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The Rhetorical Dimensions of Place-making: Texts, Structures, and Movement in Atlantic Station

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THE RHETORICAL DIMENSIONS OF PLACE-MAKING:
TEXTS, STRUCTURES, AND MOVEMENT IN ATLANTIC STATION

by

BROOK ALYS IRVING

Under the Direction of Dr. Jeffrey Bennett

ABSTRACT

The suggestion that cities “speak” has become a growing interest in communication scholarship, yet the particular ways city spaces communicate remains under theorized. I argue that the intersection of people with spaces, the networks between texts, objects, and movement are all implicated in the rhetorical process of place-making in which individuals are both shaped by and shaping space. I envision this process to involve three interdependent modes of symbolization: textual constructions *about* place, symbolic activities *of* place, and movement and action *in* space. The mode of inquiry proposed here contributes to a body of scholarship interested in exploring the multiple ways cities “speak” by forwarding a reading of space as text. Focusing on the new urbanist community Atlantic Station in Atlanta, GA, this analysis reveals the dynamic tensions between the community’s textual representations, the structural symbolization of the development, and the uses of the space.

INDEX WORDS: Place, Space, Rhetoric, New urbanism, Communicative city, Atlantic Station

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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Place-making

“Sometimes it is important to find out what the city is, instead of what it was, or what it should be. That is what drove me to Atlanta – an intuition that the real city at the end of the 20th century could be found there” - Rem Koolhaas (1995, p. 75).

At the start of the 21st century, the Atlanta skyline is peppered with clusters of high-rises and mid-rises, domineering signs of the city’s status as the urban center of the South. Construction cranes erupt from the city streets all over the Metro area, reflecting the city’s massive transformations and growth in recent years. Snuggly nestled within all of these changing neighborhoods sits Atlantic Station, a new-urbanist community, home to four high-rises of its own, a thriving retail area, and eventually residential units for over 10,000 people. Banners throughout the private development announce “Life Happens Here” and in the four years since the neighborhood opened its doors to businesses and residents, a very particular kind of lifestyle has been enacted.

This thesis is aimed at exploring the ways Atlantic Station has emerged as a bounded place within urban Atlanta. The rhetorical dimensions of the place-making process reveal Atlantic Station to be a site where the tensions between public and private space, urban livability and consumption practices, and personal agency and power are all engaged in a dynamic contestation. The intersection of people with spaces, and the networks between texts, objects, and movement are all vital to the place-making process wherein individual subjectivities are both shaped by and shaping space through mobility and action, language, and structures. I envision this process to involve three interdependent modes of symbolization: textual constructions *about* place, symbolic activities *of* place, and movement and action *in* space. Engaging the rhetorical

practice of place-making illuminates the ways spaces are defined and altered, thereby energizing discursive possibilities within places.

Scholars would be well served by addressing the ways these three interconnected processes operate to form a geographical place that generates communicative practices. Scrutinizing the production of place through texts, structures, and movements unmasks “the complex spatialized processes and multiple heterogeneous ways in which our identities are pushed and pulled” (Shome, 2003, p. 55). Space as both “a means and medium” (p. 40) for the construction of politics and power relationships is, as Shome asserts, a central component of communicative practices. The critical heuristic I am proposing provides a foundation for exploring the ways places are infused with ideologically-laden meanings that support these relationships of power. As such, this inquiry contributes to a body of scholarship preoccupied with the multiple ways cities “speak” by forwarding a reading of space as text.

City space specifically is a site where, through the process of place-making, identities are forged, and alliances and communities are mobilized. As Gumpert and Drucker (2008) note in their reading of the city as a communicative entity, “cities remain captivating, living, economic, manufacturing, entertainment centers” that, in their size, density and heterogeneity create “opportunities for meeting others” (p. 196) and establishing a sense of community. Likewise, in his reading of urbanism Krieger (2008) argues that “the virtue of cities” lies in the connectivity of people and places within city space. Urban life is constituted by the constant and on-going interaction of people, the overarching boundaries of place that foster connectivity between city streets and neighborhoods (and thereby residents on those streets and in those neighborhoods), and “the sense of proximity to a public realm” (p. 10) that imbues the urban environment with a degree of openness. While scholars are increasingly critical of the extent to which cities do, in

fact, foster communal activities between urban residents (Zukin, 1995), there remains a powerful conviction that it is within the city that differences are confronted, bonds are forged, and social change is possible (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008; Hamelink, 2008).

I evaluate Atlantic Station because it is a site where the rhetorical dimensions of place-making are rooted in political and economic transformations that threaten to forever alter the practices that enact urbanism. Atlantic Station is a development that has been “placed” through the textual and structural communicative practices of the neighborhood’s owners and managers. It is a private development that has been largely defined by the corporation that owns it (Atlantic Station LLC). Moreover, it has been strategically constructed to present an idea of livability centered on a limited number of activities, most of which emphasize consumerism (Hankins and Powers, forthcoming). It has been heralded as a “model” for urban re-development projects (Shelton, 2005), suggesting that more will follow that use similar place-making practices.¹ In constructing Atlantic Station, the urban resident has been increasingly marginalized, through the negation of what Hankins and Powers (forthcoming) refer to as a “political public.” An analysis of how this place has proved salient to the larger Atlanta community is thus an important consideration. A reading of Atlantic Station suggests that the development has self-defined in a number of limiting ways, establishing the community as pseudo-diverse site for consumptive activities, absent of many features traditionally associated with a neighborhood. The tensions, however, between what Atlantic Station is, as a textual or structural artifact, and the ways it is used, suggests that even heavily controlled places are infused with elements of individual agency. This component of the critical heuristic I have outlined highlights the transformative

¹ Jacoby Development has already begun a similar project in another urban area of Atlanta, re-developing a now-closed Ford factory into a mixed-use space.

nature of urban spaces, and exposes the malleable boundaries of discursive possibilities within a given place.

In order to substantiate these conclusions I will outline the three components involved in the process of place-making. Following a review of critical spatial scholarship, I will propose a critical heuristic for exploring the construction of place. Finally, I will show how the rhetorical process of place-making is activated in Atlantic Station.

The Communicative City

In June 2008 *The New York Times Magazine* ran its annual architecture issue, entitled “The Next City.” The authors of the issue were interested in the ways the city of the future would be imagined, built, designed, peopled, landscaped, and argued with. Modern metropolises, it seems, have rhetorical power, and, at least in the eyes of *The New York Times Magazine*, the ways in which planners, governments, and citizens argue with the city are as important as they ways they are designed and inhabited. But what does arguing with the city entail? Cities, as countless theorists and planners have noted, are fluid, vibrant spaces where the interaction of people and businesses, landscapes and technoscapes, industry and retail is at once always occurring and always fluctuating (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008; Burd, 2008; Carpentier, 2008; Hamelink, 2008). Within this endless ebb and flow of modern urban existence, global capital, civic action, and the framework of social life is continually formed and re-formed (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008). The movement between an ever-expanding set of urban practices is constitutive of the city itself and reflects what scholars have termed *the communicative city*, the “interactive patterns of infrastructure” within a geographic locale and, as global flows and technological interconnectivity increase, the “extended symbolic mass-mediated projections and representations of its civic image and brand” (Burd, 2008, p. 209). Engaging elements of the

communicative city thus involves not only analyzing the discursive practices at the local level (for example, city council meetings, local media outlets, and political debates) but also evaluating the ways cities present themselves to the rest of the world (through, for example, internet marketing campaigns, or a presence in global media outlets).

The desire to formulate a complex and layered conceptualization of the communicative city reflects “a concern for the quality of life in an increasingly urban world” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 206) and the particular ways individuals and the built environment interact. Communication practices are a central component of this interaction. Gumpert and Drucker suggest that in isolating and evaluating the communicative networks that contribute to the shaping of the city, the possibilities for social change and transformation in urban planning are elucidated.

The communicative city as a theoretical concept engages both discursive possibilities at the local level and the discursive structures operating at the global level (through both global capital flows and technological connectivity). In an era when the interconnected nature of the local/global framework has profound implications on collective community cohesion and processes of identification at the local level, the communicative city framework outlines potential ways in which the discursive potency of a city can be understood. I contend that scholarship centered on communicative city theory would benefit from an understanding of urban space as a combination of a *number* of interrelated processes that contribute to a reading of space as a communicative entity. The critical heuristic I have proposed marks one possible way to approach the multiple components that contribute to an understanding of space as text. A brief review of existing communicative city scholarship situates this project within this growing area of research.

Scholarship addressing the communicative city as a concept centers on a number of interrelated nodes or networks of features through which the city “speaks.” Gumpert and Drucker (2008) organize these features around four categories: fixed and semi-fixed features including landscape, climate, dwellings, parks, streets, and the city-specific communication infrastructure (i.e., the modes through which city business is conducted, and the investments a city makes toward technological advancements); dynamic features that include the degree to which public and private spaces are transformable and flexible and the degree to which both events and structures in the city are unpredictable; policy features including zoning regulations, regulatory measures, and the economic prowess of the city itself; and finally, traditional “communication” features including information processing systems, cultural venues, and entertainment sources. Scholars suggest that these four categories function discursively within extensive networks and spheres of influence and constitute ways the city exists as a communicative entity.

The organizing nodes around which the communicative city is based situates urban agglomerations within the vast possibilities of global space. The city as a communicative entity embodies both the discursive and performative possibilities of not just the populace, but the architecture, design, and infrastructure of a place. It is also the situatedness of a given place within a larger global system. The communicative city, in this light, is a space of possibility, change, and engagement. Scholarship growing out of this concept is still emerging. Burd (2008) and Georgiou (2008), respectively, have explored one aspect of these networks by addressing the changing local and global communicative practices as products of technological changes influencing city communication. Within these readings, the city extends beyond its geographical location as a mediated entity. City space is thus conceptualized as the local and material, and

also as a virtual entity through its representations and presence on technology networks like the internet. Carpentier (2008) has suggested alternative media sources offer a prime example of the ways urban spaces might be transformed or influenced by local, independent outlets, suggesting that the city already embodies liberatory discursive practices in the form of local medias.

Communicative city theory, however, has yet to sufficiently outline in practice an assessment of the polyvalent communicative practices operating within and upon a given place. Research has focused largely on the communicative practices of cities as they are activated in media or marketing campaigns, relying on the explicit textual artifacts of a location as evidence that the city embodies a communicative entity.

I contend that a comprehensive analysis of the ways texts, structures, and movement interact with and contradict one another to create a place that communicates is a necessary move within this body of research. The critical heuristic proposed here evaluates the signification practices mobilized in texts, but also in structures and movement, to show how place-making is activated. Like the fragments of rhetorical discourses, the discursive practices out of which the communicative city functions provide “scraps and pieces of evidence” (McGee, 1990, p. 279) from which urban communicative meanings are forged. And so, I return to the question posed earlier in this section: what does arguing with the city entail? As I will show, my conceptualization of place-making offers one possible way of exploring the dynamic communicative components that define and operate within urban spaces. By evaluating texts, structures, and movement as contributors to this process this study assesses urban spaces as communicative entities that are formed and transforming through varied, multiple, sometimes antagonistic discursive practices – spaces that embody rhetorical possibilities and impossibilities through a variety of media and entities. This project is rooted in communicative city theory, but

draws inspiration from a number of cross-disciplinary conversations aimed at exploring the rhetorical, political, and cultural components of place-making. I will briefly introduce literature aimed at exploring the ways space can be understood as social production and the emergence of defined places that occurs as part of that construction, before turning to new urbanism as a means of interrogating Atlantic Station as a communicative entity.

Producing Space

There are parallels between the triadic process that I suggest constitutes the rhetorical dimensions of place-making and Henri Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualization of the production of space. For Lefebvre, an analysis of the ways space is produced is invariably an analysis of social practices. Space, Lefebvre (1991) argues, is socially produced, and is "revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space on the one hand and physical space on the other" (p. 27). In other words, the construction of space involves not only concrete and tangible space but also the ways that space exists as a mental construct. The production of space is thus an irreducible process that complexly intertwines physical and social contexts.

Lefebvre (1991) proposes a "conceptual triad" (p. 33) to engage the ways social space is produced. He argues that this production involves: representations of space, spatial practices and representational spaces. Representations of space are, for Lefebvre, "conceptualized space" (p. 38). These representations are the domain of planners and architects, and often emerge in the form of "verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs" (p. 39). Representations of space roughly correspond to my reading of the textual representations of Atlantic Station, the first component of the critical heuristic I am proposing. Spatial practices, within Lefebvre's framework, "embrace production and re-production and the particular locations and spatial sets

characteristic of each social formation” (p. 33). Spatial practices constitute what is perceived about a spatial formation, “fallin[ing] between the daily routine and the infrastructure that allows it” (Conrad, 2006, p. 3). Spatial practices correspond to my reading of the structural composition of Atlantic Station, and the symbolic dimension of these structures through architectural form and design components. Finally, Lefebvre argues representational spaces can be understood as lived space “through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users,’” (p. 39). Representational space, in this reading, is the “space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (p. 39), and as such, it is the space where social change and spatial transformation might occur. Representational space roughly corresponds to my reading of the movements and activities of people within Atlantic Station.

Social space is thus transforming and transformative, dictating and dictated by social structures, organizations, and inhabitants within a society. In his articulation of a socio-spatial dialectic, Soja (1989) contends that “the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience” (p. 80), and the socio-spatial dialectic can be understood as the inseparable link between the social and the spatial. These meanings are purposively constructed to offer support for existing modes of cohabitation (and notably domination and exploitation within a given location). The socio-spatial dialectic reveals “how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life” (p. 6). Massey (1993) suggests that within this framework we might understand the emergence of place as “not simply areas on maps, but shifting bundles of social spatial relations which are maintained by the exercise of power relations” (cited in Mansvelt, 2005, p. 56). The critical heuristic I have proposed is aimed at an evaluation of the rhetorical dimensions of these

processes. Engaging the ways rhetorical constructs are mobilized and situated within the larger urban totality illuminates the ways that a place is constructed and manipulated.

Defining Place as a Rhetorical Activity

The conceptualization of place as a rhetorical artifact has been explored from a number of angles (Clark; 2004; de Certeau; 1984; McKerrow; 1999; Shome; 2003; Wood, 1998, 2003, 2005, 2009). Wood (1998) has suggested that space encapsulates an endless sphere of potentialities which is “rendered rhetorical when an individual or group attempts to impose shape upon its constituent points” (p. 278). It is within this process of shaping that spaces take on the qualities of place. Indeed as philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) has postulated, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (p. 66). In other words, within the on-going struggles, tensions, and interactions that are born out of the socio-spatial dialectic, places emerge, imbued with ideas and knowledges. Places, then, “are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are spaces people are attached to in one way or another” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7). Geographers reading place in this manner subscribe to a school of thought rooted in the social construction of place, and the “politics behind the ways in which place is deployed” (Staeheli, 2003, p. 167). This notion of place is consistent with de Certeau’s (1984) distinction between space and place, a distinction I will return to in greater detail. But it is important to note here that central to this practice of place-making, and, in fact, a driving factor in the slippage between place and space is the practice of discourse. In de Certeau’s (1984) reading, it is rhetorical acts that “carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces and spaces into places” (p. 118), creating places of meaning, and spaces of possibility.

Clark (2004) has termed this process the creation of a landscape, suggesting that “land becomes landscape when it is assigned the role of symbol, and as symbol it functions rhetorically” (p. 9).² For Clark, material space (land) becomes conceptual space (landscape) through both the public discourses about it and public experiences within it. Thus landscape is a decidedly rhetorical entity in that it symbolizes “a common home and, thus, a common identity” (p. 9) reflecting “the attitudes and aspirations of a national culture” (p. 13). The intersection of place-making and rhetoric, is a process of identification rooted in public encounters with symbolic landscapes. Clark’s (2004) analysis is aimed at the expression of a national identity through tourism of the country’s prominent destination sites, but his proposal that landscapes are ultimately rhetorical entities can be extended beyond tourism practices that invoke a sense of nationalism. If, as Clark (2004) suggests, “Americans have learned from their public culture to encounter in the landscape symbols of their common home, or more precisely, of the common identity that is to be shared by those who make their homes there” (p. 14), then the symbols of landscape that help to construct a sense of identity can be traced at the local level as well. Rhetorical landscapes can help to create a sense of American identity, but they also contribute to our identification as residents of states (“I am a Texan”), cities (“I am a New Yorker”), or neighborhoods (“I am an Upper-East-sider”).

While the construction of place and the identification practices that occur because of our interaction with it are, as Clark (2004) has established, rooted in the symbolic dimensions of landscape, the organization and orientation of place is often understood as purely neutral and static. McKerrow (1999) has suggested that this process creates what he has termed “place logic”

² Clark’s distinction between land and landscape is not synonymous with a distinction between space and place, but his notion of landscape does correspond with some elements of place as a rhetorical entity. Land, for Clark, is purely material. Landscape, on the other hand, is symbolic and public. It constitutes a shared sense of identity and it “is to experience a sense of being at home” (p. 14) through these processes of identification.

or nomos, in its material and symbolic construction within lived experience, “it is the world of maps and directions, of social planning and an understanding of what goes where space-wise” (p. 279). Material spatialities and representations of place are generally “unquestioned by those involved, they are expressed and enacted as one’s ‘second nature’” (p. 280). Indeed, as Lefebvre (1991) noted, “ideology which, in positing the transparency of space, identifies knowledge, information and communication” (p. 29), thereby establishing the rhetorical possibilities within a produced social space. This presumed neutrality of place is significant in that it effectively masks the ways sites embody marginalizing power practices (Shome, 2003).

Recent explorations in Critical Geography have, likewise, followed this line of thinking. Shields (2003) has argued that place is, “intrinsic to the intellectual ordering of our lives and our everyday notions of causality” (p. 147), in both the external structure of geographies, and also in the relationships between those structures and an internal sense of belonging or situatedness within a community. This sense of spatial organization, an understanding of what goes where within a given geography, creates “distinct spatialized modalities of control” (Pile, 1997, p. 2) born out of the power relationships between individuals and social groups. Investigations of these power relationships via a heightened attention to the way they are supported by spatial constructs has become an ongoing project. Davis (1990) has explored the ways power is enacted spatially in his bleak reading of downtown Los Angeles and the marginalizing practices associated with constructing spaces designed to keep the lower class out and the upper class contained. Likewise Kruse (2005) has demonstrated the ways downtown Atlanta effectively segregated neighborhoods by dividing them from the urban core by massive interstate systems that alienated African Americans geographically from the city-proper. Of course the dynamic nature of space is exactly what makes these interrogations valuable. And the intersection

between geographies of power and domination, individuals and social groups, remains an intriguing area of scholarship both within and outside of the communication discipline.

The critical heuristic I am proposing is aimed at evaluating the rhetorical dimensions of place-making, both in the explicit discursive activities produced about places, but also in the rhetorical possibilities encapsulated within places. In her essay, *Space Matters*, Shome (2003) shows the degree to which power is spatially oriented, and, moreover, the importance of spatial positions in an inquiry aimed at explaining identity politics and power relationships within communication studies. Shome (2003) argues that the intersection of identity, power, and space act as an important site for understanding identity politics, particularly when considered in relation to the fluid dimensions of space and time that provide an always fluctuating context for communication and action.

Shome (2003) draws her reading of time and space in relation to power from geographer Doreen Massey's (2003) extended analysis of the tensions between these two concepts. For Massey, the notions of time and space within sociological theories of power and change have been hotly contested. Even Foucault observed what he called a denigration of space in favor of time. Part of this tendency, as Massey has argued, emerges in discussions on representation and the conflation of space and time into a sense of something concrete and static. Representations of space have often treated the concept as a backdrop on which societal relationships and identity politics act, a treatment that ignores the "more-than-oneness of space" (p. 4). Indeed, "the ways in which space constitutes an active and constantly changing site of power have implications for the production of identities and the distribution of populations" (p. 44). Evaluating the construction of place as a rhetorical activity elucidates how power is enacted through the act of

defining a location, but also the ways that power is possibly challenged through the uses of space that transgress the boundaries that promote identification and govern behavioral norms.

Place as a temporally specific, constructed, and therefore potentially malleable entity provides the context through which we might understand place-transgressions. As Cresswell (2004) has observed, the very standards through which one is situated as *in-place* or *out-of-place* are determined by those with “more power than others to determine what is appropriate” (p. 27) and establish place-norms. Transgressions, then, occur when those occupying a place behave in ways or use spaces outside of the prescribed functions. Cresswell (2004) provides a myriad of examples of place-transgressions, including New York graffiti artists, London city squatters, and bohemian travelers, all of whom “have transgressed the supposedly common-sense link between place and the things that go in it” (p. 27), challenging the pre-established definitions of place and those in power who have established place parameters. Thus, to transgress is to act “out-of-place,” to engage in activities that are not traditionally understood as place-appropriate, or to occupy a place considered off-limits or out of reach. To identify and evaluate those transgressions is to confront the place-making practices that have been enacted by those with the power to define place. As the next section shows, new urban developments have engaged in lengthy and aggressive place-making efforts to present a clear and cohesive definition of just what these places are meant to be and who they are for.

Place-making and New Urbanism

New urbanist developments have been both applauded and criticized by scholars and urban planners (Ellis, 2002). On the one hand, new urbanism is considered an appealing alternative to the suburban sprawl and loss of neighborly connectivity characteristic of the American landscape (Kunstler, 1993). On the other hand, critics have accused new urbanist

developments of creating communities centered on private business interests and exclusionary policies (Grant, 2006). Wood (1998) has made a direct link between communication-place research and new urbanism in his unpublished dissertation focusing on Celebration, Florida, a controversial development designed and built by the Disney Corporation. With its heightened emphasis on “community values,” Wood (1998) suggests that Celebration is shaped by “a rhetorical process that enacts and authorizes behaviors according to a precise, though subtle, template” (p. 303) in community documents, marketing, and policy decisions. Celebration is a site of paradoxical spaces – private-public, progress-nostalgia, and arcadia-utopia, that require residents to engage in a kind of “ideological labor that saps the desire to confront the implications of Celebration directly” (p. 286). The neighborhood uses these dichotomized pairs as selling points for possible residents, but never addresses the contradictory claims they make about life in Celebration. For example, Celebration simultaneously marketed itself as a neighborhood brimming with public spaces that would foster neighborly interactions, yet these spaces remained in the hands of the private developers. Likewise, the community was marketed as a nostalgic return to a simpler way of life centered on interaction and engagement with one’s neighbors, all the while promoting the advanced technological capabilities that residents would enjoy, providing them with “an almost staggering amount of online interactivity” (Wood, 1998, p. 1), keeping them isolated in their homes.

In similar fashion, Harvey (1997) has argued new urbanist communities unfairly promote a return to community and neighborhood values aimed solely at the affluent, and at the expense of the lower class. This emphasis on communitarian living, is, as McCann (1995) noted, a common theme in new urbanist (also referred to as neotraditional) developments, that present themselves as “the second coming of the American small town” (p. 213). The emphasis on a

vision of nostalgic Americana community oddly often contradicts the “modernist tactics” (Grant, 2006, p. 3) developers take, privileging progress, growth, and technological advancement over old-world understandings of community.

The incongruities between this emphasis on nostalgia-technology is not the only way new urbanist developments engage paradoxical practices. Geographers have argued that new urbanist developments frequently highlight the public spaces available to residents while advancing private interests and advocating participatory communities all the while producing developments solely for affluent consumers (Grant, 2006). In the early years of new urbanist planning Till (1993) criticized the development model for engaging in the practice of Othering, establishing new urbanist dwellers as elite residents, decidedly distinct and socially superior from their urban neighbors. Likewise, Al-Hindi and Staddon (1996) in their reading of Seaside, Florida, were heavily critical of the new urbanist development, suggesting that the construction of a community based on private interests and accessible only to the economic elite had profound implications on the identification practices of residents, by linking community engagement with capital and consumption. For Al-Hindi and Staddon, these identification practices were mobilized through the architectural forms of Seaside that alluded to an image of yester-year that trumpeted a false sense of communitarian living. St. Antoine (2007) has also traced the contradictory claims new urbanist developments have made in marketing documents aimed at attracting residents. In St. Antoine’s reading, developers make use of faulty reasoning by focusing on the ills of suburban life, but fail to provide an alternative that adequately addresses the problems of suburbia.

As these authors have shown, there is reason to question the degree to which residents of new urbanist communities are really “getting what they pay for” in terms of an open, sustainable,

congenial community. New urbanism within these criticisms, marks a stark contrast to the notion of public urban space as a site of open, rational, and easily accessible discursive activity. This is problematic because, as Fleming (1998) has suggested, the creation of “good” public spaces necessarily relies on “good” public discourse, and the space of rational argumentation will only emerge if democratic public spaces exist.³ Likewise, Bridge (2005) has traced the notion of communicative rationality within urban spheres, highlighting the opportunities available for communicative action based on rational argument within post-modern urban spaces traditionally associated with difference and conflict. Bridge sees this notion of communicative action manifesting in city streets, within communities, and exercised in city planning offices, where the necessary on-going negotiations between urban residents can be a force driving the evolution of the city forward. The urban, in Bridge’s schemata, is the site of encounters with others, the context for exposure and movement central to the creation of positive communicative relationships. City space is “performative but also full of articulation and interpretation” (p. 2), embodying the dynamic relationships inherent in urban forms. Urban interactions, according to Bridge, foster communicative engagements and create the possibilities for cohabitation within geographies of dramatic socio-economic difference.

The urban, for Fleming (1998) and Bridge (2005), support what Warner (2002) has called the stranger-relationality component of the public. City spaces in these readings provide the context through which strangers unite “through participation alone” (p. 56) rather than based on allegiances to particular parties or groups. The stranger-relationality component of the public requires participants be “identified primarily through their participation in the discourses” (p.

³ Fleming (1998) argues that rational argumentation requires a general respect for the opinions and positions of others, and that, moreover, “good argument require contexts in which arguers are daily confronted with *other* arguers holding *different* views but united by *common* problems” (p. 152). This condition, according to Fleming, is nowhere more likely than in urban formations.

56), and constitutes “the necessary medium of commonality” (p. 57), through which a public is constituted. Indeed, the highly populated urban is the geographical terrain constituted by high degrees of stranger interaction, or at least stranger exposure.

Yet the mere existence of many different types of strangers inhabiting a similar geographical space does not ensure productive⁴ argument will follow. Urban backdrops serve as the setting for dynamic confrontations resulting in community and individual progress, and as such, they are political spaces. As Fleming (1998) has noted, sidewalks and parks within urban spaces offer the possibility for interaction, but there must also be places like libraries “where we can learn and build factions, and places like town halls and courthouses, where we can debate differences and resolve conflicts” (p. 161). Urban politics emerge from urban geographies both conditioned by the context out of which they were born and at once always influencing the places they occupy (McCann, 2003).

Hankins and Powers (forthcoming) have explored the political dimensions of public space in Atlantic Station specifically, revealing the extent to which the development “has very narrowly defined public spaces that enable the *visibility* of a public, but not the formation of a collective identity associated with a political public” (emphasis theirs, p. 8). The experience of participating in a public, within this development, “is the ability to be seen, or viewed” by fellow shoppers. Within these conditions, the ability to engage in communicative action that might lead to transformations in social conditions is significantly marginalized. Engaging the rhetorical act of place-making that has created Atlantic Station as a bounded development reveals how this public has been constructed, and the limitations of place that are manipulated by users of space that do not subscribe to the narrow vision of citizenship presented within the community.

⁴ I use Bridge’s (2005) sense of productive here, in other words, discourse, argument, and debate that will establish and transform the ethical, moral, and political norms of a given society or culture.

As communication scholars continue to show, our discipline can make significant contributions to a discussion on the role of space and place as a site of power struggle, communicative invention, and individual identification. Communicative city theory marks the most recent (and arguably most organized) attempt to engage this dialogue, but without a framework that establishes the interrelated components that contribute to the communicative activity of place the communicative city project remains incomplete. The critical heuristic is, as I will show, a way to fill this gap in the existing research and makes a contribution to ongoing discussions about the role of space and place in social organizations, particularly in the complex relationships between place, power, and the social in transforming city spaces.

As Burd (2008) has suggested, the communicative city is born out of its very form, the “structure and skeleton distinctly ‘announces’ its identity in space and place” facilitating “circulation and movement in a variety of modes both collective and individual” (p. 211). Engaging the rhetorical dimensions of place-making can make a theoretical contribution to communicative city scholarship by highlighting the intersection of texts, structures, and movement within city space as three processes that not only define place, but dictate the possible trajectories of future spaces. The critical heuristic proposed here accounts for not only the way city space is presented and structured to facilitate or monitor certain types of behaviors and movements, but also the ways bodies move through space as a contribution, and sometimes a disruption of, the process of place-making. This kind of assessment is particularly necessary for an analysis of Atlantic Station, a place largely controlled and dictated by private dollars and interests (Hankins and Powers, forthcoming) where the individual resident is significantly marginalized or obscured from engaging with their community in any activity other than shopping.

Theoretical Foundations

To engage the rhetorical dimensions of place-making I rely on a number of theoretical concepts in an effort to create a comprehensive vision of a temporally unique material place. Three specific modes of thought will be of central importance to my exploration of Atlantic Station. First in the relationships between discursive constructions of space and efforts to control or delimit space as discussed in Foucault's (1967) conceptualization of heterotopias, and more recently in a body of scholarship developed around the concept of non-place (Auge, 1995). Second, in the socio-semiotic structure of geographical spaces (Gottdiener & Lagopoulos, 1986) and the signification practices of objects and structures within them. And finally, the conceptualization of walking rhetoric and the potential uses of space (as well as the distinction between space and place) as theorized by deCerteau (1984). I utilize these three theories to show the particular ways place-making is enacted in Atlantic Station. Taken together these modes of analysis provide a lens that reveals the layered, polyvalent meaning structures operating within Atlantic Station. Utilizing these lines of inquiry elucidates the tensions between the textual presentation of Atlantic Station as a bounded urban development with prescribed behavioral norms, the structural organization of the neighborhood and the resulting emphasis on movement and consumption for those navigating the material environment, and the movements and action within this space that potentially transgress the place-norms established by Atlantic Station LLC.

Broadly speaking, these three theoretical components contribute to a reading of Atlantic Station in the spirit of critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989). My use of heterotopias and non-place, socio-semiotics, and walking rhetoric is aimed at elucidating the way power is enacted within this new urbanist community, and centers on the creation and manipulation of discursive possibilities available to occupants within this place. Assessed within communicative city

theory, these three frameworks best highlight the tensions existing between different modes of action and signification within Atlantic Station. When considered together, the rhetorical dimensions of place-making demonstrate that the communicative city is a site of discursive possibilities, limitations, and potential transformations.

Non-place and Heterotopias

In his effort to assess the ways that places contribute to an understanding of space as a larger totality, Foucault (1967) proposed that certain locations within society could be conceptualized as what he called heterotopias, places that helped to illuminate the relationships between social practices and spatial ideologies. Heterotopias, Foucault argued, contributed to a knowledge of space, in their very contradiction to all “other” spaces, they reflected the extent to which “the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space” (Foucault, 1967, para. 9). Heterotopias are sequestered places, “not freely accessible like a public place,” constructed in opposition to other spaces. They are created and understood as “another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (para. 15). Heterotopias are spaces marked by boundaries, differentiated from the rest of society through the creation of bounded places that establish a notion of “here” and “there.” New urbanist developments embody elements of a heterotopia in their emphasis on boundaries and community cohesion presented as an alternative to urban or suburban chaos and instability (Wood, 1998). As I will demonstrate, Atlantic Station, with its unique position in a remarkably urban and transitional area, embodies many of the dominant themes associated with the heterotopia, making this development markedly different from its urban neighbors.

In more recent research Wood (2003, 2005) has suggested global business trends and increased mobility has led to what the author terms “omnitopias.” Rather than places explicitly demarcated from other, more corrupted or penetrable spaces, omnitopias reflect the growing trend to embody sameness on a global scale. Like the more commonly used phrase “non-place,” omnitopias contain a degree of nothingness, a sense of no place and every place simultaneously enacted in multiple geographies.

Non-places, as Auge (1995) notes, are geographies designed to be passed through rather than occupied, spaces “where people cohabit without living together” (p. 110), characterized by movement and dislocation.⁵ Of course non-places, while lacking some element of local substance, cannot be evaluated as sites free from political and cultural structures. In her critical interrogation of non-places, Sharma (2009) argues that non-places should be conceptualized as sites, not empty of any signification or meaning, but rather geographies embodying a specific set of politics rooted in the *banopticon* through “pro-active risk management and control through banning” (p. 137).⁶ Sharma suggests that individuals occupying non-places participate in geographies based on established bans and laws that presuppose the roles and expectations of certain types of people and behaviors that are “governed by the logic of the ban” (p. 137). Non-places may contain the structural elements of empty or uncharacterized space (the most popular

⁵ Notably, Auge (1995) and other non-place theorists do not make a distinction between “space” and “place” in de Certeau’s (1984) sense of the two terms.

⁶ Sharma draws from Bigo’s (2005) notion of the *banopticon*, a retooling of the *panopticon* as a mode of surveillance popularized by Jeremy Bentham in the late 1700s. The *panopticon* was proposed as an ideal model of prison design. Prisoners living in the *panopticon* are subjected to the threat of constant observation by an invisible enforcer. The *banopticon*, on the other hand, is less a mode of observation than a means through which behavior is pre-determined before inhabitants enter a place as occupants or users. This is a constituent feature of non-place, according to Sharma, where behaviors are prescribed and bodies are disciplined by pre-existing bans, rather than modes of surveillance.

example of non-place is the airport terminal), but they nonetheless embody the “geopolitical politics of the day” (p. 146) through the rules and regulations that dictate who goes where within a given place. The structural components of a material space contribute to non-place in significant ways. As places increasingly embody a sense of sameness rooted in architectural and technological norms (Auge, 1995), non-place as a popular architectural trend has become a growing concern (Diken, 2004). The creation of non-place can be traced in both the textual artifacts about a place and also through a socio-semiotic reading of place that is aimed at evaluating the ways architecture and orientation communicate the norms and behavioral expectations associated with a given landscape.

Socio-semiotics

Urban semiotics, or socio-semiotics, is based on the understanding that material objects are vehicles of signification – that the city itself, in conjunction with and constantly interacting with language, is a sign (Gottdiener & Lagopoulos, 1986). In a socio-semiotic approach, the architectural and structural objects constituting the city at once interact with social discourses and are social discourses themselves, always implicated in the symbolic action central to city life itself. The relationships between individuals and the connotative and ideologically-laden signs operating within a particular urban setting is a central focus of a socio-semiotic reading of the city. Emphasizing the particular ways “denotative” codes are born out of connotative meanings within a given urban milieu, socio-semiotics blurs the distinction between these two forms of symbolic meaning structures. Objects *appear* exact, their implication within an arbitrary, constructed system is masked by their presumed pure functionality (a functionality erroneously believed to exist independent of any ideological power structure).

The construction and maintenance of these processes of signification occur in three-interrelated ways. First, modes of signification can occur explicitly through an object's positioning within material space. Greimas (1976/1986) has suggested space itself constitutes a language based in the politics of exclusion, where geographically distinct areas are understood "as a language signified to itself ... operat[ing] first by exclusion, by opposing itself spatially to all that it is not" (p. 29). Through design and literal spatial barriers, urban spaces become their own signs – signs of affluence or degradation, of particular racial, ethnic, economic, political, or social affiliations. Objects also carry signification that manifests in the ways they are used. The interaction between the occupants of a place and the structures within that place in a temporally-specific moment imbue objects with meaning. For example, Vastokas (1994) has traced the way objects contain collective symbols in her reading of the social signification of woven sashes worn by women in Lithuania. Likewise, Douglas (1994) has shown how the presentation of antique artifacts signifies affluence and prestige in American homes. Finally, the signification process can be understood as an un-ending process of diachronic transformation, in other words, in the historical evolution of space. The cultural, political, and ideological codes embedded in geographical objects is a product of the object in question, the interaction between that object and the people using and manipulating it, and the historically embedded structure within which that moment occurs.

These three processes, far from independent or mutually exclusive, operate simultaneously to create a shared social space that is both physical and imagined. The purpose of making these distinctions lies in the necessity for any reading of the city to identify the unique relationships between people and objects that ultimately result in layered, ideologically-relevant subject positions. But places are created, not simply by planning boards and business owners,

but by people, the users of a given space. The ways users of place manipulate it, drawing it out into the realm of spatial possibilities, marks the third component of the critical heuristic.

de Certeau and Walking Rhetoric

Without the vibrant, unpredictable, unreliable movement of people within a city's space, urban life would be hollow. A city is as much its people as it is its skyline, transportation infrastructure, or sewage system. The interrelationships between these three components of the city, the dynamics between objects, individuals and discourse, places and people, constitute the rhetorical dimensions of place-making, as well as the spatial possibilities that emerge within these constructions. Yet assessing the specific ways place is used and manipulated through the patterns of movement and action within it is both difficult and problematic. Socio-semiotics provides a reading of the possibilities of movement within the existing spatial structure, movement dictated and traced by the geographical possibilities available to the urban pedestrian. But to fully theorize the rhetorical components of place-making, de Certeau's (1984) more liberating perspective on urban action proves helpful.

The instability of spatial readings is reflected in de Certeau's treatment of spaces and places. While the structure of the city provides the foundations upon which city-life is built, the "practices of space" (p. 100), the action created by the people inhabiting space is part of a constant movement of space through time. Place involves the "being-there" in the local sense, establishing the "law of place" (p. 118), while space embodies the transformative possibilities of movement within time. For de Certeau, space reflects a constellation of possibilities, while place represents the physical/discursive temporally-bound construction of a moment. The dynamic possibilities of space reflects the transformative relationships between individuals and the built environment. In this reading "things extra and other insert themselves into the accepted

framework, the imposed order” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 107), troubling the static nature of place and opening it up to spatial possibilities. Urban spaces as sites of what Jacobs (1961) called the “sidewalk ballet,” provide a unique geographical terrain for the activities of the urban resident. Pedestrian mobility and interaction, for de Certeau, can be understood tropologically, as a walking rhetoric, a “turn of phrase” or “stylistic figure” (p. 100) that “manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be” (p. 101). Thus, in walking through place, spatial possibilities become accessible through our uses and manipulations of existing organizational structures and patterns. As the limits of place are tested, the temporally contingent nature of its construction is revealed.

Massey’s (2003) reading of space-time as a fragmentary and unstable cross-section of always-fluctuating conditions reflects the ways the production of space embodies potentialities for change and transformation. As Massey has noted, material constructions of space and one’s sense of belonging within a particular locale are always informed by a temporal dimension that creates the possibility (and, in fact, the inevitability) of some kind of evolution or alteration. Places invariably change given the movement of time, and users of places contribute to the possible transformations that might occur within a given spatial formation. Massey (2003) writes:

Space has its times. To open up space to this kind of imagination means thinking about time and space together. You can’t hold places and things still. What you *can* do is meet up with them, catch up with where another’s history has got to “now,” and acknowledge that “now” is itself constituted by that meeting up. “Here,” in that sense, is not a place on a map. It is that intersection of trajectories, the meeting-up of stories; an encounter. Every “here” is a here-and-now (para. 12).

Place, thus conceived, has a past and a future, and through uses and manipulations, it shifts and transforms. This is of central importance in a reading of Atlantic Station; a neighborhood overtly controlled and demarcated. This is a place designed and maintained by an explicit set of rules and regulations, a neighborhood structured around a unique and orderly development pattern that embodies, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three, the symbolic components of the traditional suburban shopping mall. This is a site where the dynamic components of individual action, the ability of the urban resident to act out and with a city space, appear frighteningly limited given the exhaustive regulations that govern acceptable behavior and the carefully orchestrated design that facilitates pedestrian flows around the global retail outlets located within it. However, it is precisely in these practices of place-making that the rhetorical construction of Atlantic Station emerges and the potentials for altering that process become more evident. Evaluating how place has been constructed within this new urbanist development highlights the boundaries that have been established there and the activities that push place-making practices, exposing the contradictions and vulnerabilities of Atlantic Station as it is currently constructed.

Research Process

An inquiry into the rhetorical dimensions of place-making involves a number of theoretical concepts and a series of different critical literatures that contribute to the triad I have proposed. To evaluate the representations of Atlantic Station as examples of the way the neighborhood constitutes dimensions of both a heterotopia and a non-place, in Chapter Two I conduct a textual analysis of the documents produced by the developers to map, market, and monitor the neighborhood. I have limited my analysis to texts that have been produced by Atlantic Station LLC and which have been posted on its website. Many of the texts have also been reproduced and printed on documents available at the Atlantic Station concierge office

located within the development. I have noted when this is the case and commented on the significance of this reproduction when analyzing the neighborhood as a heterotopia and non-place. While this analysis is limited in its scope to the documents produced by the developers, a central component of non-place theory is the suggestion that the textual representations produced by those who control and monitor a space play an increasingly important role in defining place. Moreover, as a planned community, Atlantic Station LLC has engaged a carefully orchestrated marketing campaign to clearly define what kind of neighborhood it is, and this campaign is reflected in the documents posted on the Atlantic Station website.

I have used personal observation to collect data for a reading of the structures and movement in Atlantic Station. In a reading of this community rooted in socio-semiotics I have moved through the neighborhood, utilizing the sidewalks and streets located there, and walking in and out of residential and shopping areas. I have also observed how others participate in these activities. My reading of the movement and action of people within Atlantic Station likewise relies on my observation of public activities that have occurred within the neighborhood. My observations have been limited to public activities enacted within Atlantic Station, I have not conducted interviews or engaged in conversations with occupants of the development. I have documented these public activities and contextualize them as rhetorical actions through the framework established by de Certeau.

Atlantic Station and the New Urbanism Movement

Residents of the metropolitan Atlanta area have witnessed dramatic changes in the trajectory of the city's development in recent years. Indeed, the transformations the urban center has undergone in the 12 years since it hosted the Olympic Games seem quite contradictory to the concerns reverberating among scholars in the early 1990s. Re-urbanization, increased pedestrian

traffic in the urban center, a slowing in the expansion of suburban sprawl, are all trends almost entirely unpredicted by most urban scholars assessing the city at the end of the 20th century (Dagenhart, 1995; Koolhaas, 1995; Argullol, 1995).

As the population continues to swell, the dramatic transformations of in-town Atlanta become increasingly apparent. Massive condominium complexes, business centers, and towering luxury hotels have become staples of the city's skyline. Atlanta has become home to a growing number of young transplants in addition to drawing in many long-time residents who had abandoned the city decades earlier for the suburbs (Pickel, 2008). One particularly popular draw for residents returning to the city center has been a number of "new-urban" developments located in some of the most unlikely sites within the city's boundaries.⁷ Many of these developments owe their notoriety to an earlier predecessor, the first new urbanist development in Atlanta, currently in its fourth year of occupancy, Atlantic Station.

Hailed as "the most important project in Atlanta in 50 years," by former city mayor Bill Campbell (Shelton, 2005), Atlantic Station is currently the largest urban brownfield re-development in the United States (Miller, 2006). A multi-billion dollar project, Atlantic Station was the product of a layered development and management deal interweaving public and private interests and dollars to build a retail-residential community on a former Superfund site. Completed in 2005, Atlantic Station has received national accolades and is serving as the quintessential model for urban growth nation-wide (Shelton, 2005). Designed around a mixed-use concept, Atlantic Station features a variety of retail outlets sprinkled with condominiums, lofts, student apartments, and town homes. As it has grown it has become a recognizable subsection of Atlanta-proper, with its own zipcode, green belt, "central park," and museum.

⁷ Glenwood Park, Lindbergh Center, Inman Park Village, and the North Highland Lofts are the completed developments located within downtown Atlanta that have marketed themselves as "new urbanist."

Atlantic Station's marketing emphasizes its mixed-use design pattern, centering their website on the theme "Live, Work, Play" (atlanticstation.com). An eight-block retail corridor is situated at the center of the development, with clothing stores, coffee shops, and restaurants located in the bottom suites of the buildings in this area, while the upper levels are reserved for loft and apartment living. The development places a heavy emphasis on the desirability of living in a neighborhood where residents can enjoy the retail amenities the neighborhood has to offer, and potentially work in the neighborhood as well (presumably at one of the retail locations, or at one of two newly-opened office buildings housing two prominent banking companies).

Atlantic Station's location, just 1.5 miles from Centennial Olympic Park and the former central business district of Atlanta-proper, thoroughly situates the development within the urban. Indeed, it may offer the best example of a real-world implementation of new urbanist design in an *urban* space, especially when we consider that new urbanist developments are often located far outside of any urban area. But its development as an intown neighborhood is quite distinct from traditional urban growth. Its introduction into the urban fabric and its transformations over the past four years suggest new urbanist communities offer a variety of perplexing questions about the very nature of urban (and suburban) life.

The 1997 unveiling of the new urbanist community Celebration, Florida, a planned, private town created by the Disney Corporation, has spawned a great deal of discourse on the future of community development (Wood, 1998; Ross, 1999; Frantz & Collins, 2000). Criticisms of new urbanist developments in the 20-plus years since the first community, Seaside, Florida, have been numerous and varied.⁸ Critics have accused the communities of offering false

⁸ Seaside is perhaps most well-known as the set for the movie *The Truman Show*. The director had originally planned to construct a sound-screen set for the film to create his utopian community until he discovered the picturesque Florida development (Boxer, 1998).

promises of a utopian, pedestrian lifestyle free of the congestion of urban spaces or the automobile-driven chaos of suburbia (see Harvey (1997) and St. Antoine (2007) for two examples encapsulating these arguments). Yet despite early concerns, new urbanism is quickly gaining traction among planners seeking to gentrify or re-think current uses of urban space (Ellis, 2002). Atlantic Station as a bounded place is vulnerable to many of these criticisms. The textual and structural rhetorical dimensions of place-making have presented and defined Atlantic Station as a neighborhood set aside from the larger urban totality, dedicated to shopping, dining, and entertainment. But uses of this place suggest that, in marketing the development as a heterogeneous, urban space, Atlantic Station has opened the door for transgressions and manipulations that ultimately destabilize the place-making process.

Chapter Preview

In Chapter Two I demonstrate the ways Atlantic Station is mapped, marketed, and monitored through the texts produced by the developers to present the neighborhood as a unique place with a distinct purpose. Atlantic Station emerges as a non-place in the emphasis placed on a pre-defined vision of urban life that is ultimately linked to shopping and dining, absent of virtually any claims that residents will engage with each other or their community outside of their consumptive practices. I analyze how the development has been mapped to suggest Atlantic Station is carefully positioned as a neighborhood easily distinguished from its urban surroundings. As such, it enters the larger Atlanta urban cityscape as a heterotopia, distinct from its neighbors, presented as a clean, meticulous place in contrast to the messy urban life around it. In monitoring place, Atlantic Station, again, reveals its resemblance to a non-place. The Rules of Conduct and Respect that dictate acceptable behavioral patterns and activities privileges movement, encouraging occupants to continue circulating and keep shopping. The development

has established pervasive and numerous modes of surveillance and discipline to ensure visitors and residents are not disturbed in their efforts to shop, dine, or be entertained. Atlantic Station as a place is an example of Foucault's heterotopia, par excellence, in its ability to define and enclose a given urban space, segregating itself from its urban neighbors and clearly defining and monitoring its use. Moreover, the rules and regulations governing the community are designed purposively to dictate what kind of behaviors and what kind of individuals will occupy the space.

In Chapter Three I evaluate the structural components of the community and draw parallels between the architecture and design components of the community and the layout of the traditional shopping mall. Using previous research rooted in socio-semiotics, specifically in work evaluating suburban shopping malls in the 1980s and 1990s, I show that the orientation of buildings and objects within Atlantic Station is designed to facilitate movement, rather than provide open, communal spaces for enacting neighborhood activities. Despite this emphasis on movement through the retail space, the design elements of the neighborhood suggest the area is attempting to impose a sense of yesterday, of old-Americana community features. While aesthetically the features of "the mall" and "nostalgia" might seem harmonious to shoppers familiar with the design of traditional suburban malls, the messages associated with these two community purposes are quite different. New urbanism has largely focused on the desire to escape suburbia (and what is more suburban than the American shopping mall?) through an emphasis on community cohesion and a nostalgic idea of a work-play American urban area. Yet the only features supporting some notion of community cohesion in the guise of nostalgic Americana are purely aesthetic. Atlantic Station's design and composition suggest the neighborhood is neither new nor urban. Rather, it appears as a place quite distinct from the urban, favoring instead some remnant of sterile suburban shoptopias.

In Chapter Four I address the third component of the critical heuristic proposed here, individual and group movement and action. As Chapters Two and Three will demonstrate, the purpose, design, and function of Atlantic Station is both specific and regulatory. While the same can be said of other urban areas (public parks most often have extensive rules and guidelines), Atlantic Station's discourse and structural significations are both overt and extensively repressive. In this chapter I explore dimensions of what has been called the "sidewalk ballet" or "urban drama"⁹ within Atlanta as an urban center, and Atlantic Station as a place situated within that center. This analysis involves use and observation of the space over a 28 month period, from February 2007 to May 2009, during which time I have witnessed a variety of activities both in compliance and notably resistive of the official uses and regulations of the development. In the two years of personal observation, Atlantic Station has been the site of an impromptu dance competition waged in the main street of the development, an event that blocked traffic and impeded pedestrian mobility (and was eventually disbanded by the private security force), the setting of a flash mob,¹⁰ and a popular location for local college students to enact chanting rituals.¹¹ These activities mark the most visible uses of space that deviate from the development's stated purpose and regulations, but more have certainly occurred. Even the daily snapping of photos by residents and visitors is in itself transgressive, to the extent that it violates the rules of the development because the regulations require potential photographers to register with the management office.

⁹ By Jacobs (1961) and Mumford (2007/1937) respectively.

¹⁰ Flash mobs can be a variety of different group activities, often involving young people engaging in "bizarre" behavior. The Atlantic Station flash mob witnessed by the author involved over 40 college-age participants, all of whom "froze" in a variety of positions for a total of five minutes. Many passersby, shoppers, and residents stopped to observe this sea of still bodies.

¹¹ On more than one occasion Morehouse students, a residential predominantly African American college located in southwest Atlanta, have enacted a series of chanting and marching rituals in the development.

To summarize, the argument of this thesis is two-fold: it emphasizes modes of domination and resistance. Chapters Two, Three, and Four extend the critical heuristic I have proposed to engage a reading of Atlantic Station that illuminates the multiple dimensions of place-making. Attention to all three of these modes of meaning construction and signification can better inform a reading of the city as a communication entity (i.e. the communicative city). This type of analysis engages the layered, interconnected, sometimes contradictory processes that contribute to the urban form as “text.” In addition to establishing this mode of analysis, I have shown how the rhetorical process of place-making enacted in Atlantic Station has created a notion of place that relies on contradictory claims that ultimately situate the development as a site of tensions. Atlantic Station is not new, nor is it urban (in a more traditionally enthusiastic use of the term circa Jacobs, 1961). However, the heightened emphasis on control and surveillance when evaluated in tandem with the specific uses of the space highlights the particular ways places can be at once controlled and relatively malleable. Evaluating Atlantic Station as a textual manifestation of the dynamic processes occurring in changing urban developments demonstrates the ways urban spaces are transforming and identifies the places available (and unavailable) for discourse and interaction within these new kinds of urban neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 2.

Textual Representations and Place-making:

Mapping, Marketing, and Monitoring Atlantic Station

Situated on a large parcel of land considered virtually unusable 15 years ago, Atlantic Station has become a dominating presence in the Atlanta skyline. Scanning the city from the top of the circling sky bar in the downtown Atlanta Westin Hotel, visitors observe a veritable explosion of megalithic structures to the north – buildings that a few short years ago were only sketches and ideas. But the changes in the skyline are not the only means through which Atlantic Station has entered into the urban Atlanta market. The developers of this private community have engaged in an aggressive marketing campaign to attract residents and visitors here, introducing Atlantans to “the most attractive urban neighborhood in the nation” (atlanticstation.com, 2009).

In this chapter I suggest that the textual representations created by the developers of Atlantic Station contribute to a process of place-making, establishing the center as an urban neighborhood through a series of ambiguous and contradictory claims. Representations of Atlantic Station situate the development in three dominant ways: by clearly demarcating its boundaries, promoting the heterogeneous urban lifestyle it presumably embodies, and prescribing acceptable behavioral patterns. These themes constitute a strategic self-presentation that is designed to increase the saliency of Atlantic Station as a viable urban community, all the while establishing the parameters through which we understand this space as a bounded place. Atlantic Station relies on these motifs to simultaneously mask and support the global capital flows around which the neighborhood is centered. These texts establish a representation of urban livability rooted in retail activities, but also operate to effectively reduce the urban resident

to a faceless consumer. This presupposed subjectivity limits the extent to which occupants of Atlantic Station are imagined to contribute to its construction as a place.

Textual representations of place mark one of the triadic elements involved in the rhetoric of place-making. Lefebvre (1991) suggested that representations of space help to determine “what is lived, and what is perceived with what is conceived” (p. 38). In other words, in representing space, we are making sense of it, negotiating the ways we use space with what we know about it. Textual artifacts, therefore, engender understandings of a place and how it is situated within the urban landscape. Textual constructions of place, what Bender (2006) has called the “rhetorical dimension of spatial practices” (p. 305), reflect the communicative possibilities and power limitations within that place. This component of place-making is significant because it reveals the dominant (and publicly salient) themes and genres that define and promote a place. These textual artifacts enable what a place can be and what we, as occupants, know about it. As such, an analysis of the prevailing textual artifacts that contribute to a spatial knowledge is essential to a reading of space as text.

The documents created by the Atlantic Station development staff emphasize the urban plurality of the neighborhood but, paradoxically, base this diversity almost entirely on allegiance to retail and entertainment activities. This is significant, not only in the ways the development is marketed to support a false sense of openness and urbanity (as I will demonstrate more clearly when I discuss the Rules of Conduct and Respect that clearly limit who is allowed in Atlantic Station and for what purpose), but also in the heightened emphasis Atlantic Station places on the relationship between consumption and community. As DeChaine (2001) has shown, promotional documents aimed at attracting residents to planned communities highlight the intimate relationship between material and social space. These texts reveal the “ongoing

tensions involved in negotiating bounded spaces” where the binaries “of inside and outside, or rights and privileges, of public and private, of us and them” (p. 131) become inextricably linked to the material space they promote and the power structures they represent. The promotional documents produced by Atlantic Station reveal one such way the confluence of material and social space might be understood within this community.¹²

The texts contributing to a reading of Atlantic Station focus on themes designed to attract widespread appeal while nonetheless supporting a neighborhood that is not intended to encapsulate widespread interests. These motifs emerge in three different, but complexly intertwined, textual representations produced by the developers: the map of the neighborhood, the atlanticstation.com website, and the printed rules and regulations dictating acceptable behaviors within the neighborhood. Rather than constitute an urban neighborhood designed to appeal to all types of urban residents and living practices, Atlantic Station has created a series of texts that clearly situate the development as one with specific, and limiting standards of use, standards that simultaneously segregate the neighborhood from its surroundings while propagating a sense of openness to promote the shopping district.

The textual disassociation of Atlantic Station from its urban neighbors establishes the development as what Foucault (1967) termed a heterotopia. This is a space clearly delineated and demarcated from other spaces, spaces “which are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the other sites” (para. 10) Heterotopias, according to Foucault, are spaces of opposition. These spaces exist in relation to all others, as counter sites, spaces of order and planning, decidedly distinct from their surroundings. The texts developed to map and market Atlantic Station place a heavy emphasis on this notion of division and difference. In addition to

¹² Though the aim of this thesis is to show that this material-social relationship is enacted through a variety of venues including, but not limited to, the textual constructions of place.

the heterotopic elements of Atlantic Station, I will demonstrate the way the aforementioned themes establish the neighborhood as a kind of non-place (Auge, 1995) by creating an image of the community that privileges the movement of people through space. The construction of the Atlantic Station resident in these texts is ambiguous and unclear outside of their role as shoppers and diners. If, as Auge has suggested, the practice of place-making is contributing to a fragmentation of urban spaces, where the relationship between spatial occupants and the places they inhabit is increasingly marginalized, then Atlantic Station provides a fruitful example of how this spatial dislocation is occurring. A reading of the texts that have mapped, marketed, and regulated this development reveal Atlantic Station to be a heterotopic non-place in the cityscape of Atlanta.

In what follows I will explore Auge's conceptualization of non-place to suggest that, in establishing Atlantic Station as a distinct microcosm of the larger urban totality, the idea of urban residency is significantly limited. I will cross read the notion of non-place as a process of urban fragmentation with Foucault's reading of heterotopias to suggest that the textual representations of Atlantic Station contribute to a categorization of place that imbues the development with meaning. Finally, I will show how these concepts illuminate a reading of Atlantic Station by turning to the maps, marketing texts, and rules that constitute components in the process of place-making.

Defining Non-place

In his efforts to explain shifts in the ways spaces are defined and used, Auge (1995) has suggested that with the collapse of capital and cultural flows, material and social spaces increasingly resemble what he calls non-place, sites that "mediate a whole mass of relations with the self and with others which are only indirectly connected with their purposes" (p. 14). Non-

places, for Auge, are locations that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical,” (p. 78), sites that are only tangentially related to the occupant, but are rather constituted by movement and disconnection. Non-places are defined by an ongoing transience. Rather than the social relationships that might occur there, they communicate “partly by the words and texts they offer us” (p. 96), but without offering any substantive relationship to individual subjectivities. Power in non-place is a one-way process within which the individual travels. “Alone, but one of many, the user of non-place is in contractual relations with it (or the powers that govern it). He is reminded, when necessary, that the contract exists” (p. 101), but is afforded no personal contribution to the contract itself. This emphasis on movement, Auge has argued, is a result of globalized consumer practices that have essentially erased any essence of local (and socially constructed) geographical identities.

Defining non-place, thus, is a decidedly textual activity. Locations that offer no foreseeable venue through which occupants can contribute to the meaning of place are safe to self-define, provided, of course, occupants continue to move through space without establishing connections to it. Sorkin (1992) explored this movement theme in his analysis of Los Angeles and Disneyland, a geography where visitors are ushered from the airport to the hotel on the city’s vast network of interstates and freeways, and then again shuttled into the world’s most famous theme park for a day of transitory voyeurism. As movements continue, connections to place become useless or impossible. Disney, in this framework, establishes the rules of the game, and the meaning of place. Spatial occupants become nothing more than figurines moving through a pre-determined labyrinth, and while this is perhaps no where more clear than in places like Disneyland, Auge (1995) has argued non-place is a growing trend in areas that extend far beyond the theme park.

Recent research suggests that non-place can be understood not only as site of movement, but also a space for enacting biopolitical regulations. Sharma (2009) has argued that we must assess non-place as “housing a very specific politics of place” (p. 130) in which spatial occupants are at once implicated and controlled. The way this power is enacted in non-place is obscured by the constituent features of non-place itself. Power dynamics prove difficult to isolate in a system that suffers from an overall incoherence, what Diken (2004) has called the practice of “splintering urbanism,” through the fragmentation of city forms that lack a unified whole or center. “What we get instead are fragments: governmental districts, shopping malls, cultural centers, office parks, gated communities, ghettos, and hybrids such as themed shopping malls, the airport retail area, and so on” (Diken, 2004, p. 98). This new kind of fragmented city structure is constituted by self-imposed surveillance practices where “entry is blocked but the exit is free” (the gated community) or “where entry is free but the exit is blocked” (the ghetto) (p. 99). In either case, in non-place theory, the ability of the occupant to situate her activities within a larger urban totality is problematized by the fragmentation of the very space she inhabits.

But this process of fragmentation can also be understood as an active contribution to the meaning of place. The status of spatial knowledge, collective identification, and social-material conditions are all involved in a process of textual categorization that offers one possible avenue for conceptualizing the practice of place-making. In creating and understanding space as a material and social product, we are involved in a process of differentiation and distinction. Our experiences with places, as Clark (2004) has observed, constitute a kind of “public experience” that “work(s) to ‘condense and simplify,’ as well as to ‘intensify’ the sensations that individuals share in particular places by ‘separating and framing’ representative elements of that experience

(p. 160). The textual representations of place are invariably a central component in this categorizing of urban space. Texts about place establish boundaries, define purposes, create limitations, and open up possibilities.

In his efforts to explain the heterogeneity of urban experience, Foucault suggested we might understand spatial organization through what he called heterotopias, spaces “something like counter-sites” (para. 3) that exist in opposition to all other spaces. Heterotopias, according to Foucault, “have a function in relation to all the space that remains” as either a space of illusion, or as a “space that is other ... as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy” (para. 29). For Foucault, spaces as diverse as the cemetery, brothel, retirement home, and movie theater could all be understood as heterotopias. These spaces, as places with a direct and specific purpose, where entry and exit is monitored, serve as organizing principles through which complex urban agglomerations can be categorized and understood. Notably, Foucault found within this kind of fragmentation, liberating possibilities. As counter-sites, heterotopias offered resistive possibilities unavailable or at least less visible in the places they countered. In this sense, heterotopias could be understood “as powerful sites of the imaginary” (Genocchio, 1995, p. 38), with locales as diverse as amusement parks, festivals, and shopping malls.¹³

The textual construction of Atlantic Station reveals dimensions of this community that mirror those of both a non-place and a heterotopia. As a planned development, what deChaine has called a “community without history” (p. 135), the marketing of Atlantic Station plays a significant role in the enactment of place-making. The notion of place as a fragmented social

¹³ In Chapter Four I will explore the ways resistance manifests in Atlantic Station, but for my purposes I use heterotopia as a concept to explore the ways the development has engaged in this process of differentiation, and the resulting complexities that have emerged because of the contrasts between the development and its neighbors.

space where spatial knowledge is partially reliant¹⁴ on the textual construction of meaning provides a fruitful point for engaging place as a rhetorical construction with social and material consequences.

In the following sections I will evaluate three types of texts that have been constructed by the developers and management of Atlantic Station: the official Atlantic Station map, the marketing documents designed to promote the neighborhood, and the rules and regulations governing behavior within the community. I will demonstrate how all three of these components contribute to an overarching narrative that situates Atlantic Station as a distinct urban community within Atlanta. These texts help to define the development and the power communicated by these rhetorical artifacts.

Mapping Place

Perhaps the most oft-used text about a material space is the map. As Turnbull (2007) has noted, cartographic practices contribute to an on-going narrative of place where “our world and the ways in which we understand it have been profoundly shaped” (p. 146) by maps that fit into an overarching understanding of our location in space. The map, by its very nature, fixes places, situating a location as a static, neutral construction of lines and loops. Indeed, even a seemingly innocuous document representing a parcel of the world is, as Wells (2007) notes, laden with power relationships and tensions, for “mapping and the accuracy of maps is a marker of the capacity of governments to govern” (p. 140) through the acknowledgment or disavowal of

¹⁴ I do not entirely subscribe to a reading of place rooted in non-place theory. In his conceptualization of omnitopias, Wood (2009) has argued that travelers of “even the most banal places can spot unmistakable utterances of ‘here’ and ‘now’ anywhere, and undoubtedly, all places are real and meaningful to someone” (p. 12). Rather, according to Wood, “a growing number of places are becoming nodes to an enclave that is designed to resemble the real world, but not so accurately as to hinder consumer behaviors” (p. 13).

certain places or neighborhoods.¹⁵ Cartography writes what had remained unwritten – the map proves that a place exists, it legitimizes and de-legitimizes. Mapmaking, as Crampton (2007) has noted, constitutes a cartographic knowledge that acts as “a technology of government and biopolitics” (p. 223) where the power to acknowledge and control is explicitly acted out.

Atlantic Station LLC, the management group appointed to promote Atlantic Station, has produced two official community maps: a property map and a district map.¹⁶ Both maps are available online at the official Atlantic Station website (atlanticstation.com). In addition, both maps can be attained from the guest services counter within the development. The District Map is also posted on large signs peppered throughout the retail component of the neighborhood. The Property Map, on the other hand, situates Atlantic Station within the larger urban fabric of downtown Atlanta. Atlantic Station is loosely tied to the Midtown neighborhood of Atlanta directly to the east of the development, though they are separated by an expansive twelve-lane interstate system. While Midtown is acknowledged on the map, it is featured in fading grey lines, juxtaposed against the bright, vibrant depiction of Atlantic Station-proper. Notably, the neighborhood on the western border of Atlantic Station, an area still undergoing significant gentrification efforts, is erased entirely from the map. The Atlantic Station property map depicts the development as an island amidst a sea of fading lines and nothingness to its east and west borders. This is significant given Atlantic Station’s situatedness within a relatively dense and interconnected urban area.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, a recent exploration by the author of downtown Atlanta bookstores in search of city street maps that document the street grid of Southwest Atlanta. Despite the proximity of these stores to this geographical area, all available downtown or urban Atlanta maps document the street grids of Midtown and Buckhead to the north, but none represented the streets of Southwest Atlanta. Interestingly, Southwestern Atlanta is an area suffering from significant economic blight. It is home to a vast majority of African American residents and is not home to any mainstream shopping areas or tourist attractions.

¹⁶ See Appendix A (Property Map) and Appendix B (District Map).

Interestingly, Midtown Alliance, the association uniting Midtown and Atlanta neighborhoods surrounding Atlantic Station, heralds the development as a sub-section of Midtown proper (midtownalliance.org). The map of the Midtown area produced by the Alliance situates Atlantic Station within Midtown, integrating the neighborhood into its surrounding streets.¹⁷ The Property Map reveals the desire to clearly demarcate and differentiate Atlantic Station from its urban neighbors. It contributes to a sense of place, a place that is decidedly segregated from its urban neighbors in a way that the Midtown Atlanta map does not. This component of the Atlantic Station map reveals the extent to which the development contributes to a fractured sense of urban spaces, not simply in the differentiation between different urban enclaves, but in the almost entire negation of the development's material location as one situated within a larger urban fabric.

The Property Map also establishes three thematic geographical clusters within the development labeled The District, The Village, and The Commons. These distinctions parallel what Duany and Plater-Zyberk (2007/1993) advocated in their early proposals for new urban development: the neighborhood, The District and the corridor. Duany and Plater-Zyberk (2007/1993) suggest these three thematic elements are “the fundamental organizing elements” (p. 193) of new urbanism and constitute a microcosm of traditional urban features where a number of neighborhoods and districts are linked by corridors for transit or pedestrian activity. I will address some significant ways Duany and Plater-Zyberk's (2007/1993) reading of these three components differ significantly from the way they are enacted in Atlantic Station in Chapter Three – but for my reading in this chapter, I suggest that the utilization of this new urban structure provides one possible explanation for the negation of Atlantic Station's neighbors. For

¹⁷ See Appendix C for a map of Midtown (midtownalliance.org).

Duany and Plater-Zyberk, (2007/1993) new urban developments constitute a cluster of sub-sections (via the neighborhood, district, corridor schemata). In fact, new urban developments are often considered self-sustaining and are demarcated by some kind of barrier (LeGates and Stout, 2007). New urbanism, at least in its early planning stages, consisted of self contained neighborhoods where all of the necessary components of urban life could be found in a small geographical place.

New urbanism as a development pattern has often been advocated as an alternative to suburban areas where zoning regulations clearly delineated between retail, business, and residential developments, and Atlantic Station is no exception (Kunstler, 1993). Yet as Hankins and Powers (forthcoming) have shown, Atlantic Station does not exist as a self-sustaining community. The development constitutes a place entirely absent of familiar state institutions typically associated with public communities. The District, The Village, and The Commons are not home to a school, church, public park, or post office. Despite the exclusiveness supported by The Property Map of Atlantic Station, it is virtually impossible to inhabit the development without transversing its borders if residents hope to educate their children, cast a ballot, or mail a letter.

The District Map reveals those outlets that are available in Atlantic Station. The development may lack “topographical spaces and social imaginaries that invoke the political public” (Hankins & Powers, forthcoming, p. 22), but the community is rife with places allocated for capital consumption. While The Property Map is only available online and in printed brochures, The District Map is clearly posted at street corners throughout The District area of Atlantic Station. Like kiosks characteristic of suburban shopping malls, The District Map is color coded and numerically labeled, supported by a key to indicate the location of the variety of

retail shops, restaurants, and “services” available to the Atlantic Station occupant. The proliferation of these clearly posted and publicly accessible maps suggests that the priority within the development is to clearly identify the opportunities for consumption. Even the one retail center located outside of The District, Ikea, is noted on the periphery of the map. A clear arrow points shoppers in the direction of this mega-store. Notably, The District Map does not mention the four residential areas located between The District and Ikea. The purpose of The District Map is clear. It is designed to navigate shoppers and diners within the development, not to map the various buildings within Atlantic Station. Though the community is home to over 10,000 residents, the only mention of residency on The District Map is the location of the two “Residential Sales Centers” located within the retail area of The District.

The components of The Property and The District Maps of Atlantic Station suggest two interrelated images are propagated by the developers. First, The Property Map clearly distinguishes and segregates the development from any of its urban neighbors. Atlantic Station is mapped as an independent urban cluster, unique and differentiated from its surrounding area. Second, The District Map reveals just what makes Atlantic Station so different from the neighborhoods surrounding it. City space here is presented as a clean, color-coded grid of retail and entertainment venues. In fact, the residential component of Atlantic Station remains unmapped in this text. Recall that for Foucault (1967) “each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society” (para. 18) that is either “to create a space of illusion” or to create a space that is “perfect, meticulous, (and) well arranged” (para. 29). In mapping Atlantic Station the development is not only presented as an other space, set aside from its urban counterparts, but is also presented in neat, clean lines centered around the retail opportunities that

constitute urban life within this neighborhood. The Atlantic Station resident is thus mapped as an invisible occupant whose day-to-day existence is neatly balanced between Ikea and The Gap.

Marketing Place

Like the official maps, the marketing texts advertising the development establish the heterotopic dimensions of Atlantic Station by “juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1967, para. 21). Atlantic Station as an open, urban space is, in fact, illusory. The developers highlight the vibrancy of this urban heterogeneous neighborhood, yet the extent to which these claims are substantiated by the material conditions here is extremely limited. It is, rather, constructed as a place where the illusion of co-mingling is carefully constructed to support the notion that Atlantic Station is, in fact, an urban neighborhood. The marketing texts advertising the development also suggest Atlantic Station embodies many elements of Auge’s (1995) non-place. The notion of urban life is fundamentally linked to a resident’s ability to patronize businesses.

Cities and sub-divisions have a longstanding history of self-marketing focused on the production of texts aimed at highlighting the particular, sometimes nuanced, elements of a given community (DeChaine, 2001). Newly established or transitioning neighborhoods utilize these kinds of textual artifacts to create a spatial identity, often centered on a number of limited themes that highlight the desirability of a given area. The need to enter the market with a clear, strategically designed campaign is essential for emerging urban developments (Grant, 2006). In his analysis of websites promoting popular golf communities, DeChaine (2001) has suggested community developers centered their promotional materials on themes that “underlie formative American ideologies of nature, purity, individualism” (p. 134) through an emphasis on exclusivity, safety, serenity, and prestige. Of course the themes emerging in promotional

materials vary based on the kind of community being promoted, but the dominance of a particular type of lifestyle reflects, as DeChaine has highlighted, fundamental ideological underpinnings.

Developments privately owned and operated with a heightened emphasis on commodity consumption must establish a connection between livability and the retail patterns they embody. In their evaluation of a suburban shopping mall and “lifestyle center” in Colorado, Stewart and Dickinson (2008) have suggested the shopping center announces a sense of “here” and “now,” that “is nothing more – and nothing less – than a node in the networks of globalized capitalism,” a place offering “locality in place of the local, images of the city in place of the profound difficulties of city living, the excitement of difference in place of a confrontation with diversity itself” (p. 301). This sense is communicated by material and visual rhetoric promoting a sense of location. The shopping mall, thus, offers a “recognizable image of place” (p. 298) that corresponds to an image of rugged Colorado living, weaving global retail networks into a much more specific understanding of locality.

The Atlantic Station website defines the neighborhood as a new urban development, highlighting the accessibility of community and the individually fulfilling lifestyle that stems from this close urban proximity. “Life Happens Here” the Atlantic Station website asserts, and the page is designed to indicate just what kind of “life” happens there. The dominant organizing theme of the Atlantic Station website is centered on the development’s catchphrase “LIVE WORK PLAY,” a statement implying residents of Atlantic Station can find all of the necessary components to create a successful lifestyle within the community’s borders. Harvey (1997) has observed this is a common theme in new urban planning, where the goal is “to transform large and teeming cities, so seemingly out of control, into an interlinked series of ‘urban villages’” (p.

2) where residents are civil and relatable. The marketing of Atlantic Station establishes the community as one such village, a place with “something for everyone. Whether it’s your first apartment or a 46th floor penthouse condominium” where residents enjoy “a quality of life unmatched in the Southeast” (atlanticstation.com). This quality, the website tirelessly maintains, derives from the walkability of the community. And this quality, presumably, is available for everyone. “Welcome to the Neighborhood” (atlanticstation.com) the website declares under its “Live” tab, alongside advertisements for two condominium complexes where units are priced from the high 200s to the million-plus.

The degree to which Atlantic Station is, in fact, accessible to everyone is questionable. A first apartment in the community is priced well above rental averages within the city of Atlanta (Atlanta GA MSA, 2009). Nonetheless, the development is marketed as a place where “whatever fits your fancy and lifestyle” is possible – where residents of a diverse “vibrant walking community” can “take a short stroll to shop, enjoy a movie, grab a bite to eat, or relax with family and friends” (atlanticstation.com). The Atlantic Station resident in these marketing documents could be anyone – Atlantic Station as a place is urban and open – its accessibility and walkability make it an ideal community for residents and visitors of all shapes and sizes. Of course, just what this “everyone” looks like is debatable, particularly in terms of class accessibility to the residential units in the development. Likewise, the ways this “everyone” might behave, as I will discuss shortly, is strictly monitored by the development’s exhaustive list of rules and regulations.

In addition to a community that is all-encompassing, Atlantic Station highlights the environmental benefits of living within the development, and, moreover, the individual fulfillment residents enjoy because of this green lifestyle. “What could you do with an extra hour

a day? ... an extra day a month? ... an extra week a year? Anything you want”

(atlanticstation.com). A lifestyle in Atlantic Station will seemingly provide you with just that by obliterating your commute and improving your quality of life. In fact, simply occupying the buildings designed with “unsurpassed architectural quality” will increase your productivity (by increasing your comfortability), the website argues. The obvious environmental benefit associated with new urbanism is the decreased emphasis on automobile traffic. In fact, the development was almost curbed by the federal government until developers convinced lawmakers that Atlantic Station might improve air quality in the downtown area by enabling more residents to adopt a pedestrian friendly lifestyle (Saporta, 2008). Living in an environmentally sustainable community is, according to atlanticstation.com, inherently exciting and vibrant. The Atlantic Station resident is personally empowered by the movement of her feet.

Atlantic Station’s emphasis on a walkable lifestyle is problematized by its tenacious marketing campaigns aimed at promoting the site as a destination location for suburbanites to “shop, dine, and be entertained” (atlanticstation.com), a function that requires the thousands of daily visitors to drive to Atlantic Station and park their vehicles in the vast underground parking structure beneath the neighborhood itself. Within this framework Atlantic Station is implicated in what environmentalists have termed “greenwashing,” a practice in which products and commodity consumptions are linked to the environmental movement while the organization in question “makes no attempt to address the company’s wider deliberate disavowal of environmental impacts” (Pezzullo, 2007, p. 112). So, while the development has been praised for their initial approach to this brownfield site, and their desire to construct high-rise towers with

LEED certification,¹⁸ some rather fundamental environmental efforts, including basic recycling and consumer waste reduction, have been almost entirely overlooked.

Atlantic Station is thus presented as a perfect place, a site where the best components of urban living can be found: vibrancy, 24-hour activities, and a co-mingling of different kinds of people, are all at the fingertips of residents here. Unquestionably, many of these claims are blatantly false. The vibrancy of life emanating from Atlantic Station is produced not by the people who occupy this space, but by the amenities offered by the stores and restaurants within the development. This is, as we have seen, one of the fundamental components of non-place. The individual resident in Atlantic Station is thrust into a development where the idea of urban life has been pre-defined, centering on retail and dining activities.

Monitoring Place

While Atlantic Station's marketing campaign aimed at green living is rife with contradictions, the degree to which the development is an open, urban center accessible to residents and visitors alike from all walks of life is equally questionable. Scholars have frequently explored the extent to which city space is a carceral space where "a collection of surveillant nodes designed to impose a particular model of conduct and disciplinary adherence" (Soja, 1995, p. 29) enact a version of panoptic control over urban residents. Of course, as Soja suggests, power in city space does not operate "simply and directly along the extended visual lines of Bentham's Panopticon," but is rather inscribed into space through a socio-spatial dialectic whereby spatial occupants are implicating and implicated in the dynamics of power and knowledge. While the relationship between city space and power can be conceptualized as a

¹⁸ LEED is a nationally recognized program designed to acknowledge "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design." The program is aimed at acknowledging "green" architectural practices that contribute to a plan geared at conservation.

process far more complex and networked than a pure panoptic gaze would allow, evaluating the rhetorical dimensions of spatial practice where “governments materialize their rule in the organization and surveillance of urban space” (Wells, 2007, p. 138) illuminates significant components of the power relationships at work in an urban place.

The regulation of behaviors and power dynamics are particularly visible in places dominated by private ownership. Private places are often sites of biopolitical control (Amsden, 2008; Diken, 2004) where the movement, actions, and positions of inhabitants are carefully monitored. Like many of its predecessors, Atlantic Station as a decidedly private place engages in a variety of modes of surveillance and monitoring techniques.¹⁹ The development is policed by both the Atlanta Police Department and an independent security team employed by the property managers. The security team’s primary responsibility is to ensure that the occupants of Atlantic Station are obeying the extensive list of rules and regulations titled “The Rules of Conduct and Respect” (TRCR). TRCR are posted throughout the development on large signs. In addition they are available through the website and are also distributed by members of the security team to Atlantic Station residents and visitors.

The purpose of TRCR is, according to Atlantic Station LLC, to provide a “safe, secure, and pleasant environment” where residents and visitors can shop and dine. In a desire to “allow others to shop safely and comfortably” residents and visitors are prohibited from “shouting, making loud noises, using indecent language. Loud and boisterous behavior. Playing loud music,” or any other variety of disruptive behavior including running, skating, skateboarding, loitering, or using benches for anything other than sitting. These kinds of regulations, as

¹⁹ The development does claim its green spaces are “public” parks— and while these places are public in the sense they are generally accessible to inhabitants of Atlantic Station, they remain privately owned and are subject to any laws or regulations established by the management of the neighborhood.

Amsden (2008) has noted, not only “serve the financial interests of mall owners and retailers, but also appeal to patron’s desire to preserve a pleasing and comfortable environment” (p. 423).

Interestingly, TRCR is not established to protect the rights or desires of home owners or residents of Atlantic Station.

The construction of TRCR to monitor behavior in Atlantic Station, and the activities and uses of the development that these regulations are designed to protect, marks a significant departure from other planned communities like those explored by deChaine (2001). While gated communities have a long-standing history of marketing themselves as desirable places to inhabit and homeowners associations often establish rules and regulations that monitor certain types of home maintenance practices (for example lawn maintenance and aesthetic design choices), TRCR is neither a text produced by the residents of the development nor is it designed to protect the rights, safety, or security of those who live in Atlantic Station.²⁰ Rather, TRCR are designed to secure the ability of residents and visitors to shop in peace without the disruptions that might surface in this seemingly open space.

TRCR introduces Atlantic Station as a “Private Property” where the appropriate rules and regulations must be followed or the occupant will be “asked to leave and stay away for a specified period of time.” Occupants of Atlantic Station are prohibited from “disruptive conduct of any kind” including standing in doorways or stairwells – we “must keep moving in an orderly fashion” and keep our shoes on at all times. Groups of juveniles are limited to four or fewer, and photographs, demonstrations, and audio recordings are prohibited. In addition to what are fairly extensive regulations, TRCR also establishes the hours the neighborhood is open for business:

²⁰ Unlike many neighborhood groups, Atlantic Station is governed by a private organization. Homeowners associations, on the other hand, are usually made up of residents of the neighborhood they oversee. The mandates established that govern acceptable practices and the board responsible for overseeing these mandates are typically elected to the office and hold positions that have term limits.

“Atlantic Station closes when the retail stores close ... Gathering outdoors after dark is not allowed unless attending a public park.”²¹ Unlike traditional urban residential and commercial areas, even the sidewalks in Atlantic Station are off limits when the shops close their doors.

TRCR constitute a significant and problematic rhetorical contribution to the existing textual artifacts establishing Atlantic Station as a defined place. While scholars have increasingly noted the dynamics of power within city places, and dissuaded the use of “tired rehearsals of discourses about the city as panoptic space” (Latham and McCormack, 2004, p. 708), TRCR constitute a different kind of urban power play. The rules governing behavior in Atlantic Station are not only extensive, but decidedly repressive. Acceptable behavior patterns within the development are limited to those activities that promote and privilege shopping and dining. Sharma (2009) has called this dimension of non-place a space dictated by *banopticon*, where movement within these transitory sites is dictated by pre-existing bans that establish acceptable behavior patterns. Within this framework, non-place is framed around what is not allowed, and TRCR establish Atlantic Station as one such place. While TRCR establish that shopping, dining, and entertainment are the only acceptable activities with The District, the definition of these activities remains decidedly vague. Is window shopping excluded? What kind of entertainment are they referring to? Are picnics brought from home an acceptable dining practice? Yet the bans in this neighborhood are explicit and specific. Even the neighborhood as a whole has hours of business, hours that, notably, are not pre-determined but relational, based on the retail schedule of a given week.

Communicative Texts: Establishing Place in Atlantic Station

Atlantic Station is thus constructed in tense, sometimes contradictory ways by Atlantic Station LLC. Maps of the development differentiate the neighborhood from its surroundings,

²¹ Notably there are no public parks in Atlantic Station.

reinforcing Atlantic Station proper as a kind of heterotopia, “outside of or fundamentally different to all other spaces” (Genocchio, 1995, p. 38) but implicated in a larger urban space of heterogeneity. Mapping Atlantic Station provides the occupant with a sense of place, an understanding that the neighborhood exists as something unique and different from its surroundings. The District, The Village, and The Commons represent a microcosm of the larger urban core. Atlantic Station appears as a cohesive urban system, distinct from its neighbors yet reflective of them.

The website entices possible residents from a similar angle, highlighting the simplicity of a life without automobiles within the development. According to website marketing, residents of Atlantic Station have everything they need at their fingertips. The appeal of Atlantic Station is an ease of living unavailable in other urban and suburban areas. Moreover, the ease of living will prove personally fulfilling. Residents will presumably be more productive, have more control over their lives, and more time to engage in personal activities. Again the sense of difference is highlighted. Atlantic Station is vibrant and new. And this vibrancy affects its residents at the personal level, making residents better, more efficient, and more relaxed. As such, the development situates itself within the larger urban milieu as a kind of heterotopia. It is a place decidedly unique from the rest of the metropolitan Atlanta area. The District is distinct from the suburbs in its emphasis on walkability, yet varies from its urban neighbors by maps, and as I will discuss at greater length in Chapter Three, structural barriers that differentiate the Atlantic Station neighborhood from its surroundings.

Yet Atlantic Station also markets itself as fluid space, one in which everyone is welcome. Rather than marketing the community as elusive, elite, or a place of privilege, Atlantic Station is

promoted as a place accessible to all.²² While it is mapped as a place unique within a larger heterogeneous urbanity, it itself claims to embody heterogeneity. Photographs of presumed residents and visitors to Atlantic Station on its website are of individuals from a variety of races, genders, and age groups. The neighborhood claims to be home to low-, middle-, and high-income residents, all living together in this “24-hour community abuzz with pedestrian traffic on its wide boulevards and the crowd of people in the sidewalk cafes and expansive parks.”²³ This claim advertises Atlantic Station as a decidedly urban neighborhood, open to residents and visitors from all walks of life.

The primary problem with Atlantic Station’s “Welcome to the Neighborhood” mantra is that the neighborhood is not very welcoming. Contrary to lifestyle well-being and open accessibility marketed at atlanticstation.com, Atlantic Station is remarkably controlled and differentiated from its urban brethren, particularly through the TRCR clearly aimed at protecting the retail foundation of the neighborhood. The fissures between Atlantic Station and its neighbors grows wider, the development might be heterogeneous to the extent that those with differences continue to behave in the prescribed way. And the behavior privileged by Atlantic Station? Shopping, and therefore movement. Like Auge’s reading of non-place, the development is a place to be moved through, rather than impressed upon. It is a site with designated behavioral norms, which the posted TRCR and security staff supporting them,

²² Planned communities with similar home prices often make claims aimed at communicating an exclusivity DeChaine (2001).

²³ Part of Atlantic Station’s funding during development and construction was given by the city with the agreement that the development would house low-income residents. Developers conceded and agreed to include a student apartment complex that houses college students from the nearby Georgia Tech. While the complex qualifies as “low income” students still pay well above market value for rooms in shared apartments.

constantly seek to enforce. The Atlantic Station resident enjoying the new-found serenity of a car-less world is nonetheless prohibited from standing still.

The ongoing emphasis on movement and use highlighted in TRCR suggests Atlantic Station closely resembles a non-place. Atlantic Station as an urban subdivision reflects the fractured urbanity central to an understanding of non-place. The residents and occupants of Atlantic Station are implicated in an existing contract that has already established who they are and what they do within this place. Moreover, TRCR marks an explicit attempt to enact power and dictate behavior and movement, all the while operating under close surveillance by the private owners of the neighborhood. The claims Atlantic Station makes about the lifestyle and accessibility of the development are not only grandiose, they are farcical. Atlantic Station is not a 24-hour community. On the contrary TRCR explicitly states that it closes. Atlantic Station is not accessible to everyone. It is expensive and it is allocated for shopping. Atlantic Station does not promote individual choice and well-being. Occupants are prohibited from removing their shoes, standing in one place, talking too loud, or taking a photograph.

The most fascinating aspect of these competing and contradictory claims is that they continue to exist. Their ongoing use contributes to a construction of place that is at once controlled yet indefinite. As critics of non-place theory have noted (Sharma, 2009), the suggestion that place can be entirely pre-determined by text, or that as occupants of place we lack any concrete connection to our own locality, does not paint a complete picture of the communicative practices occurring within space. The textual representation created by Atlantic Station LLC undoubtedly plays an important role in the definition of Atlantic Station as an urban place, but it nonetheless does not encompass all the dimensions of place-making. As Latham and McCormack (2004) have noted, an analysis of the materiality of urban geographies must

acknowledge the nature of the city as a plurality of potentially transformative shapes and forms.²⁴ The rhetorical construction of representations of space marks one area through which this plurality is enacted. Rather than concrete representations clearly demarcating what a place is, and will be, these rhetorical artifacts reflect the ways place can be understood, within a larger constellation of possibly malleable urban networks. A reading of atlanticstation.com positions the occupant in an awkward, ill-conceived location: enlightened residency armed with a shopping bag and a martini. Occupants here have been stripped of even their most fundamental relationships to civic urbanism, radically removed from notions of city living that include schools and libraries, churches and parks. The architecture and design attributes of the community reveal one possible explanation for how this transformation has occurred and they constitute the second component through which the rhetoric of place-making is enacted.

²⁴ The third component of critical heuristic I am proposing attempts to address the ways that these pluralities might be conceptualized within a reading of space. Chapter Four will show more specifically the ways the uses of Atlantic Station problematize the textual reading of place outlined here

CHAPTER 3.

Structural Components as Rhetorical Artifacts:

Reading the Architecture and Layout of Atlantic Station

The developers of Atlantic Station present the neighborhood as an urban playground in their marketing literature, a place where residents can enjoy the full amenities that come with living in a walkable, densely built, community. As we have seen, however, in the official rules dictating appropriate behavior, urbanism is narrowly defined by the ability of Atlantic Station occupants to move through the space, doing little more than shopping and dining. But texts alone do not determine our notions of place or establish acceptable norms of decorum. The architecture and layout of city space is equally important and acts as the second component of this thesis's critical heuristic. The rhetorical work embodied in the material elements of Atlantic Station both contribute to and enhance the discursivity of Atlantic Station as a communicative space. The center's spatial design and its accompanying significations have profound implications on its communicative force.

The movement of bodies through material space constitutes what Lefebvre (1991) has called "spatial practices," where the intersection of "daily life (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life, and leisure)" (p. 38) create the social space of a society. The practice of place-making then, involves the structures and designs of material space, and the ways these components facilitate movement and communicate meaning. Indeed, as Bender (2006) has noted "although our engagement with the land is subjective, the land itself, because of its materiality, 'talks back' – it sets up resistances and constraints (p. 303). Like the marketing texts created to advertise and attract residents to

Atlantic Station, the architecture of the development has been carefully orchestrated to communicate a particular type of place that is read and used by those who occupy it.²⁵ This material dimension of place is imbued with meaning, positioning dwellers, enabling and constricting movement, providing “a particular order for patrons to follow” (Stewart & Dickinson, 2008, p. 293) and thus contributing to a reading of place.

In this chapter I explore the material dimensions of Atlantic Station as a communicative entity that actively contribute to the process of place-making. If non-places are in part determined by the texts about them, as Auge (1995) has asserted, then they are also understood through their design and the ways these material structures signify meaning. Using socio-semiotics to read the structure and design of Atlantic Station, I reveal the significant parallels between this urban neighborhood and the suburban shopping malls emerging in the United States in the 1960s. I argue design patterns employed within this development not only operate to trigger certain modes of signification, but also infuse the neighborhood with a kind of familiarity to anyone familiar with the layout of a traditional shopping mall. If Atlantic Station can be fairly understood as an urban community, as its developers would have us believe, then the structural components that contribute to our understanding of this place should be heavily scrutinized. The neighborhood is not home to a playground, school, or church, but it is full to the brim with shops and restaurants. Like the marketing texts created to advertise and attract residents to Atlantic

²⁵ As I discussed in Chapter Two, Atlantic Station’s emergence was simultaneous and intentional, mirroring the kind of development often used in the construction of planned or gated communities. Like the texts designed to introduce potential residents and occupants to the development, the architecture and design of the neighborhood is purposeful and cohesive.

Station, the architecture of the development has been carefully orchestrated to communicate a vision of urbanism that is integrally linked to shopping and consumption.²⁶

In adopting a structural composition reminiscent of the shopping mall, Atlantic Station situates occupants in a familiar and ideologically-laden material geography. The structural components that contribute to our understanding of Atlantic Station as a place reveal that a significant transformation in urban design is occurring here. Like the maps produced by Atlantic Station developers, the design of the community clearly demarcates the boundaries of this neighborhood. The design of the streets, sidewalks, and open spaces of Atlantic Station, play with the notion that this is a community, but all of these networks operate to better facilitate the movement of shoppers through this space. The layout and structure of the development establishes methodical pedestrian patterns that facilitate retail activities. Atlantic Station is thus constructed as an urban place that has effectively recast our notions of urban livability as an activity structured around shopping. Through its materiality, Atlantic Station positions dwellers as shoppers, rather than as urban citizens. Non-place theory helps to elucidate the differences between these two positions. The structural composition of this development, as I will show, emphasizes movement and encourages activities based on individual consumptive practices. Like the airports and theme parks often cited as non-places, Atlantic Station encourages occupants to keep moving and keep shopping, providing no venues to engage in community activities or the interaction typically associated with urban lifestyle practices.

Before turning to Atlantic Station specifically, I will first explore socio-semiotics as a useful means for interrogating the way architecture and design components contribute to the

²⁶ As I discussed in Chapter Two, Atlantic Station's emergence was simultaneous and intentional, mirroring the kind of development often used in the construction of planned or gated communities. Like the texts designed to introduce potential residents and occupants to the development, the architecture and design of the neighborhood is purposeful and cohesive.

practice of place-making. As a methodology aimed at uncovering the way materialities embody ideological motivations, socio-semiotics provides a lens through which to read the layout and design components of Atlantic Station as communicative entities that position occupants as shoppers and diners, rather than residents or citizens. Following an exploration of socio-semiotics more broadly, I will discuss the underlying signification practices associated with the structural components of the traditional shopping mall. Finally, I will relate the themes proposed in shopping mall literature to the material forms in Atlantic Station. The parallels between these two design patterns suggest that Atlantic Station is effectively re-appropriating the shopping mall and framing it as an urban development. This trend, I argue, has damaging repercussions on our very notions of urban space, and the ways, as urban residents, we might enact citizenship within that space.

Socio-Semiotics: The Material as Social

A reading of the built environment is rooted in an understanding of material forms as symbolic, and therefore rhetorical. As Clark (2004) notes in his reading of American landscapes, “the rhetorical symbols we encounter and exchange are not limited to language” (p. 3). The rhetorical functions of the material world can be found in “the full range of symbols that constitute a person’s social and cultural experience” (p. 3), experiences that are laden with political and ideological undertones. Socio-semiotics, an approach aimed at “a materialist inquiry into the role of ideology in everyday life” (Gottdiener & Lagopoulos, 1986, p. 14) provides a methodological tool for identifying and evaluating the kinds of meanings embodied within material forms.²⁷ Reading place from a socio-semiotic perspective involves occupying the space, moving through it, and drawing parallels between various places. It is a process aimed at articulating the way material objects signify meanings. It is a way to conceptualize a material

²⁷ For an overview of foundational socio-semiotic essays see, *The City & the Sign* (Gottdiener & Lagopoulos, 1986).

space as a place that has relevance outside of simple context. This place is itself a communicative entity, and as such presupposes certain kinds of behavioral and communicative possibilities.

An evaluation of city space within socio-semiotics reveals not only the ways that material spaces might communicate, but also highlights the possible interpretations and relationships between structures and objects within a place. In this framework, the components of space as material entities also contribute to place-making as a social process. As Law (2002) has observed, objects that appear to be fixed or static are, in fact, situated within a larger network that infuses them with meaning. In our interaction with the material, we are engaging dominant symbolic structures that establish meaningful communicative nodes within geographic locations. For example, as Davis (1990) observes in his reading of a heavily fortified Los Angeles, shopping malls and office centers with limited entry and exit points and almost no street level access, “are full of invisible signs warning off the underclass” (p. 226) through their architectural composition. Gates and surveillance cameras, for instance, communicate meaning through the ways they monitor behaviors and bar access. A fence communicates “keep out” without ever actually speaking, and, in doing so, underscores the way social spaces are formed.

The rhetorical dimension of the material is thus, a collective process in which common identities are formed through “our encounters with each other’s symbols” (Clark, 2004, p. 3) experiences that constitute “in individual citizens a shared sense of common identity” (p. 148). A socio-semiotic analysis reveals not only what kinds of identification practices are derived from the material world, but also “the regulation or hegemonic domination of people” (Gottdiener, 1995, p. 56) that is enacted through these symbolic forms. Urban spaces in particular, “are excellent for illustrating the fundamental premise of socio-semiotics – namely, that the

articulation of ideology with material objects constitutes a non-reducible social process” (Gottdiener, p. 54), largely because it is within urban space that the intersection of social practices and material contexts is continuously and visibly acted out. The meaning of objects and structures is rooted in the “sociocultural and environmental contexts” (Vastokas, 1994, p. 339) in which they exist, providing what Shields (1994) has called “meta-codes” (p. 214) through which we understand and operate within our surroundings.

Socio-semiotics has been criticized in the age of post-structuralism by critics who are wary of “imposing arbitrary classifications upon the streams of objects that flow around us” (Douglas, 1994, p. 10). Nonetheless, socio-semiotics remains a useful way to engage the ways objects signify meanings that are forged through collective social processes. Indeed, objects and places are potentially malleable given spatial and temporal transformations (Lagopoulos, 2003), but the polysemic readings of these objects are limited by “the full communication process occurring in *particular* rhetorical configurations” (Condit, 1989, p. 104). The communicative force of structures and objects thus relies on the social and spatial conventions that infuse them with shared symbolism.

My reading of the socio-semiotic symbolization of Atlantic Station rests on a well-established vein of research aimed at unmasking the ways retail spaces communicate meaning. The architecture and composition of Atlantic Station allude to a number of pre-existing modes of signification most commonly found in the American shopping mall. These modes of signification have been conceived in three dominant ways. First, the shopping mall has been conceptualized as a location constructed in opposition to its surroundings. Second, objects, structures, and the organization of the interior of the mall can be read as a mode of signification both structuring movement and communicating meaning to those occupying the center. Third,

the mall can be conceptualized as a product of the changing conditions of urban and suburban life. In what follows I will briefly discuss the ways these three conceptualizations have emerged in socio-semiotic literature. Then I will turn to Atlantic Station to address the ways socio-semiotics contributes to a reading of this unique place.

Semiotics and the Mall

The relationship between a place and its surroundings is itself a signifying practice. Greimas (1976/1986) has suggested place constitutes a language based on the politics of exclusion, where geographically distinct areas are understood “as a language signified to itself . . . operat(ing) first by exclusion, by opposing itself spatially to all that it is not” (p. 29) through design and material spatial segregation. Through these processes of division, urban spaces become their own signs – signs of affluence, of degradation, of particular racial, ethnic, economic, political, or social affiliations. The city, Greimas (1976/1986) argues, is first and foremost a sign created out of spatial divisions where “interrelations and interactions between subjects and objects” (p. 41) are dictated by the boundaries between material spaces.

In his early exploration of the socio-semiotic dimensions of the shopping mall, Gottdiener (1986) argued that these centers could be understood as direct responses to the growing instability of central business districts and the increased desire to create a spatial language centered on a binary division between belonging and othering. Gottdiener suggested that the 1970s-era shopping mall could be understood as a distinct architectural form, a form that, through socio-semiotics, could be explored through its connotative meanings and the particular symbolic interactions that combined to create the “sign” of a modern American shopping mecca. Gottdiener’s (1986) analysis centered on shopping malls emerging on the outskirts of Los Angeles in the 1970s, situated well within the confines of suburban LA sprawl.

These malls marked a spatial distinction between “here” and “there.” This sense of “here” is created by both the distance between the standard shopping mall and the central urban business district and also supported by the architectural features of the mall that enclose and segregate it from its surroundings.²⁸ In fact, the success of the mall in early suburbs “depended on its ability to contrast positively with the experience of the everyday environment in the surrounding space” (Gottdiener, 1986, p. 295). Shopping malls, in their isolation from virtually all other modes of business and/or commerce, distinctively announced their identity as unique retail areas that “are essentially places for white middle classes” (Goss, 1993, p. 26). These centers invited those with the ability and desire to consume into their fortress-like confines where one could be lulled to retail euphoria by the carefully controlled pedestrian movements and not-quite identifiable humming background music.

Gottdiener’s (1986) reading of the California shopping mall as a space clearly delineated and differentiated from its urban brethren reflects Greimas’ (1976/1986) conclusions about the politics of exclusion and the spatial language implicated in a binary division between “in” and “out.” Entering “the mall,” the consumer is immersed into “a spatial unity and temporal stability that contrasts with the dynamic and discontinuous, fragmented and segregated reality beyond its bounds” (Goss, 1999, p. 45). The geographical distinction between “the mall” and everywhere else comprises one element of signification that proves relevant in a reading of Atlantic Station. The stability, or one might say fluidity of form, greeting mall users once they enter the confines of these retail centers is created and supported by the internal organization and artifacts that communicate specific types of symbolic interaction and behavior.

²⁸ Recall most malls have very few windows, doors, or exterior common areas. They are not only spatially isolated, but architecturally isolated as well, frequently situated amidst a sea of parking lots and access roads. Entry is controlled, and pedestrian accessibility is often limited.

Outside of the physical segregation of “this” place from “that” place, the mall also embodies particular signification practices unique to its very form. While shopping centers often rely on an aesthetic of exclusion, they also invoke meaning through the design and orientation of the interior. After all, as Law (2002) has argued, “spaces are made with objects” (p.96), and it is in part through these objects that place acquires meaning. Malls, in particular, as Gottdiener (1986) has noted, mark places where “the ideology of profit and the ideology of consumption” (p.292) comprise the sole purpose guiding desired behavior. Mall design, on the other hand, has been carefully constructed “to disguise the exchange relation between producer and consumer” (p. 293) through a variety of thematic references that are only tangentially related, if at all, to the retail experience.

As the sophistication of mall architecture has increased, so too have the thematic elements incorporated into retail design strategies. The mall, in many cases, has become a microcosm of the world, complete with rivers and meandering pathways (Crawford, 1992), central meeting areas and “public” plazas (Goss, 1993), special exhibitions, art shows, and demonstrations (Shields, 1994). The construction of mall interiors to mirror the life that exists outside its walls has been a consistent design pattern across malls of all shapes and sizes (Crawford, 1992; Goss, 1993, 1999; Gottdiener, 1986; Shields, 1994; Stewart & Dickinson, 2008). The Mall of America, for example, perhaps the quintessential shopping mecca of North America, centers on seven dominant themes, linking the various retail and entertainment venues to state pride, nature, time travel, mobility and tourism, childhood, primitiveness, and heritage (Goss, 1999). These themes re-center the retail shopping experience around “a collective loss of a natural world of innocence and immanence ... promising restoration into a utopian community of consumption” (Goss, 1999, p. 45). The shopping mall becomes an anesthetized version of the

exterior world, “it invites the outside in, and takes the inside out” (Stewart & Dickinson, 2008, p. 300), offering a sense of locality within the safe, secure confines of regulated place.

The interior spatial orientation of the mall facilitates this perception, harmoniously interweaving sites and signs that promote purchasing with spaces where cohabitation and intermingling is overt (the food court, for example). In addition, the exterior organization of the shopping mall highlights the spatial language best associated with a politics of exclusion and “safe” civic interaction, separating shoppers from the world outside “filled with the vagaries of urban life in a society characterized by conflict and social stratification” through the use of “blank fortress like walls and by the auspices of its feudal-like proprietor, the mall management” (Gottdiener, 1986, p. 296). The street, within the mall-city, is “‘The Street’ – an idealized social space” (Goss, 1993, p. 24) where shoppers co-mingle without exposure to weather, pollution, or the criminal element so frequently associated with downtown urban areas. The spatial orientation and architectural elements of the mall signifies security, isolation, protection – a place designated for a certain *type* of person (i.e. one with ability to shop). The internal composition of the mall, likewise offers a sense of security in the clean, manicured pathways through which mall patrons travel, but it also offers a vague resemblance to the city form itself. Early malls offered more than merely an alternative shopping experience. They provided an alternative place for individuals to enact some sense of communal interaction, a “third place beyond home and work/school” (Goss, 1993, p. 25) where members of the community could “congregate and commune.” More than a place in the suburbs to buy a sweater, malls both materially, and sometimes psychologically, balanced the sense of loss in areas where urban interaction seemed increasingly dangerous, impossible, unfeasible, or simply undesired

(Gottdiener, 1986). Thus conceived the mall constitutes a kind of city in and of itself, albeit a city with no residents, government, civic institutions, or actual “public” space.

Along with the signification that occurs as a result of exclusionary practices and the architecture and design elements from within, the mall in itself embodies rhetorical meaning in its emergence as a reflection of the values and beliefs of a particular epoch. As Hattenhauer (1984) has noted, architectural forms are particularly rhetorical in their facilitation of what the author terms ritual activities, “rhythmic, repetitive behaviors that dramatize meanings,” actions that “remind us of our identity and place in the cosmos, community, family, and workplace” (p. 74). Shoppers have not merely been duped into believing that the mall somehow adequately replaces or represents a geography of community engagement. Rather, the creation of the suburban shopping mall is the product of specific historical conditions. Mall popularity and the withdrawal from urban centers are interrelated phenomenon, and the on-going thematic devices used to situate malls into a narrative of nostalgia and community cohesion can be linked to their historical emergence (Gottdiener, 1986).

The construction of suburban shopping malls in the early 1950s enabled the residents of those suburbs to further sever their connection to the urban core. Shopping malls, Cohen (1996) observes, responded to the complaints of shoppers accustomed to downtown retail areas by providing ample parking, visible security guards, and well maintained air-conditioned walkways and stores. Unlike the city street, “the place where people had to cope with the sheer vibrancy and diversity of urban experience” (Pile, 2005, p. 15), the shopping mall enabled suburban residents to engage in a more aggressive disassociation from the urban core by establishing a sophisticated network of commerce within residential areas located on the periphery. Of course this shift in retail development was not a question merely of proximity. Shopping centers, unlike

their retail urban brethren, “aimed to exclude from this public space unwanted urban groups such as vagrants, prostitutes, racial minorities, and poor people” thereby establishing their status as a central figure in the community “in exclusionary socioeconomic and racial terms” (Cohen, 1996, p. 1059). The emergence of the shopping mall, framed in this context, was not simply a response to the growing number of suburbanites evacuating the urban core, but also facilitated increased segregation practices rooted in economic, social, and racial status already determining the development of urban and suburban areas in the 1950s.

While suburbs in the decades following the 1950s saw an explosion of growth, and shopping malls established themselves as the quintessential outlets for retail activities, a great deal has changed in recent years. Urban populations have begun to slowly climb, and the popularity of the suburban shopping mall has slowly decreased (Pristin, 2007). Do these reversals suggest we have at last determined the politics and exclusionary practices upon which the mall was founded are untenable? Have we opted to embrace the ‘vagrants, prostitutes, and minorities’ at our door in urban retail areas? Or is it the urban form itself that has responded and shifted to attract suburbanites back to the city? Scholars have bemoaned some of the changes occurring within the urban, suggesting that city space increasingly resembles a parking lot (Dagenhart, 1995), an airport (Wood, 2003), and a theme park (Sorkin, 1992). Changes in urban formations have led to what Koolhaas & Mau (1995) have termed “the generic city,” a place that “is nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability” (p. 1250), a city based on utility with no connection to history or identity. Within this context, the city is a space where the sole function of spatial organization is the support of global capital flows. In the context of these urban alterations, the shopping mall has made a resounding shift in the trajectory of its development. Retail has again come home to roost in central business areas. But the shape and

structure of this return suggests it is the urban form itself, rather than our allegiance to suburbia, that is undergoing a significant transformation.

The New Urban Shopping Mall

Atlanta is, as one might surmise, no stranger to the shopping mall. While retail nodes resided in the central business district for decades (the final giant inhabiting downtown Atlanta, Macys, eventually closed its doors in 2003), like many urban cities, retail evacuated for all points suburb as the 1980s marched forward. Predictably, however, as centralizing trends in population movements suggest signs of suburban decline, shopping malls peppering the outskirts of the city have likewise seen a dramatic decrease in popularity (Pristin, 2007). Perhaps critics of suburban mall mega-structures should begin a unified and resounding cheer of victory. Yet the growth of urban Atlanta and transformations in city population are not entirely positive, and some of the patterns emerging in developing urban centers suggest the shopping mall's underlying structure may be far from obsolete. In a city where gentrification has transformed the skyline of the urban core, the population within that center has likewise shifted. For the first time since 1920, the population of African Americans is falling, and the number of White residents is on the rise. Some in-town Atlanta neighborhoods have "virtually priced out their black residents" (Cobb, 2008, para. 21), and a staggering number of federal housing projects have been closed or demolished to make room for developments aiming to gentrify the urban core.

Within this context, can it be that the shopping mall-model of retail development is obsolete? Or, perhaps, the mall as it has traditionally been understood has managed to cleverly disguise itself in a new and utterly perplexing guise, that of the in-town living development? The existing research evaluating the shopping mall and the modes of signification operating within it establish a foundation through which Atlantic Station can be evaluated as a

development with structural similarities to the (formerly suburban) mall. Using the aforementioned threads of socio-semiotic theory, I will show the parallels between a more traditional shopping mall and Atlantic Station. These parallels occur at the level of exclusion, via a designation of a specific notion of “here” and “there.” They also manifest in the objects, orientation, and architecture of the development. In addition, these parallels are significant given the moment and urban conditions in which they occur.

Atlantic Station as a decidedly urban neighborhood offers an important point of departure for an evaluation of the exclusionary politics the developers engage. The development has often been understood as a new alternative to suburban living (jezebel magazine, 2005) and a nesting ground for urban yuppies attracted to the amenities associated with the city lifestyle: walking culture, accessibility to restaurants and shops, and proximity to the office. Despite these seemingly urban characteristics, the geographical composition of the development is in many ways reminiscent of the suburban shopping mall. Of course, the box-like architecture most often associated with the traditional shopping mall (enclosed spaces with limited access to the outside) is an impossibility for Atlantic Station because it covers a large area of land and entries to residences and places of business open up to the outside. The neighborhood, however, remains clearly demarcated and segregated from its far more urban neighbors by two domineering boundaries. To the east a large interstate, I-75/85, separates the community from the rest of urban Midtown. To the west a big-box retailer, Ikea, stretches across the border of the development.²⁹ The boundaries of the community are clearly established, despite the fact that

²⁹ Notably, while most automobile parking is underground in Atlantic Station, the Ikea parking lot stretches above and below ground, increasing the spatial division between Atlantic Station-proper and the commercial and residential areas just beyond the development on its western edge.

there is substantial retail and residential development directly to the west of the neighborhood.³⁰

While the gates so frequently associated with suburban communities are absent in Atlantic Station (though residential parking areas and access to the halls and lobbies connecting the luxury lofts and condos are still heavily fortified) the geographical orientation clearly demarcates a sense of “here” and “there.” Unlike many urban neighborhoods or sectors within urban Atlanta, the boundaries establishing Atlantic Station are clear and static.³¹

Like the spatial orientation to the surrounding neighborhoods, the internal organization and architectural aesthetics of the community also operate symbolically. As Shields (1994) has observed, malls are typically “anchored”³² by large department stores “which architects believe motivate pedestrian flows so that people circulate from one end to the other end of the mall” (p. 205). Atlantic Station flows in a similar pattern. At the eastern border of the neighborhood, the retail department store Dillard’s (certainly no stranger to the shopping mall circuit) marks one end of the development’s shopping district. Likewise, to the west, Target, another familiar mega store, anchors the eight-block retail center. On the grid streets separating these two large-scale establishments are smaller clothing and retail shops, almost all of which can most traditionally be found in the suburban shopping mall.³³ In addition to the types of stores lining Atlantic Station’s

³⁰ The western border, at the time of Atlantic Station’s construction, was undergoing a dramatic transformation that might best be described as gentrification. While the desire to remain independent of this area may be less apparent now, the economic status of the western border during the planning stages of the development may have been a convincing reason to stay geographically independent of the area.

³¹ Even an assessment of relatively affluent neighborhoods connected to or directly north of the city center show the permeable boundaries of many urban communities. Downtown, SONO (south of North Ave.), Midtown, Lindberg, and Buckhead overlap and intertwine in barely visible ways.

³² The term anchor within mall vernacular typically refers to a large chain store that has a pre-existing customer base. These anchors are usually used to draw in retail business based on the popularity of a given retailer.

³³ Retail in the area includes American Eagle Outfitters, Ann Taylor, Ann Taylor Loft, Banana Republic, Dillard's, Express, Gap, Guess?, H&M, Old Navy, Victoria's Secret, White House | Black Market, nani Sensorium, Kay’s

streets, a small walking corridor linking the central park to Target to the west is reminiscent of the traditional mall food court. Smaller dining establishments designed for in and out service (Doc Greens and Moe's Burritos are two examples) are sandwiched in between two of the major retail alleys within the development. The retail composition of the neighborhood signifies a shopping mall-like familiarity with the residents and/or shoppers occupying the space. Here as in Chapter Two, we find an emphasis on the movement of shoppers within Atlantic Station. The layout is designed to facilitate pedestrian traffic flows between and around the existing retail structure, a practice already well in place in the traditional mall.

The type of retail development here is markedly different from the type of shopping areas situated in the central business district of Atlanta up until the 1970s (and indeed is quite different from the type of retail development currently existing in other parts of the city including the retail-centered Virginia Highland and West End neighborhoods).³⁴ Atlantic Station's structure and isolation mirror that of the suburban shopping mall, still isolated geographically from urban threats related to the city center by large structural barriers, still composed of the traditional retail giants associated with the shopping mall. But Atlantic Station also takes the signification practices that have been operating in suburban malls to an entirely new level. For decades shopping malls have been capitalizing on a notion of nostalgia or community identity rooted in some understanding of what a neighborhood should be (Goss, 1999). Atlantic Station's status as a neighborhood, a place where people live and shop, meet and greet, brings this system of signification full circle.

Jewelers, & DSW shoes. Of the 15 retail stores in the area, one is a locally based retailer, all others are national or global retail meccas frequently found in the shopping mall.

³⁴ Local stores including Atlanta-based Rich's department store were retail figure-heads in the downtown shopping district in the 1970s. Likewise, current retail-centers in other parts of city are composed almost entirely of locally-owned businesses. Of the 17 dining establishments in Atlantic Station, three are "locally" owned, but all but one is part of a chain.

Atlantic Station, it appears, offers urban shoppers the opportunity to live in a playground. Simply stay in your neighborhood and you will never have to leave the mall again. This trend in new urban development is not unique to Atlanta. Celebration, Florida, perhaps the most well known new urban community in the United States, opened in 1997 to the cheers of adoring Mickey Mouse fans everywhere, offering Disney lovers the ultimate paradise, living in Disneyworld. Initial residents of Celebration heralded the praises of Disney's "brave new community" (Frantz & Collins, 2000; Ross, 1999), suggesting the neighborhood marked the return of community values, warm neighborly relationships, and of course, those uncharacteristically clean brick-lined streets typical of the theme park itself. Celebration may have been new, but it was actually old, or at least pseudo-old, reliant on some kind of semi-fictionalized nostalgia for a Disney-like community lost to the decline of a post-1950s America (Wood, 1998). The tendency to emulate some kind of small-town, semi-urban, seemingly nostalgic development pattern emerges not only in many new urban communities, but has been observed as a central theme in mall design as well (Goss, 1993, 1999).³⁵ Atlantic Station is no different, drawing on community designs rooted in a semi-historical, semi-suburban pattern.

Like the brick-lined streets of Celebration and the nostalgic community design motifs often found in the shopping mall, Atlantic Station emulates these old-world themes in neighborhood design components. Even a cursory glance at the retail district reveals that the buildings housing retail in the central business area are all made of fake brick, arranged in a way to appear semi-discolored and aged (the way an older brick building would look after years of use). Some of the city streets, as well, are made of fake brick where colored concrete has been stamped in a brick-like pattern. Lamps designed to look like older gas lamps and park benches

³⁵ See Glenwood Park in Atlanta and Seaside, Florida, the first new urban development (and notably the location for the filming of *The Truman Show*) for examples of this pattern.

with intricate (though imitation) wrought iron patterns are all reminiscent of what communities of yesteryear looked like.³⁶ The streets of Atlantic Station are the streets of Disneyland's Main Street U.S.A. These components create the second network of symbolization (beyond the shopping mall theme) in the particular ways the design components suggest a degree of community cohesion, or at least, community. The winding green belts separating the condominium developments, the wide brick sidewalks, the aged looking buildings, all contribute to a pattern of signification put into use early in the development of the suburban retail haven. The simulacrum of community presented by the shopping mall has been recast within Atlantic Station as an actual community.

Of course, Atlantic Station *is* a neighborhood. People do *live* there (and presumably shop there and work there if the development's marketing is accurate). Occupants interact, both with each other, and with the components of place just outlined, components that are organized in specific and potentially limiting ways. In the spatializing of the development and the order of objects within that space, Atlantic Station is presented as a place for shopping, a place free of the unsavory characters of city life through its geographical segregation from neighboring communities, a place that, beyond merely operating as context, symbolizes a return to some essence of communal engagement as it was appropriated by the American shopping mall of earlier suburbia.

The new urban, in the form of Atlantic Station, re-casts the shopping mall in the urban shadows of Atlanta proper. It suggests that the symbolic structure of the American shopping mall has effectively transformed from a place that *resembles* a neighborhood or community, to a place that *is* a neighborhood and community. The organizing structure, however, around which

³⁶ These design characteristics draw heavily from other shopping areas and theme parks attempting to mimic some semblance of older American community design.

this community is forged is not communal cohesion or public interaction, but the same emphasis on consumerism and profit that has been the founding principle on which the shopping mall has been structured for decades.

The emergence of Atlantic Station within the urban center of Atlanta, and the apparent popularity of these kinds of developments within a city that is undergoing significant gentrification efforts, is significant.³⁷ Like the spatialization of the development that excludes and includes, and the architecture and design components that communicate meaning is also aimed at articulating the ways material spaces and objects carry meaning as products of a particular moment in time. The shopping malls of yesteryear did not simply emerge and enjoy massive popularity out of forced usage. Rather the amenities the mall provided (security, ease of access, and segregation from urban ills), proved appealing to suburban shoppers (Cohen, 1996). Indeed, the antiseptic pseudo-streetscapes of the shopping mall, winding occupants through a meticulous retail-haven is designed to promote the financial interests of shop owners, but they nonetheless appeal to occupants as well, occupants who desire “a pleasing and comfortable environment” (Amsden, 2008, p. 423) in which to shop. Of course, the popularity of the mall and our complacency in the proliferation of these retail centers, has been scrupulously addressed by scholars (Crawford, 1992; Goss, 1993; 1999; Shields, 1994; Stewart & Dickinson, 2008). The emergence of Atlantic Station as a mall-like development with the added benefit of urban residencies suggests we have new reasons to closely evaluate our relationship to “the mall.”

Atlantic Station as a material space that is both an urban residential neighborhood and a space with a striking resemblance to the mall suggests residents and shoppers are implicated in

³⁷ Jacoby Development, the primary organization behind the development of Atlantic Station, is in the process of transforming another site in southeast Atlanta into a similar neighborhood. Jim Jacoby, the CEO, has cited the success of Atlantic Station as the primary reason the company is pursuing yet another new urban venture (Saporta, 2008).

an entirely new level of cooptation that threatens to further transform the way we understand urban living. Concerns that the shopping mall has replaced, or at least corrupted, the notion of open public spaces (Amsden, 2008; Goss, 1993, 1999) should be accompanied by concerns that the shopping mall is corrupting the very notion of urban life in general. In Atlantic Station, there is a great deal more for sale than a blouse and a bookshelf. The development sells a *lifestyle* and a new way of thinking about what it means to live in the urban. The trouble is, the lifestyle for sale marks a significant departure from previous conceptualizations of what it meant to live within the urban formation. If “the city is being radically re-structured towards residential accommodation and cultural consumption” (Makeham, 2005, p. 151), then Atlantic Station represents the veritable convergence of these notions. The success of neighborhoods structured in this fashion reveal that the shopping mall is far from a dying trend, but has rather transformed into an urban planning model. The “neighborhood” design patterns employed by many early American shopping malls has mutated into the real thing, and given the sole purpose of the mall, urban advocates have reason to be alarmed.

Communicative Structures: The Malling of Atlantic Station

Using an analysis of Atlantic Station’s structural components, via its positioning within the larger urban area, the architecture and design elements within the neighborhood, and the emergence of this kind of development at a particular moment in a transforming Atlanta, this chapter reveals the parallels between Atlantic Station and the shopping mall. In this new formulation of an urban living development we find a site where place-making is in part determined by a structural discontinuity between Atlantic Station and its urban neighbors. Place, here, is designed to appear community-like, all the while promoting movement through a variety of retail outlets that offer occupants commodities while failing to provide any substantive ties to

the urban residents who call Atlantic Station home. If, as Clark has asserted, interacting with the landscape is a collective process of identification, then how does the Atlantic Station resident articulate her relationship with her environment? Urban residency has been reduced to urban consumption, civic action has been supplanted by shopping. Of course the relationship between city spaces, consumption, and cooptation is evident not only in retail outlets, but also in places traditionally understood as open urban spaces like public parks, where “motifs of identify are chosen by merchants and commercial property owners” (Zukin, 1995, p. 144) with a vested interest in securing these spaces for the middle class.

Atlantic Station, nonetheless, reveals the extent to which our cities are embracing a landscape where consumption, commodity, and cohabitation are collapsing in a way that threatens to destroy any lingering semblance of an urban political public.³⁸ The textual representations of Atlantic Station outlined in the previous chapter show the ways the development has sought to simultaneously embrace notions of urban heterogeneity while defining precisely what that heterogeneous landscape will look like. A reading of Atlantic Station’s structural form reveals why this approach has proved salient. The material construction of this development is one decidedly familiar to the suburban transplant, whether she recognizes it as such or not. For decades millions of shoppers have occupied the mall, shopping there, relaxing there, meeting with friends, sipping lattes, and furnishing their homes and closets. Atlantic Station thus presents itself as an urban alternative within the urban, an development that embodies all that was so comfortable about the shopping mall of the 1960s, ample parking, clean streets, and air conditioned stores, within the urban core. Like the shopping mall of days gone by, Atlantic Station might be attractive because of these qualities, yet the introduction of urban

³⁸ Hankins and Powers (forthcoming) have explored this phenomenon in Atlantic Station, where “public” action is expressed through retail activities and voyeurism. Unfortunately, any notion of civic public engagement in this space has been entirely dismissed in favor of consumptive practices.

living intricately connected to the practices of consumption is decidedly threatening to notions of urbanity as public sites of cohabitation and active citizen involvement.

The texts about and structures within Atlantic Station work together to establish the neighborhood as a new kind of urbanism. Evaluating these two components of the practice of place-making reveals a communicative space that trumps up false notions of urban heterogeneity while recapitulating the shopping mall under the guise of the in-town living development. For Atlantic Station to retain this image, for it to constitute a non-place where residents make use of the amenities here without transforming the underlying principles of consumption and retail activity, requires a constant movement of bodies in and out of shops and restaurants. Yet this stagnancy of place is problematized by the very nature of place-making as a social process. In the following chapter I will demonstrate how the presence of people in Atlantic Station, through their movements and actions, fundamentally alters an understanding of the development as a social space. Through manipulations and contestations, the users of space invoke their own voice, altering the communicative dimensions of Atlantic Station and destabilizing the place established by the texts and structures produced there.

Chapter 4.

Movement and Action in Atlantic Station

The texts fabricated by the developers of Atlantic Station and the architectural semiotics of the community create, as we have seen, an image of the neighborhood and a foundation for understanding our relationship to it. Atlantic Station is presented as an urban neighborhood with a narrow community function. Residents here are hip and life is vibrant, but this urban chic buzz is a product of a social and material disassociation from its city surroundings and a reliance on a prototypical retail pattern consistent with the shopping mall. These components of city space, however, are not the only factors contributing to a reading of Atlantic Station as a communicative entity. Place-making is a process rooted not only in the texts and structures of a geography, but also in the movement and action occurring within it. Through our use and manipulation of space we contribute to its discursivity. In this chapter I will highlight this third and final component of the rhetorical dimensions of place-making. I argue that Atlantic Station as both a material and social space is influenced and in part, created by the activities that occur there. Rather than an urban playground where shopping and livability are harmoniously interwoven, Atlantic Station is a site of dynamic tensions, where personal agency and power are involved in a visible contestation.

The movement and action of Atlantic Station occupants create challenges that unsettle a clear and cohesive communicative message rooted in the texts and structures of the development. Michel de Certeau (1984) situates these activities within the sphere of the rhetorical, suggesting that “the walking of passers-by offers a series of turns (tours) and detours that can be compared to ‘turns of phrase’ or ‘stylistic figures’ (p. 100) within a system of language. For de Certeau

(1984), the “pedestrian speech act” (p. 97) is an enunciation that can be paralleled with the linguistic speech act. In this reading, the city, like a language system, has “the status of the ‘proper meaning’ constructed by grammarians and linguists,” while pedestrian movements constitute “the drifting of ‘figurative language’” (p. 100), the styles and uses of movement and activity within the existing cityscape. Walking in the city is thus tropological, it constitutes an appropriation of the “‘literal meaning’ defined by the urbanistic system” (p. 100), manipulating spatial organizations through stylistic turns that emerge in our encounters with and maneuvers through the built environment.

Within this context, the textual and structural components of Atlantic Station constitute “a spatial order organiz(ing) an ensemble of possibilities,” in the development, but it is “the walker who actualizes some of these possibilities” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 94). The Atlantic Station pedestrian then, through movements and transgressions, encounters and circumnavigations, privileges and transforms elements of the spatial organization enacted here. Atlantic Station as a textual and structural construction enters the Atlanta cityscape as a static place, but it is a mythical place that in its very stabilization creates the foundation for movement and action with transformative dimensions. Atlantic Station is marketed and designed to propagate a limited range of activities, suitable for a specific urban demographic, but the uses and activities of occupants within this place contribute to its communicative power, transforming and adjusting the signification practices that infuse this geography with meaning. I have spent 28 months observing the activities of shoppers, pedestrians, and residents in Atlantic Station. Using these personal observations as evidence, I will show how these activities contribute to the communicative process of place-making. Articulating the ways movement and action problematize the textual and structural modes of signification reveal the resistive and

transformative possibilities available to Atlantic Station occupants. This is an important consideration for an analysis of the discursivity of space because it provides a venue through which we can account for our relationship with a place, the ways through which we contribute to its communicative power, and the extent to which place is both constructed and evolving through our involvement with it.

In what follows I will explore some ongoing tensions among scholars regarding the ways we conceptualize relationships between social change and spatial structures. I will then discuss de Certeau's (1984) distinctions between strategies and tactics, space and place, linking these notions to performative practices and recent applications of this concept within cultural geography literature. Following a brief discussion of the intersection between performance and urban contexts, I will show how Atlantic Station has served as a site for performative enunciations that contribute to a reading of space that is more nuanced and malleable than the texts and structures created by the development might suggest. This final element of the critical heuristic reveals that Atlantic Station is ultimately a site of contestation, where tensions between urban and suburban lifestyle practices, public and private space, community and consumption, often bubble to the surface and de-stabilize the notions of place supported by the texts and structures created by the developers.

People in Place: Ongoing Tensions

The relationships between places and people have been heavily debated among critical and cultural theorists. The notion of power and the ability of those lacking dominant political or economic influence to instigate change is central to the conflicting readings of spatial practices as they relate to spatial occupants. For de Certeau (1984), pedestrians are organized by and contributors to the spatial order in their very movements, creating new spatial possibilities "since

the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform, or abandon spatial elements” (p. 98). Pedestrians in Atlantic Station, then, contribute to the development’s spatial organization through their movements. The bodies that fill this space – walking, wandering, waiting, and watching – engage in activities that sometimes disrupt the spatial order of the neighborhood. The developers of Atlantic Station, as we have seen, have presented the development as a community organized around a central purpose: shopping. Yet, our use of Atlantic Station legitimizes and de-legitimizes parts of this landscape. Through our movement we make a contribution to the material and social space Atlantic Station embodies.

This position has not been wholly popular and has been criticized as unrealistically optimistic (Highmore, 2002), particularly when considered within the context of dominant capital flows that render the city walker into a city shopper. Stewart and Dickinson (2008), in their reading of a Colorado shopping mall, suggest that the clearly manicured trails and fountains characteristic of the mall “colonizes walking rhetoric, structuring what might otherwise be a resistive meaning for the path” (p. 294), by clearly structuring pedestrian traffic flows. Lefebvre (1991) highlighted this position decades earlier in his suggestion that “activity in space is restricted by that space, space ‘decides’ what activity may occur” (p. 143). Lefebvre argued spaces were often produced to be “deceptive and tricked-up” where “the will to power and the arbitrariness of power” (p. 143) was lost beneath a false sense of collectivity and mutual engagement.³⁹

³⁹ In his interrogation into theoretical conceptualizations of the everyday, Highmore (2002) explores the significant differences and fleeting similarities between de Certeau and Lefebvre. While Lefebvre was firmly rooted in a theoretical project aimed at articulating the intersection between social and material space and power “the emphasis is clearly on the extension of capitalist logic into the everyday” (p. 150). de Certeau, on the contrary, focused on “the impossibility of the full colonization of daily life by the system” (p. 150), an impossibility that ultimately facilitated a certain type of resistive practice where “things extra and other” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 107) “insert themselves into the accepted framework.”

Yet, for Lefebvre (1991), there remain subversive possibilities in space, in “communal and shared spaces, the possession or consumption of which cannot be entirely privatized” (p. 57). Social transformations are, in his reading, rooted in spatial orientations and a “collective ownership and management of space founded on the permanent participation of the ‘interested parties,’ with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests” (p. 422). Resisting the existing politics of place is thus a re-tooling of space from below. Indeed, as Castells (1983) has argued “grassroots mobilization has been a crucial factor in the shaping of the city, as well as the decisive element in urban innovation against prevailing social interests” (p. 318).⁴⁰ Of course, as Castells himself has acknowledged, the political and potentially transformative power of community-based action is limited, both in the ability of geographically unified groups of people to successfully organize around a set of specific issues, but also in the lack of power at the local level (Evans, 2002).

Notions of agency and resistance to the existing status quo have been increasingly problematized by the proliferation of global capital flows and improvements in technology. Some critics argue these changes have fortified the political and economic power of the affluent, further marginalizing residents at the local and community level to nothing more than consumers, laborers, or prisoners (Auge, 1995; Davis, 1990). In his analysis of urban development, Davis reads the city of Los Angeles as a carceral geography where movements and access are strictly and repressively limited. In urban space increasingly designed for security and division purposes, “the neo-military syntax of contemporary architecture insinuates violence,”

⁴⁰ As scholars have noted (Evans, 2002) Castells made significant changes in his position over the course of his envision mobilization from below, even within the capital system. This is divergent from much of his earlier work in which he harshly criticized Lefebvre and others for abandoning a strict Marxist reading of space as the product of production and exchange values. He is cited here from one of his latter works in which he saw technology as a possible way to initiate some kind of spatial transformation.

according to Davis, where “the semiotics of so-called ‘defensible space’ are just as subtle as a swaggering white cop” (p. 226). The barricaded urban core of Los Angeles is a sign representing control, power, and security. The urban form itself becomes imbued with ideological meaning, security over freedom of movement, exclusion over interaction. Within this context the urban resident is significantly marginalized and freedom of movement is explicitly limited.⁴¹

While there are tensions between the positions of de Certeau (1984), Lefebvre (1991), and Castells (1983), these authors, and a host of cultural critics who followed them are all concerned with the potentialities for resistance and political change as a process with a decidedly spatial undertone. Change and social progress, within these vastly divergent intellectual positions, is nonetheless a desired and necessary outcome – an outcome that is attained through the manipulation (or at the very least appreciation) for the way social and material space is implicated in social formations and power relationships. Indeed, as Pile (1997) has noted, “definitions of resistance have become bound up with the ways that people are understood to have capacities to change things” (p. 14), but this change is not always rooted in dramatic, unified social movements. Resistance thus conceived can include a wide breadth of activities that subtly reject the status quo, “activities such as poaching, pilfering, clandestine tax evasion, and (doing) intentionally shabby work” Scott, 1990, p. 14) that remain largely unnoticed, but nonetheless create opportunities for agency and the potentiality for change.

Conceptualizing Atlantic Station as a place requires attention to the ways movement and uses within this space coincide or complicate a reading of it. If “the logic of certain kinds of

⁴¹ Mollenkopf (1992) explored some of the ongoing tensions among geographers interested in the condition of urban political power at the end of the 20th century. Mollenkopf articulates a dualism between political analysts who, on the one hand, are wedded to a Marxist (or neo-Marxist) approach to political power, one in which capitalist structures ultimately determine political outcomes and any semblance of local political power is ultimately illusory or analysts on the other who maintain there still exists political power within urban pluralities.

power relations is to produce and uncover space in particular ways” (Pile, 1997, p. 29), then engaging the ways we use that space reveals the extent to which these spatial definitions are both salient and static. My observations of Atlantic Station suggest that there are resistive elements that de-stabilize the fixation of place privileged by the texts and design of the community. Resistance in Atlantic Station is less a grandiose rejection of a neighborhood organized around private interests and global capital flows, and more a practice of “tiny micro-movements” (Pile, 1997, p. 29). These activities manipulate the dominant spatial arrangements, unsettling and disrupting an entirely cohesive understanding of what this place is. They are, in the words of de Certeau, tactical, operating and subverting from within, transforming the stagnancy of place into a wider fabric of spatial possibilities. To better situate these practices a brief discussion of de Certeau’s distinction between strategies, tactics, space, and place is warranted.

Using Tactics and Activating Spaces

de Certeau’s (1984) project in his seminal book *The Practice of Everyday Life* is “to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to” what he calls “grids of discipline” that organize and control the political and social spheres (p. xiv). If city space is structured around a system of order aimed at controlling and dictating the activities of the people within it, then what can be said about those who use it? For de Certeau, it is in the realm of everyday life that the opportunity to confront and negotiate with these larger organizing principles emerges. Rather than mindless pawns entrapped in a system of domination, as users of space we are actively making and doing, and possibilities for resistance are enacted through these activities. In his effort to uncover a logic to the particular ways the “popular” engage in “arts of making,” de Certeau posits a number of concepts that are useful for thinking through the practices of everyday life and the resistive power inherent in these activities. His distinction between

strategies and tactics reveals the possibilities for transgression within the existing urban system. Likewise, his articulation of spaces and places as two different ways of conceptualizing geography provide a lens through which we can understand the movements and activities of people in space.

For de Certeau, strategies are housed as proper actions that are fitting within a given context. Strategies, in this light, set the rules of the game – they are the moves made politically, economically, and scientifically that create acceptable modes of acting, thinking, and creating. Strategies are the domain of those in power, with the ability to set standards and norms. Atlantic Station has thus been designed strategically through the texts and architectural components created by the developers. The marketing documents advertising Atlantic Station as an urban neighborhood, the code of conduct and security detail employed to enforce these regulations are all part of the strategic presentation of this geography. Likewise, the design of the development, the placing of stores, and the incorporation of greenspaces all contribute to an overarching strategy that facilitates pedestrian movement in desired ways. de Certeau distinguishes these kinds of actions from tactics, activities and motivations outside of the proper.

The tactic “insinuates itself into the other’s place fragmentarily without taking over in its entirety” (p. xix). Tactics capitalize on unpredictable opportunities, engaging in moments when one can transgress the boundaries of place from within. Like Scott’s (1990) hidden transcripts, “rumors, gossip, folktales,” and songs of disguised “ideological insubordination” (p. xiii), tactics are quiet and often unnoticed – they are the province of the everyday, evident in the simplest activities like walking, cooking, and talking. The tactic, for de Certeau, is a rhetorical practice, it is a kind of enunciation that can be paralleled with the act of speaking. Like the speech act which “operates within the field of a linguistic system” involving “an appropriation, or

reappropriation, of language by its speakers” (p. xiii) the users of space operating within a dominant cultural economy create “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations” (p. xiv) within that system. Tactics play with space, finding and creating fissures through which the strategic order of a topography might be unsettled. Tactics, then, are activities that give us access to spatial possibilities, and they are essential to an understanding of the distinction de Certeau makes between place and space.

Like strategies, de Certeau (1984) situates place within the proper, it is “an instantaneous configuration of positions” (p. 117) implying stability and temporal fixation. It is place, according to de Certeau, that provides occupants with a sense of locality. Yet as human beings we do not exist solely in a network of places, but rather in space and the “ensemble of movements” occurring within it (p. 117). Space is polyvalent and conflicted, open to re-contextualization and interpretation. It is contingent on time and people, it has “none of the univocity or stability of a ‘proper’” (p. 117). Place and space within this framework are mutually dependent. The way they are conceptualized, according to de Certeau (1984), through the stories about them and our movement through them “constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (p. 118). Tactics enacted within place are transformative – opening windows through which the constellations of space might be glimpsed. Practices of everyday life provide avenues through which spatial possibilities might be enacted, for “to walk is to lack a place” (de Certeau, p. 103). Walking destabilizes the relationship between occupant and place, creating a space that is vulnerable to movement and time, one in which the strategies of the elite are never entirely successful, and the tactics of the pedestrian are never entirely suppressed.

Performing Everyday Life

The tactic can be thus understood as an activity with performative dimensions. Within the province of the everyday, through our uses of space, we are involved in the practice of performing place, a performance that sometimes legitimizes the boundaries of place and sometimes destabilizes place. These moments of destabilization belong to the tactic, and through them we create a transformation in which spatial possibilities become more attainable. The idea that people, movement, and space is a relationship rooted in the performative has a long-standing tradition. Threads of this kind of thinking can be traced back to early urban theorists including famed planner Lewis Mumford's (2007/1937) suggestion that cities could be understood as "a theater of social action" where complex social relationships were constantly implicated in a process of negotiation and interaction. Jane Jacobs (1961), likewise, observed a "sidewalk ballet" on the streets outside her Greenwich Village apartment, where residents from all walks of life interacted and engaged one another in a decidedly urban context. Urban performance, therefore, can be understood as a process where "cities as a whole can be understood as site upon which an urban(e) citizenry, in the practice of everyday life, performs its collective memory, imagination and aspiration, performing its sense of self both to itself and beyond" (Makeham, 2005, p. 152). Performing urban life is a practice that not only contributes to defining place, but also contributes to an understanding of ourselves as urban dwellers.

Scholars have increasingly linked this notion of urban performativity to the production of subjectivities (Pile, 1997; Thrift, 2008; Turnbull, 2002). Thrift (2008) has suggested geography and the intersection of performativity and the body are linked in what he terms "nonrepresentational theory." For Thrift, the "mundane everyday practices that shape the conduct of human beings" (p. 126) can be understood as "the performative 'presentations,'

‘showings,’ and ‘manifestations’ of everyday life,” where subjects are situated as relational, decentered beings. Performativity, for Thrift, is an expressive embodiment of the transformative spatial practices at work within place. It involves “a continuous re-arrangement of things in response to events” (Thrift, 2006, p. 144) that necessarily requires processes of improvisation and invention. Performative bodies, in his reading, are at once present and elusive. Like de Certeau who saw cities where “forests of gestures are manifest in the streets, their movement cannot be captured in a picture, nor can the meaning of their movements be circumscribed in a text” (p. 102), Thrift (2006) suggests that performance creates space where “there is no settled ground” (p. 145). Performance, in this sense, is a temporally fleeting, liminal, unsettling activity. But importantly, as Thrift (2008) observes, drawing from Butler (1997), performance is not always transgressive or resistant. Rather, it is a process through which places and people are formed and re-formed, and it is an essential component of place-making. Resistive possibilities emerge in this on-going re-making, through the activities of occupants there and the contribution our uses of space make to notions of place.

Engaging the performative dimensions of place-making, given the minutiae of everyday practices, can be difficult. The stylistic turns, the movements and meanderings of the urban transgressor, are often elusive. As Thrift (2008) has noted, “writing about performance as the art of the now is a problem since marking the unmarked is likely to alter fundamentally and to devalue precisely what it is about” (p. 137). By initiating the performance into the world of text, and thereby interrogation and interpretation, the essence of the performative act is threatened. If urban citizenry and the production of social space ultimately involves a performative quality, a quality that “cannot be used, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations” lest it “betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology” (Phelan, 1993, p.

146), then what is left to say about the relationship between bodies and places? de Certeau also explores this dilemma in his suggestion that “beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of power that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them” (p. 95). Indeed, for de Certeau and others, it is often the very *invisibility* that constitutes the political power and resistive potentials within the urban pedestrian.

The tensions between (in)visible urban action presents a dilemma for readings of space as text, a dilemma that problematizes the relationship between the three components of a discursive geography outlined here. As communication scholars, are we left with no recourse but to abandon the positioning of bodies in space – left only with texts and buildings to formulate our readings of place in a desire to grant autonomy, or at the very least anonymity, to the movement and actions of people as urban performances? Moreover, are these invisible urban performances even accessible? The answer, as de Certeau shows, is in the traces left when “things extra and other (details and excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order.” Within what de Certeau (1984) terms the “structured space” of the city, the pedestrian produces “anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and escape” (p. 107) that potentially upset the “story” of the city. Schieffelin (1998), has suggested these moments, while fleeting, have a lasting impact once they are gone “leaving their reverberations (fresh insights, reconstituted selves, new structures, altered realities) behind them” (p. 198). Both the “text” and “anti-text” of the city, as de Certeau would call them, are products of performance, a performance that situates people in place and place in people. While grasping at moments of transgressive urban performativity is difficult, in their disruptions they leave evidence of their occurrence. In Atlantic Station specifically, the strategic practices aimed at establishing place,

and the tactics that disrupt this place, are engaged in a dialogic dispute with a very visible dimension.

Urban Encounters

As I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, Atlantic Station as a development has marketed and constructed itself in several ways that embody two related but conflicting themes. The textual constructions of the neighborhood aimed at attracting residents to the community have largely centered on the urban nature of the development. Recall from Chapter Two that Atlantic Station residents are, according to the development's website, from all walks of life. They are those interested in living amid the hustle and bustle of downtown Atlanta in a place where the pedestrian is king and the ease of living is magnificent. Yet, Atlantic Station also embodies many characteristics of the shopping mall, a place quite different from the dynamic urban environment presumably embraced by Atlantic Station. Engaging thematic components that often involve quite contradictory performative expectations situates the movement and actions of Atlantic Station occupants at the center of a number of tensions. On the one hand, the interaction and performative exchanges between urban residents is often privileged as a site of on-going struggle and negotiation. Urbanity, as decidedly heterogeneous, is, in this sense, a place where increased contact leads to spatial reorganizations and contestations. The shopping mall patron, on the other hand, is engaged in a place that accommodates a small, finite number of prescribed behavioral possibilities centered on movement and shopping. A brief overview of the ways these kinds of activities have been conceptualized is necessary in order to situate the patterns of movement I have observed in Atlantic Station.

The dynamic possibilities for action are, many scholars have argued, nowhere more clear than in the urban. It was in the city, after all, where Mumford (2007/1937) situated the "theater

of social action” and the streets of New York where Jacobs (1961) witnessed the “sidewalk ballet.” The city, according to Makeham (2005), “is animated through the collective actions of individuals, exchanging signs and meanings, in dialogue and conflict with one another, seeing and being seen, telling stories, enacting the core rituals of performance,” (p. 158) a performance that embodies the vibrancy of urban living. Of course, the degree to which the modern city really embraces dynamic collective activities is frequently problematized.⁴² As Wells (2007) has argued, “if monuments and memorials are testimony to the close connection between state power and urbanization the proliferation of shops in urban centers, whether as high street, arcade, mall, or market, speak to the connections between cities and capitalism.” Yet the increasing number of retail outlets within the urban also involves an increase in visibility, a visibility that leads us to “ask how objects are produced, arranged, and circulated and how their production, arrangement, and circulation shapes the practices of people” (p. 141). Nowhere is this circulation of capital and consumption more evident than in the shopping mall, a place where retail performances are strictly regulated, and resistive responses are met with explicit disciplinary measures (Amsden, 2008).

Like occupants of the urban, users of the mall are also involved in a relationship with place that has performative dimensions, though few scholars have shared in the exuberant reading of the performative construction of space characteristic of the urban form. Nonetheless, the shopping mall itself constitutes a site where “the theater of merchandise and patrons” (Shields, 1994, p. 223) contributes to a sense of place, albeit one based on shopping as the bottom line. As Goss (1993; 1999) and Stewart & Dickinson (2007) have observed, performative actions within the typical American shopping mall often follow the clearly

⁴² Almost all the scholars cited in this chapter have acknowledged the ways cities engage in disciplinary, repressive, marginalizing practices.

demarcated boundaries established by the mall itself. Movements and behaviors within this context are highly predictable, and, as Shields (1994) has argued, the subject within the mall is itself caught up in a process of commodification, whereby shoppers are “separated from one’s rootedness in community and kin” (p. 222), engaging the space and one another as anonymous consumers. The performative dimensions of the shopping mall, in this light, appear quite bleak. But the notion of performativity itself suggest this understanding of the subject within the mall does not paint a complete picture. Indeed, as de Certeau noted in his reading of city space, the “almost mythical landmark for socioeconomic and political strategies” rooted in capital structures, is nonetheless “left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power” (p. 95).

Can the same be true for the mall? The mall is a powerful example of a non-place, with entry and exit points that are carefully regulated and an exhaustive set of rules that dictate appropriate movement and behaviors (Amsden, 2008), but there remains a subversive element emerging in our occupation of it. Like all places, “the mall is subject to constant reappropriation by its users” (Shields, 1994, p. 224), a reappropriation that potentially reveals the spatial possibilities within the fortress confines of these monolithic retail havens. Goss (1993) advocated this kind of reclaiming in his assessment of the mall, suggesting that through “the collective staging of games and farcical events” (p. 43) the predominant cultural codes of the shopping mall can be temporarily called into question. Changes in the shape and location of mall-like structures potentially offer new possibilities for transgressive performativity within these locations. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the ways these kind of disruptions have manifested in Atlantic Station. While the instability of place in these moments of

articulation might be temporary, their effects linger, hinting at a destabilization of the place politics situating occupants within the development.

Using Atlantic Station

Atlantic Station sits within this material and theoretical context of place, performance, and space. Reading this development as a place with spatial possibilities necessarily involves an inquiry into the way performativity is enacted. My observations suggest that reading place must involve this dimension of geographical discursivity to fully articulate the ways that places, within possible spaces, speak. Atlantic Station as a place is, as I will demonstrate, a location struggling to control its definition. While the textual and structural components present the community in a way that embraces urban heterogeneity, all the while limiting acceptable modes of engaging this place, the way occupants continue to use this space has implications on the communicative dimensions of place-making enacted here. I will show that the accessibility and heterogeneity of the development is destabilized when we attempt to perform it, and that through these performances the boundaries of Atlantic Station, boundaries that establish the development as an in-town retail mecca, are challenged and pushed. By evaluating the activities here, we can reveal not only what a community based on capital and consumption might look like, but also our refusal as urban residents to be entirely co-opted by this system.

I have observed behavior in Atlantic Station for 28 months, spending anywhere from five to 50 hours a week in the development. I have occupied the development at all hours of the day, from 5pm to midnight to 4am. I have participated in the place as an employee of one of the development's establishments, and as a shopper, a diner, a pedestrian, and a loiterer. As an observer I have witnessed behaviors of all kinds, from massive shopping excursions, to drunken debaucheries, to organized outbursts. Most of my observations have taken place in The District

of the development, the most crowded, frequently occupied public area. Following the line of thinking outlined throughout the early portion of this chapter, I consider the movements and activities within the development to constitute a kind of performative enunciation, one that is not necessarily transgressive or even purposeful. The ways these performances manifest, and their visible and less-than-visible dimensions allude to the ongoing spatial possibilities upon which the pseudo-crystallized image of Atlantic Station as a place is forged.

Like the behaviors observed in traditional shopping malls (Goss, 1993; 1999; Stewart & Dickinson, 2007) occupants of Atlantic Station often move through the neighborhood and behave in ways allocated by the development. On Saturday afternoons The District is abuzz with shoppers laden with bags from the plethora of retail shops, and the restaurants are often full to capacity with diners peacefully enjoying an early libation. The movement and action in Atlantic Station, as I have observed, often corresponds with the ways the development is designed and marketed. Yet these performances of consumption do not proceed uninterrupted, and the image of community and accessibility Atlantic Station presumably supports is sometimes disrupted and revealed as illusory by transgressive performances. These moments are sometimes purposeful, sometimes accidental, sometimes visible and sometimes unnoticed, but they all destabilize, at least temporarily, our understanding of what Atlantic Station can be.

Disrupting Place

A number of events have occurred in The District that have visibly disrupted the flow of pedestrian and automobile traffic to and from the retail shops and entertainment venues. While public outbursts that disrupt shoppers within the development is prohibited, these events have nonetheless occurred, and the response from Atlantic Station security officers reveals the extent to which the development does not embody the open, heterogeneous atmosphere that developers

try to highlight. Some of these events are purposeful and visible. They draw a significant amount of attention from those attempting to shop and dine within Atlantic Station, and they often involve a response on the part of the development's management or security force. But transgressions in Atlantic Station are not always disruptive and overt. Through The Rules of Conduct and Respect and the security staff enforcing those policies, behavior within Atlantic Station is strictly monitored. Activities as mundane as sitting, standing, or speaking loudly are, as we have seen, prohibited here. Occupants of the development frequently violate these rules (and notably, often do so simply because they are unaware of the tight standards monitoring place here). These transgressions, purposeful or not, are significant because they reveal the extent to which movers within the development continue to treat Atlantic Station as a public space. They constitute a kind of stylistic turn that manipulates the existing spatial organization within Atlantic Station, destabilizing what structures and surfaces are for through our sitting, stretching, leaning, and lying. They are also significant, as I will show, because if these activities are noticed they often involve a purposefully visible response on the part of the security force, a response that reveals the tremendous amount of energy required to sustain the existing construction of Atlantic Station as a place.

On weekend evenings the streets and sidewalks of Atlantic Station are filled with bodies and cars. Families enjoying dinner, couples heading to the movie theater, and frequently, groups of young people meeting up with friends. Nineteenth Street, the central artery of The District, serves as the main thoroughfare through which both pedestrians and automobiles travel. It is a site of ongoing movement. Shoppers move in and out of stores, autos circulate searching for open meters, diners flow in and out of restaurants, and the line in front of the cinema creeps forward. On one such evening movement ceased on this street when teens formed a dance circle

that turned into an attention-grabbing dance competition. The typical buzz of low-level shopping conversations was disrupted with shouts of encouragement as the group grew in size, attracting an audience of all ages that billowed from the sidewalk out onto the street. Pedestrians and cars alike were blocked from their typical movement patterns, shopping and dining, at least momentarily, was the less than central activity within this part of the development. The audience and participants of this dance-off, while from a variety of demographics, were primarily young, and therefore in violation of district rules which allows security to break up groups of four or more. The sheer size of the event blocked entry into stores, and was a disruption of the “public peace” to the extent that it was noisy, and impeded traffic flows, also violations of The District’s rules. The growing crowd was eventually dispersed by Atlantic Station security.

This moment of performative enunciation disrupted the existing standards of place-making within Atlantic Station because it simultaneously embodied the open, heterogeneous quality of life highlighted by the development, all the while violating the acceptable movement patterns established by the neighborhood. Participants treated the streets and sidewalks of Atlantic Station as if it were a public space where group activities like dance circles might be permitted. The growing size of the group, as it stretched out from the sidewalk to the street hindered automobile traffic, re-asserting the status of the pedestrian in this “walkable” community.⁴³ While the response by Atlantic Station security essentially restored the parameters of place as they have been established by the neighborhood’s developers, this momentary

⁴³ Notably, this event occurred a few short weeks after the development re-opened the streets to automobile traffic on Friday and Saturday evenings. Prior to that, the streets of Atlantic Station were closed to automobiles on these evenings to better facilitate the large number of pedestrians occupying the neighborhood. With the streets re-opened for cars, the flows of movement within The District are increasingly regulated. The sheer number of residents and visitors, coupled with increased traffic on these once closed streets creates unidirectional pedestrian patterns that wind through the retail outlets and make group activities or clusters of people disruptive for shoppers attempting to navigate from shop to shop.

transgression of the boundaries of place within The District infused the space with a dynamic and playful dimension. A snapshot of Atlantic Station during this dance-off reveals a neighborhood full of bodies in motion, artists and audiences, a co-mingling of people performing place in exuberant and expressive ways.

Like the dance competition, enthusiastic chants have also disrupted the typical flows of traffic within the development. The crowded weekend streets of The District and the proximity of Atlantic Station to nearby colleges has made the neighborhood a popular place for local fraternities to congregate and enact public chanting rituals. These rituals have occurred on several occasions, and the size of these groups and volume of their chants is noticeably disruptive. On one occasion two groups engaged in what might be called a chant-off between rival fraternity houses. In all cases I have observed the rituals have been stopped by the security administrators, but not before drawing a great deal of attention.

The chanting rituals enacted in Atlantic Station are subversive to the extent that they are designed to be public performances that attract attention. Not only do these large groups of young men inhibit pedestrian flows, but their presence in the community is not related to shopping or entertainment. In the moments of performative enunciation when these chants erupt, the social boundaries of Atlantic Station appear more malleable than TRCR would suggest. A snapshot of Atlantic Station during a chant reveals a place of public performance, of free speech and enthusiastic displays. The response on the part of development security further increases the visibility, at least momentarily, of these activities. The chanting enacted here is threatening to the extent it is distracting. In the process of stifling these activities and restoring the order of place, Atlantic Station is revealed as a community where public performance is prohibited, and speaking practices are monitored.

Unlike the noise and crowds of the dance competition and chanting rituals, Atlantic Station's central green space, Central Park, served as the site of a silent flash mob one weekday evening.⁴⁴ As shoppers and diners moved through the Park they encountered over 35 frozen bodies distributed all over the Park area in a variety of poses and positions. In this case, performances of consumption were disrupted by silence and non-movement. Central Park appeared as a sea of frozen bodies, a snapshot of people occupying space that went on for five minutes. At first unnoticed, movers began to notice something odd when they realized they were surrounded by dozens of bodies not moving at all. Small groups of shoppers began to stop and watch, observing these frozen occupants. As five minutes came to an end, all of the 35-plus flash mobbers quickly dispersed, without any noise or co-mingling.

While critics have accused flash mobs of being purposeless, they nonetheless have been characterized as a kind of "urban poetry" that turns the city into "an enormous toy." Participating in a flash mob, according to one participant cited in an article documenting a flash mob in New York, "brings all sorts of people together unexpectedly" (Grunewald, cite in Humer, 2003, para. 13) within an urban space. Indeed, the notion of a purposeless activity in Atlantic Station is in and of itself subversive, for in their occupation of Central Park, flash mobbers were not moving or shopping, but simply standing and staring.

I have also witnessed an explicit and purposeful public protest within Atlantic Station. With the snaking lines of cinema-goers as a backdrop, hundreds of bicyclists roared through the streets of the development one recent Friday evening. Adorned in everything from business clothes to clown costumes, the revelers greeted the Atlantic Station crowds with "Happy Friday"

⁴⁴ A "flash mob" can consist of any number of activities from pillow fights waged on the streets of San Francisco to groups running through populated areas with no specific purpose. Flash mobs are usually organized over the internet and are usually composed of people who do not know each other. They are often characterized by behaviors that are attention grabbing and bizarre.

shouts as they stopped traffic and disrupted the valet service located at the center of The District. This massive bicycle parade was not a unique Atlantic Station event, but rather an anti-automobile protest referred to as Critical Mass. The event is staged monthly and originates in downtown Atlanta, traveling north through the Midtown area, blocking major thoroughfares in an attempt to “take back the streets” for pedestrians and peddlers.

The mere presence of this kind of display helps to situate Atlantic Station within the urban core of the city, for Critical Mass rallies are designed to impede traffic flows within urban centers. While gatherings of this size are prohibited in Atlantic Station, the publicly constructed 17th Street Bridge that connects the private community to its counterparts provided these cyclists with easy access to the manicured streets within the development. Critical Mass’s presence in Atlantic Station challenges the development’s use of automobile-free marketing rhetoric. Moreover, my observations of the disturbance Critical Mass created on the day-to-day movement patterns within the community, specifically on the typical stream of automobile traffic on the streets in this part of the development, reveal the extent to which Atlantic Station fails to live up to its claims that the neighborhood privileges the bicyclist and pedestrian.

The presence of Critical Mass not only challenged the claims that Atlantic Station is a haven for the non-driver, but also poses a more problematic mode of resistance for development security. As we recall from earlier chapters, Atlantic Station relies heavily on the notion of movement, and it is precisely Critical Mass’s on-going movement that makes it more difficult to control and repress. The large number of cyclists, their pace and constant motion, and their ability to part ways and regroup, make their use of Atlanta city streets, including those in Atlantic Station, a formidable resistance to automobile traffic. Their efforts in Atlantic Station,

on this occasion, remained un-stifled by development security, making use of open roadways and entry-points that are difficult to closely monitor.

Activities like Critical Mass and the flash mob drew significant attention and visibly disrupted shoppers within Atlantic Station.⁴⁵ They were all group activities, involving a number of people, and in the case of the dance competition, attracting more by-standers to participate. While two of these cases involved a response by development security, the security force is far more active in policing the activities of individual people. Weekend evenings, Central Park was filled to the brim with bodies sitting on every available surface, packed with people, some who had finished their day of shopping and were trying to relax in this central green space, and others who were in Atlantic Station simply to hang out in the scene. Central Park is no longer open in the evenings. Policing the park became so difficult that the central area is now blocked from use by caution tape and rolling metal gates.⁴⁶ Audio speakers located throughout The District announce nightly that the area is closed. Occupants within the community are informed they must leave the premises if they do not plan to enter a place of business. Enforcing the development's rules has required an increased security force, policing the area on segways, armed with flashlights and stacks of "rules and regulations" cards to pass out to transgressing non-shoppers.⁴⁷ These efforts at overtly policing and monitoring the community are highly visible, and highly restrictive. These kinds of individual transgressions are not necessarily

⁴⁵ Notably, a direct violation of the rules and regulations which state shoppers should not be disturbed and behavior disturbing the public peace is prohibited.

⁴⁶ Securing the park in the evenings is presumably to prevent occupants from loitering. A database of criminal activities reported in and around Central Park before and after the area was closed down reveals that the crime rates in this area have not changed because of the closure. Moreover, in the three months leading up to the decision to shut the area down at night, no criminal activities were reported in the park itself (*Atlanta Police Department Crime Map*, 2008-2009).

⁴⁷ These rules apply to both residents and non-residents of Atlantic Station. Occupants of The District must keep moving after the stores have closed. Sitting, standing, lingering, or loitering of any kind is prohibited.

purposeful, but they nonetheless disturb the practice of place-making not only in the fact that they do not conform to the desired behavior patterns of consumption and movement, but also because they seemingly warrant a visible response. The openness and inclusiveness allegedly characteristic of the development is problematized by the networks of traveling security forces moving bodies up and out of the neighborhood.

Movement and Action in Space

In this chapter I have shown that the movements and activities of Atlantic Station occupants communicates resistive or alternative modes of understanding space. If, as de Certeau claims the “pedestrian speech act” is a “process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian” where we are engaged in “a spatial acting-out of the place” (p. 97), then in acting out Atlantic Station, the instabilities of this development as a marketed place, the on-going work that is required to stabilize the neighborhood as a viable urban area, is revealed and pushed. The performative enunciations in Atlantic Station have two dimensions, through their visibility and invisibility. In the practice of everyday life, even in miniscule activities, occupants leave their rhetorical footprints. In using places designed to walk through as areas for lingering, in using planters as benches, and benches as beds, occupants here are manipulating place, creating new ways of coming together and falling apart. In moments when these uses bubble to the surface, visibly disrupting and re-making Atlantic Station as a site of public activity, interaction, and performance, the spatial possibilities for understanding Atlantic Station as an urban place glimmer, at least momentarily, through the crowds of shoppers. The question then becomes, not how Atlantic Station has marketed and designed itself as a non-place, but rather how we, as occupants, contribute to Atlantic Station as a specific place? The transgressions and resistances I have observed suggest the boundaries of Atlantic Station are

stretched and pushed in our desire to create a meaningful relationship between ourselves as occupants, and the spaces we inhabit. Indeed, the shopping-mall pattern of retail and residential design has made a powerful play in the form of Atlantic Station, but the uses of this space suggest as movers and doers, our vision of community and retail consumption do not harmoniously intertwine. These contestations suggest that we still have venues through which we can challenge the claims Atlantic Station is making in its marketing and design.

While, as I have noted, many of these spatial transgressions are policed by the security force, their response to these disruptions is also a kind of fissure of place. It is difficult to envision a community where one can live, work, and play in peace, where urban inclusion and ease of living are central tenants, when the streets are lined with posted rules and filled with security officers and pamphlets dictating behavioral norms. The policing of place and the silencing of these performative enunciations disrupts place itself by revealing the prison-like conditions required to keep the fallacy of the “Atlantic Station community” alive. A byproduct of the performative act, Taylor (2003) reminds us, is their power to “elucidate power relations” and “make visible the many points of conflict and contact” (p. 272-273) that are inherent in social systems. By making these tensions visible, we are both acknowledging place as a construction, and revealing the layers of power that contribute to the process of place-making. As the visibility of performative transgressions increases, the modes of enacting place politics within the development also become more visible. And that visibility, I suggest, leads to a kind of undoing of place – revealing how fragile Atlantic Station as a viable urban community is. “Life Happens Here” according to the Atlantic Station website, and an evaluation of uses within the development suggests that as spatial occupants we are helping to determine what life looks like in Atlantic Station, through our challenges and confrontations.

Thus in this third element of the rhetoric of place-making, we discover that the space of Atlantic Station is more complicated than the marketing and architecture would have us believe. Atlantic Station is more than a shopping mall or a new urban community. It is these things, but it is also something more. It is a space where the politics of place are enacted in on-going, visible ways. It is a site where power and people frequently engage in direct contestations, where expectations of urban rights are enacted and are frequently stifled. It is, in my reading, a space of struggle – where tensions between capital as the chief organizing principle of place, and people, as the producers of space, are explicit and intense. Of course, despite these antagonisms, in the early years of its development Atlantic Station remains a place largely defined by the texts and structures that encourage shopping and consumption. The power to control and monitor behavior, and the appeal of a neighborhood where global retail outlets and chain restaurants are within arms reach, continue to re-stabilize the place that Atlantic Station presents itself to be. Yet, if “there are always connections *yet to be* made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction” (Massey, 2003, p. 5) then the uses of Atlantic Station remain a possible avenue through which place-making practices there might be transformed. As such, Atlantic Station is a place of great importance. The activities that occur there reflect tensions operating in larger urban forums, and the visibility of these tensions – the shock on the faces of occupants informed they are prohibited from sitting now that Banana Republic is closed – suggest Atlantic Station might be a place particularly vulnerable to the grassroots mobilization of residents interested in urban spaces that facilitate more than a shopping buzz.

CHAPTER 5.

Conclusion: Placing Atlantic Station

“Atlanta may present evidence of an urban future for much of the world. But it is evidence that needs to be carefully understood, not emulated” (Richard Dagenhart, 1995, p. 27).

Atlanta has been and will be many things. It is a city situated at the center of the maelstrom of urban changes sweeping across the globe, a city whose occupants and planners are both forward thinking and reflective, pensive and ambitious. Atlantic Station’s location within Atlanta’s dense urban fabric makes this site a powerful example of the ways the city’s landscape is transitioning. It is a place that reflects the exigencies that continue to haunt urban redevelopment practices, through its emphasis on a lifestyle centered almost entirely on shopping and a neighborhood entirely devoted to global capital outlets. But importantly, Atlantic Station remains a constructed place, and by accessing the rhetorical dimensions of this construction, the fragility of the boundaries and parameters that define it are exposed.

Indeed, as we have seen, Atlantic Station is a place where the notion of urbanism is problematized by an increased emphasis on urban discontinuity and suburban modes of familiarity. Using an original, triadic critical heuristic, this study has scrutinized the ways place is constructed through texts, structures, and movement to assess the multi-dimensionality of place-making. An evaluation of Atlantic Station suggests that this is a location where the place-politics of urban redevelopment is a central guiding force in the way we understand this space. The three modes of discursive invention discussed in this study reveal the layers of the sometimes cohesive, and often contradictory, modes of symbolization that contribute to what makes Atlantic Station a meaningful place. The texts and structures of this community suggest

that the idea of urban livability has a great deal of salience within the larger Atlanta community. However, the prohibitions, limitations, and even aesthetics of what that notion of urbanity can be is far less heterogeneous for those occupying the space and the activities allowed to occur there. Atlantic Station is more than a new urban development where Atlanta residents can enjoy the benefits of living, working, and playing. It is also a site epitomizing the tensions between urbanism and the security of suburbia, where the struggle between the idea of community and the practices of consumption are explicit. Despite these limits, the movements through and uses of this space reveal the extent to which the development's texts and structures do not entirely dictate our understandings of it.

In this concluding chapter I will highlight the contribution this critical heuristic makes to scholarship aimed at exploring city space as a communicative entity. I will briefly revisit the conclusions drawn from an analysis of the texts, structures, and movements occurring about and within Atlantic Station, and the way these processes contribute to our understanding of Atlantic Station as a specific place within Atlanta. Reading Atlantic Station as a communicative space exposes this site as one filled with tensions. The sometimes transgressive uses of Atlantic Station suggest that the new image of urbanism articulated by the texts and structures enacted here is an image that can be problematized. Atlantic Station might appear to be a place where the notion of a heterogeneous urbanism is directly challenged, but it is also a place where the homogeneity of suburbanism is likewise under attack. While the balance of power between these two polarities is decidedly uneven, acknowledging the oppositional forces at work there reveals the extent to which Atlantic Station remains a neighborhood in transition, a place where the possibilities for change rest largely on our ability to initiate a ground-up approach to urban place-making.

Place-making: Texts, Symbols, and Movement

Engaging place as a communicative entity through the three modes of analysis employed here enables a valuable contribution to cross-disciplinary discussions aimed at describing and evaluating social and material space. Of course, the suggestion that space has a rhetorical dimension has been explored from a variety of angles (Burd, 2008; Clark, 2004; Gumpert & Drucker, 2008; Wood, 2009). The aim of this project has been two-fold: to show how places are presented textually or designed structurally, but also how those discursive constructions are used and manipulated to paint a more complete picture of the communicative function of place within a specific moment in time. The foreboding undertone of popular theoretical concepts used to describe space, the proliferation of non-places (Auge, 1995; Sharma, 2009; Diken, 2004), omnitopias (Wood, 2009, 2005, 2003), or generic cities (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995) alludes to our desire to understand what is happening to our urban spaces, and what recourse we might have to change the dangerous trajectory these transformations promise. The critical heuristic proposed here is designed to improve the way we understand city space as a rhetorical artifact. Indeed, readings of urban places, particularly in the context of global capital flows and private business interests that are invariably influencing the ways urban landscapes are transitioning, are decidedly bleak. As Auge (1995) and Wood (2009) have noted, the result of these urban transformations is the marginalization of the urban occupant as an active participant in the construction of place, to a transitory, disconnected traveler with little connection or influence over the spaces she occupies.

These apocalyptic readings of city formations, however, fail to account for the dynamic nature of bodies in space, and the ways those bodies contribute to the rhetorical construction of places. Places pre-defined and organized around activities centered on consumption have surely

relegated the urban resident to a limited position based on her ability to shop, but places nonetheless remain spaces designed to be occupied and used. Engaging place at the level of text, structure, and movement highlights the extent to which a location embodies the characteristics of these non-places, and the extent to which the communicative dimensions of place extend beyond that of the generic city. To read place in this manner is to acknowledge that city space is not entirely monolithic. The dimensions through which places communicate creates discursive possibilities and patterns of movement. Representations of space do not tell us the whole story, but they help to determine what uses are possible. The design and architecture of a place do not solely determine movement within a city formation, but as pedestrians we are not free to move in any conceivable way. Our relationships, thus, with our material surroundings are dynamic. The interactions between texts, structures, and movements are layered and innumerable – yet they interweave in ways that create a temporally specific, seemingly stable, place. This place is meaningful, it is communicative, and it is powerful. To engage it, to evaluate it, to change it, we must first understand it.

The Communicative Dimensions of Atlantic Station

I began this inquiry in an attempt to determine the ways in which places speak. If cities are communicative entities, as a growing number of scholars are beginning to explore (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008; Burd, 2008; Carpentier, 2008; Georgiou, 2008; Hamelink, 2008), then how do we know what they say? And what is our role, as spatial occupants, in this communicative process? Addressing these kinds of questions has relevance not just on determining what we know about a place, but also what possibilities exist within that place for change and evolution. As a private, planned community filled with aggressive global business interests, Atlantic Station is a community where the communicative nodes determining place are specific and strategic. As

this study has shown, Atlantic Station has carefully marketed its image and meticulously designed its interior to create a knowledge of place rooted in a false sense of urban heterogeneity in favor of a more restrictive emphasis on capitalist retail activities. But a reading of the movement and action within Atlantic Station suggests that this image does not go unchallenged. For all of its repressive qualities, Atlantic Station remains a site where we can reject these standards, and through these rejections, expose how unstable and uncontrollable space can be. Given the implication of the state in developments like Atlantic Station (Hankins & Powers, forthcoming) it is increasingly the province of the individual to resist, transform, and create new spaces, or at the very least, create moments when places are clearly understood as constructions with vulnerabilities.

To engage the city as a communicative entity is an effort rooted in the exploration of the discursive practices and possibilities of urban space. The communicative city, as a theoretical concept, encapsulates not only the modes through which cities engage in the process of communication, but also “seeks options where alternatives have disappeared” (Gumpert & Drucker, p. 206). In other words, in confronting the communication practices that make and remake city space, we are evaluating the way discursive practices interact with material space, establishing “the right to be heard as a human right” (p. 206) and contextualizing that right within the process of city making and planning. Evaluating the communicative nodes of the city involves not only a reading of the discourse that promotes or structures an urban formation, but also the resistive measures that question this process. Communicative city theory is thus aimed at unmasking spaces and expanding the opportunities to speak and influence urban environments.

As I discussed to some length in Chapter One, communicative city theory has established the importance of evaluating the ways the cities engage in communicative practices, but a distinct methodology for evaluating these processes is still missing from this body of research. The critical heuristic I have proposed here contributes to communicative city scholarship by forwarding a theoretical framework that identifies and evaluates the rhetorical practices that imbue places with meaning. This mode of inquiry not only elucidates the communicative elements of city space within a given formation, but also the rhetorical agency that creates possibilities for spatial transformations, and thereby social and urban change. If, as Carpentier (2008) has suggested, alternative networks of communication practices “contribute to the definition and viability of the communicative city” (p. 239), then evaluating the way places are constructed via not only texts and structures, but also alternative uses and movements, is a necessary consideration for explorations of urban space as communicative space.

This thesis has elucidated the place-making process enacted in Atlantic Station, and the construction of this place as a communicative entity. In the marketing texts advertising Atlantic Station the development is represented as a heterogeneous place, one unique from its urban surroundings, embodying a microcosm of the urban within its very borders. Atlantic Station is open for all urban walks of life in these representations, or at least “open for business” to diverse residents and occupants. While the neighborhood is marketed as an open, urban, heterogeneous space with all the amenities of city living within its boundaries, *The Rules of Conduct and Respect* severely limit the activities that are supposed to occur here. These rules, as I have shown, extend far beyond the limits of even the codes dictating appropriate behaviors in private gated communities. Atlantic Station is thus presented as a contradictory place, a site simultaneously open and closed. It is open to the extent that residents and occupants are invited

into this seemingly urban sub-section of the city, and closed in the fact that they are welcomed only if they plan to shop, dine, or entertain themselves here. This dimension of Atlantic Station is Auge's (1995) non-place par excellence, a site determined largely by the texts about it, where movement is privileged over interaction. What we know about non-place is what it tells us, our investment as users of the space is limited to a transient relationship to it. While the activities within non-places might differ, the central behavioral pattern within them is movement, a stream of bodies flowing in and out, monitored and controlled by the defining features of a non-place.

The Atlantic Station resident is further marginalized from the place-making practices enacted there by the structural composition of the neighborhood. Like the rules that dictate behavioral norms, the design and architecture within the development encourage movement and circulation. As Shields (1994) noted, the layout of the shopping mall, a layout similar to that employed in Atlantic Station, is designed to move shoppers from one anchor to the next, peppering the paths between with smaller retail outlets. New visitors to Atlantic Station might be oddly surprised by the comfortable familiarity they find navigating the streets of the central business district. Moving through Atlantic Station is an easy and predictable task for anyone even remotely familiar with the typical shopping mall. Even areas outside of The District, the primary shopping area within Atlantic Station, facilitate this notion of movement. The winding greenbelt connecting The District to IKEA at the western border of Atlantic Station is designed as a path, rather than park, to keep pedestrians, shoppers, and dog walkers moving. There are no picnic tables here, no outdoor grills or children's playgrounds, only paths that enable walkers to keep the pace.

Critics have been highly skeptical of the potential power of the pedestrian within contexts where paths and partitions essentially "colonize walking rhetoric" (Stewart & Dickinson, 2008,

p. 294) by structuring movement and prohibiting wandering feet. Yet my observations of the movement and action in Atlantic Station suggests that, rather than stifling the rhetorical power of the tactical moves made by the Atlantic Station occupant, attempts to dictate and curtail behaviors within the development provide moments of enunciation with increased communicative force. For example, it is powerful to observe the hundreds of bicyclists involved in the monthly Critical Mass protest weave their way through the open city streets of downtown Atlanta. But their presence in Atlantic Station carries even more significant rhetorical power. Critical Mass's occupation of Atlantic Station is a direct contestation of the greenwashing in which the development is implicated. The disruption of automobile traffic resulting from Critical Mass's ride through the streets of Atlantic Station reveal the extent to which the neighborhood is far from a pedestrian-driven community. The dance-off I witnessed on Nineteenth Street and the ensuing crowds, crowds that were interested in watching and participating in this event, suggest that at least some occupants of Atlantic Station consider this location a place where one is permitted to engage in public activities outside of those prescribed by TRCR. The fact that these events occur suggests Atlantic Station is not entirely successful in determining the behavior of the occupants, and the response on the part of the security staff to some of these more visible transgressions is often met with increased resistance on the part of those who believe it is their right to engage in these public behaviors.

Opportunities for Future Study

This critical heuristic has been designed to describe and evaluate the communicative dimensions of city space. I have limited this analysis to Atlantic Station, but future research using the heuristic proposed here might focus on a number of artifacts. First, I have situated this critical analysis within the on-going communicative city project. Scholars working in this

tradition would be well served by making use of the methodology proposed here to evaluate the ways city spaces engage in communicative practices that extend beyond material texts. The parameters of this heuristic are meant to be malleable and applicable to a number of places, both large and small. While Atlantic Station is a private development with a clear and concise marketing campaign, an analysis of areas with more divergent spatial representations would provide an interesting perspective for better understanding the communicative power of city space. Moreover, greater attention to the ways these processes are implicated in larger global changes including capital flows, information technologies, and migrating populations might reveal the dynamic communication processes at work in our understanding of public and private space.

Second, as the notion of space as a non-place or omnitopia continues to gain traction, the critical heuristic I have proposed provides an alternative vantage point through which to evaluate place-making. Future research devoted to places like theme parks, shopping malls, and airports, can make use of the heuristic to evaluate the possible slippages of place that occur in these highly regulated areas. Utilizing the heuristic in assessments of locations that might best be described as non-places elucidates another component of place-making that is ignored in many assessments of city space, specifically in the uses and actions of space that contribute to and possibly de-stabilize notions of place that are rooted in texts or structures.

Third, while I focused on the widely distributed texts and publicly visible behaviors within Atlantic Station, an approach taking into account personal narratives and opinions about Atlantic Station as a viable urban space would prove illuminating. In their analysis of Atlantic Station Hankins and Powers conducted interviews with residents and found that many occupants applauded the mixed-use design of the development. But as we have seen, the behaviors and

performances that have occurred in Atlantic Station suggest that the neighborhood's marketed image is not always successful in establishing shopping as the solely acceptable mode of engaging this space. Personal contact with those who visibly transgress the boundaries of place-making within Atlantic Station would provide new insight into the ways this neighborhood is understood and problematized.

Finally, a diachronic analysis of the ways these communicative processes transform in Atlantic Station would also prove useful. If, as Ellis (2002) has argued, "new urbanist communities stand a higher chance of evolving in interesting ways through time than conventional projects, because they mix uses and blend different housing types together" (p. 278), then attention to the ways this evolution takes place, and the accompanying transformations of the communication messages privileged by the developers, will provide increased insight into this space. Atlantic Station has only been occupied for four years, and the changes that will take place in the future is an intriguing area of study. There is no question that Atlantic Station will invariably transform in some ways as residents and visitors continue to use this space. Future research aimed at analyzing the way place-making in Atlantic Station is influenced by the activities that occur within it will provide new insights and new possibilities.

Placing People in Atlantic Station

If, as Clark (2004) has suggested, landscape is rhetorical to the extent that it necessarily involves processes of identification, then the question becomes not only what Atlantic Station is saying as a communicative entity, but what these modes of signification say about us? If the notion of an urban lifestyle still retains saliency with potential Atlantic Station residents and occupants, then what does this urbanism look like? And what are the characteristics of the new urban resident? The picture painted by the analysis of texts and structures emerging in Atlanta is

unsettling. Urbanism as a site of cohabitation, a place with “everything for everyone” is trumped up in the management’s discourse, but the way this heterogeneous urbanity is actually engaged by the development, particularly as reflected in TRCR and the structural composition of the neighborhood is disturbingly one-dimensional. Atlantic Station thus represents a troubling shift in the idea of city space as a shared public space.

Yet what might be considered a somewhat grim vision of urban development is problematized by the uses of this place that continue to disrupt, unsettle, or re-cast the notions of place established by Atlantic Station LLC. It is true that an observation of pedestrians and residents on a given Friday evening suggests that most people use Atlantic Station in the ways it has been designed: shopping, dining, moving, consuming. But even in the perhaps mundane uses of places, we are invariably implicated in the place-making process. Indeed as de Certeau (1984) has asserted, spatial possibilities emerge in our everyday uses of place, from walking to cooking to relaxing. In the act of making Atlantic Station home, residents are, at the very least, engaging with place, making it their own, and thus influencing the trajectory of development that is occurring there. As Massey (2003) reminds us, space and time are inextricably linked, and any discussion of space should necessarily acknowledge the transformations that will undoubtedly occur as time marches forward. As more occupants settle in this growing neighborhood, the idea of livability propagated by the developers will be acted out, stressed, and challenged through the day-to-day activities of those who reside there.

Uses and manipulations of space in Atlantic Station already reflect the tensions and stresses that de-stabilize the neighborhood as a clearly defined urban place. The development’s claim that it is open and accessible (all the while limiting for who and what purpose) is, at moments, more accurate than a reading of text and structure would suggest. Despite Atlantic

Station's overt and explicit attempts to monitor the activity occurring within it, despite the heavy emphasis placed on retail practices, the neighborhood is at times inflected with elements of the urban through our uses of it, and resistances to it. Engaging Atlantic Station as a site involving the multi-dimensions of place-making suggests this is a site of possible contestations. Reading Atlantic Station therefore shows the extent to which we are willing to accept a sanitized, controlled, clearly demarcated notion of the urban and the degree to which urban public action remains a viable process within our city centers. For the time being, Atlantic Station exists as a place with a decidedly non-urban bottom line, but evaluating the tensions embodied in the texts, structures, and movement that determine what this place is reveals some bold contradictions between these new notions of urbanism, and the way we intend to enact that urbanism.

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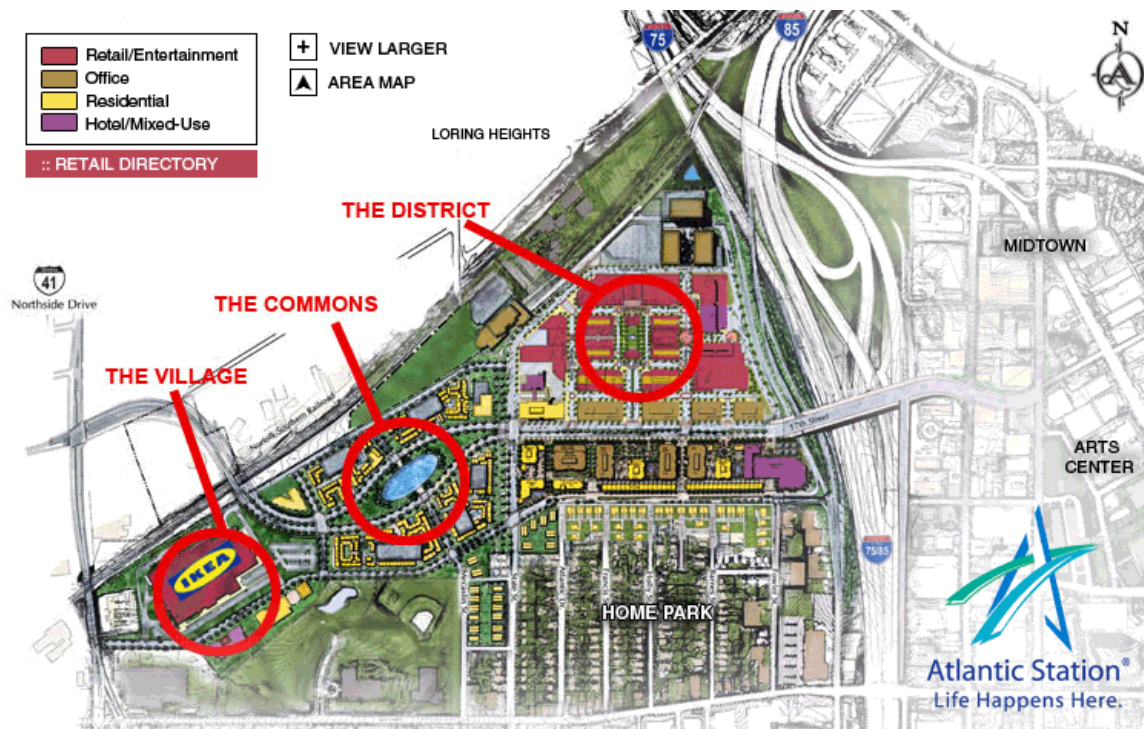
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Appendix A – Neighborhood Map of Atlantic Station



Appendix B – District Map of Atlantic Station



Appendix C – Map of Midtown, Atlanta

