

THE PRODUCTION OF VALUE

A STUDY OF URBANISM IN SOUTH LAKE UNION, SEATTLE

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Abstract

The Production of Value: A Study of Urbanism in South Lake Union

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This paper seeks to explore how political economy determines urban spatial patterns, but also how those spatial patterns reinforce the dominant political economy. I begin with an examination of the production of value in the built environment. Value is produced through an iterative relationship between *fixed capital*, *exchange*, and *use*. I attempt to employ this formulation as a critical analysis of South Lake Union, Seattle (SLU) to understand real estate development and power structures. My theoretical foundation rests on David Harvey's critiques of capitalist urban economies as inherently unjust. Fixed capital facilitates the social activities that reinforce values of the power structures in control of that fixed capital. Contemporary political economy emphasizes exchange values that produce disproportionate benefits to some groups and diminishes the opportunities for others. In other words, class structure exists only and always in relation to the structure of the

political economy (this would be true of non-capitalist economies as well). I then examine the urban form of SLU as a representation of dominant values. SLU is a new biotech hub, the home of Amazon headquarters, and consists of New Urbanist residential and retail development. New Urbanism claims to bolster sustainability and create community in cities. While it may be an improvement from sprawling suburban development, New Urbanism exists exclusively as real estate development, retaining the goal of maximizing exchange values. In SLU (as well as other places), community becomes a strategy of advertising and discourse. As a result, community itself becomes a commodity. When human bonds and social networks become secondary to consumer amenities, social relations are reduced to mechanistic roles that serve commodity markets. New Urbanism's claim to create community ultimately struggles, if not fails, due to its inseparability from real estate exchange and problems of consumer capitalism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction – Theoretical and Spatial Contexts	
1. David Harvey & Political Economy.....	1
2. South Lake Union.....	4
3. The Quest for Global Capital.....	9
4. Framework.....	13
Chapter I – Urban Systems & Questions of Value	
1. Urban Systems.....	14
2. Questions of Value.....	16
3. Urban Centers.....	25
4. Gentrification.....	28
Chapter II – New Urbanism in South Lake Union: Urban Village or Corporate City?	
1. New Urbanism.....	32
2. Critiques & Reconciliations.....	34
3. Community.....	39
4. Urban Villages.....	45
5. The Corporate City.....	49
Chapter III – Conspicuous Consumption & ‘The Generic City’	
1. Urbanism.....	51
2. The Reproduction of Urbanism.....	55
3. The Urban Way of Life.....	63
Conclusion	69
Bibliography.....	74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Number	Page
1. Production of Value.....	2
2. Seattle Context Map.....	5
3. South Lake Union Context.....	6
4. South Lake Union Zoning.....	7
5. Vulcan and Amazon.....	8
6. Amazon Campus.....	49
7. Vulcan Advertising.....	62

INTRODUCTION – THEORETICAL & SPATIAL CONTEXTS

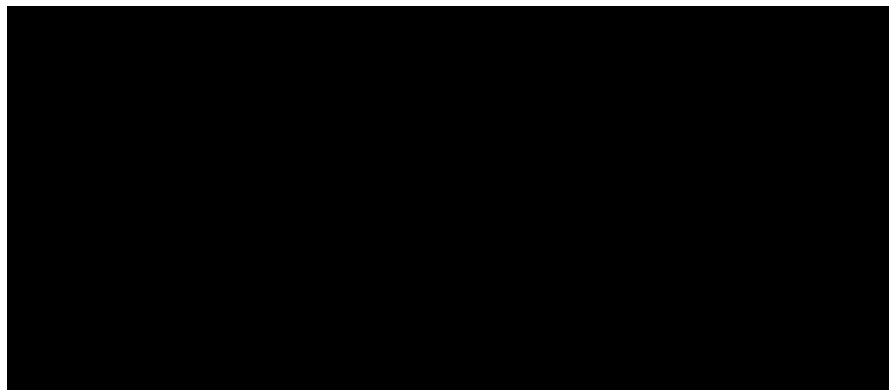
I. David Harvey & Political Economy

Since beginning my studies in the MUP program, it has been my interest to understand the relationships between power, politics, capitalist economy, and patterns of urban development (particularly form and design). This paper seeks to explore how political economy determines urban spatial patterns, but also how those spatial patterns reinforce a dominant political economy. I rely most heavily on the work of political geographer David Harvey, particularly his book *Social Justice and the City* (2009 ed.), buttressed by other theorists and researchers, for an understanding of urban space economies. I rely on Harvey because he articulates the depth of the inherent inability of commodity capitalism to realize social justice. Poverty (and all its trappings) is integrated into the very structure of capitalism. Harvey explains how, and it is for this reason that I argue all urban planners would benefit from reading his work on capitalist urban processes. In order to understand Harvey's theories of urban process, I attempt to ground them in an examination of South Lake Union (SLU) in Seattle. SLU is a neighborhood that has undergone major transformations to facilitate the growth of a nascent biotech industry, large multifamily and mixed-use developments, and subsequently, the relocation of Amazon's headquarters. It is also an interesting example of New Urbanist design, which is one of the primary paradigms and methodologies driving urban design today. I hope to demonstrate, as Harvey argues, how use value, exchange value, and urban form (or fixed capital) reinforce social values. Harvey articulates a theory of capitalist urbanism that rests on what he calls "the twin themes of accumulation and class struggle" as "different sides of the same coin—different windows from which to view the totality of capitalist activity" (1978, 101). The question of value in capitalist society must be examined in light of social equity problems

associated with these twin themes of urban development.

We can begin by defining ‘use value’ as a collection of social activities and practices that exist on land or in space within the built environment. We can define ‘exchange value’ as the amount of money (including rent, profit, credit, taxes, etc.) established in trade for control or ownership of that land and space. I argue that such a reduction of these terms proves useful as an initial foundation from which I hope, in a sense, to rebuild their complexity throughout this paper. Ownership of land and property allows the owner to establish certain *uses* that he or she deems most desirable. That which is desirable, in a market system, is often that which is most profitable. In other words, the uses that command the highest monetary returns tend to be the most desirable. It is this relationship that organizes the built environment into fixed capital. Fixed capital consists of the physical spaces that a group must territorialize in order to facilitate specific uses because capitalism “cannot do without its ‘spatial fixes’” (Harvey 2000, 54). Power groups in capitalist cities produce social value through a three-part assemblage of *fixed capital*, *exchange*, and *use* of land and built forms (Figure 1). In this way, the economic value of the built environment becomes, in itself, one of the most dominant social values of capitalist societies. One of the goals of this paper is to expand upon this conceptualization of the production of value.

Figure 1



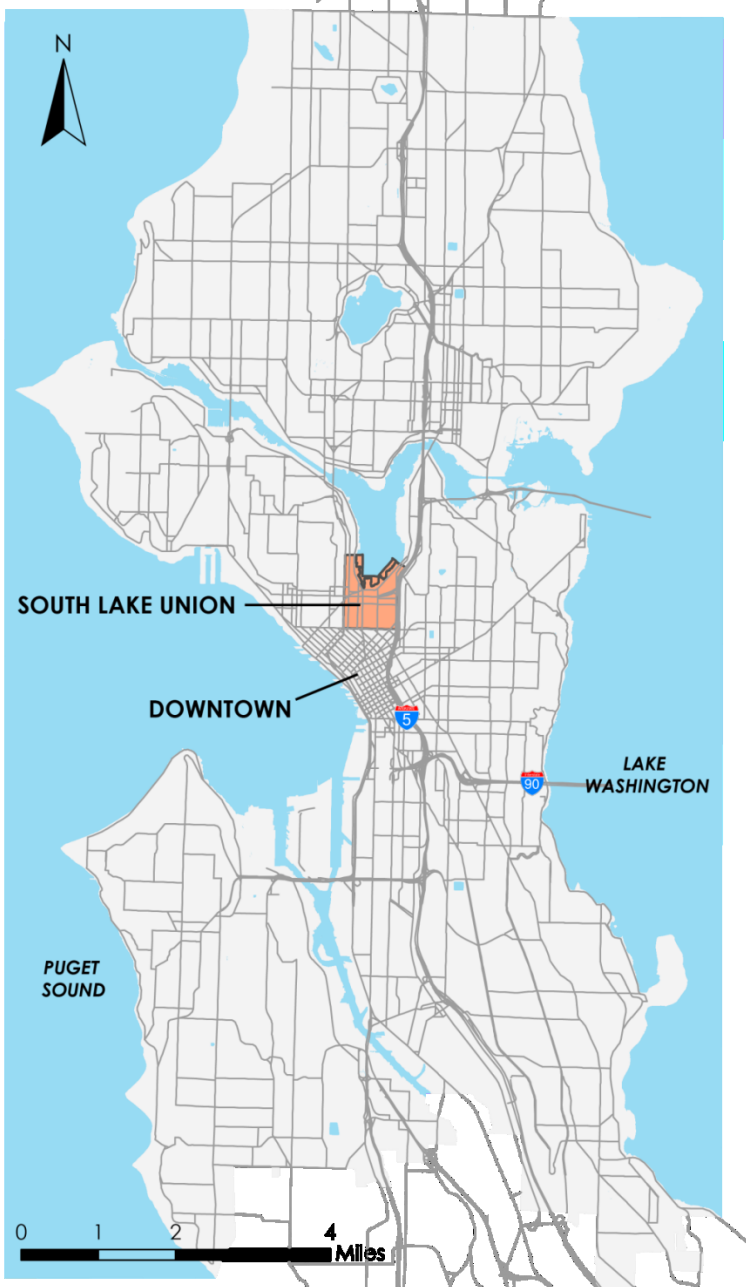
Social values are produced when powerful political groups control fixed capital. Fixed capital concretizes specific values by facilitating certain social activities (uses) in space. It remains fixed in space, while it can simultaneously be traded as a market commodity because it serves to generate profit for the owners. Within given constraints (such as zoning and physical environment), the land owner will develop a building that either facilitates a certain activity or a type of structure that will draw the maximum market exchange. Usually, there are degrees of both. The relationship between use and exchange determines the form and function of fixed capital; in turn, fixed capital facilitates uses. In his essay “The Urban Process Under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis,” Harvey argues that all the components of urban processes lead to “the creation of a built environment to serve as a physical infrastructure for production, including an appropriate system for the transport [and exchange] of commodities” (Harvey 1978, 115). The organization of physical space produces and reinforces social use values that encourage *accumulation*. Continued accumulation, according to Harvey, perpetuates *class struggle*. I argue that as long as Harvey’s critique of capitalist urban process is accurate, practices of urban development will continue to effect socioeconomic inequity for certain groups of people because liberal policies of urban development merely “move the poverty around” (Harvey 2009, 143). For Harvey, liberal solutions assume that poverty is linked to disequilibrium in urban land use, and that policies should be directed to getting land use back into balance. He explains, “These solutions are liberal in that they recognize inequity but seek to cure that inequity within an existing set of social mechanisms” (Harvey 2009, 136). Problems arise when groups of people differ in their interpretation of what uses are most important and what cost of exchange is most fair. These differentiations are social (and cultural), but in a capitalist political economy, where value is understood as an economic measure of importance, the groups with the greatest wealth

influence markets, as a “social mechanism,” to determine uses in the built environment. As long as urban planning remains circumscribed by the logic of liberal policies, development will favor accumulation of wealth and continue to merely shift poverty around. In order to ground my enquiry, my goal is to examine value in the contemporary political economy to construct an interpretation of how planning in South Lake Union perpetuates class struggle.

2. South Lake Union

South Lake Union (SLU) is just north of Seattle’s downtown area. Formerly a neighborhood of small industry and auto-oriented businesses, with mostly low-density, moderate-income housing, it has been undergoing major redevelopment in the last ten years or so for high-density commercial, mixed-use and multifamily buildings. For the City of Seattle, as well as the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and the developers themselves, one of the primary goals for SLU is to generate jobs and concentrate the city’s population growth. It is located in the heart of the city with excellent access to most of the transportation networks.

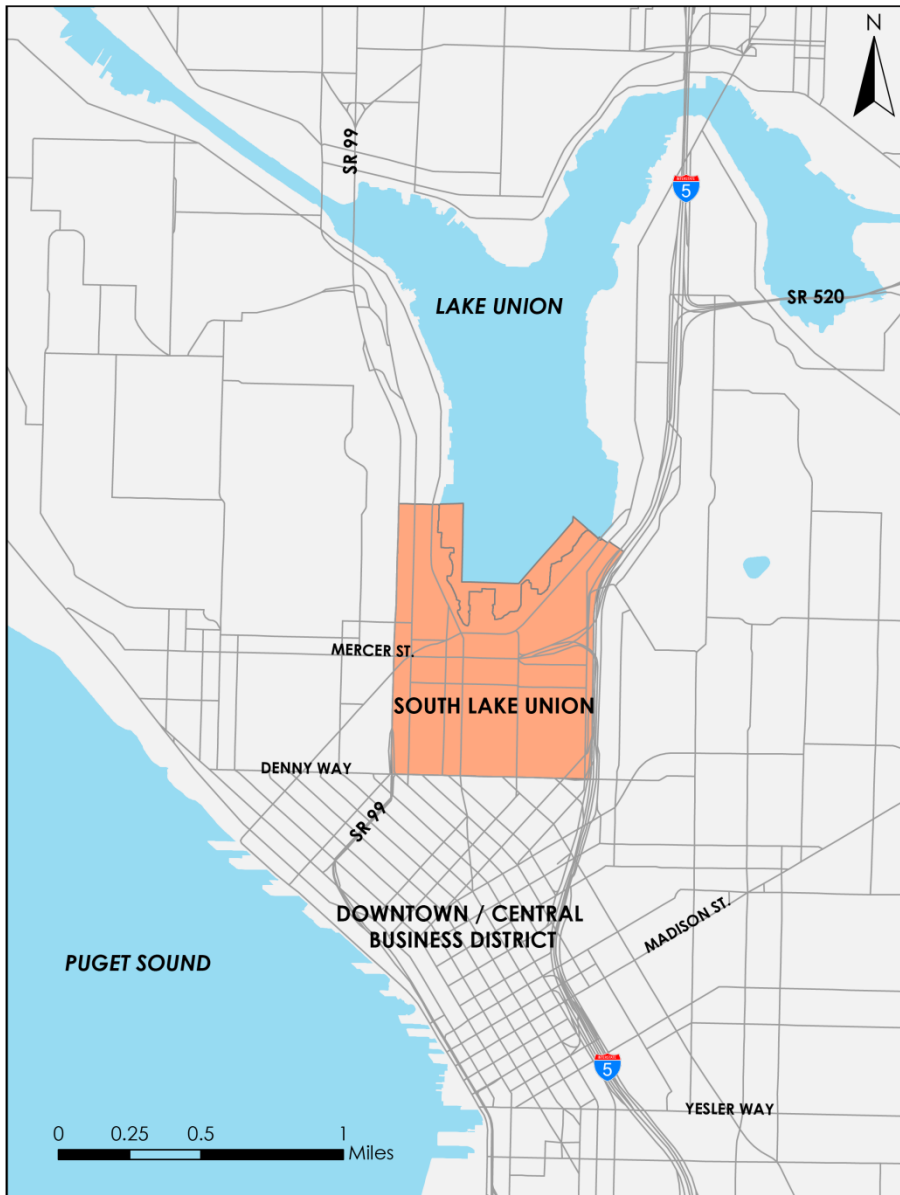
Figure 2



Location of South Lake Union (SLU) within the City of Seattle. Its position just north of downtown and adjacent to I-5 and SR 99 make it particularly desirable real estate.

Source: WA State Geospatial Data Archives

Figure 3

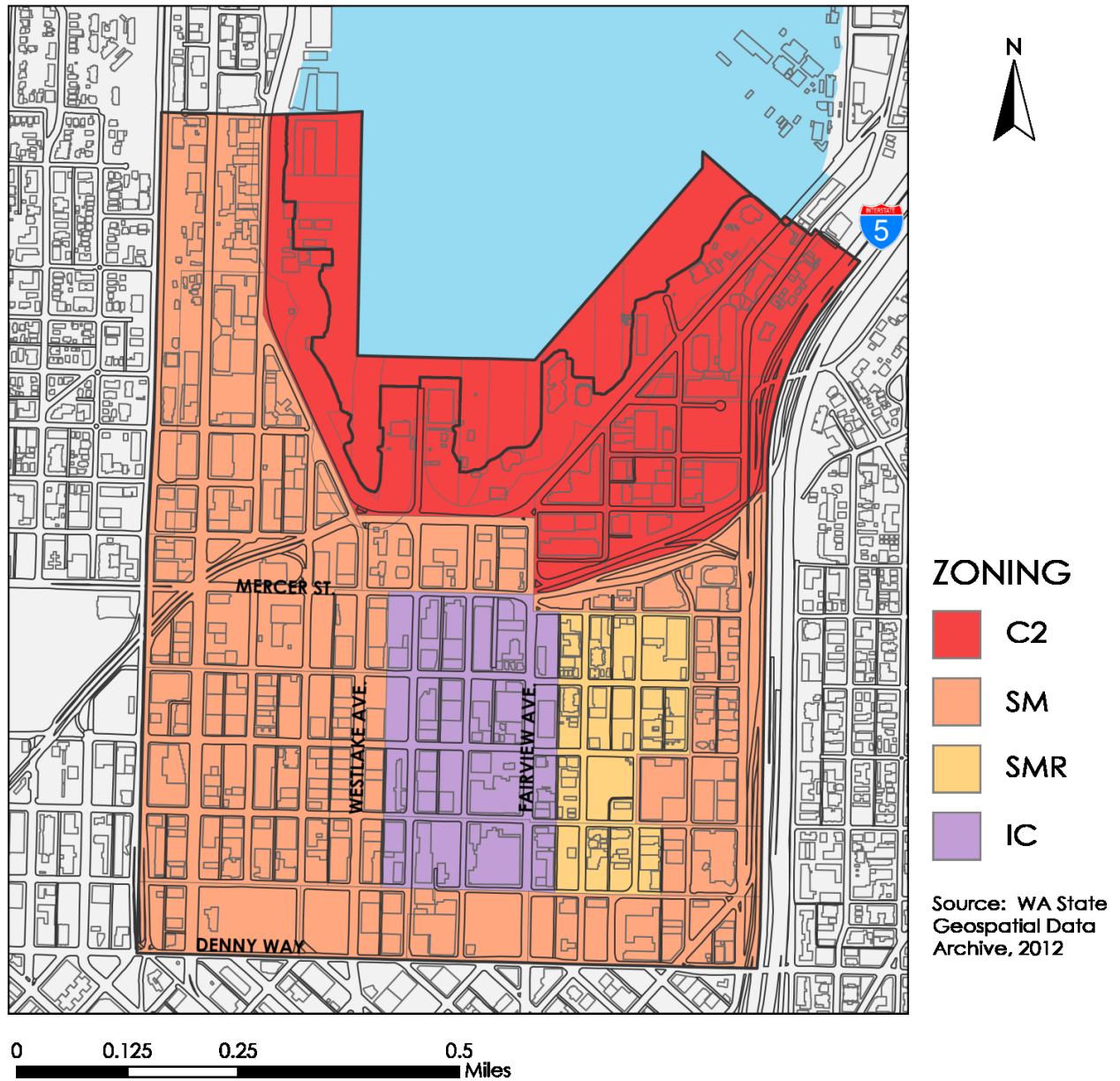


SLU is centrally located with excellent mobility between the central business district and North Seattle, adjacent to I-5 and state road (SR) 99.

Source: WA State Geospatial Data Archives

The City of Seattle has designated SLU as a center for biotechnology research by shifting land use regulations and pumping in public money for infrastructure to facilitate the growth of biotech. Much of the development is led by Vulcan Inc. Vulcan is a large corporation owned by Microsoft co-founder and billionaire Paul Allen, of which real estate constitutes only one portion of the corporation's work.

Figure 4



C2 – Auto-oriented non-retail/service commercial

SM – Seattle Mixed, encouraging a wide range of uses

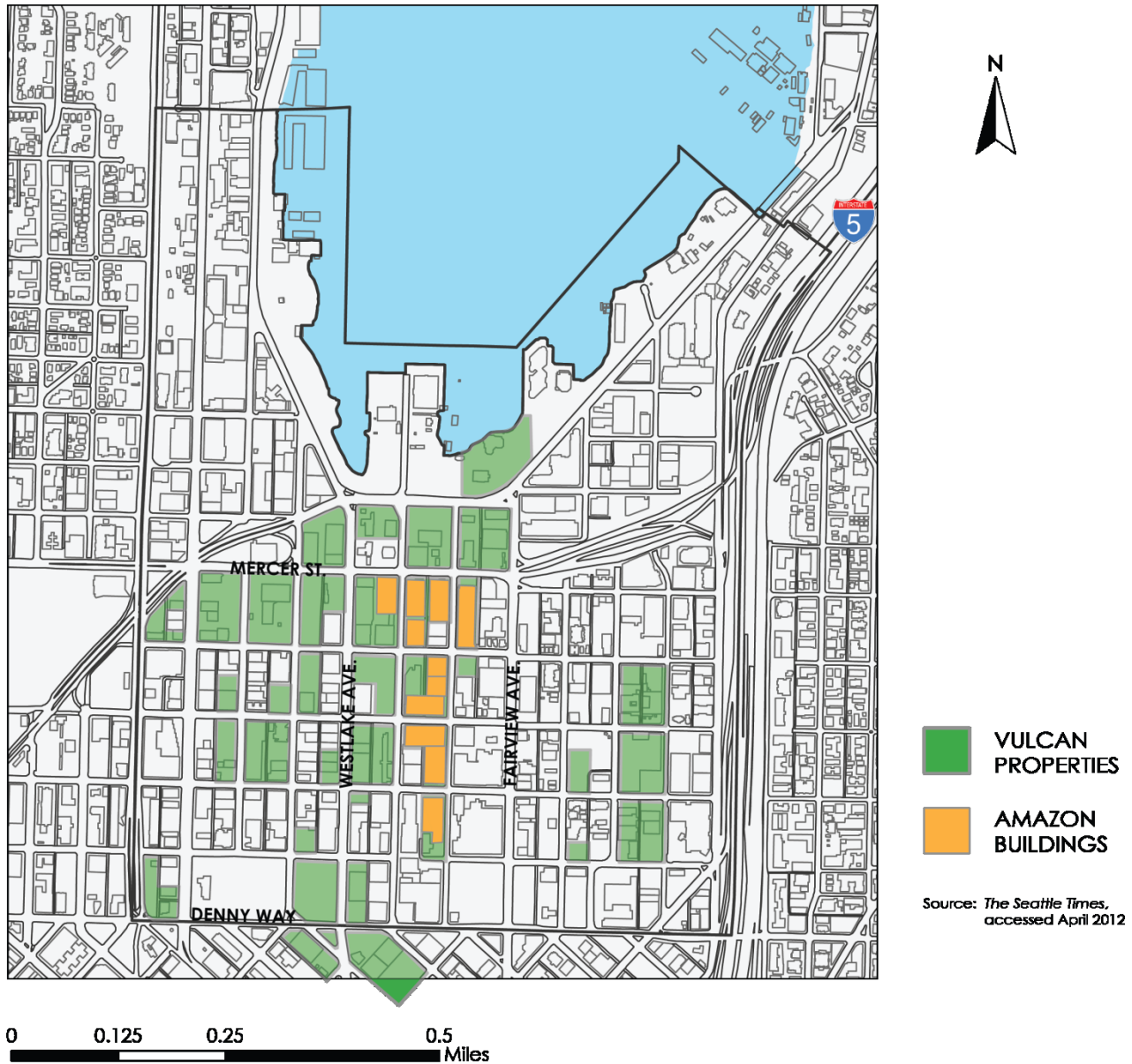
SMR – Seattle Mixed emphasizing residential

IC – Industrial Commercial for light industrial and some commercial, with limits

Source: City of Seattle

The neighborhood is a relatively small area, encompassing only about one square mile, but it is well connected by land (with I-5, SR-99, and several of the city's main arterial streets) and by water (Lake Union). The current zoning for SLU is simple enough to allow for flexibility in the uses of its new developments (Figure 4).

Figure 5



As Figure 4 shows, the majority of the neighborhood is zoned SM, or Seattle Mixed, which encourages many different uses at fairly high densities. SMR, Seattle Mixed Residential, is a relatively small area of high-density housing with some retail on the ground floor.

The IC zone, Industrial Commercial is more specifically geared toward the concentration of commercial office buildings, and it is here that Amazon has located its new urban campus, renting approximately 2.5 million square feet of office space, most of it from Vulcan (Shevory 2012) (Figure 5.) The area zoned C2 (Figure 4) is the one area that has seen the least new development. It retains an auto-oriented form that provides access to the marinas along Lake Union and connects the arteries Eastlake Avenue and Westlake Avenue.

3. The Quest for Global Capital

The neighborhood plan of SLU, published by the City of Seattle, emphasizes the neighborhood's growing role as a primary hub for biotechnology research (City of Seattle 2007). Perhaps the most important driving factor behind the development of SLU has been the goal of positioning the neighborhood as a kind of biotech research hub, attracting the organizations Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Facility, UW Medicine, ZymoGenetics, Biomed Realty Trust, the Institute for Systems Biology, Novo Nordisk, and the global health nonprofits PATH and Group Health (Pryne 2010). Moreover, the developers, particularly Vulcan, are building hundreds of apartments and condominiums in an attempt to promote urban residence within the neighborhood. Purcell writes, "[Vulcan and the city] have already developed several properties in the area, most according to a distinct new-urbanist ideal: mixed-use, green/sustainable building technologies, and dense, walkable urban form. They see their SLU project as nothing short of a grand enterprise to reimagine the city" (2008, 115). This 're-imagination' of urban development in SLU intends to redefine the urban fabric of the entire area

through commercial and residential growth. Attracting biotech facilities to this neighborhood helps increase land values and draws investment from national and international organizations. By creating a site for this high-dollar investment, Seattle increases its competitive position to attract global capital. A city's growth now largely depends on global economics. Kevin Cox writes, "Urban politics has become 'globalised' and much more emphasis is given to social forces of a non-local provenance" (1995, 213). Location choices of corporations and corporate offices have become a major concern for cities. As we can see in SLU, the city necessarily adapts the physical environment in order to encourage biotech firms to locate in the neighborhood. The increase of building height limits (Pryne 2010) and the development of infrastructure—such as the streetcar, Mercer Boulevard, high-capacity electric grids—are examples of the interplay between private capital accumulation and public expense for infrastructure that facilitates capital growth. The infrastructure is necessary for maintaining the quality of urban environments, but this maintenance depends on the revenues from increased real estate exchange values to offset the public expenditure.

But what about social value? From the beginning, with the real estate deals between Vulcan Real Estate and the City of Seattle under former Mayor Greg Nickels, the whole project has been highly polarizing. Quick sales of land to Vulcan have concentrated ownership of much of the property into the hands of one real estate developer. So what social values does SLU provide to residents of the neighborhood and to the city as a whole? The answer probably depends on where you stand in the class hierarchy. SLU residential and commercial districts have become unaffordable for large segments of Seattle's population. The prior urban fabric, however, which consisted of warehouses, light industry, and auto shops, was in many ways less valuable for the city as a whole. Purcell writes, "SLU has long been a fairly low-density mixture of warehouses, car dealerships, marine-commercial, light manufacturing, and, in its Cascade

[Neighborhood] sub-section, residents with relatively low incomes” (2008, 112). From the viewpoint of highest and best use, under-maximized land uses in such proximity to downtown made SLU quite a lot less valuable than its potential. “It [was] a relative exchange-value desert in the middle of a long-booming real estate market” (*ibid.*). The political impetus for biotech meant that the area had become ripe for development.

Purcell states, “To begin the redevelopment [in SLU], Vulcan bought many of their current holdings from the City at a bargain rate. The City then rezoned that property to make it more amenable to Vulcan’s vision” (2008, 116). Here we can see the relationship, to refer to Cox’s space political-economy, between policy alterations that achieve specific desired space economies and real estate development (1995). The City and Vulcan worked together to create an urban space economy that would facilitate the growth of biotechnology research firms. Cox writes:

What is at stake here are local interests. The ability to realize them is critically conditioned by the ability to exercise territorial power. The goal is to control the actions and interactions of others both within and between respective spaces of dependence; the means is control over a geographic area. (Cox 1998, 7)

The ownership of property is the lynchpin for control over the physical geography of cities. The politics of space play out in ways that reflect territorial power between political groups, with “the protagonists of development and their antagonists among local taxpayers struggling, through their respective coalitions and organization, to influence local government policy—policies that will make the locality attractive or otherwise to inward investment, for instance” (*ibid.*). The protagonists have differing and often conflicting evaluations of what land and property uses are most important. When one type of use promotes capital accumulation at the expense of another use or activity, some form of class struggle ensues as the users of the expended activity must somehow cope with or resist the developments of the new one (much of

New Urbanist development results in a similar problem, as I demonstrate in Chapter II).

“Territorialization is, in the end, an outcome of political struggles and decisions made in a context of technological and political-economic conditions (Harvey 2000, 75) The politics of class struggle manifest in the field of real estate development through the struggle for territorial control of fixed capital because the wants and needs of, say, upper class single professionals differ greatly from and are often in conflict with the wants and needs of families struggling in poverty.

Purcell’s (2008) research on the politics of SLU demonstrates how, in particular, two distinct community organizations exist in the political spectrum, though not with equal power. The Cascade Neighborhood Council (CNC) represents mostly long-term and low-income residents, as well as social services that risk being displaced by gentrification. South Lake Union Friends and Neighbors (SLUFAN) represents mostly business and property owners in the area, with board members from Vulcan, PEMCO Insurance, the Seattle Times, and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, among others. SLUFAN became the “acknowledged representative of the ‘SLU Community’ in deliberations about the area’s future” (*ibid.*, 120). The preference of SLUFAN over CNC reflects a strategic redefinition of the SLU community. Because SLU was designated as a regional urban center, influenced by PSRC, the existing neighborhood plan had to be revised to bring it into concurrence with the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). The old neighborhood plan that Cascade neighborhood residents had written before the existence of SLUFAN and biotech had to be scrapped to accommodate increases in density according to the precepts of the new urban center designation. Increases in density were precisely what Vulcan and the City needed to promote biotech, condominium, and commercial development. The previous neighborhood plan represented CNC—a community of mostly residents, non-profits, and local businesses constituting low- and middle-income groups—and

was designed around their needs. The new plan for SLU, an urban center for the entire Puget Sound region, represents SLUFAN's interests, reinforced by the city's political will—the interests of the professional classes dominated by business groups and property owners committed to a biotech vision (*ibid.*). The political groups with power have produced the belief that biotech in SLU is valuable for the city and its people, a belief that has worked to legitimate their territorial control.

4. Framework

This paper explores questions about the production of value in capitalist society through three distinct but overlapping chapters. Chapter I delves into the complexities of urban political economy and processes of urban development. It is in this chapter that I first problematize the production of value through the control of real estate. In Chapter II, I begin to demonstrate how the built form of cities reflects and represents the sociocultural values that political economies induce. In this chapter, I begin to problematize the question of community, and what that might mean in light of capitalist development. Chapter III examines capitalist urbanism in light of the processes of alienation and conspicuous consumption, revolving around the descriptive notion of the Generic City. I conclude, with Harvey, that the current mode of capitalist production relies on the creation of inequality and the presence of a stratified class system. Any attempt to eliminate these qualities of our political economy will require, ultimately, a shift in the mode of production, and it is our task to imagine what that shift might be.

CHAPTER I – URBAN SYSTEMS & QUESTIONS OF VALUE

I. Urban Systems

Let us begin with a quote by Edward Soja, from his book *Postmetropolis*:

...‘the normal workings’ of the urban system, the day-to-day practices and particularities of urbanism as a way of life, tend all on their own to produce and reproduce a regressive redistribution of real income that persistently benefits the rich at the expense of the poor. Harvey described the capitalist city as an inequalities-generating machine by its very nature, thereby creating in the context of urban geographies and the interrelations of social processes and spatial form a fertile terrain for the cumulative aggravation of injustices. (2000, 107)

American society is a stratified class system (Harvey 2009). Following Soja’s statement, the political economy of capitalist urbanism perpetuates the disparity between classes through the processes of accumulation and class struggle. Social values are produced when powerful political groups control fixed capital. This statement is corroborated by Harvey when he states, “I accept the proposition ...that the ruling class produces the ruling ideas in society. This production is not a simple process, of course, but by and large the ideas generated in society are those which are consistent with the interests of those who are in control of the means of production” (Harvey 2009, 147). In capitalist cities, the control of real estate markets translates into the means of determining development patterns that perpetuate a ruling class’s power and disparities between classes. The maximization of exchange values for urban land by diverse actors produces disproportionate benefits to some groups and diminishes opportunities for others (*ibid*, 175). Harvey further informs us, “In contemporary western society, the price system serves to coordinate a large number of individual activities through market behaviour and the requisite social structure is here a stratified class society” (*ibid.*, 199). Control of the market system is to be a part of the class with power. In his book, *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey defines class as “class relation,” or, “the positionality in relation to capital circulation and accumulation” (Harvey 2000, 102). Class is always relative, defined by position to others. In a capitalist

system, a person's class position is defined by his or her power to control resources or means of production within the socioeconomic system. Those who control the means of production constitute the ruling class through their control of capital and their power to accumulate wealth. They establish ideologies that reinforce both their own social values as well as the political justifications to maintain power. Those who do not own the means of production hold little power in the political economy and must sell their labor as a commodity in order to subsist within the capitalist system. Their ability to accumulate wealth is limited or denied to them because they do not have access to the means of production (fixed or financial) and therefore cannot generate enough wealth to gain control of any portion of market commodities.

Real estate is distinct as a commodity due to the inherent singularity of land and improvements thereon. Land and improvements are immobile in location and thus constitute fixed capital; they are singular and unique in character and purpose, are indispensable for all people, exchange hands infrequently, have long life expectancies for storing wealth (as investment), and, although exchange of ownership occurs at a single instant in time, the uses that fixed capital facilitates extend over a significant period of time (Harvey 2009, 157-9). The entire built environment, in this light, consists of collections of fixed capital designated for specific use values that are determined based on the exchange values they will bring. Consequently, it can be challenging to guarantee that a given established or future use value will attract sufficient exchange values for real estate developers. Harvey calls this challenge a "capital valuation problem," one that feeds speculative activity, which "has grown in proportion as fixed capital investment has grown" (*ibid.*, 312-3).

Real estate process articulates the logic of speculation, without actually using the term, by providing for "future users" who in part constitute the "space consumer group" (Graaskamp 1981, 228). Graaskamp's point is that future users are typically represented by proxy, either by

developers who anticipate the need to change the use of a building or by special-interest or judiciary groups who preserve land for future generations through different types of trusteeship. He states, “Provision for future users is a hidden charge to present consumers” (*ibid.*). Present users are subject to increases and/or decreases in exchange value that result from *anticipated* changes in the use of a property. In addition to future users as actors of the real estate market, Graaskamp explains that there are additionally “individual space users,” who rent or buy real estate for their specific needs, and “collective users,” who generally pursue real estate interests through political systems that purchase space, provide for public infrastructure, or regulate space production (*ibid.*).

The problem is that future users exist as a hypothetical potential and only have an effect on real estate by proxy. More importantly, future users exist as a speculative target of people from within a certain social status. Developers target the people they think will and should use the properties in the future. Because there is always a target group of future users, speculation acts as a means to plan for attracting specific demographic groups or specific industries to achieve a broader societal goal, whether it means changes in housing or the encouragement of certain types of commerce or industry. The notion of ‘future users’ works as euphemistic language for speculation.

2. Questions of Value

Harvey’s discussion of value is crucial for understanding social relations in the built environment:

Whatever else it may entail, the urban process implies the creation of a material physical infrastructure for production, circulation, exchange and consumption. The first point of contact, then, is to consider the manner in which this built environment is produced and the way it serves as a resource system—a complex of use values—for the production of value and surplus value. (1978, 113)

Urban planning and real estate development have at their root the two-fold aspect of use value and exchange value (2009 ed.). Use values serve directly for the needs and wants of daily existence (*ibid.*). Exchange value appears at first glance to be a “quantitative relation, the proportion in which use values are exchanged for each other” (quoted in *ibid.*). Exchange value is the price of exchange for control of a use, or control of fixed capital in the case of real estate.

But what becomes important here are the forces that define exchange value in capitalist society.

Harvey writes:

[Marx] concludes that the creation of exchange value resides in the social process of applying socially necessary labour to objects of nature to yield up material objects (commodities) suitable for consumption (use) by man. Marx then brings use value and exchange value into a relationship with each other. (Harvey 2009 ed., 155).

The application of an exchange value to a specific use transforms that use into a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market. Labor and products are bought and sold, offering themselves as uses that are monetarily valued only to the degree that they contribute to the accumulation process. In a consumption society, such as ours, this process of valuation relies on consumer demand. In order to create consumer demand, the product or service must be a use that members of society value enough to merit their willingness to pay for it. Harvey deconstructs the real estate value process:

Use value and exchange have no meaning in and of themselves. They do not refer...to two fixed but separate scaling systems (possessing universal attributes) which either “exist” in some *a priori* Kantian sense or can be discovered through an empirical investigation of human behaviour. For Marx, they take on meaning (come into existence if you will) through their relationship to each other (and to other concepts) and through their relationship to the situations and circumstances under discussion. (Harvey 2009, 154; original emphases)

Use value and exchange value exist as concepts that mutually determine and reinforce each other through the forms and functions they assume in a commodity market. The exchange value of land as a commodity is determined through real estate markets, largely according to the

concept of 'highest and best use.' 'Highest and best use' refers to the economic premise that a use ought to be selected if it is the most profitable choice among reasonable alternatives that were possible, permissible, and financially viable. It further includes the premise that wealth maximization should be qualified by how a specific use contributes to community environment and development goals (Graaskamp 1981, 240). In practice, however, that which is 'best' for a community is not always the 'highest,' and vice versa. A society that consists of a price-fixing market defines value as a function of command over resources obtained through acts of exchange. "Exchange value, expressed in prices, is an abstract quantity determined through the functioning of a market system based on money as a measure of value" (Harvey 2009, 212). The market-based economy in which we live is testament to the prominence of money as the primary tool for the conceptualization and production of social ideologies, embedded in the fixed capital of cities.

Cities have plenty of land that is underused in relation to its maximum exchange value. This land may contain existing buildings, such as houses or businesses or other structures—social use values—that may require redevelopment in order to realize its highest and best use.

Harvey argues:

We have an enormous quantity of social capital locked up in the housing stock, but in a private market system for land and housing, the value of the housing is not always measured in terms of its use as shelter and residence, but in terms of the amount received in market exchange, which may be affected by external factors such as speculation. In many inner city areas at the present time, houses patently possess little or no exchange value. This does not mean, however, that they have no use value. As a consequence, we are throwing away use value because we cannot establish exchange values (Harvey 2009 ed., 138).

Developers and city officials shift social use values in order to maximize exchange values through the emphasis of 'highest and best use.' Because real estate development alters physical and social landscapes, the ways that each development affects the community in which it is located should be an important consideration. After all, is that not what 'best' is supposed to

mean? As land uses shift according to perceived values of a highest and best use, social restructuring occurs. The problem arises when there are conflicting perceptions of what social use values should be most prominent. The people with the greatest power and wealth tend to voice their own values the loudest to influence collective sociocultural perceptions of value. A dominant class produces a hegemony of values, which is then reinforced through the ownership of land and property because those types of fixed capital represent and facilitate the social use values that the dominant power class deems most important.

Ownership of land and property provides the power to construct physical environments that reinforce social values. Fixed capital embodies and perpetuates those values. Class struggle occurs when conflicting social values meet and vie for power over territorial control of fixed capital. SLU embodies the complexity of how the values of certain groups (professional, wealthy classes) are imposed on other groups (low- and middle-income groups). The positioning of SLU as an urban center and biotech hub for the region establishes a hegemony that legitimates the subsequent development as *socially* valuable and necessary for everyone because it augments *economic* productivity (income, profit, job creation, tax revenues, property values). The discourse ignores the fact that *not* everyone actually accumulates wealth, only those who own the means of production. The *uses* of biotech development and global capital become legitimized over inherently smaller and less profitable uses, such as local business and housing, because they augment wealth for those who control the means of production (including, in this case, the city government as well). Harvey laments, “The fluid ability of capitalists and their agents to translate among themselves using the basic languages of money, commodity, and property (backed, where necessary, with the theoretical language of a reductionist economics) is one of their towering strengths” (Harvey 2000, 245). Harvey touches on how opaque language and

discourse can reinforce capitalist urban processes.

Cities become the places where accumulation processes occur; their buildings, roads, and nearly all physical structures and infrastructure constitute some of the fixed capital for accumulation (exceptions to the rule might include, community centers, community gardens, and churches). When the fixed capital for a specific use (such as biotech, though it could be anything) is established, it precludes any other type of use in that same space, becoming, in a sense, a monopoly of space. But we must understand monopoly in a philosophical, not economic way here: In *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey spends some time elaborating the differences between a dialectic of “both/and” and a dialectic of “either/or” with regard to spatial practices. He explains that because space is physical, the dialectic approach must

face up to the materialist problems of authority and closure. Closure (the making of something) of any sort contains its own authority because to materialize any one design, no matter how playfully construed, is to foreclose, in some cases temporarily but in other instances relatively permanently, on the possibility of materializing others. (Harvey 2000, 196)

In creating space, we must choose either one option or another. In light of SLU, biotech development would close the space to a housing project; but inversely, a housing project would also close that space to the use of biotech. Planners, developers, and anyone else involved in real estate choose one use or mix of uses in a project, which grants the authority to control that project and close it to the possibility of other purposes as long as the requisite structures do not change. When uses or potential uses contradict each other in a free-market system, the use that will generate the greatest profit is normally what gets built, closing it to other uses that would have been different. When development does not meet the needs of a neighborhood, or social problems are created through development, gaps in the provision of community needs spring up. These gaps are shortcomings of the market system, and are often labeled as ‘externalities’ in reductionist economics, a term that serves to diminish their importance because they exist

outside, or external to the purview of the monetary system.

Shifts in land use generally promote development that will realize higher exchange values. The people who struggle to afford the increases of property values are forced to live on less money or move to another place. Harvey elaborates on such disparity: “the maximization of exchange values by diverse actors produces disproportionate benefits to some groups and diminishes the opportunities for others. The gap between the proper production and distribution of use values and a system of allocation that rests on the concept of exchange value cannot easily be glossed over” (Harvey 2009, 175). Housing, for example, is allocated through the market, wherein exchange values fluctuate according to demand and speculation. Speculation follows the logic of highest and best use, which encourages the projects that are most demanded in a consumer society, whether or not they meet the needs of the neighborhood. Harvey informs us “that the social concept of need and the economic concept of demand are two quite different things and that they exist in a peculiar relationship to each other” (*ibid.*, 154). If people can only access housing through the market, then the market system provides housing only to those who have the purchasing power to pay for it. Public, subsidized, and other types of designated low-income housing are political interventions to correct for inherent inequalities in the market system that exist when certain classes of people who do not have purchasing power are excluded from housing options.

In the process of bidding power for housing, Harvey explains that, according to conventional models, the wealthiest groups have the widest possibility of housing choices and thus can choose first among housing options throughout a city. The poorest classes, however, enter the housing market last and tend to have the fewest options for housing. He argues that this process places the poorest groups in a struggle against producers of housing who maintain a quasi-monopolistic position. This lack of choice makes the poor more prone to being squeezed

by the antagonistic position and policies that encourage increases in exchange value (Harvey 2009, 170). Poverty does not disappear. It gets relocated. Rather than make an attempt to relieve poverty, liberal political economic policies merely shift it around geographically. This geographic relocation of poverty occurs because capitalism inherently depends on the presence of a lower class:

Poverty populations therefore function as stabilizing devices within capitalist economies—stabilizing devices which rest on human suffering and degradation.... It appears inevitable that attempts to eliminate poverty *within* the capitalist system are automatically countered through adjustments in the self-regulating market. (*ibid.*, 272; original emphasis)

Liberal policies and planning methods are inadequate to address the root causes of poverty.

They attempt to remedy problematic effects, which may help, as a bandage helps a burn, but they do little to extinguish the fire that caused the burn in the first place. Harvey indicates the problem:

there is good reason to believe that our initial suspicion is correct and that the market mechanism is the culprit in a sordid drama. If we think in these terms, we can explain why almost all policies devised for the inner city have both desirable and undesirable outcomes. If we “urban renew,” we merely move the poverty around; if we don’t, we merely sit by and watch decay....The point I am working towards is that although all serious analysts concede the seriousness of the ghetto problem, few call into question the forces which rule the very heart of our economic system. Thus we discuss everything except the basic characteristics of a capitalist market economy. We devise all manner of solutions except those which might challenge the continuance of that economy. (Harvey 2009, 143-4)

Certainly in the professional discourse of urban planning, as well as in the MUP program at the University of Washington, seldom, if ever, do we question the fundamental roots of poverty as an inevitable manifestation of capitalism. Ultimately, planning to eliminate social inequity will require that we imagine whole new ways to intervene in the development process. Such imagining is no easy task though, and it is even harder to realize practices that are not circumscribed by a capitalist economy, which has the power of “[c]ommodifying everything and subjecting almost all transactions (including those connected to the production of knowledge)

to the singular logic of commercial profitability and the cost-benefit calculus is a dominant way of thinking” (Harvey 2000, 222). Though Harvey may disagree with the following, it can be useful to reimagine systems within the capitalist system as a step toward alleviating social inequity, while clearly not being able to eliminate the problems altogether.

Graaskaamp proposes, in an essay from 1981, an alternative to highest and best use as the standard for development that could be useful. Instead of a paradigm with profit as the most important criterion, he articulates the notions of “most fitting and most probable use” (1981, 240). This shift in language could allow for greater lateral movement in defining the kind of development that may actually be the ‘best’ (though not necessarily ‘highest’) use for a community. Development of a parcel must be considered within larger systems and patterns of land use, as is usually but not always the case. The use of the terms ‘reasonable’ and ‘probable’ reveal a recognition of the uncertainties and contingencies in real estate development (*ibid.*). The term ‘highest and best use’ does not necessarily capture the complexity of uncertainties and social contexts. Graaskaamp offers an important critique of the commonly used term:

At best... the term ‘highest and best use’ is an anachronism from laissez-faire attitudes of the 19th century that have undergone an evolution in meaning like the concept of fee-simple title. At worst, it implies certainty of one man’s judgment, a one-dimensional measure of the adequacy of a development concept and cash for the landowner, even when it is apparent that there are many vested interests in the cash flows that are affected by a given land use decision. (Graaskaamp 1981, 240)

In city development, it is rare that highest and best use is determined by “one man’s judgment,” but it does lead to a rather one-dimensional process of evaluation. In practice, ‘highest’ use tends to be the more important metric because exchange value is quantifiable. Problems arise because what is ‘best’ for one group of people may not be so good for another (*ibid.*). This notion is similar to Harvey’s statement, “What is a use value for one is an exchange value for another, and each conceives use value differently” (Harvey 2009 ed., 166). ‘Best’ is a notion that requires

knowledge of context. Zoning represents a city's general assumption for what types of use are best for a given area. But zoning is a blanket categorization that only superficially accounts for context and cannot engage the depth of culture. For Graaskaamp, it becomes "useful to replace this terminology with the terminology of "most fitting use" and "most probable use" (1981, 240). A shift to this terminology would require more investigation into how different types of development would affect the surrounding community in positive and negative ways. It would also complicate the planning process.

Graaskaamp explains that the concept of 'most fitting use' is normative, or "the optimal reconciliation of affected consumer demands, the cost of production, the cost of infrastructure services, and the fiscal and environmental impact on third parties" (*ibid.*). Reconciliation is a process that involves a financial impact analysis of who pays and who benefits and includes an analysis of the consumers' perceptions of impact on environment and quality of life, standards that Graaskaamp recognizes are elusive at best. In order to clarify such elusive standards, he explains that the concept of 'most fitting use' requires that goals and limitations be well defined so that the "misfits" between a proposed solution or project and those standards can be recognized (*ibid.*). In other words, a project must fit its context. He then articulates that 'most probable use' is an alternative that recognizes the strong constraints by contexts—political factors, real estate technology, personalities of stakeholders, short-term solvency pressures, public infrastructure, etc. (*ibid.*). I would add and emphasize a more explicit recognition of cultural values as well. 'Highest and best use' is an economic normative practice that primarily relies on exchange value while ignoring cultural values that do not necessarily match the requirements of exchange. 'Most fitting and probable use' is a concept that can be expanded more broadly to include recognition of cultural needs and values that are not necessarily recognized or provided by the market system. Applying 'most fitting and probable use' as a

normative practice of analysis could potentially open real estate development to recognizing the complexities of shared cultural values beyond just the value of monetary exchange. This redefinition of social use valuation would, of course, resemble just another liberal strategy of planning, in light of Harvey's critiques. And ultimately, if exchange value remains the dominant factor, regardless of discursive changes, real estate will be unable to eliminate highest and best use. The inertia can be related to the way Harvey defines use value. He explains that "use values are basically formed with respect to what might be called the 'life support system' of the individual. Use value, conceived of in this everyday sense, 'lies outside of the sphere of political economy'" (Harvey 2009, 160). The problem is that use values are not conceived of in this everyday sense. Capitalist society is able to put a price on these use values, meaning that as long as the ability to realize use values is limited by the ability to pay for it, they remain tightly controlled by the power of capital, and access to them will be limited to the people who can afford them.

3. Urban Centers

The following examines a few aspects of the discourse surrounding liberal planning policies and how we might recognize them in SLU. One argument for the benefits of urban renewal and economic development in capitalist cities (of which SLU is an example) revolves around creating jobs, which will alleviate problems of poverty (see, e.g., Blakeley 2010; Seidman 2005). The discourse seldom if ever claims to completely eliminate poverty though. Cities need generative centers that promote growth, provide jobs, and concentrate development (PSRC 2008). Urban centers, with their circulations of surplus capital, act as a "growth pole" for the surrounding economy (Harvey 2009, 249-50). We can compare growth poles to the label of 'base multipliers,' which are industries that accrue wealth from beyond the region through the

export of products or knowledge by producing products or services that are purchased from outside the local region (McDonald 2007). The logic of base multipliers is a sort of trickle-down process that relies on export-based industries to attract enough jobs to compete on the international level. The service industries, or 'non-basic jobs', are necessary to provide for the amenities that employees of the 'basic industry' require. The biotech industry generally and Amazon specifically act as base multipliers. They attract a variety of service industries that cater to several thousand employees who purchase food, drinks, and other merchandise. The goal is to increase the location quotient (LQ) of a certain industry (in this case biotech). LQ is a measure of the extent to which a city or metropolitan area specializes in a particular industry, defined as the percentage of employment in that specific industry out of total employment of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) (McDonald 2007). Biotech is an industry that produces knowledge for medical research as a type of export. The industries with high LQs tend to act as a multipliers, or industries that bring in secondary jobs to support the jobs of the primary industries, with the retail service industry being one such example.

In the early 2000s, former Mayor Greg Nickels advocated for the development of SLU into one of the most prominent biotech hubs of the country. Biotech research, according to Vulcan and Nickels, would establish Seattle as a prime destination or source of knowledge, much like Los Angeles and the entertainment industry, or San Jose as Silicon Valley. They argued that it would generate thousands of new jobs, bring much needed revenue for the city, and garner international recognition of Seattle (Mulady 2004).

Conceptualizations of economic development commonly focus on the belief in sustained growth in order to attract global corporations that render a city more competitive and more highly valued in the global market system. Economic planning, in part, focuses on basic industries that create jobs in industries that reach beyond the local economy and are important

players in national or global markets. Boeing and Microsoft are the biggest examples in the Seattle region. The argument is that basic sector industries have a spillover effect of creating jobs that support the people who work in the basic industries. Former Mayor Nickels was a major proponent of the idea that SLU will provide a unique opportunity for establishing biotech research as a major strategy for the city's overall economic development (Mulady 2004). With the addition of Amazon's headquarters, jobs, public and private revenues, and socioeconomic status of residents have risen in the neighborhood (see, e.g., Glaeser 2011; Pailthorp 2011).

Increases in productivity of the major tech industries draw educated professionals, exemplifying how the city's policies have shifted in order to attract what Richard Florida calls the "creative class." SLU has become a veritable source for white-collar middle-class tech jobs, which are somehow classified as 'creative.' According to liberal economic development strategies, the fast commercial, biotech industrial, and residential growth of SLU are precisely what the city needs.

The argument articulated by Mayor Nickels and Paul Allen is that biotech development makes the city more competitive at a global scale because it attracts major firms to the city (Mulady 2004). Their argument is that the surrounding communities will improve, or become economically stronger (*i.e.* greater wealth) around the corporate growth poles through subsequent job growth and spending increases. International recognition of SLU as a center for the biotech industry is now critical for the success of the neighborhood, if all goes according to plan. SLU becomes a global source of intellectual capital in the biotech field. The subsequent relocation of Amazon to SLU adds to the prestige of the neighborhood as an important job generator, and the new, high-density, mixed-use developments enhance its reputation as an up-and-coming residential and retail district. SLU is becoming yet another district of middle- and upper-income values, ready for purchase. In this way, capitalist political economy perpetuates itself, a crucial factor that I will explore in Chapter III.

The economy at the national scale is only partly driven by small retail outlets, but the overarching paradigm is one of consumption and credit, whether for cars, housing, or other consumer commodities. Blakeley and Leigh (2010) state that approximately 70 percent of the U.S. economy is consumer-based, and after the crisis of 2008, consumer spending has declined due to decreased access to credit from banks. For purposes of economic development, the decreased access to credit has diminished the construction industry because fewer developers are willing to risk money when housing demand has dropped so sharply. SLU seems to have weathered the crisis with continued focus on biotech as a type of base multiplier, providing the infrastructure for other businesses and residential investors to maintain demand, in addition to Vulcan's deep pockets. SLU exemplifies what Blakeley and Leigh call "The New Economy" in which a global, entrepreneurial, and knowledge-based economy that is rooted in information technology establishes itself in a city for the purposes of new products and service innovations (*ibid.*, 7-8). SLU has become a competitor in the new economy of biotechnology, and the development of fixed capital provides the physical and social infrastructure needed to facilitate it. The new development, however, exemplifies urban renewal, a rapid form of sanctioned gentrification.

4. Gentrification

Gentrification is an urban process in which fixed capital embodies how shifts in social use values raise exchange values following demographic changes in a neighborhood. Gentrification can take many forms, from the slow evolution of individual homeowners who improve their properties to urban renewal—a top-down approach of real estate speculation and rapid new development. SLU's development since the early 2000s exemplifies the latter approach; the dominant real estate company, Vulcan, has worked in close coordination with the

city to purchase devalued properties with the intention of some speculative property flipping but mostly direct development.

Liberal urban development emphasizes exchange values that certain land uses can bring in order to grow revenue and attract capital. Hence, developments for new uses often come at the expense of existing uses. Harvey uses Gaffney's explanation about how land allocation decisions are made under the "shadow of impending increments [in land value]" with what he calls a "floating value" (quoted in Harvey 2009, 187). The floating value raises land prices enough that, in a specific area, the land becomes too high-priced to renew its present use, but is not yet ripe for the higher use. Gaffney explains, "The *socially* optimal course is to renew the site in its present lower use. But the floating value factor discourages that. [A land owner] is more likely to let old buildings get old for a while, reserving the land for the higher use" (quoted in *ibid.*; emphasis added). The notion of highest use, or what can create the highest exchange value, takes precedence over the potential social needs that a neighborhood may exhibit. As development occurs on a site, exchange values rise. In turn, the property taxes, which, by convention, are assessed against the exchange values of the surrounding properties, also rise. Rising property values demonstrate to the current user (or owner) that an existing use is not consistent with *potential* exchange value. Rising exchange values are almost always advantageous for a developer, but they may adversely affect renters and homeowners who have to pay higher rents or property taxes, respectively.

Through re-valuations of exchange potential, a "rent gap" is created, to use Neil Smith's term. A rent gap is:

the disparity between the potential ground rent level and the actual ground rent capitalized under the present land use. The rent gap is produced primarily by capital devalorization (which diminishes the proportion of the ground rent able to be capitalized) and also by continued development and expansion (which has historically raised the potential ground rent level in the inner city). (Smith 1996, 67-8)

Once the gap between actual and potential values is wide enough, the potential opportunity for profit comes to outweigh the risk of redeveloping the devalued land. Though gentrification is often conceptualized merely as a demographic shift caused by people and sociocultural change, Smith asserts that in fact it is primarily to be understood as a movement of capital, not people (*ibid.*, xvi). In this sense, gentrification is yet another component of the urban processes of accumulation and class struggle. Atkinson and Bridge (2005) attempt to draw greater attention to the importance of globalization as a neoliberal force that transforms local policies with the aim of attracting professional and elite groups, as well as mobile middle-class professionals. All this is facilitated by new information and transport technologies, which work in tandem with urban policies that support the displacement of non-owning residents in the name of economic development, factors that have been ignored in SLU.

Economy becomes the driving paradigm for a neighborhood's redevelopment, with the purpose of attracting the people and businesses that produce the highest land values and attract global investment. The competition for foreign investment, financial services, and the groups servicing these developments take precedence over the welfare and social justice agendas in the attempt to remain business-friendly. Investors and gentrifiers move to areas of a city that become architecturally desirable or hold symbolic value as a landmark location (*ibid.*, 12). By altering the urban form, the desirability of a neighborhood grows, which attracts higher income residents and more expensive businesses. SLU has become iconic throughout the Seattle region for precisely this reason—it is new, with distinct architectural styles, improved infrastructure, a dense and walkable form, and host to an influx of white-collar jobs through the establishment of biotech and Amazon. It also embodies the type of urban development that concentrates ownership of land and property into the hands of fewer and fewer people, therefore concentrating ownership of the means of production and reinforcing Cox's argument on the

significance of territorial power (1998). Harvey informs us that:

Value is a distinctive spatiotemporal construction depending upon the development of a whole array of spatiotemporal practices (including the *territorialization* of the earth's surface through property rights and state formation and the development of geographical networks and systems of exchange for money and all commodities, including that of labor power itself). (2000, 108; emphasis added)

If value is produced through the territorialization of land and physical space, it follows that the forms of territorialization will represent the values of the dominant power structures in society.

SLU embodies one of the newest paradigms of urban development—high-density New Urbanist design. It becomes necessary to examine the physical patterns and forms of New Urbanism in order to understand how they reflect values of the dominant political economy.

CHAPTER II – NEW URBANISM IN SOUTH LAKE UNION: URBAN VILLAGE OR CORPORATE CITY?

I. New Urbanism

Much of the new development in SLU can be characterized as a dense form of New Urbanism, a design theory that promotes walkability, proximity to services, and some notion of community. New Urbanism was a planning concept that emerged in the 1980s with the work of Peter Calthorpe, Peter Katz, Robert Davis, and the team of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. Influenced largely by traditional European architectural forms, New Urbanism advocates design-based strategies to combat urban sprawl, help rebuild communities, and provide the kind of spatial arrangement that could foster a sense of community (Devlin 2010; Bohl 2000). New Urbanism attaches particular importance to walkability and mixed-use developments through increasing density and attempting to create a sense of place. As an alternative to conventional American development of suburban style housing and the automobile, New Urbanism offers new opportunities for rethinking the American built environment by evoking certain nostalgia for old, small American towns. The master planning of New Urbanism attempts to alleviate many of the concerns surrounding the “predicament [involving] spatial isolation and loss of community in the suburbs, longer commutes to work, a reliance on the automobile, and a paucity of mass transit options” (Devlin 2010, 5).

According to New Urbanist discourse, that which has been lost from small-town America includes a solid sense of community and the institutions, mixed land uses, and high densities that went along with it. The argument is that we must bring all this back through urban design by creating a sense of place, and the quality of urban social life will improve. New Urbanism attempts to combat the ‘placelessness’ and of sprawling and fragmented American cities. In this way, New Urbanism “offers something positive as well as nostalgic” (Harvey 2000,

169). He continues:

There is, first, the willingness to think about the place of particular developments within the region as a whole and to pursue a much more organic, holistic ideal of what cities and regions might be about. In so doing, the postmodern penchant for fragmentation is overcome.... There is, furthermore, a strong interest in intimate and integrated forms of development that by-pass the rather stultifying conception of the horizontally zoned and large-platted city. This liberates an interest in the street and civic architecture as arenas of sociality. (Harvey 1997, 1)

New Urbanism opens up opportunities for reimagining urban development in American cities, an opportunity that warrants praise because it challenges the development paradigm that has dominated since WWII. With its attempts to increase density, walkability, and connectedness, New Urbanism explores live-work options of urban design, attempting to minimize the need for people to commute to jobs. (This can be problematic, however, when many New Urbanist developments require low-paying service employees who cater to but cannot afford the middle-income housing that New Urbanist development offers.) It also facilitates ecological design and more efficient energy use within buildings, while decreasing automobile dependence through urban design (*ibid.*).

New Urbanism originated as greenfield development in Seaside, Florida. Since that first project, it has evolved into an urban design philosophy for infill development and the revitalization of inner cities (Bohl 2000). It applies the ideals of walkability, ecology, transit, energy efficiency, and mixed uses in a dense, urban context with condos, lofts, and apartments. The design theory focuses on limiting neighborhoods to an area that approximates a 5 to 10 minute walk from center to edge to ensure that amenities and activities are easily accessible to residents. New Urbanism incorporates a variety of housing types and land uses, including shops and services that satisfy consumer needs. Streets are designed to encourage pedestrian use with wide sidewalks, street trees, and buffers from traffic to make sidewalks safer. Buildings are generally low- to mid-rise, close together, and set close to the street to help define the public

spaces in the form of streets, squares, and plazas (*ibid.*). New Urbanism within cities also tries to address socioeconomic problems. Bohl states:

One reason for the growing application of New Urbanism in inner cities is to support policies aimed at reducing high concentrations of poverty by creating more diverse, mixed-income neighborhoods. New Urbanist design principles explicitly support the goal of creating mixed-income neighborhoods. (Bohl 2000, 779)

It is a strategy for redeveloping inner cities to attract middle-income households to create more diverse neighborhoods. Bohl recognizes, at least in passing, the problems of displacement and gentrification that many inner-city New Urbanist projects induce. He does not, however, engage the question of how shifts in income demographics of neighborhoods, as through gentrification, do not necessarily translate into improvements for low-income people themselves.

2. Critiques & Reconciliations

In fact, much of New Urbanist development in inner cities can be characterized as types of urban renewal, which, as I demonstrated in Chapter I, does not eliminate poverty but merely moves it around. Because New Urbanism is a real estate phenomenon, it leaves capitalist social relations in place and is unable to address problems at a systemic level. In a New York Times article, Christopher Leinberger demonstrates that inner city areas of many American cities are experiencing increased demand and real estate values as they become more walkable. He states that today, the most valuable real estate lies in walkable urban locations whereas many of these now pricey places were slums just 30 years ago (Leinberger 2012). We can recall here Harvey's statement about liberal treatments of poverty—"If we 'urban renew,' we merely move the poverty around; if we don't, we merely sit by and watch decay" (Harvey 2009, 143).

Leinberger, a professor of business and member of a real estate investor coalition, unwittingly

verifies Harvey's position. What used to be "slums just 30 years ago" are now coveted urban areas that offer the amenities and lifestyles that people with money demand. The slums were areas that were slowly decaying until attitudes about cities changed. Now that the dominant planning and design theories posit walkability and multi-modal transit as positive things, investment has shifted from the suburbs to the inner cities, demonstrating precisely Smith's understanding of gentrification as a movement of capital. The trend of New Urbanism reinforces middle and upper class territorialization, cloaked in an ideology of community and walkability, which tends to displace lower-income groups of people.

The residential and retail developments in SLU have followed New Urbanist theory by establishing a vibrant (albeit high-end) residential and retail center. As a regional urban center, SLU has already become a site for the biotech industry. But in order to become an actual, vibrant urban area that encourages economic development and at least a modicum of community, people must be present at all times of day. Without the focus on creating a residential and commercial center, SLU would only be a place for day-time workers, and there would be considerably less variety of urban form types due to decreases in need for amenities. By adopting the live-work concept, the development of SLU has allowed the neighborhood to grow rapidly in all aspects of the commercial and residential sectors.

SLU is touted by the City of Seattle, Vulcan as well as other developers, the media, and many Seattleites as a unique, vibrant, modern, and hip community. In addition to being densely New Urbanist, SLU is one of the few neighborhoods in the country with LEED-ND status—the LEED standard for sustainable neighborhoods. LEED (or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a sustainability rating system coordinated by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) to assess the environmental effects and footprint of buildings. LEED-ND takes the same principles and applies them to a neighborhood scale. The USGBC describes it as

follows:

The LEED for Neighborhood Development Rating System integrates the principles of smart growth, urbanism and green building into the first national system for neighborhood design. LEED for Neighborhood Development is a collaboration among USGBC, Congress for the New Urbanism, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. LEED-ND certification provides independent, third-party verification that a development's location and design meet accepted high levels of environmentally responsible, sustainable development. (USGBC)

LEED-ND embodies the shifting paradigm of contemporary urban master planning and design. It attempts to encourage holistic design that diminishes the negative effects of development on the natural environment. Its focus on creating a rating system for energy and environment allows it to be based on metrics that can normalize more sustainable design and construction practices. LEED-ND remains rooted in the empirical and quantitative realms of energy, water use, green space, and other physical and infrastructural components with limited focus on social issues. Lest we forget, sustainability is now a necessary marketing element for good business, which we can see in everything from food service to real estate to Wal-Mart.

New Urbanism, however, explicitly focuses on social sustainability, with its discourse on community. Harvey summarizes New Urbanism's guiding ideology: The discourse states that community will rescue us from the "deadening world of social dissolution, grab-it-yourself materialism, and individualized selfish market-oriented greed" (2000, 170). It is the belief that an improvement in urban design, which facilitates different movements and interactions in space, can create community. For Harvey, New Urbanism seems to be another example of the design field's tendency toward architectural determinism—the belief that form will create social change. Bohl counters this claim by arguing that the "specter of physical determinism in planning," a hallmark of modernism, has greatly diminished (2000, 778). While he recognizes that particularly ardent supporters of New Urbanism have overstated design's potential to realize social change, he cites the official statement from the Congress of New Urbanism (CNU)

to allay critiques of New Urbanism's deterministic tendencies:

'We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework. (quoted in Bohl 2000, 778).

A "coherent and supportive physical framework" is of course necessary, but New Urbanism is not necessarily supportive for everyone. Most New Urbanist developments boast high exchange values and bring higher rents than most lower and lower-middle class people can afford. In practice, New Urbanism tends to become another real estate commodity touted for its lofty goals of community and equity, but manifesting as just another superficial real estate project. It is incapable of reaching the roots of poverty or inequity for it remains real estate development, thus reinforcing existing social relations. Though Duany objects to the accusation that he is complicit with power structures and that he caters to personal taste, "he also insists that everything he does is designed to create *spectacular* projects that outperform all others on a commercial basis. This means 'faster permits, less cost, and faster sales.' His version of the new urbanism operates strictly within such parameters" (Harvey 2000, 173; emphasis added). If New Urbanist development exists within the parameters that Harvey describes, then the individual projects are still commodities of the real estate market. If this is so, then can New Urbanism really escape from the "grab-it-yourself materialism" and "selfish market-oriented greed" that it claims to counteract (*ibid.*, 170)? Mike Pyatok, an architect, writes, "It was not too long ago, of course, that we learned that just fixing the real estate is not enough, and that wholesale removal of people and their neighborhoods is inappropriate" (2000, 40). New Urbanism seems to get stuck in the contradictions between real estate praxis of moving poverty around and its discursive claim for the broader societal good.

Ann Sloan Devlin (2010) demonstrates that because New Urbanist projects are master

planned and built very quickly, they fail to re-create the sense of established community within older towns that they emulate. She articulates that there is an enormous difference between the life of a small town that has evolved over time and a small town that has been planned and built essentially at one time (*ibid.*). She describes the variety of businesses that used to exist in her own town thirty years ago, some of which still remain. She paints a picture of the locally owned businesses that somehow have survived through changes in commercial real estate and a partial influx of chain stores. She argues that sense of community is something that grows and changes over time in relation to the physical forms and social uses of the built environment. New Urbanism's attempt to overlay a form that will then establish community rarely, if ever, achieves such lofty social goals. The theory posits an attempt to manifest community through architecture, but its speed of development precludes the evolution of urban form, which in turn precludes the formation of community through time. New Urbanism is still a quick turnover kind of real estate development, which occurs too fast for the establishment of an actual rooted community.

Harvey states that the practice and logic of New Urbanism are such that spatial design is able to organize social processes as a method of creating community. "The New Urbanism assembles much of its rhetorical and political power through a nostalgic appeal to 'community' as a panacea for our social and economic as well as our urban ills" (Harvey 1997, 2). The word "community" has become one of the most overused, and thus watered-down, terms in contemporary *lingua franca* (along with 'sustainability'). It is only occasionally deconstructed in academic contexts, and rarely if ever examined in daily practice. The New Urbanist literature seldom addresses what is meant by community, only that it is a desired outcome. It behooves us therefore to unpack the term a bit.

3. Community

The *American Heritage College Dictionary* (1997) defines “community” as follows:

1.a. A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government. b. The district or locality in which such a group lives. 2. A group of people having common interests. 3.a. Similarity or identity. b. Sharing, participation, and fellowship. 4. Society as a whole; the public.

The dictionary explains that the etymology consists of the Latin *communitas*, meaning fellowship, and *communis*, or common. The first definitions, 1.a. and 1.b., articulate a political understanding such that the entire American nation-state, at one scale, and the City of Seattle, at a smaller scale, and all scales of government in between, constitute community. New Urbanism is bound within the political constraints of a governing body but does not work directly upon it to realize its stated goals of community. Surely, then, this definition is not the intended meaning of New Urbanist discourse.

Definitions 2. and 3. get closer to the way that the term community is used in New Urbanist discourse. Definition 2. implies that the groups of people living in such developments have something in common, without stating what that something might be. Definition 3.a. shows that that something might be identity, or the common characteristics, activities, or beliefs with which a group of people identify. In this sense, the U.S., as a nation of people who all share the same values, may constitute community. The people who identify themselves as natives of Seattle comprise the Seattleite community. And similarly, the people who believe in the necessity of New Urbanist design make up that community. Definition 3.b., however, seems to be closest to common usage. “Sharing, participation, and fellowship” are actions that reinforce bonds between people, families, and other groups. Community can be understood in this light as the networks of people who share social bonds for the benefit of themselves, each other, and the group as a whole. This definition reminds us that community must consist of people being

humane to each other. As definition 4. implies, community can be the entire public, a public that does not always share the same identities or belief systems.

In common usage as well as New Urbanist discourse, community refers to a sense of place, usually defined by neighborhood, such that neighborhood and community are often conflated as different words for the same thing. Much of New Urbanism revolves around the goal of recuperating history, tradition, collective memory, and identity associated with U.S. cities that were lost due to fragmented, placeless sprawl development (Harvey 1997, 1). Harvey summarizes the goal:

Urban living can be radically improved, made more authentic and less placeless, it is argued, by a return to concepts of neighborhood and community that once upon a time gave such vibrancy, coherence, continuity, and stability to urban life. Collective memory of a more civic past can be recaptured by a proper appeal to traditional symbols. (Harvey 1997, 1)

Community becomes associated with nostalgic appeals to the cities of the past where traditions were apparently more visible and more strongly rooted. Today, the implication is that we have lost our traditions, and New Urbanism supposes to bring them back. Community becomes the physical spaces in which collective memory reestablishes traditions through architecture.

Harvey elucidates:

The presumption here is that neighborhoods are in some sense “intrinsic,” that the proper form of cities is some “structure of neighborhoods,” that “neighborhood” is equivalent to “community,” and that “community” is what most Americans want and need (whether they know it or not). (Harvey 1997, 2)

One of the results of such an assumption is the way that New Urbanism creates an image of community through architectural form without being able to guarantee the social bonds that truly constitute community.

Community can be problematic as well. Because the notion is a means of identification, it has exclusionary tendencies as well. Harvey posits, “Community should be viewed as a delicate relation between fluid processes and relatively permanent rules of belonging and

association” (Harvey 2000, 240). It is this belonging and association that becomes crucial when we talk about community.

“Community” has ever been one of the key sites of social control and surveillance, bordering on overt social repression. Well-founded communities often exclude, define themselves against others, erect all sorts of keep-out signs (if not tangible walls)... As a consequence, community has often been a barrier to rather than facilitator of progressive social change” (Harvey 1997, 3).

When political discourse and New Urbanism talk about vibrant and healthy communities, on one hand we can imagine them as places that are filled with people sharing ideas, bonding, and doing things together. On the other hand, community can be certain groups of people who want to exclude themselves. Seaside, Florida, in some ways, embodies the desire of middle and upper class people wanting to distance themselves from other groups that do not have the money to live in their town. The new residential developments in SLU have a similar effect. The people who have money can distance themselves from the lower economic classes on the ground by living in expensive condos several floors up. Though they in part constitute the local neighborhood, to say that they share the same experiences and social bonds of the low-income families or homeless people (two distinct communities in themselves) is almost certainly not an accurate assumption. “Thus, although community ‘in itself’ has meaning as part of a broader politics, community ‘for itself’ almost invariably degenerates into regressive exclusions and fragmentations” (Harvey 2000, 240). Images of community may also have this tendency.

In the discourse of contemporary political economy, a vibrant community generally refers to the fact that there are many different types of retail outlets where residents and visitors alike can go to eat food and to shop, two activities that require money and reinforce capitalist social relations. Moreover, if a vibrant community is defined thus, people without money are unable to participate and are therefore, intentionally or unintentionally, excluded from that community, or at least from the vibrant part of it. When the marketing for New Urbanist

developments touts the creation of community, it seems contrived, as if community is available only to the consumer—all one must do is buy into it. The fact is, physical design alone rarely results in more than an image of community. Harvey argues that New Urbanism “builds an image of community and a rhetoric of place-based civic pride and consciousness for those who do not need it [the middle and upper classes, according to him], while abandoning those that do [need it] to their “underclass” fate” (*ibid.*, 3). He levels a harsh critique indeed, but observing the ‘community’ of people in SLU shows us that most public interactions occur in retail establishments. The few exceptions include the Cascade Neighborhood Park and P-Patch community garden. Perhaps community, as Harvey seems to posit, is a process of perpetuating homogenous identities that are defined by an ethos of consumer capitalism.

For Harvey, New Urbanism falls into the same discursive problem that modernist planning and architecture tend toward: The habit of privileging spatial forms and assuming that those spatial forms will solve social problems. Harvey poses the following question: “Put simply, does [New Urbanism] not perpetuate the idea that the shaping of spatial order is or can be the foundation for a new moral and aesthetic order?” (1997, 2) This type of critique rarely comes from within the design field, with its almost religious appeal to the belief that ‘good’ design will solve social ills. Harvey states that New Urbanism “cannot get to the crux of urban impoverishment and decay” that comprise social relations and processes within capitalism (2). Looking around South Lake Union, there are expensive restaurants, cafés and bars, boutique retail stores, and lots and lots of office space—standards of urban consumption that we can see in almost every neighborhood of Seattle with a predominant middle class. All these places require money, offering nothing to those who do not have expendable income. The assemblage of these components tends to be an important standard by which we decide how vibrant a neighborhood is.

One important critique of New Urbanism does, however, come from within the design field. Pyatok is an architect based in Oakland who designs low-income housing. He begins by deconstructing what he calls the “cure mythology,” which argues for the reconstruction of troubled housing projects at lower densities (inevitably displacing some people), and then importing higher-income households to live among the remaining low-income residents (2000). This practice asserts that mixed-income neighborhoods are healthier for people than homogenous low-income neighborhoods. While the argument may hold true, the problem manifests with regard to the process of importing people from outside rather than providing ways for existing residents to remain and to build their own social capital. Pyatok offers an important critique: “Importing neighbors who already have jobs does little in the way of providing real jobs for the underemployed people who remain as part of the new mix, or for those who must move on and be excluded from the mix” (2000, 40). It is common for cities to push a discourse of urban renewal and inner-city revitalization. Conventional discourse describes shifts in neighborhood demographics as successes because the previously existing problems associated with poverty and low exchange values are diminished or erased from the neighborhood. Here again, liberal planning practices verify Harvey’s argument that poverty is merely shifted around. The changes constitute a statistical drop in demographics, which represents a relative reduction of levels of poverty, but the drop happens largely through the relocation of poor people to other parts of the city. The newcomers arrive *en masse*, particularly with high-density multifamily developments such as those in SLU, and demand changes in social activities. The social shifts require certain alterations of physical forms in order to facilitate the demand for new activities.

Bohl responds to critiques like Harvey’s by articulating what New Urbanism is *not* and should not be viewed as. He writes, “New Urbanism is not a housing program: It cannot defy

the dynamics of real estate markets nor ensure that affordable public housing units will be provided without public sector involvement” (Bohl 2000, 792). As I stated above, New Urbanism is subject to real estate commodification and consumer demand, as is any development, which demonstrates that New Urbanism is in fact, as Harvey argues and Duany denies, just another part of the dominant power structure of urban development and geographic shifts of social and fixed capital. “New Urbanism is not an economic development program” (*ibid.*). It does not provide job training or start-up capital or mom-and-pop stores of the past (although its appeal to nostalgia for traditional American towns does imply nostalgia for such stores). Finally, Bohl states, “New Urbanism is not a social service program” (*ibid.*). Nor should it be. It is design. But as design, it affects social processes, particularly through real estate values, which in turn alter social fabric. Bohl provides an important understanding of the role New Urbanism can play: “The potential for design to encourage and support social and civic interaction should not be confused with *causing* neighboring and civic engagement” (2000, 793; original emphasis). Thus Bohl recognizes that New Urbanism as a design theory may facilitate but will not automatically create community. If New Urbanism, however, is merely another real estate trend, then it has the potential to disrupt existing communities. As long as New Urbanism remains a real estate phenomenon, regardless of the discourse for community, it will perpetuate capitalist social relations of class struggle.

So what of seven-story buildings with upscale apartments and trendy retail on the ground floor? Is that the kind of design that promotes community? There is no doubt that SLU is vibrant, according to conventional value measures. There is a great variety of places to visit and things to buy during the day and night. There is the Cascade Neighborhood Community Center next to the P-Patch community garden and a neighborhood park, which together constitute an entire city block, adjacent to the Alcylene apartments, a Vulcan development.

There are employment opportunities for those with education and a willingness to work in biotech research or corporate technology. The neighborhood is an economic powerhouse and iconic as a hip place to be in Seattle. But do these characteristics constitute community? Bohl refers to the gaps in research that will help understand such problems. He writes:

The question for researchers is not whether New Urbanism has a deterministic influence over people's behavior, but the extent to which New Urbanist design is any better or worse at satisfying ("affording") the needs of people living in inner-city neighborhoods. The question for policy makers concerns the extent to which New Urbanism supports broader social, economic, and community development policies aimed at revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods. (Bohl 2000, 794)

New Urbanism is a design theory that dovetails with conventional liberal policies geared toward alleviating inner-city poverty, but it falls short of Harvey's call for a revolutionary strategy that could eliminate poverty and change social relations. Harvey concludes his essay:

the intensifying contradictions of contemporary urbanization, even for the privileged (some of which are highlighted in the New Urbanism), create all sorts of interstitial spaces in which liberatory and emancipatory possibilities can flourish. The New Urbanism identifies some of those spaces, but its conservatism, its communitarianism, and its refusal to confront the political economy of power blunt its revolutionary potential. (Harvey 1997, 3)

SLU shows us how and why New Urbanism fails to effect any significant improvement of class struggle. It exemplifies a top-down, private-public approach geared toward white-collar professionals. The process is one of bringing in outside people who already have jobs, and it does little to alleviate pre-existing problems of poverty and uneven resource distribution. The expensive rents and high land values in SLU exacerbate socioeconomic divides. And unless community is defined by how much money a person spends, the new condos and lofts that have become ubiquitous in the neighborhood become a sort of urban village for consumer capitalism.

4. Urban Villages

Globalization has induced a discourse of the urban village within a city that works to

retain hallmarks of tight-knit communities with local character. The City of Seattle has a specific component of its comprehensive plan dedicated to planning for urban villages. For Seattle, urban villages are nodal neighborhoods in which the city attempts to concentrate development and density, largely to help reduce sprawl. The Urban Villages Element of the Seattle Comprehensive Plan states, “Urban villages are community resources that enable the City to: deliver services more equitably, pursue a development pattern that is environmentally and economically sound, and provide a better means of managing growth and change through collaboration with the community in planning for the future of these areas. The urban village strategy is a comprehensive approach to planning for a sustainable future” (City of Seattle, 2005, 1.3). It is a strategy of smart growth that allows the city to manage where and how growth can happen. Urban villages are a means of realizing the City’s vision. The introduction of the Urban Village Element states, “This Plan envisions a city where growth: helps to build stronger communities, heightens our stewardship of the environment, leads to enhanced economic opportunity and security for all residents, and is accompanied by greater social equity across Seattle’s communities” (*ibid.*). The strategy for establishing urban villages states four actions, or tools, as the plan calls them:

- diverse housing and employment growth
- pedestrian and transit-oriented communities
- the provision of services and infrastructure targeted to support that growth
- enhancements to the natural environment and the city’s cultural resources (*ibid.*)

By applying these principles, it is Seattle’s goal to focus new growth and increased density in urban villages. Walkability and sustainability inform practices of economic development in this case.

There are four categories of urban villages: urban centers, manufacturing/industrial centers, hub urban villages, and residential urban villages. Urban centers are the densest areas

that act as both city and regional growth centers; they provide the highest concentrations of people and activities, host a wide variety of uses, and are considered employment centers. Manufacturing/industrial centers in the city are also considered important regional industrial clusters for job creation. Hub urban villages are treated as communities that provide a balance of housing and employment but smaller and lower density areas than urban centers. They tend to be tightly knit with a more explicit focus on maintaining community. Residential urban villages are focused on housing and the amenities that residents need without necessarily being an employment center (*ibid.*). SLU is an urban center (for the city and for the Puget Sound region) because of its central location and its focus on biotech industry (and Amazon of course). With its continual increases in housing development, it is becoming one of Seattle's most important neighborhoods for concentrating population growth.

Seattle's urban village strategy focuses on community building through physical form: Policy UV1 states, "Promote the growth of urban villages as compact mixed-use neighborhoods in order to support walking and transit use, and to provide services and employment close to residences" (1.5). Policy UV5 states: "the urban village designation is intended to transform automobile-oriented environments into more cohesive, mixed-use pedestrian environments" (1.6). Along with discussions of transportation networks, land use, walkability, and physical form, including open spaces, green spaces, and parks (Policies UV 53 and UV 57 in particular). There are even a few recognitions of how investment affects urban form and community. Policy UV5 recognizes the need "within economically distressed communities to focus economic reinvestment to benefit the existing population" (1.6). This statement clearly articulates that some people in city government recognize their planning policies cause the shifting around of poverty in the inner city. But recognition remains a distant reach from understanding how to avoid this shifting. There is especially little about SLU's redevelopment that seems to recognize

such patterns.

At the beginning of the Urban Village Element, there is a list of goals. Goal UVG10 discusses investment in a more comprehensive (though less articulate) way. It aims to:

Maximize the benefit of public investment in infrastructure and services, and deliver those services more equitably by focusing new infrastructure and services, as well as maintenance and improvements to existing infrastructure and services, in areas expecting to see additional growth, and by focusing growth in areas with sufficient infrastructure and services to support that growth. (City of Seattle 2005, 1.5)

All neighborhoods need infrastructure maintenance. The neighborhoods that increase capital accumulation, however, often take precedence. Before Vulcan's involvement in SLU, the neighborhood was in serious need of improvements for years. Purcell demonstrates the politics of public expenditure:

Spending public money to improve SLU roads, for example, is perfectly reasonable, given their manifest disrepair. However, the needs have existed for a long time; it is clear that the City is committing funds for improvement *now* because it wishes to foster comprehensive redevelopment and a biotech hub. For the same reason, it is spending funds *here* rather than in other parts of the city with similar needs, again because its spending is driven by the desire to foster economic development, not to meet the needs of inhabitants. (Purcell 2008, 117)

Using public money to foster economic development facilitates accumulation for ruling and wealthy classes, while using public money to foster the livelihoods of the lower classes, or the "inhabitants," is less desirable for a city because it does not contribute to accumulation. SLU has become an urban village for residents, but it is first and foremost an urban center for the concentration of jobs and capital. The City of Seattle has channeled money in the neighborhood in order to facilitate capital accumulation, with the residential development as the subsidiary that depends on the corporate campuses of biotech firms and Amazon. SLU has many urban village characteristics, not unlike the Ballard and Capitol Hill neighborhoods. But it is also, in large part, a corporate campus.

5. The Corporate City

Kaid Benfield, a journalist, is impressed with Amazon's new campus in SLU (2012). His essay discusses the Amazon campus as a walkable and public transit-oriented area. It is located in the center of SLU, with several buildings along the streetcar line, and even has preserved two historic buildings for adaptive reuse. Plus, Benfield emphasizes its location among the many residential and retail developments in the neighborhood. He states that the company posits an impressive commitment to smart growth and urbanism with emphases on open space design, outdoor seating, public art, landscaping, transit connectivity, and architectural cohesiveness. The buildings are also designed to complement the character of the old warehouses in the neighborhood (see Figure 8). Additionally, Vulcan is paying \$6.4 million to the City of Seattle to help support lower-income housing, and Amazon will help provide for daycare needs in the city. Benfield finds it difficult to criticize anything about the new development and argues that it is an example of the kind of environment that consumers will demand in the near future.

Figure 6



Businesses can become leaders in the growth of walkable neighborhoods, and those that do will be the most successful (*ibid.*). Cities already compete to attract the headquarters of national and international corporations, but imagine the city as a collection of corporate

campuses around which most residential and retail uses congregate. Can a neighborhood actually be an urban village and corporate campus? Ada Healy, Vice President of Real Estate for Vulcan, stated at one point, “It takes a village to construct a 700-million dollar project” (quoted in Pailthorp 2011). In the case of SLU and Amazon, with its insider politics and huge sums of money, perhaps the question is: Which groups of people actually get to be a part of this corporate village? And more importantly, who is excluded?

If exchange value is the dominant mode of determining spatial patterns in capitalist cities, then corporate campuses are the most logical type for cities to pursue. Sharon Zukin states that cities have become homes for transnational headquarters, big box stores, and business improvement districts in order to become corporate cities (2011). For her, the business class city no longer recognizes the difference between creating and consuming. We consume images that corporations generate and that appeal to our human desires for authentic experiences and community. Corporate cities have the power to commodify community and urban villages in such a way that concentrates power. The corporate city repackages itself and takes root in our individual desires, “persuading us that consuming the authentic city has everything to do with aesthetics and nothing to do with power” (*ibid.*, 300). The corporate city co-opts the urban village for the sake of capital. Homogenization ensues (even with attempts at architectural variety), and the generic city is born.

CHAPTER III – CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION & “THE GENERIC CITY”

I. Urbanism

Urbanism doesn't exist; it is only an ideology in Marx's sense of the word. Architecture does really exist, like Coca-Cola: Though coated with ideology, it is a real production, falsely satisfying a falsified need. Urbanism is comparable to the advertising propagated around Coca-Cola—pure spectacular ideology. Modern capitalism, which organized the reduction of all social life to a spectacle, is incapable of presenting any spectacle other than that of our own alienation. Its urbanistic dream is its masterpiece. (Koolhaas *et al.* 1995, 1269)

This 'definition' of urbanism, in the book *S, M, L, XL* by Koolhaas *et al.* (1995), is provocative. It is a critique that is somehow trite yet accurate. The authors' reduction of architecture to the status of Coca-Cola is a cynical viewpoint, one with which I (and the authors as well, I suspect) do not necessarily agree. Architecture—as creative expression of place, as spatial organization of social activity—is not a commodity. It is concept and craft. It is an “embedded, spatiotemporal practice” (Harvey 2000, 204). Embedded within space and time on one hand, yes. But on the other hand, architecture is embedded within capitalism, which therefore commodifies it into a material expression of the “falsified need” that Koolhaas *et al.* mention. Hence their comparison of architecture to a cheap, carbonated, sugary drink. Developers need architecture in order to profit from real estate. Design is purchased by the client as an investment toward profit. Often, architecture is pre-packaged, or designed *en masse* for large-scale developments (suburban housing tracts are the most notable examples, but the Amazon buildings in SLU share remarkably similar building types, and differ only slightly from the surrounding office buildings).

Architecture is “a real production,” it exists in the material world. Buildings (and thus architecture) are not only a falsified need, as Koolhaas *et al.* write; they fill necessary needs of all people. Architecture begins to satisfy a false need, however, through trends, styles, and images

that evoke desires. Like fashion, architecture works to convey perceptions aesthetic value and social status. Within the market system, we are subject to the architectural forms that materialize through the commodity system. The material forms represent trends of what select groups of people value as most important for a city's needs. The current trend of New Urbanism is dense living, 'communal' consumerism, and walkability. Thirty years ago, the trend was suburban single-family homes and personal automobiles. What we valued thirty years ago was the convention of the standardized single-family home because that is what we were told was best. Now, society tells us that suburban housing is not actually very good, and dense urban living is better. Capital investment flows to the inner city, marketing schemes rebrand urban neighborhoods, dense apartment buildings pop up quickly, and people decide that that is where they should go. Even though architecture remains a genuine need, society declares that there is a certain typology that all cities need in order to be modern and competitive. Again like fashion, it must be in vogue style. It is as if what we value in cities is formed for us by external forces.

Those external forces constitute ideology—in this case, urbanism. If our value of certain architectural types is created externally, it is realized through the power of conspicuous consumption. Architecture as a commodity is consumed in order to realize a way of life that is distinctly urban. That said, cities, like architecture, are also real. They are assemblages of people and architectural constructions. Urbanism, however, is the abstract notion that defines how architecture (and thus people) should be organized. If we agree, as Koolhaas *et al.* state, that modern capitalism has reduced all social life to a spectacle, then urbanism comprises the stage, story, and cast of society's trajectory toward the endless accumulation of capital. All cities are trying to grow, and all want to be the next big thing. Urbanism ensues.

Urbanism is an ideology of process, but cities embody the meanings of that ideology in form. Harvey argues:

In the ancient city the organization of space was a symbolic re-creation of a supposed cosmic order. It had an ideological purpose. Created space in the modern city has an equivalent ideological purpose. In part it reflects the prevailing ideology of the ruling groups and institutions in society. In part it is fashioned by the dynamics of market forces. (Harvey 2009, 310)

The creation of cities is an ideological process of social relations that serves to concentrate capital and strengthen accumulation. Cities themselves are inevitable results of capitalist processes because urbanism is “viewed as a product of the circulation of surplus value” (*ibid.*, 312). Harvey argues, “To understand the circulation of surplus value is in fact to understand the way in which society works” (*ibid.*). Harvey defines surplus value as follows: “Surplus value is that part of the total value of production which is left over after constant capital (which includes the means of production, raw materials and instruments of labour) and variable capital (labour power) have been accounted for” (Harvey 2009, 224). He goes on to explain that “surplus value is in part realized in the three forms of rent, interest and profit” (*ibid.*). Real estate becomes a crucial means for the realization of surplus value. Harvey contends that a complete understanding of surplus value would require voluminous amounts of work, beyond the scope of even his own essays, but he employs Lefebvre’s discussion of the two circuits of capital to illustrate the basic elements. “The first circuit arises out of industrial activity and involves that simple conversion of naturally occurring materials and forces into objects and powers of utility to man” (*ibid.*). In other words, the exploitation of natural resources that are converted into commodities. The second circuit concerns us more directly.

The second circuit involves the creation and extraction of surplus value out of speculation in property rights (of all sorts) and out of returns gained from the disbursement of fixed capital investment. Lefebvre argues “Whereas the proportion of global surplus value formed and realized in industry declines, the proportion realized in speculation and in construction and real estate development grows. The secondary circuit comes to supplant the principal circuit.” (Harvey 2009, 312)

In contemporary American cities, financial speculation is one of the most profitable sectors in

the economy, and real estate gets subsumed into it. The increasing salience of the ideology of urbanism reinforces the power of the second circuit. Harvey further clarifies the connection: “Speculative activity has grown in proportion as fixed capital investment has grown and since urbanism is in part the product of the latter it is hardly surprising that urbanism and the circuit of speculative capital are intimately related to each other” (*ibid.*, 313). Harvey does not agree with Lefebvre’s position that the second circuit has supplanted the first, but rather that the two circuits are fundamental to each other. Recalling that his book was published in 1973, he recognized at that time the potential for risk. He elaborates, “Pressures generated out of the second circuit threaten the stability of the first for it now appears that the second circuit is far more crisis prone than the first, while contradiction between the two circuits is a constant source of tension” (*ibid.*). With the majority of industrial production now located in developing countries and the advent of the 2008 housing crisis (a product of rampant, uncontrolled, second circuit speculation), his foresight was particularly keen.

Liberal planning policies do not deal with the problems that Harvey points out. Growth remains the driving paradigm, which professes the need for the continuation of rapid physical development. This rapid development, driven by maximizing exchange values, commonly creates what Koolhaas *et al.* describe as the “Generic City.” In the opening line to his essay on the Generic City, Koolhaas *et al.* write, “Is the contemporary city like the contemporary airport—‘all the same?’” (1995, 1,248) They build an argument around the perception of the loss of identity in architecture, in form, perhaps even in society. The authors explore important notions of how conventional urban development affects social patterns. When we examine SLU and its New Urbanist development, the architecture appears stylized, as if it is attempting to be unique, but its differences are mostly superficial. Contrasted with conventional suburban development,

however, the styles, layouts, and architecture of SLU are more varied and interesting. If generic cities embody how urbanization manifests in a society based on the values of consumer capitalism, are the stylizations of New Urbanism just renditions of some homogenous, marketable notion of community? Because the value of development is so strongly oriented toward the accumulation of capital, even with variation in the physical forms themselves, the projects get reduced to a collection of homogenizing norms that proponents claim can be applied anywhere. If uniqueness can be mass produced, as Smith has argued with regard to gentrification, then that uniqueness itself becomes inherently generic (1996).

The Generic City simplifies and homogenizes places, even places with their extensive histories manifest in urban form. “Sometimes an old, singular city, like Barcelona, by oversimplifying its identity, turns Generic. It becomes transparent, like a logo” (Koolhaas *et al*, 1995, 1250). Barcelona becomes a romanticization that stems from the imaging of *Las Ramblas* and Gaudi’s architecture, which take root as the primary icons for the entire city. Pike Place Market in Seattle serves much the same purpose. These are icons that represent a portion of the cities’ respective histories, but have been made hollow through capitalism’s consumer symbolism and do not necessarily represent the daily life of most residents. SLU does not attempt to re-brand any of Seattle’s history, unlike Pike Place Market. Instead, it is trying to establish itself as the new place for corporate campuses, fine dining, and condo lifestyles. Its imagery is not a romanticization of the past; rather, it is a romanticization of the future.

2. The Reproduction of Urbanism—Alienation and Conspicuous Consumption

As with all capital processes, urbanism must reproduce itself. “Urbanism may be regarded as a particular form or patterning of the social process” (Harvey 2009, 196). In this way, urbanism can be thought of as a capitalist mode of production that serves to concentrate

capital, surplus value, and ownership of the means of production. “Mode of production” is not a simple concept, and Harvey spends several pages explaining the meaning (2009, 196-203). He does, however, provide a succinct explication that suffices for our purposes:

Each society will exhibit a particular blend of elements, a particular mix of activities and a particular patterning of social relationships. All of these, when taken together and insofar as they contribute to the production and reproduction of real life, constitute the mode of production. (Harvey 2009, 200)

Every society has its own mode of production that is unique unto it. “The survival of a society means the perpetuation of a given mode of production” (*ibid.*). Society defines itself in relation to its mode of production. A given mode of production “must create the conditions for its own perpetuation—the reproduction of these conditions becomes as important as production itself” (*ibid.*). Contemporary capitalist society has a mode of production that is based on urbanism and a market economy.

The survival of an economic system requires, for example, the survival of the property relations upon which it is based. Marx therefore draws attention to the way in which a mode of production “produces” the conditions for its own existence. Under these conditions a given mode of production becomes “its own prerequisite, and proceeds from itself, creating the presupposition of its maintenance and growth.” (Harvey 2009, 201).

Because urbanism is a process that concentrates capital, people, and the ever-expanding role of consumption, society must produce certain ‘urban values’ that serve to reinforce the continuation of urban development. It achieves its own reproduction through the creation of and appeal to cultural norms. Urban space becomes a created product of socioeconomic value.

Harvey argues that “created space is an integral part of an intricate sign-process that gives direction and meaning to daily life within the urban culture. The signs, symbols and signals that surround us in the urban environment are powerful influences” (Harvey 2009, 310). In late capitalist society, the signs and symbols remind us that market forces and the consumption of commodities are what matter. If we agree, as Koolhaas *et al.* posit, that modern

capitalism has reduced all social life to a spectacle, then we must also agree with Harvey's position that "[m]arket exchange reduces every human being to the status of a commodity" (Harvey 2009, 278). Harvey points out that few individuals find this to be an adequate measure of their own value or an adequate means by which to establish self-identity. Notions of community that orient around social bonds and networks begin to resist capitalism's reductionist tendencies, but community still gets co-opted, reduced, and converted into a commodity. In this way, community itself becomes a commodity. Such reductions are deeply unsatisfying because they alienate us, as humans, from the social bonds that community is supposed to provide. Harvey offers yet another keen insight:

There is a deep and underlying resistance even to interpreting problems in market exchange terms, for to do so is to admit that market exchange is the ultimate determinant of value in society—a notion which the very condition of being human makes us rightly revolt against. Yet it is only when we recognize the conditions under which we exist for what they are that it becomes possible to confront them directly. It is this aspect of analysis that the Marxist theory of alienation is most clearly directed towards. (Harvey 2009, 279)

The commodification process in capitalist social relations induces alienation. Harvey provides an excellent summary of the meaning of the term, alienation:

Marx there argues that human beings have, through history, become progressively more alienated (1) from the product of labour (from the world of objects and from nature), (2) from the activity of production (as control is lost over the means of production), (3) from their own inherent "species being" (which stems from the sense in which human beings are a part of nature and therefore have a human nature) and (4) from each other (as each individual assumes an identity and is forced to compete rather than to cooperate with others). These aspects of "universal alienation" are all present in the commodity. (Harvey 2009, 156)

Regardless of the "deep and underlying resistance," the commodification of people and social relations constitute the hegemony of contemporary political economy, which is reinforced by the signs and symbols of consumer capitalism.

A consumption-driven society manipulates the human psyche into believing that spending money is the only way to achieve the American dream. Discourse reminds us to keep

spending because consumers are what make the economy run, and a good economy translates to a good quality of life. Harvey posits:

The market exchange relationship affects the consciousness of the individual in a number of ways. The individual replaces states of *personal* dependence (characteristic of egalitarian and rank societies) by states of *material* dependence (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 70-73). The individual becomes “free” yet is controlled by the hidden hand of the market system. The ideology of societies penetrated by market exchange reflects this. (Harvey 2009 ed., 212; original emphases)

We can see in the case of South Lake Union a direct relationship between New Urbanist design as style and the act of spending in order to achieve that style through the new, urban-chic American dream. The American dream has shifted. Real estate is no longer exclusively about the single family home, but now incorporates the condo lifestyle of proximity to amenities and some notion of dense urban community as the driving commodity force.

Neil Smith builds on Harvey’s arguments that capitalist society shifted a few decades ago from an economy that was primarily driven by production to one that is driven by domestic consumption through imported products and the growth of the service sector (1996). Smith demonstrates relationships between a service sector economy of consumption and contemporary processes of urban development. He argues, “The mutual reconfiguration of consumption and production after 1973 had dramatic spatial effects” (*ibid.*, 116). These relationships commonly lead to increases in the polarization of cities. He continues, “the consumption ethic and consumption-led urbanization have continued to be a reality for many in the middle classes while they are a “dream turned sour” for most industrial and service workers” (*ibid.*). Is this what urban development looks like? When conventional assessment of neighborhood vitality measures the quantity and quality of retail and service establishments, it demonstrates that small-scale consumption is a determining factor in our evaluation of what constitutes urban communities. Such a neighborhood, however, becomes a kind of community

that requires money to participate.

Developers market the image of SLU as distinct from the rest of Seattle. Smith explains that a commodity market homogenizes neighborhoods through gentrification while producing an image of diversity to make consumers believe in the redifferentiation and diversity of their own social landscapes (1996). Marketing must create an iconic image of the neighborhood that resonates with the targeted clientele. The neighborhood must be transformed into a desirable consumer good. Smith poignantly remarks, “Whether in the urbs, burbs or exurbs...the perpetual search for difference and distinction amid mass consumption is eternally frustrated. It can lead to a new “gentrification kitsch” in which cultural difference itself becomes mass produced” (*ibid.*, 115). In other words, cultural difference also becomes a commodity as it is adopted by the marketing strategies of real estate development. It becomes a selling point for community, implying that variation and diversity are desirable elements and a New Urbanist project can fulfill that desire for diversity. The commodification of cultural difference exposes how deeply market exchange reaches into our collective understandings of value. We are able to see this depth by recognizing that a commodity is more than just a simple object or “thing in itself.” Instead, we must understand the

commodity as an expression of innumerable social relationships which, through a simple changing of hands, can undergo a radical transformation of meaning. The “commodity” subsumes within itself everything else that is happening in the social situation in which it is produced and consumed. (Harvey 2009, 156)

Even with people’s genuine desire for community, for example, value as a process of market exchange labels community as a ‘demand’ that the market then attempts to supply. Community (however it is defined) continues to represent sets of human relationships; but, the commodification process values those relationships as socioeconomic relations according to its own logic (which is to say, monetarily, or how much they are worth) and subsequently defines

those social relations insofar as they function within the commodity system. It is through this process that we are able to purchase the images of community and cultural diversity, whether or not we know they are images.

The Generic City embodies the paradox of mass-produced, homogenized forms of heterogeneity. To attract the targeted clientele, developers use signs and discourse that distinguish a neighborhood as the new and best place in the city, better than all the other places, because it is different, because it provides community. The statement that follows is quoted directly from Vulcan's website regarding SLU:

The energy of an urban environment. The beauty of a lakefront setting. The opportunity of a lifetime. That's South Lake Union.

One of Vulcan's largest and most active projects is the redevelopment of more than 60 acres in the South Lake Union neighborhood, which is adjacent to downtown Seattle.

As Seattle's downtown lakefront neighborhood, South Lake Union offers 24-hour opportunities to enjoy the **best** of the Northwest lifestyle. The neighborhood blends **modern culture** with **historic sensibilities**; where leading edge organizations co-exist with urban lofts and penthouses to create an **authentic vibrant community** that offers something for **everyone**:

- High performance workplaces;
- Lofts, townhomes and penthouses for rent and for sale;
- Eclectic restaurants, hotels, galleries and boutiques;
- Whole Foods Market
- Waterfront boardwalks and pedestrian-friendly streets;
- A 12-acre lakefront park and vibrant public open space;
- An electric streetcar that circulates throughout the neighborhood and connects to rapid transit;
- Access to kayaking, sailing, hiking, and biking trails; and
- Schools, museums, arts and entertainment.

In addition to becoming one of Seattle's **most desirable neighborhoods** to live in, South Lake Union has become home to many of the region's top creative class and headquarter companies including NBBJ, Tommy Bahama, Cole & Weber/Red Cell, Group Health Cooperative, Seattle Biomedical Research (SBRI), UW Medicine, and REI.

South Lake Union is also the current and future home of organizations on the forefront of vital life sciences research. These organizations are committed to curing diseases and finding solutions to prolong life across our global community.

The emphases are my own in order to spotlight what Harvey and Smith critique. The marketing

of SLU requires that it seem unique. The irony is that developers all over the city must employ the same advertising strategy for other developments, which all tend to look remarkably *similar* to each other. They are in different places, distinct in the details of the specific businesses that are located in each neighborhood, but the overall spatial patterns of condos, apartments, restaurants, and bars, as well as some kind of office space, homogenize and erase the more subtle characteristics of neighborhoods that have evolved over several decades.


The marketing of architecture works to reinforce the falsified desires to which Koolhaas *et al.* refer (1995). Bocoock argues that people are influenced to desire the products of social and cultural practices of modern consumerism even if they cannot afford to buy them (1993). Summarizing Baudrillard, Bocoock writes, “Consumption is seen here, therefore, as being based increasingly upon desires, not simply upon need.... In the social formations of western capitalism...consumption has become linked with desires, through the use of signs and symbols in selling products to the majority of consumers” (*ibid.*, 3). Figure 7, a brochure advertising one of Vulcan’s projects, attempts to evoke desire for the urban lifestyle (www.vulcan.com). Urbanism, to continue with Koolhaas *et al.*’s formulation, is the symbol of the consumer’s purpose. Many, if not most, trends in consumer style originate in cities, which are most readily available for purchase. The trends that people choose to consume help define their identity. Bocoock writes, “The processes involved in living in the city increase the awareness of style, of the need to consume within a repertory which is both distinctive to a specific social group and expressive of individual preferences” (1993, 17). Not only are there signs within and part of architecture, people purchase certain items and thereby become representations themselves in order to create their own identity. People in the big city must consume in order to articulate a sense of identity that they want other members of society to recognize. People mark themselves

Figure 7

GET IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR

SOUTH LAKE UNION

SEATTLE'S NEWEST RETAIL DESTINATION



A detailed architectural rendering of a vibrant urban street scene in South Lake Union, Seattle. The image shows a mix of modern and historic architecture. On the left, a multi-story building with a white facade and large windows stands next to a brick building with green-framed windows and striped awnings. A streetcar is visible on the left, and a silver convertible is on the right. Pedestrians are walking on the sidewalk, and there are trees and planters along the street.

- › Be a part of Seattle's newest retail destination and all the great improvements to South Lake Union
- › Educated, affluent employees
- › South Lake Union is a dynamic 24/7 urban destination with a great mix of office workers to city dwellers
- › Urban setting
- › Strategic location
- › Join Whole Foods Market, Amazon.com, PATH, Tom Douglas, Flying Fish, Tutta Bella Pizzeria, Seastar Restaurant and more
- › The access to South Lake Union via Seattle Streetcar, walking, biking or driving is a perfect daytime or night-time destination

as part of a social group in order to be interpreted and understood by others (*ibid.*). They achieve identity through consumption; according to Baudrillard's argument, consumption "can be conceptualized as a process in which a purchaser of an item is actively engaged in trying to create and maintain a *sense of identity* through the display of purchased goods," from cars to clothes to houses (Bocock 1993, 67; original emphases). Consumerism "has become an active process involving the symbolic construction of a sense of both collective and individual

identities” (*ibid.*). Identities are actively constructed, a process in which “consumption has come to play a central role” (*ibid.*). This argument stems from Baudrillard’s “that all consumption is always the consumption of symbolic signs,” the meanings of which are generated within the system of signs and symbols that engage the consumer’s attention in order to induce the consumer’s desire for a “sense of identity” (*ibid.*). Urbanism is an ideology of city development, but also of lifestyles, status, and spectacle.

3. The Urban Way of Life

There are multiple examples in SLU of how an ‘urban’ identity is created. It is most visible through the consumer choices that people make, whether they are employees of Amazon or regular customers at REI, Starbucks, coffee shops that are specifically *not* Starbucks, Whole Foods, or one of the five Tom Douglas restaurants. Late capitalist society emphasizes the construction of an identity that is realized through consumerism. This kind of individuality formed through consumerism has consequences though. The images of urban society that provoke us to buy have overwhelming effects on the sensory experience of an individual. The overexposure to signs and symbols of commodity culture in urban environments desensitizes us to the physical and emotional stimuli surrounding us. The ubiquitous images provoke us to buy, and thus induce what Georg Simmel described in the 1900s as a “blasé attitude,” which becomes one of the most significant responses to the excessive stimuli of urban setting (Harvey 2000, 168). These stimuli exist for the express purpose of influencing people to consume. Simmel, one of the first sociologists to focus specifically on questions of urbanism, oriented much of his analyses around the social effects of modernity.

Peter Saunders, an urban sociologist himself, provides a thorough overview of Simmel’s

work in his book *Social Theory and the Urban Question* (1984). Saunders explains, regarding Simmel's argument, "Of particular significance here is the development of an advanced division of labour in society, together with the establishment of a money economy" (87). Both are symptoms of capitalism's tendency to alienate, a process that is exacerbated and reinforced by urbanism. Alienation (of people from each other, of people from labor, of people from their own "species being") affects people most notably in cities. For Simmel, this is because, as "a group expands, so it threatens to immerse the individual within the mass," causing the "intellect of the individual [to be] eroded by the emotion of the masses" (*ibid.*, 86). Simmel comes to the conclusion that the "larger the group, the more impersonal group interaction becomes, and the less concerned members become with the unique personal qualities of others.... In the large group, the individual increasingly stands alone" (*ibid.*). In this light, cities lead to impersonal relations and alienation from the human nature of others. In part, alienation is due to size and diversity of people, but only concomitantly with two other aspects—the division of labor and the money economy. Saunders summarizes Simmel's argument about how the division of labor affects society. "First, it fragments and segmentalizes social life," creating a social experience in which the interactions of people are tangential to each other instead of wholly integrated (87). "Second, the division of labour reinforces the self-consciousness engendered by an increase in size," which occurs because "the individual is constantly exposed to an infinite variety of changing situations and sensations in which his own unique personality is the only constant factor.... The division of labour therefore encourages egoism and individualism" (*ibid.*). If we agree with the preceding statement, it is no wonder that the social bonds of community can be simultaneously eroded and converted into a commodity. "Third, the development of the division of labour in society brings about an alienation of the individual from the entire cultural world

that he and others have created. For Simmel, alienation is the unavoidable effect of modernity” (*ibid.*). Such alienation and depersonalization is fortified by the money economy. “Money is totally depersonalized, for its exchange leaves no trace of the personality of its previous owner. It is a leveler, for it reduces all qualitative values to a common quantitative base” (*ibid.*, 88). As an effect, the broader social relations become mechanistic roles, rather than based on cultural customs and personal qualities. The social bonds of community may still exist, but only within the fragmentation and reductionism of cities.

Some thirty years after Simmel, Louis Wirth attempted to further develop a theory of urbanism also oriented around social relations (Saunders 1984, 96). I should note here that Harvey clearly articulates, in Chapter 6 of *Social Justice and the City*, that a general theory of urbanism is probably impossible to construct (195). That does not diminish the value of Wirth’s insights into urban processes and social relations. It does mean, however, that Wirth’s (and Simmel’s) constructs must be understood as conceptual but not necessarily empirically accurate (Saunders 1984). Wirth follows Simmel’s argument that large groups of people (cities) means greater variation, which in turns suggests degrees of spatial segregation based on ethnicity, race, status, occupation, etc. He goes on to say that “an increase in size reduces the chances of any two individuals knowing each other personally, and that this leads to segmentalism in social relationships” (*ibid.*, 95). Wirth writes:

The contacts of the city may indeed be face to face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental. The reserve, the indifference and the blasé outlook which urbanites manifest in their relationships may thus be regarded as devices for immunising themselves against the personal claims and expectations of others. (quoted in Saunders 1984, 95)

Saunders clarifies the important point that Wirth does not claim that primary (more personal) relationships disappear in cities. Rather, he argues that in a large settlement, an individual will personally know a smaller proportion of the people with whom he interacts than an individual

in a small settlement. For Wirth, “this fact alone explains the development of the social distance that characterizes urban life” (*ibid.*, 96). As social distance expands (as person-to-person alienation increases), “people relate to each other on the basis of their specific roles rather than their personal qualities” (*ibid.*). Alienation is a phenomenon of urbanism that manifests in the social relations in cities. From his essay, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” originally published in 1938, Wirth observes, “Nowhere has mankind been farther removed from organic nature than under the conditions of life characteristic of great cities” (2000, 98). One of the results of being removed from “organic nature” is how people treat each other according to mechanistic roles. The processes of alienation that arise from size and heterogeneity cause social relations to change:

The bonds of kinship, of neighborliness, and the sentiments arising out of living together for generations under a common folk tradition are likely to be absent or, at best, relatively weak in an aggregate the members of which have such diverse origins and backgrounds. Under such circumstances competition and formal control mechanisms furnish the substitutes for the bonds of solidarity that are relied upon to hold a folk society together. (Wirth 2000, 99)

For Wirth, the mechanistic roles of relating in cities are of crucial importance. He writes, “Our acquaintances tend to stand in a relationship of utility to us in the sense that the role which each one plays in our life is overwhelmingly regarded as a means for the achievement of our own ends” (*ibid.*, 100). In a market economy, social relations (beyond friendship and kinship) exist as temporary interactions for the realization a specific goal, usually revolving around exchange. Harvey reminds us that the price system coordinates a large number of individual activities through market behavior (Harvey 2009, 199). Relations are reduced to the purpose of production and consumption. Even in the 1930s, Wirth recognized some of the problems with the urban process (though he did not label it as capitalism *per se*). He notes, “On the whole, the city discourages an economic life in which the individual in time of crisis has a basis of

subsistence to fall back upon” (2000, 103). Homelessness is the most obvious example of how people’s needs are not met when they are unable to pay for housing, which is a commodity in the market system. Wirth further connects his argument to a dearth of regular community support networks. He argues, “What the communal services do not furnish the urbanite must purchase, and there is virtually no human need which has remained unexploited by commercialism” (*ibid.*, 104). As social relations become mechanistic and based on economic roles, community networks diminish in strength, and the services that social bonds can provide (largely informally) are replaced by commodities that are accessible only with money. Social relations themselves are commodified. Though Wirth wrote in the 1930s, much of his insight is still relevant today.

Because of the overwhelming sensations in urban environments and the mechanization of social relations, desensitization becomes a necessary response. Expressing identity through consumption patterns makes a person anxious “to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces” (quoted in Bocock 1993, 17). As the size of the built environment diversifies and increases in population and in spatial extent, an essential paradox of urban existence becomes visible: The social circle gets larger and wider which leads to greater individual freedom while reducing the quality of human relationships within those circles. People desire community as a sort of antidote to urban anonymity because it is precisely this urban anonymity that wears holes into the sense of community. Signs and symbols attempt to fill these holes by evoking imaginary communities and experiences of commonality and safety. The environments themselves become images of community because they mostly consist of spaces of consumption. Urbanism as a mode of production uses advertising and images of the urban consumer lifestyle as a means to continuously propagate its own mechanistic properties of commodification. SLU embodies what Harvey describes as the

“continuous spectacles of commodity culture, including the commodification of the spectacle itself” (*ibid.*). If a community of commodity culture is what one seeks, then SLU is the place to find it.

CONCLUSION

Harvey's project is to take on the entire dominant mode of production of contemporary capitalist society. He fully rejects the notion that people are valued only according to the market exchange mode and he demands that we begin to imagine a political economy in which people are not alienated and reduced to commodities or consumers. Regarding the current system, Harvey sets up his critique of the origin of consumer demand:

Effective demand depends ultimately upon consumption. If we reject the view that mankind possesses a natural and insatiable appetite for consumer goods (as opposed to a culturally instilled commodity fetishism), then we are forced to consider the origins of effective demand. Within the global economy there is an obvious answer—the unfulfilled and real needs are everywhere apparent. (Harvey 2009, 272)

He implies here that demand stems from unmet needs. This is in part true, but the notion of need gets manipulated as well, by using advertisements and images to instill desires and perceptions of need into the consumer. It is for this reason that he clearly articulates his view that demand is primarily a “culturally instilled commodity fetishism.” The current mode of production is a process of reiterating commodity culture so that it continues to propagate itself.

Marketing strategies focus on either urban lifestyles or community, sometimes both. Urbanism, however, has the effect of enhancing anonymity in the built environment through increases in a city's density and size. The human bonds that manifest through community are the antidote to anonymity. Community implies that people know each other, share common spaces and resources, and possibly even care for each other. But when community is co-opted by marketing strategies for real estate development, community itself becomes a commodity. Community becomes manufactured. We can see this in all its spectacular beauty in Vulcan's advertisements for its housing developments in SLU. Anyone who can afford it can participate in this brand new community with all the consumer amenities of the hip, urban lifestyle. The marketing of community is a way to exploit the phenomenon of urban anonymity. This

marketing exploit is so effective because it stems out of people's feeling of a loss of community in their daily lives. The contradiction is that the market system itself induces the loss of community. Developers can advertise that their project provides community without actually having to deliver on genuine social bonds; they need only provide the amenities that people expect of an urban lifestyle. Community gets equated with access to the diverse array of amenities, which perpetuates the capitalist mode of production but does little to generate genuine social bonds.

SLU represents the way powerful interests in the market economy reproduce their own ideologies through the production of fixed capital. In the mode of the global economy, the current development in SLU is one of the best ways Seattle can leverage itself in competition against other cities for further investment and growth. It embodies the ways that New Urbanism recreates inner cities as consumer spectacles that claim to offer 'authentic community' for everyone. Such discourse fails to mention that those who cannot pay for the products are invariably excluded from the majority of the activities of SLU. Social relations along with community are reduced to the commodity of the spectacle.

For Harvey, the challenge is to understand in full these processes so that we can learn to change them. "The chicken-and-egg problem of how to change ourselves through changing our world must be set slowly but persistently in motion" (Harvey 2000, 238). The desire for change is common in the planning profession, as well as the desire to eliminate poverty. Harvey laments, however, that so few professionals "call into question the forces which rule the very heart of our economic system" (Harvey 2009, 144). His critique of current liberal policies is their inability to actually effect change, which stems from an unwillingness to discuss the basic characteristics of a capitalist market economy. "Thus we devise all manner of solutions except

those which might challenge the continuance of that economy” (*ibid.*). His call is that we begin to reimagine the dominant mode of production.

The seeming unwillingness is not entirely conscious for many people though. There are two aspects that affect people’s inability to undertake the attempt to reimagine the political economy. On one hand, our entire system of knowledge conditions us not to question the dominate mode.

The whole organization of knowledge (the organization of the learning process, the structure of the educational system, the division of knowledge into distinctive disciplines, and so on) also reflects the ruling interests in society, for these are all part of the process which contributes to the reproduction of society. (Harvey 2009, 147)

In many cases, people are never confronted with capitalism’s tendency to perpetuate poverty through the alienation of people from labor, from the products of labor, from other people (by reducing social relations to commodities), and even from their own “species being.” The hegemony permeates so deeply that the ability even to know how to critique the system requires concerted movement against inertia.

On the other hand, the system conditions us through the experience of our daily lives.

Harvey declares:

the fierce spatiotemporalities of daily life—driven by technologies that emphasize speed and rapid reductions in the friction of distance and of turnover times—preclude time to imagine or construct alternatives other than those forced unthinkingly upon us as we rush to perform our respective professional roles in the name of technological progress and endless capital accumulation. (Harvey 2000, 237)

Our daily lives are so engrossed in the mechanistic roles society produces for us that we are unable to spend time pondering alternatives to inequalities inherent in capitalist social relations. The fast-paced life is one of the greatest and most real clichés of the urban lifestyle. Finding the time and energy to imagine alternatives is the task nevertheless.

Harvey calls for a change. He concludes his seminal book, *Social Justice and the City*, “It remains for revolutionary theory to chart the path from an urbanism based in exploitation to an urbanism appropriate for the human species. And it remains for revolutionary practice to accomplish such a transformation” (2009, 314). No easy task, of course, and certainly beyond the scope of any sole individual. It is also a process that requires substantial upheaval against the dominant modes of production. At the same time, however, much like the creation of community itself, an effective holistic shift in modes of production is an evolutionary process. It does not happen overnight. The belief that community can be built rapidly with novel design is one of New Urbanism’s primary contradictions and failures. The creation of community is a slow process of engaging the interstices of the urban society in ways that allow alternatives to commodity reductionism to be replaced by a conceptualization of community that is based on social bonds and human relationships. Value must, in an inverse sense, be alienated from exchange and melded back into the belief of the intrinsic nature of the human “species being.” Harvey challenges his readers to undertake the problem:

The problem is then to enlist in the struggle to advance a more socially just, politically emancipatory, and ecologically sane mix of spatio-temporal production processes rather than to acquiesce to those imposed by uncontrolled capital accumulation, backed by class privilege and gross inequalities of political-economic power. (Harvey 1997, 3)

Perhaps one of the first steps is to more thoroughly infiltrate the paradigm of planning, and encourage candid, honest, constructive discussion about the inherent problems of the market exchange economy. Though social change is seldom realized in the abstractions of academia, it regularly and profoundly foments the kinds of actions required for both revolutionary strategies against the dominant mode and emancipatory acts within the interstices of society. Both approaches are necessary and relevant, and it is the task of social and methodological theory to

invite discussion around the revolutionary *and* the evolutionary nature of changes that Harvey and many others hope to see.

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