and popularized through its closest urban planning relative – new urbanism.

The Arrival of New Urbanism

New Urbanism, or Neo-Traditional Urbanism as it also known, seeks to combine the best of previous movements into a unified set of principles and guidelines for

improved urban design, development, re-development, and use (Ellin 1996). More specifically, it is “a strong reflection – and compelling example – of the principles of Smart Growth” (Broeberg 2003). It also shares a goal of curing the social ills brought on by rapid suburban sprawl, downtown decay, segregated land use, automobile pollution and congestion, and the loss of community built around a lived experience in place (Thorns 2002; Katz 1994; Congress for New Urbanism 1996; Southworth 1997; Leccese and McCorkmick 2000). Peter Katz, one of the most prominent leaders of New Urbanism, has said “The model we’re creating is neighborhood” (Broeberg 2003). Further, Judy Howlin, a resident of the Kentlands in Maryland, a prototype New Urbanist community, commented on her town by saying “A lot of people say it reminds them of the little town they grew up in or their parents grew up in. They become nostalgic.” (Broeberg 2003).

Many of the goals of New Urbanism are also reflected, in part or in whole, by other urban movements and are thus not specific to itself. What is new about New Urbanism, however, is the approach to achieving these goals. New Urbanists assume that the solution to urban problems needs to be worked out together, and not independently of one another (Talen 2002). They also assert that new solutions and designs are needed to meet contemporary situations. We can no longer rely on the same principles and techniques utilized by a post-World War II demographic. Further, New Urbanism is unique in that it is not reliant solely on a professional organization or corporation (although both of these certainly exist under their rubric) but also “a coalition of designers, other professionals, public and private decision-makers, and concerned citizens” (Barnett 2000, 10).

The ideological birth of New Urbanism stemmed from a concern for what were perceived to be many of the social ills plaguing the American city and its people. Many had become worried about the “placelessness of modern suburbs, the decline of central cities, the growing separation in communities by race and income, the challenges of raising children in an economy that requires two incomes for every family, and the environmental damage brought on by development that requires us to depend on the automobile for all daily activities” (Poticha 2000). There was a desire to reduce urban sprawl, revive the inner city, advocate a return to community, save time wasted in unnecessary travel to be spent with family and friends, and re-assert public over private space (Katz 1994).

The term “New Urbanism”, itself, was first introduced at a weekend meeting in 1991 in Davis, California at the home of Judy Corbett, an urban visionary who had, with her husband, designed and built Village Homes, a community in Davis, inspired by the Garden City Movement. Other attendees at the meeting included many who would go on to become the most prominent leaders of this new movement including Steve Weissman, Peter Katz, Peter Calthorpe, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zybeck, Elizabeth Moule, Stefanos Polyzoides, and Michael Corbett. The group had met to discuss strategies and principles to better urban systems. They also compiled a rough version of a document that would go on to serve as the foundation for the guidelines at the heart of new urbanism – The Ahwahnee Principles (Katz 2002).

The meetings at the Corbett house that weekend also served as a planning session for a series of meetings – to be known as Congresses – that would occur over the course of the next several years and address each of the three principle levels of planning –

regional, community, and block, street, and building. The first of these was organized by Duany and Plater-Zybeck and took place in Alexandria, Virginia focusing on the mid-range level of neighborhood, district, and community. The second Congress was organized by Moule and Polyzidos and took place in Los Angeles with a focus on the smallest scale – the block, street, and building. Finally, the third Congress was organized by Peter Calthorpe and Daniel Solomon and took place in Los Angeles with a focus on the largest scale – the region. Eventually these six organizers became an official board of directors and formed the Congress of the New Urbanism (CNU), a nonprofit organization with a goal of promoting and furthering the ideals of the New Urbanist movement. Peter Katz, the initiator of the meetings in Davis was asked to serve as the first executive director of the new organization (Katz 2002).

Another pivotal moment in the history of the CNU occurred in 1996 at the fourth Congress held in Charleston, South Carolina. At these meetings it was decided that the organization should open its membership policy to allow anyone to join – up to this point it had been a rather exclusive invitation-only elite. It was also in Charleston that the official document of the CNU, the Charter of the New Urbanism, was unveiled and ratified. Herbert Muschamp, architecture critic for the New York Times, wrote that the CNU was “the most important phenomenon to emerge in American architecture in the post-Cold War era” (quoted in Katz 2002, 40).

The Tenets of New Urbanism

New Urbanism seeks to address the problems of both expansive suburbs and existing urban infill projects (Calthorpe 1994; Katz 2002). It treats the city, its suburbs,

and the natural environment as a single entity and seeks to address many of their problems through the assertion of a number of guiding principles. New Urbanism has a number of goals and directives, however, the literature repeatedly references a few of the more important initiatives over and over again. These include defined edges known as Urban Growth Boundaries, pedestrian friendly communities with a regional transit system, formative, not residual, public space placed in prominent locations, a diverse population, mixed-use spaces, responses specific to the local environment and history, and rigid planning.

It is worth noting that many of these principles center around the problems created and associated with one particular feature of contemporary social life – the automobile. New Urbanists believe that, “dense communities with a wide variety of housing types, mixed land uses, and good transit connections can reduce Americans’ reliance on the automobile. Like the early Garden City proponents, New Urbanists believe that compact planned communities promote a more wholesome lifestyle and foster civic values” (Lee and Ahn 2003, 55). It is believed that the principles of New Urbanism will reduce automobile dependency.

Defined Edges

There is some disagreement over the importance of rigidly defining the edges of a neighborhood, however, the recognition of some form of an edge is a generally accepted tenet of New Urban development (Calthorpe 1994; Duany and Plater-Zybeck 1994). Calthorpe (1994) argues that it is important to have defined edges, what he also calls Urban Growth Boundaries. Duany and Plater-Zybeck (1994) are less concerned about the

importance of an edge as they are the prominence of a public center. The “edge” to them can be anything from farmland to low-density residential areas to infrastructure such as rail lines. Whatever defines the edge, they also argue that it should be no more than ¼ mile from the publicly defined center allowing for a 5 minute walk from the center to anywhere in the definable neighborhood (New Urbanist Website).

Pedestrian Friendly

Although New Urbanist projects are not entirely anti-automobile, they do seek to provide more environmentally friendly and community conscious transportation alternatives (Arrington 2000). Thus, one of the central tenets of any new urbanist project is the importance of creating a space that is pedestrian friendly (Kulash 2000; Plater-Zybeck 2000) and also encourages the use of public transit (Lieberman 2000). Increased opportunity to walk to one’s destination, even if it is a transit stop, has the potential to reduce automobile dependency, conserve energy, reduce pollution, and make both cities and suburbs more sustainable (Randall and Baetz 2001).

Duany and Plater-Zybeck have developed an approach known as “traditional neighborhood development” (TND) to address this issue. In their “The Thirteen Points of Traditional Neighborhood Development”, they outline their goal of creating communities in such a way that most of the residential homes are within less than a 5 minute walk of commercial and public facilities. This not only encourages pedestrian travel but also discourages automobile use.

Calthorpe (1993), although also heavily focused on pedestrian linkage, shows a greater concern with the use of public transportation. He defines his approach, known as “transit-oriented development” by stating:

A Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a mixed-use community within an average 2,000 foot walking distance of a transit stop and core commercial area. TODs mix residential, retail, office, open space, and public uses in a walkable environment, making it convenient for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle, foot, or car (56).

Thus, although it has a goal of encouraging pedestrian activity, public transit is considered to be *the* central feature of New Urbanism to Calthorpe (Rafter 1997).

Formative Public Space

The placement and accessibility of public space is at the heart of many of the other tenets of New Urbanism. Daniel Solomon (2000) asserts that “a primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets and public spaces as places of shared use” (123). Thus, the central location of a public square or park is nearly universal to all New Urbanist designs. Moule and Polyzoides (1994) even assert that, “above all, it is about ensuring that there *is* a public realm” (xxii). The presence of a shared public space, in turn, encourages community building and serves as a primary means of reasserting the perceived traditional small town, a major goal of New Urbanism (Lejeune 2002; Bressi 1994).

Population Diversity

Another goal of New Urbanism is to integrate all levels of income, race, age, and other demographics by providing a range of housing types and costs (Duany and Plater-

Zybeck 1994; Walker 1997). Apartments, single-family dwellings, and townhouses are all integrated to promote a more mixed-class environment. There is a goal of reviving the heyday of the downtown environment and of bringing the middle class from the suburbs back into the city (Richmond 2000; Plater-Zybeck 2000). Diversity, however, is admittedly one of the most challenging goals of any New Urbanist project. “New Urbanism may not always succeed in radically reintegrating the segregated geography of our cities and suburbs, but it does lay out design and policy principles that provide the means to do so. The political will to make such a change consistently involves a larger cultural challenge” (Calthorpe 2000, 180).

Mixed Use

One of the central issues standing in the way of our ability to walk to work is the modernist approach of segregated uses. In much traditional city planning and zoning, homes have been kept far away from the industrial centers and even, to a large extent, out of commercial centers. This segregation of zoning has increased our forced dependency on the automobile and hence exacerbated the problems of congestion, pollution, and wasted time. New Urbanist designs call for a more mixed-use approach incorporating places to live, work, eat, and shop all within the same neighborhood, preferably no more than a quarter mile or a “5-minute walk” (Plater-Zybeck 2000; Bressi 1994). In turn, the ease of accessibility to daily facilities reduces dependency on the automobile and encourages greater population diversity as well as fosters a more comfortable sense of community.

Specific Local Responses

New Urbanists do not propose any grand scheme or plan for use in each and every single development. Although they do have a set of general guidelines, they also recognize the diversity and uniqueness of each development and thus encourage strategies specific to each individual locale. There is a goal of incorporating the local history and environment into the plans in order to create a fuller sense of community with both the social and environmental surroundings.

The ecological environment is also a special concern for New Urbanist developers. The goal of reducing sprawl limits the amount of natural landscape that has to be gobbled up for human development. Increased pedestrian activity and improved public transit help to reduce air and noise pollution. Energy is conserved through reduced automobile usage and resources needed to maintain extended space. Overall, a healthy relationship with the surrounding nature is a goal of any New Urbanist design (Walker 1997).

Rigid Planning

A well-defined and comprehensive plan is the first step in any New Urbanist plan, whether for an entirely new town or to infill existing urban areas. Every detail of the plan must be drawn up, right down to architectural design guidelines, “to force greater attention to detail, thereby invigorating suburban architecture and imparting a greater level of civility to the streetscape” (Bressi 1994, xv). Without a specified plan, even new urbanist projects can cause excessive sprawl and promote unnecessary automobile traffic. Planning also takes place at every level from building details to the entire region.

Calthorpe (2000) notes that, “a regional plan is the necessary armature for the placement of new growth as towns, neighborhoods, or villages” (180).

Critiques of New Urbanism

Although it has an ever-increasing number of supporters, as well as a growing body of literature documenting its successes, New Urbanism also endures a number of criticisms. One such contretemps is that the movement is elitist focused on those who have the wealth to live in such communities. Although there is a goal of including a diverse population, critics do not believe that New Urbanist towns have yet to address “the full spectrum of our social dilemma: the particular problems of the aging, the discriminated, the sick, the young, the destitute, the lower economic classes, the poor” (Henry 1997, 4).

Critics also assert that New Urbanism is too idealistic and fails to deal comprehensively with the social issues and complexities of today’s world (O’Toole 1998; Dear 2000). Most notably, critics argue that there is insufficient acknowledgment of the market and commercial realities. There is no place in New Urbanist designs for parking lots (probably because there is a reduced need for them!) or for big box retailers and megastores. Some of the world’s biggest corporations - Wal-Mart, McDonalds, Home Depot - are not simply going to vanish in the face of an idealistic urban design. Hence, New Urbanist towns are accused of being “made to work primarily for residential enclaves” (4).

Further, many of the New Urbanist projects can be prohibitive to a true diversity of income levels because of the higher premiums associated with living in such places.

Thus, they are critiqued for having failed to meet their social objectives. “Certainly, few would disagree that they tend to be exclusively high income and that they lack racial diversity” (Talen 2002).

New Urbanists are often seen as romantics who idealize the past and wish to return to the small town life of yesteryear. This desire blots out the many problems associated with such a setting, especially the potential for oppression and discrimination. Blacks, Jews, Hispanics, and homosexuals, among others, are likely to find little comfort in a return to the traditional small town of decades ago (or even today!). Thus, New Urbanism is also accused of being inhospitable to difference (Sennett 2000).

Case Studies of New Urbanism

Although we now have a better understanding of the guiding principles of New Urbanism, we still lack a clear understanding of their real-world possibilities. The best way to get at the more pragmatic potentials of New Urbanist philosophy is by looking more closely at three key NU developments. Arguably, the three best-known, influential, and certainly the most researched and media-glamorized NU developments are Seaside, Florida; Celebration, Florida; and Kentlands, Maryland. Each of these prototypes can provide valuable insight into the potential uses of, and lessons to be learned from, New Urbanism.

New Urbanist Origins: Seaside, Florida

“The unambiguous logic of the overall Seaside Plan – the pedestrian-scaled and well-proportioned streets, the accessible beach pavilions, the harmonious grouping of residential and commercial buildings, the absence of high-rise beachside condos – makes a persuasive case for Seaside’s underlying message: civilized livability” (Brooke 2002, 22).

Although not large enough to be considered a municipality in the state of Florida, Seaside, now hailed as one of the earliest prototypes and successes of New Urbanist planning, is a community of approximately 2000 residents on the coast of Florida’s panhandle (Mohney and Easterling 1991). The site occupies 80 acres of land and will eventually feature 350 houses along with 300 other dwellings. When it “opened” in 1981, Seaside became an almost overnight media sensation. It was even used as a setting for the 1998 Hollywood blockbuster, *The Truman Show*, starring Jim Carrey – a movie supposedly set in the “ideal” American small-town. It has received numerous awards and even praise from the Prince of Wales: “I believe that the lessons they’re working out at Seaside have very serious applications, both in rural areas and in our cities” (quoted from Brooke 2002, 23).

Seaside has its origins in plans for a better community. The 80 acres of land on which Seaside now sits was originally purchased by J. S. Smolian, a department store owner from Birmingham, Alabama in 1946. Smolian had purchased the land with the intention of building a summer camp for employees he would call Dreamland Heights. That vision never materialized, however, as economic conditions prohibited its completion (Brooke 2002).

In 1978, more than 30 years later, the land was inherited by Smolian’s grandson, Robert Davis. Davis had received a degree in history from Antioch College, where he

was a member of the Socialist Workers' Party, and an MBA from Harvard Business School. He had since gone on to become a successful real estate developer in South Florida. Upon inheriting the land, Davis began thinking of uses for his newly acquired parcel. At first, he envisioned a development of small cottages. However, after spending several years studying town planning, cities, architecture, and most especially the works of theorist and urban designer Leon Krier, Davis decided to develop a town. As quoted in Brooke 2002, Davis says, "Part of my intention was to construct a demonstrable and overdue antidote to the well-intentioned idea that took hold at the beginning of this century, the idea that social ills could be ameliorated by the separation of housing from work-places" (15).

As a part of Davis' research for the construction of his new town – to be called Seaside - he traveled the South with his wife examining various forms of architecture in the region. On their trip, the couple met Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, as mentioned before two of the most influential names in New Urbanism today. Duany and Plater-Zyberk were brought on to the project and set about developing a Code for Seaside. Additionally, Davis met Krier in 1980 and offered him a plot of land in Seaside in exchange for his consultation on the Master Plan.

The group was finally ready to begin. In 1983, the Seaside Building Code was completed and the first neighborhood, Tupelo Street, was under construction. The Master Plan at Seaside was quite strict and required that every dwelling have certain features. Picket fences were a requirement, not to keep neighbors separated, but rather to promote a boundary and definition to the street. They are also all required to be different from one another in order to promote some sense of individuality and control for the owner –both

frequently said to be lacking under the Code's rigid policies. Porches were also necessary in order to promote communal activity and bridge the gap between the inner private and outer public. Towers were strongly encouraged so that even the most land-locked residences could still have a view of the nearby Gulf of Mexico though their size was strictly enforced so as not to block the views of others. Additionally, the Code prevented developing any lawns except at the Town Center. Instead, houses were to be surrounded by the natural foliage and greenery of the area (Brooke 2002; Mohny and Easterling 1991).

New Urbanism at Seaside

Seaside is held by many to be an excellent example of New Urbanism (NU), but how well does it measure up to the tenets of that philosophy? A closer look at the principal considerations of NU designers will show how and why Seaside has gained a reputation as the first real NU prototype.

Formative Public Space

Formative public space is perhaps the most important tenet of NU design and was clearly at the forefront of the thinking behind Seaside (Katz 1994). The lure and accessibility of public space has been critical to its design and success. David Mohny (1991, 36) has noted, "Even during that first visit, it was unmistakable that Seaside was a serious attempt to address the issue of the public realm in contemporary American society". It is this central tenet around which all of the others have been developed.

At the heart of Seaside is the Town Square. It is here that a majority of the community events are staged and it is meant to give the “feeling of an outdoor living room” (Brooke 2002, 108). The Square features The Seaside Amphitheater which is home to not only spontaneous communal events but also regularly scheduled concerts, carolers at Christmas, and outdoor movies during the summer. The Square is also home to PER-SPI-CAS-ITY Market, modeled after outdoor European markets, and hailed as “one of the most successful retail operations in North Florida and one of Seaside’s biggest attractions” (115). Regardless of the success of its marketplace, however, Seaside is still “a partnership of citizens rather than consumers” (Mohney and Easterling 1991, 60).

The streets at Seaside are of particular importance to community building. It is here that the public and the private are said to meet and mingle. They were built to encourage walking over driving as the entire town was constructed with the goal that no communal location or service would be more than a five-minute walk from any residence. The streets are also constructed to provide views of the Gulf and the rest of the town. They act as thoroughfares down which either your eye or body can travel to meet the neighbors, the Town Square, or the waterfront.

Defined Edges

Seaside itself is well defined in terms of its surrounding natural habitat. It is bounded on one side by the Gulf of Mexico and on the other three by woodlands. An aerial view of the town shows clearly the defined boundaries of the urban space. Further, the inner workings of the town are defined by the streets. As mentioned before, picket

fences act to define the boundaries of the street. Most importantly, regardless of how or where the edge is defined, the publicly defined center of the town is no more than a 5 minute walk from nearly anywhere in the town. The streets, in turn, define the boundaries of the public and the private.

Pedestrian Friendly

One of the driving goals of NU developments is to reduce the dependency people have on automobiles. Thus, the development follows the guidelines of Duany and Plater-Zyberk's approach of the "traditional neighborhood development" (TND). One way this is accomplished is through the creation of pedestrian friendly spaces with community conscious public transportation when necessary. Given the small size of Seaside, there is no need for public transportation, however, it has succeeded quite well in creating pedestrian friendly thoroughfares. The streets have all been constructed with the foot traveler in mind and automobiles are discouraged throughout the town. In addition to the main thoroughfares, there is also a network of footpaths to enhance pedestrian mobility.

Population Diversity

Perhaps the one goal of NU design that is not met at Seaside, or in many other NU creations, is that of population diversity. Although the residents and visitors to Seaside do represent a broad spectrum of age and both sexes seem equally well represented (in fact, even on a planning level, Seaside was one of the first endeavors of its kind to see such a heightened level of female involvement), the town is still disproportionately White and middle to upper class. A glance through one of the many books of photos of Seaside will

turn up few, if any, non-White people. Given their traditional family orientation, it is also unlikely that many same-sex couples inhabit the town. Additionally, the extremely high cost of real estate in the town is prohibitive of anyone but members of the middle to upper classes. Although critics have cited these complaints in many NU developments, champions of NU contend that once the novelty of such locales has worn off, and they become increasingly widespread, then the financial resources required to live in such places will also diminish making them more accessible to more people.

Mixed Use

The success of Seaside in the achievement of creating a mixed-use development is debatable. Certainly there are a variety of residential and commercial facilities to be found, however, there is no industry. Few of those who live in Seaside, also work there. Thus, it falls victim to another common criticism of NU, that such communities function well for residential and sometimes commercial enclaves, but do not provide sufficient employment or cultural opportunities for their residents.

Specific Local Responses

The concern with catering to the local environment is present throughout Seaside. From before its creation, Davis was concerned with maintaining the architectural style and nuance of the region. Additionally, the local foliage is kept intact through the prohibition of its clearing or the creation of lawns anywhere except the Town Square. The streets, towers, and public spaces were all also constructed with the goal of integrating the surrounding nature into the landscape and especially the view. The

surrounding woodlands and especially the Gulf act as focal points for many of the planned vistas.

Rigid Planning

No place is the idea of rigid planning more evident at Seaside than in the Seaside Code. Although certain areas are left open for variation – for example, choosing a designer or the style of your picket fence – most of the major planning aspects are very tightly controlled. “The Code’s stipulations – covering everything from building materials to roof pitch – were so precise that they ensured the stylistic harmony of the overall development while granting great freedom to Seaside landowners as to whom they could choose to design their houses” (Brook 2002, 18). The strict planning, however, was deemed necessary in order to ensure the fulfillment of the town’s social goals.

It would seem that there is good reason to consider Seaside a successful prototype of NU development. It has taken many of the core tenets of that philosophy to heart in both design and construction. There are, however, several key ways in which Seaside falls short of a true NU community – namely in terms of residents, cost, and diversity.

Seaside undoubtedly provides a heightened sense of community and small-town lifestyle to those who inhabit it (Brooke 2002). One issue, however, is that only roughly 20 families inhabit Seaside on a regular year-round basis. Most either visit sporadically for a release from their non-NU lives, or are vacationers. Cost is one prohibiting factor for many to live in Seaside (Lee and Ahn 2003). Most of the homes are well out of the

price range of the typical American working-class family, the same type who would have most likely inhabited the small-town Seaside attempts to recreate. Thus, diversity is also stalled as a result of prohibitive economic requirements for citizenship.

Although Seaside falls short in these areas, the reasons are explainable. Given the novelty of what is occurring at Seaside, it can be no wonder that many want to live there. It has already become far more successful than even its planners or designers had imagined (Katz 1994). This demand, in turn, has pushed real estate values sky high given the fixed supply. It is unlikely that the real estate prices will drop to “affordable” prices at Seaside, however, when and if, this type of urban planning and community building ideals spread further, the financial liabilities associated with membership in other such towns will almost certainly drop to a rate that will further encourage full-time residents and greater diversity.

One of the legacies of Seaside is already certainly The Seaside Institute, “a nonprofit organization established in the 1980s to ensure Seaside’s leadership position as a laboratory for better community planning, design, and development” (Brooke 2002, 124). The Seaside Institute has a number of programs that encourage further creative thinking and improvement of the ideals embodied there. It sponsors a number of workshops, awards, and a publication to promote its ideals of an improved way of life.

Another legacy of Seaside is its mere existence. This brave undertaking had the potential to result in economic and architectural failure, but has instead come to be recognized as one of the earliest successes of New Urbanism. Regardless of the future of NU, Seaside will undoubtedly remain one of the most looked to and well-respected of its early communities.

New Urbanism and Corporations: Celebration, Florida

Celebration, Florida is located in Osceola County Florida, just a quick drive from Disneyworld and Orlando. It is another stunning example of an attempt at New Urbanist design. The town, founded by the Disney Corporation, opened in 1996 to a whirlwind of media attention and researcher interest. Just 8 years later, Celebration is home to over 8000 residents and has seen the sale of over \$600 million in homes (Usborne 2004). Built at an estimated cost of \$2.5 billion, this growing Florida town represents the attempts of the Disney corporation at town planning and year-round community building.

Celebration was built at the edge of the 30,000 acre land swell originally purchased by Walt Disney in the 1960's. Walt had seen the undesirable commercial development around other amusement parks, especially Coney Island in New York and his own Disneyland in California, and so purposefully set out to buy not only the land for his intended vision, but also all of the surrounding land as well to prevent outside forces from moving in. However, much of the land that had been purchased has since been sitting unused by Disney itself because it is largely undesirable swampland. Part of the birth of Celebration was a desire to find a profitable way to use this land. Celebration has indeed been profitable. It has profited Disney financially. It has won it even more media attention than its usual lion's share. It has even enthralled a whole new wave of Disney devotees who came clamoring to live in the closest thing to the Magic Kingdom outside of Sleeping Beauty's Castle.

Celebration is not the first attempt at community building and town planning undertaken by Disney. When Walt originally laid out plans for Disney World, they

included a futuristic community known as the Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow, or EPCOT. This town of 20,000 was to be built inside a giant dome and serve as the model for communities around the world. Home ownership would be non-existent as everyone would rent from Disney and the homeless, poor, and unemployed would all be barred from residing there. This utopian vision of urban life, however, never came to be and EPCOT was instead opened as another theme park in 1982 (Frantz and Collins 1999).

In the beginning, Disney was about control – it still is. All Celebration residents have to agree to abide by a long list of enforced rules and regulations. For example, residents are not allowed to hang their clothes out to dry or park recreation vehicles or “junk” cars in front of their homes. They are also not to harass the alligators (one has trouble imagining they would want to anyway) or even complain about the mosquitos! Residents are also limited to one garage sale a year and one political sign in their yard. And, in order to keep up the appearance of desirability, “For Sale” signs are strictly prohibited from being posted anywhere.

Given this litany of regulations, one wonders why anyone would *want* to live in Celebration? The answer - the town promises a well-manicured “ideal” image of town and family living. The homes are all well kept, the lawns are manicured, the people seem “happy”. Leaves are shipped in every autumn to decorate the streets and fake snow is spewed from machines on the streetlights hourly for portions of the winter season (a heretofore largely unknown phenomenon in Florida). It seems Disney has even sought to

control the seasons! At one point they even had music pumped throughout the town via tiny mushroom shaped speakers³². In searching for idyllic perfection, to many, this is it.

The town is currently home to two public schools, an 18-hole golf course, a hotel, a 60 acre health campus, and a host of other amenities associated with many luxury resort towns. Celebration, however, was not built to be a luxury resort town; it was built to be a community. Much like Seaside, Celebration suffers from incredibly high housing costs. A typical home in Celebration will cost its owner 20-25% more than a similar home in nearby suburban Orlando. Hence, Celebration has become another enclave for the rich and seems like a gated community – albeit without the gates.

A lack of gates, however, should not be read as a lack of gate-keeping. Many residents have noted the general absence of blacks and other racial minorities in the town (Frantz and Collins 1999). There are few visibly handicapped people. And, of course, there are no poor and likely few non-heterosexuals, who would threaten to disrupt the family image promoted by Disney. Any goal of diversity is hardly met by the elite, overwhelmingly white population of the town.

Aside from the questionable desire to have fake leaves and snow in the Florida climate, other important questions remain – is it real? And does it matter if it isn't? Certainly the people in Celebration are real³³ even if the seasons and mushrooms are not. And most of them agree that the sense of community is real as well (Frantz and Collins 1999). Manufactured, controlled, or corporate owned, it doesn't seem to make a difference to the townspeople of Celebration. Of course, given their mutual interest in

³² It was not until Michael Eisner's wife was visiting the town and was appalled at this over-Disneyfication that the mushrooms were removed and the music was stopped.

³³ Although they might be considered non-people, the paradigm of which is the nearby Disney employee, or "cast member". For a more thorough discussion of this, see Ritzer 2004a.

moving to and living in this prototype setting, it stands to reason that residents are apt to have much in common. None of the people living in the town were unaware of what it was and who it was owned by before moving there. And certainly the search for a place to find community is likely to increase one's chances of creating such a place once it is "found".

Another, and potentially more important, reason for Celebration's initial appeal - Disney. The Disney corporation and its associated products, movies, and theme parks have become images of fantasy and imagination for millions (if not billions) around the world (Bryman 1995; 2004). For many who grew up watching Mickey Mouse and dreamed of a Cinderella or Snow White romance, Celebration offers the perfect place to live. However, direct involvement by Disney in the town is waning especially since it sold the entire 18 acre downtown area to Lexin Capital in January 2004 (Schneider 2004). The town had already sold off the local golf course last September but the sale of the large downtown area represents a near assurance that Disney is pulling out entirely (Usborne). Many residents had been fearful of this for a while. Warning signs came last September when the corporation, with its long history of being bent on control, allowed the town board to pass to the control of residents.

Overall Celebration has provided a number of insights into what to do and what not to do in New Urbanist planning. Its corporate ownership and the recent sale of the downtown have demonstrated the dangers, and potential benefits, associated with living in a company-owned landscape. Like Seaside, it has failed in the goals of diversity and affordability. Unlike Seaside, however, it has succeeded in maintaining a notable year-round population and being more fully integrated into the surrounding urban landscape

(Seaside is often considered too geographically remote to be a true model of New Urbanism). Thus, while there are well defined borders to Celebration, it still exists in an integrated framework of other nearby urban centers, especially Orlando. It is just this sense of integration with existing populations that is the lesson of our next case study – Kentlands, Maryland.

New Urbanism and Community: Kentlands, Maryland

Kentlands was the first year-round, functioning community following the principles of New Urbanism (Katz 1994). It is located 23 miles northwest of Washington, D.C. and situated in the larger municipality of Gaithersburg, Maryland. Kentlands is currently a 352 acre site comprised of over 1900 living units, 870,000 square feet of retail space, 84,800 square feet of office space, and more than 5000 residents (Kentlands.com). At completion in 2012, however, the site is expected to encompass 507 acres with more than 1 million square feet of offices and 150,000 square feet of retail space (Jones and Hedgpeth 2003).

The land on which Kentlands is situated was once the property of a wealthy Washington lawyer, Otis Beall Kent, who purchased the land in 1942 and renamed it Kentlands. The property was intended to serve as a model farm and natural habitat. To this effect, Mr. Kent made a number of changes to the estate, including adding a series of ponds and lakes. During the 1960's, a portion of the Kentlands estate was set aside for the construction of a neighborhood to be known as Lakelands – a dream not realized during Mr. Kent's lifetime.

Mr. Kent's adopted daughter inherited the land following his death in 1972 and eventually sold it to Joseph Alfandre, a local developer, in 1988. Mr. Alfandre, much like Mr. Kent, had the dream of building a town based on the traditional neighborhood planning principles. He called in Duany and Plater-Zyberk, the same architects responsible for Seaside and through a partnership with Gaithersburg Mayor Edward Bohrer began planning in 1988. The following year, in 1989, construction on the town began. At this time, ownership and management of the project passed to the Great Seneca Development Corporation, an affiliate of Chevy Chase Bank. They have continued to abide by the original plans laid out for Kentlands and have also begun construction on Mr. Kent's dream of a neighboring 340 acre Lakelands community (Kentlands.org).

Kentlands is considered by many to be the best example of New Urbanism at work (Katz 1994). A closer look at the success of Kentlands in meeting the goals of New Urbanist design will prove useful in making this case.

Formative Public Space

Kentlands undoubtedly succeeds in prioritizing the public over the private domain. Parks and open spaces comprise more than 100 acres, or 18% of the site (Lee and Ahn 2003). Each of the four neighborhoods are built around a community feature. Rachel Carson Elementary School, for example, is the focus of the Gatehouse neighborhood and the original Kent homestead is the focus of the Old Farm neighborhood. "Green spaces in Kentlands range from quiet parks and active playgrounds to lakes, gardens, a village green, paths and nature trails" (Kentlands.org).

Defined Edges

One need not question when they are entering or leaving Kentlands. Although it is a community which has blended with the encompassing town of Gaithersburg, it is still a distinct townscape of its own. Aside from the more explicit markers of town signs, the transition into lower density, less pedestrian friendly areas is the more implicit sign of passing beyond Kentlands' boundaries.

Pedestrian Friendly

Kentlands has been highly successful in maintaining a focus on the pedestrian. Nearly 1/3 of the 35,000 linear feet of streets are pedestrian only (11,254 linear feet) and 19 of the 99 intersections are also accessible only to pedestrians (Lee and Ahn 2003). In addition, many key community features are within a short walk of every residence. The shopping center is a mean distance of 2,311 feet away, the elementary school is 1,844 feet, and a park is only 396 feet from the average Kentlands residence (Lee and Ahn 2003).

Population Diversity

This tenet is more questionably met by Kentlands than the others. There are financial inhibitors to reaching true population diversity. Like many New Urbanist communities, Kentlands residents pay a premium for their community design. It is estimated that the residents of Kentlands are paying a 12% premium (which is still roughly half that of Celebration), or an average of \$25,000 more for their homes solely

because of the New Urbanist design (Lee and Ahn 2003). This type of increased cost to an already expensive area to live keeps many would-be Kentlands residents away.

Mixed Use

There is undoubtedly an excellent implementation of mixed-use development in Kentlands. Although original city codes prohibited many of the designs used at Kentlands, the city of Gaithersburg created a new zoning type, MDX, which allowed for the mix of residential and commercial spaces in a single zone (Kentlands.org). Various housing types – apartments, townhomes, single-family dwellings – are all mixed together. There are few areas of Kentlands where only one type of residence is present. There are also many places where residents are on the levels above a ground-level business.

Specific Local Responses

The layout of the town was built largely around the existing ponds and lakes built by Mr. Kent during his ownership of the property. Many of the existing physical structures on the property – the Kent mansion, barn, and carriage house, for example – were all retained and integrated into the town plan. As much as possible, Kentlands was built around the existing farm and natural habitat rather than over it.

Rigid Planning

The entire plan of Kentlands was laid out before any ground was broken on the first building. Rigid planning and following a strict code are two of the most important components of a successful project according to Duany and Plater- Zyberk (1991).

Although the venture switched hands shortly after construction began, the new managers have closely followed the original plans and layout.

The above descriptions would seem to paint Kentlands as a near perfect example of New Urbanism – and it is. However, even this prototype has its flaws. Although the design is meant to reduce the need for an automobile and, in fact, to limit the presence of automobiles in the town, it is still notable that the easiest way to reach Kentlands is by car (Flint 2003). Without public transportation easily accessible to pedestrians, few residents can survive without their autos. Another glitch in the plan is the Kentlands Square Shopping Center which opened in 1993 (Forgey 1993). It is home to three large big box retailers and is surrounded by a large parking lot – two things New Urbanists try to avoid. Despite its flaws, however, Kentlands can certainly be seen as another step in the direction of a more community-oriented, pedestrian-friendly future.

Kentlands & Gaithersburg: A Partnership of Community

There is an abundance of civic space throughout Kentlands, most of which is built around the historic estate of Mr. Kent. The former Kent mansion, for example, now serves as a rental facility for weddings and other social events. The former horse barn has been transformed into the Gaithersburg Arts Barn and houses a 99-seat theater. Even crypts built on the land remain, although unused, as scenic landmarks. The Kentlands Citizens Assembly, the neighborhood homeowner's association, maintains the Kentlands

Clubhouse which “is the neighborhood’s social, administrative and recreational center” (Kentlands.org).

Unlike Seaside, Kentlands is not an isolated community. In fact, Kentlands is technically part of Gaithersburg – the latter annexed the former in 1966 (Kentlands.org). One need only drive just outside the Kentlands boundary to find oneself in more traditional suburban sprawl. Large lawns, gas stations, and strip malls are all within a five-minute drive. Kentlands exists as the dream of an island of community in a sea of suburban nightmare.

Unlike Celebration, Kentlands is not corporately owned. Much of the public land is, in fact, owned by the town of Gaithersburg. As part of his philanthropy in building the town, Mr. Alfandre deeded the historic Kent buildings to the City of Gaithersburg and the lakes, green spaces, and quarry were integrated into the City park system. The city still maintains these areas while the neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and other common areas are the responsibility of the Kentlands Citizens Assembly. “This interlocking of public and private lands meant that Kentlands would always have a civic focus, and connected the new community to the City of Gaithersburg” (Kentlands.org).

Overall, Kentlands is an excellent example of how New Urbanism can function in pre-existing urban locales. Although a highly distinct “neighborhood”, Kentlands is still very much integrated into the larger city of Gaithersburg. The two urban entities, although different in built form and social function, are able to co-exist and, in fact, benefit from one another. Thus, New Urbanist communities need not always represent additional sprawl or isolated ventures, but can be fully integrated into existing urban areas.

Easton: New Form of Urbanism, Form of New Urbanism, or New Form of New Urbanism?

Easton has already been shown to represent something new in the realm of consumption settings, but is it also something new in the realm of urbanism? Could Easton really be defined as an independent urban center? Does it stand as an example of New Urbanist design? Or is it something beyond New Urbanism – the latest revolution in urbanism?.

The Birth of a City

There are few towns that can actually celebrate a birthday and know with certainty that this was their first arrival into the world. Easton, however, is an exception. Before its “birth”, however, this novel frontier in urban development was nothing more than the far-off dream of Les Wexner, CEO of The Limited, Inc. During the 1980’s and early 1990s, The Limited began acquiring bits of former farmland on Columbus’s northeast side to build a new distribution center and warehouses. These never came to be, however, as local infrastructure improvements, including a federally funded project to widen the Columbus Beltway (I-270), made Wexner realize he was sitting on a gold mine. He knew the land was too valuable for just warehouses and “so they decided on a planned community” (Palmieri 2003).

Wexner had heard of Coco Walk in metro Miami, commonly regarded as the first lifestyle center³⁴ in the country, and knew it was just what Columbus was missing. He convinced The Georgetown Co. to put up a stake in the project and they were off. The facility was designed by the Development Design Group, Inc. of Baltimore, Maryland and the architect for the project was Meacham & Apel Architects, Inc. of Dublin, Ohio (Palmieri 2003). Finally, on June 30, 1999, Easton Town Center was born into a world, and a market, that would quickly make it one of Ohio and the Midwest's biggest tourist attractions and one of retail and urban development's most intriguing advances.

Easton was designed (as were many lifestyle centers) with the intent of recreating the look and feel of a small American town from the 1950's. Easton Station was built to look as though it had already undergone several remodelings and different colored bricks were used in part of the walls of Barnes and Nobles to give the illusion that there had once been windows there. The phone booths, swinging shop signs, old-fashioned street lights (which are even used inside), and overall architecture all convey a sense of being in that oft-longed for Mayberry depicted in *The Andy Griffith Show*. John Clark, the president of Baltimore-based Development Design Group that helped design Easton, made clear the intent by saying, "I look at it as this Norman Rockwell middle America hometown vernacular" (Mander 2001).

Easton also employs other design and material methods to re-create the desired atmosphere. Thus, there are narrow streets (or "streetscapes") many of which are brick, metered parking spaces along the street (two garages are also available although they are kept on the periphery), open-air town squares, fountains and parks for children, and

³⁴ A lifestyle center is "broadly defined as open-air groupings of national specialty chains coupled with upscale independents, restaurants, and often, entertainment venues" (Fairchild 2003). For more on lifestyle centers, see Maurer 2003; Levy 2003; Underhill 2004; Banoo 2003; Bohl 2003; Roundtable 2002.

outdoor shops. Outside of the central Easton Station, there are six city blocks lined with two-story red-brick buildings, several street-front restaurants and cafes, bright red phone booths on many street corners, and even the town police car is in the mode of a 1950's style cruiser. In addition, the Barnes and Nobles doubles as the town library and the art deco movie theater houses Pottery Barn.

There is an attempt to conceal that which would have been out of place in a small town. For example, the central square of Easton Station is overshadowed by a grand staircase with the escalators hidden off to the sides and the elevators completely out of view. Hence, that which is more modern is less visible.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule. For example, Easton is also Central Ohio's largest free wireless internet hotspot. This means that those with internet-enabled devices (cell phones, computers, etc.) will be automatically logged into the T1 connection available across the premises. "Free wireless internet throughout Easton Town Center is a demonstration of our commitment to provide Columbus with the latest technology to enhance visitors' experience and move beyond the ordinary" (Easton Website - Wireless). Although at first this might seem to contradict the simulation of a 1950s style atmosphere, since the "waves" used to provide this service are invisible, the vista and appearance of the town remains still quaintly Mayberry.

This last point reflects something that should not be overlooked about Easton. Although there is a goal to call forth the feel of an era gone by in their guests (or residents), they are not willing to do so at the expense of modern luxuries. One might long to enjoy local artists in a town square, let children play in the town fountains, or watch the lighted carriages at Christmas, but not without a cell phone in one hand and a

pager in the other. Easton realizes this common contradiction in the American shopper and answers it by supplementing old-time charm with cutting-edge services such as the internet hot spot – at least as long as that cutting edge remains invisible or well hidden (as with the elevators).

Easton in Columbus: Community destroying community

Easton has undertaken a number of endeavors to enhance the larger city of Columbus. One way they do this is through their Change for Charities program. This program donates a portion of the revenues generated by their parking meters and tickets to local charities. To date, over \$160,000 has been donated to area non-profits. The recipients in 2003 were the Salvation Army of Columbus, Salesian Boys & Girls Club of Columbus, Columbus Cancer Clinic, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Franklin County (the county in which Columbus is located), Childhood League Center, and A Special Wish Foundation. The selected recipients for 2004 include Buckeye Ranch, James Cancer Hospital, the Center for Child and Family Advocacy, Children's Hunger Alliance, Community Shelter Board, and the Big Brothers Big Sisters Association. Steiner said of the program, "The innovative concept of helping the local community via parking meters and parking tickets, truly reflects the vision of Easton Town Center. Even when a customer is dropping a quarter into a meter, that customer becomes part of the experience and makes a difference in the community" (Easton Website). The difference Easton is making was recognized in 2003 when it won a

Business First Corporate Caring Award. Steiner's quote also suggests yet again the intention of the town officials to make Easton a true community.

In addition to the Change for Charities program, Easton also offers a community booth free of charge to local groups interested in public exposure or interaction. In addition to the booth, there is also a community room available to area groups. The great success of both the community room and booth reflects the fact that Easton is seen by many in the community as a true social hub.

In September of 2003, Easton unveiled its high school scholarship program. Four scholarships of \$2,500 each will be awarded to winning seniors from two local high schools. "We at Easton Town Center are dedicated to partnering with our local neighborhoods for the advancement of social goals, especially when our goal is the education of our children" (Easton Website - Scholarship). Note the use of the word "our". Again, this reflects the attitude of officials at Easton who see themselves not as part of a retail or consumption environment, at least not exclusively, but rather as members of a burgeoning town with concerns for the community and "social goals".

All of this is not to argue that Easton has a purely beneficial, or even symbiotic, relationship with Columbus. It has, in fact, done damage to a lot of other businesses (and people) in the area. Just a few miles west on I-270, Northland Mall, for example, was forced to close its doors in October 2002. Northland offered a blue-collar alternative to the more up-scale Easton and although it is now being turned into multi-purpose community center it was still a wake-up call to many in the area that Easton was going to have some negative effects on the area as well (Wray 2004). The site is also drawing business away from other malls and retail establishments in the area, many of which

could quickly follow Northland. In addition, Palmetto, a company that administers Medicare benefits, moved 500 employees from the suburb of Grove City to Easton in 2004 “in part to provide better amenities for its employees...and Easton provides more restaurants and shopping” (Stammen 2004).

One of the great ironies of the town of Easton is that it is killing the downtown of Columbus. City Center Mall, which was once home to such upscale stores as Gucci and Tommy Hilfiger and was the pride and joy of the Columbus retail market, is being not-so-slowly transformed into a “dead mall”. Recently stores such as LensCrafters, Lazarus, Ann Taylor, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Nine West have all failed to renew their leases. In addition, Wexner owns many of the stores still left – Express, Express for Men, Bath and Body Works, and two Victoria’s Secret’s. If he chooses to pull these, the mall is sure to be the next Northland.

Easton is drawing more than just shoppers from the downtown area. Many parents are now taking their children there to play in the fountains; seniors are choosing the safe Disneyfied environment of Easton for their walking exercise instead of downtown Goodale or Bicentennial Parks; new residents are drawn more to the trendy Easton than to the newly constructed downtown lofts; and as mentioned before, conventions are opting away from downtown for the greater appeal of the 50’s style town just minutes away. Much as the suburbs did to the downtown in the “original” 1950’s, Easton is once again sucking the life out of the heart of the city, as well as the older suburbs.

In addition, guests and residents moving to and from Easton frequently jam even the recently widened interstates and the pollution from their automobiles pollutes the Columbus air. Skyrocketing real estate values and a new town in their backyard are

forcing many who had once lived in this quiet country area to pack up and leave their homes (Nelson interview). Finally, the enormous flood of retail and entertainment tenants is only further crushing existing locals in an already saturated market. And although many of the retailers are indeed new to the market, one wonders if a bit of a novelty is worth the presence of yet another Cheesecake Factory.

Easton as a New Form of Urbanism

Historically, towns and cities have been created with a primary emphasis on living space. Even today's largest business and industrial metropolises began with a focus on housing and later developed commercial interests to meet the needs of residents³⁵. Easton, however, has done just the opposite. That is, it was not, at least initially, a town in which residents lived and that then developed consumption settings to meet their needs. Instead, retail, dining, and leisure activities were all constructed *before* residents moved in (the addition of housing will be discussed later). Additionally, Easton as a town does, and for the foreseeable future will continue to, function more as a setting of consumption than of residence.

Another difference is that unlike most towns that emerge in organic relationship with their surroundings, Easton was created and built from the ground up to serve as a community of consumption (for more on this, see previous chapter). Easton was

³⁵ An amendment could be added to this statement detailing the creation of cities for political purposes. Washington, D.C., USA, Canberra, Australia, and Brasilia, Brazil are three examples of cities that were planned specifically to serve as political centers for their respective countries. However, although politics was their phronesis, or “the practical and political reason involved in creating, managing, and sustaining a territorially defined community” (Soja 2000; 46), they still emphasized the needs of residents over the interests of businesses.

completely planned out before the first shovel broke ground. There were few unexpected inhabitants (i.e. retailers in this case) or unplanned structural developments.

All of this is not to say that there are not other cities that formed organically that are not also already primarily dominated by landscapes of consumption. Thus, although Easton was founded to be an entirely new community of consumption, a geographic locale which is based on consumption, is home to full-time residents, and attempts to revive traditional community, other towns founded for a different purpose are now moving dramatically in a similar direction. Many of these towns have come to fame and fortune only by way of this transformation. For example, Branson, Missouri, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and Orlando, Florida have all achieved fame and growth because of their radical transformation into destination centers as landscapes of consumption³⁶.

There is still one key difference, however, that sets Easton apart and makes it different from these other landscapes. It was founded to be a locale of consumption. It began with businesses, services, and profit as motivation under the rule of a partnership of businesses and out of the minds of pioneering businesspeople. Further, it is highly unlikely that Easton will be transformed into something other than what it was originally designed to be – a setting of hyperconsumption. In other words, it is improbable that the residential will ever overshadow the commercial and even if it did, the beginning of the city as a commercial center would still make it unique.

In spite of a difference in who the “inhabitants” are, Easton, like other towns, has responded to their needs. Again, however, the situation has been reversed. Instead of adding consumption settings for residents, Easton is adding residents for consumption

³⁶ It is also interesting to note those towns which have sold rights to their names. Examples include Half.com, Oregon and JenniferAnn.com in New Zealand.

settings. Over 800 apartments have already been constructed and there are plans to build another 700 apartments and to break ground for luxury condominiums. Consequently, Easton can now officially boast full-time residents. In addition to simply building a stable population, the appearance of residential locations offers people the opportunity to get a piece of Easton for themselves. “The residential aspect was always planned here [at Easton]. Now that the apartments are finally finished, people who don’t want to leave Easton, don’t have to” (Howell interview).

In addition to the presence of residential and retail space, Easton is also currently home to about 135,000 square feet of office space (Mander 2001). There are plans for over 6 million square feet of office space (most of it belonging to Wexner’s The Limited Inc.), which is approximately half of what is already available in downtown Columbus, by the time the town is fully developed. Thus, Easton has many of the typical zoning features of a traditional town just in different quantity and priority. The presence of homes and offices in addition to consumption settings (although arguably even the home is a setting of consumption), should be enough to mark Easton as a town. There are, however, stronger arguments yet for this case.

In terms of the appeal of cities, it is often the case that size does matter. Easton is no exception and it has certainly realized that sheer physical size can be an attraction in itself. The Center is huge - approximately 1,300 acres – and it already has 1.5 million square feet of developed retail space with up to another 2.5 million square feet planned. All of this in addition to the 6 million square feet of aforementioned planned office space and the square footage added by the existing and planned residential developments. In spite of using enormous size as a draw, town officials (planners, management, etc.) have

also kept the scale small enough that visitors do not feel overwhelmed and can easily walk from one consumption site to the next. Roads are narrow to discourage cars and there are numerous wide cross-walks to help people move throughout the town with little interference. And just in case visitors do start to get tired, there is a town trolley provided free of charge to whisk them to the next town event.

Although size might matter, labels do not. Official recognition as a town is not necessary for public recognition as a town. Easton developers had this in mind when they set about advertising the Center. In addition to all of the techniques mentioned above for creating a town atmosphere, Easton officials have also used labeling to get the idea across. Hence, the location itself is known as Easton *Town* Center and the map of the grounds is labeled as a “town directory”. With or without political standing, Easton is billing itself as a town, and more importantly a town anyone would want to visit, and even live in!

Easton as a Form of New Urbanism

Peter Calthorpe (1999), a leader in New Urbanist design, has argued that New Urbanism represents something beyond a simple “reworking of a Norman Rockwell fantasy of a small town America”. In this regard, many descriptions of Easton would seem to paint it as something short of an exemplar of NU principles. An argument can be made, however, for Easton as a form of New Urbanism by holding it up to the principles of NU and comparing and contrasting it to the case studies already examined.

The Tenets of NU at Easton

An examination of how well Easton holds up to the foundational principles of NU design will serve as the starting point for this argument.

Formative Public Space

Easton has certainly aimed to make “public”³⁷ space its primary focus. Each of the two neighborhoods at Easton are centered around a public square and even the enclosed Easton Station has a large open gathering place at its heart. Perhaps the most valuable attempt undertaken by Easton to bring public space to the forefront is its attempt at recreating social events nostalgic of typical American cities 50 years ago. For example, in the summer there are outdoor music concerts, art shows, and even a farmers’ market. During the winter season, at Christmas, there is a parade and a ceremony to light the town Christmas tree, horse-drawn carriages are available to take you all around the town (for a small fee of course), and carolers in period clothing as well as local school and church choirs roam the premises which are lit by over a half million white lights.

Thus, one of the central appeals of Easton is that it brings together everyday life with opportunities promised in a consumer culture. Easton exemplifies a particular type of landscape that seeks to reproduce a kind of community that seems to have been lost in the midst of an increasingly ubiquitous consumer culture (Sklair 2002). Ironically, even as the rise of consumer culture has been vilified as one of the primary causes of the

³⁷ The word “public” is used loosely here since the public space is still privately owned. This will be more thoroughly discussed in the upcoming section comparing Easton to Celebration.

demise of idealized forms of community, Easton aims to reconcile community with the forces of hyperconsumption that are often blamed for its demise.

Defined Edges

The boundaries of Easton are unquestionable. Given its distance from other urban centers, it stands alone as a center of development amidst a relatively barren farmland on two sides, and a major interstate on the third side. Across the road on the fourth side are sprawling parking lots and big box retailers such as Target and Best Buy. This transition from a more compact Easton to the expansive sprawl is significant enough to mark a distinct boundary.

Pedestrian Friendly

Easton is not your typical consumption setting where parking lots are often larger than the retail environment itself. Nor does Easton prioritize parking and vehicles over pedestrian traffic. The roads within the town are purposefully small and narrow – meant to serve more as symbolic representations of small town life than functioning automobile thoroughfares. There is limited curbside parking, and even what exists is, again, mostly there to lend credence to the feeling of a typical small town. There is, however, ample parking – over 8000 spaces to be exact. This parking is housed primarily in three large garages and a few smaller parking lots, all kept to the periphery of the downtown. This emphasis on the pedestrian is apparent to anyone walking through the town who will notice the ample crosswalks filled with fellow Easton-goers and the relative absence of engines purring.

Population Diversity

This aspect of NU is more difficult to measure at Easton given its limited number of residents. All residents are housed within only a few residential facilities and are nearly indistinguishable from other Easton-goers thereby making a participant observation of their demographics nearly impossible. It can be assumed, however, that those residing in Easton are relatively homogeneous given the unique prospects of living in such a place and the typical resident such offerings would likely attract.

Mixed Use

At its completion, Easton will be home to over 12 million square feet of office, residential, retail, and hotel space. Although the population is currently only a few thousand, this is still larger than Seaside and not far short of Kentlands or Celebration. Commercial interests are clearly represented as consumption is the focus of the town and even industry is supported by the creation of many thousands of jobs. Most importantly to NU, however, is that all of these zones have imploded and exist within and beside one another. Residents have only a short 5 minute walk to nearly any shop, office, restaurant, hotel, or entertainment facility at Easton.

Specific Local Responses

Easton certainly took the local environment – both natural and built – into consideration when it was being constructed. As mentioned before, one of the catalysts

for the birth of Easton was the improved infrastructure in the area. Additionally, Steiner's website comments on their new town center design strategy by stating:

Unlike the traditional interior mall development process which often requires clearing attractive surroundings to make way for asphalt parking lots, a new town center seeks to sustain or even add 'greenspace' to the landscape. Trees, plants, and water features are integral to the center's design sensibility. The surrounding landscape remains intact to the greatest degree possible.

Rigid Planning

A strict and rigid planning code is certainly at the heart of Easton's built (and arguably even their social) environment. The entire development was planned out before Wexner broke the first ground. Additionally, it has been planned with the future in mind. "The most compelling statement that can be made about a Steiner development is that its founding principle is 'sustained use'. The fully-realized Town Center with its shopping districts, park and community areas is intended to survive not just a few decades but for future generations" (Easton Website).

It would seem that Easton does indeed measure up to the tenets of New Urbanism, and, in fact, does so better than many of those communities hailed as NU prototypes. The true test, however, will come as more and more inhabitants come to call Easton home. Only time will tell if Easton, or other NU developments, will indeed stand its rigid test.

Easton: A New Form of New Urbanism

Charles Bohl (2003) argues that the key factors in the development of places such as Easton include: "changing demographics and lifestyle preferences; trends and

innovations in retailing, apartment building, and office projects; the desire for a stronger sense of community identity and sense of place; and the emergence of public policies that promote smart growth and the new urbanism” (Bohl presentation, 3). Bohl has also summarized the implications of these social trends:

- The change from mass-market standards to nice market differentiation, both by life stage and by lifestyle
- The change from unplanned suburbs to master-planned communities
- The change from suburban anonymity and individualism to a yearning for community.
- The change from contemporary to neotraditional styling.
- The change from strip-commercial suburban sprawl to compact, highly-defined town centers. (Bohl presentation, 3).

Easton can be seen in light of this analysis. We have seen how Easton has attempted to respond to changes in lifestyle preferences. The very use of the term “lifestyle center” implies attentiveness to such changes. Steiner has also outlined how Easton represents the latest innovations in retailing (Steiner website). The attempt to build community and a sense of place at Easton has been discussed repeatedly throughout this chapter and the previous one and the most recent discussion has shown how Easton abides by the tenets of New Urbanism. Thus, it would seem that Bohl’s analysis of the key factors is in sync with this argument.

We can now build on the argument that Easton is a form of New Urbanism to assert that Easton is, in fact, a new form of New Urbanism. This is, however, not a new idea as the developers of Easton have already made such a claim.

Steiner called his firm’s work, which includes the Easton Town Center, Columbus, Ohio, "new urban retail" which, in essence, follows the guidelines laid out by new urbanism, but is centered on leisure time and shopping rather

than residential planning. "Historically, downtowns combined leisure time with shopping," Steiner said. But the two split in the 1950s with the construction of early regional malls. These centers were "very single-focused shopping experiences. Leisure did not follow shopping. Today we are experiencing a reintroduction of leisure time activities into shopping settings," he said (Bodamer 2001).

This argument fuses the previous two – that Easton is a new urban form and that Easton is a form of New Urbanism – while going beyond them to show how Easton has created an urban form that, while it has the tenets of New Urbanism at its core, is still best represented by a reversal in the prioritization of consumption settings. Thus, Easton is more than a consumption setting because it is also an urban environment and it is more than a traditional, or even neo-traditional, urban environment because of its priority on consumption settings.

While New Urbanism arose as a response to the perceived social ills plaguing American society, the new form of New Urbanism represented at Easton, or what I shall call *Eastonism*, can be seen as the product of an ever-expanding consumer culture. *Thus, Eastonism is the built and ideological environment created by the fusion of a mass consumer society and its expanding social geographies with the principle tenets of New Urbanist design and philosophy.* Eastonism represents the attempts of a mass consumerism, after having been given impetus by the suburban manifesto and its consequent autophilia, to adapt to the changing social consciousness of a new millennium. To a larger degree, Eastonism is the latest effort by capitalism to stay alive in the face of increasing concerns over the environment, social inequality, community, and above all - *space*.

Chapter IV: Eastonism: Towards a Spatial Analysis of Consumer Culture

“Trial by space invariably reaches a dramatic moment, that moment when whatever is being tried – philosophy or religion, ideology or established knowledge, capitalism or socialism, state or community – is put radically into question” (Lefebvre 1991, 417).

The previous chapters have sought to give greater insight into two of the most innovative aspects of Easton – its advances in the world of consumption and urbanism. This chapter will serve as a meta-analysis of the preceding two and introduce a critical new aspect to our understanding of both – space. The introduction of a spatial analysis will help tie together the previous arguments and present a more coherent picture of the grander implications of Easton.

Space and Easton: A Lefebvrian Analysis

The interest in space is a recent one for many in sociology (Gieryn 2000). Foucault (1980, 70) states that a "critique could be carried out of this devaluation of space that has prevailed for generations.... Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic". Edward Soja (1989) agrees noting that giving attention to space is especially important because many modern social theories focused exclusively on social change, history, and time. The role of space in social theory has become the interest of many in recent decades, especially neo-Marxian theorists (see Baudrillard 1998; Benjamin 1999; Jameson 1991; Katznelson 1992; Lefebvre 1991, 1996, 2003; Soja 1989, 1996). Advances in technology, transportation, and communication have brought many

throughout the world into more frequent contact with others from far, and near, away. Thus, we can say that “we are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side” (Foucault 1986, 22).

A groundbreaking work in the theory of space was French neo-Marxist Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) *The Production of Space*. He argues that capitalism is increasingly turning its attention to the manipulation and control of space. Lefebvre urges our attention to “shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*” (37). No commodities are produced at Easton (at least not to a degree which would parallel the production taking place in most factories), hence no “things in space”. I have also already shown how Easton seeks to mirror new urbanist ideology, and hence a “production of space”. Therefore, Lefebvre’s insight into spatial theory can help further our understanding of Easton, communities of consumption, and Eastonism.

One of the fundamental ideas upon which Lefebvre’s theory of space is built is his tripartite distinction between spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. Spatial practice constitutes the “perceived” space - the way in which one understands space. “The spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space” (38). Representations of space are “conceived” spaces - the ways in which space is already interpreted by elites and laid out for others. They are “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived and what is

perceived with what is conceived. This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)” (38-39). Representational space is “lived” space - the way in which space is actually used. It is “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’... This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (39).

I argue, as did Lefebvre to some extent, that the boundaries between these three distinctions are not clear and hard, but rather have been increasingly blurred. It is sometimes unclear where representations of space end and representational space begins to say nothing of the relationship of spatial practices to both. Lefebvre notes:

Perhaps we shall go further, and conclude that the producers of space have always acted in accordance with a representation, while the ‘users’ passively experience whatever was imposed upon them inasmuch as it was more or less thoroughly inserted into, or justified by, their representational space. How much manipulation might occur is a matter for our analysis to determine. If architects (and urban planners) do indeed have a representation of space, whence does it derive? Whose interests are served when it becomes ‘operational’? As to whether or not ‘inhabitants’ possess a representational space, if we arrive at an affirmative answer, we shall be well on the way to dispelling a curious misunderstanding (which is not to say that this misunderstanding will disappear in social and political practice) (43-44).

We can begin to unravel this “curious misunderstanding” by examining the questions put forth by Lefebvre in light of Easton. The first question – “If architects (and urban planners) do indeed have a representation of space, whence does it derive?” – is answered by the master plan laid out by Easton’s designers and engineers. Easton was designed to simulate an American small-town of the 1950’s. The image of what this town was like was pulled from the image found in the collective consciousness of today’s society. This image has likely been distorted by the idealistic media representations and

romantic tendencies of nostalgia. Regardless of its accuracy, however, Easton seeks to revive a time and place that has been lost to both time and place themselves. In this way, it seeks to distort not only present time, but historical time as well.

The second question – “Whose interests are served when it becomes ‘operational’?” – is one which elicits divergent responses. Those who own, manage, and control Easton argue that it is a place that seeks to benefit the consumer. The ease of having everything in one place, the convenience of living near to, in fact, among, so many consumption settings, and the number of “community” oriented philanthropies at Easton are all offered as reasons why it is a place which benefits consumers. Indeed, many, if not most, of those who visit, vacation to, and live in Easton argue the same thing. There are those, however, who argue that Easton is not a place geared to benefit the consumer but rather the owners, managers, and other capitalist entrepreneurs. Since the profits of Easton go to the owners, the use of space and resources is controlled, supervised, and restricted by the management, and the entire endeavor is the result of the master plan of a group of entrepreneurs, it is difficult to assume that any of it was done to benefit those who come there to spend money.

The third question – “As to whether or not ‘inhabitants’ possess a representational space” – is more difficult to answer. I concur with Lefebvre that producers of space have always acted in accordance with a particular representation and that those who used such spaces experience these spaces through a lens of their own representational space. The analysis of the history of consumption settings and the transition into the era of ubiquitous consumption suggests that the amount of manipulation has become near total. At Easton, the “images and symbols” that constitute the means by which the space is

“directly lived” are not produced organically. Instead, the symbols used to construct space at Easton are produced, presented, controlled, and sold to the users without benefit of their intervention. This denies the possibility of spatial practice at Easton since the total institution (Goffman) of Easton is one which exerts total dominance over the symbolic and lived practices of its inhabitants. Further, the commodification of everyday life has instantiated Lefebvre’s fear that “representational space disappears into representations of space” (398). Thus, Easton also cannot be representational space. But can it exist solely as a representation of space? After all, people do live there - people who come in with their own histories (assuming they were not born at Easton, a fearful prospect from the standpoint of this analysis), who have the ability to leave (assuming that places like Easton do not become so ubiquitous themselves that there is no escape from the “iron cage” of Eastonism), and who have at least some level of agency (although many fear that even this is being commodified).

So what kind of space is Easton? Lefebvre notes that, “Since, *ex hypothesi*, each mode of production has its own particular space, the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space” (46). We can modify this argument to say that each mode of *consumption* has its own particular space and that the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space. Chapter two demonstrated the shift in the modes of consumption settings from one form (those in the era of consumption) to another (those in the era of ubiquitous consumption) and so presumably, using Lefebvre’s argument, the production of a new kind of space.

A Mode of Production of the Production of Space

As noted before, Lefebvre urges a shift in attention from a mode of production in space to the production of space. A mode of production in space characterizes a world “of domination in which control is exercised by the state, the capitalist and the bourgeoisie. It is a closed, sterile world, one that is being emptied out of contents (e.g. highways replacing and destroying local communities)” (Ritzer and Goodman 2004, 164). In contrast, the production of space means that, “instead of domination, we have here a world in which appropriation is predominant. That is, people in concert with other people work in and with space to produce what they need to survive and prosper” (164). The possibility opened up at Easton is a blend of these two. It is an attempt by capitalists to insert a mode of production in the production of space. In other words, the production of produced space. Easton is not entirely characterized as a “closed, sterile world, one that is emptied out of contents”. Nor is it “a world in which appropriation is predominant”. Instead, it is a world in which the tools of the production of space (images, symbols, material resources) are generated, not by the inhabitants and users of the space, but by the domination of the capitalist. Those living in Easton make use of the mode of production in space to produce their own spaces. However, this production of space, spatial practice, is constructed from “things in space” and not the actual “production of space”. Hence we have here a new kind of space – a *produced space* – and more importantly, a mode of production of produced space³⁸.

³⁸ This introduction of a third typology fits well into general Lefebvrian theory given his proclivity toward tripartite distinctions.

It is helpful at this point to turn our attention to the work of Frederick Jameson (1991) on postmodern hyperspace. Jameson uses the term postmodern to describe the “latest mutation in space...[which]...has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world” (44). Easton demonstrates an attempt by capitalists to create such a hyperspace. They wish to disorient the consumer in a world of fantastical and spectacular commodities and experiences, each waiting to be better than the last, and each available in exchange for money and time. This attempt at disorientation is demonstrated through the relative absence of clocks³⁹, the integration of the limitless outdoor landscape, and the wide range of goods, services, and experiences available and on display throughout the setting.

The creation of hyperspace, therefore, can be seen as a critical aspect of this new type of space – produced space. Capitalists are using a mode of production in space to disorient those who might act in the production of space. The inhabitants of Easton are led to believe that they are creating representational spaces when, in fact, they are only furthering the representations of space laid out by the owners. The sense of hyperspace and the total organization of produced space present the illusion of freely “lived” experiences under the guise of a “perception” of “conceived’ space. This colonization of perceived and lived space can be seen both as a natural extension of the capitalist drive to dominate space and as a modern-day witch hunt seeking to confuse and disorient the masses from the source of their true oppressor. Thus, produced space is a type of

³⁹ One notable exception is a large clock on the outside of the central indoor mall, although it is arguable that this is more to promote a sense of community (in the fashion of Big Ben) than to orient inhabitants to time.

hyperspace which conceals the domination of a mode of production in space under the guise of a spatially practiced production of space.

Capitalism in the Era of Produced Space

Many neo-Marxists (and their postmodernist cousins) assert that we are in the era of the dominance of space (Foucault 1986; Jameson 1991; Lefebvre 1991, 1996, 2003; Soja 1989, 1996). Capitalists seem to agree with this assertion. Since the Industrial Revolution, capitalism has increasingly sought to control time. The center of the Industrial Revolution and leader in production for many decades, the United Kingdom, took the lead in this area. It was here that time was standardized on a global scale through the Greenwich Mean Convention and hours of the workday were regulated and standardized. It is surely no accident that one of the most notable landmarks of the city of London – Big Ben - is a giant clock tower. Anthony Giddens (1990, 17) notes that “The clock expressed a uniform dimension of “empty” time, quantified in such a way as to permit the precise designation of “zones” of the day (e.d., the “working day”)”. It was this “emptying of time” that set the stage for the contemporary “emptying of space” (Giddens 1990). It should come as no surprise then that as capitalism has shifted its attention from production to consumption (Ritzer 2004a), its center from the United Kingdom to the United States, and its concern from time to space (Lefebvre 1991), that the United States would become the leader in capitalist exploitation through spatial control of consumption settings.

Marxian theorists have been aware of capitalism's tendencies towards spatial control for some time (Marx and Engels 1848/1948; Wallerstein 1974). However, they defined the increasing conquest of space by capital as an explosive movement. In other words, capital would seek to control space by means of expansion, conquest, annexation, and a general imperialism. The fall of the Soviet Union and its associated form of communism, the increasing difficulty in arguing that China is not a capitalist society, and the relative economic unimportance of Cuba on a global scale, all suggest that capitalism has reached the end of its manifest destiny. It has successfully cornered all the major markets and absorbed the entire planet into an increasingly globalized capitalist market. Left with nowhere to "explode", capitalism has now turned inward on itself, "imploded" to use the postmodern term, in order to find new avenues of exploitation. The focus of capitalism has now become the total control of space within its own borders – the dominance of intra-capitalist zones. Such zones can be seen in the examples of several new urbanist developments outlined in chapter three. If nothing else, these developments seek to dominate the production of space through guidelines, rigid codes, and architecturally induced social practices. Eastonism, the built and ideological environment created by the fusion of a mass consumer society and its expanding social geographies with the principle tenets of New Urbanist design and philosophy, represents the ne plus ultra of such an achievement.

Jameson (1991) outlines three stages in the history of capitalism. The first stage, market capitalism, was best theorized by Marx and represented by the emergence of national markets. The second stage, imperialist capitalism, was best theorized by Lenin and represented by the emergence of a global capitalist market. The third stage, or what

Jameson labels as “late capitalism”, is marked by a “prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas” (78). The argument presented in Chapter II suggests that this “uncommodified area” is, in fact, a full vertical integration of our daily lives. Thus, capitalism has turned its attention from a quantitative concern with spatial expansion to a qualitative concern with integrated implosion.

While many conclusions can be drawn from all of this, one rises to the top – capitalism is alive and well. The system so well outlined by Marx nearly 150 years ago is humming along at record efficiency. Our time, our space, and to an increasing degree, our lives themselves have come under the powerful sway of modernity’s closest ally. Not content to simply turn goods and services into commodities, capitalism now seeks to commodify the very moments and spaces of our human existence. Easton represents the latest move in a long running chess game of capitalism against humanity. We must respond in force before it is “checkmate”. Indeed, we can modify the famous perfervid exhortation of the Communist Manifesto to decree “consumers of the world unite!”.

General Conclusions

This research was designed, planned, and implemented with three overarching and interrelated objectives in mind – to apply existing theoretical knowledge on consumption, community, urbanism, and space to the specific case study of Easton Town Center; to enhance, contribute, and extend the research and literature surrounding these four areas; and to flesh out the paradigm of Easton into a more coherent, comprehensive theory with potential applications for future social scientific inquiry.

Chapter II, “The Rise of Consumption Settings and Their Associated Mentality,” focused specifically on the relationship of Easton to consumption as well as its place in, and contribution to, that literature. Through examining the history of consumption settings as well as some of their associated social and cultural implications, I outlined what I argue are four distinct periods in the history of such settings – an era of social trading, an era of production, an era of consumption, and finally the emergence of an era of ubiquitous consumption. The goal was to demonstrate that Easton is an innovation in consumption settings, one that builds on the history of these locations yet takes them a step further and marks a new era in consumption.

The second part of Chapter II focused on Easton as an evolution in the geography of consumption settings. In this section, I traced the history of consumption settings through a more social geographic lens. By drawing largely on George Ritzer’s work on the cathedrals and landscapes of consumption, I theorized a new consumption geography – a *community of consumption*. Both this argument about communities of consumption as well as my assertion of the four eras in the history of consumption settings point to the same conclusion – consumption settings are achieving a full vertical integration of our daily lives.

Chapter III, “Easton: From Urbanism to New Urbanism and Beyond,” demonstrated the changes Easton represents from the point of view of the history of urban development. After a brief introduction to the history of urbanism, a discussion of suburbanization lent insight into one of the key factors in the rise of the true focus of this chapter, the development of urban planning. A history of important milestones in the development of planned communities culminated in a discussion of one of the most

recent, and arguably the most influential, of these techniques – New Urbanism. After outlining the key tenets of New Urbanist philosophy, a closer look at three critical prototypes of this type of development - Seaside, Florida, Celebration, Florida, and Kentlands, Maryland – led to a discussion of Easton in the context of the history of urban development. The concept of “Eastonism”, coined here for the first time, was introduced to argue that Easton is, in fact, something new in the history of urban planning and represents a distinctly new form in the history of urbanism.

Chapter IV, “Eastonism: Towards a Spatial Analysis of Consumer Culture,” served as a meta-analysis of the preceding two chapters and introduced a critical new aspect – space - to the understanding of both. Drawing largely on the work of Henri Lefebvre, I argued that Easton is the paradigm of a new type of space – *produced space*. This argument has allowed for the beginnings of a critical new insight into capitalism in the context of produced space. Overall, the introduction of a spatial analysis helped tie together the previous arguments and present a more coherent picture of the larger implications called forth by Easton.

Appendix A: Research Methods

“Social research is the systematic observation of social life for the purpose of finding and understanding patterns among what is observed” (Babbie 2001:2). This study uses social research for the purpose of exploring, describing, and explaining innovations in consumption, urbanism, community, and space at Easton Town Center. This study begins with the premise of not blindly accepting the authority of those marketers, designers, planners, and public relations officials who have already sought to describe, or more accurately, to promote Easton. My goal is to use largely qualitative data in order to build on, and add to, the current literature and theory surrounding consumption, urbanism, community, and space.

I take a decidedly modern approach to this study. Although the rise, and arguably the death, of postmodernity has sensitized sociologists to nuances and challenged modern methodology (Ritzer 1997), I will generally take a modern approach. More specifically, a macrotheoretical structural-functional approach is employed as focus is given more to structures and social artifacts than individuals or belief systems. Hence my unit of analysis will be the structure of Easton Town Center and the aggregate of individuals who populate it as visitors, consumers, and residents.

The goal of this study will be to build on and expand theory. Both inductive and deductive approaches will be used as “studying specific topics typically involves alternating between the two” (5). Theory construction begins by identifying the topic – in this case, Easton Town Center. The range of phenomena this theory addresses will be divided between four chapters – the first as a general introduction, the second on consumption and community, the third on urbanism, and the fourth on space. Major

topics and concepts will be laid out - this stage of conceptualization is particularly important before operational definitions can be outlined to help lay the groundwork for a more specialized theoretical approach. Examination of existing literature will then be necessary in order to determine what is already known, and not known, about each area. Finally, existing theory will be extended based on the culmination of the previous steps.

This study will serve three of the main purposes of social research – exploration, description, and explanation (Babbie 2001). Exploratory research will be useful in elaborating inductive theoretical approaches and for adding validity to the study. Since Easton is a relatively unexamined research topic, it will also be necessary to conduct exploratory research in order to determine the feasibility and potential gains to be made from studying such a topic. Description will be a second purpose of this study. It is necessary to describe Easton in order to fully understand what is occurring there. This will satisfy the “What?” of social inquiry. Lastly, this study will have an explanatory component. I uncover *why* Easton represents an innovation in consumption, community, urbanism, and space.

A qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach will be used. Further, since it is Easton Town Center that will be the focus of this study, this could be classified as a case study. Case studies can be rich sources of both descriptive and explanatory insights (Babbie 20001, 285). As noted in Babbie, Michael Burawoy and colleagues (1991) assert that case studies can be used to build upon existing theory rather than to simply validate or invalidate it. Thus, this will be a case-oriented analysis although some cross-case analysis will be employed to highlight the distinctiveness, as well as commonalities, found at Easton.

Semiotics will also provide an important backdrop to this study, although by no means a principle technique of investigation. Understanding the meanings of the symbols and signs surrounding consumer, community, urban, and spatial culture is central to realizing how they are evolving and influencing our lives. A deeper analysis of many of the aesthetic signifiers of contemporary culture highlights just exactly what is innovative about Easton. Both the manifest and latent content of these meanings is explored to deepen and broaden our understanding of this location and experience.

A historical methodology will be employed in order to understand the history, development, and innovation in consumer, community, urban, and space settings and functions. Through the use of ideal types, I trace the history of these social artifacts in order to show how and why Easton serves as a paradigm of innovation. Only through examining previous historical originations and modifications can any contemporary innovation be fully understood.

This study will rely heavily on unobtrusive research. Academic resources such as books and published articles, especially those in the fields of sociology and urban studies, are referenced and serve as the basis for a literature review. A critique of some of this literature will also serve as the springboard for developing my own theoretical propositions. Content analysis of newspaper articles is another source. Since much of what has been written about Easton has appeared in newspapers rather than more academic publications, they will serve as one of the few sources for information about the specific topic. The internet will also provide another valuable resource for many of the same reasons. In particular, the websites for Easton and Steiner & Associates will serve as key places to find descriptive information.

Data collection also involved participant observation and field research. John and Lyn Lofland, in *Analyzing Social Settings* (1995) discuss various social phenomena appropriate for field research. Among them are organizations and settlements, both of which apply to Easton Town Center. Memoing, both through theoretical and operational notes, was employed while on site.

Finally, qualitative interviewing was conducted both on-site and by telephone. As opposed to more formal survey research techniques, interviews were conducted as relatively open-ended conversations in which I raised key issues of interest and allowed the respondents to largely guide the conversation. There were, however, a set of preplanned questions that guided my inquiries during the interview. Given the sensitive nature of involving human subjects, a more precise section on the interviewing techniques and methodology is below.

Overall, this particular approach to the study has a number of strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative studies tend to be high in validity although they do suffer from lower reliability than other, especially quantitative, techniques. Content analysis, on the other hand, has just the reverse – lower validity but higher reliability than many alternative methodologies. The internet is especially prone to weaknesses, however, as mentioned before, it serves as the sole source of much of the more descriptive information to be gathered. Additionally, the methodology employed for this study is the most feasible available given the limitations of time and money associated with conducting thesis-level research.

Interviewing Methodology

Since the effects of many of Easton's novel retail, urban, and social undertakings are, as yet, not fully explored, interviews were conducted with local residents, shoppers, employees and other town officials. The University of Maryland at College Park Internal Review Board approval was granted for this project on October 29, 2003. Most human subjects involved in this study were observed anonymously in their roles as consumers. The results of interviews with some consumers were quoted, however, their identity is not revealed as anything more than that of a consumer except in those instances when informed consent for the use of their real name was obtained in advance. Additionally, management and public relations individuals were also interviewed after having given their informed consent. Given the nature of their public positions, these individuals are more likely to be referenced in a manner that makes them identifiable. However, no criminal or otherwise questionable information obtained during the interview will be released and all subjects will be honestly informed about the purpose and intent of this study and their interview.

The subjects in the sample were only interviewed; nothing further was done with the subjects. No formal questionnaire or handout was used when interviewing subjects but instead a qualitative interviewing technique of allowing for a natural flow of conversation was the means employed (291). "A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (292). A formal questionnaire might have affected the answers given by the subjects as it could have overdetermined the

course of the conversation and potentially have appeared intimidating. For these same reasons, oral, rather than written, consent was obtained. The subjects were not selected for any specific demographic characteristic and hence were chosen without a conscious bias. They were selected merely on the grounds that they were in some way associated with Easton Town Center near Columbus, Ohio.

Subjects who were interviewed were given full and honest information relating to the purpose of this study and their interview. Those subjects who did not want to be identified either by name or position have remained anonymous or been provided with a pseudonym. Data was taken in the form of memoing. Only the principal researcher, Dr. George Ritzer, and myself have had access to the data. Once the study has been completed all data will be destroyed by means of shredding. Hence, there are no perceived risks (or benefits) to any of the subjects.

The subjects for this study were approximately a dozen consumers, a half-dozen members of management, and a handful of other public relations officials, owners, public officials, and other individuals associated with Easton. The following script was employed, "Greetings. My name is Mike Ryan and I am a graduate student in sociology at the University of Maryland. I am interested in issues of consumption and was wondering if you would be willing to talk with me for a few moments. You are free to decline speaking with me and are also free to break off the conversation at any point during the interview. Further, you are not obliged to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Would you like to participate in this study?" None of this information is deceptive.

There was no advertisement for subjects and they were selected on the basis of a random, positional, or a reputation sample. A convenience sample was employed for the random sampling of consumers. Given the limited amount of time available to conduct on-site interviewing and the lack of feasibility of determining an accurate sampling frame, this method of sampling is the most effective. Consumers were primarily observed as a group at large and no information has been given about those that did not give verbal consent.

Managers were selected on the basis of a random sample and have not been made identifiable without their consent. Certain managers, however, are identified in their role as manager of a given store or department or area of the Town Center. Oral consent was also the method used especially because many of the interviews were done via telephone due to the limited time available on-site. Hence, the use of a written consent form would have been almost impossible. The same script to be used to obtain oral consent from consumers was also used to obtain consent from managers.

Public relations officials and public officials at large were selected on the basis of a positional sample. This method of nonrandom sampling involves the selection of informants from a sampling frame constructed on the basis of the occupational positions of its aggregate. Hence, these informants will be identifiable because of their occupational positions. Additionally, their job implies that they are available for this type of research. Since they are identifiable, however, oral consent was obtained using the same methodology as that employed for managers.

I also employed a reputational sampling technique in order to find informants who had the potential of contributing to this project. This sampling technique involves

selecting interviewees on the basis of their reputations. For example, certain managers and public relations officials suggested that I speak with certain other individuals in order to obtain additional information. One benefit of the use of a reputational sample is that while doing the initial exploratory research, those who were recommended through a reputational reference were those most likely to be of value in this study because of their known affiliations with Easton.

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