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The Commodification and Militarization  
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Genealogy of the Public to a Politics of  
Place

Timothy Case

# **The Commodification and Militarization of American Public Space:**

**From a Genealogy of the Public to a Politics of Place**

By

Timothy Case

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## ABSTRACT

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The history of public space in America is consistent with a pattern of privatization, rationalization, and individual escapism. From the frontier to the regulatory bureaucracy and into suburbanization and New Urbanism, we have and are witnessing the steady decline of vibrant, critical, and democratic public spheres and their replacement with a corporate and media controlled space that reflects the commodification and militarization of American culture at the hands of these corporate elites. After tracing a genealogy of the public and public space, this thesis will focus on two examples of New Urbanist design that illustrate the corporate nature of community politics: the Disney Corporation's Celebration, Florida and DreamWorks' Playa Vista, California. Discussing the ideological basis for both communities, this thesis will suggest possible lessons to be learned for the creation of a public based on an ethic of common ground made possible by organized resistance to corporate manipulation of place.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction: The Crisis of American Public Space**

In a culture where social divisions and structural power inequalities constitute the reality of everyday life, particularly in the postmodern state of market-driven culture and most recently in the wake of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, these divisions are reflected by and connected to the space that constructs and defines them. The response by Americans after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks has been shaped by the dominant media to instill a rediscovery of American innocence and this rediscovery has become the ideological basis for the state of American culture. In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Zizek (2002) writes, “It is as if we are living in the unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic impact...If nothing else, we can clearly experience yet again the limitation of our democracy: decisions are being made which will affect the fate of all of us, and all of us just wait, aware that we are utterly powerless” (2002: 44-45). There is a danger in adhering to the nostalgic citizen image constructed by the dominant media to shape the “true patriotic American.” This nostalgia is being transferred by “war-time” politics into a commodity that is being increasingly reinforced through the design of current community planning and the construction of public space. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Edward Said (2004) suggests that the current state of politics is controlled by a vast network of power aimed at creating a geography or place completely devoid of human agency and citizen participation. He writes:

Yet it is also overwhelmingly true that in America there is no shortage in the public realm of partisan policy intellectuals who are organically linked to one or another political party, lobby, special interest, or foreign power. The world of the Washington think tanks, the various television talk shows, innumerable radio programs, to say nothing of literally thousands of occasional papers, journals, and magazines – all this testifies amply to how densely saturated public discourse is with interests, authorities, and powers whose extent in the aggregate is literally unimaginable in scope and variety, except as that whole bears

centrally on the acceptance of a neoliberal postwelfare state responsive neither to the citizenry nor to the natural environment, but to a vast structure of global corporations unrestricted by traditional barriers or sovereignties...with an administration whose idea of national security is preemptive war, we are beginning to discern an immense panorama of how these systems and practices have been assembled to provide a geography whose purpose is slowly to crowd out human agency. (Said, 2004: 124)

This network-like nature of the structure of global capital, reflective of the politics of “infinite war,” is instrumental in shaping public space so as to limit the ability for criticism of state politics. Thus, issues of place and the construction of community and public space are intimately tied to the formation and state of American culture defined by security, infinite and pre-emptive war, and fear that is reinforcing an exclusionary and isolating social politics. This thesis will focus on the possibility of the creation of public space and a public sphere that resists the network of power manipulating space and reverses current trends towards the escapist and isolated citizen. It will trace changes in the construction of community and urban design and their effect on corresponding changes in the shaping and control of public space and the public sphere, analyzing these changes to explain the escapist and nostalgic ideology permeating American public space.

The escapist mentality of current citizens is hardly a new paradigm to define American culture. According to Hegel, it was the sense of escapism into the infinite frontier that prevented any development of civic culture or public in America. In his book, *Community and the Politics of Place* writes, Daniel Kemmis writes, “Hegel argued that America would not develop a genuine public dimension until it stopped escaping from itself and turned (especially through the maturing of its cities) to face itself” (1990: 139). What he missed was the state’s changing role in the expansion of its powers as a global empire and the increased bureaucracy of the nation state that opened infinite

opportunities for the escapism that prevented the development of the public and became the implicit definition of American culture. The American Dream represents the individual struggle to “make it” often associated with the exploration and colonization of the Western territories and the seizure of individual property for ownership. Space, however, ultimately caught up with this traditional escape into the limitless frontier, and instead a new order replaced limitless expansion, the bureaucratic nation-state and city. The transition to the bureaucratic nation state in turn led to the rationalization of state action, politics, and the public sphere where the escape to rationally structured and ordered societies is a result of a deeply embedded politics of escape from the realities of social life. According to Darrell Fasching’s (1993) book, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, bureaucratic rationality is the logic that ushered in the structured juridical order, and is what provided the rationalization for the tragic events of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As he writes:

The naked public square that appeared to offer the cosmopolitan possibility of a new international human community, a unity-in-diversity, seems instead to be producing a global Disneyland. The modern secular world is turning out to be, not a community but its antithesis – scarcely more than a collection of privatized fantasylands held together by a hidden technobureaucratic structure...When Nietzsche’s madman entered the *naked public square* to announce the death of God and the coming of the new secular order governed by a “will to power,” he was prophesying the birth of a MAD world without ethical horizons. He was anticipating a world held together not by the bonds of human self-transcendence and compassion for the stranger but by bureaucratic technicism and technological dread. (Fasching, 1993: 231).

The rational order imposed by the National Socialist state was the basis for the most extreme technologically efficient action for the creation of this order, Auschwitz and the Holocaust, as was America’s decision for the most “efficient” solution to the end of World War II, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These were the ultimate consequences of the rationalization of the public sphere and we must take seriously the



questions they raise about how these events were possible and how to avoid others like them in the future.

Walter Benjamin (1936) states that the logical result of Fascism was the aesthetization of politics that ultimately culminates in one thing, war. This aesthetization of politics and the ability to control public space and the public sphere was instrumental in solidifying support for the National Socialist agenda and was accomplished according to Benjamin by an underlying rational order produced by the technologies of mechanical reproduction. This merging of aesthetics and politics would later be appropriated in post-war American space. In his book, *The Ministry of Illusion*, Eric Rentschler observes, “Goebbels stressed the importance of variation, of ‘repeating the same thing in different forms.’ If the Nazi state became a grand aesthetic construction in which ‘the political itself is instituted and constituted (and regularly re-grounds itself) in and as work of art,’ then it is clear that this *Gesamtkunstwerk* involved a pastiche in which politics and entertainment were inextricably bound” (1996: 21). As the Third Reich accomplished the aesthetization of politics via the creation of the first modern media culture and the injection of social meaning in the content and structure of films, the shift from *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art) to *Der totale krieg* (total war) in America is accomplished by architecture and the politics of suburbia and post-suburbia, which instead of injecting social meaning, eliminates it. In this suburban and post-suburban space, the illusion of community, or Fasching’s (1993) “privatized fantasylands,” are what conceal the hidden bureaucratic and rational order that entrench exclusionary social structures and conceal the actual functional basis of the city and state. ‘Total war’ and ‘total security’ are thus the logical result of this rationalized system of control. Nowhere is this more apparent

than in issues of public space and urban theory where the environment for this new state of total war/security is constructed and used to control public space according to the structure of the underlying rational, bureaucratic order.

Total war has become a corporate strategy to construct environments in order to profit off fears generated from this culture of security and create desires in accordance with the structure of urban planning. This rational order is antithetical to notions of community and public space as its association with the enemy or immigrant as “other” leads to their dehumanization and reduction to the status of things. Mike Davis (1992) traces this same sense of politics in his studies of Los Angeles, citing its image of being a “fortress city” as a reflection of the deep social divisions inherent to space in American cities. Under this logic, any sense of community produced by this rational order is inherently exclusive and alienating. Yet, according to Robert Fishman’s (1987) book, *Bourgeois Utopias*, Los Angeles, as the great suburban metropolis, is the symbol of postwar American culture. He argues that its effect is as a “shock city” that forces the reconsideration of the meaning of the city. Fishman (1987) writes, “Post-1945 Los Angeles was not so much a departure from the past as a fulfillment of its basic structure, a use of new means to safeguard the original end of a great city based on the single family house” (1987: 178). In the movement away from centralized urban settings, suburbanization represents the militarization of public space as a reflection of the social divisions inherent to Cold War America. Thus, the politics of total war inherent to the suburbanization of American space are directed at the city’s urban poor, black and Hispanic populations, and the large numbers of immigrants that were forced to locate to these urban centers. Carried out under the guise of “urban renewal,” what the city was to

experience would be the continued “white flight” from the urban core and an increasingly divisive planning aimed at the elimination and division of these communities. The single-family house reinforced the privatization of values, and public space as isolation became a welcomed and celebrated aspect of the American lifestyle. Like the aforementioned structure of Nazi cinema, the construction of suburban space is correlative with the creation of a new media culture centered on the family television that becomes one of the defining features of the suburban metropolis.

In this sense, suburbanization also represents the spatial definition of a new market culture. In her book, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, Sharon Zukin (1991) argues that mass suburbanization brought about consumption on an unprecedented scale. As she further writes, “Suburbanization offered a macroeconomic solution to prewar problems of underconsumption. Buying a house, at least one car, and domestic equipment integrated households into a national landscape of mass production and consumption. Indeed, 85 percent of new U.S. housing after World War II was built in the suburbs” (Zukin, 1991: 142). These Fordist-era market structures are eventually replaced by post-fordist spaces based ultimately on the consumption of every aspect of public life. Neo-liberal corporate culture has thus seized upon the politics of place, commodifying and simulating nostalgia, security, community, innocence, and even nature – and then universalizing these immaterial values so their consumption follows accordingly. Under the guise of community, the neo-liberal market culture’s rational public orders create a public sphere controlled by corporations that intentionally manipulate citizens’ relations to place.

Nowhere is this easier to see than in the politics behind the Disney Corporation's success in the shaping of American culture, particularly in its original vision of EPCOT (Experimental Prototype City of Tomorrow), and its ability to combine the commodification of the public sphere, the politics of innocence, and the control of space. Disney tries to deny the 'id' of our other consciousness. The simulation of reality made possible by Disney is the function by which this consciousness is subdued. Its images make us believe, or at least want to believe, in the innocence of the present, the brotherhood of mankind, and the patriotic. This image is ultimately accomplished by the rationally structured order of society that is preclusive of the actual realization of public or common values. It is from the lens of Disney that we can begin to see the state of community and public space in our corporate controlled, post-nuclear culture. What is urgently needed is an ethics of "common ground" and "public" that is necessarily intertwined with place. The transformation, cultivation, and actualization of an active and inclusive community and public sphere are thus central components of resisting corporate control, domination, and hierarchical structuring of community life and public order. Looking at contemporary manifestations of "common ground" possibilities within corporate structured and controlled society is important for understanding what is necessary for the proliferation of a revolutionary ethic that promotes communities of diversity based on difference, the politics of the common, and cosmopolitan solidarity centered around a shared relationship with place.

The newest and seemingly most-popular form of contemporary urban development, New Urbanism, best represents the intersection of market politics and the construction of community. This "new" form of urban planning, however, attempts and

projects a sense of place that is anything but new. New Urbanism is the corporate manifestation of post-nuclear politics and commodity formation in community design, with the design and order ultimately preventing the realization of anything public. What we are left with instead is a hyper-real world, shielding us from the reality of the present and entrenching a politics of place representative of this very rational, technologically driven social structuring. This foundation becomes the means for social, political, and economic exclusion from the community, as well as increased individualism, privatization, and isolation within this constructed and supposedly “public” order. If false universality is the problem, that is the denial of difference through the universalization of elitist and powerful interests when constructing community, that false universal is in the form of consumption. The commodity is the universal of community politics in our post-nuclear culture; it is the universal by which each individual is sold a unique experience of public life, or an individualized community, that everyone else simultaneously and identically consumes.

Focusing on two examples that effectively illustrate the corporate nature of New Urbanist community design - the Disney corporation’s Celebration, Florida, and what was once the Dreamworks’ design for a futuristic studio city in Playa Vista, California - this thesis will trace the ideological foundations for the creation of both communities as well as suggest possible lessons to be learned for the creation of a public based on an ethic of common ground made possible by the organized resistance to corporate manipulation of place.

The central questions of this thesis, then, are what constitutes public space and what it means to be public in America. Current public space is reflective of our

commodified, security culture. Corporations, through the media and its vast information networks, control the structure, design, and implementation of public space in order to eliminate all 'public' aspects. Community design in our current media culture is representative of attempts at distancing citizens from other citizens and their surrounding environments in order to control space in such a way that challenges to this system of order are never successful. Tracing American space from the frontier to New Urbanism demonstrates the rationalization of the public sphere, and allows us to see how issues of public space, and its manipulation, are essential to the realization of utopian and dystopian communities.

Celebration's identity as "the town that Disney built" allows for a critical examination of the way the theme park is increasingly constructed as public space in community planning and organization. The shadow of Disney in the creation and control of community in Celebration is enigmatic of the marketing of the fears of post-nuclear culture. In an attempt to re-create a life free from the horrors of nuclear conflict and terrorism, security and nostalgia are sold as commodities that attract middle and upper class families that can afford the pricey lots, and who buy a plot in this fantasy to escape into a time of innocence completely divorced from the realities just outside the city boundaries, a world and its inhabitants increasingly defined as the "other." Such politics of exclusion are descriptive of this culture of consumption whereby the very notion of community and public are sold to shield residents of these communities from the dangers present in the "other." It is a quasi-religious image of community that reflects uniformity and control, and in return produces a sense of security and individualism from the outside within a community of uniform residents that are anything but diverse, all the while

concealing the rational, bureaucratic, and planned order that denies the ability for civic and public action to exist within this space. While the New Urbanist city in its ideal form does offer important suggestions and solutions to exclusionary and isolating urban structures, the manipulation of the ideal by market forces and “Imagineering” enterprises, such as that of Disney and Celebration, are reflective of the failure of the actualization of the full ideal, and instead its replacement by a corporate driven ideology that sells community while masking rational control.

Dreamworks’ Playa Vista, however, represents the possibility for an ethic and politics of place built on shared understanding, common ground, and the “public.” While Playa Vista originally signified a politics of place much like that of Celebration, where an image producing corporation attempted to both physically and ideologically plan and control community design, the community mobilization around protest of Dreamworks’ involvement and the development of preserved wetlands ultimately led to the Dreamworks corporation pulling out of the New Urbanist project. It is from within the politics of this particular situation that we can begin to realize and actualize an ethic and politics of common ground, civic activism, and the public necessary to resist corporate manipulation and control of community, democratic action, and public space.

It is here that we can recognize what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) refer to as the “flesh of the multitude.” They further write:

Looking at our postmodern society...free from any nostalgia for the modern social bodies that have dissolved or the people that [are] missing, one can see that what we experience is a kind of social flesh, a flesh that is not a body, a flesh that is common, living substance...The flesh of the multitude is pure potential, an unformed life force, and in this sense an element of social being, aimed constantly at the fullness of life. (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 192)

This “social flesh” is what is necessary for the development of a “common framework of singularities,” that is communities that are able to organize and form strong social bonds

based upon the association with and celebration of differences with similar overall common goals and interests. It is the realization of the pure potential of the bonds formed by the recognition of this “social flesh” that has the potential to generate a politics of place that emphasizes the production of community and active involvement to shape and create public space, rather than the consumption of community, where citizens are passive objects as a result of the manipulation and control of public space by the corporations who plan these communities. Here, the “swarm-like” character of an insurgency described by Hardt and Negri (2004) is representative of the politics of the Multitude, the living alternative growing within Empire. What makes this “swarm” so effective is that all individual members share a common purpose yet their differences allow them to “attack” from all sides in order to continually catch capital and Empire off guard. This practice seems necessarily tied to attempts at the creation of a public sphere. The notion of place can serve as the “social flesh” of the Multitude as it is place that is the source of the many independent subjective identities that in the instance of Playa Vista generate the different movements that organized to protest Dreamworks’ involvement in the project and that continue to fight against corporate control of the city. The environmental groups and social advocacy groups that were mobilized provided the different “attack” points, and a sense of place provided the foundation for the creation of a network of resistance to corporate power that was successful in resisting the Dreamworks Corporation’s participation in the project and continues to be successful involving social advocacy court victories against the current property managers.

In light of all of this, the issue of the commodification and militarization of public space is extremely important given the state of our time. As Hardt and Negri (2004)



describe, we find ourselves within the sovereign caught between a state of biopower through Empire and the biopolitics of the Multitude. The possibility for mobilization around environmental and social issues based on a shared value of place represents the chance for re-writing Empire, challenging the fundamental basis of its power. Similarly, in his book, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*, Cornel West (2004) argues that the battle of our time is one between imperialism and true democratization. This democracy, West (2004) argues, does not just come from our efforts at the ballot box, but rather through a motivated citizenry and coalitions that push for change yet never let the outcome of that change be immune to the power of constant democratic criticism that keeps steady the American democratic project as a work in progress. As he writes:

September 11<sup>th</sup> was a deeply traumatic event for us. It shattered our illusions of security and invincibility and shocked us about the degree of hatred the terrorists harbored for us. After a brief moment of national unity, disillusionment and division set in. Deep polarization resurfaced with more vengeance as we turned on one another with anger and frustration. The pervasive depression and disaffection of youth, the flight of so many adults into mindless escapism to combat the loneliness and the lack of a sense of purpose in their lives, and the plunge into frenetic consumerism to offset our restlessness all reveal the fissures in our civic life. In our disillusionment... we have lost our sense of connection to the vital roles played in any democracy by an enlightened and motivated democratic citizenry, and by the principled coalitions that can so effectively push for democratic change. Democracy is not simply a matter of an electoral system... Genuine, robust democracy must be brought to life through democratic individuality, democratic community, and democratic society. This will to transform corrupted forms of elite rule into more democratic ways of life is an extraordinary force, though each new democratic result of the exercise of this will falls short of democratic ideals. This is why all democracies are incomplete and unfinished, and this is why American democracy is a work in progress. We have seen that there are two opposing tendencies in American democracy – toward imperialism and toward democratization – and we are in a period of intense battle between the two. (West, 2004: .202-204)

The politics of place exhibited by the citizens of Playa Vista and the greater Los Angeles community - which organized a multi-tiered platform of resistance to the Dreamworks Corporation's bid for the design of Playa Vista, combined with the social resistance of

the environmentally sensitive wetlands debate and the conflict over the hazards posed by building on the Playa Vista site - was and is successful in challenging the power of global capital and corporations through the resistance to the control of community life. This is a testament to the truly democratic powers of landscape and the ability to resist the control and manipulation of place so common to neo-liberal market culture.

Thus, the politics of Playa Vista represents a politics of resistance to the strict corporate planning of communities that for decades has attempted to homogenize difference and suppress the voices of the excluded. This exclusion can be seen not only in the “white flight” from urban centers, but also new “white flight” from suburban communities - now heavily populated by blacks, Latinos, Mexicans, and other non-white groups – to gated and New Urbanist communities (California Newsreel, 2003). The resistance of the ethnically diverse groups in Playa Vista is representative of the resistance of excluded communities, and the writings of people from the margins calling for a more democratic social planning and multicultural community formations. As Leonie Sanderdock writes:

The writings of bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Cornel West...and many more, are exploring the borderlands, the margins – searching for a new consciousness or, as Anzaldua says, “a new story, to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet”...Their central theme is the meaning and importance of difference. They are speaking from experience about the violence, physical and spiritual, done to those whom the dominant white racist and homophobic culture labels as different...These are the voices not only of immigrants but of indigenous peoples, African Americans, gays and lesbians. We need to hear their stories because they are telling us something about the death of the modernist city with its drive/will to homogeneity, and of the need to create a different kind of planning, one which eases rather than resists the transition to genuinely multicultural (that is multiracial and multiethnic) cities, now and into the twenty-first century, a more democratic planning for a heterogeneous public and an expanded notion of social citizenship. (Sanderdock, 2004: 436)

It is within the framework of democratic politics that a sense of place and community based on hope can be fostered. In her book, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks beautifully states:

Our senses are assaulted by the very stench of domination every day, here in the places where we live. No wonder, then, that so many people feel terribly confused, uncertain, and without hope. More than anywhere else a dominator-controlled mass media...assaults us in that place where we would know hope...Paulo Freire reminds us that 'without a vision for tomorrow hope is impossible. Our visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now. (hooks, 2003: 12)

By focusing on the changes in the politics of place that American culture faces right now, as well as tracing the politics of the common and public mirrored in public space and community design throughout the turbulent history of the American past, this thesis aims at positing a vision for tomorrow based on a politics of place, the social flesh of the multitude, and a profound pedagogy of hope to resist the cynicism and stifling of democratic public spheres instituted by market driven culture. It is towards this genealogy of the public in America and a democratic vision for tomorrow that we now turn.

## **Chapter Two: American Landscape: From Pastoral Frontier to Regulatory Bureaucracy and Back Again**

The current state of American politics is placing a significant strain on what being public and interacting in the public sphere means to the American citizen. As our culture becomes increasingly saturated in a media environment that force-feeds pre-authorized newsreel and other information about the world outside our homes, we are experiencing an even further distancing from the citizen and her/his location and responsibility to place. As Daniel Kemmis (1990) notes, the word *public* has lost its meaning in the American lifestyle as we have become so saturated with the dominant culture's reproduction of empty public activity that we have lost any sense of what action implied by the word might entail. He further writes,

It is doubtful any society has ever used the word *public* as incessantly as we now do. We have public hearings to help us shape public policy about issues like public lands, public education, public welfare, and public health. In all of these areas, special groups are formed to pursue the public interest, while politicians base their public policy decisions increasingly upon the results of public opinion polls. It would be strange indeed to discover that we Americans, who use the word *public* in more contexts than ever before, have lost almost all sense of what that word might actually mean (Kemmis, 1990: 4-5)

The rationalization of the public sphere can be traced through specialization of “public interest groups” and the distancing of the citizen from the actual decisions made that affect the common “public.” In this social setting, where “public interest groups” replace the democratic agency of the citizen, society and American culture become defined by the neo-liberal “democratic” action of consumption in the market economy. As Cornel West (2004) argues, the current record of diminishing voter turn-out, increased cynicism and nihilism towards state policy, and the consumer economy's function in diminishing

our own capacity to feel we are able to govern ourselves is reflective of the fading and regulated public sphere of post-9/11 American culture.

Sharon Zukin argues that the term “landscape” can be used as a tool of cultural analysis that reflects not just the usual geographical meaning of the environment and physical surroundings but also “the ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representation” (Zukin, 1991: 16). Thus, in the same sense that the neo-liberal market economy manipulates landscape in such a way to only be perceived as the physical socio-spatial patterns of what can be seen, a result of the ideological power of what Hardt and Negri (2000) call Empire, the term can also be used to define the state of neo-liberal market culture and its relation and dislocation from place. As Zukin writes, “A landscape mediates, both symbolically and materially, between the socio-spatial differentiation of capital implied by *market* and the socio-spatial homogeneity of labor suggested by *place*” (1991: 16). Thus, the perspective of landscape offers the ability to trace the dislocation of the citizen from any attempt at democratic agency in the environment of which she/he is a part. This dislocation is a result of the socio-spatial homogeneity of the *market*, with the increasingly standardized and rationalized urban spacing of the suburb and post-suburb, a result of the socio-spatial homogeneity of *place* according to this design and the ideology of the dominant culture that influences it. It is thus not surprising that feelings of despair, disillusionment, and escapism are so prevalent in a powerful and “cut-throat” market economy that is reinforced by standardized and isolating community and city designs. This state of culture is also reflective of the continued distancing of the democratic citizen from the decisions and outcomes of democratic policy and society. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1958) argues,

“The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost the power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them” (1958: 52-53). Here, the notion of landscape can be used to see how the market structures that have produced this mass society are aggravating and expanding common conceptions of public space and community design as the space to organize this mass culture has been cleverly diminished and eliminated, or better yet, was perhaps envisioned to be never possible to begin with.

According to Kemmis, “What ‘we’ do depends upon who ‘we’ are. It depends in other words, upon how we choose to relate to each other, to the place we inhabit, and to the issues which that inhabiting raises for us. All of those ‘we’ questions are about our way of being public. Our current way of doing that is not satisfactory – or at least it is not satisfying the needs or aspirations of a growing number of people” (1990: 41). The current state of public culture is causing us to divorce ourselves and the ways we relate to each other from the places that we occupy and inhabit. According to Kemmis (1990), we cannot create a sense of what it means to be public unless we recognize the connection between place and the culture it produces – beginning with place and then attempting to “imagine a way of being public which would fit that place” (1990: 41). This concept of being public goes beyond a public that is cut out by the law and regulated by rational order towards the fulfillment of a condition that is only possible by relating place to the politics it produces. In his book, *The Unsettling of America*, Wendell Berry (1977) describes this sense of public that incorporates a politics of place. He writes:

The concept of country, homeland, dwelling place becomes simplified as ‘the environment’ – that is, what surrounds us. Once we see our place, our part of the world, as *surrounding* us, we have already made a profound division between it and ourselves. We have given up the understanding – dropped it out of our language and so out of our thought – that we and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; that, therefore, our culture must be our response to our place, our culture and our place are images of each other and inseparable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other. (Berry, 1977: 22).

What modernity and the rationalization of public space has entrenched is a passive conception of place as the *surrounding* world, rather than place as the extension of our bodies and ourselves. As Judith Butler (2004) writes in her book, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, “Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine” (2004: 26). The technologies of modern civilization, particularly the technologies of community design and development, have contributed to the passive conception of place and the public sphere as something to observe, consistent with the manipulation of landscape as shaped only by visual perception.

Thus, we must push landscape to its furthest democratic potential, allowing us to expose and challenge the social connection between the forces that regulate the organization of the people and the design and control of space that makes this organization possible. Such challenges are necessary if we are to link our interconnection with place and the culture that this connection produces. Instead, however, the cynicism and nihilism that Cornel West (2004) argues has come to define current American politics, is causing disillusionment and feeding the market-driven urge to consume in order to escape from the realities of the present. As he writes:

These nihilistic threats connect the spiritual to the social, the personal to the political, and the existential to the economic. They shape every dimension of our lives, from the bedroom to the corporate meeting room, from suite to street. Serious reflection on democracy matters...forces us to think broadly about the future of the American Republic, and the overriding issue we must grapple with in the post-9/11 world is the threat of this rising imperialism. The pervasive nihilism of our political culture and this surging imperialism go hand in hand. (West, 2004: 40)

Thus, we must challenge this rising imperialism in every sphere in which it arises, including and perhaps most importantly it's merging with the market economy and its construction and control of the public sphere.

The rising trend of imperial democracy is reinvigorating a sense of escapism and individualism in America that, as noted before, is anything but new. The escapism inherent to the conflict between individual and communal concerns can be traced back to the early founding of the American colonies, and, according to Christopher Strain's (2003) essay, *The American Dream: Communalist Experiment or Materialist Ethos?*, represents a fundamental premise of the American Dream. Strain (2003) traces the roots of this "faith-based system of belief" to the views of John Winthrop and the Puritans who, seeking freedom from religious persecution in Europe, founded a colony that would serve as a model of piety as a "City Upon a Hill." He writes, "Winthrop...sought to escape the tentacles of the Anglican Church; he also sought land and opportunity for his family. 'We must consider that we shall be as a 'City upon a Hill,' he told his fellow passengers aboard the ship *Arabella* as it sailed across the Atlantic in 1630. 'The eyes of all people are upon us'" (Strain, 2003: 29). Thus, community in America was to be a spectacle, a city on display, from its very beginning.

The desire to build the utopian city via the mandate of God eventually comes into conflict with the structuring and order of public space in post-Revolutionary War America. As Kemmis (1990) notes, the views and policies supported by James Madison



represent a departure from traditional republican democratic theory such as the writings of Montesquieu. Where Montesquieu wanted a small republic so there would be face-to-face interaction between people, Madison wanted the people to be dispersed and disconnected. Referring to the views of Madison, Kemmis writes:

If all those who were attached to a particular private interest learned that many others shared this attachment, the result might be the dreaded tyranny of the majority...the new American order required an 'expanding sphere' precisely in order to keep people from too much beholding of a 'common unity.' What Rousseau had so painfully observed in theory was now being put into practice: 'Keeping citizens apart has become the first maxim of modern politics.'  
(Kemmis, 1990: 17-18)

Here the seeds of rational control of public space can be seen along with the call for expansion of the frontier as the new American space. Thus, the frontier experience becomes a central element of the American identity as civic responsibility is defined by the rugged, individualistic, and private trek westward.

Kemmis (1990) argues that like Madison, Thomas Jefferson sought the same frontier mentality for American culture; though his belief was that expansion was necessary for the continued cultivation of civic virtue based upon an agrarian lifestyle. Despite the fact that this agrarian ethic is far different from Madison's maxim of keeping people apart, it was still influential in the realization of the more negative aspects of the individualistic conception of the American Dream. Strain (2003) argues that the French-born essayist and planter, Crèvecoeur, was the first to expose the "darker side of the American Dream" in accordance with what would later be the Jeffersonian agrarian ethic.

As Strain writes,

Celebrating the agrarian promise of Great Britain's New World colonies, Crèvecoeur's America was Jefferson's America...it was he who first exposed – albeit, unconsciously – the darker side of the American Dream...He praises the land – not for richness or beauty or bounty, but as commodity, a vestige of property...It is in possessing and subduing the land that Crèvecoeur finds redemption. His letters document the early settlers' paradoxical admiration of nature and disregard for the environment. (Strain, 2003: 32)

Jefferson, Crèvecoeur, and the settlers' ability to both control and admire nature is depictive of how the frontier mentality was able to separate the aesthetic image of nature from its use value, ironically leading to a further distancing from oneself and the surrounding environment all the while forging deeper into the countryside and nature.

It is this American view of nature as a commodity and the necessity for its cultivation, combined with a focus on the well being of the individual and control, that de Tocqueville both celebrates and distrusts about American public space and the frontier mentality. Furthermore, according to Strain, "Like Crèvecoeur, de Tocqueville saw the well-being of society in the well-being of the individual...But unlike Crèvecoeur, [he] saw an ominous undertone in this self-interested enterprise...For de Tocqueville, Americans did not work to attain the American Dream so much as the American Dream worked to attain them" (2003: 34). Thus, public space from the early foundation of the American democratic project was challenged by the self-interested ethic of the escapist frontier mentality that regardless of if it was for the distancing of citizens, or the cultivation of an agrarian ethic, prevented the realization of anything public. Kemmis (1990) notes, however, that the Jeffersonian dream would eventually fade over time as its vision assumed a reality that with the closing of the frontier was no longer possible – that population in the countryside would maintain a higher rate of growth than the move to city life.

During the height of American expansion, a completely different view of the relationship between the frontier and the potential for the development of civic culture - one that stressed the closing of the frontier and ending America's transfixion with manifest destiny in order to achieve a true politics of the common - was being theorized

by Hegel. Like de Tocqueville, Hegel (In Kemmis, 1990) recognized the republican potential of America, yet argued that the public necessary for its full realization was completely lacking in America. According to Hegel, “If we compare North America further with Europe, we shall find in the former...universal protection for property, and a something approaching entire immunity from public burdens...We have in these facts the fundamental character of the community – the endeavor of the individual after acquisition, commercial profit, and gain; the preponderance of *private* interest, devoting itself to that of the community only for its own advantage” (In Kemmis, 1990: 23). According to Hegel, the closing of the frontier was supposed to provide the impetus for the development of the public. He argued that the symbolic impact of the closing of the frontier would serve as the moment whereby “America turns to face itself.” This, he claimed, was necessary to prevent this escapist, individualistic ethic from defining the American public and the American Dream in favor of a politics of the common based on a shared understanding and relationship with place. Directly contradicting Jeffersonian views on the role of rural and city economies in public life, Hegel contended that the increase of agrarian influence must be checked so that people begin to pursue town occupations and citizen-trades as opposed to “fleeing to the fields” (In Kemmis, 1990).

Kemmis (1990) argues that if the “frontier” had closed by the end of the nineteenth century we may have experienced Hegel’s America, yet according to Kemmis (1990), two new escape valves were developing near the end of the century that continued to prevent the realization of a true public. He writes,

Whether coincidentally or not, the last few years of the century brought the nation two new escape valves, which in a sense replaced the frontier and allowed a further delay in the development of what Hegel had identified as civic culture. The first of these developments was the new, extracontinental phase of American imperialism. The second was to become the unique contribution of

the twentieth century to 'public life': the launching of the regulatory bureaucracy. (Kemmis, 1990: 31-32)

Though the first new development is essential to the global expansion of the social reality made possible by the second, it is the regulatory bureaucracy and increasingly rationalized public sphere that would have profound implications on the organization and proper way of being public in America.

The Madisonian view that eliminates any sense of place by requiring distance between people in order to ensure the development of America is reinvigorated by this regulatory bureaucracy, replacing the physical separation of the frontier with a symbolic and ideological separation and escape made possible by the techniques and technologies of modern culture. Kemmis (1990) points to the 1896 election between William Jennings Bryan and William McKinley as a major turning point in the modernization and rationalization of American public space. He writes, "Perhaps no election has ever so clearly pitted against each other the forces which Thomas Jefferson identified as the key elements in American politics. The agrarian populist movement ('those who labor in the earth') furnished the great, fervent core of Bryan's support, while a new consolidation of commercial and manufacturing interests characterized McKinley's winning effort" (Kemmis, 1990: 29). Kemmis (1990) contends that the win would have a lasting impact on American culture as it represented for the first time the fusion of unprecedented amounts of money and the launching of the first mass advertising campaigns in order to organize and control the minds of the American people according to the interests of industrial and corporate elites. In what could be seen as a foreshadowing of the tragic events of the new century, the success of corporate interests in the election of 1896 was made possible by the defeat of the populist vision of increased community through face-

to-face interaction by a new media of impersonal mass communication technologies whose underlying rational order made the further distancing between people and their surrounding environment inevitable.

The fact that some areas of the frontier were not open for settlement and exploitation, according to Kemmis (1990), is another example of the bureaucratization of the American landscape. He writes, “The West was never totally opened to settlement. Vast stretches of it were reserved to the ‘public domain’ as national forests or grazing lands, while smaller tracts became national parks and wilderness areas...bureaucracy and its procedures and regulations have come into the country, not only because there was uninhabited public land to be managed, but also because of what inhabiting the land came to mean to many people” (Kemmis, 1990: 44-45). Once again the logic that supported the conflict between admiration and control of nature as a result of the frontier mentality through the politics of escape resurfaces in the new escape valve of the regulatory bureaucracy. Rational control of the ‘public domain’ allows for both the awe of an idealized pastoral vision of nature, that is possible today only in these regulated, bureaucratic nature zones, and a continued ability to shape and control the rest of the “natural” world. Much like Darrell Fasching (1993) states above, where the rational and technologically based public domain is spurring the anti-thesis of community as “a collection of privatized fantasylands held together by a hidden techno-bureaucratic structure,” the ‘public domain’ of the bureaucratically controlled nature preserve becomes just another form of pre-packaged passive entertainment that prevents the realization of a sense of being public or the necessity for participation in the public sphere.

The establishment of the regulatory bureaucracy through the Interstate Commerce Act, the 1896 election and a new communications culture, and the regulation and control of preserved frontier represents the modernization and rationalization of American society. As Fasching (1993) writes of its implications:

Modern society, with its plurality of institutions generates a plurality of selves (i.e., doubling). Every institutional context we step into demands that we generate a self (i.e., social role) to meet its demands. As a result, modern individuals juggle a plurality of identities so that each one of us has an inner community of selves that mirrors the pluralism of the outer community in which we dwell. The demonic emerges when these selves are bureaucratically compartmentalized so that the right hand pretends not to know what the left hand is doing. (Fasching, 1993: 270)

The notion that our inner community or plurality of selves is reflective of the outer community in which we dwell suggests that issues of place play an important role in shaping the way we relate to the environment as well as perceive ourselves.

The bureaucratic compartmentalization of these multiple selves represents what Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) describes as the essential dualism of modern politics – that only two forms of social life are possible, the sovereignty of the individual and the sovereignty of the bureaucracy to limit the freedom and choices of the individual. As MacIntyre states, “Given this deep cultural agreement, it is unsurprising that the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interest” (1984: 34-35). Thus, the plurality of selves reflected by the modern consciousness represents the choice between the escapist individualism characterized by the lack of regulation of individual behavior, and a sense of the common established by the rational order of the bureaucracy so as to limit all self-interest – a choice between complete privatization or a rationally ordered community. Kemmis (1990) argues that the privatization of values as a result of this choice mandates that public decisions and

discourse that occurs must pretend to be objective and rational while silently advancing private values, leaving only the illusion of community or a public sphere. Here, the rational control described by Fasching (1993) that dominates public life in modernity, and the replacement of face-to-face interaction with efficient technologically driven bureaucracy, lead to one of the greatest anti-public actions in American history – the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This tragic event was made possible in part by the logic of Madison and individualistic ethics premised on keeping citizens apart, forcing them to constantly escape from themselves and the very public sphere they are supposed to occupy to criticize these bureaucratic tendencies. This episode, and the culture in America in its aftermath, lead to even greater regulatory control in post World War II and Cold War American culture.

Around the same time in world history, Germany was enacting its own efficiently rational action under Hitler – the extermination of the Jewish race according to the logic of the ultimate modern city, Auschwitz as Necropolis (Fasching, 1993) – as a result of the same bureaucratic tendencies of urban individuation, or the forcing of the self into self-awareness. This allowed a distancing between these multiple selves ensuring their compartmentalization and preventing any chance for the realization of an integrated ethical ecology that locates and creates a sense of the common according to place. Quickly tracing the logic behind the Third Reich’s ability to generate mass support or at least compliance for its ideology, and the way this compartmentalization of the self is made possible through the logic of a new media culture, allows us to see how this ideology is directly appropriated and reflected in America by the control of public space

in city and public design in the aftermath of World War II and with the rising Russian “threat.”

Attempting to explain how the full realization of the Nazi regime was accomplished, Eric Rentschler (1996) points to the Third Reich’s institution of the first media culture and its simultaneous effect of rationalizing public order according to the logic of mechanical reproduction while generating a sense of nostalgia for old German heritage. He contends that the Third Reich practiced a reactionary mode of modernism that blended the cultural system of the romantic past with rational technologies that organized the entire country as a bureaucratic mechanism of the worst kind. Speaking of the medium of film’s ability to enact this effect, Rentschler writes, “Film was to map the universe in accordance with party designs, to provide a comprehensive lexical guide to the past and present...films charted physical reality and occupied psychic space. Screen narratives often provided the illusion of room to move while remaining organized and administered by the state...National Socialism was a totalitarian government that employed film as the most important vehicle in its media dictatorship, as a psychotechnology designed to channel the flow of impressions and information” (1996: 16). The importance of space, and the organization of society according to the logic of the technology of film in accordance with the National Socialist agenda, is evident in the impact this medium had on the channeling and perception of knowledge.

German films, *Die Stadt von Morgen* (1929) and *Metropolis* (1927) are evident of the use of film as a medium for what would later be the National Socialist agenda on urbanization. Ed Dimendberg (1995) argues that Germany feared the rapid and increasingly vertical spaces of America, such as New York and Chicago. The



demonization of urban modernity in *Metropolis* is combined with the idyllic garden-city landscape and ‘city of tomorrow’ image of *Die Stadt von Morgen* to form the Third Reich’s reactionary modernism, a vision of a “garden-city of tomorrow” with the underlying rational order of National Socialist ideology. Eric Rentschler (1996) argues that it is through film that the Ministry of Propaganda attempts to construct society, implementing a plan of *Der totale krieg*, or total war, through Nazi cinema. As he writes, “Film and the mass media constituted crucial military instruments...Total war, a consequence of immense technical and sociological developments in our time, has forced us to reconsider our notions of ‘weapons’ and ‘soldiers’...In total war, nations in their entirety confront each other, and all expressions of national life become weapons of war” (Rentschler, 1996: 202). This total war is reflected in the films *Die Stadt von Morgen* and *Metropolis*, and becomes a central ideological basis for the implementation of one of the grandest Nazi attempts to enact this ideology through the control and structure of space – the *Reichsautobahnen*.

Dimendberg (1995) argues that Germany was torn between an extreme idealization of technology and its skepticism. He argues that Germany’s lack of a frontier myth led to a dread for the claustrophobia of modern Germany and desires for an expansive sense of place. The construction of the Autobahn system that would spread from Frankfurt in 1935 all throughout Germany and into the countries it occupied provided the physical space necessary for the realization of the reactionary modernist agenda of the Third Reich. Fritz Todt, appointed by Hitler as Inspector General of German Road Construction, describes the ultimate design of the German Autobahn as an

attempt to simultaneously shape and control the German people in accordance with the design and control of the German landscape. As he states:

Already in the planning stages, the greatest value is placed on the perfect insertion of these roads into the German landscape. It is a pioneering achievement of the road construction of the Third Reich that not only functional but above all beautiful highways have been built...The organization of routes that results in complete adaptation to nature the best. The beautiful road attracts traffic to it like a magnet. But the new roads, the roads of Adolf Hitler, also express a very new characteristic feature of the German landscape. The open road forced the gaze in its direction. Origin and goal clearly stand out. And over time the German people themselves will be led by means of these grand routes to think in larger spaces and dimensions than they have previously. (Dimendberg, 1995: 108-110)

Reflective of Benjamin's warning of the merging of aesthetics and politics, the *Reichsautobahnen* represents the projection of ideological and political meaning into the aesthetic construction of the German landscape. Hitler himself knew full well the impact that the Autobahn would have in his ability to shape and control German society, creating national unity and strengthening centralized rule. Breaking ground on the first section of the *Reichsautobahnen*, Hitler states, "This is not merely the hour in which we begin building the greatest network of roads in the world, this hour is at the same time a milestone on the road towards building up of the community of the German people" (HHM, 1999: ¶1). Thus, the control of landscape and place is central to Hitler's vision of the control of the German community. This control is reflected in the cinematic recording of the construction of the German Autobahn via the genre of "Autobahn Film." According to Dimendberg (1995), Hitler broadcast the sights and sounds of its construction - including commentary, movie production, and radio broadcasts of the sounds of dynamite and digging - leading Dimendberg to suggest that, "Representing 'Hitler's Roads' figured so prominently in National Socialist propaganda that one is

tempted to conclude that the Autobahn existed as much to be photographed and filmed as to be driven upon” (Dimendberg, 1995: 95).

The design, layout, and even intentions of the *Reichsautobahnen* would be appropriated in post-war American space. Many American politicians and bureaucrats visited the Autobahn before and after the war in an attempt to mirror or adopt certain aspects of this road construction as part of the highway system of the U.S. Thomas MacDonald, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Public Roads from 1919 to 1953, was one of these visitors, commenting that the Autobahn road networks were “wonderful examples of the best modern road building” (Weingroff, 2000: ¶ 13). MacDonald was also influential in pioneering one of the major differences between the *Reichsautobahnen* and the U.S. Interstate system. The Autobahn bypassed the cities in an attempt to create Hitler’s vision of a “garden-city” landscape just off the routes of the Autobahn, whereas the U.S. Interstate system would be planned to go through cities in order to decrease traffic congestion. This would eventually lead to the nationwide trend of city decentralization and suburbanization giving rise to the suburban metropolis of Los Angeles and cities like it.

President Eisenhower would become the greatest proponent of the Interstate system as a means of both communication and defense. Eisenhower served as the Allied Commander in Europe during the invasion of Germany and saw first hand the benefits of the German Autobahn. As he stated, "After seeing the autobahns of modern Germany and knowing the asset those highways were to the Germans, I decided, as President, to put an emphasis on this kind of road building. ... The old [1919] convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of

broader ribbons across the land” (DOT.reichs, 2005: ¶16). The convoy Eisenhower is referencing here was the Army’s first transcontinental motor convoy from Washington D.C. to San Francisco. Eisenhower thus experienced the sad state of the numbered highway system as the convoy took sixty-two days to reach its destination (Weingroff, 1996). This illustrates that his planning and intentions for the Interstate system were initially based on the military potential of the highways. With rhetoric eerily similar to Hitler’s vision of the Autobahn as the centerpiece for the molding of the Germany community, Eisenhower argued that the Interstate system was necessary for the unification of the American community. As he stated:

Our unity as a nation is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods...The ceaseless flow of information throughout the republic is matched by individual and commercial movement over a vast system of interconnected highways crisscrossing the country and joining our national borders. Together, the united forces of communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear – United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of separate parts. (Weingroff, 1996: ¶35)

Much like the policy of the Third Reich, the Interstate system was conceived as a means to pursue the unity and defense of the American people. Thus, the construction and control of place via the Interstate system was essential to the creation of a vision of a homogenous America. On June 29, 1956, President Eisenhower signed legislation that created the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways (Weingroff, 1996).

Even in name the military purpose of the Interstate was inscribed. Frank Turner, a career employee of the Bureau of Public Roads who later became Federal Highway Administrator from 1969-1972, describes the direct influence of military intentions for the Interstate and Defense Highways, an influence still very much present today. He states:

After the war in the early '50s, we were pressured pretty hard by the Air Force to build into the Interstate System exactly that same capability and that we would even locate the lines, not in accordance with what the law says, by routes as direct as practicable between [the principal metropolitan areas, cities, and industrial centers]-even if we had to twist the alignment here to get in the wind directional consideration, and the low gradients and lack of obstructions and one thing and another, for three mile long sections that would be spaced along here at certain intervals, we were to design those into the system. So, periodically, about every 40-50 miles, we'd have about a three-mile section there that would meet those requirements. This was to be highly classified, of course. But this was one of the concepts that was cranked into it at that time. (DOT.turner, 2005: ¶5)

Building upon German and Allied use of the Autobahn as an airstrip, the Interstate and Defense Highways were designed with the same military capability in mind.

Thus, total war is accomplished via the logic of total architecture in post-war American space. The construction of these Interstate and Defense Highways is central to the creation of decentralized American space that has given rise to the suburban and post-suburban space of our consumer and passive media culture. Rentschler (1996) argues that this puts our current postmodern culture dangerously close to the order of the Third Reich. He writes:

Our continuing fascination with the Nazis," observes J. Hoberman, "is not only that they represent an absolute evil, but that they pioneered spectacular politics – mass rallies, orchestrated media campaigns, and pseudo-documentaries meant to glorify a star-leader." Seen in this way, contemporary American media culture has more than a superficial or vicarious relationship with the Third Reich's society of the spectacle. Indeed, the incessant recycling of Nazi sights and sounds surely represents a crucial measure of today's postmodernism. A direct line leads from the Nazi's vanguard deployment of pyrotechnic histrionics and audiovisual excesses to the profuse present-day investment in constant simulations and hyperreal events...One thing is certain: this discussion must account for a legacy that extends from the Third Reich into our own lives today. (Rentschler, 1996: 7)

The suburbs, fashioned as the American identity after World War II, would provide the initial space possible for the appropriation of this media culture, and the postmodern space and ideology of New Urbanism, manipulated by the "Imagineering" enterprise of corporate culture, perhaps representing a disturbing resurgence of Nazi aesthetics – a nostalgic appeal for a return to an American past with a hidden rational order aimed at

preventing the realization of the democratic ideals that this past sought to embody. If the bureaucracy of the early American modern project was enough to stifle criticism of the government, the increased politics of spatialization in the post-war era would play a significant role not only in the regulation of the public sphere and community design, but also the regulatory bureaucracy's increased partnership with market politics to sell isolating and mass-produced spatial dynamics as a solution to the fear and insecurity constructed by the state during the Cold War, ushering in even more dangerous privatized fantasylands.

### **Chapter Three: The Suburbs and American Security Culture**

Just as escapism and the limitless frontier spatially defined America during the earlier years of its growth, post-World War II American public space is defined by a new escapism - the escape from the city via suburbanization. Though the Los Angeles of the 1940's represents the culmination of this urban design in the suburban metropolis, it was the industrial shift from developed urban centers to the fringes of the suburbs that laid the basis for an ever-increasing web of residential and commercial growth outwards from the city center. Sharon Zukin (1991) argues that the decentralized industrial suburb has been a distinct form of American social organization since 1910, providing the infrastructure for residential suburbanization. According to Zukin, it was this infrastructure coupled with cheap land and room to grow that served as the roots for the suburban manifest destiny.

Robert Fishman (1987) argues that in the sense that contemporary American culture is rooted in the single-family home, the city of Los Angeles, the American suburban metropolis, is both a reflection of and model for suburbanization and post-war American culture. As Fishman writes, "Los Angeles has never lacked publicity, but after World War II the city entered a new era as a symbol of postwar American culture. It became, in Asa Briggs's phrase, a 'shock city,' a city...so new that it came as a shock to visitors and caused them to reconsider the meaning of the city" (Fishman, 1987: 178). Fishman argues that the suburbanization of Los Angeles was a result of the city's decision to uphold the single-family home lifestyle by building a road system that made possible the symbol of this lifestyle - the automobile - and resulted in a restructuring of the city as no central point was privileged and residences bordered businesses due to

decentralization. As he writes of this new vision of the suburban lifestyle, “The ‘city of the future will be a harmoniously developed community of local centers and garden cities,’ an environment of single family homes linked by highways...It was an updated version of the original Los Angeles vision, the whole basin to become a single great decentralized city without a center or boundaries” (Fishman, 1987: 166). This vision of environments of single family homes was reflective of a culture where freedom of movement over vast spaces was sought along with the ability to return to one’s own private home, perhaps representative of the innate escapist aspect of American culture when reinforced by private values.

In his book, *America*, Jean Baudrillard (1988) argues that Americans have not destroyed space; they have simply rendered it infinite by the destruction of its center. Thus, the logic of public space in suburbia fails Hegel’s test of civic virtue, as Americans no longer have a place to stop escaping to. While the open-fields mentality of the frontier became increasingly obsolete with increased expansion, the open-fields mentality of decentralized, highway-ridden suburban America represented the institution of an escapist mentality whose immortality is threatened only by the obsolescence of suburban space. Baudrillard (1988) argues that the logic of space based on this “collective propulsion” and decentralization make it difficult to distinguish between the desert and the metropolis. He writes:

There is something of the freedom of movement that you have in the desert here, and indeed Los Angeles, with its extensive structure, is merely an inhabited fragment of the desert. Thus the freeways do not de-nature the city or the landscape; they simply pass through it and unravel it without altering the desert character of this particular metropolis. And they are ideally suited to the only truly profound pleasure, that of keeping on the move. (Baudrillard, 1988: 53)

Baudrillard (1988) argues that despite the fact that the city existed in America before the highway system, it now looks as if the suburban city was constructed with the



highway in mind. For Baudrillard (1988), Los Angeles is “a city of incredible proportions” but without any boundaries, space, or dimension.

This view of Los Angeles as a city without boundaries would eventually be a contributing factor to the realization that the universalization of the suburban ideal, central to the elements of the vision of Los Angeles above, was impossible. Increased growth as a result of the city’s lack of boundaries, and increased necessity to continually reshape the highway system so that each new developed area would be accessible, led to the devastation of the surrounding natural areas of Los Angeles County. As Fishman writes, “In the end...the universalization of the suburban ideal proved to be impossible. Nature was virtually abolished in the endless spread of subdivisions, and not even the hundreds of square miles of California land could prevent the massive rise in land prices in the 1970s that has threatened to restrict the suburban ideal once more to an elite” (Fishman, 1987: 157). The destruction of the natural areas as a result of suburbanization, despite the city’s vision of “harmonious garden cities,” shows that the contradiction inherent to the suburban metropolis is a contradiction reflective of Americans’ environmental consciousness - our inability to reconcile our desire for natural space and our economic values. Thus, the distancing of the citizen with her/his surrounding environment, representative of the demise of public space with suburban design, is a source of the privileging of economic interests over the environment and an attempt at community centered on this environment.

Also representative of the “shock” value of Los Angeles is the way the spatial dynamics of L.A. and American suburbs were able to make possible an American media culture centered on the television. This element would also have a significant impact on

cultural conceptions of public space in the suburban “telecity.” According to Fishman (1987), the television brought about by suburbanization bypassed old centers of entertainment to bring and create the mass media to these decentralized “cities.” This decentralization, in turn, lead to a renewed sense of individualism and privatization. Fishman argues that the decentralized audience was essential for the consumption of an increasing amount of standardized products to support the standardized single-family home lifestyle. The implication of this adoption of what Zygmunt Bauman (1993) calls in his book, *Postmodern Ethics*, a “telecity,” is the creation of a culture based on a magnified separation between the citizen and her/his surround public sphere. Bauman argues that here, in this city, strangers can be looked at openly “without fear,” for the, “Telecity is the ultimate *aesthetic space*. In the telecity, the others appear solely as objects of enjoyment, no strings attached. Offering amusement is their only right to exist – and a right which it is up to them to confirm ever anew, with each successive ‘switching on’” (Bauman, 1993: 178). Here, it is easy to see the connection between Benjamin’s (1936) conception of Fascism as the aesthetization of politics, accomplished via the logic of Nazi Cinema and corresponding control of public space, and the products of the suburban and post-suburban projects in American community design. The *Reichsautobahnen* constructed to accomplish the reactionary modernist project of National Socialism is appropriated in post-war American suburbanization via the highway to create a decentralized web of suburban residential and commercial developments that led to a social distancing of citizens from each other and their surrounding environments in order to control and create the desired American community. In this telecity, the resident of the suburban and post-suburban community

can experience the dangers of society through the glass lens of the family television, which Bauman (1993) notes has been rendered obsolete in the days of televisions in every room of the household and home computers, leading to even further individualism. Fishman describes the state of culture based on this social ordering; he writes, “It is not difficult to wind up with a picture of the techno-city as a cultural wasteland, mired in standardization and conformity, unable to generate individuality. A mass migration to the new city can therefore be seen as a cultural disaster, a trivialization of American culture, and a destructive threat to the only environment in which culture can flourish” (Fishman, 1987: 202). The cultural wasteland of the “techno-city” is reflective of the division between citizens and community.

Sharon Zukin (1991) argues that the American media culture centered around the television and the suburban and post-suburban environment spatially defined a new market culture, “anchor[ing] in *place* the *market* arrangements of the postwar period” (Zukin, 1991: 140). For Zukin (1991), the suburban manifest destiny was made possible by increased bureaucratic economic power as a result of the merging of major real estate developers, national corporations, and the federal government. She argues that the impasse in middle-class growth in the suburbs as a result of the Great Depression brought about this dangerous coalition that would have long lasting implications on the social and racial organization of the city. As she writes:

The massive federal aid to suburban development that began during the 1930s subjected intensive spatial reorganization to norms of social homogenization. . . . When the Federal Housing Authority instructed local employees on how to measure the quality of an area, the FHA emphasized ‘economic stability’ and ‘protection from adverse interests.’ These were understood to be code words against the city’s social, especially racial, heterogeneity. (Zukin, 1991: 140)

Thus, despite the various social and economic functions of the American suburb, its physical and symbolic ordering reinforced a social and racial hierarchy based upon the interests of societal elites.

As noted above, the process of suburbanization in America is reflective of the social segregation of American cities. The “white flight” to the suburbs represents a reversal of the roles of the core and the periphery based largely on racist attitudes. As Mohammed Asadi writes in his essay, *Constructing a Global Ghetto: Racism, The West, & The “Third World”*, “America is now predominantly suburban and the suburbs are predominately white...The central city has become the periphery where minorities, especially African Americans are concentrated. This has led to the development of the ghetto and the birth of what is described as the ‘Underclass’” (Asadi, 2005: 3). As a result of the city’s new role as the space for the supposed “underclass,” not just African Americans, but also large numbers of Hispanic, Chinese, Latino, and other immigrant populations have been forced, due to the real-estate market, to take up residence in these urban cores (Sandercock, 2004). The fact that this landscape still served as the symbol for post-war American culture is not surprising given that the public space discussed for much of this paper is one that for most of its history structurally excluded the participation of women and minorities.

The notion of “white flight” would later be reinforced with an increasing presence of minorities in the suburbs, laying the ground for the development of exclusionary community formations like New Urbanism that will be discussed later on. This is documented in the California Newsreel’s film, *Race: the power of an illusion*. The film’s description of corporate strategies to profit off purported racial fears exemplifies the

inherent social inequalities present in the suburban market economy (California Newsreel, 2003). As black residents moved to Roosevelt, the real-estate market used tactics called “block busting” to play on the racial fears of white residents. Agents would use black “invasion” rhetoric to get white residents to sell their homes for less than they were worth, then divide these lots up into small units and sell them at higher rates (California Newsreel, 2003). As the film states, geography took the place of Jim Crow in legal matters using racial fears and economic inequalities to further the intentions of Jim Crow culture.

Thus, the suburbanization of America represents a culmination of security culture where social homogeneity in public design and architecture is necessary to shield residents from the “other” and from the “dark forces” of urban-city life. This security culture in turn leads to the militarization of public space as a result of the logic of the Cold War. In his book, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis (1992) argues that the development and redevelopment of Los Angeles massively reproduced spatial apartheid. He writes, “This, of course, only dramatizes the current bias against accessibility – that is to say, against *any* spatial interaction between old and new, poor and rich, except in the framework of gentrification or recolonization” (Davis, 1992: 230-231). Until the complete gentrification and recolonization of public space was accomplished, the pacification of Los Angeles space would remain unfinished. In their essay, *From Refugee Camps to Gated Communities*, Bülent Diken and Arsten Laustsen (2003) argue that the process of splintering urbanization represented in the suburban metropolis leads to the transformation of city life through “urban space wars.” As they write, “With the generalization of splintered urban structures according to the logic of the camp, the

obsession with security has become ‘a zeitgeist of urban restructuring’... Today, as the production of security is fast becoming the key factor that is transforming the city through ‘urban space wars,’ the city itself is increasingly assuming the status of a chaotic object ‘beyond control’” (Diken & Laustsen, 2003: 20). Their reference to splintered urbanism, or suburbanization, as a “zeitgeist or urban restructuring,” or a grand vision or paradigm for community, is reflective of the appropriation of the logic of total war, *Der totale krieg*, via total architecture accomplished through suburbanization. Here, the ultimate decentralized, homogenous city of suburban America reflects the reactionary modernism of the Germany of the Third Reich, attempting to accomplish the same homogeneity in the public sphere through an increasingly covert bureaucracy and rationalization.

According to Hardt and Negri (2004), war is rendered as a primary organizing principle of society and as a global phenomenon in the aftermath of Hiroshima. In this society, global war tends towards the absolute that requires the absolutization of space and a new policy shift from defense to security. This shift is accomplished in post-suburban America. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that the Cold War never had an ontological character. Its logic rested in the policy of containment and a clear distinction between self and other as a justification for maintaining a permanent stasis of global order. The initial post-war suburbs provided the ideological space for the dialectical war of containment accomplished by mass-produced urban design and the media culture it was able to establish as a result of its decentralized structure. Mike Davis (1992) points to the extension of the Cold War containment policy in L.A. suburbs, and its reverse effect, in his essay, “*Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Public Space*. He

writes, “Instead the city, self-consciously adopting the idiom of cold war, has promoted ‘containment’ (the official term) of the homeless in Skid Row, along Fifth Street, systematically transforming the neighborhood into an outdoor poorhouse. But this containment strategy breeds its own vicious cycle of contradiction. By condensing the mass of the desperate and houseless together in such a small place, and denying adequate housing, official policy has transformed Skid Row into probably the most dangerous ten square blocks in the world” (Davis, 1992: 160). Thus, the Cold War policy of containment, reflected in the structure of suburban life, leads to the militarization and division of social space. With the shift and move past the suburb to the “techno-city” described by Fishman, the global state of war is rendered indeterminate. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that the metaphorical wars against poverty, crime, drugs, and now terrorism are representative of the decreased temporal and spatial determinacy provided by the media culture of Bauman’s “telecity.” Here, images of these “wars” generate a desire for security and a public consumption of increasingly isolated community structures while magnifying the distance between the public and any sense of community.

Hardt and Negri (2004) also describe the military and social tactics of insurgency and counter-insurgency measures as part of the politics of global war. Just as the effectiveness of certain guerilla politics is presented through the metaphor of the “swarm,” the format of the insurgency to strike one point from many directions so as to always leave the opponent unprepared, is representative of a successful critical public sphere; the methods of counter-insurgency are reflective of the way the control of public space is instituted by these networks of power to stifle criticism and discourse. The “environmental deprivation” model and newly implemented positive techniques that

focus not on destroying the environment, but rather creating and controlling it, “engaging the network not only militarily but also economically, politically, socially, psychologically, and ideologically” (58), are reflective of the way corporations structure and control space in suburban and post-suburban America to prevent any criticism from being directed at them or the foundations of society that generate their power (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Creating the environment in such a way that eliminates all avenues for being ‘public’ prevents any criticism for the basis of the control of space. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that the military is experiencing difficulties with this new warfare because of its centralized structure, stating that “in order to fight a network you have to be a network.” For community and social groups fighting the corporate and media control of community and urban planning the opposite seems to be true. Capital, and the corporations that social organizations are attempting to resist, is the network, and what must be formed is a coalition of social groups with different interests but based on common and shared understandings in order to successfully combat this network of control.

Before emphasizing a politics of place based on common and shared understandings, this thesis will first turn to the shift from a market of production to a market of consumption accomplished by the postmodern warfare of biopower. Here, market politics and the commodification of security, best represented by Disney politics, is the finalization of the infinite nature of war. That is, not only are we at war with ideas and concepts, but our endless ability to purchase and consume war, and its opposite state of innocence, leads to the finalization of spatial and temporal indeterminacy, rendering the space between citizens and their surroundings virtually unconquerable.



## Chapter Four: The Disneyfication of Public Space and the Culture of Consumption

After tracing the history of escapism in the public sphere, and the way a new market culture based on suburbanization generated social divisions and brought about a consumption based economy, this thesis now turns to ways in which elements of this exclusion are developed into commodities. What better way is there to trace this “white-washing” of public space through entertainment, and the creation of an image of community based on corporate control, than through the lens of the Disney Corporation? Thus, synonymous with suburbanization is the development of another symbol of post-war American culture, one that would have global and long-lasting implications in the success of neo-liberal market economies and the control and planning of community design and public space.

The Disney Corporation, known today as a global media giant, has been functioning as a driving force of media culture since its inception. Its initial success in controlling public space as a result of its power over media culture can be traced to its first theme park, Disneyland. Located in the heart of the grand suburban project of Southern California, Disneyland was designed as an escape for the post-war generation living with the tension of the nuclear age. This escape would be coupled with an almost complete - in imagery, entertainment, and architecture - nostalgia for a patriotic America. As Henry Giroux writes in his book, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*:

Walt had more in mind than simply providing therapeutic relief for those anxious to flee, if only temporarily, the conflicts and traumas of modern society; he also insisted that the park provide entertainment-filled lessons that reaffirm an unqualified patriotic enthusiasm for the American way of life as experienced through the cultural matrix of sentiment, nostalgia, middle-class family values,

unfettered consumerism, and the celebration of technological advancement.  
(Giroux, 1999: 36)

This image of American culture is packaged and sold in the theme park as Disneyland allows us to escape into the past before the horrors of the war to a time where Manifest Destiny is once again possible, if only in “Frontierland,” and the ability to continue re-living this fantasy is as easy as purchasing a ticket at the door.

Giroux (1999) argues that the violence witnessed by suburban America in schools, homes, and neighborhoods is increasingly making Disney the symbol for the solution to a loss of the innocence and security of small-town America. According to Giroux, “Disney’s power lies, in part, in its ability to tap into the lost hopes, abortive dreams, and utopian potential of popular culture” (Giroux, 1999: 5). Thus, innocence and its consumption is the basic logic of the power of Disney, an innocence continually reinforced by its enterprise of “Imagineering.” Giroux argues that Disney not only uses innocence as a narrative for shaping public memory to “reconstruct an American past in its own image,” but also as a rhetorical device designed to cleanse itself of its corporate and commercial image. He writes, “The Walt Disney Company’s attachment to the appeal of innocence provides a rationale for Disney both to reaffirm its commitment to children’s pleasure and to downplay any critical assessments of the role Disney plays as a benevolent corporate power in sentimentalizing childhood innocence as it simultaneously commodifies it” (Giroux, 1999: 31). Giroux argues that when innocence is separate from the social and historical situations that construct it, its basis as the logic for the public sphere generates an atheoretical, apolitical, and atemporal space that prevents community and democratic action. He contends that this sense of innocence serves as a principle of moral regulation as part of a “politics of historical erasure.” In the Disney reality,

innocence is the ultimate truth that legitimates the “escapist fantasy” as a vehicle for the promotion of conservative values and a social order that generates a market for continuous profit. As Giroux importantly notes, “That Disney has a political stake in creating a particular moral order favorable to its commercial interests raises questions about what it teaches in order to produce the meanings, desires, and dreams through which it attempts to subscribe all of us to the Disney worldview” (Giroux, 1999: 34-35). The success of this worldview is a result of the Disney Corporation’s model as the face of corporate power and as an icon of American culture.

Giroux (1999) points to the contradiction inherent to the combination of the political and economic power of Disney and its image of “making everyone’s dreams come true.” He argues that these contradictions could serve as mobilizing points by which to criticize the corporate giant but success hinges upon battling the power of Disney and the global media, a task, he says, most aren’t willing to undertake. This, according to Giroux (1999), represents the success of Disney in substituting democracy and the public sphere with consumption and a marketplace that is now everywhere. As he writes:

As part of a handful of industries that control the ‘country’s media-cultural space,’ Disney represents the disturbing victory of structural power and commercial values over those competing public spheres and value systems that are critical to a just society and to democracy itself. As corporate and consumer rights prevail over citizenship rights, the tension between corporate society and civil society is either downplayed or displaced, and the commercialization of everyday life along with the waning of democratic institutions and social relations continues. (Giroux, 1999: 27)

The ability for Disney to replace consumer rights with citizen rights is a result of its access to all public communication media combined with the economy of consumerism brought about by its grand marketing schemes.

Similarly, In his book, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, Stephen Fjellman (1992), suggests that the Disney Corporation is powerful because it combines the symbolic essence of childhood innocence with control over the communications media to shape this consumer economy replacing democratic public life. It is through this control that Disney offers us their antidote to modern life. As Fjellman (1992) writes:

The [Disney] Company is selling, to those of us who can afford it, an antidote to everyday life. Under the rule of the commodity, our lives have become fragmented and confusing. Our environments are dangerous and threatening. Our sense of powerlessness is fed by the institutions of modern life and by the uncontrollable behavior of others. What we buy at WDW (Walt Disney World) is not just fun and souvenirs but is also welcome civility on a human scale. (Fjellman, 1992: 11-12)

For Fjellman (1992), Disney's greatest asset, its symbolic capital, is its image. This image and the ability for it to have considerable control over public life is reflective of its association and links with other corporations to maintain a hegemony of power in a world of commodities designed to offer the antidote to the isolating lifestyle of suburban America. This world, according to Fjellman (1992), is Huxley's *Brave New World* as commodities are Americans' soma. Thus, Americans have been "amusing ourselves to death" with the increasing replacement of public discourse and the public sphere with the entertainment of the Disney Corporation and other corporate media giants. Disney and the media have created what Marshall McLuhan (2001) refers to as the "mass audience." According to McLuhan (2001), the public has been replaced with this mass audience, which noted above, is reproducing Fasching's global Disneyland with its underlying rational order and "packages of passive entertainment."

For Disney, the power to use this mass audience while shaping its vision of modern America and the city and public space of tomorrow is accomplished through the

plans for Disney's second theme park - Walt Disney World – and Walt Disney's vision for the "City of Tomorrow" in his designs for EPCOT. As Umberto Eco (1990) argues in his book, *Travels in HyperReality*, Walt Disney World is one hundred and fifty times larger than Disneyland, projecting itself as the model for "an urban agglomerate of the future." This vision, according to Fjellman (1992) goes beyond Walt Disney's view of himself as an entrepreneur and entertainer. As he writes, "Far more complicated than Disneyland, WDW carries a more complex set of moral meanings... Within a metemap of shared moral meanings, there are significant differences between the allegories of the Magic Kingdom and those of EPCOT Center. Although Walt Disney always thought of himself as an entrepreneur and entertainer, in his later years he acquired the labels of moral educator and urban planner as well" (Fjellman, 1992: 317). For Fjellman (1992), the moral and urban vision of Walt Disney was to present its parks and city plans as an idealized vision of America as heaven, "white-washing" the history of American public space while generating a sense of longing for the small-town Disney life that never was.

Giroux (1999) contends that it was Walt's desire to control the park's internal and external environment that was a driving factor for the ideological force of Walt Disney World. Controlling all elements of the park allowed Disney to manage the view of the public, eliminate the negative aspects of his new reality, and prevent "suburbanization at the gates," what Disney lamented so much in Southern California and Disneyland. As Giroux writes, "Disney World would not only be a theme park, it would also showcase the EPCOT Center (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), a utopian model of modern urban life, a celebration of technological rationality and the virtues of a corporate-designed future. EPCOT would provide a paradigm of how corporations

would solve the problems of society through their technological wizardry: corporate culture, social engineering, and corporate control would banish the need for politics, intellectual inquiry, and a spirited citizenship based upon democratic values and social relations” (Giroux, 1999: 37-38). The corporate model of urban life would provide a “risk-free city” where citizens could escape the violence of modern urban life and embrace the private virtues of the free-market economy spearheaded by the Disney Corporation and a new media culture. Fjellman (1992) confirms the technological future envisioned for the EPCOT project, arguing that it would be a demonstration of the “efficacy of science and applied technology” to solve the problems of cities. He writes:

The engineering of technological infrastructure would be combined with the strict admissions policies and firm political control to form an experimental city that would be efficient, entertaining, and civil. This city would use the best technology U.S. free market industry could develop for Disney’s imaginative social experiment. EPCOT would be everchanging – marching in tandem with engineering progress. (Fjellman, 1992: 349).

One does not have to look far back in history to see the designs of an initial project much grander in scale but along the same ideological lines – the control of community with an appeal to a nostalgic cultural image that occurs with simultaneous progress in media culture and technological engineering. Whether EPCOT was truly intended to be this solution to the problems of city life is debatable. However, Disney’s disdain for the suburbanization of America was not enough to prevent him from creating two “Mecca cities” as a commercial escape from this suburban lifestyle, profiting immensely and generating vast amount of economic and symbolic power from them.

A brief look at the politics behind Disney’s plans for Walt Disney World in Orlando allows us to see just how much power the Disney Corporation was able to use to secure the land necessary to implement its grand vision and to shape the vision of public space in America. In his book, *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*,

Richard Foglesong (2001) suggests that Disney was given its own private government for the purpose of complete self-control and regulation of the fantasy that would later become a social reality. Foglesong (2001) describes the degree of power and exemptions Disney was able to obtain as a result of its symbolic capital and economic potential for the city of Orlando and the state of Florida – a potential that would be extinguished with the degree of power given to Disney and its failure to live up to all of its promises. He writes:

The Disney Co. got something special in coming to Florida: their own private government, a sort of Vatican with Mouse Ears, with powers and immunities that exceed nearby Orlando's. The entertainment titan was authorized, among other things, to regulate land use, provide police and fire services, build roads, lay sewer lines, license the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, even to build an airport and a nuclear power plant...To the envy of other developers, Disney also won immunity from building, zoning, and land-use regulations. (Foglesong, 2001: 5)

The “private government” bestowed upon Disney in Orlando would be just the beginning of the social engineering that the Disney Corporation would use to implement its vision for modern American life in its entertainment cities, and later the New Urbanist community of Celebration.

The legal foundation for Disney's power to develop its vision for Walt Disney World is an example of its ability to appropriate the spirit of postmodernism to implement and profit off of a culture of commodities. Foglesong (2001) argues that the Disney Corporation's desire for a federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) planning grant was satisfied by offering a compromise to reconcile democracy with land development. This compromise, Foglesong (2001) contends, was accomplished by Disney's promise to keep up with the challenges of city building by keeping the city in the constant process of “becoming.” As he writes:

The challenge of city building, they said, was to keep the city “always in a state of becoming.” It was an appealing statement, reminiscent of Hegel’s discourse in *Philosophy of Mind* on “being and becoming,” a statement Disney publicists would make into a catchphrase... The answer from the ERA was to limit the scope of democracy. “New community developers should be exempted from processing their plans and development requests through local governing bodies,” they said. To keep their community “in a state of becoming,” they should be “freed from the impediments to change, such as rigid building codes, traditional property rights, and elected political officials.” (Foglesong, 2001: 65-66)

The same spirit that was the basis for a vision of public life charted by Hegel and his contemporaries such as Derrida, whose vision of democracy was as a state of continuous “becoming” (Caputo, 1997), would thus also serve as the spirit for absolute control and the erosion of most all of the democratic aspects of public life in the Disney reality.

Foglesong (2001) argues that it was Walt Disney’s death during the bidding for private-government control of Walt Disney World that provided the Disney Corporation the ability to win over the Florida legislature based on sentimental and purposely vague ideas of Disney’s design for the Orlando area. He argues that despite the anti-democratic nature of their reconstruction of Walt’s vision, it was praised in imagination and design – once again exemplary of the great symbolic capital of Walt Disney. As Foglesong (2001) writes:

Four days after Walt’s death, Halliwell told the Orange County legislative delegation that Disney wanted to charter two municipalities. He refused to be specific, saying legislation was still being drafted. His announcements correspond with ideas circulating in the press, dating from an interview that Walt gave in November to *Chicago Tribune* columnist Norma Lee Browning. There would be two model cities, Walt said. One would be named Epcot, a planned and controlled community that would showcase American industry and research, schools, and cultural and educational opportunities. The other, yet to be named, would be an experimental laboratory for administering municipal governments... It was radically antidemocratic – to deny residents the vote, as if American political history could be repealed. Yet the *Orlando Sentinel*... lauded the concept. They ran the Browning article on the front page with an accompanying editorial. Restricting Epcot residents from owning, they said, would give Disney “the kind of control it feels essential.” Somehow this would make the city more responsive to residents. “Imagine a city whose sole function is to serve the people who serve it,” the editors wrote. “This in itself is a revolutionary new concept. So often the citizens, who make our communities



what they are, are the last to get any consideration from the heads of their local government.” (Foglesong, 2001: 65-66)

Thus, it was freedom *from* democracy that the *Orlando Sentinel* argued would make the Disney vision for the utopian city responsive to its citizens and residents. Foglesong (2001) argues that in-so-much as the Disney Corporation, and Walt Disney himself, never intended on building a city that would have to be responsible to residents, this approval of Disney’s bid for its own private government was based on a false premise. In what is commonly referred to as the “Helliwell memo,” Disney is said to have written his intentions to not include permanent residents in his plan. As Foglesong (2001) writes, “[Disney] wrote comments directly on the memo, which was found in his desk when he died. Every place where Helliwell referred to the problem of ‘permanent residents,’ Walt crossed it out and wrote ‘temporary residents/tourists.’ Despite his fanciful mind, he clearly grasped the political reality – if people lived there, they could vote there, undermining the company’s political control” (Foglesong, 2001: 63). Fjellman (1992) humorously argues that Disney’s decision to remove permanent residents from its original design turned the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow into the Experimental Prototype Commercial of Tomorrow – the model city, as a technological utopia, became a mall. The deal struck in 1967 that gave the Disney Corporation everything it wanted to pursue what development it wished with very little strings attached was a testament to “the power of pixie dust and the Disney mystique” (Fjellman, 1992). With this power, Disney implemented its vision of a centralized administration that solved the problems of the fragmentation of land ownership and political interests. This vision would have lasting implications for the corporate control of community design and public space.

The fact that the Disney ideology is antithetical to democracy, community, and public space will become equally apparent with Celebration; however, its control of landscape, public space, and American culture, evident in its two theme parks and its ability to control the public sphere through its media power, has established as reality, and continues to be a prominent factor in, the commodification of everything in the public sphere. Sharon Zukin (1991) argues that Walt Disney constructed a “new vernacular image for postmodern society” based on the view of landscape as a source for mass visual consumption. As she writes, “It was Disney World that abstracted the desire for security from the vernacular and projected it into a coherent landscape of corporate power” (Zukin, 1991:232). This landscape is still today consistent with Disney’s access to all avenues of media to continually shape and re-shape the public memory. As Giroux writes, “Public memory, in Disney’s worldview, is inseparable from commercial culture. And this equation raises serious questions about how history is written when corporate interests sponsor it. As a model for a corporate notion of utopia, Disney’s theme parks collapse public and historical discourse into the language of entertainment and commercialism. In the name of ‘edutainment’...Disney educates and entertains in order to create corporate identities and to define citizens primarily as consumers and spectators” (Giroux, 1999: 43-44). Under the guise of “edutainment,” Disney is re-writing public memory and whitewashing history. What we get instead is a “Mickey Mouse history” representative of the merging of corporate culture and education to create a system for the commercialization of the past – Disney’s past. Giroux (1999) argues that Disney’s educational practices need to be seen as an attack on the foundation of public discourse and democratic spheres. These practices create a landscape that removes the

many subjective identities necessary for the basis of a politics of the common with multiple singular viewpoints that are the foundation for any critical democracy.

The economic and media shift representative of the Disney ideology is one from production to consumption, forming the state of our postmodern, neo-liberal market culture. Slavoj Žižek (2002) writes that in the late-capitalist consumer society “real social life” is more similar to the features of a “stage fake.” The features of this staged reality are detailed in another one of Giroux’s (2003) books, *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond a Culture of Fear*. In it Giroux describes the impact of the neo-liberal market ideology on public space and the public sphere. According to Giroux, neo-liberalism redefines the public sphere around privatism, safety, and consumption, where a democracy of critical citizens is replaced by a democracy of consumers. He writes, “Neoliberalism defines society exclusively through the privileging of market relations, deregulation, privatization, and consumerism. Under the reign of neoliberalism...everybody becomes a customer, and the exchange of money takes precedence over social justice, socially responsible citizens, and the building of democratic communities” (Giroux, 2003: 3). Community in this culture demands silence, complicity, and fear - not criticism. The language of community becomes instead a means of corporate propaganda, and the language of the market becomes synonymous with consumption patterns that reflect one’s “democratic” identity.

Looking at the pervasiveness of corporate influence in public life allows us to focus on what Daniel Kemmis (1990) has referred to as “our inability to be public.” Corporations, as Kemmis (1990) notes, have and will continue to be a part of our culture. The difficulty arises when the balance between public benefit and private interest is

upset. As he writes, “The problem is that corporations have grown so powerful in both the economic and political spheres that they are often able to dictate terms to the very public which allows them to exist in the first place” (Kemmis, 1990: 130). This, according to Kemmis (1990), represents a failure at our sense of being public.

Corporations have succeeded in controlling both the means and objects of public life, and in doing so have had a significant impact upon public space in America. He argues that perhaps one of the most significant implications, one that may permanently entrench the Madisonian conception of public life if left unchecked, is that the political losses suffered by the public at the hands of corporations, and the increased sentiment that corporate control is inevitable, leads to a public sphere that is based solely on individual claims with no common goal or purpose (Kemmis, 1990). As he writes of the public under this mindset, “They are no longer citizens; they are now just taxpayers, and as such they will at best be neutral, at worst adversarial to public interest causes. Very few of these people will be brought back into politics by democratic appeals to the public interest, but many of them might be mobilized by more regressive or authoritarian appeals” (Kemmis, 1990: 132). Such is the state of the crisis in American public space. Citizens are succumbing to the more regressive and authoritarian appeals of a democracy of citizens whose sole function of responsibility in the “public life” are to consume. As consumers replace democratic citizens we are losing sight of the possibility for public space and a public sphere that creates a public that, being closely tied to its surrounding environment, is based on patterns of relationship between the differing viewpoints of all its citizens. It is through the intersection of market politics and community design that we can generate

specific criticisms of corporate control of community life and recognize a vision of the public based upon an interconnection between people and place.

## **Chapter Five: New Urbanism: Celebrate Good Times or Dreamworks No More?**

Drawing upon the history of public space traced above - from the frontier to the development of the suburbs, and the way entertainment and public space are combined to generate passive citizens as a result of the dominance of the Disney ideology – this thesis will now focus on the culmination of our security and commodity based culture in the design and planning of the New Urbanist community. This growing movement within urban planning and theory, designed to address the ideological and structural implications of the decentralization and suburbanization discussed earlier, has not just radically altered the physical space of cities, but has also entrenched civic indifference, isolation, and social division. New Urbanism, a type of city-planning seemingly aimed at instilling a sense of community and tradition, is one example of the attempt to resolve the isolation of suburbanization by carefully organizing and structuring the architecture, design, and layout of the city to produce community. In his essay, *New Urbanism and its Discontents*, Dean MacCannell (2000) argues that New Urbanism is a reflection of the post-nuclear age of the United States, an attempt at a false sense of security through a nostalgic look backward at life before the threat of nuclear annihilation. According to MacCannell, the deep pathos of New Urbanism is its proponent's inability to see itself as symptomatic of this alienating, nuclear era. As he writes, "The entire ensemble is symptomatic of an unavowed desire to rewind the life of the people from the present back to 1945 and replay it as if it had not been lived under the threat of nuclear annihilation...New Urbanism is fully shaped by the nuclear unconscious. Its politics are built around a nostalgic submission to the kind of absolute authority that replaced civic

life during the nuclear age” (MacCannell, 2000: 383-385). Kemmis (1990) argues that this sense of nostalgia is preclusive of any true change necessary for the development of a public, as civic duty is constructed and perceived as backward looking. This backward looking focus is the problem with attempting to re-create the past in the present. Just as values, ideas, and cultures change, so too does conditions and factors that produce community. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) argue that we should do away with this nostalgia for it represents both danger and a sign of defeat. They argue that our postmodern world free from any nostalgia is the only way to recognize the social flesh and pure potential of the Multitude.

Nowhere is this danger more apparent than in what the implications to the re-framing of public life based on a nostalgic return to small-town America and pre-1940 American lifestyle might mean for the re-emergence of racist sentiments in community design. Yet these sentiments are exactly those packaged and sold as part of the nostalgic New Urbanist experiment according to Jacqueline Jones (1995). In her essay, *Back to the Future with The Bell Curve: Jim Crow, Slavery, and G*, Jones (1995) traces the nostalgic references to Jim Crow community life in Herrnstein and Murray’s *The Bell Curve*, which claimed to scientifically prove the mental inferiority of black people. Jones (1995) argues that according to *The Bell Curve*, the racial and class segregation of neighborhoods is necessary to prevent the co-mingling of the productive and non-productive elements of society. It is an idyllic image of small-town life, reflected in the advertising and allure of New Urbanism, which bears a striking resemblance to a period in American history characterized by the law of *Jim Crow*. Jones writes:

The rural South, in a ‘simpler’ America, was a time and place where ‘the community provided clear and understandable incentives for doing what needed to be done’ (Herrnstein & Murray, p.537), characteristics attributed by

Herrnstein and Murray to a society superior to our own. Jim Crow courts often deferred to Judge Lynch in dealing with black men and women who resisting doing 'what needed to be done.' (Jones, 1995: 84).

This notion of community life based upon “doing what needed to be done” is all too often the basis for egregious acts in the public life of American history, and nostalgic references to small town America are appeals to a return to a time where lynch mobs and hangings were organized public activities. We must be on guard against this nostalgia and imagery that represents the entrenchment of dangerous social formations. This danger is even further magnified by corporate and media ability to gloss over the racial undertones expressed in the lack of low-income housing in most New Urban projects.

Thus, MacCannell (2000) suggests that the ideology of New Urbanism, particularly the corporate interpretation of community and solidarity via the citizen as pure consumer, is antithetical to citizen involvement in the community. He argues that middle-class solidarity has historically been generated around local resistance to corporate interests, control, and power through consumer boycotts, anti-development initiatives, and environmental activism. Yet, this vision of solidarity is antithetical to the profit driven motives of community developers and their vision of large corporations and existing communities “working together” with hope and in harmony (MacCannell, 2000). In reality, however, this corporate and citizen “union” is the citizens’ acceptance of corporate manipulation of post-nuclear politics. Daniel Kemmis (1990) argues that the common ground, or public, cannot be fully realized here because culture is reinforced and defined by private values. Security and innocence are the private and commodified values that are the foundation for public space in New Urbanism and that prevent the realization of common ground or an active public sphere. According to Bülent Diken and Carsten Laustsen (2003), these private values are increasingly standardized into



privatized environments as a result of the unbundling of the old Fordist era community structures to the new privatized network communities of New Urbanism. According to MacCannell (2000), the nostalgia for a life free from fear of external threats, and the Other, allows corporations to sell these private values as a false sense of security, and citizens expect their acceptance of the image of the past to shield them from the realities of the present. Formation of community around a politics of “Other” exclusion generates an alienating and exclusive public sphere that reinforces internal civility rather than directed citizen activism.

Diken and Laustsen (2003) argue that in New Urbanism, the logic of urban city life is reversed. Instead of city politics where the urban “ghetto” serves as the state of exception, or camp, the “defensible ‘ghettoes’ of New Urbanism” exclude the city and all areas outside their physical and symbolic boundaries. The city becomes the camp, the state of exception that must only enter the psychological lives of the New Urban community as a commodity. Diken and Laustsen (2003) write:

Herein we have the underlying fantasy behind contemporary urban life: the city is an unpredictable and dangerous site of survival, an ‘urban jungle.’ The urban jungle is, seen from the gated communities, a zone of indistinction, in which *terror* reigns and the homo sacer engages in a struggle for survival. While the city is transformed from a market place into a marketable object, what is repressed is the fact that there is no longer a city but the camp, which combines the logics of exception, marketing and administrative control (Diken and Laustsen, 2003: 22).

Thus, the walls that surround these communities, gated or symbolic, both prevent the “Other” of the city and its surroundings from entering the ideological and physical community they have constructed, as well as eliminate the need for a public within these communities - as their highest order, security, is achieved by a physical and ideological distancing from citizens and each other and the world outside the community. Diken and Laustsen argue that New Urbanism generates two different types of spaces, “cities

without a place and places without a city” (2003: 23) – the former referring to the cybernetic community that is tagged with New Urban development, and the later being New Urbanism’s focus on physical space and design through the simulated, theme-park “fantasy cities” represented by shopping malls, CityPlace, Disneyland, CityWalk, and Celebration.

This focus on physical space and its design as the defining feature of the public sphere in New Urban communities overlooks how the body produces space through social action and discourse. As Susan Torre writes, “[B]odies produce space by introducing direction, rotation, orientation, occupation, and by organizing a *topos* through gestures, traces, and marks. The formal structure of these actions, their ability to refunctionalize existing urban spaces, and the visual power of the supporting props contribute to the creation of public space” (Torre, 2000: 335). This notion of an active body or self is necessary for the transformation of public space from a site of exclusion, social division, manipulation and passivity towards a site of participation based on an ethic of civic responsibility and community. Diken and Laustsen (2003) argue that this politics of the body in city theory, that is viewing the city as a biopolitical practice, allows us to see that it is not the city, rather the camp, that is the dominant paradigm of the west - the means by which communities of exclusion are constructed to prevent the outsiders and their camps from infiltrating the community boundary. They further write:

Most things that take place in today’s cities are biopolitical practices, that is, practices of engineering the senses, the body, and its life, practices through which power penetrates bodies: “life is at the centre of all the calculations made about cities.” What the traditional focus on the ‘polis’ overlooks is the bare life of the *homo sacer* at its center; today ‘it is not the city but the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West. (Diken & Laustsen, 2000: 23-24)

The privatization of urban space, particularly in New Urbanist developments, where the goal is to create a self-sustaining community that is independent from the world outside its boundaries, is eliminating the need for the face-to-face interaction of urban city life. Here, the logic of the public order is completely reversed. Corporate control and design replace a public with multiple singular viewpoints; social homogeneity replaces diverse heterogeneity in public space.

Recognizing “the loss of architecture’s power to represent the *public*, as a living, acting, and self-determining community” (Torre, 2000: 335), allows us to see how city ‘planning’ requires creating the illusion of public space, all the while reinforcing homogeneity and denying the possibility for a culturally diverse community. The failure of this focus on planning illustrates that, “It may be that ‘default neighborhoods’ hold greater potential for civility than the idealized neighborhoods of cohesion, such as New Urbanism, due to the presumed levels of difference and identity, respectively. Under conditions where residents perceive relative homogeneity in their neighborhood, they may be less prepared to cope with inevitable disagreement compared to residents who recognize their heterogeneity” (Cuff, 2004: 569). What Dana Cuff is suggesting here is that the focus on design, structure, and cohesion in New Urbanism reinforces homogeneity, whereas what she terms “default neighborhoods,” much like the ties formed between residents of Playa Vista and Los Angeles over the Ballona Wetlands protection, provide a better opportunity for civic participation and community based on difference. The term “default neighborhoods” is used to refer to communities and groups of people that organize beyond the corporate constructed boundaries and divisions of constructed communities (Cuff, 2004). Such neighborhoods provide a vision for public

space and community that demonstrates the relationship between social action and physical space. As Susan Torre beautifully states:

The current debate about the demise of public space... focuses almost exclusively on the physical space of public appearance, without regard for the social action that can make that environment come alive or change its meaning... But this focus on physical space - and this ideological potential to encompass the public appearance of all people, regardless of color, class, age, or sex - loses credibility when specific classes of people are denouncing their exclusion and asserting their presence and influence in public life. The claims of these excluded people underscore the roles of *access* and *appearance* in the production and representation of public space, regardless of how it is physically or virtually constituted. They also suggest that public space is produced through public discourse, and its representation is not the exclusive territory of architecture, but is the product of the inextricable relationship between social action and physical space. (Torre, 2000: 335)

We must focus on building these relationships that combine the social action of the body and physical space to create a public based on a shared conception of place.

Analyzing two New Urbanist projects with similar corporate foundations – Disney’s town of Celebration and what was once DreamWorks’s studio-city of Playa Vista – and tracing the relationships between the way citizens interact with, shape, and experience public space controlled by the “Imagineering” power of DreamWorks and Disney, allows us to see the ways in which New Urbanism entrenches social and economic inequalities as a result of its profit-driven corporate foundation, as well as how these structural inequalities deny the ability for the formation of an active conception of *civitas* and public sphere. As Dana Cuff (2004) suggests, it is the combination of the citizens’ participation and the local place one inhabits that de Tocqueville argues is central to political life and an active public sphere.

Comparing Disney’s continued control over the image of Celebration with the failure of the DreamWorks Corporation to actualize the script for their 21<sup>st</sup> century studio-city, a result of massive citizen protest over social justice and environmental issues, provides a model for citizens to begin to resist corporate control of the public

sphere. The success of community mobilization and activism in chasing DreamWorks away and protecting half of the original open space of the wetlands suggests the effectiveness of active involvement in the public sphere to challenge and reformulate that sphere, and the increased potential for mobilizations like “default neighborhoods” to represent a unique democratic potential for community life. Such “default neighborhoods” represent the possibility of a true politics of the common and multitude based upon a shared understanding and relationship with place.

### **Celebrate Good Times?**

There was once a place where neighbors greeted neighbors in the quiet of summer twilight. Where children chased fireflies. And porch swings provided easy refuge from the care of the day. The movie house showed cartoons on Saturday. The grocery store delivered. And there was once a teacher who always knew that you had that “special something.” Remember that place? Perhaps from your childhood. Or maybe just from stories... There is a place that takes you back to that time of innocence. A place where the biggest decision is whether to play Kick the Can or King of the Hill. A place of caramel apples and cotton candy, secret forts, and hopscotch on the streets. That place is here again, in a new town called Celebration. - From Promotional Material for Celebration In (Setha Low, 2004: 53)

The town of Celebration, so beautifully crafted in its marketing image above, builds upon Walt Disney’s vision of a utopian community in EPCOT, a futuristic representation of a city free of urban problems. In his last film, designed to influence the Florida legislature to approve the Disney Corporation’s plans for the creation of the Reedy Creek Improvement District, Walt Disney argued that EPCOT, “will never cease to be a living blueprint of the future where people actually live a life they can’t find anyplace else in the world...[where] everything...will be dedicated to the happiness of people who live, work, and play here, and those who come here from around the world to visit our living showcase” (Waltopia.com). Yet Disney’s focus on the future in his

visionary city's planning is abandoned in Celebration. Here, the recreation of the fable Disney sought to instill within the images of his theme parks, a nostalgic look backward at the American small town, becomes the foundation for the dreams that are packaged and sold as part of the *Celebration experience*, the "living showcase," a community that embraces life in the good ol' days, a historical journey back to the 'simpler' and 'purer' small-town American life. Richard Foglesong (2001) argues that Celebration drew from the traditions of New Urbanism. As he writes, "What urban planner would not love Celebration? It drew from the tradition of 'New-urbanism,' combining cutting-edge urban design with a historically sensitive approach known as Traditional Neighborhood Development, which tried to appropriate the best of pre-World War II town planning" (Foglesong, 2001: 198). The New Urbanist project of Celebration, much like most New Urbanist projects, would include aspects contrary to the New Urban ideal in order to accomplish the historic nostalgia and "living showcase" presented in the towns' marketing material.

This particular notion of nostalgia of the past is further complicated by the fact that the era depicted by Disney in this vision perhaps never existed; that Celebration represents an attempt to recreate a past that never was by playing on the fantasies and dreams of an American public that yearns for reality to be replaced by Disney's imaginary world. As Umberto Eco (2000) argues, the impact of Disney's images of the past is the admiration of the perfection of the imitation, where faked nature relates more to the demands of our dreams than reality, where illusion is not only produced, it is also desired. Not only have Americans aided in the perpetuation of a romantic idealization of their own history, they have also accepted this romanticized vision as fact. Through

images of nostalgia and fantasy, Disney has triumphed once more in its control of the real by its substitution of the imaginary, only this time, instead of a theme park where the visitor *expects* fantasy, it is a simulated reality of escaping into a pastoral vision of the past accepted by 20,000 people who will eventually call this wasteland of images, home.

These images can be seen everywhere as evidenced by the inclusion of the picture of a billboard advertising Celebration in Andrew Ross's (1999) account of his year spent in Celebration. The billboard consisted of one large image of two girls with pigtails swinging on swings with the words "Isn't this reason enough for Celebration?" inscribed over it. Much like Jean Baudrillard argues in his book, *Simulacra & Simulation*, where Disney is presented as imaginary to make us believe that everything else is real, whereas, "...the America that surrounds it [is] no longer real, but belong[s] to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation" (Baudrillard, 1983: 12-13), the billboard utilizes the fantasy, remorse, and nostalgia for a life where this is possible that is constructed in the theme park to sell a plot of land in Disney's greatest fantasy, or reality, of all. Thus, Jameson's (1992) vision in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, predicted Disney's eventual construction of Celebration. Like the billboard image indicates, aesthetic production has been integrated into commodity production, making sense why a company that has been historically superior in aesthetic production, like the Disney Corporation, would embark on perhaps one of the grandest attempts to fuse this aesthetic in the biggest commodity of all, a city built from the ground up, "on virgin land," as Walt would say (Waltopia.com). A city that, from Walt's description as the "living showcase," seems like the depiction of Winthrop's "city on a hill" for the rest of society to emulate, where residents live a more "meaningful" existence. The first American city as spectacle has

finally reached modern day urban planning, where spectacle has become the foundation of city and public life.

An escape from the suburban hell and commercial spectacle of Highway 192, and the perceptual extension of the expansive sets of exits off I-4 into a land of dreams and fairytales, the entrance to Celebration, with its long white picket fence and water tower are immediate images of the small town experience of the Disney fantasy. The small replica of an “aged” bridge that a visitor crosses over on their entrance into town is the portal to the hyperreal. Beyond this bridge the visitor arrives in a world where the architectural form follows the ideological function of the town’s design; something about the place is soothing and fresh. At this point, the visitor does not realize that the white picket fence, so often idealized in visions of grand houses by small town minded people, is actually plastic and not white paint-brushed wood, and that the water tower’s only functioning property is to advertise the wonderland that both residents and tourists alike are about to enter, “Disney’s Town of Celebration” (Collins & Frantz, 1999). These features, intended to convey a sense of authenticity, are simulations of a reality that the Disney Corporation is trying desperately hard to convey in its representation of small town America. Yet, Umberto Eco (1990) argues that the ideology of preservation is designed to conceal the desire for profit. By simulating an “authentic,” nostalgic view of the small town, Disney could hide its motives of profit, derived from the control exercised over enthusiastic and awestruck residents in lot size and pricing, within the procession of its images.

Perhaps the defining feature of Celebration, other than its extensive groups of nature preserves, is the Town Center developed in the heart of downtown Celebration,



where the image and architecture reflects the nostalgia and fantasy of the American small town depicted in Disneyland's and Disney World's, Main Street, U.S.A. As Richard Francaviglia (1996) argues in his book, *Main Street Revisited*, the implication of Main Street was its creation of a culture of commercialism in the nineteenth century. Main Street ceased to be a place simply rooted in values; it also became a commercial reality, yielding newer material realities, which led to the marketing of its own image as the idealized community. As he states, "Main Street...reaffirms the power of image building in creating icons that became the substance of popular culture, where images are voraciously 'consumed' as products" (Francaviglia, 1996: xxiv). In *Celebration*, the image of small town America is sold in the look and aura of storefronts, movie fronts, lakefronts, and arrangement of buildings in the downtown area. In what seems an apology from the Disney Corporation for not being able to apply the proper touches to their fantasy, the *Walking Architectural Guide to Downtown* explains that 'Market' Street is their 'Main' Street because, "there already was a Main Street in Osceola County, and street names can't be used twice" (CelebCo, 1996: 13). While this may be to ensure the reality of the simulation of Walt's constructed Main Street U.S.A., full of nostalgia and dreams of an ideal place for the expression of community, it certainly shed light on the desire for a particular vision of Market Street to be cast in the reader's mind.

Reaffirming Baudrillard (1988) and Zizek's (2002) view of public space in America as a "staged fake," Market Street, for *Celebration*, becomes the Main Street theorized by Francaviglia. As he writes, "Main Street is essentially a stage upon which several types of human dramas are performed simultaneously, each character or actor in the drama having a designated role that is dependant on his or her relationship to the

‘set.’ Whether one stands behind the counter or in front of a store window brings with different expectations. Disney was the ultimate merchant on Main Street, and visitors to Main Street are the ultimate consumers (Francaviglia, 1996: 156). This description is reminiscent of a story told by Douglas Franz in his book with Catherine Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.*, related to character play on Market Street, with its seemingly endless barrage of tourists:

Cathy was stopped on Market Street by a tourist who asked, pointing to the houses in the distance, “Are those *real* houses?”  
“Of course,” Cathy answered, slightly puzzled by her first run-in with an incredulous tourist.  
“Well then, where are the real people?” he continued.  
Looking at her watch which read ten-thirty A.M., on a Tuesday, Cathy said,  
“They’re at their real jobs, paying for their real mortgages for their real houses.”  
(Collins & Frantz, 1999: 22)

This conversation emphasizes the impact of the perception of Celebration as another theme park. Not only does it displace the dream so carefully planned by the Disney Corporation for the resident of the city, it also highlights the role that a citizen, tourist, or visitor may play in the ongoing drama of a simulated version of small town America through the projection of Main Street onto Market Street in Celebration. Even the town seal, the outline of a little girl with pigtails riding her bike on a sidewalk with the fences of houses beside her and her dog chasing from behind, becomes an image of consumption on Market Street sold as key chains and window decals in stores and located on the lamp posts, street signs, and man-hole covers of the town’s public fixtures. The seal alone represents Market Street and Celebration’s attempt to appeal to family values, and the sentimental longing for days gone by, mixed with a repressed fear of the present. It embodies the transition from the seal as an object of simulation to an object of the ‘real’ dreamlike narrative of the town.

Dean MacCannell (2000) argues that New Urbanism fails to represent a successful solution to the problems of the modern world as its architecture reinforces a deep homogeneity and suppression of difference, and its corporate design to create a unity of self and place is accomplished by the creation of a designed and ‘imagineered’ ‘backstory’ completely different from the actual lived experiences of the residents. As he writes:

The apparent drive of the New Urbanism is to forge a vapid unity of self and place, unconstrained by history, seemingly unconstrained by what was once called ‘the human.’ At Celebration, the undoing in advance of any edge that might be capable of producing a human contour is accomplished by the creation of a ‘backstory’ for the town...One of the things we do particularly in Imagineering, is we often create a story, a backstory. You write a whole mythology about something, and it helps you stay true to your design of a show or a ride or whatever you are doing. The mission of the Celebration Foundation is to make the town ‘feel like it has tradition, even though it doesn’t.’ (MacCannell, 2000: 388)

For Celebration, then, a community created public sphere does not exist. Community in Celebration from the beginning is determined by the ‘backstory’ of the Disney Corporation. From the very onset, Celebration and Disney deny the conditions necessary for the realization of a public sphere. In denying the possibility for these conditions, Disney waives the citizens’ responsibility for participation in the public sphere, thereby equating community with homogeneity in non-action. These ‘backstories,’ imagined by the corporate planners, are much different than what MacCannell (2001) terms as ‘stories in reserve,’ or the actual culture and history of the public sphere.

A large portion of Disney’s “backstory” for Celebration is the reproduction of images of Eden through the extensive structural and aesthetic construction of the 4,700 acres of preserved land located on the Celebration site. In his book, *Visions of Eden*, R. Bruce Stephenson (1997) argues that nature has always played a very crucial role in America’s understanding of itself. The outlay of the natural areas, and the relationship

between nature and culture in these spheres, mirrors Stephenson's description of John Nolen's plans for the ideal solution to the urban problem of the automobile through alternative city planning. As he states, "[Nolen] would offer a new model, that of a resort city where humans lived in harmony with nature...a site 'blessed by benevolent Nature,' Nolen wrote, 'and the enhancement of the beauty that already exists is a work that should be kept continually active, insuring for future generations the glories of today'" (Stephenson, 1997: 3). This image of Eden is also represented in Celebration's information material which states that, "Celebration's wetlands [are]...left in their pristine state, [and] are a vital part of Celebration's plan and of the town's natural ecology...Celebration has almost equal portions of wetlands and built-up land in an effort to preserve the native environment and the species, both flora and fauna, that inhabit it" (CelebCo, 1996: 6). It is this vision and imagery that sells Disney's image of Eden as one more element of the nostalgic search for a glorified past. Only here, in the city of simulacra, is the existence of Eden and culture allowed so close together, for here and here only, one reinforces the other. Images of Eden add another hyperreal text to the entire book of fantasy and nostalgia that defines the public and social life of the city of Celebration.

However, the strength of the images of Eden masks what is hidden in its description; that is, the introduction of artifice in the world of nature in order to represent a tellable story of reality. In Celebration, sitting on the rocking chairs that overlook the Downtown lakeside view of the preserved wetlands behind this lake is a common past time. Leave it to Disney to cover up the artificiality of the lake, which is often, if not always, included in the experience of 'nature' in Celebration. The sidewalks, pathways,

and boardwalks that cut through, intersect, and join the now very fragmented area of the wetland preserve are more examples of the human impact and the shaping of ‘virgin, pristine’ nature so often described by Celebration goers. The ability of the Edenic narrative to replace the crocodile infested swamp narrative of pre-development times shows the dramatic weight of the Disney Corporation and Celebration Company’s control of the images of Nature as Eden, despite the old environment’s dominance in material presence through six foot alligators in back yards, and encephalitis mosquito scares that keep children from trick-or-treating on Halloween (Ross, 1999). Stephenson (1997) argues later in his book that Nolen’s new model of a city was never carried out because the citizens were sold by land speculators on an image of a false Eden. This is exactly what is occurring in Celebration, where the land speculators are the Disney Corporation’s publications and statements. Citizens are being sold on the image of a false Eden, an Eden which in no way compares to the ‘reality’ of the swamps, which also lose their grasp on authenticity; the image replaces the real. This notion of a “false Eden” is descriptive of the “backstory” designed for the “natural” areas of the town, which often directly contradicts the unique social and cultural “stories in reserve” of an ecosystem far from Eden. In Celebration, personal images of and relationships with nature in regards to social action are prevented by images of nature as pure commodity and object.

Despite the fact that the Disney Corporation has stepped away from the physical control of Celebration, their symbolic and ideological power still remain as large impediments for non-exclusionary, democratic space. The new public high school, created as a result of the district’s new zoning, is a great example of Disney’s lasting impact. As Foglesong (2001) reveals, when Osceola County projections for the

construction of new schools were released in 1999, Disney donated a 50-acre site to build a public high school in Celebration. This decision, carried out while in the process of cutting its administrative ties with the community, would have lasting implications on the attempt to build the school in such a way that the majority of the students who attend the school, bussed in from low-income Osceola County, would have the least amount of contact with the residents and city of Celebration. As Foglesong notes, “By donating a fifty-acre school site, Disney could control the school’s location” (2001: 168). And intentionally control it they did, as the school is located at the furthest point of the western portion of Celebration; the buses that move the “outsiders” from Osceola County can leave the school via the World Drive exit to I-4 and Rt. 417 without ever having to pass through Celebration.

The current possibility of an emerging civic involvement as a result of the shift away from Disney control is cause for hope for the formulation of an ethic of community and the creation of *civitas*, or an active, democratic public sphere. Instead, however, what we are faced with in the status quo is an ever-increasing stratification of class relations, and a shift in architecture that emphasizes greater wealth projection from its ornate design, reinforcing an exclusionary concept of community. What is necessary, then, is questioning who controls the formation of this community ethic based on social action - citizens of the city, or corporations, whose simulation of civic life masks the reality of a community ethic based on homogenization and exclusion.

### **DreamWorks No More?**

DreamWorks’ attempt at a 21<sup>st</sup> century studio-city located in Playa Vista, California, near Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), and the citizen resistance that

stood in opposition to the project's development, highlights the necessity of citizen participation, responsibility, and action for the production of public space. In her article "The Figure of the Neighbor: Los Angeles Past and Future," Dana Cuff (2004) argues that Los Angeles is a particularly unique location for the study of historical and constantly shifting conceptions of the neighbor and community, allowing us to see the way citizens perceive themselves and their relationship to different conceptions of the public sphere. In response to these changing ideas of community and increased housing demands, the development company Playa Capital initially announced plans for Playa Vista as a 1,087 square acre mixed-use development near LAX based around DreamWorks SKG's design for a 21<sup>st</sup> century studio-city complex. It was designed to include: 13,000 residential units, 5 million square feet of commercial space, 500,000 feet of retail, 600,000 square feet of civic and cultural space, and 3.2 million square feet of entertainment and media complexes (Jarmuth, 1999). However, years of activist organizing to stop the placement of the DreamWorks studio and city in Playa Vista, as this area is the natural area known as the Ballona Wetlands – considered the last open space in Los Angeles - have led to significant victories against corporate control and exclusionary planning. As Nick Madigan humorously states:

When Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen assembled in Howard Hughes' mammoth Spruce Goose hangar on Dec. 13,1995, and announced with great fanfare that they would build their vaunted new studio at the site, their vision seemed unstoppable. The DreamWorks studio, part of the proposed Playa Vista development north of Los Angeles Intl. Airport, was to be the ultimate state-of-the-art facility, a tree-lined, 22-acre campus where Hollywood's most successful filmmaker could realize his celluloid fantasies. Spielberg stipulated that his headquarters overlook a lake, and even climbed into a crane at the site, the better to imagine the view from what would one day be his office...But in the nearly three years since, not a single brick has been laid, and workers can barely move dirt from one pile to another without getting slapped with restraining orders and lawsuits from environmental activists. (Madigan, 1998: ¶ 1-6)

Such activism provides a framework for how mobilizing issues such as environmental damage and social justice concerns provide the foundation for a successful and necessary movement to resist the corporate manipulation of images of community.

The design of New Urbanism in Playa Vista is different from Celebration; the former, under the leadership of DreamWorks, and influenced by the culture of Los Angeles, is futuristic as opposed to nostalgic – though the same eerie corporate planning of community life that can be sold as commodity and simulated in the architecture and structure of public space remains. As Wade Major writes:

The actual studio lot, in fact, is but a part of a larger \$7 billion development plan that is as revolutionary from a real estate and urban planning perspective as DreamWorks is from an entertainment one. Partnering DreamWorks SKG with developer Maguire Thomas Partners and the Howard Hughes Corp., the plan ultimately entails development for an area a full 30 percent larger than New York's Central Park... The studio itself will be no less impressive, boasting, among other things, the world's largest sound stage, a multi-purpose lake and boat basin as well as fully-digital facilities for all phases of production. Finally, state-of-the-art communication and transportation technology will link the entire "planned" community and studio, creating what the partnership has termed a "prototype for an urban community of the 21st century." (Major, n.d.: ¶ 7)

In addition to the state-of-the-art entertainment complex mentioned above, the city, along with major home appliance corporations have the intention on making this town the ultimate “wired-in” city, picking up where Celebration has seemed to fail. Rick Broida (2001) outlines some of these amenities:

You don't have to relocate to the City of Angels to live in a brand-new wired home. Whirlpool, Playa Vista's kitchen-appliance supplier, says this project is just the beginning. "We're moving beyond the concept-and-testing phase of Internet-enabled appliances, and making strides toward actually delivering these products into consumers' homes," says Michael Todman, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Whirlpool North America. "The project will serve as a launching pad for this technology into similar wired communities under development across the country."... At Playa Vista, a Whirlpool refrigerator-mounted Web tablet will serve as the kitchen-appliance control point, linking oven, dishwasher, and microwave. Its integrated browser can search for recipes that match whatever food is on hand, and then program the oven to ensure proper cooking. The tablet will also help keep families organized with electronic notes and schedules. Soon, the Whirlpool appliances will track and automatically order groceries and household items. (Broida, 2001: ¶ 1-4)



These descriptions of the technologies and plans of what was to be a new ‘techno-polis’ seem quite similar to the theme-park aura of Celebration, suggesting a similar ability for this image to be sold as commodity.

Despite what DreamWorks might have predicted as an easy deal, from the moment their intention to fund the 21<sup>st</sup> century studio-city in Playa Vista was published, they faced tough and continuous criticism and resistance. DreamWorks initially received \$110 million in state and city subsidies paid by the citizens of Los Angeles through trickle-down tax policies, yet despite this and the fact that their leading investor was Paul Allen, the Microsoft co-founder, they were unable to generate the funds to survive in the project (Cockburn, 1996). Perhaps the image of the technological utopia they projected in the design was too big for its full realization; could the images DreamWorks was promising *really* have caught up with them?

It is clear that some of their own actions were contributing factors in their decision to back out of Playa Vista. Their contribution to the Clinton/Gore campaign aroused a continued interest in the situation regarding Al Gore, leading him to remain in close contact with the Sierra Club who was fighting the project, thus keeping Dreamworks and Playa Vista at arms length (Cockburn, 1996). Additionally, Jeffrey Katzenberg’s known harsh negotiating style (from his previous tenure with the Disney Corporation) was influential and contributed to the “sea of accusations, misunderstandings, and reversals” that continued to fuel arguments between Playa Capital and DreamWorks, distancing themselves from each other (Madigan, 1998). Katzenberg’s main complaint was based on the company’s desire to buy their portion of the land and pay for the costs of the staging, etc., to have control over their decisions as

opposed to leasing the space from Playa Capital, where they would certainly face more restrictions (Madigan, 1998). Whereas Disney was successful in gaining complete control over the Reedy Creek Improvement District by the Florida legislature, allowing them to have much more control over the design and implementation of his dream, DreamWorks failed to achieve this goal as a result of the overall negative attitude over the Playa Vista development.

Perhaps most damaging to the actualization of the DreamWorks vision was the large and dynamic coalition for environmental protection and social justice concerns that now had a definitive corporate image to attach their criticism to, generating even greater solidarity between these groups. J. William Gibson writes:

Opponents of Playa Vista have been jubilant since the announcement of DreamWorks' withdrawal... Could it be that the much-maligned and scoffed-at campaign of die-hard environmentalists finally carried the day? For five years, activists have filed lawsuits and staged demonstrations, making it clear that they considered publicity-sensitive DreamWorks as much a target as Playa Capital itself. One group, the Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, reports that it has distributed 15,000 post cards of protest addressed to DreamWorks over the last three years. (Gibson, 1999: ¶ 9)

This coalition, comprised of over eighty opposing groups was successful in pointing out the adverse affects of the Playa Vista development in issues of traffic congestion, air pollution, and wetlands loss. As Gibson continues:

Over eighty opposing groups, ranging from national organizations such as the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation, to regional and local entities such as the Wetlands Action Network and California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG), have fought the proposed development. Organized in 1995, the Citizens United to Save All of Ballona coalition has argued that destroying LA's last open space and replacing it with a project that will generate more than 200,000 car trips and ten tons of air pollution each day will cause irrevocable harm. While the coalition accepts development of the roughly sixty-acre Howard Hughes aircraft plant as a potential new home for DreamWorks, it wants the remaining, unpaved 1,030 acres brought into the public domain and saved as a nature preserve and park. (Gibson, 1999: ¶ 6)

As noted above, particularly important to the movement was maintaining as much of the land as possible so as to preserve and restore the Ballona Wetlands back to a healthier

functioning ecosystem. Though they were not able to halt all development in Playa Vista, activist movements were successful in substantially decreasing the size of the development project and increasing more preserved wetlands. Changes include: less than half the amount of residential units, less than half the square footage of retail business, 4 million square feet less of commercial space, and a 50% increase in the amount of land set aside for preservation and restoration (Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, n.d.).

Pinpointing the source of activist success in pushing Dreamworks out of the project, Alexander Cockburn describes the ability for continued protests and lawsuits to tarnish the image of the company, diminishing the company's desire to remain. As he writes:

The Administration pushed the Army Corps of Engineers into an expedited approval process. (The corps was involved, because the wetlands would have to be drained and filled and this, under the Clean Water Act, requires a Section 404 permit from the Army Corps.) The Army Corps duly rushed through an approving permit. But this has allowed the wetlands' defenders to launch a federal suit, filed in late November, charging that the corps had violated the law. Years of litigation lie ahead, but the whole project - already financially ailing after McGuire Thomas ran into financial problems amid the property slump of the late eighties - now faces the prospect of Dreamworks bailing out, since studio space presumably won't be available for a while. It may be that Spielberg, who cherishes his reputation as a friend of all living things has realized that the prospective rape of Ballona is beginning to dent his image, the same way Disney has been tarnished by all its immense real estate operations, such as the failed bid to turn the Manassas battlefield into a Disney development. (Cockburn, 1996: ¶ 7)

Attacking the corporate image was accomplished not only from an environmental perspective, but was also based on social justice concerns. As Tom Hayden writes, "Far from being a 'City within the City', as some have called it, Playa Vista will be a 'City away from the City,' a live-in coastal Paradise, which will reinforce the patterns of economic and social segregation tearing at Los Angeles" (Hayden, 1992: ¶ 7). J. William

Gibson agrees, arguing that the Playa Vista development would intensify the race and class divisions of Los Angeles discussed earlier. As he states:

The affluent west side of Los Angeles is hardly the best place to build a huge new project: "It's a new beach town, a pattern of development that perpetuates race and class divisions. The people who will live there are going to be middle-class and up. Had it been built in the middle of the city, it would have had a different complexion. The barrio and the ghetto continue unfazed by this development." (Gibson, 1999: ¶ 19)

Thus, the movements that helped generate enough pressure on DreamWorks and Playa Capital are principled on social, not just environmental, issues, suggesting that residents of the area were no longer willing to sit and watch while the city continued to support a development that would generate immense profits for Dreamworks from their exclusion.

The battle over Playa Vista, the Ballona Wetlands, and its environmental and social concerns still continues to be fought, despite the success of eliminating the Dreamworks corporate “aura” and preserving so much of the original wetlands. According to a Ballona Wetlands Land Trust press release (2004), in November of 2004 the City of Santa Monica, The Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, Surfrider Foundation, and representatives of the Tongva/Gabrieleno Native Americans filed suit to challenge the approval of the second phase of the Playa Vista development project. Among their main concerns was the unnecessary removal of over 400 burials from a Native American burial site listed by the State’s Native American Heritage Commission as a “sacred site,” and the failure of treatment and prevention measures for methane and other gas leaks in what is the largest oil field gas seepage area in the entire United States and the only densely populated and planned community located adjacent to an active site (BWLTL, 2004).

The press release demonstrates the networked and active involvement to protest Playa Vista, as it states “Los Angeles City-sanctioned Neighborhood Councils and

community organizations, spearheaded by the Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, convened a Town Hall meeting at Venice High School auditorium on September 20 to allow over 1200 concerned residents to express their vehement opposition to the project and clear support for the natural treatment wetland alternative. ‘We fully intend to protect the remaining portion of the Ballona Wetlands ecosystem for the benefit of all of this City’s residents,’ said Tom Francis, Executive Director of the Land Trust” (BWLTL, 2004). These continuous and relentless protests over social advocacy and environmental issues are continuing to pay off as the development of the second phase, for the time being, has come to a halt. Additionally, serious considerations exist for abandoning the entire project due to massive potential lawsuits as a result of the explosive methane leaks over already built and planned house sites (BWLTL, 2004). An appellate court ruling has recently upheld an appeal sponsored by the Spirit of the Sage Council, Environmentalism Through Inspiration and Non-Violent Action, and the Grassroots Coalition that will halt the project for now (ENN, 2005).

These court victories and changes were and are the result of active participation in the public sphere, and an emphasis on resisting corporate control of community life through local protests, sit-ins, court battles, and government petitioning. Through these demonstrations, citizens and their bodies actively shape the public sphere, which is necessary for the transformation of static conceptions of the public space that place too much emphasis on the structure and architecture of the city, failing to see how the body, as it moves across public space, is what generates the interactions between oneself and the world that are definitive of the public sphere. When the body constitutes space in such a way, through active participation, the public sphere becomes defined by an ethic of compassion for the other, not exclusion.

Thus, the ‘backstory’ charted by DreamWorks and Playa Capital was and is continuously challenged through the re-appropriation of the public sphere where corporations lose their control over the production of images of the city and citizens are directly involved in creating and defining public space based on local and cultural values, history, and thought. MacCannell’s (2000) concept of ‘stories in reserve’ are particularly useful in reference to the environmental politics of Playa Vista and Celebration, and what each has to say about this politics’ influence on the public sphere. The nature/culture relationships established and experienced in Celebration’s public sphere are ones that foster passivity – as nature is *acted out* on the decks of boardwalks and in the public parks instead of being *transformed*. For the citizens of Los Angeles fighting to save the Ballona Wetlands, nature/culture relationships are based on intersection and suggest that social action is necessary for the transformation of physical space. In the case of Celebration, the ‘backstory’ created by Disney is the mediator between nature and culture, whereas for Playa Vista, no mediator is necessary as the ‘stories in reserve’ come to define the public sphere instead of the backstory imagineered by a company seeking profit in the name of community at the expense of this very community. Recognition of the rouse of this backstory is necessary to challenge its existence. As Gibson writes, “Playa Vista’s foes...still hope to preserve most of the acreage as public wetlands. The Citizens United To Save All of Ballona coalition is gearing up to lobby against the Mello-Roos bonds. "Without the Hollywood glitter" of DreamWorks, "these Mello-Roos funds can be seen for what they are — straight corporate welfare" (Gibson, 1999: ¶8). Thus, the resistance of the imagineering of corporations becomes essential for the

realization of an ethic of civic responsibility and activism that re-captures the public sphere.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion: Toward a Politics of the Common Based on Place**

The continued New Urbanist trend towards sites of exclusion slows the growth of civil society. When bodies act in the public realm, their actions must be increasingly garnered towards the re-invigoration of *civitas* and the public sphere. Thus, the citizens of Orlando and Celebration might learn a lot from the success of activist organizing in Playa Vista in resisting the exclusionary and destructive development of L.A.'s "last open space." Not only is action necessary for the transformation of the self that defines one's relationship to the social space of the city in question, but also for recognizing the benefits of a politics of neighborhood as inclusion, as opposed to "otherization," as the result of a local catalyst for the formation of community. As Cuff writes, "To begin to build a more civil society within urban cultures, neighborhood form cannot be set by exclusionary tactics of segregation or boundary by definition. Rather than walled domains of seeming similarity, a local catalyst constellates the figure of the neighbor around something worth saving to the community" (Cuff, 2004: 575-576). Strategies for balancing the exclusionary practices of New Urbanism with the necessity for civil society are thus essential for a re-invigoration and democratization of the public sphere.

The intersection of common interests in the fight over Playa Vista is representative of the democratic potential for default neighborhoods to generate a critical and heterogeneous public space. As Dana Cuff (2004) suggests default neighborhoods offer the potential for political hope based on a common and shared relationship with place and the different subjective identities it generates. This common relationship to the places we inhabit is enough to generate public discussions to resolve community problems and resist corporate control and influence. As Cuff writes:



While residents' only common interest may be geographical, it is a strong bond: that interest is persistent (the terrain does not disappear), shared (everyone is connected by common geography), and nontrivial (we care where we live). And this is readied... a neighborhood politics where an argument between two neighbors over a car that too often blocks the driveway turns into a street's worth of household's informally discussing crowded parking conditions, which ends up at the planning commission, where neighbors debate the merits of permit parking. The internal civility generated enables neighbors to organize politically with greater effectiveness on subsequent issues – say, when an unwanted commercial development is proposed nearby. (Cuff, 2004: 568)

Here, the politics of Playa Vista can be traced quite easily to the effectiveness of over 80 different advocacy groups with a shared relationship and commitment to their place and to each other. These groups formed strong social bonds and were able to organize to push out DreamWorks and achieve continuous success in recent court battles, which reflects the success of citizen activism in the public space of default neighborhoods.

Cuff's vision of the bonds between the interpersonal relationships with place and the embrace of the "figure of the neighbor," inclusive of all people as the source for socio-spatial action in the public sphere, provide answers to questions asked by Hardt and Negri (2004) in *Multitude* of how the "common" is politically constituted and how singularities express themselves as they cooperate in contemporary society. As they write, "The common does not refer to traditional notions of either the community or the public; it is based on the *communication* among singularities and emerges through the collaborative social processes of production. Whereas the individual dissolves in the unity of the community, singularities are not diminished but express themselves freely in the common" (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 204). Cuff's (2004) default neighborhoods and the success of mobilization at Playa Vista represent the realization of this "common," as it is communication and collaborative networking with a central concern – place - based on multiple singularities that together comprise the source of the "common" as a political event or movement. We now turn our discussion toward a politics of the common or

public based on these shared relationships to place reflected in the “default neighborhood” politics of cities like Playa Vista; we emphasize their chance for eliminating the distinction between citizens and their surrounding environments, reinvigorating America’s commitment to a vision of democracy not manipulated by corporate interests.

It is necessary again to reflect on the meaning of public and how our view of landscape has a simultaneous effect on shaping public space. This will allow us to see, as Sharon Zukin (1991) contends, that the concept of landscape goes beyond just the visual perception of place and space. If we are to base this new movement in favor of common and shared understandings with a similar relationship to place, we must come to see the non-visual understandings of place in accordance with non-visual perceptions of landscape. As Daniel Kemmis writes, “It takes a while to get acclimated to an entirely new linguistic (and moral) landscape - ... ‘commitment,’ ‘memory,’ ‘hope’ – these are not familiar landmarks in the procedural republic. We are prone to doubt that the same set of people can actually use both of these languages or occupy both of these landscapes...Here is a common language, describing a relationship of diverse individuals to ‘common ground.’ The language is not that of individual rights, but of shared gratitude, echoing of humility and hope” (Kemmis, 1990: 68-69). Thus place, and the public it generates, is as much a result of the communication that makes the relationships that form the “common” possible as it is the physical organization of space. This is what Susan Torre (2000) means when she argues that architecture has lost its ability to represent the public and its corresponding relationship with place. Expanding our conception of landscape in conjunction with an expansion of our conception of place is

necessary to see the way the public is represented by the way the body moves, interacts, and communicates in social space. Looking once more to the focus on Celebration and Playa Vista, this view of place as a locus for interpersonal relationships, shared understandings, and active citizens allows us to see Celebration's relation to the politics of the spectacle represented by the commodification and militarization of public space; and Playa Vista's potential in actualizing a politics of the common based on a shared relationship with place.

Thus, the question of this thesis remains: what does it mean to be public, and how do we go about creating non-commodified and non-militarized public spheres? This genealogy of public space and the public sphere in America, though certainly not complete, suggests that these questions remain central to concerns about what types of ethics ought to govern social interaction and the space that both makes this action possible and structurally excludes it. Thus, questions concerning our relationships with each other, the place we live and connect with, and the social orderings we choose to follow are as much questions of how to organize physical space and community as they are about the political, economic, ethical, and moral foundations for the many subjective relationships we generate between each other and the places we inhabit. The history of the American public sphere can be seen as a turbulent one at best. From the frontier to the regulatory bureaucracy, from Walt Disney World and into the structures of New Urbanism, American culture has witnessed the rationalization of the public sphere and the order of public space where citizen participation is based solely on fragmented, isolated, and privatized commitments as a result of the desire for individual welfare. What we have witnessed is a shift from the ideals of democratic public space as a

constantly changing site of public criticism that guarantees accountable governments responsible to the calls of the common public to an authoritarian and imperialistic market based model of democracy as the antithesis of itself.

The frontier mentality that fostered an escapism based on designed division between citizens, and the cultivation of an agrarian ethic that instituted the profit driven, self-interested basis for the American Dream, is still with us today in the endless escapism of bureaucratic and rational social orderings that now offer visual landscapes of consumption, replacing democratic public spheres with consumer oriented and corporate controlled space. What we are left with is a “Disney Democracy” where consumption replaces criticism and social division creates only self-interested action in the public sphere. This self-interested politics instituted by private dominance over public concerns is causing antagonism between citizens and each other and their surrounding environments. The dualism of American public life described by MacIntyre (1984) is continually resurfacing as the politics and technologies of modern life continue to confine “public” decisions to the choice between the extreme individualism described above and bureaucratically controlled community. As Daniel Kemmis (1990) writes, “If people could actually hear the ways in which their neighbors’ lives and hopes are rooted in this particular part of the earth that they all call home, they might be able to begin figuring out how to go about living well together here. But the oscillation between unrestrained individualism and stifling bureaucracy never seems to come to rest on that question” (Kemmis, 1990: 67). Thus, this dualism, reflected in American politics today, is preventing the connections and relationships between the public necessary for the development of strong social bonds, and a shared understanding of an intimate

connection with the environment, that ensures the development of communities based on a celebration of difference. We must find the solution to this dualism, as Arendt (1958) argues; it is in the middle ground found between this individualism and bureaucracy that the public is formed, “gathering us together” in a politics of shared understanding and the common. This type of politics is necessary to resist the imperialism and powers of market capitalism that Cornel West argues is causing American democratic culture to become defined by consumer-oriented nihilism.

This nihilism, according to Hardt and Negri (2004), is a product of the policy shift from defense to security represented by the constant “state of war” in public life. Though the separation of war and politics is a premise of modern theory and practice, we can see Benjamin’s (1936) warning of the implications of the aesthetization of politics and its result in the dissolution of the dichotomy between politics and war in the aesthetics of Fascism appropriated in post-war American public space and media culture. With the institution of the suburban and post-suburban landscape, we witness a merging of government and corporate interests as the *Der totale krieg*, or total war politics of public space, is turned into a commodity via mass-produced community designs. This allows for the development of the American media culture based on the decentralized city connected via the television.

Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that the market and security functions of Empire are combined to form a “regime of biopower” that prevents the possibility of the realization of any common or shared understandings between people. The logic of biopower is increasingly reinforced and reflected in public space and city politics. When Diken and Laustsen (2003) refer to the politics of the city as always being a biopolitical process, this

biopower is a function of corporations that exclude community and militarize public space.

The default neighborhoods represented by Playa Vista can be seen as example of Hardt and Negri's (2004) "common," necessary for attacking biopower at its heart. As they write, "When the concept of the common arises – not as a preconstituted entity and not as an organic substance that is a byproduct of the national community, or *geimenschaft*, but rather as the productive activity of singularities in the multitude – it breaks the continuity of modern state sovereignty and attacks biopower at its heart, demystifying its scared core" (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 206). The "preconstituted entity" they reference is like the structures of suburban and post-suburban space, particularly New Urbanism, and the "productive activity of singularities in the multitude" represents the possibility for default neighborhoods to generate vibrant and critical democratic public space.

Judith Butler (2004) also points to the necessity of a common community based on relationality and interdependence. As she writes,

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependant on one another, physically vulnerable to one another?...This way of imagining community affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also as an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence. (Butler, 2004: 27)

In this view of public life, community is not seen as static, able to be refashioned via the reproduction of picturesque snapshots of small-town America, but rather as an ongoing element of our lives. This allows a shift from biopower, where rigid community structures control bodily movement, to biopolitics – representative of political organization around the common. As Hardt and Negri (2004) write, "We need to build

the project on the institutional mechanisms we recognized earlier, suggested by the emerging forms of biopolitical production. The institutions of democracy today must coincide with the communicative and collaborative networks that constantly produce and reproduce social life” (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 354-355). Thus, a project for the biopolitics of the Multitude is dependant upon the relationships created by communication between the diverse viewpoints of the common. They also argue “the Multitude needs a political project to bring it into existence” (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 212). It is here that Playa Vista can serve as an ideal example of a successful mobilization of the Multitude around the multiple relationships generated by resistance to the corporate power of DreamWorks and the Playa Vista development. Just as in default neighborhoods, where the only visible “form” of community is the communication and dialogue between residents, the political project necessary to bring about the Multitude is representative of the issues, like a controversial commercial development project, that democratic communities mobilize around.

The success of Playa Vista, as noted above, is representative of the network like nature of the coalition of diverse groups who organized to fight for the Ballona Wetlands and remove DreamWorks from the site. This network intelligence is fundamentally premised on the communication that makes democratic public space possible. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that these new network political organizations are more complex and more effective in that they are based on multi-faceted political platforms. As they write, “The members of the multitude do not have to become the same or renounce their creativity in order to communicate and cooperate with each other. They remain different in terms of race, sex, sexuality, and so forth. What we need to understand, then, is the

collective intelligence that can emerge from the communication and cooperation of such a varied multiplicity” (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 92).

The possibility for default neighborhoods representative of the politics of Playa Vista is an example of the success of this type of communication and cooperation as seen in the diversity of social interests groups working for a common purpose. The common relationship to place that generates these default neighborhoods is an essential component for successful communication and cooperation between these diverse viewpoints. Place, in this light, can serve what Hardt and Negri (2004) refer to as the “flesh of the multitude.” As they write, “The flesh of the multitude...does not create chaos and social disorder. What it produces, in fact, is *common*, and that common we share serves as the basis for future production, in a spiral, expansive relationship. This is perhaps most easily understood in terms of the examples of communication as production: we can communicate only on the basis of languages, symbols, ideas, and relationships we share in common, and in turn the results of our communication are new common languages, symbols, ideas, and relationships” (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 196-197). Thus, if nostalgic capitalism through New Urbanism leads to the consumption of communication and community, transforming social agents into passive objects not active subjects, the production of communication with the multitude through default neighborhoods like Playa Vista require action and production of community through social agency. This community formation is essential for social agency as the foundation for democracy and critical public spheres, allowing recognition of the way the body creates public space through its interaction and relationship with its environment.



The dangerous state of American culture and public space is all the more reason why the development of strong social relationships with a range of various viewpoints is necessary if we are to cultivate a public strong enough to resist the nihilism and control of public space that we are now experiencing. Henry Giroux (2003) argues that post-9/11 appeals to “emergency time powers” removes government power from political and ethical responsibility. He writes that community comes to be defined as the opposite of its democratic ideals, devoid of any elements central to transform the passive public into an active body of social agents. What makes this power so effective is that the appeal for “security” as a justification for these emergency powers is cloaked in the same rhetoric that defines the community image of suburban and post-suburban spaces. The same image that we are consuming as public space is the image we are being fed for the justification for state policy and government actions.

Allowing the weakening of democratic spheres in this fashion leads to the power of fundamentalisms defining every inch of the social, solidifying their passive conception of the public sphere so as to prevent any criticism. Giroux (2003) argues that the concept of “public time” allows us to fully realize the democratic potential of resistance to passively defined public space. As he writes, “public time ‘presents the question of the social – not as a space for the articulation of pre-formed visions through which to mobilize action, but as the movement in which the very question of the possibility of democracy becomes the frame within which a necessary radical learning (and questioning) is enabled’...Public time provides a conception of democracy that is never complete and determinate but constantly open to different understandings of the

contingency of its decisions, mechanisms of exclusions, and operations of power” (Giroux, 2003: 9).

The possibility for a politics of ‘public time’ represented by Playa Vista is a necessary pedagogical and social resistance to take back the “state of constant becoming” stolen by Disney, and re-appropriate this concept based on its original intentions in an environment that is always open to the criticism of on-going democracy. Whereas public space and community developments are increasingly pre-designed with a vision for action already created, the heterogeneous public space of communicative action in default neighborhoods represents the best potential for a community formation open enough to sustain a movement for democracy and public space in an open “state of becoming.”

The realization of this democratic community formation is as simple as looking around and taking responsibility and concern for place and space. This relationship with neighbors and other citizens based upon a shared sense of place is representative of the possibility for a revitalization of democratic community and democratic space necessary to resist the corrupt and powerful interests that are causing the nihilism and escapism that defines American public space. As Cornel West argues, the power of elites extends as far as the critical and democratic public and common will allow. A shared politics of the common based upon place represents the basis for democratic projects to redefine American public culture. As he writes:

We must remember that the basis of democratic leadership is ordinary citizens’ desire to take their country back from the hands of corrupted plutocratic and imperial elites. This desire is predicated on an awakening among the populace from the seductive lives and comforting illusions that sedate them and a moral channeling of new political energy that constitutes a formidable threat to the status quo. This is what happened in the 1860s, 1890s, 1930s, and 1960s, in American history. Just as it looked as if we were about to lose the American democratic experiment – in the face of civil war, imperial greed, economic depression, and racial upheaval – in each of these periods a democratic

awakening and activist energy emerged to keep our democratic project afloat.  
We must work and hope for such an awakening again. (West, 2004: 23)

Thus, we must realize this democratic and activist energy in the places where we live and interact with each other if we are to actualize a politics of the common based on place.

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