

Value Space: an architectural geography of new retail formats on Southern Vancouver
Island.

by

Justin McGrail
B.A., McGill University, 1991
M.A., McGill University, 1995

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of History in Art.

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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The subject of this dissertation is the architectural history of big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island since their arrival in 1992. It examines the architecture and cultural significance of stores located in the Regional District of Nanaimo, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, and the Capital Regional District. This study hypothesizes that big-box stores are, in terms of their architecture, retailing formats, and consumption practices, central locations and vehicles for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. In the postmodern or Late Capitalist era, these relations have emphasized consumption over production, and have exerted a deep influence on everyday life and political economy in urban Canada. This study interprets the architectural and social spaces of New Retail Formats (NRFs) through a Marxist perspective, and uses the interdisciplinary methods of vernacular architecture studies and architectural-geography. I have evaluated the big-box store in terms of typology, distribution, and social operation. I have also placed them in the context of North American architectural history, especially in relation to shopping centres. I argue that big-box stores produce, consume, and reproduce distinctive forms of social space, which I have named “value space”. Value space is the set of social and spatial relationships found within big-box stores that are

shaped by both retailers and consumers, and which are focused on low-priced commodities. Value space is a contemporary and clear example of what Karl Marx and Henri Lefebvre each identified as key to capitalism's survival: the reproduction of the relations of production and consumption. In the same way that factory relationships also shape life beyond the factory, the value space of big-box stores is also produced, consumed, and reproduced in other social and professional practices, such as urban planning and municipal politics. The aims of my study were: to document the history of this new architectural type; to explain the place of big-box store development in municipal political economy; and, to examine the role of big-box stores in the reproduction of capitalist urban space on Southern Vancouver Island. In doing so, I argue that big-box stores are engines and symbols of urban development that foster increased consumption, support the socio-economic status quo, and refashion natural and social environments in accordance with the values of capitalism.

I believe big-box stores are the architectural subject of greatest contemporary importance on Southern Vancouver Island. Few other buildings types today generate similar feelings - for and against - as do big-box stores. They are at once a building type, a retail format, and a symbol of contemporary urban development. Their importance comes from their size, from the scale of their operations, and from their impacts on municipal politics, urban planning, transportation infrastructure, regional ecosystems, and community life. The retailing and consumption practices they house, facilitate and manage contain the seeds of, or needs for, future consumption. This makes NRFs economic and symbolic centres for the reproduction of the relations of production and consumption.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, and to Karen

Chapter One: Introduction

In May 2007, the office-supply chain Staples opened a new store on Fort Street, between Douglas and Blanshard, in the city of Victoria.¹ Unlike its suburban stores, the new Staples was housed in an existing building on a busy commercial street in the downtown core of a city (**Figure 1.1**). The Fort Street Staples is located in the ground floor and basement of the Rohani Building, a ten-storey office tower designed by Siddall, Dennis, Warner Architects and constructed in 1977.² The street-level commercial space was previously occupied by a branch of the Bank of Nova Scotia, and the Rohani Building itself had long carried the bank's logo, in the form of a large fascia sign, near the cornice of its eastern and western façades. These signs were replaced in 2007 by those of the Staples chain soon after the new store opened (**Figure 1.2**). Affixed to the side of one of the tallest buildings in downtown Victoria, the new signs are among the most visible in the city. They are also a signal of changes in the practices and presentations of capitalism in contemporary Canadian cities. In a time when retailers were expanding, the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, a federal regulatory agency, reported that eighty-four bank branches have been closed in British Columbia since 2002, seven of them in Victoria.³ At the start of the 21st century, Canadian banks are contracting while as retailers were at the same time expanding. However, with the suburbs largely saturated with retail space, big-box store chains have turned to the urban core for new locations. By doing so, it is to be wondered if big-box stores have begun to suburbanize the architectural and cultural geographies of Canadian downtowns.

¹ Darron Kloster, "Staples fills a need downtown", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (May 17, 2007), B8.

² Martin Segger, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1996), 98.

³ "Bank Branch Closures", Financial Consumer Agency of Canada [<http://www.fcac-acfc.gc.ca>], (accessed August 5, 2008).

This is just the latest change to urban life brought about by retailers, which is the subject of this dissertation. Specifically, this study considers the architecture of big-box stores and other new retail formats on Southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Common and yet controversial, big-box stores are today important centres for the retailing and consumption of commodities in Canada. It is clear that, to shoppers, the main attraction of these sites is the price of the goods for sale; all other concerns are secondary to the idea of the bargain. Big-box stores like Wal-Mart and Costco offer consumers convenience by offering all manner of provisions and luxuries in one location. Economist Richard Sennett writes, “everything they might want to buy cheap - clothes, auto goods, food, perfume, computers,...- is in one place. The centralization of command seems mirrored in the position of the consumer wandering the aisles of a Wal-Mart, everything available instantly, the clothes only a few steps away from the computers.”⁴ The success of warehouse clubs, discount department stores, and other retail formats is based on the attraction of bargains that typically come in the form of large quantities at low prices.

This sense of bargain is vividly represented by the architecture of the stores themselves. Through size, material, and often exposed structural elements, big-box stores appear to be similar to the commodities they shelter – large and inexpensive. As will be argued in this study, however, there are present elements of decoration and architectural *pastiche* in the big-box store, which make connections to historical forms and designs of retail, such as the general store and the shopping centre. The presence of such elements shows the stores continue historic languages of retail architecture with a balance of tradition and innovation. More importantly, big-box stores are, functionally and

⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 134.

symbolically, a major component of contemporary urban capitalism. They are key economic and symbolic engines of commodity production, consumption, and, most especially, reproduction. The latter refers to the presence, within the designs and use-values of commodity production and consumption, of the need for ongoing production and consumption. Big-box stores, in their format and locations, and in the modes of retailing and shopping they engender, are sites for both immediate and future acts of consumption. Part of their function is to produce the need for future consumption and production, or reconsumption and reproduction. The result is a building format that is repetitious and singular, banal and remarkable, and which has become a major element in the planning and politics of contemporary Canadian municipalities.

What, it may be asked, is the scholarly and social value of studying contemporary retailers and shoppers on Southern Vancouver Island? This thesis argues that big-box stores represent a major style or type of vernacular architecture that is widespread and representative of several recent trends in retail and market capitalism. The practices of consumption found in big-box stores have great influences on other social practices, particularly urban development, municipal governance, and environmental sustainability. I will argue that big-box stores and value consumption are the architectural subjects of greatest importance in 21st century Canada. Few other buildings types today generate similar feelings - for and against - among the residents of Southern Vancouver Island. The big-box store is at once a building type, a retail format, and a symbol of urban development and urban politics.

The Big-Box Store and Social Space

The term “big-box store” is used today to describe both contemporary discount retailers and their stores (**Figures 1.3-1.4**). The distinguishing features of a big-box store are its size, location, merchandise category, and age.⁵ The name’s precise origins are unclear; however, it is generally agreed to have come into use in the mid-1980s.

According to Richard Panek, the name was used on Wall Street to describe new discount chains and their large, simple buildings packed with broad ranges of goods.⁶ In contrast to department stores and shopping centres, big-box stores were stripped-down operations that required only their stock, four walls, and a roof to operate. In this context, “big-box store” signifies the retail operation, in particular its low capital expenditures and high profits based on competitive discount pricing, as much as the buildings themselves. This dual meaning has stayed with the name into the present day.

Other interpretations of “big-box store”, such as its use to describe buildings which, with their windowless walls and colour schemes, resemble actual boxes, or which are filled with big boxes and large containers, are not commonly used by scholars, though they will be considered here as part of the visual analysis of the architecture. It is also worth noting that “big-box” has come to be used in Canada as an adjective to describe non-retail businesses and organizations. Generally, these businesses are large chains or transnational corporations, and the descriptive use is pejorative. For example, in November 2007, the three Federal opposition parties in the House of Commons united to oppose “big-box daycare”, by which they meant the expansion of large, foreign-owned

⁵ Eric Genest-Laplante, “Specialized big-box stores”, *Analytical Paper Series*, No.29 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2000), 1.

⁶ Richard Panek, “Superstore Inflation”, *The New York Times* (April 6, 1997), Section 6, 66.

child-care providers into Canada.⁷ There was no suggestion that the daycare itself would be provided by actual big-box retailers or be housed in big-box stores. However, the image of the big-box store was invoked as a symbol that incorporates everything that, in opposition politicians and journalists assume Canadians do not want in their daycare providers. This symbolism stems from the controversial place of big-box store development in Canadian cities – these are stores that are loathed and loved, for very different reasons, in different communities. The buildings are signs and symbols of economic development to their supporters, and of sprawl to their critics, and their history and future are closely tied to municipal politics and community activism.

The name “big-box store” began to first appear in Canadian retail literature in 1988 and was applied to the new U.S. chains expanding across the border.⁸ These new operations were called “new retail”, “new format retail”, “warehouse-style retail”, “category killers”, “value retail”, and “power retail”, and their various buildings collectively dubbed “new retail formats” (NRFs).⁹ Industry groups, such as the International Council of Shopping Centres, and scholars, like those associated with the Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity (CSCA) at Ryerson University, have established a vocabulary to describe big-box stores and their various formats in North America. The CSCA defines big-box stores as “retail outlets that are several times larger

⁷ Tonda MacCharles, “Opposition unites against big-box daycare”, *Victoria News Daily* (November 2, 2007), 3.

⁸ Ken Jones, Michael Doucet, *The big box, the big screen, the flagship, and beyond: impacts and trends in the Greater Toronto Area* (Toronto: Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, 1998), 6.

⁹ *New format retailing and the public interest*, prepared by Barry Lyon Consultants Ltd, Emrik Suichies and Associates for the Provincial Facilitator (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 1994); *Shopping Centers and Other Retail Properties: Investment, Developing, Financing, and Management*, (Ed.s) John White, Kevin Gray (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1996); Dolores Hayden, *Field Guide to Sprawl* (New York: WW Norton, 2004).

than the average store in the same retail sector.”¹⁰ This relative measurement is used in order to account for the variations of size among big-box stores based on merchandise category. While an average Home Depot is eighteen times the size of a hardware store, a Real Canadian Superstore is only three times the size of a supermarket.¹¹ While CSCA scholars now use “power retail” instead of “new retail format” to describe big-box store retailing, I will continue to use the latter in this study. This will help keep the buildings framed historically; that is, they were new in the 1990s. Also, the name “new retail format” is quite close to the related marketing term “next big thing”, consideration of which will follow in chapter four.

Big-box stores are strongly associated with American retail chains, especially Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Costco. These companies began to expand into Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These retail operations and their large-format stores, along with their social histories, represent quintessential big-box stores. In 2003, the CSCA classified fifty-two retailers in Canada as big-box chains, of which thirty-two were Canadian owned, nineteen American, and one Swedish.¹² Tony Hernandez and Jim Simmons argue it is more accurate to define big-box stores based on chain organization, rather than on buildings alone. Not only are there variations in size and style among big-box stores, there also exist numerous older retailers, such as department stores and supermarkets, that might, based on size, be re-classified as big-box stores.¹³ Kenneth Jones and Michael Doucet observed earlier that “big-boxes, in fact, existed before the

¹⁰ Tony Hernandez, Jim Simmons, “Evolving retail landscapes: power retail in Canada”, *The Canadian Geographer* 50: 4 (2006), 468.

¹¹ Jones, Doucet (1998), 1.

¹² Hernandez, Simmons (2006), 471-472.

¹³ Ibid, 467-468.

relevant terminology was coined.”¹⁴ For these reasons, CSCA and other scholars have focused on retail chains that entered the Canadian market after 1985 as being indicative of “power retail” and the big-box store phenomenon. In the case of Southern Vancouver Island, all of the locations considered in this study were built after 1992, and all are parts of national or international retail chains.

The size of big-box stores and the scale of their operations, along with their impact on municipal politics, urban planning, and community life make them one of today’s quintessential buildings types. Through the habits and expectations they engender in everyday life, big-box stores have come to play an important role in cities of Southern Vancouver Island. This is most clearly seen in municipal politics, and particularly in urban and regional planning. More than just places to shop, they are also where citizens can find their place in the social and economic order of globalization. While consumption is promoted as an economic and political expression of freedom and as a means of identity formation, contemporary retail produces widespread conformity. A criticism often heard at community meetings and public forums is that big-box stores make every place look the same. This production of sameness, and the eradication of cultural differences, is one of the most commonly voiced criticisms of consumer culture and globalization in general. The big-box store, ubiquitous and homogenous, contributes to and symbolizes this conformity. In their physical appearance and operations, big-box stores contribute to ongoing practices of conformity in Canadian suburbs as described by geographer Richard Harris.¹⁵ Some retailers and shopping-centre developers have responded to these concerns of homogenization by incorporating local or postmodern

¹⁴ Jones, Doucet (1998), 6.

¹⁵ Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 173.

themes into the facades of their locations. The growing presence of retail in suburban and urban areas also illustrates socio-economic discourses and priorities of 21st-century Canada in action. It thus seems appropriate to include them among these histories of Canadian architecture.

Through the exploration of big-box store architecture, discount retailing, and popular modes of shopping, this dissertation argues that these structures produce and consume distinct forms of “social space”. This is a geographical and sociological term that is used to refer to the physical, mental, and cultural locations within society, or social order. The geographer Doreen Massey writes that “social space is not an empty arena within which we conduct our lives; rather, it is something we construct and which others construct about us.”¹⁶ Social space is neither void nor vacuum, neither Nature nor empty stage. Instead it is a location in culture, while being at the same time the customs that determine the uses and meanings of that location in culture. For the philosopher and social scientist Henri Lefebvre, social space “is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).”¹⁷ Lefebvre’s conception of social space as constituting the social relations between things (people, animals, buildings) develops out of Marxist interpretations of capitalism and bourgeois society. Karl Marx similarly emphasized the importance of the relationships that surround and animate the objects of economics. Writing about the English political scientist Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s ideas of colonization, Marx observed “he [Wakefield] discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of

¹⁶ Doreen Massey, “Space-Time and the Politics of Location.” *Architectural Design*, 68: 3/4 (1998), 34.

¹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans.) Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), 83.

things.”¹⁸ The cultural uses and ideological assumptions surrounding objects make them economically relevant, something they are not by themselves. To use Marx’s examples, gold is not intrinsically money, and Africans are not intrinsically slaves.¹⁹ Social relations of power and wealth determine these uses. As such, social relations and their space can operate in terms of tradition (static) while also being open to innovation (dynamic). These spaces take on both static and dynamic qualities, which make them sometimes hard to pin down in terms of analysis. As will be seen, this fluidity or looseness accords well with the ideas of Lefebvre about social space.

The social spaces I am concerned with are those produced and consumed in the context of “value consumption”, a term used to describe changes in North American shopping behaviour that became manifest in the 1980s.²⁰ It describes the shift of focus by shoppers and retailers from the conspicuous consumption of luxury, single items to discount, sale-priced consumption of everyday and multiple items.²¹ Value consumption requires good quality, low prices, broad selection, and decent service, in contrast to the high quality, high prices, limited selection, and specialized service of conspicuous consumption. This shift, from luxury to discount shopping, is also observable in the writing of cultural theorist Raymond Williams. In his critical lexicon *Keywords*, he notes the shift by academic, government, and professional writers from describing shoppers as “customers” to speaking of them as “consumers”.²² To Williams, “customer” suggests a person engaged in habitual patronage, as in “customary”, or “I’ll have the usual, Anne.”

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, (trans.) Samuel Moore, Edward Aveling, (New York: Modern Library/Random House, 1906), 839.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Howard C. Gelbtuch, “The Formats Employed in New Retail Strategies” *Shopping Centers and Other Retail Properties: Investment, Developing, Financing, and Management* (Ed.s) John White, Kevin Gray (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 173.

²¹ Ibid, 174.

²² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana Press, 1973), 79.

“Consumer,” on the other hand suggests not so much a person as that person’s actions or function. To Williams, it is an abstraction that seems more statistical than human.

For researchers writing on consumption or consumer culture, this abstract figure is a subject of considerable interest, especially in the context of North American popular culture and political economy. In the context of value consumption, shoppers are not customers but consumers. The popularity of value consumption and the expansion of discount retailers have not only threatened older department stores and shopping centres with closure, they have also made the “bargain hunter” and the “bargain basement” obsolete. It is worth wondering just how much hunting is to be had in retail spaces shaped by computerized inventories, and low price guarantees, which claim to offer nothing but bargains. Pushing super-sized shopping carts around warehouse format stores, the hunters are no longer consigned to the basement but seem to have since become “bargain gatherers.”

Big-Box Stores: Architecture or Building?

It is fitting that the year 2000 was marked by the publication of numerous books and essays on architecture and on consumption. One work published in that year serves to introduce some of the issues surrounding the topics of big-box store architecture: *The Millennium Celebration of Canadian Architecture*, produced by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. This publication will be considered in order to answer the question: where do big-box stores fit into architectural history?

To mark the year 2000, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada organized *The Millennium Celebration of Canadian Architecture*, centered on a survey of the buildings

Canadians value the most.²³ For one month, the RAIC received nominations of buildings from across the country to which contributors were attached or which they “believed to have been significant in shaping our built environment.”²⁴ Dominated by locations in Ontario, B.C., and Quebec, the list of 482 buildings is nonetheless impressive in length and diversity. The list features the familiar icons of Canadian architecture, along with numerous rural churches, public buildings, and houses. Some commercial and retail buildings did make the list, including four major shopping centres: John Parkin’s Don Mills Shopping Center (1955), Victor Prus and Ian Martin’s Rockland Centre (1959), Eberhard Zeidler’s Toronto Eaton Centre (1973-81), and James Wensley’s Coquitlam Centre (1979).²⁵ Notably absent, however, were Toronto’s Yorkdale Shopping Centre, West Vancouver’s Park Royal, and most especially West Edmonton Mall, the centres most often discussed by architectural historians and human geographers. While shopping centres made it onto the list, big-box stores did not. This unsurprising fact was emphasized by RAIC officials at the press launch of the survey. Atlantic regional director John Emmett lamented: “so much of our built environment, particularly the big box store, is a product rather than a creation, slapped together to keep the rain out and sell a product.”²⁶ Ron Keenberg, Ontario East regional director, was starker in his observations: “In the land of the big box, there is no community.”²⁷ Aesthetically, socially, and culturally, for the RAIC the big-box store is the antithesis of the architecture most valued by Canadians or at least their architectural representatives. Worse, it seems

²³ *Millennium Celebration of Canadian Architecture*, (Ed) Essy Baniassad (Ottawa: RAIC, 2000), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7,13,21; Harold Kalman, *The Concise History of Canadian Architecture* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000), 589-592.

²⁶ Patricia Bailey, “Canadians love churches, tolerate boxes,” *Victoria Times-Colonist* (May 6, 2000) F3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

that “Canadian Architecture” was in danger of being lost amid the spreading growth of “Big Box Land”.

The RAIC survey is a good place to start an exploration of the big-box store in Canada. The fact no one nominated a big box store for the list is, as I say, unsurprising: the buildings are generally considered functional, undistinguished, and impermanent, qualities conveyed in Emmett’s description of “a product rather than a creation”. He is not wrong about the buildings being designed for short-term use. Retail buildings are especially subject to cyclical trends and surface fashions, as well as much deeper economic and social currents, which can result in refurbishment or complete replacement. In the words of Daniel Herman: “Shopping buildings don’t age; they die young.”²⁸ This was evident with downtown department stores in the 1960s and 70s, and now is seen in shopping-centre closures. Dead malls, as they are known, have steadily grown in number across North America; Dolores Hayden estimated there were, as of 2002, 4,000 dead malls in the United States alone.²⁹ This trend is starting now to catch up with big-box stores.

Where I disagree with Emmett concerns his division of architecture into creations and products; this is reminiscent of Nikolaus Pevsner’s distinction between “architecture” (Lincoln Cathedral) and “building” (a bicycle shed).³⁰ For Pevsner, architecture refers to buildings designed with aesthetic appeal, ones meant to be looked at. Like Pevsner, Emmett argues that a creation (architecture) is meant to be visually consumed and is full

²⁸ Daniel Herman, “The Next Big Thing”, *Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2*, (Ed.s) Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, Sze Tsung Leong (New York: Taschen, 2001), 531.

²⁹ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), 179.

³⁰ Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), 15.

of cultural value and historical significance, while a product (building) is a functional yet symbolically empty shell. All buildings are looked at, however, and how they are looked at is beyond the control of the architect or academic. Emmett's and Pevsner's ordering of the built landscape uses the word "architecture" not as a category description but as a mark of quality or distinction. Why is it not possible to view architecture as a broad category of built objects of which there are simply good and bad examples? Perhaps it is because this division separates architects from ugly or unpopular architecture. When sites don't merit the title of architecture, how can architects be responsible for them?

At the start of the 21st century, this seems an extremely old fashioned and defensive approach to defining what constitutes "architecture". Big-box stores are designed by architects, are featured in architectural magazines, and even win architectural awards. Vancouver's Abbarch Partnership, for example, is an award-winning firm primarily engaged in retail projects, whose clients include Wal-Mart Sam's Clubs and Save-on Foods Grocery Stores.³¹ We might not think big-box stores are meant to be looked at; however, their size, location, and signs argue against that. In terms of marketing and business, they are of course meant to be seen. The building's size and distinctive colours and design features house and advertise the operation. For instance, a Staples store is identifiable from a distance because the façade of everyone is divided into two horizontal bands of white and red. Every location is visually branded and instantly recognizable. Further, some big-box stores feature architectural forms and decorations, such as the pilasters, string-courses, gables, piers, and loggias. The form and exterior colour scheme of a Staples location are reminiscent of one of its basic stock items: Xerox

³¹ Greg Potter, "The Abbrach Partnership Architects: Striking a balance between retail vicissitudes and aesthetic verities" *Award Magazine* (August 2005), 8-9.

paper, sold in white boxes with red lids (**Figures 1.5- 1.6**). In the terminology of *Learning From Las Vegas*, the decorated shed turns out in the end to be a duck!³² While these features might not be the stuff the RAIC dreams about, the big-box store is clearly a work of architecture.

In describing big-box stores as “slapped together to keep out the rain and sell a product”, Emmett points out that current architectural practices are dominated by market, non-aesthetic priorities, and that resulting buildings are not meant to last. As such, these buildings can, at best, be tolerated by Canadians. While Emmett appears resigned to big-box stores, Keenberg is clearly opposed to them. To him, big-box stores are simply bad for communities. Of course, Keenberg has a specific idea of community in mind, and it is one that does not include big-box stores. In this position, he is not alone. Many critics of suburbs, sprawl, and consumption argue that big-box stores present environmental, social, economic, and cultural threats to existing communities.³³ The stores are characterized as engines of traffic, pollution, and environmentally destructive development. The big-box store is also the site of mass consumption, the sustainability of which is highly questioned. Opposing these criticisms are academics, retailers, developers, investors, and politicians who argue that big-box stores, on balance, contribute positively to their surrounding communities. For instance, city officials from Langford, B.C., a community that will be considered in detail in this study, argue that

³² Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: the Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, revised (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 88.

³³ For anti-big-box store arguments see: Dolores Hayden *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*, (New York: Pantheon, 2003); Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zybeck, Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, (New York: North Point Press, 2000); Constance Beaumont, *Superstore Sprawl Can Harm Communities: And what citizens can do about it*, (Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994); Stacy Mitchell, *Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2006).

big-box stores have fueled commercial growth, funded city works, and made their community a stronger and better place to live. Odd as it may seem to some, Langford is a community local politicians claim big-box stores are helping build.

Organization and Approach

This study is organized around consideration of the fundamental elements in the retail landscape of discounting: architecture, retailing, and consumption. These elements are identified here as “value architecture”, “value retailing”, and “value consumption”, and each performs a role in the production, consumption, and reproduction of social space. The social spaces that are produced and consumed within this discount retail landscape are identified as “value space”. Value space consists of the architectural and social settings, ideas, and practices of retailing and consumption, including mechanisms for reproduction. Value space is most characterized by repetition, which is indicative of the reproduction of consumption. The big-box store, in form and function, presents, and also represents, the social relations of consumption that operate amid the buildings, the retailers, and the shoppers. In order to clarify the role of each, and to keep architecture in the forefront of this study, these elements will be considered separately: value architecture in chapter four; and value retailing, value consumption, and value space in chapter five.

This dissertation will begin chapter two with a consideration of the literature relevant to the subjects of big-box stores, consumption, and social space. These subjects have been considered from a number of different scholarly perspectives. As a result, the project bibliography is interdisciplinary, with sources drawn from architectural history,

urban geography, sociology, and cultural theory. The contemporary nature of the subject has also made journalistic sources very important, especially in establishing chronology of big-box store development on Southern Vancouver Island.

Chapter three will present the study's methodology and theoretical basis. The ideas of Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, and Henri Lefebvre, as they apply to consumption and architecture, will be reviewed in detail. Marx's conceptions of value will be used to elucidate the way notions of exchange value and use value have changed over the history of capitalism, and how these notions currently find expression in activities outside commodity consumption, such as in politics. The connection of consumption to everyday life signals the influence of Henri Lefebvre and his focus on the mundane and ordinary, not on luxury or other forms of conspicuous consumption. Paradoxically in value space, all consumption is conspicuous, being subject to the eyes of other consumers and of surveillance cameras. Walter Benjamin's writings on the mixing of real and dream spaces, along with phantasmagoria, will provide a 19th-century contrast to the situation of the present, and also an example of a Marxist interpretation of retail architecture and practices. Proceeding from a Marxist base, with special attention to the dialectical operations of consumption and production, I will illustrate value space in terms of everyday life and its impacts on urbanism and politics.

Value architecture and the retail landscape of Southern Vancouver Island is the focus of chapter four. The architectural forms and designs of big-box stores will be examined in detail, with a close description of one site, the Home Depot in University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich, as a representative example. Having identified the standard architectural designs and features, I will articulate a typology of the formats and

the configurations in which NRFs are situated on Southern Vancouver Island. The buildings considered here will be drawn from the Capital Regional District (CRD), the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). Using the typology, I will identify and analyze the locations and histories of NRFs in each regional district, and consider how big-box stores have been developed differently in each jurisdiction. In this chapter, the formats and their locations will be illustrated by maps, tables, and photographs.

Chapter five considers the history of value retailing and value consumption, and the production and reproduction of value space. Value retail and value consumption will be presented in terms of their respective histories and modes of operation, and how they combine with architecture in the production of the physical spaces and social relations of value space. To account for the divergent and paradoxical spatial productions of contemporary retail, I will use a dialectical analysis in order to illustrate value space. This analysis will examine value space in terms of the following pairings of themes: the spectacular and the mundane; obsolescence and durability; scarcity and abundance; value and waste. NRF architecture and its social-political impacts will be interpreted through the dynamic operations that may be gathered under each of these terms. The aim of the theorization is to identify clearly the operations of value and waste at the centre of NRF architecture and the modes of consumption they produce. The impact of value and waste on culture and political economy will be analyzed in the context of the three regional districts of Southern Vancouver Island under study. This will include consideration of the informal economies of the main urban centres, based on recycling and reconsumption, activities that are increasingly dominated by the indigent. The final result will be a

dialectical architectural geography of big-box stores and value space on Southern Vancouver Island. I aim to explain how current forms of urbanization and NRF development have socio-economic and cultural impacts that extend well beyond their aisles and parking lots.

This thesis argues that big-box stores and shopping malls are economic and symbolic centres for the reproduction of consumption. The acts of consumption they house, facilitate and manage each contain the seeds of, or needs for, future consumption. Mass-produced commodities designed with planned obsolescence, such as electronics, are an example of this process of reproduction through repetitive acts of consumption. The economic and political need for ongoing consumption makes retailing, the buying and the selling, a dialectical balancing of satisfaction and deferment, and of value and waste. As will be presented here, these dialectical conflicts run through the retail landscape, informing all its parts, including its architecture and its use of language. The dialectical use of language is evident in its use of literal, metaphoric, and symbolic meanings. A photograph taken at Nanaimo's Country Club Mall provides an example (**Figure 1.7**). The big-box store retailer Future Shop is a leader in the Canadian market for home electronics and appliances. Its name presents multiple meanings: the Future Shop is where the newest products are available, and where consumers can acquire the latest model. The future, defined in terms of product innovation and re-modeling, is available for shoppers to consumer. Future Shop also plays on cultural notions of "futuristic" and an imagined future, that is the idea our society will become increasing run through by technological developments as represented in science-fiction literature and films. The store is where consumers can partake in this technological transformation.

Future Shop lastly advertises itself as a site of reproduction –shopping in the present leads to shopping in the future. The goods purchased in the store are not intended or designed to last forever; and consumers, it is hoped, will return to the store when these goods wear out or break. The act of consumption in Future Shop does not free the consumer from shopping in the future. Instead, the future of the consumer, and of the communities of Southern Vancouver Island, will include shopping. As the name of Nanaimo’s oldest shopping centre suggests, the political and cultural economics of consumption represent themselves as terminal (**Figure 1.8**).

Chapter Two: The Literature of Retail Architecture and Consumption

The subjects of retail architecture and consumption have been studied and written about from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Research has been done by architectural historians, social historians, urban and retail geographers, economists, sociologists, and industry writers, with a stress on the socio-economic impacts of retail development. All recognize the increased importance and culturally transformative role played by consumption in Western nations since the Second World War. Studies today analyze and critique the structures and operations of consumption, including its architectural spaces, to better understand social relations, shared systems of values, and the fashioning of individual and cultural identities. In some studies architectural design is a secondary concern, cited as a symbol of market values, real estate strategies, or planning traditions. In others, it is the focal point. Architectural historians have created a number of studies of retail, especially concerning Main Streets and shopping centres. With the growth of new retail formats, it has become necessary to add big-box stores and power centres to architectural history. These new building types have brought about: an increase in the scale of stores; new patterns of land-use and ownership; consumer shifts to value-driven, warehouse-style facilities; and community protests. As a result, the big-box store is a building type that has been pushed into the public spotlight, and that needs to be considered when examining the current planning, development, and operation of Western urbanism.

In researching this dissertation, I have read and compiled a diverse bibliography. In order to determine how my questions about value space and New Retail Formats

(NRFs) on Southern Vancouver Island fit into this inter-disciplinary field, I have looked to architectural history, urban geography, sociology, and cultural theory for ideas and answers. Due to the contemporary nature of the topic I will also rely on the work of journalists and popular writers on big-box stores and consumption. For this reason, I have arranged this review of the literature according to these areas.

Architectural History: Traditional, Vernacular and Theoretical

Architectural history has long focused on monumental architecture and famous architects. As in traditional art history, the core of architectural history is a canon of buildings and builders, and an approach that stresses formal and biographical information. This tradition is evident in the ongoing production and publication of monographs and visual dictionaries of historic architects and sites, such as *The Phaidon Atlas of World Architecture* and Richard Weston's *Key Buildings of the 20th Century: plans, sections, and elevations*.³⁴ The latter, for example, presents 106 buildings in chronological order with brief text descriptions, photographs, plans, sections, and elevations. It is canonical in its selection of monumental design and building types and its iconic use of architectural drawings. Weston's book also replicates gender biases that have characterized many older architectural histories: only three female architects, two in partnerships, are included in the list.

In contrast, the other traditional repository of the canon, the university survey course and textbook, has been considerably altered in recent decades. Following the postmodern turn of the 1970s, such courses and books have been broadened to include

³⁴ *The Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary World Architecture* (New York: Phaidon, 2004); Richard Weston, *Key Buildings of the 20th Century: plans, sections, and elevations* (New York: WW Norton, 2004).

architects of diverse backgrounds, along with non-monumental and anonymous buildings. Pevsner's influential distinction between architecture and buildings, mentioned in the chapter one, is no longer reflected in contemporary architectural criticism. New and revised survey textbooks by Spiro Kostof, Ian Sutton, and Martin Trachtenberg illustrate this process, by including everyday buildings such as stores and shopping centres, and emphasising cultural context.³⁵ The methods of architectural history and the range of subjects under study have also grown beyond the consideration of high architecture. The two, method and subject, are of course connected; new subjects require new methods of description, interpretation, judgment, and theorization. Retail, domestic, industrial, and agrarian architecture lack the design, style, celebrity, and documentation of high architecture. For these reasons they are inadequately served by the traditional language and approaches of architectural history. Scholars interested in buildings and methods outside the mainstream created an alternative method and subject area identified as "vernacular architecture".

"Vernacular architecture" describes both a class of buildings and a set of non-canonical approaches to their study. The study of non-monumental architecture began in the 19th century and greatly expanded during the 20th. It continues today and is frequently interdisciplinary in approach. As a class of buildings, vernacular architecture is identified as informal, domestic, or commercial, and usually designed by non-architects whose names are unrecorded.³⁶ Bernard Rudofsky famously labelled it "architecture without architects", calling it a class of buildings that have been "traditionally neglected or

³⁵ Spiro Kostof, *Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ian Sutton, *Western Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); Martin Trachtenberg, *Architecture: From Prehistory to Postmodernity* (New York: Prentice Hall Abrams, 2003).

³⁶ N.W. Alcock, "Vernacular Architecture," *Grove Dictionary of Art*, 32 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 272-275.

downright ignored.”³⁷ Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman define vernacular architecture as “the common, the local, [and] the regional.”³⁸ The subject is ordinary not extraordinary architecture. The dominant building type studied by vernacular architectural historians has been the house. Residences have been examined in the context of regional craft styles, technological innovation, and gender. The Vernacular Architecture Group (UK) and the Vernacular Architecture Forum (USA) are the two most prominent organizations that host conferences and publish the respective journals *Vernacular Architecture* and *Perspectives on Vernacular Architecture*. These two groups have played a key role in defining and supporting the vernacular architecture movement among scholars.

Carter and Herman see the breadth and diversity of study to be the main challenge to anyone attempting to define vernacular architecture. So many building types and related topics are included under the big tent of everyday architecture that the term can seem too unspecific, and really not viable as a category of study. Most vernacular studies respond to this by focusing on regional examples of known building types; Carter and Herman state: “Vernacular buildings are localized versions of known forms.”³⁹ For this reason, architectural typology is often used to organize studies of vernacular architecture into building types. There are of course those uncommon and odd buildings that clearly test Carter and Herman’s presumption that all built forms can be, in a sense, known, or traced to a clear source. Vernacular buildings, constructed with at-hand, common

³⁷ Bernard Rudofsky, *The Prodigious Builders: notes toward a natural history of architecture with special regard to those species that are traditionally neglected or downright ignored* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 9.

³⁸ Thomas Carter, Bernard Herman, “Toward A New Architectural History,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, IV (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 5.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

materials and designed for simple everyday uses, can be just as unique and surprising as the work of a famous architect. However, in the main, vernacular architectural historians use building types, which are by definition reproducible formats, to focus and to define their studies.

The characteristic interests of vernacular studies, as described by Herman, are “architectural form, construction, ornamentation, function, and setting.”⁴⁰ With close connections to regional and peasant studies, the vernacular approach to the buildings produces detailed descriptions of materials, tools, and techniques. These are used to illuminate “the different mental attitudes of people to their environment through the interpretation of their domestic and working space.”⁴¹ Such studies have been concerned with craft traditions, immigrant cultures, and regional differences. Appropriate for domestic and agrarian buildings, these topics can also be applied to retail buildings. North American general and corner stores, for example, have been studied in terms of architecture, along with the cultural background of retailers and consumers, and distinct store innovations.⁴²

Vernacular architecture is also an approach to the study of buildings that in some senses parallels scholarly innovations in New History and New Art History. As part of the postmodern re-examination of history, vernacular architecture seeks out marginal and ignored subjects, and considers the social and political context, including gender and race, in which buildings were created. As with New Art History, vernacular architecture can also be conceived as a weapon to fight the patriarchal elitism of traditional, canonical

⁴⁰ Bernard Herman, “Vernacular Architecture: North America,” *Grove Dictionary of Art*, 32 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 304.

⁴¹ Alcock (2000), 275.

⁴² Bernice Thomas, *America’s 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy* (New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1997); Joy Parr, “Reinventing Consumption”, *The Beaver*, 80:1 (Feb/Mar.2000), 66-73.

scholarship, by shedding light on ordinary buildings and everyday life. Carter and Herman propose changing the name of vernacular architecture to New Architectural History.⁴³ This would emphasize the contemporary and innovative nature of the approach and recognize the ties to both architectural history and new history. The term would also highlight the interdisciplinary nature of much current vernacular scholarship that build on tested methods of fieldwork and regionalism with statistical analysis and geographic information systems (GIS).

New Architectural History is interdisciplinary, and interdisciplinarity is unavoidable in the study of contemporary retail buildings. As a key part of urban development, retail facilities are studied, measured, and monitored by planners, developers, politicians, merchant associations, geographers, marketers, and cultural critics. All contribute ideas and, most especially, statistics as a way of illustrating the various social impacts of retailing and consumption. Vernacular studies of retail sites often incorporate a range of statistical data into the more plan-and-photograph base of study. By doing so, the approach of New Architectural History can interpret retail architecture from material and theoretical perspectives.

Retail architecture has been studied and presented in both traditional and vernacular architectural histories. In traditional studies, retail architecture is highlighted for: its monumentality (Trajan's Market, West Edmonton Mall); its celebrity (Marshall Field Warehouse, Carson, Pirie, Scott Department Store); and, its social role in middle and working class lives (Bon Marché, St. Lawrence Market).⁴⁴ Buildings are described in terms of structure, iconography, façade, and presented in a chronological order, ever

⁴³ Carter and Herman (1991), 4-5.

⁴⁴ These examples are considered, variously, in Harold Kalman, *A Concise History of Canadian Architecture* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000); Kostof (1995); Sutton (1999); Trachtenberg (2003).

suggestive of a clear, progressive path of development. All this is done in accordance with the canon of art history.

In vernacular studies of architecture the focus is on typology, regional styles, social function, and context. Vernacular architectural historians have written about retail history, shopping centre and store design, technological innovations, and the place of retail architecture in urban development. Books by Chester Liebs, Richard Longstreth, Johann Geist, and Alan Gowans are examples of penetrating studies into the historical development of retail architecture.⁴⁵ The authors use typology to classify and document building formats and to serve as a lens through which to consider urban and suburban development. Typology is a key tool for both traditional and vernacular architectural historians and one I will use to organize sites in this study of big-box stores.

Within architectural history, the study of retail subjects has generally followed the vernacular-studies approach, with a focus on single buildings or building types. Writers begin by identifying the object of study in respect to its dates and locations, usually developing an inventory of examples from a specific region.⁴⁶ From there, it is typical to identify the physical commonalities and discrepancies within the region before addressing individual examples. A frequent difficulty encountered when studying vernacular buildings lies in the accurate dating of the building's construction and subsequent renovations. Unlike monuments, such building-types as houses, barns, general stores rarely have accurate or accessible records. The memories of owners and

⁴⁵ Chester B. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston: Little Brown, 1985); Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Johann Friedrich Geist, *Arcades: The History of a Building Type* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture: Social Function and Cultural Expression* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

⁴⁶ Herman (2000), 304.

employees are sometimes the only surviving records. Also absent are most physical clues that help writers to ascertain dates, such as style, detailing, or iconography. Writers so confronted by unknown origins have often turned to a focus on the building's "life", that is the order and magnitude of its renovations, whose study may inform speculations regarding changing inhabitants, functions, or climate. An example of such an investigation is Gavin Macrae-Gibson's *The Secret Lives of Buildings*.⁴⁷ The "life" of any building is tied to materials. In many ways, vernacular architectural historians are mainly focused on materials as potentially eloquent of history, of money and expense, of techniques, and of innovation. The materials lead the historian to consider the tools used and the techniques employed in construction. With such information, almost wholly derived from physical evidence, the architectural historian may reach conclusions about regional styles and crafts.

In the case of major contemporary retail, the vernacular approach is challenged and potentially altered. Shopping malls, big-box stores, and power centres hardly qualify as "architecture without architects", nor do they usually represent distinct regional styles. Also, the frequent renovations and re-brandings of retail buildings further obscure the physical legacies of the past and often wilfully hide the building-materials. Still, these sites are considered vernacular because of their ordinariness, lack of architectural pretension, and relatively ephemeral existence. They are truly buildings of everyday life. Retail histories of shopping malls and NRFs can be assembled from municipal records, local media, and information provided by the site operators. Of course the latter, as Meaghan Morris observed, may or may not be forthcoming, due to the shopping-centre's

⁴⁷ Gavin Macrae-Gibson, *The Secret Lives of Buildings: An American Mythology for Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA :MIT Press, 1988).

adverse relationship with history.⁴⁸ The sources of this relationship are multiple and include “short-term employment patterns, employee and often managerial indifference to the workplace,” and marketing strategies focused on newness.⁴⁹ Tied to the latter is the sense that, in the context of the mall, the past is best forgotten: many malls stand on contested sites or were controversial when built. Architecturally, older forms and design trends are potentially embarrassing reminders of past styles that make the mall appear dated and no longer in fashion.

What is altered is the end result of the vernacular study – rather than documenting differences, it appears to document architectural and cultural similarities. In the case of NRFs, an architectural style can be observed to be brought into, not drawn from, a region. This suggests that vernacular typology will illustrate a process of architectural homogenization in the areas of retail, a theme popular in some studies. Yet, as Morris observes, along with geographers Peter Jackson and Nigel Thrift, any in-depth examination of retail facilities turns up heterogeneous elements amid the generally homogenous forms.⁵⁰ The researcher must recognize that every big box store is in a specific location and is a particular example. My NRF typology will document both general and unique elements of the Southern Vancouver Island sites.

The work of Richard Longstreth presents some of the best examples of vernacular studies applied to North American retail architecture. Professor of American Studies at George Washington University, Longstreth has written numerous articles, architectural

⁴⁸ Meaghan Morris, “Things to Do with Shopping Centres”, *Gender, space, architecture: an interdisciplinary introduction* (Ed.s) Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden (Routledge: New York, 2000), 177.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 177.

⁵⁰ Peter Jackson, Nigel Thrift, “Geographies of Consumption”, *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (Ed) Daniel Miller, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 209.

guidebooks, and major studies on retail and commercial architecture, with a specific focus on the shopping centre.⁵¹ He is also active in the field of historic preservation and has been part of numerous campaigns to save vernacular buildings from demolition. His efforts have contributed to the ongoing debates surrounding definitions of what constitutes architectural heritage in North America.

In his work on American stores and shopping centres, Longstreth has written about the early development of these retail formats in the first half of the twentieth century, with a focus on Los Angeles as a hothouse of retail concepts. His interest lies more in the origins and early examples of the shopping centre than in the post-war, suburban development boom that began the great age of shopping-centre construction. In the essay “The Diffusion of the Community Shopping Center Concept during the Interwar Decades,” Longstreth provides a close study of retail developments in the 1920s and 1930s, when the shopping center was an “exceptional as well as experimental phenomenon.”⁵² The history of iconic sites like Country Club Plaza in Kansas City and Westwood Village in Los Angeles is reviewed by Longstreth, with an emphasis on the patterns such locations imprint on future shopping-centre designs. He writes, “Pre-World War II examples provided an essential proving ground for the type, facilitating its proliferation after 1945. In business and design realms alike, these centers helped give new definition to the ever more complicated, decentralizing structure of the metropolitan areas.”⁵³ Illustrating one his strengths, Longstreth ties 1920s and 1930s architecture and

⁵¹ Along with the previously cited *City Center to Regional Mall*, other relevant studies by Longstreth include: *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Washington DC: Preservation Press, 1987).

⁵² Richard Longstreth, “The Diffusion of the Community Shopping Center Concept during the Interwar Decades”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 56:3 (Sept.1997), 268.

⁵³ Ibid.

retailing to post-war suburban growth and sprawl development. In this way his writing is an invaluable resource for scholars investigating the historic background to contemporary commercial architecture.

In the works of Longstreth, retail buildings are considered in light of suburban developments and planning. One architectural historian who is deeply interested in suburbs and, by extension, suburban retail is Dolores Hayden. In her early works, Hayden researched the alternative architectural and city planning ideas produced by American socialists and feminists in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁵⁴ She observed that “the suburban retreat” begun in the 1920s and intensified after 1945 was antithetical to the goals of material feminists, socialists, and suffragettes. Further, the adoption of the single-family home at the heart of a national housing policy, itself wedded to pro-development politics, perpetuated Victorian housing plans and their attendant notions of “respectability, consumption, and female domesticity.”⁵⁵ In her more recent books, such as *Building Suburbia* and *A Field Guide to Sprawl*, Hayden has focused on historical and contemporary suburban development and growth conflicts. She identifies a series of suburb “vernacular patterns” or types, which each represent different historic eras of development, and the latter two of which, “edge nodes” and “rural fringes”, are relevant to my consideration of NRF’s.⁵⁶ Along with these landscape types, Hayden’s work establishes a suburban typology of buildings and plans that is based on the terminology and descriptive vocabulary of real estate developers, retail corporations, contractors,

⁵⁴ Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976); *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

⁵⁵ Hayden (1981), 22-23.

⁵⁶ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), 4-5.

urban planners, politicians, and community organisations. While her work is on U.S. cities and history, Hayden's typology, focus on gender and space, and conclusions about suburban growth are extremely relevant to the Canadian experience of suburbia. In his analysis of gender and the history of West Vancouver, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe builds directly on Hayden's history of women's spaces and struggles within cultural definitions of domesticity and femininity.⁵⁷

Margaret Crawford is an urban historian and planner whose studies of American towns and cities have also considered suburbia and shopping centres.⁵⁸ She has been associated with "everyday urbanism", an academic movement attempting to widen the practice of urban planning to include the spontaneous contributions of citizens.⁵⁹ In her often-cited essay "The World in a Shopping Mall", Crawford presents a retail history of the West Edmonton Mall (WEM) and of North American shopping centres, which considers the cultural implications of hyper-consumption and the mega-mall.⁶⁰ After experiencing the spatial-sensory overload of WEM, she observes that because most architectural critics still use "a discourse based on visible demonstrations of order," they inevitably fail to perceive the essence of mall spaces amid the flux and apparent disorder of the commercial environment.⁶¹ The soaring verticals are surely present in WEM; however, they are visually mixed in with various signs, wall treatments, and tourist attractions. Besides, they are not really the point. It is the architectural space, shaped

⁵⁷ Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, "The Fe-Male Spaces of Modernism: A Western Canadian Perspective", *Prospects* 26 (2002), 667-700.

⁵⁸ Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns* (New York: Verso, 1995).

⁵⁹ *Everyday Urbanism*, (Ed.s) John Chase, Margaret Crawford, John Kaliski (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall", *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, (Ed) Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 3-30.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 13.

through the manipulation of movement, sound, temperature, and surfaces that concerns Crawford. She is also fairly optimistic, in 1992, about the mall's future prospects based upon its proven adaptability in the past, and the numerous opportunities in shopping entertainment. However, her opinions of the mall's viability may have changed in more recent times.

Another popular essay on the architecture of malls is "Things to Do at Shopping Centres", written by cultural studies professor Meaghan Morris. She perceives, like Crawford, shopping centres are buildings that balance order and disorder. Morris observes that shopping malls are "overwhelmingly and constitutively paradoxical."⁶² They appear to be large, rigid, and strongly present; yet, when one tries to analyze them, they become variable, vapid, flexible, and suddenly absent. One reason for this impression, Morris suggests, is the crowds of moving people, who are alternately present and absent. The contrast of fixed architecture and moving crowds within the mall produces a "stirring tension" that is a spatial experience of both presence and absence.⁶³ The scale of the architecture and its social centrality convey both a physical presence and the absence of the location's previous forms and functions. Morris's aim here is not a general theory of shopping centres, but its opposite: a methodological approach for interpreting individual malls that focuses on difference. As a postmodernist, Morris is drawn to differences between particular sites, especially to the idiosyncratic and local aspects of each location. Following this approach in chapter four, this study will consider the unique and unplanned aspects of NRF's that distinguish one big-box store location from another.

⁶² Morris (2000), 170.

⁶³ Ibid.

Vernacular architectural history has adopted critical and cultural theory on a widespread basis. These approaches seem best suited to carry Carter and Herman's name "New Architectural History". Contemporary architectural historians have engaged theory in order to better analyse unconventional buildings and builders, and to expand disciplinary boundaries. Nancy Stieber posits, simply, that theory is good for stimulating fresh questions and conceptions about the buildings.⁶⁴ Postmodern scholarship, especially concerning social constructions of space and gender, has also influenced the re-evaluation of monuments and approaches. Architectural historians have long studied material history, micro-narratives, and limited case studies. So, they are well placed among scholars to appreciate the consequences of the postmodern deconstruction of meta-narratives and unitary concepts of history. The canon is reconsidered and the inclusion of vernacular buildings and marginalised builders facilitated. The focus of much theoretical writing has been architectural space, and the cultural spaces it produces.

One of the studies that pioneered spatial analyses of architecture was Bruno Zevi's *Architecture as Space*, first published in 1948.⁶⁵ Zevi observes that critics and writers have generally overlooked the fact that the essence of architecture lies not in its walls or ceilings, but in the spatial volumes contained by these built forms.⁶⁶ He insists that it is only by occupying or passing through the interior space of a building that we can actually experience architecture. Put another way: when we are in a room, our eyes may rest upon the walls, but our body and actions rest in the space enclosed by those walls. Zevi thus points out that architecture can be understood as solid and void, visible and

⁶⁴ Nancy Stieber, "Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58:3 (1999), 382-391.

⁶⁵ Bruno Zevi, *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture*, (trans.) Milton Gendel (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 22-23.

invisible. In these points, the influence of the organic architecture movement, especially the ideas and designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, is clearly evident.⁶⁷

The emphasis placed in architectural publications upon the exteriority of buildings, such as in the composition or decoration of façades, reflects the under-valuing of the space of the building and the over-valuing of its purely visual elements. To correct this, and to direct critics to the proper subject of architecture, Zevi argues for a spatial approach to architectural history. His method balances general elements of social history and contextual analysis, such as economics, technology, and aesthetics, with specific factors of space as related to an individual building. These factors are: the urban environment (the space surrounding, and shaped by, the building); the architecture (the living experience of interior); the volumetrics (the space formed by enclosing walls); the decorative detailing (the chromatic and plastic elements that emphasize volume); and scale (the proportions of the building in relation to human scale).⁶⁸ Zevi's method aims to present individual buildings in proper social and spatial context – anticipating Morris and other postmodern writers, Zevi insists on the uniqueness of each building and is wary of the traditional notions of architectural styles. Last, by choosing space as the focus of analysis, Zevi takes standard architectural terms, such as “rhythm, scale, balance, mass”, and uses them to describe not visual surfaces and features but the experience of space.⁶⁹ Zevi's spatial method, with adaptations, will be utilized in my descriptions of the building sites and in the subsequent analysis of consumer behaviours in these sites.

⁶⁷ Thomas Muirhead, “Bruno Zevi: Architectural philosopher who railed against the evils of classicism”, *The Guardian* (Mar. 1, 2000).

⁶⁸ Zevi (1993), 73-74.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

Along with the focus on space, theoretically inclined architectural history also differs from most vernacular architecture studies by considering monuments alongside everyday architecture. Major architects and buildings, among them the most famous and written-about examples from the canon, are reconsidered and compared to minor figures and vernacular buildings. A good example of this approach is *Architecture and the Sites of History*, an architectural history anthology edited by Iain Borden and David Dunster.⁷⁰ This series of twenty-six essays considers famous buildings, including the Parthenon and Versailles, alongside apartments, city squares, and suburban housing. Each receives equal attention from essayists engaged in a disciplinary re-evaluation of the canon and involved with cultural theory. Borden and Dunster write in their Preface:

Architectural History is becoming more explicitly concerned with the implications of its own practices, and so more able to set the boundaries and scope of its own visions. More interpretations and theories to expound, more things and processes to investigate – these are the developments of a newly invigorated discipline.⁷¹

For Borden, Dunster, and many others, it is the application of theory that fuels self-critical perspectives and the broadening of subject-matter. Borden has been prominent in this reinvigoration, authoring and editing numerous essays, books, and anthologies that represent some of the most innovative postmodern approaches to theory and architecture today. As a member of the “Strangely Familiar” group, a London-based research collective of architects and critics focused on the city, Borden wrote “Another Pavement, Another Beach: Skateboarding and the Performative Critique of Architecture”. In this essay he brings French philosopher and theorist Henri Lefebvre’s ideas of social space to

⁷⁰ *Architecture and the Sites of History: Interpretations of Buildings and Cities*, (Ed.s) Iain Borden, David Dunster (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1995).

⁷¹ *Ibid*, vii.

bear on teen-age skateboarders and their use of urban locations.⁷² Borden argues that the subversive and illegal practices of skateboarders challenge normative, urban spatial practices and thereby produce a Lefebvrian city space of difference. Skateboarders perform their opinions about urban spaces by adapting and sometimes destroying them. By placing his focus on unintended and destructive users and uses of architecture, Borden presents a remarkable alternative to both traditional and vernacular architectural history. In my study of retail buildings and shoppers I have found his writings to be instructive in balancing building and material concerns with postmodern theory. Borden has also been an active contributor to the consideration of gender and architecture, co-editing with Jane Rendell and Barbara Penner *Gender, Space, Architecture: an interdisciplinary introduction*.⁷³ This anthology brings together scholars from a range of disciplines, including women's studies, geography, history, sociology, and architectural history. While I will discuss the geographers in the section below, two art/architectural historians featured in the book, Mary McLeod and Rosalyn Deutsche, are worth considering here. Their feminist evaluations of interdisciplinary uses of architectural history point to the relevance of gender for both subjects and authors.

Mary McLeod presents a feminist critique of postmodern "otherness" as used by Michel Foucault in his concept of "heterotopia" and much of the writing it has inspired.⁷⁴ Foucault's "otherness" is defined by life outside the everyday, and by non-normative practices that occur within specialised locations. These "other spaces" are heterotopias-

⁷² Iain Borden, "Another Pavement, Another Beach: Skateboarding and the Performative Critique of Architecture", *The Unknown City*, (Ed.s) Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell, Alicia Pivaro (London: MIT Press, 2001), 178-198.

⁷³ *Gender, Space, Architecture: an interdisciplinary introduction*, (Ed.s) Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁷⁴ Mary McLeod, "Everyday and *Other Spaces*" (1996), *Ibid*, 182-202.

real places (as opposed to utopias) that are acknowledged yet kept to the social margins.⁷⁵

The essence of McLeod's evaluation is that Foucault's "other spaces" ignore or exclude actual social "others." Foucault's "otherness" is really a male, mental state rather than a social construction shaped by women, children, the elderly, immigrants, and the poor. Notably absent from his vision of "other spaces" are houses, workplaces, shopping centres, streets, restaurants, and parks – places associated with women and children.⁷⁶

This approach to "otherness", along with a spirit of machismo, is perceived by McLeod in the works of critics influenced by Foucault, especially Edward Soja and Mike Davis.⁷⁷ McLeod argues for the application of the more inclusive approaches of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. It is Lefebvre's notion of "everyday life" and de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, that interests McLeod.⁷⁸ If "everyday life" for Foucault is the tyranny of routine, for de Certeau and Lefebvre it is the source of diversity, freedom and happiness: everyday life, shaped by the positive and negative effects of capitalism, contains both oppression and liberation, along with norms and differences.⁷⁹ The experience of these dialectical social relations, of oppression and liberation, is strongly gendered and is illustrated in customs of consumption. Lefebvre, McLeod writes "seems to have an acute understanding of the role of the everyday in woman's experience and how consumption has been both her demon and liberator, offering her an arena of action that grants her entry into power in the public sphere."⁸⁰ The identification of shopping with women is an argument for non-elite "other spaces."

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, "Other spaces: The principles of heterotopia", *Lotus International*, 48 (1985) 9-17.

⁷⁶ McLeod (1996), 186.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 187.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 188-189.

⁷⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (trans.) Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁸⁰ McLeod (1995), 189.

These are locations for the everyday actions of “others”, temporarily outside the boundaries of normative power relations. In the case of women this means the home or workplace. Barbara Kruger’s slogan “I Shop Therefore I Am” encapsulates the paradoxical nature of shopping for women. The liberating power of decision-making and culturally acknowledged expertise exists alongside restrictive stereotypes and forms of social subordination. This paradox is truly an experience of “otherness.” In this sense, the shopping centre and the big box store can be a site of “otherness” and “others.”

Rosalyn Deutsche is another historian critical of current interdisciplinary work on architecture and urban geography.⁸¹ In her critical essay “Men in Space”, Deutsche presents the gendered blind spots and/or biases in such writings; originally published in *Artforum* (1990), “Men in Space” is specifically a response to Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies* and David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Deutsche sees, as its appeal, the potentiality of interdisciplinary research to undermine authority and the knowledge structures of academic disciplines. Despite this, she notes, it rarely actually overturns these disciplines however, but is instead assimilated by the discipline, reinforcing power relations in the form of something “new.”

More often disciplines unite in alliances that fortify an authoritarian epistemology – by adding to its appearance of completeness – instead of relinquishing it for a more democratic one. Is the current synthesis of urban studies, cultural theory and sociology such a defensive formation? If so, what are its casualties?⁸²

Deutsche, an art historian, draws her first example of “casualties” from this background when she recounts Griselda Pollock’s critique of T.J. Clark’s *The Painting of Modern Life*. It is Pollock’s view that Clark’s reading of the politics and economics of

⁸¹ Rosalyn Deutsche, “Men in Space”, *Gender, Space, Architecture: An interdisciplinary introduction* (Ed.s) Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden (New York: Routledge, 2000), 134-139.

⁸² *Ibid*, 134.

nineteenth-century Paris achieves its Marxist coherence by invoking a falsely homogeneous model of French social relations. This theoretical coherence omits any serious consideration of either gender or ethnicity. Pollock and Deutsche both see Clark's attempt to craft a totalising theory and establish strong claims to truth and authority, leading him to dismiss feminist analysis as "expendable" and not "requisite."⁸³ This is reminiscent of Jean-François Lyotard's criticism of Jürgen Habermas, whose meta-theories invoke a disembodied, gender-neutral, universal objectivity.⁸⁴ This viewpoint, feminists argue, simply gives another face to elite male positions of power. Deutsche applies a similar critique to Fredric Jameson and his theory of Postmodernism. Like Clark, Jameson adopts a narrow focus, in this case on cultural fragmentation directly caused by the economic and spatial crises of capitalism. This fragmentation has negative impacts that are more or less equally experienced across different networks of social relations. Deutsche writes:

Because he disavows the importance and complexity of other social relations, Jameson confuses capital's fragmentations with the fragmentations caused by challenges – from feminists, gays, lesbians, postcolonials, antiracists – to the types of discursive power Jameson himself exercises: universalizing thought, essentialist discourses, constructions of unitary subjectivity.⁸⁵

Jameson's theoretical unity ignores the difficult issues and contradictions raised by "otherness" and instead invokes a generalized class consciousness in an effort to close ranks in opposition to capitalism. Feminist, queer, and postcolonial theories suddenly become a threat to unified political action and, as so, another source of negative fragmentation. With respect to Soja and Harvey, Deutsche points out that the

⁸³ Ibid, 135.

⁸⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "What is Postmodernism?", *Art in Theory, 1900-1990* (Ed.s) Charles Harrison, Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 1008-1015.

⁸⁵ Deutsche (2000), 136-137.

bibliographies of their respective books are largely restricted to texts by white, Western men. Of the two, she is more sympathetic to Soja, who is portrayed as someone genuinely interested in dissolving disciplinary boundaries and power, and whose explanation for the production of space is socially and not economically determined. In contrast, Harvey's theory is totalising, economically determined, class-focused, and non-gender-specific. He also reinforces the idea that multiplicity of contemporary viewpoints threatens chances for coherent political action.

The criticisms of Deutsche and McLeod are important because they stress the personal position of the researcher/writer studying everyday life. Also, both observe in the literature of postmodern space the presence of pseudo-objectivity, or "a belief in the total vantage point."⁸⁶ Geographer Gillian Rose refers to this vantage point as the "penetrating gaze," which she describes as a core belief in Western geographical knowledge.⁸⁷ This gaze is also synonymous with masculine subjectivity. Deutsche suggests that if postmodern urban studies are dominated by such biased theories, there is a fear that "Feminist contributions to analyses of the visual environment would evade *real* urban politics." For Deutsche, MacLeod, Morris, and many others, the study of cities and buildings needs to be interdisciplinary in order to engage in real politics and to highlight real social problems. The postmodern academic is not apart from these issues but is both the cause and solution, like any other member of society. This is what the self-critical awareness of postmodern scholarship requires – a refashioning of perspective.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 137.

⁸⁷ Gillian Rose, "Some notes towards thinking about the spaces of the future" *Mapping the Futures: local cultures, global change* (Ed.s) Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, Lisa Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993), 70.

Urban and architectural subjects are too complex and important to be left to one group of specialists.

So far, we've mainly been considering writings by academic architectural historians. Retail buildings have also been addressed by architects and critics, such as Lawrence Israel, Susan Doubilet, and Clive Darlow.⁸⁸ Each have written on shopping-centre and retail-store designs, with a focus on the aesthetic and engineering aspects of the architecture. There are also several, monthly trade journals that regularly publish articles on architectural topics, the most influential being *Shopping Center World*, *Stores*, *Chain Store Age Executive*, and *Shopping Centers Today*. The latter is published by the International Council of Shopping Centers, the pre-eminent industry organisation that also publishes directories and reports on retail activity, mostly with a focus on North America.

A recent anthology of writing by architects and critics that has influenced my thinking is *The Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2*.⁸⁹ The book's essayists consider contemporary retail through building typology, design surveys, and social analysis. Overseen by architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas (also the author of *S, M, L, XL*), this publication is one of the most original interdisciplinary studies of historical and contemporary retail facilities.⁹⁰ It considers international and North American topics and sites, though the focus is on the U.S. The book features text and photo essays conceived by architects, designers, and academics, united by strong

⁸⁸ Susan Doubilet, "Reinventing the Mall", *Architectural Record* 187: 10 (1999) 151-153; Clive Darlow, *Enclosed Shopping Centers* (London: The Architectural Press, 1972); Lawrence Israel, *Store Planning Design: History, Theory, Process* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

⁸⁹ *Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2*, (Ed.s) Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, Sze Tsung Leong (New York: Taschen, 2001).

⁹⁰ Rem Koolhaas, OMA, and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995).

social criticism and effective use of statistical data. Methods of architectural history, human geography, sociology, and market research are combined throughout the book. The result is a series of focused essays on the components of retailing in the 21st century. The book also identifies this system as one both in crisis and in expansion. The crisis is evidenced by the declining popularity of shopping centres, the increasing number of dead malls in North America, and the meteoric rise and present decline of the big-box store. At the same time, it is argued, shopping is coming to characterize more and more aspects of everyday life; as Sze Tsung Leong puts it: “Not only is shopping melting into everything, but everything is melting into shopping.”⁹¹ In my consideration of NRF architecture I will be citing essays by Koolhaas, Leong, Daniel Herman, Srdjan Jovanovich Weiss, and John McMorrough from this anthology. The *Guide to Shopping* is a model, postmodern study, and, in a strange way, also its own kind of retail environment. It reads like a shopping trip. The diversity of topics, multiple authorial voices, visually powerful and often unorthodox design, and sheer size of the book make it seductive, confusing, entertaining, and difficult to use. If your bookmark or sticky note falls out, it is hard to find your place again. Like a mall or a big-box store, it is not an easy space to navigate

Social analyses of retail architecture have also been written by scholars studying labour issues, the consumer-society, urban sprawl, commercial globalization. Authors from a range of academic backgrounds, including Jerry Jacobs, Lizabeth Cohen, Peter Gibian, Kenneth Jackson, and Juliet Schor have contributed studies that consider the role of retail architecture in shaping North American society and culture.⁹² The disciplinary

⁹¹ Sze Tsung Leong, “...And Then There Was Shopping”, C.J. Chung (2001), 129.

⁹² Jerry Jacobs, *The Mall: An Attempted Escape for Everyday Life* (New York: Waveland Press, 1984); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred Knopff, 2003); Peter Gibian, “Shopping Center Spaces and the Spectacles of Consumer

diversity represented by these authors, who share a common focus on consumption, presents a range of innovative approaches and conclusions, which include issues of gender, class, race, and urban planning. These authors, along with others, will be discussed in a review of geographical and sociological sources and in support of arguments concerning the social, political, economic, and cultural issues attached to retail architecture.

With few exceptions, the architectural histories I have reviewed here concern buildings in the United States and Great Britain. Architectural writing on Canadian sites tends to focus on Ontario and Quebec, or on single, major sites such as WEM or Toronto's Eaton Centre.⁹³ Modern retail architecture in British Columbia has received little attention, with the exception of two M.A. theses (Cook, and Williams), and municipal publications and reports.⁹⁴ Of the latter, an especially useful though now dated source is the *Retail Centre Inventory* of the Capital Regional District, published in 1986 and revised in 1989.⁹⁵ The inventories present a detailed statistical picture of the retail landscape in the CRD just prior to the arrival of NRF's. They also include several centres that have since added big box stores and retailers to their sites. The inventories will be used as a reference point from which to measure the development of NRF's since their

Culture", *Mass Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 238-92; Kenneth Jackson, "All the World's a Mall: Reflections on the Social and Economic Consequences of the American Shopping Center", *American Historical Review*, 101:4 (1996), 1111-1121; Juliet Schor, *Do Americans Shop Too Much?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

⁹³ William Bernstein, Ruth Cawker, *Contemporary Canadian Architecture* (Don Mills: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982); Alan Hallsworth, *Regional Shopping Centres: some lessons from Canada* (London: Test, Publishing, 1988); M.C. Ircha, *Shopping centres and downtown revitalization in Canada: A preliminary analysis* (Winnipeg: Department of Municipal Affairs, Municipal Planning Branch, 1982); *Metropolitan Mutations: The Architecture of Emerging Public Spaces*. RAIC Annual, (Ed) Detlef Mertins (Toronto: Little, Brown & Co, 1989).

⁹⁴ Norman Cook, "Small Food Stores in Victoria", unpublished MA thesis (University of Alberta, 1969); Judith Williams, "The Victoria Eaton Centre and the Discursive Construction of Local Politics", unpublished MA thesis (University of Victoria, 1991).

⁹⁵ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume One (Regional Information Service: CRD, 1986); *Retail Centre Inventory*. Volume Two (Regional Information Service: CRD, 1989).

first appearance on Southern Vancouver Island in 1992. My project will analyse retail architecture from the inter-disciplinary perspective of New Architectural History. One of my goals is to provide scholars with an up-to-date and theorised interpretation and history of recent trends in retail and urban development on Southern Vancouver Island.

Urban Geography: Retail, Architectural, and Radical

The main body of scholarship that does exist on Canadian retail spaces has been done by human and urban geographers. In ways similar to vernacular architectural historians, geographers have studied retail in terms of "landscape", using a mixture of quantitative and spatial methodologies. Richard Harris is an urban geographer whose area of focus is the development of Canadian suburbs and who sees strong ties between the post-1945 "corporate suburb" and contemporary suburban developments.⁹⁶ By virtue of being created by rational systems of capitalist production, both create spatial and social landscapes of predictable conformity. Despite the diversity of postmodern styles, there is just as much sameness today as in the suburban stereotypes of the 1950s. Harris suggests: "the deeper conformity of the post-war suburbs was the way that they mandated a high level of consumption, encouraging people to define themselves through what they purchased by acquiring debt."⁹⁷ Today's levels of consumption and debt confirm the presence of this pattern. After reviewing the roles played by government, mortgage lenders, developers, and builders in the creation of corporate suburbs, Harris concludes: "the most important motives that built the corporate suburb were not at all those of the

⁹⁶ Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 172-174.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 173.

consumers but those of the builder and financier. Mass housing was erected by the mass builder that had ridden in on the tide of corporate finance.”⁹⁸ Today’s big-box stores also appear to be built for reasons beyond local market demands.

Beginning in the 1960s, consumption became an increasingly ubiquitous subject for human and economic geographers in North America and Europe.⁹⁹ The spatial organization of consumption has since been considered by many operating within the shifting categories of urban, retail, architectural, and cultural geography. All share the recognition that consumption is a major and ongoing spatial and social process. This signals a shift in focus from the structures of production to those of consumption. No longer simply the end point of production crystallized in the act of purchase, consumption is instead reconfigured as a truly dialectical equal to production. It is reproduced through, and characterized by, social mechanisms of necessity, desire, and obsolescence. To this end, geographers have studied the sites of consumption, the links that ties locations, and broader cultural impacts.¹⁰⁰ The influence of Marxist theory here is significant. It has provided an alternative to neoclassical models no longer able to account for the diversity and complexity of Late Capitalism and postmodern cultures.¹⁰¹ Marxist geographers have argued that contemporary consumption is shaped by the logic of capitalism and the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, and fuelled by culture industries.¹⁰²

Geographers such as Harvey, Soja, and Andy Merrifield have pursued Marxist studies of

⁹⁸ Ibid, 144.

⁹⁹ Peter Jackson, Nigel Thrift, “Geographies of Consumption”, *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, (Ed) Daniel Miller (New York: Routledge, 1995), 204; James Kneale, Claire Dwyer, “Consumption”, *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (Ed.s) James Duncan, Nuala Johnson, Richard Schein (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 298.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, Thrift (1995), 206.

¹⁰¹ Peter Dicken, Peter E. Lloyd, *Location in Space: Theoretical Perspectives in Economic Geography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 340; Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

¹⁰² Kneale, Dwyer (2004), 299.

the economic shifts from production to consumption and their impact on cities and citizens. However their studies have been criticized for not adequately considering consumption beyond its profit function and often for being too deterministic.¹⁰³ As well, Marxist and postmodern writers often invoke a contrast between the commercialized present and a highly idealized and nostalgic, pre-commercial past.¹⁰⁴ That past is a chimera, an imaginary lost paradise, or what Ada Louise Huxtable called “the way it never was.”¹⁰⁵ I will avoid making references to a better time or to past utopias and, instead, focus on the present and the future.

Before moving on to consider in greater detail the literature of retail, architectural, and cultural geography, it is important to recognize a further feature of consumption studies. Consumption constitutes more than simply a new subject to consider geographically. It is also a mechanism of interdisciplinarity. As Dicken and Lloyd observe, the “cultural turn”, Marxist theory, and the adoption of consumption as subject greatly increased the range of inquiry open to geographers, along with new questions to be considered.¹⁰⁶ These brought writers into contact with peers in other fields or sub-disciplines. The result has been the now-broad adoption of interdisciplinary methods for the study of contemporary culture and consumption. I will consider below three approaches relevant to my study of consumption: retail geography, cultural geography, and architectural geography.

Neil Wrigley and Michelle Lowe are geographers at the University of Southampton, who have made numerous contributions to retail geography in articles and

¹⁰³ Jackson, Thrift (1995), 205.

¹⁰⁴ Kneale, Dwyer (2004), 300.

¹⁰⁵ Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: New Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁰⁶ Dicken, Lloyd (1990), 342.

books, most especially *Reading Retail*.¹⁰⁷ Conceived as a textbook for students of retail and economic geography, this study combines Wrigley and Lowe's historical and thematic overview with a selection of excerpts from a broad range of secondary sources, including academic, theoretical, and professional writing. Their book provides an overview of the academic topic of consumption and retail, which especially illustrates the diverse and often non-academic sources used by researchers in the field. This approach has been called "New Retail Geography", a postmodern cousin to New Architectural History that expands the breadth of subjects and use of cultural theory in geographic discourse.¹⁰⁸ In their analyses, Wrigley and Lowe highlight the economic and cultural importance of retail activity in the UK and the USA, where it has grown enormously in financial importance at the turn of the 21st century.¹⁰⁹ Their work also investigates the role corporate re-organization or re-structuring plays in shaping urban development and new modes of consumption. Wrigley and Lowe, along with other New Retail Geographers, will be cited in this study, though their perspectives tend to be international in nature. The consideration of Canada's retail geography has fallen to Canadian geographers.

In 1991, *Canadian Geographer* dedicated a single issue to essays on West Edmonton Mall.¹¹⁰ The range of essay topics illustrated the types of questions geographers bring to the study of retail facilities. These include zoning conflicts, concentration of ownership, and cultural impacts on consumers and retailers. The edition

¹⁰⁷ Michelle Lowe, Neil Wrigley, *Reading Retail: A Geographical Perspective on Retailing and Consumption Spaces* (New York: Hodder Arnold Publishing, 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Michelle Lowe, Neil Wrigley, "Retail and The Urban – A Progress Report." *Urban Geography*, 21:7 (2000). 640-653.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 640.

¹¹⁰ *Canadian Geographer* 35, No. 3 (1991).

also illustrated the different, specialised geographies that can be brought to bear on a retail site although this is aided by the fact that, at the time, the subject was the biggest shopping centre on earth. Several of the authors featured in the *Canadian Geographer* are affiliated with the CSCA at Ryerson University in Toronto, mentioned in chapter one.

The CSCA is the hub of activity for retail geographers in Canada. It maintains comprehensive databases on retail landscapes in regions across Canada and publishes annual and special reports. Typical CSCA interests include the classification of retail structures, an understanding of their spatial operations, the dynamics of retail change, and the social and theoretical impacts of consumption.¹¹¹ The CSCA's director, Ken Jones, and one of its most prolific contributors, Jim Simmons, are two leading authorities on the Canadian retail environment, and among the best known retail geographers in the world. They co-authored *Location, Location, Location: Analysing the Retail Environment* (1987), a seminal work that applied spatial models and location analysis to the subjects of consumer demand, retail facilities, and systems of distribution in Canada.¹¹² In 1990 Jones and Simmons published *The Retail Environment*, which is a revised version of their 1987 text with additional examples drawn from the United States.¹¹³ In CSCA studies, and in the writing of Jones and Simmons, architecture is of secondary concern. Buildings are considered in terms of diffusion and patterns of activity, not design. Architecture is considered, and statistically illustrated, as a vehicle for profit and growth. CSCA research does provide a wealth of hard data on the impacts of NRF's on Canadian retail sectors. It has been a major influence on my project, and I have been fortunate to meet and consult

¹¹¹ Ken Jones, Michael Doucet, "The big box, the flagship, and beyond: impacts and trends in the Greater Toronto Area", *Canadian Geographer* 45:4 (2001), 495.

¹¹² Ken Jones, Jim Simmons, *Location, Location, Location: Analysing the Retail Environment* (Toronto: Metheun, 1987).

¹¹³ Ken Jones, Jim Simmons, *The Retail Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

with Dr. Simmons. He has assisted me in the gathering and framing of statistical data on NRF's, and in perceiving retail architecture in geographical terms.

The CSCA approach begins with the application of location analysis to the spatial distribution of retail activity. In *Location, Location, Location*, Jones and Simmons describe what they see as two traditions - theoretical and applied - in location analysis.¹¹⁴ The theoretical or academic tradition is interested in how location orders distribution systems and consumption patterns, with the goal of creating macro-theories to explain the economic, spatial, and social processes of the retail environment. The applied or practical tradition is closer to the concerns of the retailers themselves, and thus examines in a hands-on way site selection, market share, and microeconomics. While the academic analysts are engaged in scholarship and teaching, the applied analysts function in the field and work as retail advisors, generating action-oriented reports. Beginning in the 1980s, the two approaches began to mix, as retail advisors sought new frameworks for problem-solving and geography professors sought to engage more closely with their subjects. Jones and Simmons present an example of this academic-applied approach to location analysis, one in which they vow to stress the role of the practitioner.¹¹⁵ In their studies, location analysis is concerned with individual stores and their markets, retail clusters, the urban retail structures, and regional settlement patterns.¹¹⁶ For instance, a key spatial factor for retailers is the distance between consumer's homes and shopping facilities. Long distances or inconvenient locations reduce demand, since travel time and cost are added to the price of the commodities. Retailers have sought to diminish distance-cost issues, in the case of big-box stores, by locating facilities on or near highways, or by

¹¹⁴ Jones, Simmons (1987), 17.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 12.

clustering stores into shopping malls. The aim is to increase convenience and thus total consumption.

Jones and Simmons frame the context of location analysis within the retail environment in a way that has proven very useful in my study. At the core is the relationship between the retailer and the consumer, around which operate distribution systems and social systems.¹¹⁷ Jones and Simmons place defining elements of consumers, their characteristics and behaviour, opposite those of retail facilities, business type-products, and store size. Both consumers and retailers are also defined by location, something that points to the importance of spatiality in retail relationships. Studies within the core area by retail geographers tend to focus on the spatial scales of neighbourhood, community, city, and region. The intermediate area of distribution links spaces of consumption with spaces of production. The geography of distribution links the operations of transportation, credit, media, and corporate organisation to the core relationship of retailer and consumer. It also connects this core to the larger context of culture, or the social system, which incorporates regulations, laws, morals, and values. These are concerns of governments, and also of businesses, labour unions, and consumers, and each institution contributes to the relations between distribution and consumption. In sum, the model of Jones and Simmons illustrates the vertical and horizontal relations of production and consumption that need to be considered in the analysis of retail location and distribution.

When considering this model, it is important to remember the consumer - the person - at the core of the retail environment. Rather than assume that the retail environment, by virtue of its scale and organizational complexity, determines the actions

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 13.

of the consumer, we need to consider human agency within this environment. Do consumer requirements and preferences determine products and modes of distribution, or do corporate structures create both the products and the needs of the consumer? The answer seems to be “yes and yes” – both are responsible, and both have agency. The role of the consumer cannot be unequivocally predicted or taken for granted, hence the importance of measuring customer satisfaction. The ability of corporate structures to market “needs” and product desire should be neither over- nor under-estimated. Hence the importance of product test groups, mass advertising, celebrity endorsements, product placement, and an endless stream of market analysis, aimed at cracking what Jones and Simmons accurately call “the mystery of consumer behaviour.”¹¹⁸ The key for researchers is to recognize the fluidity in consumer-retailer relationships. This is worth noting for the scientific models, maps, and statistics used by retail geographers can have the effect of flattening reality and reducing people to two-dimensional shadows of themselves.

I will conclude my discussion of Jones and Simmons by considering their reckoning of retail architecture. *Location, Location, Location*, written prior to the introduction of NRFs in Canada, focuses primarily on shopping centres and department stores. Following the logic of clusters and distance-costs, malls are designed to be accessible to consumers and to feature a broad range of retailers. For mall operators, the right tenant mix, distribution, and public amenities are central concerns since these are the means to maximize profits. For this reason, operators study mall spaces in relation to time. This can take the practical form of tracking pedestrian flow rates through malls, and

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 86.

scrutinizing where shoppers enter and linger and what they avoid.¹¹⁹ Popular author Paco Underhill is a retail consultant who coordinates precisely these types of spatio-temporal studies for mall operators. His firm conclusion: “the more time someone spends in a mall, the more stores they visit and the more things they buy.”¹²⁰ This relationship between time and shopping, which is related to comfort and enjoyment, is something that stores and malls have addressed with air-conditioning and escalators, along with various forms of entertainment and sale cycles.

The goal of keeping the shopper inside as long as possible has driven design innovations from the Southdale Centre in Edina, Minnesota, the first interior shopping centre, to West Edmonton Mall. In the 1950s, studies of consumer flow rates supported the adoption of “dumbbell plan” malls, in which two large stores anchor opposite ends of an enclosed mall to encourage shoppers to visit the smaller stores between them.¹²¹ The dumbbell plan would be later be expanded in the 1960s and 70s, with the connecting malls taking curved or diagonal paths, which variously aimed to increase the distance between anchors and the number of store-fronts passed. Another design element related to consumer flow rates - one common in many sites - is the minimization of exit points within the mall itself. Often the most challenging aspect of being in a mall is getting out. Two other aspects of design that similarly developed from the study of flow rates and consumer behaviour were the orientations of escalators, which extend spatio-temporal distances, and the near-impossible task of finding public bathrooms, encouraging

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 107-108; Also considered in Jacobs (1984), 34.

¹²⁰ Paco Underhill, *Call of the Mall: The Geography of Shopping* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 86.

¹²¹ Barry Maitland, *Shopping Malls: planning and design* (London: Construction Press, 1985), 8-10.

restaurant patronage.¹²² These innovations, familiar to any mall user, are structural elements designed to increase the spatio-temporal distances in the mall, and thereby increase the potential volume of consumption. The retail environment, as framed and detailed by Jones and Simmons, is useful not only for locating the context of consumption but also for seeing its links to political, economic and cultural systems. I will use their model of the retail environment to frame my understanding of the distribution of sites, along with the multiple and complex networks of spatial and social relations operating in contemporary consumption.

The second geographic approach of importance to this study is that of cultural geography. Directly tied to the “cultural turn” in geography has been the emergence of a theoretically inclined cultural geography, similar to Wrigley and Lowe’s New Retail Geography. Cultural geographers have contributed to debates on consumption and popular culture by emphasizing consumers and the roles shopping plays in their everyday lives. In this, their interests are shared with sociologists of consumption and critical thinkers. As such, cultural geography is characterized by interdisciplinary approaches and mainly vernacular subject-matter.

In two separate reviews of current writing, Jon Goss and Louise Crewe both observe that many cultural geographers continue (in the tradition of the Frankfurt School) to present shopping as morally suspect, a position that demonstrates the longevity of elitist attitudes to consumption and popular culture.¹²³ Many writers have condemned consumption outright and portrayed its locations as sites of control and exploitation of

¹²² Jon Goss, “The Magic of the Mall: An Analysis of Form, Function, and Meaning in the Contemporary Retail Built Environment”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83: 1 (1993), 29-30.

¹²³ Louise Crewe, “Geographies of retailing and consumption: markets in motion”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 27:3 (2003), 352-362. Jon Goss, “Geographies of consumption: the work of consumption”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 30:2 (2006), 237-249.

consumers. However, they often do so with little acknowledgment of how consumers themselves feel about their activities, instead generalizing about “the masses”.¹²⁴ Crewe names this approach in academic and popular writing the “Global Cultural Meltdown,” deriving that name from the title of the previously quoted essay by Leong.¹²⁵ The meltdown model essentially argues that Western market capitalism has colonized, commodified, and consumed nearly every side and site of life on the planet, replacing cultural diversity with cheap consumer homogeneity.¹²⁶ Crewe argues that this idea of global consumer society overstates the historical uniqueness of contemporary consumption, disenfranchises consumers of notable agency, overlooks alternative forms of shopping, and rests on the anti-materialistic assumption that shopping is bad. People, it seems, shouldn’t really want the things they want. Goss arrives at a similar conclusion about this global consumption model and argues, further, that such studies characterize consumers solely as tools of mass culture industries who, it seems, need to be told how to act and live better.¹²⁷ This moralizing tendency continues the Frankfurt School critique of capitalism, in which highly market-driven, mass culture industries ensure their survival by manufacturing false needs in the consumer.¹²⁸

The meltdown model tends to caricature all forms of consumption, even in its more mundane, everyday forms. This presents difficulties, however, as the consumption of necessities is surely not the same as that of luxuries, the commodity type usually linked to false needs. In his study of supermarkets, Daniel Miller illustrates how grocery shopping presents a challenge to these assumptions by functioning in a manner that

¹²⁴ Jackson, *Thrift* (1995), 220

¹²⁵ Leong (2001), 129.

¹²⁶ Louise Crewe (2003), 353-355.

¹²⁷ Jon Goss (2006), 238.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

evades the typical mechanisms of mass culture: advertising and display.¹²⁹ Miller discovered that the provision of necessities, especially food, operates as a central expression of love and support in family lives. Further, personal and emotional factors shape the selection of everyday products far more than advertising. Far from being manipulated dupes, Miller's shoppers were thoughtful and unpredictable in their supermarket trips, operating with considerable agency. In their everyday lives, consumers may be subject to controls by the structures of consumption, and yet they are not necessarily controlled. They are subject to homogenizing influences and yet still can creatively fashion individuality.¹³⁰ This is an important point to bear in mind, one that is not always reflected in the literature, much of which emphasizes the power of management.¹³¹

The third and final geographic approach of importance here is that of architectural geography. Architectural geography thus far has rested primarily upon the works of human geographers Larry Ford and Jon Goss; the latter is the author who introduced me to "architectural geography".¹³² This is an interdisciplinary method, merging elements of urban geography, architectural history, and social theory. It mixes concern for the architecture of the city with the study of social characteristics of the urban structure and human population. This approach is one Larry Ford describes as "merging the traditions of Space and Place."¹³³ It is well-suited to the study of retail topics, something Goss has

¹²⁹ Daniel Miller, "Making Love in Supermarkets", *The Everyday Life Reader* (Ed) Ben. Highmore (New York: Routledge, 2002), 339-345.

¹³⁰ Ideas about "creative consumption" are presented in: Mark Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jayne (2006).

¹³¹ Jackson, Thrift (1995), 210-211.

¹³² Jon Goss, "The Built Environment and Social Theory: Towards an Architectural Geography", *Professional Geographer* 40:4 (1988), 392.

¹³³ Larry Ford, *Cities and Buildings: Skyscrapers, Skid Rows, and Suburbs* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1996), 1.

demonstrated in his studies of American shopping centres. One notable difference between his work and that of the CSCA is the use of social theory in spatial analysis. This gives Goss's writing political and critical edges, something I wish to bring to my research. For that reason I have studied considerable social theory over the course of this study. Retail facilities need to be examined critically because they are heavily used buildings that are increasingly subject to controversy and protest. Like Goss, I am interested in both the positive and negative effects of the retail formats and the consumption practices they engender.

In the introduction to his book *Cities and Buildings* (1994), Larry Ford proposes a hybrid of architectural history and urban geography.¹³⁴ This interdisciplinary approach would combine the interests of architectural historians - individual buildings and types of buildings - with those of urban geographers, spatial contexts and social practices. Ford relates an anecdote about architectural historians worth repeating here. As a speaker at an architectural conference, Ford participated in several field trips, which form a typical aspect of such meetings. These field trips were quite different from ones he had participated in at geography conferences. While on the bus travelling to a site, the architects and architectural historians chatted amongst themselves or read. When the tour reached a site, they would exit the bus and proceed to "photograph the hell out of the building."¹³⁵ Afterward, they would return to the bus and to their books and conversations before exiting at the next location. At no time did they evince any interest in the urban environment between the chosen sites. To Ford, this disinterest in the general urban landscape is symptomatic of the differences between those who study buildings

¹³⁴ Ibid, 1-9.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 2.

(places) and those who study environments (spaces). Ford's prescription is a broader understanding of the urban environment that mixes concerns for the architecture of the city and for the social characteristics of the urban population and structure. This merger helps geographers reconsider the urban setting in terms of its actual appearance, rather than as mere quantitative data or as two-dimensional surface patterns and graphs. Architectural historians benefit by the inclusion of a spatial dimension to their examination of buildings and an acknowledgement of the social systems that in part produce them. Just as geographers can benefit from deeper knowledge of built places, so too can architectural historians benefit from deeper knowledge of urban spaces. In *Cities and Buildings*, Ford organises his architectural geography of the North American city around a typology that applies to both buildings and urban planning. The city is investigated in terms of business, retail, residential, public, and roadside types of architecture and city space. His approach is similar to those of vernacular architectural historians, and, unsurprisingly, like them Ford is more interested in architecture without architects than in monumental buildings.

Along with vernacular architectural history, architectural geography shares affinities with cultural geography. This is illustrated by the use of social or cultural theory to augment geographical and historical tools of interpretation of buildings. The aim of using theory is to open architectural (and human) geographies to themes of "action, practice, and performativity", the purpose of which is to examine how life actually is lived by individuals.¹³⁶ This makes everyday life a clear subject for study. A stress on social practices pushes architectural geographers beyond the past focus on

¹³⁶ Keith Hoggart, Loretta Lees, Anna Davies, *Researching Human Geography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33.

contextualizing and interpreting symbols, into the living landscapes that surround buildings and prominently feature building's users. Developing from Ford's idea of a mixed discipline of space and place, architectural geographers such as Goss, Mark Llewellyn, and Loretta Lees have contributed to the growth of a theoretical approach suiting the study of everyday, vernacular buildings and neighbourhoods. Llewellyn stresses the importance of considering "the complete and wide range of individuals who were implicated in the process of designing and inhabiting the built forms produced."¹³⁷ This means the equal consideration of the producers and consumers of architecture, as well as the input of planners and politicians, as will be seen in chapter four. Llewellyn argues that consumption is productive and, further, that the objects and means of consumption contain the means of their own social reproduction. He writes: "we need to consider the ways in which space is reproduced by individuals, rather than just simply consumed."¹³⁸ The influence of Marx and particularly Lefebvre is evident, and acknowledged, here. For Llewellyn, the purpose of an architectural geography is to illustrate the architectural context and mechanisms for the reproduction of social relations. This closely matches the goal of this study. As stated in the previous chapter, I am arguing that NRFs are most significant as locations for the reproduction of the relations of production and consumption.

In his essay "The Built Environment and Social Theory: Towards an Architectural Geography", Goss argues the need to "establish a theoretical basis for the study of architecture within geography in a manner that incorporates both the traditions of

¹³⁷ Mark Llewellyn, "Polyvocalism and the public: *doing* a critical historical geography of architecture", *Area* 35:3 (2003), 264.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 265.

architectural geography and contemporary social theory.”¹³⁹ A benefit of such an architectural geography will be a better appreciation by cultural geographers of the complex network of social relations, abstract beliefs, material and symbolic forms that produce and are reproduced in architectural spaces. To do this, Goss tries to avoid the use of a value framework of form and style. Despite embodying cultural values, style can also lead to predictable and evolutionary descriptions of architecture. Instead, Goss presents architecture as a changing social product.¹⁴⁰ The context is shaped by relations of power and ideologies built into and around the architectural landscape. The spatial configuration of a store-front, neighbourhood, or city illustrates both local and international social organization and practices. Shopping centres and pedestrian malls are both good examples of built environments that shape and are shaped by diverse sets of economic, political, and social relations. Goss proposes to study architecture either as a cultural artefact, or as an object of sign-value, or as a spatial system. Each reveals different historical and ideological content, but all are united by their spatial qualities:

Space can no longer be conceived as merely material, nor social relations as merely abstract. An invigorated architectural geography would have as its basis the realization that all architectural forms must be located in space, and that buildings are at the same time commodities embodying social values and meaning which impart character to that space.¹⁴¹

In accounting for physical, mental, and social features, such an architectural geography is suited to the fluid changeability of the retail environment.

¹³⁹ Goss (1988), 392.-

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 394.

¹⁴¹ Goss (1988), 402.

Two studies by Goss present examples of the above described architectural geography in practice.¹⁴² In both essays, Goss takes the shopping centre as his subject and considers it in terms of architectural design, promotional imagery, and consumer experience. In visiting and studying malls, he conceives of himself as a participant observer, who is not detached from the subject but instead is present and involved.¹⁴³ Such an approach involves both overt and covert actions – times at which the researcher’s intentions are declared or withheld.¹⁴⁴ For Goss, his participation includes collecting promotional materials, photographing the architecture, informally interviewing workers and patrons, and shopping.¹⁴⁵ What I admire about his essays is his stated determination to avoid producing privileged, distanced readings of consumers and consumption sites. His “critical participatory” approach acknowledges his status as researcher and consumer. From this perspective Goss presents the mall as a space of collective values and desires and interprets its “truth content”, instead of its “false consciousness”.¹⁴⁶ Further, Goss advises mall researchers to avoid searching for “the real” behind the mall facades, or sticking to the facades and celebrating “the unreal”. Instead, researchers should look at what is actually visible in the mall, including patrons, to fully understand how it operates and engages in social exchanges of power and ideology, and why it is successful. They should also be less cynical, pessimistic, and elitist about their subject. Simply put, it is important to recognize the good in shopping. To not do so, is to never fully understand an

¹⁴² Goss (1993); “Once-upon-a-Time in the Commodity World: An Unofficial Guide to Mall of America”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89:1 (1999), 45-75;

¹⁴³ Goss (1999), 47.

¹⁴⁴ Hoggart, Lees, Davies (2001), 251.

¹⁴⁵ Goss (1999), 47.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 49.

activity that is necessary, popular, and expansive and which reproduces itself in real and imagined forms before our very eyes.

An important consideration in creating a retail architectural geography is the type of consumption under study. Kneale and Dwyer observe that a non-elitist geography of consumption will focus on it as a socialized means of provisioning and not as an individualized process of symbolic accumulation and identity representation.¹⁴⁷ In my study, I have thus chosen to focus on architectural sites that sell both necessities and luxuries, though the stress is on the former. The presence of both types of commodities in NRFs fuels the dialectical operations of the mundane and the spectacular and of value and waste. My choice of big-box stores and other NRFs puts stress on consumption as provisioning. This will allow me to evade, as much as possible, the pitfalls of cultural elitism (“shopping is bad”), sexism (trivialization of women), and postmodern identity creation (“consumption is great”). Instead, I will present consumption as a social practice that can be directed by both ideology and love, or by greed and fiscal responsibility, whose outcomes may be expressed in terms of good parenting, smart shopping, or impulse purchasing.

The final area of geography I have researched for this project is radical geography. In many ways, radical geography is similar to New Architectural History or New Retail Geography, in that it incorporates a range of postmodern interests, notably Marxism and Feminism. It also considers issues of activism and protest, policing and crime, sprawl and gentrification. Radical geography as a category covers a wide range of scholarship, including that of Goss and Morris already discussed. A well known figure in

¹⁴⁷ Kneale, Dwyer (2004), 303-304.

radical geography, Richard Peet, defines it simply as “a study of the quality of life”.¹⁴⁸ Tim Unwin considers it more clearly political, with an activist goal of overthrowing capitalist oppression, especially in the non-Western world.¹⁴⁹ Radical geographers are part of the postmodern push of disciplinary and subject boundaries towards greater inclusivity, especially in subject-matter. Authors whose works fall within this area include Doreen Massey, Gillian Rose, Derek Gregory, Andy Merrifield, David Harvey, and Edward Soja. While not all interested in architecture, these writers are interested in cities, and their studies provide models for politicized, interdisciplinary interpretation of urban space.

The works of Harvey and Soja are among the best known examples of radical, postmodern geography. Harvey is an extremely influential figure in Marxist geography, whose numerous publications include *The Urbanization of Capital* and *The Condition of Postmodernity*.¹⁵⁰ Derek Gregory, for instance, dedicates the third and final section of *Geographical Imaginations* to exploring Harvey’s ideas, often in comparison to those of Lefebvre.¹⁵¹ Andy Merrifield also notes similarities between Harvey and Lefebvre in their interpretations of urban development. They both stress the rising influence of financial and real estate sectors (the secondary circuit of capital) at the cost of industry (the primary circuit), dating to the 1960s in the West.¹⁵² Furthermore, Harvey and Lefebvre also argue that urban space is both an active producer of social conditions and the setting upon which those conditions are lived and experienced.

¹⁴⁸ Richard Peet, “Introduction” *Radical Geography: Alternative Viewpoints on Contemporary Social Issues* (Chicago: Maaroufa Press, 1977), 1.

¹⁴⁹ Tim Unwin, *The Place of Geography* (London: Longmans, 1992), 166.

¹⁵⁰ David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985); *The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (New York: Blackwell, 1989).

¹⁵¹ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁵² Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142.

Harvey's work has been primarily concerned with urban spaces, and with the inequities and failures produced by capitalist societies; in his writing he has tried to insert spatial dimensions into Marx's historical materialism.¹⁵³ He has also explored the dynamic relationship of space and place, and some of the challenges facing "place-based identities" in our era of economic globalization.¹⁵⁴ Harvey argues that such identities are increasing in importance, in the face of globalization and its "world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication."¹⁵⁵ Amid fears articulated by the "Global Cultural Meltdown" model, and increasingly homogeneous patterns of mass consumption, Harvey notes there has also been widespread recognition and celebration of unique places and local practices. At the same time globalization undermines traditional, material places, it provides the opportunity to redefine and rediscover those same cultures. He writes: "We worry about the meaning of place in general when the security of actual places becomes generally threatened."¹⁵⁶

Along with the very real threat faced by communities and cultures around the globe, Harvey includes another reason for the prominence of place in contemporary discourse. He observes that from the early 1970s onward many progressive academics, theorists, and other writers began to distance themselves from labour movements and direct action, in favour of a politics that stressed difference and focused on communities. The failures of 1968 made progressives review their political tactics, one result of which was a new focus on "the local." Constituting the replacement of class-based politics with

¹⁵³ Unwin (1992), 165-166.

¹⁵⁴ David Harvey, "From place to space and back again." *Mapping the Futures: local cultures, global change* (Ed.s) Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, Lisa Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993) 3-29.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

place-based politics, this was a blow to Internationalism. Other academics, among them Fredric Jameson, similarly locate the origins of globalization, such as the mobility of capital, after 1968.¹⁵⁷ Of greatest use to my research is Harvey's articulation of inter-community competition, which sees cities and towns pitted against one another in a fight to attract investment. The result of such competitions is a social and physical geography of concessions and benefits negotiated by businesses and municipal authorities. The process is a race to the bottom.¹⁵⁸ Such races have been conducted on Southern Vancouver Island and will be considered in this study.

The works of Soja, like those of Harvey, possess a "Lefebvrian" sensibility. Soja's writings utilize flexible methods and are un-dogmatic, self-critical, and open to expansion. In *Thirdspace*, Soja proposes an alternative, neo-Marxist approach to urban space, one that is inspired by Lefebvre's use of philosophical triads.¹⁵⁹ This use of three's is meant to insist on the presence of alternatives – "third space" – even within apparently binary or dialectical relations. This, Soja argues, makes applying cultural theory to contemporary real-life examples easier. His "trialectics of spatiality" is meant to account for unpredictable or unforeseen elements in human relations.

Soja examines contemporary urban spaces as multifaceted and vast sites of capitalist exploitation, dominance and struggle. The goal of his research is to find practical solutions to urban issues of power, such as those raised by class, gender, and racism. Soja is particularly concerned with inequities and oppressions caused and maintained by globalization and neo-conservative politics:

¹⁵⁷ Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", *New Left Review*, 146 (July-Aug, 1984), 52-92.

¹⁵⁸ Harvey, (1993) 6-8.

¹⁵⁹ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Los Angeles: Blackwell, 1996), 53-82.

[T]he exploration of Thirdspace must be additionally guided by some form of potentially emancipatory *praxis*, the translation of knowledge into action in a conscious - and consciously spatial - effort to improve the world in some significant way.¹⁶⁰

Soja sees his spatial explorations as contributions to a progressive project of social emancipation and positive change. *Thirdspace* was written after Deutsche's "Men in Space," and in it, Soja responds to feminist criticism: the book features a diverse bibliography, and considers in detail the geographical ideas of feminist and postcolonial authors, including bell hooks, Dolores Hayden, Gillian Rose, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. Recognizing that contemporary cities have passed from "crisis-generated restructuring" to "restructuring-generated crises", Soja's writing is animated by a desire for practicality along with a dynamic of urgency.¹⁶¹

Radical geography includes feminists who have explored gender and otherness in physical and social spaces and places. Two leading feminist geographers are Gillian Rose and Doreen Massey. Rose has written that as feminism is an ongoing critique of the way society organises everyday life, then female spaces need to be constantly re-evaluated as sites of liberation or confinement.¹⁶² She argues that feminist geography must "acknowledge both the power of hegemonic discourse and insist on the possibility of resistance" in order to function as an alternative to geographical meta-theory.¹⁶³ In its operations, such a geography is radically inclusive, not exclusive. Doreen Massey is similarly committed to opening up the discipline of geography to the study of female and other spaces. She is also an influential figure in writing on social space, the social

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 22.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Gillian Rose, "Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge", *The Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography* (Ed.s) Michael.Dear, Steven Flusty (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 315.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 322.

production of place, and locality.¹⁶⁴ Space is something produced by societies and is not a vacuum that surrounds them. Massey writes: “Social space is not an empty arena within which we conduct our lives; rather, it is something we construct and which others construct about us.”¹⁶⁵ Massey is here referring to both physical spaces, such as buildings, and lived spaces, such as social customs. Taken together, these social spaces reflect the order of society and shape the experience of everyday life.

To Massey, the work of Harvey and Jameson places too much emphasis on money and capitalism.¹⁶⁶ This leaves out elements of gender and ethnicity while elevating a simplified vision of capitalism to a cross-societal, determinative role. Are there activities and social practices not deterministically and externally driven by capital? Massey thinks so: “there is a lot more determining how we experience space than what *capital* gets up to.”¹⁶⁷ She suggests there are different power relations producing space, which she calls the power-geometry of time-space compression. This idea describes the network of power that exists between different social groups in different places, which have varying degrees of mobility. As some groups possess more authority and mobility than others, the time-space compression is experienced quite differently. What Massey would like to see emerge from the recognition of power-geometry is not more theory, but rather action that responds to the inequality of mobility. Such action could, for example, argue positions on disabled access, immigration, public transit, and violence against women. In other words, it is by addressing specifics, and not by brushing over them, that

¹⁶⁴ Unwin (1992), 174.

¹⁶⁵ Doreen Massey, “Space-Time and the Politics of Location”, *Architectural Design*, 68: 3/4 (1998), 34.

¹⁶⁶ Doreen Massey, “Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place”, *Mapping the Futures: local cultures, global change* (Ed.s) Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, Lisa Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993) 59-69.

¹⁶⁷ Italics in the original. Ibid, 60.

real, radical political action is made possible and carries with it a chance for success. As with McLeod, Morris, and Rose, Massey establishes a persuasive claim that difference makes place and that social relations cannot be reduced to a singular influence, especially not something as nebulous as urban capitalism.

The final radical geographer to consider is Andy Merrifield. I have chosen to discuss him last in this section because his urban geography is both Marxist and postmodern. It is also the most straightforward. He maintains a dialectical approach to the study of urban development, without losing sight of the fragmented and complex experiences of postmodernity. Merrifield does this by casting the political economy of North American cities as an ongoing struggle between urbanization and urbanism. He calls this model “dialectical urbanism”. The essential urban conflict at the start of the twenty-first century, with roots going back the nineteenth, is between developers and residents – the former wishing to change the places where the latter live.¹⁶⁸ Merrifield defines urbanization as a macro-process that unfolds “over *space*” while urbanism is a micro, everyday, local set of routines that occur “in a *place*.”¹⁶⁹ Put another way, urbanization is the making of the urban, while urbanism is the living in the urban. This conflict between space and place takes its clearest form in major urban redevelopment projects, such as those analyzed by Merrifield in Baltimore, New York, and Los Angeles.¹⁷⁰ It is visible in public forums, city council meetings, community organizing, and in demonstrations and protests. In these cases, architecture is central to arguments on both sides, and often is discussed in terms of heritage preservation as well as physical

¹⁶⁸ Andy Merrifield, *Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002) 10-11.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 22. (italics in original)

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* – see Chapter 2, 4, and 5.

obsolescence. The dialectic of urbanization and urbanism is also at hand in suburban developments, especially those that include big-box retail. Although wider arguments are used in these cases, such as sprawl and environmental degradation, the essential fight remains between developers and residents. The history of NRF developments on Southern Vancouver Island can also be considered in such terms. Several of the big-box stores I will be considering in this study were subjects of controversy and protest. The strength of Merrifield's dialectical urbanism is in providing a scholarly and Marxist means to introduce and analyze these protests and the community-based activism behind them. It connects the actions and ideas of residents to the researcher's understanding of urban political economy.

Sociology: Consumption and Consumerism

Sociology is the third significant contributor to my analysis of retail architecture. Greatly influenced by the writings of Marx, sociology provides the means for studying the human side of production and consumption. The sociology of consumption has been a widely pursued subject, attracting the interest of many of the best known sociologists, including Jean Baudrillard, George Ritzer, and Mark Gottdiener. Studies by these three authors are especially relevant for understanding the human that is non-architectural, elements in big box retail. More than either architectural history or human geography, sociological studies are abstract and theoretical in their interpretation. Sociologists are perhaps better positioned than architectural historians or geographers to study consumption and consumers however, since their discipline focuses on human and social behaviour. Several sociologists have examined consumption in terms of the physical

actions of shopping and the interactions between consumers and staff. Peter Corrigan contrasts elements of consumer behaviour following the advent of department stores, while Sharon Zukin examines the immediate impacts of discount retailers on her own New York City neighbourhood.¹⁷¹ Given the influence of the settings of consumption and their distribution, it is unsurprising that many sociologists also engage in interdisciplinary research. This study will make use of sociological readings of consumption and everyday life to illuminate and interpret retail architecture and its social relations in operation.

In the case of art and architectural history, sociology has been influential in promoting the view of art as a socially produced and consumed object with aesthetic and exchange values. This Marxist approach, stressing collectivity over individuality in the production of cultural objects, is exemplified in Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art*.¹⁷² Her book outlines the multiplicity of persons, and the complexity of the social networks involved in the creation of historical works that art historians have traditionally identified by a single name. Wolff's approach has methodological and ideological affinities with vernacular architectural studies, stressing collective over individual production, and in its openness to anonymous art works. It further provides art and architectural historians with a fresh and broadened perspective on the artistic context in which art is made.

Two sociologists familiar to architectural historians through their writings in *Architectural Design* are Mark Gottdiener and Rob Shields.¹⁷³ Both have written on consumption locations and are influenced by Lefebvre's theories of everyday life and the

¹⁷¹ Peter Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption* (London: SAGE, 1997); Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁷² Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Methuen, 1981).

¹⁷³ Mark Gottdiener "Consumption of Space and Spaces of Consumption", *Architectural Design*, 68 (Jan-Feb 1998), 12-15; Rob Shields, "Architecture as a good", *Architectural Design* 131 (Jan-Feb 1999), 94-95.

production of space. A semiotician, Gottdiener's interest in architecture is the creation and operation of themed environments.¹⁷⁴ For this reason, he primarily writes about new trends and forms in shopping centres, chain-restaurants, tourist facilities. Shields is also interested in such trends, but his focus is more on the theoretical and political implications of consumption.¹⁷⁵ As such, questions of identity formation are considered alongside the ongoing operations of market capitalism in an analysis that is guided by semiotics and Marxism. Shields is also Canada's best-known champion of Lefebvre, writing *Lefebvre, Love, and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (1999).¹⁷⁶ This book is not a biography so much as a review and analysis of Lefebvre's ideas and interests, and it has proven to be extremely helpful to me in understanding Lefebvre. Both Shields and Gottdiener will be cited in connection to Lefebvre, and also to consumers.

Mark Paterson provides another valuable contribution to the understanding of consumption by studying it in the context of everyday life.¹⁷⁷ Like Gottdiener, Corrigan, and Shields, Paterson is interested in the architectural settings of consumption, and the influence of technology and design innovations on shopping behaviours. He argues the four key innovations or development keys in modern consumption were: plate glass; structural iron and steel; urban growth; commodity production.¹⁷⁸ These four keys transformed both the production and consumption of goods, and most especially the layouts of stores. In the pre-modern store, a customer was served directly by clerks who

¹⁷⁴ Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions, and Commercial Spaces* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); "The Consumption of Space and the Spaces of Consumption", *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification* (Ed) Mark Gottdiener (NYC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 265-285.

¹⁷⁵ For examples, see: Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative geographies of modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1992); *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption*, (Ed) Rob Shields, (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁷⁶ Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love, and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁷⁷ Mark Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 176.

retrieved the goods requested, and haggled over price. By contrast, the modern store customer collected the goods directly and paid set prices, with the most striking difference being that, “the shopper was left alone, allowed the freedom to wander, browse, and fantasize.”¹⁷⁹ The new shopping settings and experience resulted in four tendencies: “Shopping then becomes about, firstly, *looking* rather than *speaking*; secondly, *entertainment* and *leisure*; thirdly, *desire* rather than *need*; and fourthly, about *women*.”¹⁸⁰ These characteristics, which Paterson argues define *modern* consumption, are present in big-box stores and in the consumer habits they engender.

Few sociologists, or academics for that matter, have achieved the popular success and status of George Ritzer. The author of the best-seller *The McDonalization of Society* (1993), along with books on globalization, shopping, credit-cards, and casinos, Ritzer’s work aims to extend and/or adapt Weber’s theory of “rationalization” to an analysis of consumption in postmodern society. Ritzer’s sociology of consumption is influenced by the theoretical writings of Marx, Walter Benjamin, and Baudrillard.

Ritzer defines “McDonaldization” as “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.”¹⁸¹ Ritzer considers this process to be an updated, postmodern reinterpretation of Max Weber’s model of modern rationalisation. Weber’s model provided three examples of rationalization: the assembly line, scientific management, and bureaucracy. While these three examples are still with us, Ritzer argues they have been superseded by new social organizations and practices, exemplified in the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 177.

¹⁸¹ George Ritzer, *The McDonalization of Society: An Investigation Into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996) 1.

fast-food restaurant. Ritzer argues for the new and rising importance of consumption over a more traditional focus on production. McDonaldization, named after the restaurant that perfected the fast-food model, is identified by four characteristics: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, especially through the use of technology. Efficiency concerns the optimum means to a given end: fast-food products and their delivery constitute the best way to go from being hungry to feeling full. Employee training, kitchen regulations, and methods ensure an optimal mode of production. Calculability emphasizes the quantitative aspects of product and service: portion size and seemingly low prices convey a sense of a lot for a little. Service is speedy, conveying a sense that it takes less time to drive to a fast-food restaurant, order, eat, and return than it does to cook a meal at home. Predictability assures that the products and services will be the same every time and at every location. Fast-food products are predictable, being the same today as yesterday or next year. The service provided is similarly the same, with employees acting in predictable ways, ensured by strict regulations and the use of scripted responses. Control is exercised over people in fast-food restaurants, employees and customers, and is mostly achieved through the use of technology; customers line up, choose from limited menus (if they have to consult them at all), eat while sitting on uncomfortable seats, bus their own tables, and leave. Control over employees takes the form of limited training, an unbending emphasis on routine, and the presence of technology, such as automated soft-drink dispensers and cash registers, which are pre-programmed to eliminate any possible variation of action by the employee. Ritzer argues that these four characteristics (efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control) can be perceived operating in social and cultural institutions unrelated to fast-food delivery.

However, he also suggests that this is not an all-or-nothing process - there are degrees of McDonaldization. While universities have slight degrees of McDonaldization, he says, shopping centres have been almost totally changed by McDonaldization.

Ritzer applies this model to retail, in particular to shopping centres, throughout *The McDonaldization of Society*. The shopping centre is first identified as a component of Western capitalist society built, along with highways and suburbs, on Weber's triad of the assembly line, scientific management, and bureaucracy. Once established, malls operate as sites of efficiency, providing consumers with a variety of consumption options in a single location. The mall's efficiency echoes Jones's and Simmons's use of distance-cost ratios. The diversity of stores and prices invokes calculability, for malls emphasize good deals and sales, which in turn encourage greater quantities of consumption. Predictability is perceived in three ways: air-conditioning & heating guarantees perfect conditions; piped-in muzak and the absence of social "problems" (poverty, violence, crime) encourages an upbeat, safe atmosphere; last, the architectural layout and store facades are virtually the same in every mall. Control is exercised over stores, employees, and shoppers. Management determines the mix of tenants and their location within the mall and approves all store designs, including colour schemes and signs. There are numerous rules and regulations for tenants, such as opening and closing times. Stores that open late and close early are subject to fines and threatened with eviction. Mall shoppers, for all appearances of being free and self-directed, participate in controlled routines of consumption – browsing, using fitting rooms, lining up to pay, or visiting a food court. However these structures are engaged and evaded by consumers. When they submit to the structures of coercion it is as self-aware consumers and not as dupes.

Ritzer's "McDonaldization thesis" works well in the case of fast-food outlets and shopping malls. It requires adaptations in order to be applied to NRF's, some of which Ritzer himself supplies in his subsequent writings on what he calls the "new means of consumption".¹⁸² This name is derived from Marx's "means of consumption", a term meant to differentiate between subsistence and luxury consumption. Ritzer argues for Marx's "means of consumption" to be understood, instead, as an equivalent to the "means of production", the social relations and settings of production.¹⁸³ Ritzer uses the name "the new means of consumption" to mark this adaptation of Marx's terms. One of his sources for this interpretation is Jean Baudrillard, who also reconfigures the means of consumption as the economic structures and social relations that surround commodities. Building upon this, Ritzer focuses on the settings where these new means of consumption are located: franchises, malls, mega-malls, superstores, discounters, home shopping television, cybermalls, theme parks, cruise ships, casino-hotels, and themed restaurants.¹⁸⁴ The motivation for studying these settings is the suspected, ongoing exploitation of consumers. Ritzer posits that the new means of consumption encourage shoppers to consume more than they planned or perhaps can afford to, something that is facilitated by credit cards. These inducements are further presented in the form of the spectacle, which aims to entrance consumers and ensure their ongoing consumption.

Ritzer stresses enchantment in his analysis of the new modes of consumption. This allusion to religion is made explicit by his naming the locations and settings

¹⁸² George Ritzer, "Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption", *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption: Fast Food, Credit Cards and Casinos* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001), 108-144.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

¹⁸⁴ George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1999), 6-7.

“cathedrals of consumption.”¹⁸⁵ He is not alone in using such terminology. Ideas of consumption as a new religion, and specifically the term “cathedrals of consumption”, have been used by other writers on this subject.¹⁸⁶ Ritzer’s use of “enchantment” and “re-enchantment” is derived from Weber, who observed that modernity’s rationality produced and reproduced social relations that were devoid of myth, magic, and spirituality, creating a disenchanted world. This rationality or disenchantment can be illustrated in the context of retail architecture by the sameness that characterizes contemporary stores or malls. Further, the mass production and presentation of the objects in those stores can challenge the consumer’s perceptions of quality and quantity. The former is tied to scarcity, luxury, taste, and uniqueness. Yet, the overwhelming quantity of the object eliminates these enchanting aspects and makes it, regardless of spectacular presentation, seem ordinary. It is similar to the effect Benjamin observed of reproduced works of art: copies erode the aura, or uniqueness, of the original. The mundane and the homogeneous are signs of disenchantment in the realm of consumption.

When Ritzer considers big-box stores and discount retailers in terms of disenchantment, he first considers their degrees of McDonalization. Unsurprisingly, he finds that successful retail chains and NRFs have adapted efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through technology in running their stores.¹⁸⁷ What he does find surprising is how these new means of consumption have also created original forms of re-enchantment. Children are enchanted by fast-food restaurants, and so too are adults

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ See: Barney Warf, Thomas Chapman, “Cathedrals of Consumption: A Political Phenomenology of Wal-Mart”, *Wal-Mart World*, (Ed) Stanley Brunn (New York: Routledge, 2006), 163-178; John Fiske, “Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance” (1989), *The Consumer Society Reader*, (Ed.s) Juliet Schor, Douglas Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 306-328; Ira G. Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America: the shopping mall as ceremonial center* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1997).

¹⁸⁷ Ritzer (1999), 80-87.

- the faddish popularity of McDonalds in Moscow and Beijing, for instance, points to a novel, McDonaldized form of enchantment. Not that their current vogue will prevent them from succumbing to disenchantment. Ritzer's "cathedrals of consumption" use the spectacle to re-enchant the consumer.

Ritzer reviews the different forms of the spectacle presented in contemporary settings for consumption. The history of retail architecture, from arcades to mega-malls, recounts the successive forms of spectacle implemented to seduce the consumer. Such a succession of forms or effects has always been easy to observe in the regular cycles of renovations and re-brandings undertaken by retailers. The various "shopping seasons" associated with national and religious holidays represent an annual sequence of spectacles that culminate in the ultimate consumption event, Christmas. These spectacles aim to attract large numbers of consumers to stores, but also to create the natural buzz created by crowds. As Ritzer observes, half-empty malls or department stores seem bleak and thus disenchanted.¹⁸⁸ The main form of spectacle that Ritzer perceives in the new means of consumption is that of the simulation. Applying this key postmodern term to consumption settings, Ritzer naturally finds, like Baudrillard, that Las Vegas and Disneyworld are the ultimate locations for simulations that blur distinctions between the real and the imagined.¹⁸⁹ His discussions very much centre on the built environment, and so are similar to those of architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable, who has also written on the architecture of illusion and simulation.¹⁹⁰ What they both find is that consumers increasingly prefer the imitative over the real: the former seems to take away all the vagaries of the latter, and leaves a perfected copy. This process, it needs to be added here,

¹⁸⁸ Ritzer (2001), 134.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 135.

¹⁹⁰ Huxtable (1997).

is also connected to the cultural dominance of films, television, and mass media. The *trompe l'oeil* effects perfected in contemporary entertainment have become a general cultural preference. Huxtable, for instance, notes that when the producers of a film about the Alamo found the original too small and plain for their cinematic vision, they built a bigger copy nearby. Today the new Alamo is also a tourist attraction.¹⁹¹

The spectacle of simulations is very apparent in shopping centres. In locations on Southern Vancouver Island, for example, locations can simulate the appearances of “Main Street”, or of a “Village Square”. The newly opened Tuscany Village in Saanich simulates the image of an Italian town-square by breaking the exterior into a series of faux-facades that appear to be those of separate buildings (**Figures 2.1-2.2**). The theme is taken even further in the grocery store at Tuscany Village that features signs in English and Italian. This degree of simulation is not typically present in NRF architecture.

Ritzer also proposes a form of spectacle that plays upon time and space, one applicable to big-box stores. This spectacle is not focused on simulated effects or facades, but more on the actual commodities themselves. Ritzer applies Harvey’s “time-space compression” to the understanding of this alternate form of spectacle, in which technology and globalization have reduced the time required to move items over large distances.¹⁹² It is the range of commodities available and their places of origin that is spectacular here. Not only are increasingly exotic and imported foods sold at local grocery stores, but they are now available regularly and fresh. Similar observations can be made of electronics, furnishings and other goods available in NRFs. The spectacle of the commodity, as I’ve called it here, is reinforced by the ubiquity and size of big-box

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 81.

¹⁹² Ritzer (2001), 140.

stores, the abundance of stock, and their underlying promise of endless opportunities for consumption. Subsequent chapters will consider the different forms of the spectacle in the context of the buildings and the forms of consumption they generate.

To conclude: Ritzer's new means of consumption and McDonaldization may be considered together.¹⁹³ Aided by the spectacle, the new means of consumption effect a refinement of McDonaldization in which efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control come to "amaze" consumers. That is to say, Ritzer's keys of McDonalization produce their own distinctive spectacle in big-box retail, aimed at the re-enchantment of the consumer. Efficiency is illustrated by the large number of shoppers the store can process, by the items available, and by no-hassle return policies. Simpler is calculability, which is demonstrated by large quantities sold for low prices. Predictability ensures that such deals continue and that favoured items along with something new can always be found. Last, control operates through technology, in the form of bar-coding, electronic cash-registers, product tracking, and surveillance cameras. In the big box store, the principles of McDonaldization merge with the spectacle to re-enchant the consumer. However, such enchantment is apparently temporary. The consumer's sense of enchantment needs to be renewed via regular shopping trips, which become through repetition, disenchanting. This cycle - escalating spectacles and enduring banality - ends when the new means of consumption are replaced by the newer means of consumption.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 132.

Other Sources: Journalism and Activism

Over the course of researching this study, several new NRF developments were announced and constructed on Southern Vancouver Island. At the same time, arguments for and against big-box retail also developed in sophistication and urgency. Unlike typical subjects of architectural history, NRFs are in current use and invoke degrees of change with each new location. This makes the task of staying current and finding architectural information a definite challenge. It has been met here by using non-academic sources, including popular studies, activist writings, and newspaper stories. The strength of these sources is that they are the main, and usually only, body of record for contemporary big-box store developments. In this way, NRFs are similar to other vernacular building types. The weakness of these sources is their brevity, relative lack of depth in analysis (especially theoretical), and often their declared biases. Newspaper and media stories are an important source for establishing the chronology and physical characteristics of NRFs, as well as the stated goals behind each particular development and chain. Journalism also captures the immediate socio-economic dimension of big-box store developments, functioning as a source in which to hear from municipal politicians, local business owners, and members of the community. For these reasons, local and national media sources, especially the *Victoria Times-Colonist*, *The Nanaimo Daily News*, and *The Globe and Mail* will be regularly cited in chapters four and five.

Popular writing on big-box stores and consumption has become an increasingly voluminous category of literature. For this study, I have used such sources when addressing the following themes: history of discount retail; anti-NRF and anti-sprawl; consumption and obsolescence. As already mentioned, the contemporary nature of big-

box stores is such that few academic histories have been completed, something that is especially true in the case of Canadian examples. Popular histories of retail and discounters, such as those by Robert Spector, Paco Underhill, William Severini Kowinski, and John Dicker, serve to bridge this gap in scholarship.¹⁹⁴ While they range in tenor and scope, such popular histories contain much essential information concerning the growth of discount chains and their distinctive architectural styles. Spector, for instance, presents the first book-length consideration of “category killers”, one of the three NRF types I will be examining in this study. He focuses on store innovations, competitions with pre-existing retailers, and their future prospects for growth, while providing background information on their origins and founders.

While Spector holds to a neutral position on NRFs, authors such as Constance Beaumont, Leslie Tucker, Deborah Curran, and Stacy Mitchell do not.¹⁹⁵ They are representative of anti-NRF writing, which uses the critical literature of sprawl as a foundation to critique big-box store developments on the basis of their negative social and environmental impacts.¹⁹⁶ Beaumont, Tucker, and Curran combine their criticisms with support for New Urbanism and Smart Growth as alternative forms of planning and

¹⁹⁴ Robert Spector, *Category Killers: The Retail Revolution and its Impact on Consumer Culture* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005); Paco Underhill, *Call of the Mall: The Geography of Shopping* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); William Severini Kowinski, *The Malling of America: an inside look at the great consumer paradise* (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1985); John Dicker, *The United States of Wal-Mart* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005).

¹⁹⁵ Constance Beaumont, Leslie Tucker, “Big Box Sprawl (and how to control it),” *Municipal Lawyer* 43: 2 (March/April 2002); Constance Beaumont, *How Superstore Sprawl Can Harm Communities, and what citizens can do about it* (Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994); Deborah Curran, *Challenging the Sprawl of Big-Box Retail: The Smart Growth Approach to “Zone It and They Will Come” Development* (Victoria: Polis Project on Ecological Governance and Smart Growth BC, 2002); Stacy Mitchell, *Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America’s Independent Businesses* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2006).

¹⁹⁶ Influential studies on sprawl include: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zybeck, Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000); Robert Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

development. Mitchell is more concerned with the impacts big-box retail has on independent businesses and local retailers. Her study deconstructs several claims and arguments put forward by big-box developers and their supporters. She argues that NRFs are neither exemplars of free-enterprise, being recipients of hidden subsidies, nor are they good for communities, to which they have fleeting commitments. Mitchell provides an activist perspective on NRFs in North American cities, one which is especially useful when considering community-based protests.

The final theme to consider is that of obsolescence and consumption. The topic of obsolescence, more particularly the “planned obsolescence” of commodities, is one that has received some academic attention, such as Folke Doving’s *Riches to Rags: The Political Economy of Social Waste* (1984).¹⁹⁷ By comparison, popular writers on consumption and consumer culture have been long interested in obsolescence and its place in the production and consumption of commodities. Two well known authors who addressed this subject at the end of the 1950s were economist John Kenneth Galbraith and journalist Vance Packard.¹⁹⁸ It was Packard who produced the first book-length study of obsolescence as an economic and marketing strategy used to ensure consumer demand and industrial growth. *The Waste Makers* (1960) investigates how, with the enormous expansion of U.S. industrial production after 1950, capitalists aimed to correspondingly expand U.S. consumption. “Planned obsolescence” took the form of design and marketing strategies that reduced the “life expectancy” of goods and which laid new emphasis on newness and fashion over durability and thrift, and which promoted waste.

¹⁹⁷ Folke Doving, *Riches to Rags: The Political Economy of Social Waste* (Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman Publishing, 1984).

¹⁹⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, “The Dependence Effect” (1958), *The Consumer Society Reader*, (Ed.s) Juliet Schor, Douglas Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000) 20-25; Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers* (New York: David McKay Company, 1960).

Packard cites numerous examples of articles which presented these arguments in favour of planned obsolescence that appeared in trade journals dating back to the 1930s. A quotation from an article by marketing consultant Victor Lebow, written in 1955, presents an example:

Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption...We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.¹⁹⁹

It is clear that these ideas, such as making “consumption our way of life”, were never discarded by industry, but instead were embraced on an increasingly international scale. The result of which is vividly illustrated in today’s crises of hi-tech and toxic garbage, recycling, and the environmental impacts of waste management. These prompted writer Giles Slade to re-consider the relevance of Packard and criticisms of obsolescence in his book *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America* (2006).²⁰⁰ The value of Slade’s study is in connecting current anxieties over consumerism, environmental degradation and excess waste, to the history of twentieth-century industrial design and the marketing of products. In the case of hi-tech garbage, such as computers and cell-phones, Slade argues these commodities have been designed to have a limited span of use and fail, thus perpetuating wasteful consumption. Most of these products are sold in big-box stores, which themselves increasingly appear to be an architectural form of planned obsolescence.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Packard (1960), 25.

²⁰⁰ Giles Slade, *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006.)

Critical and Cultural Theory

Twentieth-century cultural theorists have often engaged with architecture, using it to illustrate conceptions of social order and cultural signification. In his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin holds up architecture as the most ancient of human works, yet one that is regularly experienced “by a collectivity in a state of distraction.”²⁰¹ This observation that perceptions of architecture are influenced by social relations is taken further in *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin’s major study of modern, capitalist culture, centred on the shopping arcades and department stores of Paris.²⁰² *The Arcades Project* will be considered in detail in the next chapter. Michel Foucault is similarly known for his use of buildings as examples in his writings and lectures. For example, his study of Western prisons, *Discipline and Punish*, explores the theories of Jeremy Bentham, specifically his Pan-opticon prison designs, as a socio-judicial discourse made solid in bricks and mortar.²⁰³ Foucault also presents architectural historians with the previously discussed concept of the “heterotopia”, which he describes as a “place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable.”²⁰⁴ The prison is an example, as are cemeteries, old-age homes, mental asylums, and group homes. However, Foucault’s “heterotopia” is an imprecise and loose concept that is generally considered to be under-developed and, as Mary McLeod made clear, imbued with a high degree of sexism.²⁰⁵ A contemporary theorist is

²⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*, (Ed.s) Charles Harrison, Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 518.

²⁰² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (trans.) Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

²⁰³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans.) Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).

²⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, “Other Spaces: The principles of heterotopia,” *Lotus International* 48 (1985), 12.

²⁰⁵ Mary McLeod (1995).

Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson. Prolific and widely read, Jameson wrote some of the earliest and most influential texts on postmodernism and its relation to capitalism. In particular, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," is considered a seminal essay and has been widely praised and criticised.²⁰⁶ Jameson presents postmodernism as the new cultural expression of multinational, "late capitalism", and uses John Portman's Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles as his example. Strangely, by doing so, Jameson affixed the label of Postmodern firmly onto a building architectural historians would consider Modern, something that points to the architectural inadequacies of his essay. Iain Borden questions whether or not the Bonaventure is even a good example of the non-architectural connections presented in the article.²⁰⁷ However, Jameson's reading of class and economic relationships in the design and experience of the Bonaventure's entrances, lobby, and elevators does balance such weaknesses. Jameson, Benjamin, and, to a lesser degree, Foucault demonstrate how cultural theory can be applied to a diverse range of architecture.

It is clear that New Architectural History and Architectural Geography place considerable importance on the incorporation of theory into the examination of the built environment. The theorist whose ideas have proven most influential on my research and broader understanding of the social implications of consumption is Henri Lefebvre. As has become apparent in this chapter, Lefebvre is a writer whose impact has been felt across disciplines, and whose ideas have directly influenced work by Borden, McLeod, Llewellyn, Goss, Massey, Harvey, Soja, Merrifield, Gottdiener, Shields, and Paterson.

²⁰⁶ Fredric Jameson (1984).

²⁰⁷ Iain Borden, "Cities, Cultural Theory, Architecture," *Architecture and the Sites of History: Interpretations of Buildings and Cities*, (Ed.s) Iain Borden, David Dunster (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1995) 387-399.

Like these authors, I will adapt and apply Lefebvre's theories of everyday life and the production of space to the topic of NRFs on Southern Vancouver Island.

Prolific and long-lived, Henri Lefebvre is one of most important Marxist intellectuals of the 20th century. Of the many subjects addressed by Lefebvre, the three of greatest relevance for this study are everyday life, consumption, and urban development. These will be explored through Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1968), *The Survival of Capitalism* (1973), *The Production of Space* (1974), and *Critique of Everyday Life* (1981).²⁰⁸ These works will be considered throughout this study, most especially in chapter three, in light of their contributions to my methodology. Along with his academic and scholarly pursuits, he had a social activist's interest in practical ideas and solutions, and in locating ideas, such as those of past French philosophers, in daily life. A liberated civil society would be based on the actual experience of time and space and not on its conceptualisation. A revolutionary for his whole life, Lefebvre was a constant critic of theoretical distance from society and of writers who omitted human experience from their work. For these reasons, in his studies, he always attempts to situate the abstract and philosophical in the context of daily life. The way a society operates, its customs, political structure, industrial and economic organisation, shapes how its citizens perceive, conceive and experience everyday life. It is the place where the abstract and the concrete meet. It is this commitment to the real politics and social change that makes Lefebvre attractive to so many scholars. For me it also makes his theorizations applicable to big-box stores in terms of the consumption practices they promote and the

²⁰⁸ Titles by Lefebvre: *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume 3 (trans.) John Moore (New York: Verso, 2005); *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, (trans.) Sacha Rabinovitch (Athlone Press: London, 2000); *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production* (trans.) Frank Bryant (London: Allison & Busby, 1976); *The Production of Space* (trans.) Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

protests they engender. As will become apparent, Lefebvre's approach to the political economy of everyday life has infused itself at multiple levels in this study. By doing so, it provides a frame through which to perceive the ties between individual consumption, municipal politics, and the macro-economics of globalization. Last, Lefebvre's dynamic and un-dogmatic interpretations of Western industry and culture in the late twentieth-century result in a renewed appreciation of Karl Marx, and a dialectical materialism updated for use today.

Summary

The literary base for this project is large and diverse. This reflects the socio-economic and cultural significance of retailing and consumption in the interpretation of contemporary urban life in the twenty-first century. This has been clearly acknowledged by the many scholars and writers cited in this chapter, most of whom work across traditional disciplinary boundaries. My intention here is to add to the study of retail and consumption by applying theoretically and geographically informed methods to the architectural history of big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island.

Big-box stores and other NRFs fall within the category of vernacular architecture. For this reason they will be considered according to the methods of Herman and Carter's New Architectural History; that is, via a theoretically-informed analysis of typology and regional style. This typology will constitute the base of this study, serving to organize the different locations, and to help bring into focus the social and political issues related to contemporary consumption. As commercial buildings of everyday life, big-box stores need to be understood in relation to local and global political economy. The place of

these buildings within the larger context of urban development and municipal politics will facilitate this Marxist reading of architecture. As well, Zevi's emphasis on space will be acknowledged here and considered in terms of social function and everyday use. As Sharon Zukin noted, the interior of big-box stores appear to be designed to without distinctive character in order to keep consumers focused on the merchandise for sale.²⁰⁹ This is an interpretation I look forward to considering in terms of space, material, and technique.

Complementing this New Architectural History are geographic and sociological modes of analysis. The location and diffusion of sites, the role of consumer agency, and the "life" of the buildings will be taken into account here. Of special use will be Andy Merrifield's dialectical urbanism. This will help organize the historical descriptions of the construction and operating of the sites themselves. The sociology of consumption will help shed further light upon the consumers who use these buildings. Mark Paterson and George Ritzer's respective interpretations of shopping and retail design will be applied to the descriptions of the retailers and consumers. Both the geography and sociology of big-box stores will be further complemented by the insights and criticisms put forward by journalists, popular writers, and activists.

The diversity of this topic will find its overall structure when seen through the theoretical lens of Henri Lefebvre. The typological and regional information, along with the logic of development and shopping, will be interpreted in terms of their social and cultural roles. As centres of everyday consumption and as key locations in contemporary urban development, NRFs are appropriate subjects for Lefebvrian analysis. For it will be

²⁰⁹ Zukin (2005), 65.

demonstrated that despite their banal appearances and mundane operations, big-box stores are the most spectacular built representations of life in today's consumer culture.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will consider in detail the Marxist methods and theories that have been used in the study of retail architecture and consumption. It will also introduce this study's interdisciplinary approach. This project considers new modes of consumption, specifically big-box stores, on Southern Vancouver Island in terms of physical sites and regional political economy. In order to identify the elements of production and reproduction in the design and use of NRFs I will employ a Marxist approach shaped by methods and theories from disciplines outside of vernacular architectural history. Along with the vernacular tools of typology and regional perspective, this study considers location analysis, cultural theory, and sociological readings of consumption. As the preceding chapter demonstrated, the subject of NRFs and their influences crosses many disciplinary boundaries within and without academe. This has necessitated the fashioning of an interdisciplinary method in order to accurately describe, interpret, and analyze the architectural and social impacts of big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island. To make the characteristics and sources of this method apparent, I will refer to this study as a *dialectical architectural geography*. That is, it is a study of building types on a multi-regional scale with a focus on their role in the ongoing operations of capitalism and culture.

My study of big-box stores has been shaped by numerous authors and theorists from different disciplines. However, nearly all these scholars have in common an interest in the ideas of Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, and Henri Lefebvre. While Marx's ideas have long been foundational to the study of capitalism, interest in Benjamin and Lefebvre is connected to more recent phenomena. These are the translations and publications for

the first time of major works on consumption and space, specifically Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* and Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. Andy Merrifield described the appearance of the latter as "*the event within Anglo-American human geography in recent years.*"²¹⁰ The theoretical models and interpretations of capitalism and consumption put forward by all three of these authors need to be considered in detail in order to establish - as is my goal - a theoretical, inter-disciplinary approach to the study of NRFs.

Karl Marx (1818-1883): The Political Economy of Consumption

Retail architecture is one of the basic structures of consumption, as such it is tied to the social economics of production and distribution. To study the cultural impacts of NRFs on Vancouver Island, these structures must be understood in relation to institutions and ruling practices of economic and political power. This perspective has its origins in the writings of Marx. His focus on the dialectic of production and consumption, the cultural role of the commodity, and the forms of market value continue to make his works relevant, and his ideas remain at the foundation of consumer studies and cultural theory. Following his ideas as they pertain to contemporary retail and consumption will help frame the issues dialectically; that is, to view the subject as a dynamic operation of contradictory social forces, not as a static institution. As will be explored, consumption creates paradox and operates with an awareness of its own contradictions. It is through these contradictions that the relations of consumption will be examined, along with the ties between consumption and production. These social and ideological relations structure and are structured by the relations of consumption and further reveal their origins in the

²¹⁰ Andy Merrifield, "Lefebvre, Anti-Logos, and Nietzsche: An Alternative Reading of *The Production of Space*," *Antipode* 27:3 (1995), 294.

political economy of capitalism and its operative aim of constant growth. Big-box stores are a means of consumption in which consumers and retailers engage the relations of consumption. They are thus suitable locations in which to examine the operations and contradictions of contemporary capitalism.

In his historical and economic essays, Marx reconsiders the Enlightenment's style of elevating society's ideas over its materials. His method of historical materialism and study of political economy argued that ideas do not proceed from but instead are derived from the conditions and production of material necessities.²¹¹ He rejected the primacy given by Hegel to the "Idea". Writing in 1873, Marx argued for a materialist basis in history-writing in which "the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind translated into forms of thought."²¹² As the previous chapter discusses, Goss argues that this conflict of idea and material has continued, as is evident in consumption studies today, particularly in the contempt for material objects and an elevated view of ideas found in many studies.²¹³

Marx's subject of study was the "base" of economic and political forces that shape and, through modes and relations of production, engage a "superstructure" of social order and culture. Frederick Engels refined the relationship of base and superstructure by drawing attention to exchanges of influence between the terms.²¹⁴ He did this because he was alarmed by Marxists who over-emphasized the role of the base, thereby making the cultural superstructure a mere reflection of the economy and turning Marx's ideas into

²¹¹ Sources on Marx: *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (Ed) Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W.Norton, 1978); Ben Fine, *Marx's Capital* (London: MacMillan, 1984); Derek Layder, *Understanding Social Theory* (London: SAGE, 1995), 34-51; David McLellan, *Marxism After Marx* (London: MacMillan Press, 1980).

²¹² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, (trans.) Samuel Moore, Edward Aveling, (New York: Modern Library/Random House, 1906), 25.

²¹³ Jon Goss, "Consumption Geographies," *Introducing Human Geographies* (Ed.s) Paul Cloke, Philip Crang, Mark Goodwin (London: Hodder Arnold, 1999), 254-255.

²¹⁴ McLellan (1980), 15.

simple economic determinism.²¹⁵ Engels, and others since, stressed that the relationship of base and superstructure is dialectical not determinative, which is to say fluid, changeable, and unpredictable.²¹⁶ Despite such efforts in the twentieth century, the base-and-superstructure model began to resemble its architectural metaphor: a strong foundation supporting an aesthetic frame. Such ossification was challenged by Raymond Williams, who argued that base and superstructure need to be reconsidered in cultural theory:

We have to revalue “determination” towards the setting of limits and the exertions of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue “superstructure” towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue “the base” away from the notion of fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.²¹⁷

Here Williams is calling for a reemphasis on the dialectic in Marxist analysis. One way to do this is to direct researchers towards “real social and economic relationships”, which, unlike their ideal form, are neither simple nor easy to contain. Instead, real relationships tend to be complex and contradictory. Williams is concerned not simply for the sake of methodological accuracy – he is arguing for researchers to engage more with the real world, especially that of the working classes and the poor. By doing so, Williams believes the relationship between base and superstructure will appear as more clearly contradictory (dialectical) and not complementary (deterministic). Engaging with the real – that is, real people – also reconnects the researcher to the methods of earlier Marxists, especially Engels in Manchester and Benjamin in Paris, who conceived of base-

²¹⁵ Frederick Engels, “Letter to Joseph Bloch” (1890), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (1978), 760-761.

²¹⁶ Merrifield (2002), 25.

²¹⁷ Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso Editions, 1980), 34.

superstructure in terms of the lives of workers and managers. It is in the context of everyday life that Marx's base-and-superstructure model finds continued relevance, and a defense against cries of determinism.

In the key writings of Marx, base and superstructure are considered in terms of factory production and popular consumption. In *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy* (better known as the *Grundrisse*), and the three volumes of *Capital*, Marx analyses the relations between production and consumption in the capitalist system. His focus is on their dialectical operations and reciprocal influences. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution swept aside much of the previous social order and in the process changed how people worked and thought about work. These radical changes in the modes and relations of production were accompanied by changes in consumption. For Marx, consumption is not simply an appendage at the end of the industrial process, following production, distribution, and exchange. Instead, it is a part of production itself. Marx wrote: "production, then, is also immediately consumption, consumption is also immediately production. Each is immediately its opposite."²¹⁸ In the context of capitalism neither can exist without the other. Production creates the material (the object of consumption) as consumption creates desire (the subject of production).²¹⁹ Not only is consumption the goal of production, but production itself is predicated on the need or desire to consume. Further, both operate to ensure their own ongoing existence, as consumption necessitates further production or, more accurately, reproduction, which in turn facilitates further consumption. For this reason, Marx argues, "consumption thus

²¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (trans.) Martin Nicolaus, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (1978), 229.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

appears as a moment of production.”²²⁰ These dialectical operations of production and consumption are best understood by focusing on the objects actually produced and consumed: the commodity.

Commodities, their systems of production, distribution, and consumption, and their forms of value, are of great importance to Marx’s study of political economy. He opens *Capital* with an analysis of commodities and money.²²¹ Two forms of valuation are present in commodities: use-value and exchange-value. In consumption, Marx notes the stability of the former, based on utility, in contrast to the variability of the latter, based on abstracted value-forms, especially money. Commodities are “both objects of utility, and at the same time, depositories of value”.²²² Value is measurable in quality and quantity. Paterson observes that use-value and exchange-value also reflect the relative stability of material and labour costs and the unpredictability of the market prices.²²³ The difference between the two, from the perspective of the capitalist, is profit or surplus-value. Profits are maintained by lowering use-values and increasing exchange-values, the means of which are the exploitation of producers and consumers. The result of this process is the alienation of the producers from the products, and the fetishizing of the commodity by the consumers.

The most commonly cited passage of *Capital* is Marx’s description of the commodity fetish.²²⁴ This concerns the status of the commodity upon entering economic circulation, where it exists primarily in abstract exchange value. Distanced from the labour-power of production, the commodity becomes fetishized, a process in which the

²²⁰ Ibid, 232.

²²¹ Marx (1906), 41.

²²² Ibid, 55.

²²³ Paterson (2006), 15-16.

²²⁴ Marx (1906), 81-96

useful labour of production is obscured and exchange value form is emphasized.²²⁵ In other words, the price of a commodity and the cost of its production become increasingly distanced, so much so that the commodity obscures the productive labour of its making. Marx argues that “the mystical character of commodities” is derived not from use value but from exchange value.²²⁶ In the case of contemporary retail, this fetishism has reached a point at which the cost of production is so low, achieved by shifting production facilities to the developing world, that it can no longer be rationally connected to the price by the consumer – running shoes are one of the icons of this process, a process that exploits both producers and consumers. The former are paid little to produce the commodity for which the latter pay a lot. Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish has been expanded and altered by NRFs. Instead of obscuring production, as in the classic case described in *Capital*, the contemporary commodity has fetishized production itself.

The writing and analyses of Marx remain fundamental to the study of capitalism and liberal democracy. In the context of this study, his ideas and his dialectical method are still applicable. Sharon Zukin argues that consumption and consumer culture are the most appropriate areas of study for contemporary Marxists:

If Marx were alive today, he would write about shopping as the new class struggle. We shop to find the bread, jeans, and homes – or baguettes, Miss Sixties, and McMansions – that we need to survive. Though we don’t make these things ourselves, we work at shopping to produce them in our lives. We spend hours, and sometimes months, doing research on the things we need, and then spend more time doing research on the prices and stores where we can buy them. The smarter we want to be as shoppers, the more work we have to do. And the more money we want to save, the more we need to buy.²²⁷

²²⁵ Ibid

²²⁶ Ibid, 82.

²²⁷ Zukin (2005), 263.

Not only does Zukin cite the contradictions present in consumer society, ripe for Marxist analysis, she also points to the further exploitation of the consumer, who now contributes labour to the process of consumption. Hence, big-box consumption is more than simply the fetishism of production – it is work itself. This was also pointed out by Goss, who noted that shopping today is increasingly “a lot of work”, involving research, budgeting, preparation, comparison shopping, and finally purchasing, so much so that shopping is additional labour, one for which there are no wages.²²⁸ Instead, the consumer-worker is rewarded with savings, that is, with imaginary or abstract value. Given such expanding forms of exploitation, it seems necessary and efficacious to continue to examine capitalism using Marx’s dialectical approach. However, it needs to be stated that this approach is not merely negative or critical. A dialectical analysis requires both researcher and reader to balance negative and positive, and to seek the good and the bad in the subject. This is the perspective argued by Marxist-influenced writers, such as Goss and Zukin, who recognize that shopping, as much as selling, is both creative and controlled.²²⁹

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940): Cultures of Consumption

Marxist analysis of consumption and the operations of the cultural superstructure have developed, changed, and persisted into the twenty-first century. Along with feminism and multiculturalism, Marxist ideas are foundational to postmodern critical and cultural theory - to such a degree that much Marxist content has become mainstream and that architectural historians engaged in Marxist analysis are now simply identified as

²²⁸ Goss (2006), 237.

²²⁹ Ibid, 238.

“social” historians. Studies by Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and other Frankfurt School figures are among the most frequently cited sources by scholars researching retail topics. Along with Marx, and some postmodernists like David Harvey, the Frankfurt School is identified with “the production of consumption” argument, which holds that consumption is “entirely due to the logic of capitalism and the expansion of mass production.”²³⁰ This section will consider briefly the contributions of the Frankfurt School and Benjamin to my understanding of consumption and NRF development.

The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, better known as the German School of Critical Theory or simply as the Frankfurt School, was made up of Marxist scholars who, starting in the 1920s, wished to focus on the cultural impacts of capitalism.²³¹ In the context of the time, when Marxism was dominated by economic focus and Communist-Party-driven politics, the Frankfurt School approach was cultural and heterodox. Non-Marxist areas of study, such as psychoanalysis and popular culture, were integrated into a broad, Hegelian Marxism which maintained its focus on political economy but also accounted for mostly neglected parts of superstructure.²³² In particular, those parts of culture, especially popular culture that served as instruments of power or dominance were considered. Fascist Germany and capitalist America provided examples of how a commodity-based mass culture can be developed, maintained, and exploited through the social application of industrial and marketing techniques and expertise.

Adorno and Horkheimer, in “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (1944), present a classic study of mass media, capitalism, markets, films, and

²³⁰ Kneale, Dwyer (2004), 299.

²³¹ Charles Lemert, “Social Theories and World Conflict: 1919-1945”, *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings* (Ed) Charles Lemert (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 195-197.

²³² McLellan (1980), 259.

the making of modern consumption in the era of commodities.²³³ Forming one chapter in their essay collection *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer's argument is plain: capitalist culture, based on reproductions, yields political and social conformity, which is a form of domination. This operates in spite of capitalist claims that consumer demand shapes the economy and that consumers are free in their shopping choices. Such claims, contend the authors, are merely obscurations of power. The production and consumption of cultural conformity are organized by the "culture industries", a name that deliberately bridges the gap between base and superstructure.

Adorno and Horkheimer focus mainly on cinema, and many of their examples are drawn from film and radio. They do, however, present points of analysis relevant to the study of architecture and consumption. In their introduction, the authors survey their urban context - at the time, New York - and observe uniformity and predictability.

Describing the environment of an emergent consumer culture, they write:

Even now the older homes just outside the concrete city centers look like slums, and the new bungalows on the outskirts are at one with the flimsy structures of world fairs in their praise of technical progress and their built-in demand to be discarded after a short while like empty food cans.²³⁴

The specter of obsolescence makes its appearance here, along with that of world exhibitions and new suburbs. Adorno and Horkheimer attempt to capture the outlines of the culture to come, the commodity world of value and waste. Three years after the writing of Adorno and Horkheimer's essay, Levitt & Sons began a housing development on Long Island organized around Fordist principles of mass production. William Levitt

²³³ Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *The Consumer Society Reader* (Ed.s) Juliet Schor, Douglas Holt, (New York: The New Press, 2000), 3-19.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

stated in 1948: “We are not builders. We are manufacturers.”²³⁵ The housing subdivision of Levittown, as it came to be called, would come to symbolize the post-war boom and North America’s suburban future. It was a community planned around consumption, as Dolores Hayden describes it:

The postwar suburbs were constructed at great speed, but they were deliberately planned to maximize consumption of mass-produced goods and minimize the responsibility of the developers to create public space and public services.²³⁶

The mass-produced goods included the suburban homes themselves, which were meant to be consumed (that is, lived in) and if necessary re-consumed (repaired or sold).

A second point to be drawn from Adorno and Horkheimer is the level of satisfaction, or more properly dis-satisfaction, which is part of consumption:

The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory; all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu.²³⁷

A restaurant may exist to satisfy the consumer’s desire, but these desires lose their fantasy when framed by what the restaurant actually wishes to sell the customer - the food on the menu. The notion of deferred satisfaction is a key theme in the study of consumption. It articulates the presence of the mundane behind the spectacle of consumption, the everyday reality behind the consumer fantasy. Goss observes this deferment in the shopping mall, where “consumption treads the dialectical knife-edge between actual realization and rational manipulation of desire.”²³⁸ While all desires and wishes are to be stoked in consumer culture, the reality of the available range is limited

²³⁵ Slade (2006), 130.

²³⁶ Hayden (2003), 128.

²³⁷ Adorno, Horkheimer (2000), 11.

²³⁸ Goss (1999), 49.

and even their fulfillment is partial at best. The deferment of satisfaction, like obsolescence, points to the mechanisms of manipulation by which capitalism operates.

While Adorno and Horkheimer studied popular culture, Walter Benjamin preferred to research the operations of capitalism at work in literature, art, architecture, and the city at large. His interest in the latter predated his interest in political economy; Merrifield observes: “If Frederick Engels discovered the city through discovering Marxism, Walter Benjamin discovered Marxism through discovering the city.”²³⁹ His unfinished opus, *The Arcades Project*, an examination of urban forms in nineteenth-century capitalism, reflects this interest.²⁴⁰ The arcades are never wholly isolated from the urban environment. Instead, they are a unique operation of interior and exterior spaces, in which the interior street is separated from the exterior street, and shops present exteriors within the interior of the arcade. The city is always present inside the arcade.

It is important to remember that Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* is not so much a history of a nineteenth-century architectural building type as an urban history of Paris and Parisians. Rolf Tiedemann suggests it might have been even more than that; finished, Benjamin’s book might “have become nothing less than a materialist philosophy of the history of the nineteenth century.”²⁴¹ However, the book was not to be and, instead of presenting a unified Marxist history, was only recently published as collection of short essays, and a collection of fragmented notes and observations. Despite this, *The Arcades Project* is a unique resource for the study of retail and consumption. It provides an outline

²³⁹ Merrifield (2002), 49.

²⁴⁰ Benjamin (2002).

²⁴¹ Rolf Tiedemann, “Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*”, (trans) Gary Smith and Andre Lefevre, *The Arcades Project* (2002), 929.

of the economic, social, and cultural issues and institutions the researcher must consider when studying consumption and, specifically, retail architecture.

By considering retail places, Benjamin presents the structures in which the object of alienated labour becomes a fetish of consumption, and class identities are formed and reformed. His choice of the arcade is an interesting one. On the one hand, it is in keeping with his interest in nineteenth-century urbanism, modernity, and the history of the commodity. On the other hand, it is an unusual and, for its time, distinctly un-academic subject for study. As with his earlier study *One Way Street*, *The Arcades Project* is an attempt to take Marxist analysis off-campus and into the real world; Ritzer wonders if the choice of arcades was also influenced by their reputation as banal and shoddy, making them an ideal location to tie academic theory to the everyday world.²⁴²

The arcade is for Benjamin a meeting place of different cultural forces and of different classes. These are brought together in the fantasy of the commodity. This is the illusion of unity that hides the real origins of its production and the ever-increasing gulf between use-values and exchange-values. In his introductory essay, Benjamin refers to these different illusionary forms as “phantasmagoria”.²⁴³ It is worth noting that originally Benjamin planned the project as an essay, whose title was to be “Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland”.²⁴⁴ This is what grew into *The Arcades Project*, in which ideas of fantasy, or fairyland, are present in many sections. Influenced too by the Surrealists, Benjamin presents shops as locales for a form of collective dreaming that is akin to

²⁴² George Ritzer, *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption: Fast Food, Credit Cards and Casinos* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001), 120.

²⁴³ Benjamin (2002), 14-15.

²⁴⁴ Tiedemann (2002) 932.

Marx's false consciousness.²⁴⁵ The commodities are the source of consumer fantasy - a visual and tactile seduction - and the arcades are the fantasy's setting. The arcade is the stage, or pedestal, upon which the fetishized commodity is presented, and on which exchange-value obscures use-value.

The notion of the arcade as a stage points towards Benjamin's considerations of architectural design. Here, he stresses the importance of iron. Iron was both the structural means for the arcades, and that which distinguished them from their retail predecessors and from domestic architecture.²⁴⁶ He groups the arcade together with train stations and exhibition halls as building types that symbolize modernity and which "serve transitory purposes."²⁴⁷ These are places of brief experience; they are sites to move through, or buildings that are designed to be impermanent. Both characteristics, exemplified in the architecture of the Great Exhibition and subsequent World's Fairs, remain true of contemporary shopping centres and big-box stores. All are buildings with designed obsolescence.

Benjamin's grouping of the arcade and the exhibition hall is also significant for the analysis of the commodity fetish. He observes:

World exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which the use value becomes secondary. They are a school in which the masses, forcibly excluded from consumption, are imbued with the exchange value of commodities to the point of identifying with it: "Do not touch the items on display".²⁴⁸

Benjamin argues that the World's Fairs contributed to modern consumption in terms of consumer behaviour and store architecture. As described in the quotation, the Fairs are

²⁴⁵ Ritzer (2001), 121-122.

²⁴⁶ Benjamin (2002), 16.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 18.

settings in which the presented commodities are not for immediate sale, and are instead viewed as fetishes; in this setting, the commodities become symbols of themselves. This is a point that Adorno and Horkheimer would further develop, noting the parallels between the modern home and the exhibition halls of past world fairs - in the age of commodity capitalism, both are technological wonderlands designed to have short lives.²⁴⁹ Further, like the hall during the run of the fair, the modern home serves to house the owner's personal exposition of goods and specialties. In chapter four, I will consider similarities between the exhibition hall and the big-box store.

Benjamin makes repeated use of the term "phantasmagoria" when describing both the commodities and their effects on the consumer. Tiedemann posits that Benjamin's phantasmagoria can be interpreted as: "wish symbols", emblems of consumer desire; the dazzling images of the commodities themselves, as presented in displays or store-windows; or, essentially, as the operation of Marx's commodity fetish.²⁵⁰ These illusions include that of satisfaction, which attaches itself to commodities operating as "wish symbols" and contributes to the consumer's production - via consumption - of identity.

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* reveals, in historical form, the operations of the commodity and of capitalist accumulation situated within a building type. His work, though fragmented, provides an important model for the Marxist analyses of retail building types. Equally treating the material and the abstract, Benjamin's imaginative study and conclusions are relevant to any analysis of contemporary retail architecture.

²⁴⁹ Adorno, Horkheimer (2000), 3.

²⁵⁰ Tiedemann (2002), 938

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991): Consumption and Everyday Life

The most important single theorist in this project turns out to be Henri Lefebvre. Concerned with alienation and exploitation in Western capitalist nations, Lefebvre had the political and philosophical aim of socialist revolution, the goal of which was the realization of total human potential. In Lefebvre, the ideas of Marx come together with those of Frederick Nietzsche in an approach that Mary McLeod and Andy Merrifield have each described as “Humanist” and “Existential Marxism.”²⁵¹

Lefebvre’s ongoing subject was the capitalist mode of economic production and consumption and their attendant relations. He considered this subject too large to fit within the boundaries of a single academic approach. Instead, Lefebvre promoted cross-disciplinary studies, which not only reckon with the true pervasiveness of capitalism in Western society, but also free thought and subvert technocratic specializations. Even so, he argued the modes and relations of production and consumption are at best glimpsed in the theoretical frames of everyday life, the urban, or the production of space.²⁵²

His writings on everyday life and the production of space have provided the central theoretical model and context for this study. Lefebvre insisted that social analysis be grounded in the actual operations of society; any consideration of theory needs to be balanced by equal consideration of practice. This insistence led him to focus on the everyday as the location where social relations take form and operate in terms of real, urban space.²⁵³ From this perspective, Lefebvre identifies the ways land development and

²⁵¹ Mary McLeod, “Henri Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction,” *Architecture of the Everyday*, (ed.s) Steven Harris, Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997) 12; Merrifield (1995), 295.

²⁵² Henri Lefebvre *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production* (trans) Frank Bryant (London: Allison & Busby, 1976), 7.

²⁵³ Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 79.

urban planning construct ideological discourses into the built forms of cities. This leads to the perception of the ideological content in the daily experience of citizens. In this section, I will elaborate on Lefebvre's theories of everyday life, the production of space, and social reproduction, and ties them to the architecture of consumption.

In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* and the three-volume series *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre presents everyday life as the key context in which to understand the operations of capitalism. However, everyday life is not outside capitalism; instead, it is also a product of the mode of production. Lefebvre ties them together: "the mode of production as produced and daily life as product illuminate one another."²⁵⁴ This introduces the dialectical operations of everyday life. In the urban, for example, everyday life functions as both the site and the opposite of modernity.²⁵⁵ That is, the novelty and dynamics of modernity (the spectacle) contrast to the familiar stability of everyday life (the mundane) as they play out over time and space. Lefebvre observes that "the misery of everyday life", its tedium and unfairness, exists alongside "the power of everyday life", found in its continuity and feelings of belonging.²⁵⁶ Lefebvre tries, as Shields notes, to make these distinctions clear through the terms "everyday life" and "everydayness."²⁵⁷ While everyday life designates the general "uncatalogued, habitual and routine nature of day-to-day living", everydayness is specific to the alienated, banal, and repetitive experiences of life in contemporary capitalist society.²⁵⁸ Everydayness is the alienated face of everyday life. These are the qualities that Lefebvre wishes to understand and to

²⁵⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol.3 (trans) John Moore (New York: Verso, 2005), 11.

²⁵⁵ McLeod (1997), 19-20.

²⁵⁶ Henri Lefebvre *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, (trans) Sacha Rabinovitch (Athlone Press: London, 2000), 35.

²⁵⁷ Henri Lefebvre "The Everyday and Everydayness," (trans) Christine Levich, *Architecture of the Everyday*, (ed.s) Steven Harris, Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 32-37.

²⁵⁸ Shields (1998), 66.

alleviate. It is through the transformation of everyday life, at the level of the most trivial or taken for granted, that social change can be effected, the goal of which is un-alienated humanity.

Everyday life is real and external. For Lefebvre, this shifts philosophy from a focus on the ideal and internal into the actual experience of time and space:

The everyday is where we make meaning, where we make home in the smallest actions, passing thoughts, spontaneous movements – meaning is not a meta-theory explained from above – meaning is the micro-pattern of planned & unplanned spaces - the more banal, unconscious, routine the production, the more important is the creation of everyday space and meaning – it is the reliable cup of espresso in the morning, the making of the unremarkable (yet tasty) dinner, your favourite chair, the daily newspaper is the ultimate example of the banal being amazing – individually they are cheap and disposable, most often not even fully read, and sometime weakly written – collectively they are of course an invaluable record of events, primary sources.²⁵⁹

Lefebvre applies dialectics to the experience of daily life and illuminates the extraordinary within the ordinary, the spectacle amid the mundane. The routines and actions whose repetition fills up our lives are often the least examined and yet most revealing moments of personal priorities and social identity. These routines follow two types of repetition: cyclical and linear. Cyclical repetition is based on the rhythms of the natural world (days, seasons), while linear repetition is based on rational models (week and weekend, holidays).²⁶⁰ The conflict of these two forms of time is evident in the urban, where linear-based production obscures or displaces cyclical - that is, natural - notions of time. An example of this phenomenon is the shopping centre. As many writers have noted, the shopping centre has been described as an architectural and social place outside cyclical time, in which time is present in only linear or commodified form.²⁶¹ The

²⁵⁹ Lefebvre (2000), 19.

²⁶⁰ Lefebvre (1997), 36.

²⁶¹ See: Goss (1993); Paterson (2006); Zukin (2005); Gottdiener (2000); Underhill (2004); Jacobs (1984).

artificiality of the centre interior - the spectacle - overwhelms the shopper with distractions that displace the exterior world - the mundane - outside the centre doors.

Everyday life is of course not a strictly personal venture. Instead, to the Marxist Lefebvre, it operates in the collective space given shape by normative modes and relations of production; it also contains individual space, the site of resistance and change. This is the contradiction, or dialectic, of everyday life that attracts Lefebvre – the simultaneous operations of capitalist control and resistance to such control. This conceptualization is similar to that of Ritzer: McDonaldised systems attempt but cannot ultimately fully establish, absolute control over the customer.²⁶² As Daniel Miller demonstrates in his analysis of grocery shopping, there is always a chance for the unpredictable, unforeseen, or spontaneous action that resists control and compliance.²⁶³ It is this special, revolutionary quality of the quotidian that makes it a source of hope and ongoing evidence of humanity amid the growth of the “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.”²⁶⁴ In Lefebvre’s supple theorizing, everyday life is the cause, mechanism, and end-goal of social change. Merrifield writes:

Nobody can get beyond everyday life, which literally internalizes global capitalism; and global capitalism, in turn, is nothing without many everyday lives, lives of real people in real time and space, coexisting with other people in real time and space. Everyday life is like quantum gravity: by going very small you can perhaps begin to understand the whole structure of life. By changing everyday life you can change the world; why change the world if it doesn’t release everyday life? People don’t fight or die for tons of steel, Lefebvre quips; they aspire to be happy in everyday life, to be free, wanting not to work or produce.²⁶⁵

In other words, social change must change everyday life. If it does not, then the change is merely idea. If political or cultural changes or reforms do not improve the conditions of

²⁶² Ritzer (1996).

²⁶³ Miller (2002).

²⁶⁴ Lefebvre (2000), 64.

²⁶⁵ Merrifield (2002), 79.

life as experienced on a day-to-day basis, then they cannot be expected to attract mass support or to influence politicians, except in the negative.

Lefebvre and Social Space

While Lefebvre might have considered his critique of everyday life to be his major contribution to contemporary studies, he is best known today for his writings on social space.²⁶⁶ These ideas were developed over the course of several books and articles, culminating in *The Production of Space*, the book title for which Lefebvre is now best known. For Lefebvre, social space “is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).”²⁶⁷ How these social relations are produced, consumed, and reproduced in a contemporary urban context constitutes Lefebvre’s subject. He wrote critical studies of urban development and everyday urban life, and the ways they are simultaneously means of production and products themselves.²⁶⁸ In *The Production of Space* he further articulates this process of urbanization.

Is space a social relationship? Certainly – but one which is inherent to property relationships (especially the ownership of the earth, of land) and also closely bound up with the forces of production (which impose a form on that earth or land); here we see the polyvalence of social space, its “reality”, at once formal and material. Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means of productions*; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Shields (1998), 141.

²⁶⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans) Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), 82.

²⁶⁸ Henri Lefebvre, “Space and Politics”, *Writings on Cities* (1996), 185.

²⁶⁹ Lefebvre (1991), 85.

Lefebvre endeavors to explain how the operations of capitalism and governance give shape to society and culture in general; they are not simply influential in the specialized areas of the economy or politics. Instead, capitalism is pervasive, and remains the dominant influence on all social relations in Western society. It is inscribed upon the productions of urban space. This, Lefebvre argues, makes such social space the appropriate subject for a revived, contemporary Marxism.

Our chief concern is with space. The problematic of space, which subsumes the problems of the urban sphere (the city and its extensions) and of everyday life (programmed consumption), has displaced the problematic of industrialization. It has not, however, destroyed that earlier set of problems: the social relationships that obtained previously still obtain; the new problem, is precisely, the problem of their *reproduction*.²⁷⁰

Lefebvre frames social relations and space in Marxist terms of production and reproduction. Thus contemporary social space contains: biological reproduction (the family); the reproduction of labour (social class); and the reproduction of the social relations of production (capitalist organization of society).²⁷¹ On each of these three levels Lefebvre perceives the operations of production, consumption, and reproduction, which sustain existing social orders and hierarchies of authority. These find representation in overt and covert forms, with the former including “buildings, monuments, and works of art.”²⁷² It is in and around such forms that Lefebvre set his now famous “spatial triad” of social spaces that philosophically and politically shape societies, cities, and consciousness. The triad is made up of three types of social space: spatial practices; representations of space; and representational spaces.²⁷³ These are not really divisible but together constitute the spatial basis of “reality” in its current social form.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 89.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 32.

²⁷² Ibid, 33.

²⁷³ Ibid, 38-39.

Radical geographer Edward Soja simplified this spatial triad by interpreting it as perceptual space, conceptual space, and lived space, in his trialectics of spatiality.²⁷⁴

While this served to clarify some of Lefebvre's more dense language, it also suggested degrees of separation between the three terms, and reduced Lefebvre's stress on political domination in terms of the original triad. Considering that the triad is meant to illustrate how capitalism influences and controls social development, Soja's interpretation tends to reduce the urgency of Lefebvre's original argument.

This urgency is linked to events in Lefebvre's own lifetime. Specifically, witnessing the post-war, industrial boom and the spread of transnational corporatism. In these phenomena, Lefebvre perceived capitalism revived and further empowered through government policies of urban growth and industrial expansion. The rate and scale of such expansion, taking in so much social terrain, moved Lefebvre to consider the changes being brought to not just work, but to all aspects of everyday life. "The production of space" is a term used by Lefebvre to describe the now pervasive nature of what is called "development".²⁷⁵ Gottdiener notes that Lefebvre, in calling attention to the production of space, began to shift his Marxist critique from a focus on industry to the "second circuit of capital", mainly the investment and circulation of real estate.²⁷⁶ This shift clearly relates to Lefebvre's interest in everyday life, and the degrees of everydayness and alienation he witnessed in the 1950s and 60s. It was also tied to his perception of the conflict between, on the one hand, public space and what he called "the right to the city", and, on the other hand, urban capitalism and governing technocracy. Shields argues that,

²⁷⁴ Soja (1996), 66-68.

²⁷⁵ Lefebvre (1976), 27.

²⁷⁶ Gottdiener (2000), 266.

with the study of the production of space, Lefebvre aimed to understand how citizens are denied their rights, and how these rights can be reclaimed and bolstered by new ones.²⁷⁷

This analysis is tied to the history of post-war France. The architectural and social reconstruction of French cities in the late 1940s and 1950s followed a Modernist prescription of rational planning, suburban apartment blocks, and mega-structures.²⁷⁸ To Lefebvre, these developments replaced local cultural diversity with a global, rational homogeneity, which he simply called “architectural urbanism”.²⁷⁹ In the short essay written in 1960, “Notes on the New Town”, he contrasts the urban experience of the village of his birth, Navarrenx, to that of the modern town of Mourenx – the former is a site of wonder while the latter is a site of terror.²⁸⁰ Such contrasts illustrated how social relations became spatial relations through the growing practices of urban planning. Marx’s formerly elusive social relations of production and consumption take clear form in the new towns and suburbs, being designed to serve liberal capitalism. The new towns, like Mourenx, are spaces of capitalist production and consumption, while also being themselves spatial productions to be consumed by inhabitants through daily use. They also illustrate a high degree of uniformity in plan and construction. When considering such urban planning and architectural design, Lefebvre stresses “repetition” as being symptomatic of spatial practices that serve capitalist authority over the human needs of everyday life. Undoubtedly thinking of Mourenx and other new towns built since, he writes in *The Production of Space*:

²⁷⁷ Shields (1998), 146.

²⁷⁸ McLeod (1997), 15.

²⁷⁹ Lefebvre (1997), 33.

²⁸⁰ Henri Lefebvre, “Notes on the New Town”, *Introduction to Modernity* (trans) John Moore, (New York: Verso, 1995), 116-26.

It is obvious, sad to say, that repetition has everywhere defeated uniqueness, that the artificial and contrived have driven all spontaneity and naturalness from the field, and, in short, that products have vanquished works. Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (those of the workers) associated with instruments which are both duplicatable and designed to duplicated: machines, bull-dozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills, and so on. Are these spaces interchangeable because they are homologous? Or are they homogenous so that they can be exchanged, bought and sold, with the only differences between them being those assessable in money – i.e. quantifiable – terms (as volumes, distances, etc.)? At all events, repetition reigns supreme.²⁸¹

Repetition in design, construction, and even the routines of everyday life in new towns or suburbs was not limited to France. These characteristics are also true of North American suburbs and their attendant impersonal forms of mass sociality. In this way, patterns of post-war urbanism bore out Lefebvre's conceptions of everyday life being in conflict with the production of space.

Lefebvre notes that the production of space, despite its highly planned rationality, divides as much as unites the world.²⁸² This paradoxical idea of homogeneity and fragmentation is illustrated by globalization. The more the world is united by capitalism and liberal democracy, the more it features exclusion; the globalized world is broken up by real estate holdings, political parties, and technical expertise. In this way, it is understood that the production of space is ideological and not neutral in character.

While the operation of ideology seems clear in the post-war world, it can also be perceived in earlier historical periods. Lefebvre argues each historical era produces, consumes, and reproduces distinct social spaces.²⁸³ These shape, and are shaped by, all social levels, from the personal to the international. It is here that Lefebvre suggests the idea of a history of spaces, which conform to the ruling practices exercised in the past.

²⁸¹ Lefebvre (1991), 75.

²⁸² Lefebvre (1976), 19

²⁸³ Lefebvre (1991), 125-126.

For example, capitalist space is “characteristic of that society which is run and dominated by the bourgeoisie.”²⁸⁴ This dominance is expressed and felt via spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. Lefebvre applies his theory of social space to historical periods, evoking past human experience in spatial terms: absolute space, sacred space, historical space, abstract space, and contradictory space. The first three eras are pre-capitalist, while the abstract corresponds to the early modern and industrial periods, and the contradictory describes the twentieth century. However, Shields argues that this historicizing of spatial production has the unfortunate effect of simplifying Lefebvre’s analysis by tying it to traditions of history writing.²⁸⁵ Even more seriously, the spatial histories appear to assert time over space as the quintessential organizer of society, something Lefebvre had earlier argued against. Further, by organizing spatial epochs around dates, Lefebvre appears to make the everyday now subservient to the tradition of great ideas or events.²⁸⁶ In history, of course, it is the everyday and everydayness that fade, while privileged moments are recorded. In order to avoid this conflict of time and space, and distancing from the everyday, it seems that the production-of-space model is best for analysis of the contemporary and the future. In the case of this study, I will refrain from identifying spatial production on the historic scale used by Lefebvre. Instead, I intend to maintain a balance between the production of space and everyday life, which may be thought of in terms both global and local.

An example of a successful spatial history, I think though not cited by Lefebvre, is E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of English Working Class*. In his detailed accounts of English industrialism as experienced by the workers themselves, Thompson illustrates

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 126.

²⁸⁵ Shields (1998), 172.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

how social transformation is spatialized in terms of home, work, and leisure.²⁸⁷ Where workers lived and worked, what possessions and tools they had, and how they saw their place in society were all subjects of change in Early Modern England. The social forces that brought together and created the English working classes also broke apart the former order of society and shattered traditions of community and class identity. Lefebvre does cite two “attempts” at spatial histories, both of which focus on architecture: Siegfried Giedeon’s *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), and Bruno Zevi’s *Architecture as Space* (1948).²⁸⁸ Lefebvre considers both works to be mixed successes as far as spatial histories. While Giedeon’s text may be the first attempted history of space, Lefebvre sees it flawed in terms of his historical characterizations of space, and in his spiritualized view of humanity.²⁸⁹ Zevi does succeed in placing space at the very centre of architectural history; and yet, it is as a void and not as a social construction itself. In the end, as far as creating a history of space, Lefebvre states of Giedeon and Zevi that “they herald that history without helping to institute it.”²⁹⁰ It is by bringing the political and social elements of space into focus, via historical materialism, that spatialized history may be begun.

Lefebvre's theories are useful for understanding the ways urban locations are planned, organized, and experienced on a daily basis. In the daily reproduction of social reality, capitalist modes of production and ideology dominate. The function of urban spaces and their control by public and private institutions are, according to Lefebvre,

²⁸⁷ Illustrations of such social transformations may be found in Chapter 10 “Standards and Experiences”, and Chapter 12 “Community”. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

²⁸⁸ Lefebvre (1991), 126-127.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 127,

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

challenged by the daily experience of urban dwellers, who may use spaces in ways unforeseen in planning or governance. His emphasis on social space is useful in the study of retail facilities because they are central locations of everyday life and because they produce both predictable and unpredictable spaces. Shopping centres and NRF's have defined functions, and are operated along strictly enforced guidelines. Yet, they are open to the unknown. Examples can range from corporate restructuring and real-estate market shifts to the presence of non-purchasing browsers, the indigent, and teenage vandals. The mix of planned and unplanned spatial production makes retail subjects well suited to the application of Lefebvre's ideas. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas observe in *Writing on Cities*: "Being Lefebvrian, it has been said, is more a sensibility, rather than a closed system; and, indeed, many have found his theoretical insights difficult to apply due to the fluidity, dynamic and openness of his thought. It is probably encapsulated to perfection by one of his most common responses: 'yes and no'."²⁹¹ In my thinking about value space, characterized by contradictions, Lefebvre's openness fuels new questions.

Lefebvre and the Reproduction of Capitalism

From the late 1960s into the early 1970s, Lefebvre's writings considered capitalism in terms of space. While these studies more or less culminate in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre did publish several books and essays on urban and social spatiality, such as "The Right to the City" and "Space and Politics".²⁹² As previously noted, in *The Production of Space* he emphasized that a central problem to be

²⁹¹ Lefebvre (1991), 131; Eleonore Kofman, Elizabeth Lebas, "Introduction", Henri Lefebvre, *Writing on Cities*, (trans.) Kofman, Lebas, (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996), 8.

²⁹² Both essays are found in *Writing on Cities*.

investigated was the reproduction of the social relations of the production of space. He had in fact already begun such an investigation the year prior with *The Survival of Capitalism*. In this section I will consider Lefebvre's investigation of capitalist reproduction, and the reproduction of consumption spaces and practices.

Lefebvre specifically addresses questions of reproduction in *The Survival of Capitalism*, which bears the sub-title *Reproduction of the Relations of Production*.²⁹³ In Marxist analysis, the mode and relations of production and consumption constitute the dialectical organization of historical materialism. The mode of production is defined by labour power and the means of production, which is fixed capital. The relations of production are defined by the social divisions of, and the relationships between, workers and management, company and market, even nature and society. While modes of production are defined by their factory or workplace locations, the relations of production are defined by social conventions, laws, and class divisions. These conventions and laws are reproduced each day when they are duplicated through the routines of everyday life. This form of reproduction is crucial to the ongoing health of capitalism. In *Capital*, Marx writes:

Whatever the form of the process of production in a society, it must be a continuous process, must continue to go periodically through the same phases. A society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and as flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction.²⁹⁴

Over time, this process of production-consumption-reproduction appears to be more and more permanent as a socio-economic and cultural force outside of the everyday life of

²⁹³ Henri Lefebvre *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, (trans.) Frank Bryant (London: Allison & Busby, 1976).

²⁹⁴ Marx (1909), 619-620.

citizens. In this way, the relations of production appear to be rigid, and beyond the control or influence of individuals.

This process of reproduction is extremely relevant to my study of NRFs, for it directly addresses the consumption of commodities, and suggests how consumer desires and profit motive are present even at the level of commodity production. Lefebvre also ties spatial production to everyday life, noting the high degree of repetition in modern life, and the key role of obsolescence in the ongoing maintenance of economic growth. Repetition and obsolescence, as will be explored, characterize the operations of architecture, retailing, and consumption in big-box stores.

Lefebvre begins by asking how it is that capitalism has not withered away as Marx predicted. Despite world wars, economic depressions, decolonization, and the student-labour actions of May 1968, capitalism survives and, in fact, keeps expanding.²⁹⁵ Contemplating the consequences of this ongoing survival, Lefebvre observes: “We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: *by occupying space, by producing a space*”²⁹⁶ Thus, capitalism survives and maintains growth through the spatial practices, such as the commodification of land. Echoing Lefebvre, Gottdiener describes this process:

[S]ettlement space today is a resource turned into a commodity by the political economy of contemporary capitalism that can be bought, sold, rented, constructed, torn down, used, and reused in much the same way as any other kind of investment. The production of space now follows its own subset of the laws of capital accumulation.²⁹⁷

This bond between capitalism and the production of space is central in consumer society and, as such, characterizes the social relations of production and consumption. These

²⁹⁵ Lefebvre (1976), 21.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. Italics in original.

²⁹⁷ Gottdiener (2000), 266

shape how citizens perceive, experience, and even think about “business” or “the economy”. Lefebvre wonders why citizens accept relations and a social order that foster alienation and are based on unequal shares of power. The answer, he suggests lies in the reproduction of these social relations in everyday life:

The relations of production characteristic of capitalist society require that they themselves be reproduced. A society is a production and reproduction of social relations, not simply a production of things...and furthermore, the social relations are not produced and reproduced only in the social locations where the working class acts, thinks, and is localized, i.e. in the enterprise. They are reproduced in the market in the widest sense-in everyday life, in the family, in the town. They are also reproduced where the global surplus value of society is realized, distributed and consumed, in the global functioning of society – in art, culture, science and many other places (including the army). They are reproduced or they fall into disrepair.²⁹⁸

The reproduction of the relations of production ensures the labour and market necessary for the reproduction of the mode of production, which provides employment and products. The relations also exist, as Lefebvre points out, outside the specific workplace and come to characterize even non-work social organization. The relations produce the social spaces of people engaged in a given mode of production. It is there, Lefebvre posits, that the reproduction of those relations occurs.²⁹⁹ These social relations are filled with ideologies, especially those of the hegemonic kind. Lefebvre examines the reproduction of the relations of production in order to isolate and identify the ideologies operating within capitalism. Obscured by the label “common sense”, capitalist ideologies appear to be non-ideological and therefore are accepted and reproduced as natural. For Lefebvre, social relations that attain the status of “natural” are the most ideological, or unnatural.³⁰⁰ His goal is to help citizens understand how their manner of living and

²⁹⁸ Lefebvre (1976), 96.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 17.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 30.

thinking contributes to the maintenance of power in the hands of the ruling classes. How it is that everyday life, even at its most banal, is ideologically tied to political economy.

How can the ideological relations of production and their reproduction be usefully understood in terms of the real world? Where are they to be found? Lefebvre suggests looking at those social conventions and characteristics which are repetitive. Repetition or recurrence is one of Lefebvre's ongoing interests, discussed in nearly all his studies of space and everyday life. To him, it epitomizes modernity. Repetition is a feature he observes in everyday life and everydayness, in urban planning, in the specializations of science and technocracy, in industrial production, and in the production of space. It also is a feature of consumption. Everyday life is structured around routines and social relations that are repetitive. By considering the daily routine, we can immediately see how the repetitive ties everyday life to the relations of production and consumption.

Everyday life is made of recurrences: gestures of labour and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic, hours, days, weeks, months, years, linear and cyclical repetitions, natural and rational time, etc.; the study of creative activity (of *production*, in its widest sense) leads to the study of reproduction or the conditions in which actions producing objects and labour are reproduced, re-commenced, and re-assume their component proportions or, on the contrary, undergo gradual or sudden modifications.³⁰¹

The production of goods is also based on repetition, not just in the sense of mass-production assembly lines in which workers perform repetitive tasks, but also in terms of distribution, circulation, and consumption. This logic of repetition is also present in the commodities themselves. Lefebvre wonders if capitalism ought not to be "defined as [the] production of what is reproducible, of the repetitive". It is certainly the case that reproducibility defines the industrial produced commodity.³⁰² Lefebvre suggests that the

³⁰¹ Lefebvre (2000), 18.

³⁰² Lefebvre (1976), 32-33.

parts of culture characterized by repetition are symptomatic of the reproduction of the relations of production. His examples include fashion, pedagogy, and science, along with various academic or philosophical “isms”.³⁰³ Lefebvre also cites school education as an example of social reproduction. Students are trained to engage in repetitive actions and relations, such as rote memory or writing exercises, which prepare them for the mode and relations of production.³⁰⁴ In these and other cases, the “appearance of newness” conceals the old and repetitive. Tradition is reborn anew each September, by being new to each student. In the following chapters, NRFs - their form, operations, and location – will be examined in terms of repetitive practices.

Studying the repetitive, Lefebvre highlights the prominence of obsolescence in reproduction. This is especially relevant to the study of NRFs and commodity culture. Lefebvre describes how, in the 1960s, most Western economists were predicting and planning for infinite growth, which, being properly numerated, quantified, and graphed, was presented as socially desirable.³⁰⁵ Critics of infinite growth, such as John Kenneth Galbraith and Vance Packard - both cited by Lefebvre - were, if not marginalized, at least labeled dissenters.³⁰⁶ It appeared to Lefebvre that capitalists, aided by new electronic technologies, now provided the means for new growth at the levels of both production (creation) and consumption (destruction). Rather than rely on consumers to tire of or break their products, capitalists designed commodities with planned obsolescence. In order to meet the demands for constant growth,

destruction becomes inherent in capitalism. This destruction does not only consist of declared violence (both the civil and the military kind). An obsolescence of

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 51-52.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 102-103.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 110.

objects is organized on all sides, that is to say the lifespan of objects and industrial products is willfully curtailed.³⁰⁷

This planned obsolescence creates what Lefebvre brilliantly calls “a demography of objects”, in which commodities are considered in terms of lifespan and are produced with predictable “death dates”.³⁰⁸ Mass-produced commodities are designed to provide only temporally limited forms of satisfaction. This ensures the need for, and the continued production of, additional commodities. The practice of planned obsolescence in the design of contemporary electronics is a familiar example of what Lefebvre calls this device in action.³⁰⁹ This device, the strategy of obsolescence, also extends into the mode of production, says Lefebvre:

Machinery is replaced before it is materially used up. There is an intense deterioration of fixed capital, which is attributed to technical progress: it is precisely one of the functions of technical progress to destroy fixed capital (quite apart from the role of war or nature itself in this destruction).³¹⁰

The short “shelf-lives” of commodities along with those of the machines that create them reveal the extreme wastefulness of the current operations of capitalism. They also point to the priority given to reproduction over production, and the profit mechanisms and strategies of unlimited growth. The production of value is also the production of waste. The role of waste in the economics of contemporary capitalism is evident in NRFs as points of distribution for these short-lived commodities.

Architecture and urban planning present other forms of capitalist reproduction. Lefebvre writes “when architectural urban space responds to the ‘social commission’ of developers and the authorities, it is contributing actively and openly to the reproduction

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 109.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 110; Also in Lefebvre (2000), 81-82.

³⁰⁹ Lefebvre (2000), 81.

³¹⁰ Lefebvre (1976), 110.

of social relations. It is programmed space.”³¹¹ Built forms and spaces shape and are shaped by power relations and social networks. These influence what it is possible not simply to build, but also to imagine. In *Space and Politics*, Lefebvre suggests that architecture of the Industrial Age, though apparently free of religious and political constraints, falls into ideology.³¹² The results are impoverished functions, frozen forms, and homogenous structures - the very worst of Modernist architecture. Capitalism and rationalization place the architect between the engineer and the draughtsman, within a larger organisation of developers, users, contractors, investors and authorities. In the end, architects don't quite know where they “fit” in the creation of architecture: “If he does have a specific role in the (social) division of labour, the product of his labour does not appear to be clearly specified.”³¹³ This ambiguity results in a deployment of stock concepts and simple formulas, which yield the built environment of the repetitive. This architectural urbanism becomes a spatial production geared to and gearing all activities it influences towards the reproduction of the relations of production.

Dialectical Architectural Geography

My approach to big-box stores and other NRFs will be to describe and interpret the buildings as centres for the reproduction of the relations of production, that is, engines of value space. In the context of the three regional districts of Southern Vancouver Island, the impacts of NRFs will be considered in terms of their impacts on retail and non-retail landscapes. A spatial analysis, as Lefebvre's various studies illustrate, can take different forms and pose different questions. My aim in choosing this mode of analysis is to

³¹¹ Ibid, 88.

³¹² Lefebvre, “Space and Politics” (1996), 185-202.

³¹³ Ibid, 190.

answer the following questions: What is historically and culturally unique about NRF development and consumption? How does retailing influence urban planning on Southern Vancouver Island? How does retailing impact everyday life and everydayness, for both citizens and regional institutions?

In terms of their architecture and patterns of distribution, NRFs will be analyzed for their production of physical, political, environmental, and social spaces. The physical space of the buildings is examined in terms of size, scale, form, material, and construction. Political space is one of the more recognizable spaces produced in and by NRF development. Big-box stores attract passionate critics and defenders in the public hearings that often accompany NRF projects, which also present challenges to municipal planning and Official Community Plan processes and implementation. Closely tied to political space is environmental space. This is because the controls over land use and zoning are also in the hands of municipal governments, and many of the arguments brought against NRFs are concerned with habitat degradation, sprawl, and the larger environmental implications of consumption and constant growth. As well, transportation policies also tie political and environmental space together, something emphasized by the historic patterns of locating large retail developments at highway interchanges. Last, social space is produced by the relations of consumption, and it incorporates consumers and retailers, along with their respective relationships to credit-card companies and over-consumption.

The span of these spatial categories is intended to be broad enough to convey Lefebvre's social scale, while also being applicable to any type of commercial development today. While framing the big-box stores in terms of multiple spaces, I will

also consider the architecture and distribution in terms of reproduction. I will specifically focus on the Lefebvrian themes and devices of the repetitive and of obsolescence and waste, which are present in NRFs and their productions of space. This final characterization of the locations will identify big-box stores and power centres as central locations for the reproduction of capitalist relations and thus the maintenance of status-quo politics and economics.

Through the close study of the architecture, retailing format, and consumption habits of big-box stores, it will be argued that there is produced and consumed a specific form of social space: "value space". Value space will be theorized as the physical and mental reproduction of the relations of consumption, an interpretation built upon an analysis of the architecture, its geographic distribution, and the practices and behaviour of retailers and consumers. This will be elucidated through the interpretation of NRF forms and operations in terms of four dialectical pairs: the spectacular and the mundane; scarcity and abundance; durability and obsolescence; value and waste. The operations of these dialectical pairs are woven into the production of space, and all contribute to the ongoing reproduction of capitalism. In value space, consumption is not the end – it is simply part of the process of renewal. Needs and desires are constantly reinforced and renewed, and thus consumption leads to more production, leading to more consumption. Lefebvre's analysis of the reproduction of the relations of production will be used to support the argument that big-box stores are where the relations of production and consumption of urban capitalism are today most clearly produced and reproduced.

I have already identified the aim of this study is to present a dialectical architectural geography of consumption on Southern Vancouver Island. An

interdisciplinary approach will be used to identify, describe, and interpret the social-cultural relationships produced, consumed, and reproduced in contemporary value space. In order to consider NRFs and their cultural context in a theoretical light, I will utilize a Marxist production-consumption model to account for the operational influences of politics, culture, economy, and environment on retail and consumption. I will elaborate on forms and manifestations of value space, which I argue is a real-and-imagined social product of big-box retail that constitutes new forms of the commodity fetish and social labour.³¹⁴

I have named it “value space” for the following reasons: to distinguish it clearly from other uses of space; to characterize the bare-bones, lightly detailed architectural setting; to indicate the unique properties of big-box social relations and their reproduction; to recognize the popular media image of NRFs as places for getting discounts and hence good value. As centres for the consumption and reproduction of capitalism, NRFs are defined by the primacy of exchange over use values and by the commodity fetish (albeit in an altered form). Finally, “value space” is appropriate because value is the common principle observable in the planning, building, and operating of NRFs, and which in turn brings its own contradiction, waste. Value space constitutes the social relations of Ritzer’s new means of consumption, phenomena that include the experiences of different shopping formats, fashion trends, and their representations in advertising and media.

The dialectical method’s great asset is its stress on fluidity of elements and meaning. This makes it extremely useful when considering topics of everyday life or vernacular buildings. I do not wish this study to be understood as yet another privileged,

³¹⁴ The phrase “real-and-imagined” to describe contemporary urban spaces comes from Soja (1996).

structuralist observation of social relations, however, or as the postmodern observations of - in the words of Morris - a “cruising grammarian.”³¹⁵ She, like Goss, Jackson, and Thrift, stresses that the goal of shopping-architecture research is the recording and reckoning of each site’s unique and different histories, experienced and conceptualized by the designers, users, and researchers.³¹⁶ While many seem to think our stores, malls, and NRFs all look the same, they are not of course the same, being in unique social and geographic contexts. Further, following Lefebvre’s line of analysis, the less noticeable these sites appear - amazing in itself, considering their size - the more crucial they are to reproduction. The more they hide in the normal, the more they are ideological. By connecting retail locations to their local contexts, articulated in terms of spatial categories, their ideological functions emerge. In the case of NRFs, value space is produced and consumed, and thus reproduced and reconsumed, by and through routines of everyday life. It is through the ideas and actions of their designers, managers, and clients, both spectacular and mundane, that shopping spaces proceed as functional operations and emotional places. My use of dialectical architectural geography aims to unite the locations in terms of similarities in design, operations, and social practices. At the same time, unlike “Global Cultural Meltdown” arguments, this study recognizes that forces of cultural homogenization are met by counter-forces of cultural, often regional, heterogeneity.

³¹⁵ Morris (2000), 169.

³¹⁶ Ibid; Goss (1999), 47; Jackson and Thrift (1995), 208-209.

Building Typology and Distribution

The core of chapter four is an architectural typology of value space. The purpose is to identify the buildings under consideration and to note their unique and recurring design features. The NRF architecture of Southern Vancouver Island will first be defined in terms of building and operation types. This will incorporate notes on construction techniques and the variety of store configurations found on Southern Vancouver Island. An inventory or vocabulary of distinctive NRF architectural elements will be documented in photographs. The design roots of these elements will be considered in the context of retail history and current architectural practices. The architectural typology will also include consideration of Lefebvre's key terms, repetition and obsolescence. The goal of the typology is to define clearly the material focus of this study and to understand its ties to the relations of consumption.

"Distribution" is a term with multiple meanings in the context of consumption and retail studies, several of which will operate here. In terms of architecture, the distribution of building types will be considered in terms of regional locations and typological varieties. This will be illustrated through a series of maps showing the locations of NRFs within each regional district. The maps will serve to graphically illustrate the patterns of distribution employed in NRF developments as productions of space, with multiple, spatial implications. Distribution will also be considered in terms of transportation of goods, the supply and demand of production-consumption. As Jones and Simmons articulate, it is the system of distribution that connects the retail core to larger social systems, in turn shaping the context, or network of distributors.³¹⁷ In the case of big-box

³¹⁷ Jones, Simmons (1987), 12-14.

development, the intensification of highway and road use by delivery trucks and consumer automobiles is a visible sign of the system of distribution. This has serious impacts on local road infrastructure and maintenance, which ties the retail system of distribution to regional transportation policies. The means by which big-box stores expand and operate involve the participation of civic bodies and departments by way of enacting zoning laws and approving development applications. These will be considered here as aspects of distribution, being the mechanisms that greatly influence where and how NRFs are constructed and operate.

NRFs are part of each regional district's unique political and cultural economy, contributing economically by way of land development, employment and commercial activity. Distribution choices are highly political and often emotionally charged; this is especially evident at public hearings and neighbourhood meetings. This is a necessary corrective to Ritzer's portrayal of the new modes of consumption as rationalized structures imposed on communities. Citizen input and oppositional politics can lead to, by Ritzer's standards, irrational results, such as the Wal-Mart designed to be environmentally-friendly, or "green", in Vancouver, BC, in 2005.³¹⁸ The community groups and coalitions that have protested NRF developments argue that big-box stores threaten the continued existence of unique neighbourhood economies, built environments, and cultural heterogeneity. The threat is economic and physical, in terms of the demolition or emptying of buildings by stores driven out of business, and is fought in political arenas. Along with tracing and documenting the retail histories on Southern

³¹⁸ Lynda Challis, "Policy Report, Development and Building: CD1 – Rezoning 86 SE Marine Drive/101 East 69th Ave (Wal-Mart)", *City of Vancouver* (April 29, 2005).

Vancouver Island, I also want to see how sites of value space influence non-retail spaces, such as those of local politics and culture.

Researchers engaged in topics of social change and activism have taken the study of the commodity out of the mall. It is now studied via the systems of distribution and exploitation that provide the retail environment its goods. These studies of “commodity chains” trace the passage of goods from their factory or farm origins, usually in developing world, to the shelves and aisles of Western stores.³¹⁹ The distances between the locations of production and of distribution are vast and global, and mirror the physical and psychological distance of Western consumers from Non-western workers. The products presented in retail environments are fetishized, appearing to miraculously originate in the back-rooms of shops, and in such a way that display obfuscates their material origins. The fetishism of the commodity is of central importance to any Marxist analysis of retail architecture, as a key to the organization of shopping space. Goss writes

the magic of the commodity depends upon an innocence about the relations of production and the social construction of consumption. The sense of innocent fun mitigates the guilt of conspicuous consumption and residual innocence may similarly attach to the commodities for sale.³²⁰

Shopping centres, Goss’s point of focus, aim to maintain this sense of consumer innocence by strictly regulating every aspect of the physical environment. In NRFs this state of innocence will potentially be harder to maintain.

Organized by type and distribution, NRFs can be interpreted in different ways. The built forms themselves will be considered in isolation, and as part of the architectural whole. Other physical elements of the retail environment that will also be considered, including check-out counters, service areas, information kiosks, and shopping carts.

³¹⁹ Kneale, Dwyer, 306-308; Goss (2006) 239-240.

³²⁰ Goss (1993), 37.

The latter serve as a key non-architectural element of consumption that illustrates the dialectical operations of value-waste, in both retail and non-retail contexts. Further elements of value space production-consumption are perceived in advertising and other representations of consumption, which connect value space to main currents of consumption. Dialectical readings of these elements will take into consideration relevant insights from Marx, Benjamin, Lefebvre. The goal is to articulate the social productions of space which occur in and around big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island.

A synthesis of typology, distribution, and site readings will form and frame an interpretation of NRFs in terms of political economy, specifically their position in the reproduction of consumption. Within this frame, I will answer questions concerning the impact of NRFs on public policy, land use, and architecture in the three regional districts. The research and analytical tools at my disposal differ between the typology, distribution, and readings. The typology will rely on primary sources: plans, drawings, and site photographs. Secondary sources used will include development application permits, minutes of zoning committee's and city councils, press releases and media interviews, and relevant academic writing.

Typology also includes retail histories of retail chains and locations, for retailers and consumers are key performers and adapters of architecture and design. Ritzer argues that this is stamped out by McDonaldization, and I think he is *mostly* correct. Efficiency systems do, as he writes, root out inefficiencies.³²¹ However, they can never be absolute because of the inherent possibilities and capacities for inefficiencies or irrational behaviour by people operating and being operated by rationalized systems. Also, there are all sorts of natural, conscious and undoubtedly unconscious forms of inefficiency in

³²¹ Ritzer (2001), 128

the everyday life of an NRF, not to mention forms of alternative consumption and reproduction.

I have identified the functioning and experience of big-box store retailing and shopping as the “reproduction of the relations of consumption”. This is to stress the importance of consumption over production, while remaining within a Marxist mode of analysis. It also helps account for the altered conditions of capitalism between the time of Marx, Benjamin, and even to a degree Lefebvre, and my own. The reversal of emphasis in the production-consumption pair also recognizes that much of today’s production is, in fact, consumption, usually of information or other productions. Outside of the normal structures of production, consumption, as observed by Goss, Llewellyn, Lees and others, has taken on the form of productive work, or “social labour”, in the twenty-first century. This labour has increasingly become a crucial contribution to the day-to-day operations of market capitalism. At heart, capitalism is about accumulation, whether of raw materials, finished commodities, or capital itself.³²² So too, of course - and not by chance - is consumption. Consumption is the means by which capitalism profits, and ensures future profits.

To keep this interpretation of consumption and reproduction connected to everyday life, Lefebvre’s triad of social space will be used: spatial practice; representations of space; representational spaces.³²³ While the former two are structured within the capitalist production of space, representational spaces exist outside of them, and belong to everyday life. One form of representational space is the informal economy of cities that exists outside of market capitalism. This third space is perceived in

³²² Victor Lippit, *Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 22.

³²³ Lefebvre (1991), 38-39.

alternative politics and lifestyles, and can resist or refashion consumption into something unforeseen in production. For my study it seems more appropriate and more sensible to stress consumption and what might be called “reconsumption.” I like the term “reconsumption” because it has more than one meaning: reconsumption can refer to literal forms (recycling, dumpster diving, used goods) and to figurative forms (everyday life routines and patterns). The reconsumption of the relations of consumption characterizes the both the misery and power of everyday life. It is where and how much of production (work) involves the consumption of resources, data, and other forms of information. Our routines consume time and space and, at the same moment, reproduce them in work (production) and leisure (consumption) in everyday life.

Architectural history has yet to adequately theorize contemporary spaces of consumption, especially those of big-box retail. With more focus on monumental architecture and on architects, architectural history has strangely under-stressed the role of the consumer of architectural spaces. This is despite Zevi’s insistence that space is the protagonist of architecture and that the cultural meaning of architecture comes from use, not visual appearance.³²⁴ Instead, as described in chapter one, it has been the high-culture orientation of Pevsner that has maintained a disciplinary focus on the producers of architecture, not on its consumers. Rather than present the big-box store on Pevsner’s terms, and be forced to argue for its status as “architecture”, I will keep it ordinary (a building) and focus on its everydayness within the context of everyday life. In fact, the more ordinary or banal the big box store appears, the more I sense the contradictions and operations of the spectacle in their functioning. When first considering this topic, I was often told there was “nothing” to write about, meaning there was not enough architecture

³²⁴ Zevi (1993), 22.

there to consider. This contrast of physical scale and mental scale is still striking, illustrating how something as overwhelmingly present as a big-box store can be ignored or made into an absence. Zukin has argued the stores are designed to be as forgettable or absent as possible to stress their role as spaces of consumption.³²⁵ I will consider the play of absence and presence in my interpretations of value architecture.

It is important here, last, to restate a previously mentioned critique of Marxist approaches to consumption and retail. From the Frankfurt School on, many scholars have proceeded from assumed positions of moral and cultural superiority.³²⁶ Shoppers are presented as simple, manipulable material that is shaped by marketing strategies and advertising. The obverse of this “consumer as dupe” perspective is a romanticized view, one detectable in Marx, of the pre-modern age as a more utopian existence, which was subsequently destroyed by industrialization and capitalism.³²⁷ Scholarly and popular notions of authenticity, for instance, elevate the hand-made object and the antique to state of superiority, one linked to both its production and consumption. This study aims to resist the urge to compare today’s retail landscape unfavourably with that of the past. The focus will be on everyday life in the real world, and not an imagined “way it never was.”³²⁸

³²⁵ Zukin (2005), 65.

³²⁶ Goss (2004), 369; Goss (2006), 238-239.

³²⁷ Goss (1999), 48; Kneale, Dwyer (2004) 299; Sennett (2006), 15.

³²⁸ Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: New Press, 1997).

Chapter Four: Value Architecture

This chapter will define, describe, and locate the value architecture of Southern Vancouver Island. These are sites of what I call value space, and the spatial practices of value retailing and consumption, which today feature largely in retail developments. I will begin by considering the importance of novelty and new building types in retail architecture, then review the historical background to the retail landscape before the arrival of NRFs in the 1990s. Value architecture will be introduced, considered in terms of size, structure, program, and context, and organized by retail format: warehouse club, discount department store, and category killer. The locations of NRFs in the study area will be presented in tables and maps, which will clarify the scale and contrast of value architecture in each regional district, and its patterns of diffusion. In reviewing both typology and location, I will highlight elements of repetition, in order to illustrate the role played by value architecture in the production of value space, and the social reproduction of the relations of consumption.

Innovation and Retail Formats

Architectural studies of consumption have been primarily concerned with extraordinary building types and shopping environments. Regional shopping centres and mega-malls, for instance, have provided authors with examples of spectacular retail designs such as the much studied West Edmonton Mall and Mall of America.³²⁹

³²⁹ On these see: special issue on West Edmonton Mall, *The Canadian Geographer* 35: 3 (1991); Margaret Crawford (1992); Robert Wilson, "Playing and Being Played: Experiencing West Edmonton Mall," *PopCan: Popular Culture in Canada* (Ed.s) Lynne Van Luven, Priscilla Walton (Scarborough: Prentice

Considerably less attention is given to more ordinary retail buildings. As discussed in chapter two, the studies that have been written are the work of vernacular or theoretical architectural historians. Authors such as Richard Longstreth, Johann Geist, Chester Liebs, and Alan Gowans write about discount stores, strip malls and retail centres, service stations, roadside restaurants, supermarkets. With a focus on typology, regional style, function, and social context, these studies examine the place of retail architecture in urban planning and city governance. These authors use building typology to classify and document store formats, and to form a base on which to construct urban and suburban histories. That is an approach I will follow in this chapter as a means to clarify the varieties of big-box retail under examination, and to organize architectural similarities and differences. I will specifically apply Longstreth's typology of commercial building types, which he used for architecture constructed prior to 1950, to the NRFs of Southern Vancouver Island.³³⁰ I do so in order to emphasize the continuities of form, plan, and space observable in past and present North American retail architecture.

Shopping centres and big-box stores are the places where citizens today engage Ritzer's "new modes of consumption", Sennett's "culture of new capitalism", and Schor's "new politics of consumption".³³¹ For scholars like Morris, McLeod, Hayden, and Borden, ordinary retail sites - just as much as spectacular retail - are locations where ideology is clearly present in everyday life. Influenced by Benjamin and Lefebvre, such scholars perceive the essential *zeitgeist* of the contemporary era in the activities of consumption and its attendant forms of politics, economics, and culture. In the case of the

Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 1999, 82-90; Jon Goss (1999); Mark Gottdiener (1997), 85-91; and Paco Underhill (2004), 30-35.

³³⁰ This typology is defined and described by Richard Longstreth in *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Washington DC: Preservation Press, 1987).

³³¹ Ritzer (1999); Sennett (2006); Schor (2000).

big-box store, categorizations of spectacular and mundane become less distinct. The stores are unique in their combination of scale, layout, and function to produce architectural spaces that are spectacular in size and mundane in detail. I argue that the spectacular and the mundane operate dialectically in the big-box store, producing contradictions and illusions. One such contradiction occurs in the buildings themselves, where social beliefs in permanence and durability meet the market mechanisms of temporality and obsolescence.

Los Angeles architect Daniel Herman writes that, at its essence, retail architecture is impermanent.³³² However, this reality is hidden by the appearance of permanence, conveyed in size, materials, and in the intentions of the developers. Like Morris, Herman sees the history of North American retail architecture as a market-driven series of new building types. Arcades, department stores, strip malls, enclosed shopping centres, mega-malls, and big-box stores have each been the “latest thing” in that history - building types that were copied and whose longevity was judged according to market performance and practices of innovation and obsolescence. For such reasons, retail architecture has become increasingly simple, undecorated, and short-lived. Critics estimate that North American big-box stores have an average life-span of twenty-five years.³³³ While they can be massive in scale, they are minute in durability - once unveiled, any new retail building types embark on a steep trajectory towards design extinction. Herman writes:

³³² Daniel Herman, “The Next Big Thing”, *Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2*, (2001), 526-542.

³³³ Virginia Gould “Don’t Get Boxed in by Abandoned Big-Boxes”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (July 4, 2004), C1; Daniel Herman, “Mall”, *Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2* (2001), 461-475.

“Shopping buildings don’t age; they die young.”³³⁴ This process is illustrated by the growing number of “dead malls” in North America.³³⁵

The CSCA’s Jim Simmons and Tony Hernandez, writing about NRFs and power retail, observe similar patterns of rapid change:

The history of retail innovations (from department stores to shopping centres to power retail) describes the same sequence of change. Rapid growth or a change in accessibility within the urban market provides the opportunity for a new retail form. The new retail form temporarily absorbs much of the growth in the market until a new equilibrium is reached in which the market share of the new form stabilizes. If the market continues to grow, older retail forms may survive. If market growth stabilizes, the new retail forms eventually erode the old. There is no reason to expect power retail phenomenon to be different.³³⁶

The retail landscape of Southern Vancouver Island, as will be discussed below, has conformed to this general pattern of retail development. However, the success of NRFs has not resulted in the closure of shopping centres. Instead, revealing the influence of city planners, existing shopping centres have been cast as regional centres around which big-box stores have been built. Simmons and Hernandez note that, in Canadian cities, planners have long concentrated retail in this fashion as a means of controlling commercial development and protecting existing retail from excessive competition.³³⁷ As a result, Canadian shopping centres have generally not closed down, as in the U.S., but instead have been repeatedly renovated and adapted to new retail trends. Within the three regional districts of the study area are examples of new shopping centre formats that have followed, and now coexist and compete with, big-box stores.

³³⁴ Daniel Herman, “The Next Big Thing” (2001), 528.

³³⁵ “Dead malls” is a widely used term for shuttered shopping centres, most of which are in the U.S. See also: Mitchell (2006)120-123; Underhill (2004), 201-204; Hayden (2003), 179.

³³⁶ Tony Hernandez, Jim Simmons, “Evolving retail landscapes: power retail in Canada”, *The Canadian Geographer* 50: 4 (2006), 482.

³³⁷ *Ibid*, 467.

The life-span of retail building types is something retailers and shopping centre managers extend through renovation or reinvention. This pattern is clearly observable in malls on Southern Vancouver Island. In a letter to Victoria Mayor Peter Pollen in 1982, Mayfair Shopping Centre manager Alec Caruth expressed the industry view that shopping centres “must be significantly revitalized every five to ten years.”³³⁸ Mayfair, built in 1963, and other regional shopping centres have all been renovated and enlarged on just such regular cycles, and continue to operate. Since the mid-1990s, many of these renovations and enlargements have included the addition of big-box stores. In the case of the big-box stores themselves, revitalization has been approached in different ways. Many were built only recently and have yet to confront the renovation cycle. In the cases of stores over ten years old, the buildings are not renovated but instead replaced. In a process dubbed “upsizing,” big-box retailers close one store and move to a new, larger store, often in the same community.³³⁹ In the United States the result has been a growing number of shuttered NRFs; in 2003, the city of Chicago had 10 million square feet of vacant big-box store space.³⁴⁰ On Southern Vancouver Island, there have been cases of upsizing and shuttering of big-box stores. In Nanaimo, Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire both moved on to larger buildings in different shopping centres, leaving their former locations to be divided and occupied by new big-box stores. As part of a national restructuring plan adopted in 2006, Loblaw closed twenty-four of its Real Canadian Wholesale Clubs, including its locations in Nanaimo and Saanich (**Figures 4.1-4.2**).³⁴¹ The most recent example of upsizing in the study area saw Wal-Mart close its Duncan Mall location and

³³⁸ Letter, City of Victoria Planning Department file on Mayfair Shopping Centre (accessed 03/19/02).

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Stacy Mitchell (2006), 121.

³⁴¹ George Weston Limited 2007 Annual Report, 82.

re-open as a power centre four kilometers away, in North Cowichan. It remains to be seen, pending an announced \$15 million redevelopment of the Duncan Mall, whether the empty Wal-Mart will be demolished or reused (**Figure 4.3**).³⁴² It may be argued that upsizing and shuttering stores suggests that NRFs are designed to be as simple and inexpensive as possible, their life-spans determined by planned obsolescence. Examining the buildings in detail and individually, however, reveals that there are other elements and practices present, including flexible structural systems, historicist façades, and numerous cases of building re-use. Similar to the shopping centres, big-box stores are confronted by the same market cycles of renovation and reinvention described by Caruth. As this chapter will discuss, Southern Vancouver Island includes examples of NRFs in the process of just such revitalization and reconfiguration.

Retail Architecture in the Study Area

The study area consists of the three contiguous regional districts on Southern Vancouver Island: Capital Regional District (CRD); Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD); and, Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). NRF locations on Southern Vancouver Island are grouped around the major urban centres in three regional districts (**Map 1**). These areas constitute the largest concentrations of urban areas and population on Vancouver Island and are the places where retail is concentrated. The estimated population of the three districts today combined is 595, 567, divided as follows: 366, 162 (CRD), 147,455 (RDN), and 81, 950 (CVRD).³⁴³ Each regional district features urban

³⁴² Sarah Simpson, "Village Green Inn on its way out, White Spot stays", *Cowichan Valley Citizen* (March 5, 2008), 7.

³⁴³ BC Stats, <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca> (accessed March 1, 2007).

centres with older downtown shopping districts (Victoria, Duncan, and Nanaimo, respectively) and outlying shopping centres (Saanich, Langford, North Cowichan, Ladysmith). These retail landscapes have been both augmented and altered by big-box store development. One common feature of all three regional districts is the importance of Highway 1 (the Island Highway) to the location of NRFs. As the map illustrates, the highway is the central transportation corridor along which are grouped the communities of Southern Vancouver Island.

Another key factor in the economies of these regional districts is their proximity to Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. Southern Vancouver Island forms one portion of what Edward Gibson labeled the Strait of Georgia Region, an urbanized network of commercial, industrial, and transportation that links the south Island to the Lower Mainland.³⁴⁴ The commodities found in NRFs are procured, stored, and transported via these regional socio-economic networks. Transportation routes are especially influential in the case of Southern Vancouver Island, which features one highway and two major ferry ports.

The urban history of the study areas has long ties to retail, for the cities of Victoria and Nanaimo both began as Hudson's Bay Company trading posts, founded in 1842 and 1853, respectively.³⁴⁵ Prior to the influx of immigrants into Victoria during the 1858 Gold Rush, the local First Nations Lekwammen and the Hudson's Bay Company operated a fur trade that had mutual economic benefits.³⁴⁶ The rapid growth in population and settlement upset this relationship, and quickly the trading posts became centres of

³⁴⁴ Edward Gibson, *The Urbanization of the Strait of Georgia Region*, Geographical Paper No. 57, (Environment Canada: Ottawa, 1976).

³⁴⁵ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History*, (Vancouver: MacMillan, 1971) 80, 127.

³⁴⁶ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992) 19-20.

urbanization.³⁴⁷ In Lefebvrian terms, colonization brought British spatial practices (property, management) and representations of spaces (maps, laws) to the region with sufficient force and energy to supplant those of the First Nations. Historian John Lutz calls it “an anti-conquest”, a term that stresses the fact that the native social order was replaced by a European one not through military conquest but through bureaucratic mechanisms of naming, surveillance, and examination.³⁴⁸ So, the production of space in the region was transformed and directed towards different social goals. While the fur trade declined and was replaced by other industries, its influence remains in the settlement geography of the Island; as Harold Innis long ago argued, the fur industry largely determined the borders of Canada while also shaping the unique character of its socio-political institutions.³⁴⁹ The trading posts and routes of the fur trade became cities, railroads, and highways. Victoria and Nanaimo have remained important retail centres on Southern Vancouver Island since the colonial period. Between 1882 and 1955, the number of stores in Nanaimo rose from fifty-one to one-hundred and eighty-three.³⁵⁰

Southern Vancouver Island has a considerable inventory of historical retail architecture. While much of it is located in the historic downtowns of Nanaimo, Ladysmith, Duncan, and Victoria, there are also examples in some of the smaller towns and on the urban fringes. Within the study area can be found examples of the main commercial types and styles in use in the 19th and early 20th centuries across North America. These range from wooden false-front “boomtown” general stores, associated

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 20.

³⁴⁸ John Lutz, “Relating to the Country: The Lekwammen and the Extension of European Settlement, 1843-1911”, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, (Ed) Ruth Wells Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 18.

³⁴⁹ Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 391-392.

³⁵⁰ Patricia Johnson, “Nanaimo: a short history”, *Welcome to Nanaimo, BC, Canada* (Nanaimo: Tredex Publishing, 1974), 80.

with the American frontier, to larger, more elaborate constructions in stone or brick that were ornamented in accordance with Victorian eclecticism.³⁵¹ The boomtown style is seen in one-storey, rectangular, wooden buildings, with large windows and false fronts; these are the vertical extensions of the façade above the roofline that make the building appear larger, provide space for signs, and hide gable roofs.³⁵² “The Fourth Street Store” in Nanaimo is an example of a wooden, commercial-residential building in the boomtown style (**Figure 4.4**). Photographs of Nanaimo from the late-19th century show many examples of boomtown style stores; the main blocks of Commercial and Fitzwilliam streets were both lined with stores featuring false-fronts, raised sidewalks, and covered porches with turned posts.³⁵³ Whippletree Junction, south of Duncan, provides examples of the boomtown style in the form of one-part commercial blocks built at the turn of the 20th century (**Figure 4.5**). The buildings of Whippletree Junction originally stood in downtown Duncan, in the city’s Chinatown, before they were disassembled (1969) and reconstructed (1978) as a historic-retail attraction. The Whippletree Junction buildings are also built off a raised, duckboard sidewalk, which is sheltered to create a porch. Longstreth identifies the one-part commercial block as a common yet key building type in 19th-century urbanization, one he describes as “a simple box with a decorated façade and thoroughly urban in its overtones”.³⁵⁴

Victoria, the largest and oldest city on Vancouver Island, has a considerable stock of 19th and 20th-century retail architecture. In the historic downtown built along Government Street are numerous two and three-part commercial blocks that form a

³⁵¹ Kalman (2000), 297.

³⁵² Ibid; Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Washington DC: Preservation Press, 1987), 54-55.

³⁵³ These photographs are found in Johnson (1974), 82-87.

³⁵⁴ Longstreth (1987), 54.

continuous façade of cast-iron fronts, with elaborate detailing and large plate-glass windows (**Figure 4.6**). Unlike the low wooden structures of Whippletree Junction, these blocks are of masonry and are multi-storied. Those located at intersections often have cut-corner entrances, making them visible from both streets; the Bank of British Columbia (1886) is an example of a cut-corner entrance-way (**Figure 4.7**). The Weiler Building (1899), designed by Thomas Sorby, is a three-part commercial block with over 109,000 square feet of interior space, organized into offices, shop floor, and storage (**Figure 4.8**).³⁵⁵ The building is a simple, timber post-and-beam frame to which is anchored the self-supporting Romanesque façade articulated in the Richardsonian manner with large, arcuated windows and eye-catching details.³⁵⁶ Although it was very large for its time, only the ground floor of the Weiler Building was used for retail. The construction in 1914 of the Hudson's Bay Company store on Douglas Street, to the designs of Horwood & White of Toronto, brought the modern department store to Vancouver Island (**Figure 4.9**).³⁵⁷ Occupying a downtown block, the store has a large size visually deemphasized and broken up by the window bays of the façade, which are marked by pilasters and engaged columns. The building types and the façade treatments used in nineteenth and early twentieth-century retail architecture have been adapted and reused up to the present day. The simple box plan, false fronts, cut-corner entrances, eclectic or historicist detailing, and the visual breaking up of wall-masses, as I will show, all continue in the big-box store.

In the 20th century, trade and retail continued to play a formative role in the region's municipal planning and politics. In the case of Nanaimo, a Provincial

³⁵⁵ Martin Segger, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1996), 55

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

Government study of 1956 placed considerable importance on the growth of retail for the city: “a key to Nanaimo’s future growth lies in the expansion and development of her position as a trading centre for a large part of the Island.”³⁵⁸ In the case of Victoria, just prior to the introduction of NRFs, that city was home to 41.6% of the CRD’s large shopping centres, representing the highest-profile retail locations in the region.³⁵⁹ Moving into the 21st century, both Nanaimo and Victoria have attempted to maintain their historic roles as retail centres of Southern Vancouver Island, positions challenged by the growing urban and suburban centres of Saanich, Langford, Duncan, and North Cowichan. In these, NRFs have played an active role in the redistribution of retail activity in the study area, especially in the CRD.

Since the 1950’s the retail architecture in the study area has followed typical patterns of development found elsewhere in Canada. In terms of architecture, downtown shopping streets and department stores were succeeded by shopping centres, built on urban fringes in patterns common to other parts of Canada. In the 1950s, strip malls were built in Victoria, Saanich, and Nanaimo. Built in 1956, Burnside Plaza, Saanich, is an example of the early types of automobile-focused shopping centres that appeared on Southern Vancouver Island (**Figure 4.10**).³⁶⁰ Strip malls were followed by enclosed shopping centres in the 1960s and 70s, which replaced individual store entrances and facades with blank curtain walls, centralized points of entry, and an interior focus. Enclosed shopping centres are found across the study area, and include the large regional

³⁵⁸ J.R. Meredith, C.P. Knight, “Nanaimo Retail and Wholesale Trade Survey”, (Victoria: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Department of Industrial Development, Trade, and Commerce, 1956), 17.

³⁵⁹ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume Two (1989), 1-3.

³⁶⁰ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume One (Regional Information Service: CRD, 1986), 3.58-3.59.

centres located in Nanaimo, Langford, Saanich, and Victoria. Nanaimo's Woodgrove Centre is the largest centre of this type on Vancouver Island (**Figure 4.11**).

In the period leading up to the 1990s, the retail landscape of Southern Vancouver Island was characterized by a mix of independent stores, department stores, retail chains, and shopping centres of various sizes and formats. These were concentrated in the cities of Victoria, Saanich, Duncan, and Nanaimo. Of these formats, the shopping centre was preeminent. In the cases of Nanaimo and Duncan, shopping centres were built along Highway 1. The Duncan Mall was built to the south and east of the downtown commercial district, directly adjacent to the highway, while in Nanaimo a series of shopping centres were built north of the downtown on both sides of the highway. Victoria, which contains the largest historic downtown area in the CRD, witnessed shopping centre development to the north of the core, on Highway 1 and Highway 17, along the edges of the municipal border with Saanich. In 1989, the CRD featured seven regional centres; the CVRD, one; and the RDN, three.

In their historical development and current usage, shopping centres can be divided into two basic formats of interior space. The open-air centre or strip mall features stores that have individual entrances and facades, which face directly onto a parking lot. The strip mall retains certain elements of boomtown style, one-part commercial blocks; Nanaimo's Terminal Park Mall features a strip facade, with false fronts and a covered sidewalk (**Figure 4.12**). The enclosed centre or shopping mall features stores that face interior passageways and are accessed through shared entrances and exterior façade. The two formats differ in physical size, layout, and target market. Strip malls are typically small, simple, and designed to serve an immediate neighborhood market. Enclosed

shopping centres are larger in architectural space and in serving a regional market. Municipal planners use size and location to define retail facility types, often using a smaller scale than the retail industry itself. Planners for the CRD, for example, define a regional centre as having a minimum retail area of 100,000 square feet.³⁶¹ In their industry definitions, The International Council of Shopping Centers defines a regional centre as occupying between 400,000 and 800,000 square feet.³⁶² While the size differs, both government and industry agree that regional centres are intended to be focal points for local commercial activity and need to be close to major streets and highways. In the cases of the three regional districts, both shopping-centre formats are found, along with several regional centres. There have also been examples of cross-conversions in the study area, in which open-air centres have been interiorized (Victoria's Mayfair Shopping Centre), and enclosed centres have been exteriorized (Nanaimo's Harewood Mall).

North American enclosed shopping centres have followed one of two architectural plans, the "dumb-bell" and the "cluster."³⁶³ These arrangements determine the location of the main retail tenants, called the anchor stores, and the shape of the interior passageways. The cluster plan comprises stores arranged around multiple, intersecting walkways, with the anchor tenants at the centre. This format was derived from open-air centres, where anchor stores were surrounded by pad developments, multiple strips, sidewalks and landscaping. A dumb-bell plan places anchor stores at the ends of the passageways. In this plan, the anchor stores are intended to draw shoppers down the passageways, exposing them to the rest of the shops. Both formats are used to lengthen

³⁶¹ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume One (1986), 1-3.

³⁶² *ICSC Shopping Center Definitions* (New York: International Council of Shopping Centers, 2004), 4.

³⁶³ Maitland (1985), 8-10. Jacobs (1984), 27-29.

the time spent by shoppers in the mall, with the aim of increasing sales.³⁶⁴ This spatio-temporal strategy, discussed in chapter two, aims to keep consumers within the retail environment for as long as possible. The two oldest and most influential examples of the two shopping-centre formats are John Graham's Northgate Center in Seattle of 1950 (dumb-bell) and Victor Gruen's Southdale Center of Edina, Minnesota of 1956 (cluster).³⁶⁵

There are multiple examples of both cluster and dumb-bell plan enclosed centres on Southern Vancouver Island. In the CVRD, the Duncan Mall is an enclosed cluster, which combines an interior centre with retail exterior strips that open onto the parking lot. Two smaller centres are built next to the Duncan Mall – Duncan Plaza, an older strip mall, and Village Green Mall, an exteriorized cluster. In the RDN, Woodgrove, Rutherford, Country Club, and Port Place have cluster plans with enclosed interiors, while the Terminal Mall and Brooks Landing have open-air centre, dumb-bell plans. In the CRD, Mayfair, Town and Country, University Heights, and CanWest are enclosed clusters, while Hillside and the Bay Centre are enclosed dumb-bells.³⁶⁶ The Bay Centre presents an example of a single anchor dumb-bell plan, in which stores are laid out along a three-storey galleria, with the interior pathways accessing the anchor store at multiple levels (**Figure 4.13**). A shopping centre in the CRD that combines both the cluster and dumb-bell plans, along with features of the open-air centre and enclosed centre, is the Tillicum Mall, Saanich. This two-level centre is built on a sloping site, both floors having direct access to the surrounding parking lot (**Figure 4.14**). Its lower storey takes the form of a dumb-bell plan, with an interior passageway linking two anchor stores (**Figure 4.15**).

³⁶⁴ Jones, Simmons (1987), 106-114.

³⁶⁵ Spector (2000), 87-88; Chung (2001), 24.

³⁶⁶ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume Two (1989), 1-5.

The upper storey features anchor stores and other large retailers, with strip mall-style individual entrances directly off the parking lot (**Figure 4.16**). The latter image reveals that Tillicum has, more recently, become a site of additional shopping centre hybridization with the inclusion of new big-box stores. The addition of NRFs to the tenant mix of older shopping centres has been one of the main strategies by which big-box stores have been built on Southern Vancouver Island.

Shopping centre managers and owners in the study area have responded to NRFs in different ways. While they might seem to rival the shopping centre, in fact big-box stores have been built largely in and around each region's older shopping centres, often in the form of new anchor stores. In Nanaimo, the largest concentration of NRFs is in the city's north end around Woodgrove Shopping Centre, an area that has since been designated, in the Official Community Plan, as the Woodgrove Urban Node, the city's key shopping district.³⁶⁷ The locating of NRFs around the island's largest enclosed mall has resulted in a concentration of variously sized shopping centres, which are accessed by highways and scaled to consumers in automobiles (**Figure 4.17**). While Wal-Mart is part of the enclosed centre, other NRFs have been built to the north, south, and east of Woodgrove, in a variety of configurations, including new open-air and strip-mall formats, such as power centres and outlet centres. The Woodgrove Urban Node provides an example of how big-box stores and their shopping centre formats have been integrated into a pre-existing retail landscape. As will be seen below, big-box stores have not signaled the end of the shopping centre but, instead, have actually fueled its reinvention and potentially extended its lifespan.

³⁶⁷ *Plan Nanaimo*, Official Community Plan (Nanaimo, 2008), 28, 32.

The Big-Box Store

The big-box store is a significant addition to the retail architecture of North America, in numbers, design, and varieties. Big-box stores began to appear in Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time numerous high-profile U.S. retail chains, including Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Costco and Staples, began their first wave of expansion north of the border. These new retailers were identified variously as New Retail, New Format Retail, Warehouse-style Retail, Value Retail, and Power Retail, while their buildings were called warehouse format stores, big-box stores, and New Retail Formats (NRFs).³⁶⁸ The combination of new store brands and formats at this time marked the big-box store as an American building type. As will be discussed in chapter five, this identification was not entirely accurate. Today, “big-box store” is the term used to identify both a building and a retail type. Big-box stores are distinguished from other retailers on the basis of their size, location, merchandise category, and age.³⁶⁹ While they have similarities with older buildings and retail operations, the name “big-box store” is best used, in the case of Canada, to distinguish large-scale chain locations developed after 1990. By these criteria, the earliest NRF constructed in the study area was The Brick, a home furnishings retailer, which opened its Nanaimo location in 1992. While the store has been renovated since its opening, it retains the distinction of being Vancouver

³⁶⁸ *New format retailing and the public interest*, prepared by Barry Lyon Consultants Ltd, Emrik Suichies and Associates for the Provincial Facilitator (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 1994); *Shopping Centers and Other Retail Properties: Investment, Developing, Financing, and Management*, (Ed.s) John White, Kevin Gray (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1996); Dolores Hayden, *Field Guide to Sprawl* (New York: WW Norton, 2004); Robert Spector, *Category Killers: The Retail Revolution and its Impact on Consumer Culture* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005).

³⁶⁹ Eric Genest-Laplante, “Specialized big-box stores”, *Analytical Paper Series*, No.29 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2000), 1.

Island's first big-box store (**Figure 4.18**). Its original appearance was similar to that of another of Brick location in Saanich (**Figure 4.19**).

The CSCA defines big-box stores as “retail outlets that are several times larger than the average store in the same retail sector.”³⁷⁰ The centre uses this relative measurement to account for the variations of size among NRFs: a Home Depot is eighteen times the size of a traditional hardware store; a Michaels is nine times the size of a traditional craft shop; a Real Canadian Superstore is three times the size of a traditional supermarket.³⁷¹ Big-box stores are also strongly associated with retail chains. This is unsurprising since key elements of big-box retailing, such as stock purchasing and distribution, require considerable organization and capital. In 2003, the CSCA classified fifty-two retailers in Canada as big-box chains, thirty-two of them were Canadian-owned, nineteen American, and one Swedish.³⁷² Of these chains, thirty-one are present on Southern Vancouver Island. This number is high when one considers that, except for pre-existing retailers that adopted big-box store formats, all of these chains arrived after 1991. In terms of ownership, sixteen are American chains, and fourteen are Canadian. The identification of big-box stores with large retail chains, especially well-known American brands, is an important source of anxiety, dislike, and resentment among critics and opponents of big-box stores. It is also a negative association with a history. In the U.S. in the 1930s, politicians and community groups opposed the growth of chain stores, such as Safeway, arguing many of the same points used by big-box store critics today.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Hernandez, Simmons (2006), 468.

³⁷¹ Kenneth Jones, Michael Doucet, *The Big Box, the Big Screen, the Flagship and Beyond: Impacts and Trends in the Greater Toronto Area* (Toronto: Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, 1998), 1.

³⁷² Hernandez, Simmons (2006), 471-472.

³⁷³ Economist Michael Hicks refers to this as “The War on the Chains” in *The Local Impact of Wal-Mart* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007), 14-21; Spector (2005), 14-16.

Constance Beaumont of the U.S. National Trust for Historic Preservation argues that the material and economic benefits of big-box stores are countered by their negative social and environmental impacts; these include environmental destruction, urban sprawl, retail consolidation, and erosion of community identity.³⁷⁴ As much criticism of big-box stores is directed at the retail chains behind the stores as at the buildings themselves.

While there is diversity among big-box operations, there is also a high degree of sameness. This appears to be especially so when it comes to the buildings. A standard big-box store is a roughly rectangular, one-storey building with windowless curtain walls, a single marked point of entry, and a flat roof.³⁷⁵ While some exceed 200,000 square feet, the majority of sites range between 25,000 and 100,000 square feet in area; in the case of Southern Vancouver Island, the largest location is the recently completed Cowichan Commons Wal-Mart Supercentre in the CVRD, with 173,000 square feet.³⁷⁶ A typical big-box sits on a concrete pad, on which is erected a post-and-beam steel frame, that sets the ceiling at an average height of thirty feet. Two photographs of a NRF under construction, in this case Canadian Tire in North Cowichan, illustrate this arrangement of pad, frame, and ceiling (**Figures 4.20-4.21**). The steel frame is based on a square module formed by four posts that support four lengths of I-beam at the ceiling level. The module and thus frame is of course adapted to the particular dimensions and outline of the site's floor plan, and is enclosed with curtain walls. Depending on the size and style of the building, these walls can be: a frame of metal studs and panels; concrete block clad in masonry or metal siding; or tilt-up concrete walls that have been cast in place. The walls

³⁷⁴ Constance Beaumont, *How Superstore Sprawl Can Harm Communities, and what citizens can do about it* (Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994), 7-12.

³⁷⁵ Genest-Laplante (2000), 4.

³⁷⁶ Figures have been compiled from academic, municipal, and media sources; Peter Rusland, "A giant awakens at Cowichan Commons", *Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial* (April 23, 2004), 1.

and frame support roof trusses that bear corrugated ceilings and flat asphalt roofs. In some cases, the ceilings also feature sky-lights. The big-box store is either fronted or surrounded by a large parking lot, whose size is determined by local zoning regulations. Hayden suggests that, from the retailer's perspective, the parking lot should be able to accommodate shopping numbers expected during the peak Christmas season.³⁷⁷

The main façade of a big-box store is the site of the entrance and the main, fascia sign. A common architectural feature of these facades is a false front, located typically over the entrance itself. The false front provides a central, framed space for the main sign, marks the entrance location, and makes reference to the retail associations of this boomtown feature. However, the false front no longer operates as a screen or illusionary extension, but instead, is a surface for text, and a symbol of retailing. Such a change in the function of false fronts, from the Old West to the Vegas Strip, is described by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour in *Learning from Las Vegas*. They write that the original false fronts,

...were bigger and taller than the interiors they fronted to communicate the store's importance and to enhance the quality and unity of the street. But false fronts are of the order and scale of Main Street. From the desert town on the highway in the West of today, we can learn new and vivid lessons about an impure architecture of communication. The little low buildings, gray-brown like the desert, separate and recede from the street that is now the highway, their false fronts disengaged and turned perpendicular to the highway, as big, high signs.³⁷⁸

The authors perceive the large signs of the Vegas Strip as enlarged false fronts, detached from their facades, moved to the edge of a parking lot, and set up perpendicular to the store front. In big-box stores, these signs return to the façade although their function has been altered. The big-box store false front does not hide a gable roof, nor is it meant to

³⁷⁷ Hayden (2004), 24

³⁷⁸ Venturi, Scott-Brown, Izenour (1994), 18.

make the building appear large. Instead, the false front's role is to help potential users, especially those in vehicles, in identifying the building as retail, along with its actual name.

As previously stated, the false front today is a surface for a sign and a symbol of retailing. Photographs show a big-box store false front in two phases of construction: framed in wood, and stuccoed (**Figures 4.22-4.23**). When completed, the false front, which is part of a new outlet of The Brick in Duncan, will resemble that of the chain's Nanaimo store (**Figure 4.18**). The shape of false fronts varies among big-box stores: flat (**Figure 4.24**); flat with cornice (**Figure 4.25**); gable (**Figure 4.26**); and crow-step gable (**Figure 4.27**). The use of this historical and regional feature in big-box store architecture indicates both continuities and, in its changed function over time, innovations in retail architecture.

Unlike its façade, the interior of a big-box store bears little similarity to that of a 19th-century store. Instead, the interior is has more in common with a warehouse or a wholesale merchant. Along with having tall steel shelves and goods on pallets, the post-and-beam frame of the store is, like that of a warehouse, left exposed. However, depending on the merchandise category, the frame is sometimes covered with finished surfaces to enhance the atmosphere of the location. While a warehouse look suits Home Depot's building products and Costco's wholesale ambience, it does not work as well for smaller NRFs which carry electronics (Future Shop), furniture (La-Z-Boy), and home goods (Home Outfitters). When Canadian lingerie chain La Senza began to move into power centres in 2004, it adapted its typical design and atmosphere to a 20,000 square foot big-box store, using dramatic lighting and an internet café to augment an interior

more finished than is typical in NRFs.³⁷⁹ The interior, be it finished or not, is, like that of a warehouse, dominated by the commodities for sale and in storage. The enormous inventory present in a big-box store makes for one of its strongest impressions. As noted in chapter two, Sharon Zukin argues that big-box stores are intentionally plain and undecorated in order to keep shoppers focused on the goods for sale.³⁸⁰ The number of goods is also due to one of the big-box store's more unexpected design elements – small loading docks and backroom storage capacity. The shelves that tower over the heads of consumers and the rows of racks simultaneously display and store merchandise; the big-box store's sales floor is also its storage area. This feature is a result of the adoption by retail chains in the 1980s of computerized inventories, centralized purchasing strategies, and international container shipping, innovations which streamlined supply chains and reduced the need to warehouse large amounts of merchandise.³⁸¹ The growth of what economist Marc Levinson calls “just-in-time manufacturing”, which aims to minimize the time between the production and consumption of goods, has eliminated the role of wholesalers while reducing the need for warehousing and on-site storage capacity.³⁸² This storage and display approach in big-box stores further communicates an appearance of abundance and the possibilities of limitless consumption to shoppers.

The Home Depot at University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich, will serve here as a representative example of a big-box store in plan, design, and final appearance.

While the majority of the building conforms to standard big-box store architecture, this

³⁷⁹ Canadian Press, “La Senza biggest store won't be a barn”, *Victoria Times-Colonist* (September 24, 2004), A16.

³⁸⁰ Zukin (2005), 65.

³⁸¹ Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 266.

³⁸² *Ibid*, 267.

Home Depot also features unique adaptations to the site. This, it turns out, is also typical of big-box stores.

Designed by Omicron Architecture, Engineering, Construction Services of Vancouver, the Saanich Home Depot is a 76,199 square foot big-box store that replaced an existing discount department store and is attached to the University Heights Shopping Centre (**Figure 4.28**).³⁸³ The store is located in one of the mall's two anchor positions, formerly occupied by Zellers, which itself had taken over the location from the mall's original anchor, Kmart.³⁸⁴ Along with its main entrance, the Home Depot is also accessible via the shopping centre, thereby "fulfilling" its role as mall anchor. The site plan shows that the anchor position is at the north end of the shopping centre and is nearly as large as the rest of the entire mall (**Figure 4.29**). The Home Depot features a garden centre of 9,216 square feet, which, when added to the store, brings the size of the development to 83,444 square feet.³⁸⁵ What is surprising is that this makes it smaller than the preceding Zellers store that measured 84,615 square feet.³⁸⁶

The floor plan is for an irregular rectangle: the north and south walls are both 228 feet in length, while the east wall is roughly 332 feet and the west wall is 401 feet. (**Figure 4.30**).³⁸⁷ The curtain walls are windowless tilt-up concrete panels that are impressed with a shallow banding that wraps the exterior of the building (**Figure 4.31**). The irregular outline of the curtain walls encloses a steel post-and-beam frame of four posts running north/south and nine posts running east/west. The frame's module unit is a square that measures 42 feet per side, each unit formed by four posts supporting four

³⁸³ See Figure 4.28.

³⁸⁴ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume Two (1989), 1-5.

³⁸⁵ See Figure 4.29.

³⁸⁶ See Site Plan, Data Tables.

³⁸⁷ See Floor Plan, Data Tables.

lengths of I-beam. The frame is affixed to the curtain walls with brackets at the cornice. Besides supporting the roof trusses, the frame also carries the lights, sprinklers, fans, and other service elements, all exposed. The floor plan also shows the garden centre on the north side of the store, through which the post-and-beam frame continues, although the ceiling treatment changes (incorporating skylights), and the area is only partially enclosed (**Figures 4.32-4.33**). The latter photograph shows the elements typical of big-box store interiors: warehouse-style shelves, squared posts, I-beams, rafter trusses, and corrugated ceiling materials.

The elevation drawings illustrate the visual matching of the Home Depot with the existing mall architecture, the presence of a sloping site, and the proposed colour scheme, as well as several exterior details (**Figure 4.34**). The east elevation shows that the rooflines of Safeway and the University Heights mall differ, and an increase in height follows the ground that slopes upward to the north. The Home Depot presents three additional, new rooflines, which also rise as they move to the north and towards the entrance vestibule. There is some degree of harmonization of the rooflines, at least visually, on the facade of the Home Depot: the roof height of Safeway matches the top of the decorative banding, and the false front above the entrance, carrying the fascia sign, nearly matches the height of the shopping centre. The curtain walls are tan in colour; the banding features Home Depot's corporate colours, orange and white, which also feature in all signs. The east facade of the store is also the location of most of the architectural detailing (**Figure 4.35**). The entrance vestibule is distinct from the rest of the building in terms of architectural members and materials. This part of the facade incorporates large windows, pilasters, an entablature band, and a projecting cornice. Below the entablature

band, the pilasters and window frames are covered in split-face concrete block while, above, both pilasters and the false front wall are tilt-up concrete panels.³⁸⁸ The split-face concrete block is darker than the tan of the walls, while the cornice moldings are brown. The fascia sign over the main entrance features illuminated letters that are five feet in height and orange in colour. It is worth noting that the pilaster rhythm on the entrance façade does not line up with that of the interior posts. Instead, it appears to follow the exterior rhythm established by the shopping centre and to serve as a visual means to accentuate the off-centre main entrance, which is further marked with a false front.

The Home Depot in Saanich is unique among Home Depot locations and big-box stores generally on Southern Vancouver Island. It neither occupies a stand-alone site nor is part of a power centre. Instead it is directly attached to an older enclosed mall, making it in fact the first Home Depot in Canada to be built as an anchor store in a shopping centre.³⁸⁹ University Heights Shopping Centre was built in 1969 and underwent significant renovations in 1975, 1980, and 1986.³⁹⁰ For both the owners of the mall, the Lai Family, and city planners, the big-box store presented an opportunity to revitalize University Heights.³⁹¹ Saanich planners hoped the big-box store would revitalize “an aging and somewhat outdated shopping centre.”³⁹² Part of its approval required the store to maintain interior access from the shopping centre, which it has done. The Home Depot proposal also included the addition of significant trees and landscaping to the site, which enhances the entire mall. One other major improvement Saanich planners identified was a reorganization of the shipping docks in the anchor location: by moving them from the

³⁸⁸ See Figure 4.25, Elevation Plans, Notes.

³⁸⁹ “Special Committee of the Whole, Minutes”, City of Saanich (October 26, 2004), 2.

³⁹⁰ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Volume One (1986), 3.34-3.35.

³⁹¹ Findlow, *Planning Report* (2004), 1.

³⁹² Neil Findlow, *Planning Report – File DPA2004-00025* City of Saanich (October 8, 2004), 8.

west to the north side of the building, the Home Depot eliminated the regular blocking of the mall's fire lane along the west wall by delivery trucks, which had happened regularly with Zellers.³⁹³

The Home Depot big-box store actually reduced the amount of commercial space in the shopping centre by 1,171 sq. ft., something not associated with NRFs. This point illustrates the value of approaching each retail site individually and, following in the mode of Morris, discovering their unique and surprising characteristics. The store is the chain's second location in the CRD, and it differs in scale and stock from the store in Langford. That location is a stand-alone big-box store of 120,086 square feet with a garden centre of 14, 435 square feet, offering the chain's full line of product stock.³⁹⁴ The University Heights is much smaller in size and stock. Home Depot considers it an "urban store", a smaller version of its suburban format, with more focus on interior design than on construction materials.³⁹⁵ This one is intended to serve a local and not a regional market, something its stock strategies also reflect.³⁹⁶ The location carries nearly all of the chain's product stock, though in smaller volumes, with exceptions in the inventory of lumber and building supplies.³⁹⁷ The interior layout is a smaller copy of that of the suburban format, while still following the same organization of aisles and stock locations. Home Depot considers urban stores to be its means of expansion into smaller markets, and also, with their smaller, "softer" appearance, of drawing in more female consumers.³⁹⁸ In 2006, the company announced its aim to make their new stores less

³⁹³ Ibid, 7.

³⁹⁴ Figures provided by Grant Leibscher, Department of Planning, City of Langford (January 2008).

³⁹⁵ Bruce Constantineau, "Home Depot 'lite' created for urban sites", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (January 15, 2005), F3.

³⁹⁶ Findlow (2004), 3.

³⁹⁷ Findlow (2004), 3.

³⁹⁸ Constantineau (2005), F3.

intimidating by lessening their physical size, increasing the degree of interior finish, and include showrooms for the display of décor and merchandise – journalist Marina Strauss identifies this trend as “the next big thing”.³⁹⁹ In the study area, the “urban” big-box store is certainly a candidate for that title.

In the case of the Saanich store, several approaches were taken to lessen the intimidating look and feel of the usual suburban big-box store. The store features a glazed vestibule that admits natural light to the store, and a façade decorated with pilasters and an entablature band. What is most striking, especially in the Planning Report and minutes of the Saanich Advisory Design Panel, is how the developers minimized the use of Home Depot’s corporate trademarks and signs in their design.⁴⁰⁰ For example, the peaked false front that is a feature of its suburban stores and carries the main fascia sign, as in Langford (**Figure 4.36**) and in Nanaimo (**Figure 4.37**), was replaced with a flat wall and cornice in the Saanich store (**Figure 4.38**). Also unlike the Langford store, which is painted white with an orange entablature band that wraps the entire building, the Saanich Home Depot is tan with a white and orange entablature band only on the facade. The Saanich store has only five signs: the main one above the entrance, and signs marking the nursery, loading area, contractor pick-up, and tool-rental centre. The name “Home Depot” appears only once on the exterior of the building. By reducing the scale and corporate branding of the store, and adapting its prototype to an existing shopping centre location, planners of the Saanich Home Depot made it visually less conspicuous than the Langford store.

³⁹⁹ Marina Strauss, “Cavernous but cozy stores the next big thing”, *The Globe and Mail* (November 16, 2006), B11.

⁴⁰⁰ Findlow (2004), 4; “Case #24.04 Saanich Advisory Design Panel Minutes” (August 19, 2004), 2-4.

A review of the development plans and of the built site reveals that big-box store architecture is a mix of standard and unique features. This makes the buildings like those of any other retail format. In their physical and social production, despite their prototypes, big-box stores develop through an architectural dialectic of homo-and-heterogeneous forms and features. This makes the resulting buildings routine, everyday, and all the same, also unique and all different. The operation of contradictory discourses in the production of big-box stores is one characteristic that makes them suited to spatial and Marxist analysis.

The discussion of the Home Depot site has thus far concentrated on the building's exterior forms and immediate context. The architectural and social spaces of the building, which constitute the interior, need to also be described and interpreted. Using Zevi's terminology, the building has thus far been described and contextualized in terms of the urban environment, decorative detailing, and scale.⁴⁰¹ This leaves the following issues to consider: volumetrics (the space formed by enclosing walls) and architectural space (the living experience of the interior). These are distinct forms of social space, which building users perceive in the physical layout of interior solids and voids, and in the directed and undirected actions the arrangement facilitates.

In terms of volumetrics, Home Depot encloses a space that is tall, broad, and rectangular. The interior is oriented along the long arms of the west and east curtain walls, with the latter marked by windows and points of access. With a thirty-foot ceiling, much of the building's volume is vertical and beyond direct contact by consumers. It is also, of course, filled with product shelves and displays that shape the interior into a grid of long, narrow aisles. In the case of Home Depot, the shelves and aisles are arranged

⁴⁰¹ Zevi (1993), 73-74.

east to west, and are crossed by a central, wide aisle that runs on a north-south axis the length of the building, dividing the space into two halves. This central aisle facilitates the movement of building users who otherwise would have to walk the full length of each product aisle when making their way through the store. Visually, the central aisle effectively breaks up the lines of product aisles, making them appear shorter, an important consideration given the size of the store.

As mentioned, much of the building's volume is literally beyond the reach of most building users. It is not, however, out of sight. In terms of function or Zevi's "architectural space", the interior contains visual as well as physical experiences. The visual space is primarily vertical, associated with the ceiling height, while the physical space is primarily horizontal, linked to the floor. The vertical and horizontal spaces, in terms of solids and voids, are articulated by the visible structure and the use of colour. Inside Home Depot, the curtain walls and floor are unpainted, grey concrete, while the posts and beams, along with the trusses, ceiling panels, and service piping, are painted white. The shelves are bright orange, and contain both packaged and unpackaged commodities. This relates to the previously mentioned combination of storage and display used in big-box stores. In case of Home Depot, only the bottom third of the shelves are readily accessible to consumers, leaving the rest for display and storage.

Zevi suggests that experience of architectural space can be articulated in terms of "rhythm, scale, balance, [and] mass".⁴⁰² In the discussion of Home Depot, scale, balance, and mass have been considered in the site description. Rhythm is particularly important when considering the experience of space, especially in a big-box store. The shelves and aisles set the rhythm within the space enclosed by the walls, floor, and ceiling. Breaking

⁴⁰² Zevi (1993), 23.

up the rectangular space into a grid, the shelves and aisles establish the alternating pattern of solids and voids that determines movement through the interior. This conveys the architectural rhythm of the interior. Despite the steady unfolding of diverse commodity categories alongside the aisles, the spaces themselves are not altered. The repetitive is crucial here for it connects the physical experience to the store's mode of retailing and consumption. The stores, in their plans and numbers, are repetitive, illustrating the format's success as retail architecture's "Next Big Thing".

The design characteristic that strongly relates to Zevi's architectural space, Herman's "Next Big Thing", and Lefebvre's production of space and everyday life is repetition. In chapter three we saw that Lefebvre argued repetition is symptomatic of the reproduction of the relations of production, and can be interpreted as evidence of, in the words of Marx, capitalism's "incessant renewal".⁴⁰³ Repetition in commercial architecture is a common feature, one connected to function and, in the case of retail, branding. The big-box store is meant to be a reproducible format, to be repeated according to retailer and consumer trends. This accounts for the general sameness attributed to the appearance and function of NRFs. While it is true that the floor plans, surface designs, and interior layout of goods are repetitive, as in the case of Home Depot, it is also true that each site is singular in location, context, and detailing. This is an architectural dialectic present in each NRF. As a retail chain, Home Depot also uses repetition as a market strategy. Their growth across North America is based on expanding their operating business model into markets of sufficient size to support them. So it is that cities or towns of a certain size in North America can expect to become home to Home Depot.

⁴⁰³ Marx (1909), 620.

Repetition features in the scale and appearance of the store itself. As discussed above, the exterior of the Saanich Home Depot departs in certain ways from other locations, though it retains sufficient commonalities so as to be recognizable as a Home Depot. The interior is less different, making it more repetitive. The ground plan used a square module-unit of four posts multiplied to form the building's rectangular frame (**Figure 4.29**). The structural members of the frame, the posts, beams, and trusses, are repeated throughout the interior. The locations of products and the shelves that display/store them follow a standardized layout used in every Home Depot. The use of standardized locations and product shelves is found in all NRF chains, which allows building users to become familiar with the organization of the store. The physical experience of Home Depot is determined by the range of products and their corresponding aisles, which result in consumers moving in linear fashion up and down the rows of goods. In the same way a dumb-bell plan is designed to make consumers pass as many stores as possible, the big-box store is designed to expose consumers to as many goods as possible. This occurs regardless of the particular commodity for which they are shopping. This exposure to goods can yield unplanned or impulse purchases, or simply suggest ideas for future purchases. Each visit to the big-box store presents reasons or motivations for another visit. In organizing and displaying the store's entire inventory, big-box stores facilitate the reproduction of consumption as much as the immediate production of consumption.

The preceding site description, derived from site visits, plans, elevations, and photographs of the Saanich Home Depot, presents a representative example of the big-box store in general and in the study area. Differences exist between the different types of

big-box stores, discussed below, and many are related to stock category. However, there are several elements unique to this development. That points to an architectural dialectic operating in the production of the big-box store – they all appear the same, yet they are also entirely unique in form. This dialectic sees development models and corporate building prototypes meeting community plans, municipal zoning regulations, and regional growth strategies. The building that results from the development process is uniquely shaped by its physical location and social context; it often has been made to incorporate elements put forward during the development approval process by planners, municipal councilors, neighbourhood associations, and protesters. In Lefebvrian terms, the spatial practices and representations of space contained within the development proposal are altered in the development process by representational spaces – that is the unforeseen input of institutions and people not connected to the proposal. This is how urban space in fact is produced in Canadian municipalities. In the case of a controversial development, such as a big-box store, these representational spaces yield, when completed, unique examples of standard prototypes. Despite initial appearances, each NRF is customized to its location via the development process.

Building Types

The big-box store is a retail building type that has been built with several variations on Southern Vancouver Island since 1992. The buildings have, in their appearance and distribution, similarities to boomtown stores and shopping centres. These connect NRFs to the architectural history of retail, and include postmodern interpretations of past commercial styles. The architectural language of the boomtown store and street is

visible in the big-box store's use of false-fronts, cut-corner entrances, and one-part commercial blocks. It is their scale, location, and materials that make them different from their boomtown predecessors. As noted earlier in this chapter, Longstreth has described the one-part commercial block as "a simple box with a decorated façade and thoroughly urban in its overtones".⁴⁰⁴ His description is partially applicable to NRFs; the buildings are certainly "simple box[es]" with "decorated façade[s]". However, the big-box store is not "thoroughly urban" in its appearance, location, and function, but is instead, thoroughly suburban. This is where the influence of the shopping centre may be detected.

In terms of Longstreth's typology, big-box stores are either free-standing stores or are one-part commercial blocks. Similar to shopping centres, the free-standing big-box store adapts the ideal of home and garden to an automotive clientele, creating the stand-alone retailer set in a parking lot.⁴⁰⁵ When the big-box store is set in a power centre, a grouping of NRFs, it approximates a one-part commercial block, an effect achieved by creating a long building with a series of individual facades and entrances that open to the parking lot. Canadian geographer Brian Lorch has described the power centre "as a regional mall turned inside-out", thereby turning the enclosed shopping centre back into the strip-mall.⁴⁰⁶ This turn "back to the street" reverses the earlier turn away seen in the creation of enclosed shopping centres; however, in the case of the power centre, "the street" is in fact a parking lot. Unlike its predecessors designed for consumers arriving on foot or via public transit, NRFs are oriented and scaled to shoppers in automobiles.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 54.

⁴⁰⁵ Longstreth (1987), 126.

⁴⁰⁶ Quoted in Hernandez, Simmons (2006), 471.

An important forerunner in the design and appearance of the big-box store is the suburban department store, located in shopping centres. The sites built by Sears, Roebuck and Company are emphasized by Longstreth – he describes the entry of the formerly mail-order driven Sears into “direct retail” in the 1920s as a key moment, where the automobile started to impact and reshape retail, and subsequently urban, planning.⁴⁰⁷ These Sears locations, known as “Sears A Stores”, containing up to 100,000 square feet of floor space, were set back from the street in the centre of large parking lots and marketed as locations for working and middle-class shoppers to purchase staple goods in a mainly self-service setting.⁴⁰⁸ Of their architectural appearance Longstreth writes: “many of Sears’s first retail stores were somewhat utilitarian in character inside and out, appearing much like the warehouses from which the company’s mail order business was conducted.”⁴⁰⁹ While the store interiors would come to resemble those of other department stores, their exteriors did not; the first windowless Sears A Store opened in Englewood, Illinois, in 1933. These designs were emulated by department stores and shopping centres. This process of emulation is apparent when the architectural pattern of the Sears A Store is summarized: large, windowless, self-service-format stores surrounded by parking lots that emphasized bargains and basics. The Hudson’s Bay Company location in Victoria’s Mayfair Shopping Centre, itself formerly a Woodward’s location, is an example of this building type in the study area (**Figure 4.39**). The big-box store continues this emulation by either reproducing the characteristic architectural forms of the Sears A Store, or by occupying former department store anchors. This was done by Wal-Mart, which expanded into Canada in 1994 by buying and adapting pre-existing

⁴⁰⁷ Longstreth (1997), 119-120.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

Woolco shopping centre locations.⁴¹⁰ The recently shuttered Wal-Mart in the Duncan Mall is an example of such a former Woolco site (**Figure 4.3**).

While “big-box store” can be used, in general, to describe the architectural format, there are different NRF types. I have chosen to concentrate on the three big-box store types most commonly encountered on Southern Vancouver Island: category killers, discount department stores, and warehouse clubs.⁴¹¹ The differences between these three types are size and category of merchandise. The three types constitute the largest NRF formats that have been built in the three regional districts and are the most recognizable and characteristic form of big-box store architecture. At present there are seventy big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island that fall within these three types, the characteristics of which are presented in detail below.

Warehouse Clubs

Of the three NRF types, the warehouse club is the largest and simplest big-box store format. In terms of building and operation, it also has the most in common with its architectural and retail predecessors: the warehouse and the wholesale trade. With buildings of up to 135,000 square feet and correspondingly large parking lots, warehouse club locations can require as much as fifteen acres of land.⁴¹² The buildings can be the most spare of all NRFs, as is evident from the blank concrete curtain walls, small entrance, and minimal decorative marking of one former warehouse club in Saanich (**Figure 4.40**). Along with concrete floors, exposed structural elements, and warehouse steel shelves, warehouse clubs feature minimal retail display. Goods are left on shipping

⁴¹⁰ Mitchell (2006), 16; Spector (2005), 127.

⁴¹¹ Hayden (2004), 24, 30, 80; Lyon (1994), 31-36.

⁴¹² Spector (2005), 49; Curran (2002), 10.

pallets or in cardboard boxes and moved about by forklifts, which operate amid consumers. The physical setting is extremely close to that of a wholesale warehouse, which conveys an atmosphere of no-frills exclusivity – a place to purchase items with the least amount of mark-up and hassle. This impression of special access to inexpensive goods is furthered by the use of membership requirements. Membership is a retail strategy that dates to the 1940s, when it was adopted by U.S. discount retailers, in emulation of the wholesale trade, as a means to evade government price controls and anti-discount laws.⁴¹³ The historical background of membership and wholesale clubs will be discussed in chapter five. In the case of the two chains operating clubs on Southern Vancouver Island, Costco has an enforced membership policy while Real Canadian Wholesale Club does not. There are currently three warehouse clubs operating in the study area: two Costco locations, in Nanaimo and Langford, and one Real Canadian Wholesale Club, in Esquimalt. As previously stated, the parent company of Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Loblaws, recently closed locations in Nanaimo and Saanich as part of a national restructuring plan.⁴¹⁴

The Real Canadian Wholesale Club is the smaller of the two warehouse club chains, something reflected in its buildings (**Figure 4.41**). Housed in a 50,000-square foot, one-storey building, the Real Canadian Wholesale Club in Esquimalt opened in 1996. The exterior, concrete-block walls of the store are blank, save for white and blue stripes that converge on the store's entrance, also marked by a small metal canopy (**Figure 4.42**). Unlike the relatively broad stock strategy of Costco, Real Canadian Warehouse Club focuses almost entirely on food products. This is unsurprising as the

⁴¹³ Spector (2005), 14-17.

⁴¹⁴ George Weston Limited 2007 Annual Report, 82.

Club's parent company is Loblaw, the largest grocery chain in Canada, and one which also operates the Real Canadian Superstore, a NRF variation of the supermarket. The focus on food product also recalls the origins of discount retailers as industry wholesalers, with a stock strategy mostly aimed at professional food service supply.⁴¹⁵ This is reflected by the single size of goods available for sale, such as meat-products in case-lots and restaurant-size bags of pre-made onion rings and french fries. As mentioned, the Real Canadian Wholesale Club offers free membership, a strategy the store uses to compete with its much larger rival.

Costco's two locations are among the largest retail buildings in the study area; both are stand-alone, one-storey buildings made up of curtain walls and roofs supported by structural steel frames. The two locations generally follow the same ground plan and exterior design. In both cases, the main points of access are at the buildings south-west corner, marked by cut-corner entrances and loggias surmounted by tall false-fronts that carry the main signs (**Figure 4.43-4.44**). These loggias, similar to those found in strip-malls (**Figure 4.12**), extend along the west curtain wall and function as exterior shelters for shopping carts (**Figure 4.45**). As images of the two clubs illustrate, the locations do differ, however, in size, age, and materials. The Nanaimo and Langford stores enclose 110,000 square feet and 135,394 square feet respectively.⁴¹⁶ The Nanaimo Costco opened in 1993, only the second big-box store to open in the RDN (**Figure 4.46-4.47**). The building features curtain walls of studs and metal siding, with the roofline cornice marked by red flashing. Costco's location in Langford opened in 1998 and was the first NRF built in the Millstream Road node located to the north of the Island Highway (**Figure 4.48-**

⁴¹⁵ Gelbtuch (1996), 176-177.

⁴¹⁶ Information provided by Planning Departments of Nanaimo and Langford.

4.49). The building consists of concrete block masonry walls, organized and dressed in a postmodern classicism of squared pilasters and multiple stringcourses. These elements carry the design and visual rhythm established at the entrance loggia by the pillars and entablature. The pilasters and stringcourses are visually emphasized through the use of different coloured and textured masonry.

Discount Department Stores

A discount department store is the NRF that offers the broadest stock range of all NRFs, with between 50,000 and 80,000 products.⁴¹⁷ More than the warehouse club, the discount department store is closer to older retail formats and consumer practices; specifically the five-and-dime and the department store. It is the scale of the stores and their inventory that makes them unique. They combine the strategies of one-stop shopping and discount prices on a colossal scale. The best known examples in Canada are K-Mart, Zellers, Wal-Mart, with the latter being dominant in the study area. Canadian Tire, an older, pre-NRF retailer, combines a discount department store with elements of a category killer.

The discount department store uses the standard big-box structure and forms, although their interior spaces are considerably different. The stores contain much less vertical space, having either low or drop ceilings, and feature some degree of interior finishing, such as linoleum floor tiles and painted walls. What the stores lack in vertical space, they make up for with floor space. Wal-Mart has four locations in the study area

⁴¹⁷ Marina Strauss, "A looming warehouse war keeping Costco on its toes", *Globe and Mail* (October 18, 2003), B4.

that range in size from 66,000 to 171,000 sq ft of retail space.⁴¹⁸ The smaller stores, such as the recently shuttered location in the Duncan Mall, are former Woolco locations, while the larger sites, such as the Supercentre in North Cowichan, are new constructions. In terms of their exterior treatments, the store façades include false-fronts with cornices that carry the main fascia signs; in Nanaimo (**Figure 4.50**) and Langford (**Figure 4.51**) the false fronts include a gable, which is not present in the former Duncan and North Cowichan stores. Discount department stores employ decorative colour schemes and architectural details to enhance their visibility and reinforce their brand. Wal-Mart has used red, white, and blue on the exterior of their stores for this branding effect. While the signs and colours are consistently used, there are also unique parts to Wal-Mart's locations. The Langford location features a porch and loggia along the length of the main façade, with square pillars dressed in smooth rock. The spatial rhythm of the pillars is carried along the sides of building in the form of pilasters and string-courses that are painted on the east and west façades (**Figure 4.52**). The discount department store type has been expanded recently with Wal-Mart's supercentre format, which combines a discount department store with a supermarket. Compared to Wal-Mart locations in Nanaimo and Langford, the North Cowichan supercentre is taller and broader, with different exterior forms, colours, and signs (**Figures 4.53-4.54**). For example, the entrances are framed by tall rectangular piers dressed in masonry courses of concrete block, and a slab-like lintel that projects over the space (**Figure 4.55**). The interior of the supercentre is similar to the discount department store in terms of surfaces, shelves, and lights. The increased floor size of the supercentre accentuates the repetition of structure

⁴¹⁸ Peter Rusland, "A giant awakens at Cowichan Commons", *Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial* (April 23, 2008), 1; Peter Rusland, "Nicest looking Wal-Mart in Canada taking shape", *Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial* (May 5, 2007), 9.

and architectural space, making the interior appear overwhelming and banal (**Figure 4.56**). This effect of scale on consumers will be considered in chapter five as an element of “value space”.

Category Killers

A category killer, also called a category warehouse store, is retailer specializing in one category or market area, such as home supplies, stationary goods, or furniture. The name refers to their reputation for dominating their market categories and running their competitors out of business.⁴¹⁹ In the study area, the leading category killers in terms of size of buildings and operations are: Home Depot, Canadian Tire, Rona, The Brick, Chapters-Indigo, Staples, Michael’s, Lay-z-Boy, Petcetera, and Future Shop. The Toys R Us store in Washington, DC, is usually identified as the first category killer, opening in 1957.⁴²⁰ Mitchell argues the chain only “became” a big-box store in 1978 after company ownership was taken public, and an aggressive expansion strategy, funded by stockholders, was adopted.⁴²¹ Canadian Tire, founded in 1927, also has claims to being the first category killer; an innovator in catalogue retail, Canadian Tire developed into a chain specializing in tires and automotive supplies.⁴²² As in the rest of Canada, category killers are the predominant NRF type in the study area.

While primarily associated with large chain stores, category killers come in a range of sizes, with some, such as Michael’s and Petcetera, under 20,000 square feet.⁴²³ The sizes can also change. Canadian Tire’s first wave of NRFs in the 1990s featured big-

⁴¹⁹ Hayden (2004), 30; Lyon (1995), 31.

⁴²⁰ Chung (2001), 35; Spector (2005) 25-28.

⁴²¹ Mitchell (2006), 9.

⁴²² Ian Brown, *Freewheeling: The Feuds, Broods, and Outrageous Fortunes of the Billes Family and Canada’s Favourite Company* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1989), 19-20.

⁴²³ Laplante (2000),5.

box stores of 57,000 square feet with 50,000 products; the chain's new stores, such as one under construction in North Cowichan, will enclose 130,000 square feet and feature 100,000 products.⁴²⁴ Home Depot and Rona compete in the category of hardware and home building supplies, and both employ buildings of different sizes. Home Depot's locations in Langford and Nanaimo are 135,000 and 130,000 square feet respectively and follow the model seen in other Canadian and American suburbs.⁴²⁵ Rona's strategy has been to expand using three different store formats: specialty outlet, big-box store, and superstore.⁴²⁶ This is evident on Southern Vancouver Island, where three new Rona locations are each a different size: 22,500 square feet (Cobble Hill); 60,000 square feet (North Cowichan); 100,000 square feet (Langford) (**Figures 4.57-4.59**).⁴²⁷ As previously discussed, Home Depot has also recently begun to open smaller, "urban" stores in Saanich and Victoria. This trend, which was first observed in Montreal and Toronto in 2002, lessens the accuracy of size-definitions for category killers, and illustrates the flexibility of the big-box store in terms of architecture and retailing model.⁴²⁸

The architectural appearances of category killers combine boomtown elements with references to product category. The standard big-box store structure is used to support a variety of facade treatments. The false-front with fascia sign is especially common in category killers. The exterior surfaces and features are meant to reference the product category and to further the visual branding of the stores. The Future Shop, a

⁴²⁴ Harvey Enchin, "Consumer Choice", *Vancouver Sun* (November 23, 2007), A15.

⁴²⁵ Darron Kloster, "Home Depot expansion plans include Vancouver Island locations", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 6, 2006) C2.

⁴²⁶ Marina Strauss, "Rona focuses on three store sizes to take on Home Depot", *The Globe and Mail* (April 7, 2004), B6.

⁴²⁷ See: Carla Wilson, "Rona's western expansion levels home improvement field", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (July 27, 2006), C1; "One down, one to go for Rona in Cowichan Valley", *Cowichan News Leader* (February 17, 2007), 29.

⁴²⁸ Marina Strauss, "Big-box retailers think small in planning latest expansions", *The Globe and Mail* (November 4, 2002), B1/B7.

category killer in electronics, operates big-box stores whose facades combine flat false fronts with steel pillars and lintels, reflective glass surfaces, and tall, red posts (**Figures 4.60-61**). The façade here visually previews the materials, shapes, and colours of the commodities found inside the store - the posts, for example, alluding to radio and cell-phone antenna. Home Outfitters, a category killer in home-furnishings, features a projecting false-front that forms an entrance porch, and curtain walls with colossal pilasters, a string-course, and a simple cornice (**Figures 4.62-63**). As the latter photograph shows, the façade of Home Outfitters also features bay-windows that are used to display merchandise. This is a feature that alludes to the pedestrian-scaled store fronts of previous era, such as found in one-part commercial blocks, where window displays were used to entice customers walking past in the store. In this case, the bay window is only an allusion to retail history. Set in a suburban power centre, Home Outfitters' bay windows are only seen by shoppers walking from their car to the store and back. The utter absence of actual pedestrians, or accidental consumers, makes the windows, along with the sidewalks in a power centre, more symbolic than functional. Another example of a category killer using exterior windows is La-Z-Boy in Saanich, whose facade also features a false front with cornice surmounting a broadly arched entrance-way (**Figures 4.64-6.65**). The second image reveals that the windows continue around the building, although they do overlook a sidewalk but instead landscaping and traffic on Highway 17. La-Z-Boy is distinct from the previous category killers in having a greater emphasis on display, which is traced to another big-box store antecedent, the furniture warehouse or showroom stores; La-Z-Boy calls it stores "furniture galleries". This is another example of big-box store hybridity in structure and operating model.

Power Centres

A power centre is a group of big-box stores which are built together on a common pad, with shared frame, walls, roofs, and parking spaces. The power centre developed almost simultaneously in the US and Canada: the first examples were built in Colma, CA, in 1986, and North York, Ont, in 1987.⁴²⁹ There are now examples of these NRF configurations in each district on Southern Vancouver Island. Described by one author as “discount version of a large regional shopping centre”, the power centre is actually more of a hybrid strip mall, or open-air centre, than an enclosed shopping centre.⁴³⁰ Unlike the regional shopping centres in the study area, power centres do not include interior space or covered sidewalks. They do approximate the forms of the one-part commercial block. However, unlike the one-part commercial block, they are fronted by parking lots and not by sidewalks and downtown streets.

The oldest power centre in the study area is the Island Home Centre in Saanich, which began in 1989 as a shopping centre proposal for an existing warehouse location.⁴³¹ This site developed into a two level centre featuring a strip of small stores, two stand-alone category killers, and a large central structure that houses multiple big-box stores on different levels (**Figure 4.66**). The Island Home Centre is extremely complex for a power centre, mixing different sizes of stores with a site that includes multiple levels of parking, uncharacteristic surface finishing, and even, in the case of the Staples store, mixed building use, combining retail and office space (**Figures 4.67-4.69**). These characteristics are unusual for both power centres and category killers. Two examples in Nanaimo are more representative of the format.

⁴²⁹ Jones, Doucet 499.

⁴³⁰ Lyon (1995), 34

⁴³¹ Ibid, 3-27.

Mary Ellen Crossing in Nanaimo, constructed in 2000 is a power centre that features three category killers: Michaels (arts and crafts), Sleep Country (beds and mattresses), and Petcetera (pet supplies) (**Figure 4.70**).⁴³² Similar to a strip mall, the big-box stores in the power centre share structural and decorative features, from the concrete pad and steel frame to, in this case, columns, niches, and ceramic tiles. While these features unite the stores into a single commercial block, colour, surface forms, and most especially distinctive false fronts and signs differentiate the stores (**Figure 4.71**). The Home Centre, which is located across Highway 1 from Mary Ellen Crossing, is similar in its combination of shared and distinctive features. The power centre has three tenants, Pet Smart (pet supplies), Home Sense (house furnishings), and Home Outfitters (house furnishings), whom are housed in a large and plain structure marked with three entrances (**Figure 4.72**) The exterior walls are divided by an alternating series of vertical grooves and bands, which cross a banding that runs the length of the building, and culminate in a projecting cornice. The vertical bands are surmounted at the level of the cornice with Art Deco-inspired consoles or brackets (**Figure 4.73**)

Lifestyle Centres

Recent trends in the design of NRFs, especially those in power centres, have been towards more public amenities, such as sidewalks and benches, which have come to characterize the lifestyle centre. These configurations are smaller than power centres and host smaller NRFs that are off-price outlets for specialty retailers. Not only are they smaller and geared towards more upscale consumption, but lifestyle centres also incorporate non-NRF facilities such as cafés and restaurants. An example is the

⁴³² Rieper, 281.

Millstream Village Mall that opened in 2006 in Langford. In this case, several well-known brands, including Tommy Hilfiger and La Vie en Rose, are matched with a large grocery store, The Market on Millstream, which stresses organic produce and exotic goods. Unlike a power centre, Millstream Village Mall has NRFs that are not stand-alones, but instead share facades and curtain walls (**Figures 4.74-4.75**). As with power centres, lifestyle centres are very similar to the strip malls and exterior shopping centres of the 1950s; the difference, of course, is in the tenant mix and the architectural details. The Millstream Village Mall features facades and porticoes decorated with bungalow-inspired surfaces and materials, alluding to some of the neighbouring, albeit commercial, buildings (**Figures 4.70-4.71**). When compared to the Home Depot on the other side of Millstream Road, the new mall is much more contextualized than its big-box neighbour. Perhaps, through the lifestyle centre format, the NRF is starting to fit into the community.

Distribution

In their studies of NRF's, scholars with the CSCA emphasize the importance of location and distribution of the stores. Jones and Doucet argue the urban retail landscape is divided into two essential areas: the "central city" and the "outer suburbs and fringe".⁴³³ Traditional downtown flagship stores, large entertainment complexes, high-end specialty malls, along with small independent merchants, are found in the central city. Regional shopping centres, big-box stores, wholesale warehouses, are located in the suburbs and urban fringes. While Jones and Doucet's organization of the retail landscape is generally true of Canadian and American cities, there are of course exceptions. NRF's

⁴³³ Jones, Doucet (1998), 26.

and other suburban building types and operations are expanding into the central city. This has led to smaller and more adaptive versions of the big-box store, such as the downtown Staples in Victoria, and Home Depot in Saanich. Despite these exceptions, nearly all of the NRFs in the study area are located outside central city areas, in the suburbs and fringes around the downtowns of Victoria, Duncan, and Nanaimo. The distribution of NRFs across the retail landscapes of each regional district is related to: retail format; access to transportation infrastructure; proximity to urban markets; local political and zoning climate.

The distribution of big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island has followed both general and unique market considerations. The stores have been developed in different configurations, which I have classified, in the tables below, as follows: stand alone (SA), regional shopping centre (RSC), and power centre (PC). The stand alone site is a free-standing building with its own parking lot and shipping facilities. Big-box stores that are tenants in malls, either as anchor's or as pad locations, are identified as a regional shopping centre configuration. Big-box store strip-malls and lifestyle centres, which share parking and often structures, are identified as power centres. Each regional district has a different mix of configuration as shown below.

The configuration options are directly related to the physical location, the overall scale of the development, and to the pre-existing zoning and planning goals. The location and configuration choice are also determined by the size and history of the retail market, which, in the case of big-box stores, is considered in regional terms. The "urban store" version of Home Depot built in Saanich previously discussed is one example. IKEA provides a further example of how market size can negatively determine location. The

Swedish retailer uses a population of one million plus as the base market size required for one of its show-room stores, and for that reason has yet to open a store on Vancouver Island.⁴³⁴ As previously noted, these locations are, with very few exceptions, found on or adjacent to Highway One. This highway is the single, major transportation artery that connects the three regional districts, and over which stock goods are transported, and consumers travel to the stores.

The political and planning inclinations and aims of municipalities are an important dynamic in NRF location. Planners and politicians can greatly influence, if not determine, the scale and rate of retail development in their municipalities. This influence has been used to achieve different ends, as will be seen in the cases of Langford and Nanaimo. When they first arrived in the 1990s, big-box stores were able to stoke competition between municipalities, often in need of revenue, new development and promises of growth. This is what Harvey calls inner-city competition, and it was something retail chains exploited in order to secure zoning variances and other concessions from city's eager to have them.⁴³⁵ In the most recent NRFs in the study area, the initiative in development seems to have swung in favour of municipal planners, who have received design concessions from the chains, in such areas as project scale, signs and glazing. With fewer locations and new markets in the suburbs and fringes, big-box retailers wanting to enter the central city have been willing to consider a range of requests and requirements in newer developments. The current redevelopment of Saanich's Town and Country Shopping Centre exemplifies this shift in bargaining power, with the

⁴³⁴ Joanne Hatherly, "Vancouver Island wants IKEA", *Nanaimo Daily News* (November 8, 2007), D1.

⁴³⁵ Harvey (1993), 4-5.

concessions and adaptations coming from the developer, representing Wal-Mart, and not the municipality.

Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN)

Big-box stores in the RDN are concentrated in the city of Nanaimo (**Map 2**). The map shows that, with a few exceptions, these NRFs are located in the north end of the city grouped along the Highway 19a (Highway 1's designation north of Nanaimo's downtown). Like Victoria, Nanaimo was home to a substantial pre-NRF retail landscape, which featured a historic downtown retail core and a series of newer shopping centres to the north along the highway. Unlike in Victoria, Nanaimo's downtown core has been in serious decline, particularly in the area of major retail, something that began well in advance of NRFs.

It was an earlier "Next Big Thing", the enclosed shopping centre, which affected this decline. In 1978, the same year three new shopping centres were proposed north of downtown (Woodgrove, Rutherford, and Country Club) and three existing shopping centres were renovating and expanding (Terminal Park, Northbrook, Harwood), Mayor Frank Ney declared "We want to make Nanaimo a great mercantile centre, but we want to do it responsibly...and we don't want to hurt the downtown."⁴³⁶ In the decades that followed, retail development expanded in and around the new shopping centres, and businesses downtown, including those in the central Port Place Mall, began to close down. By 2000, at which time the shopping centres had been joined by several NRFs, independent businesses downtown, including Fletcher Brothers (est. 1894) and The

⁴³⁶ Lawrence Rieper, "Nanaimo Businesses: The Exodus from Downtown and the March to the North", *Nanaimo between Past and Future: Critical Perspectives on Growth, Planning, and the New Nanaimo Centre* (Ed) Eric Ricker (Nanaimo: Friends of Plan Nanaimo, 2005), 273.

Scotch Bakery (est. 1892) had closed and empty store fronts featured throughout the downtown.⁴³⁷ At the time of this writing, this continues to be the case, although the new conference centre and new condominium developments are seen as attempts to revive the downtown core.

In terms of NRFs, the RDN is home to a range of retail configurations. The district has been a pioneering location for NRFs, being the site of Vancouver Island's first big-box store, The Brick (1991), and first power centre, Metral Place (1996).⁴³⁸ Many of the NRFs constructed in the district have been located in the immediate vicinity of older shopping centres, with most concentrated around the Woodgrove Centre (**Map 3**). As the map also shows, the Woodgrove Urban Node area is serviced by two major arteries, Highway 19a (Island Highway) and Highway 19 (Nanaimo Parkway), making the area ideal for big-box store development and retail. While Wal-Mart is part of the shopping centre, the rest of the big-box stores are either stand-alones built along the edges of Woodgrove's parking lot (sometimes called "pad developments"), or housed in power centres that surround the centre site (**Figure 4.17**). The clustering of NRFs in the north end of Nanaimo is similar to the situation that will be examined in Langford, although the downtown core affected will be that of Victoria. The table below (**Table 1**) presents the NRFs, and their configurations, currently in operation in the RDN

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 274.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 275, 280.

Table 1 RDN Locations			
Retailer	Type	Configuration	Municipality
The Brick	CK	SA	Nanaimo
Canadian Tire	CK	RC – Dickinson Crossing	Nanaimo
Chapter's-Indigo	CK	RSC – Woodgrove	Nanaimo
Chapter's Indigo – Coles	CK	RSC - Country Club	Nanaimo
Costco Wholesale	WC	SA	Nanaimo
Future Shop	CK	RSC - Country Club	Nanaimo
Real Canadian Superstore	DDS	SA	Nanaimo
Home Depot	CK	PC - Metral Place	Nanaimo
Home Outfitters	CK	PC - Home Centre	Nanaimo
Home Sense	CK	PC - Home Centre	Nanaimo
Michael's	CK	PC – Mary Ellen Crossing	Nanaimo
Petcetera	CK	PC – Mary Ellen Crossing	Nanaimo
Pet Smart	CK	PC - Home Centre	Nanaimo
Pier I Imports	CK	RSC - Woodgrove	Nanaimo
Sleep Country	CK	PC – Mary Ellen Crossing	Nanaimo
SportChek	CK	RSC - Woodgrove	Nanaimo
Staples Business Depot	CK	RC - Brooks Landing	Nanaimo
Staples Business Depot	CK	PC - Metral Place	Nanaimo
Toys R Us	CK	RSC - Woodgrove	Nanaimo
Wal-Mart	DDS	RSC - Woodgrove	Nanaimo

Cowichan Valley Regional District

Big-box stores in the CVRD are spread along Highway 1, and are divided between the municipalities of Cobble Hill, Duncan, and North Cowichan (**Map 4**). This is the least urbanized of the three regional districts under consideration here, with considerable amounts of agricultural and forestry activity, and several small towns and communities. The two areas of greatest NRF development are in Duncan, specifically the Duncan Mall, and in North Cowichan, specifically the new Cowichan Commons power centre. The table below (**Table 2**) presents the NRFs, and their configurations, in the CVRD, some of which have recently closed.

Table 2 - CVRD Locations			
Retailer	Type	Configuration	Municipality
The Brick	CK	SA	Duncan
Canadian Tire	CK	SA	North Cowichan
Real Canadian Superstore	DDS	SA	Duncan
Rona Specialty Outlet	CK	SA	Cobble Hill
Rona	CK	SA	North Cowichan
Staples Business Depot	CK	RSC – Duncan Mall	Duncan
Wal-Mart	DDS	RSC - Duncan Mall	Duncan

The most significant NRF development in the CVRD is Cowichan Commons Shopping Centre, a long heralded development which opened its first NRF in 2007, and which achieved retail celebrity by becoming home to Wal-Mart's first Supercentre in B.C. in 2008.⁴³⁹ The Wal-Mart location is the retailer's first supercentre to be built in BC, with three more planned for White Rock, Westbank, and Saanich.⁴⁴⁰ Cowichan Commons is a still under-construction 526,000 square foot power centre located on Highway One at Drinkwater Road in the north end of Duncan.⁴⁴¹ Covering an approximately 42 acre site, Cowichan Commons plan calls for twelve stand-alone buildings ranging in size from 4,000 to over 173, 000 square feet, arranged around a common, landscaped parking lot. The power centre is designed for large NRFs to operate alongside small retailers and service-providers, including a bank, café, and hair-dressing salon. The centre is, or will be, home to multiple category killers and one discount department store, along with smaller stores and service providers. Cowichan Commons thus represents another variation on the power centre, which mixes large and small operations and local and international chains.

⁴³⁹ A supercentre (aka hypermarket) combines a discount department store and a grocery store. Peter Rusland, "Massive Wal-Mart a first for B.C." *Business Examiner VI Edition* (January 17, 2008).

⁴⁴⁰ Carla Wilson, "B.C.'s first Wal-Mart supercentre opens", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 24, 2008), B1.

⁴⁴¹ Carla Wilson, "London Drugs to anchor new development", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 4, 2008), B1.

The site was initially developed in 2005 as the Norcross Centre by Watt Ventures.⁴⁴² This was planned as a power centre of 250,000 sq ft, with Quality Foods, London Drugs, Rona, and Home Hardware as its main anchor tenants. However, following initial site preparation at the start of 2005, the Norcross Centre development sat idle for over a year, due to financing challenges, and was finally sold to Shape Properties of Vancouver in July 2006.⁴⁴³ Shape Properties renamed and enlarged the project and changed the tenant mix to include Wal-Mart. By April 4, 2008 the future tenants included, in addition to Wal-Mart and Rona, Canadian Tire, Island Savings Credit Union, Telus Mobility, and Serious Coffee.⁴⁴⁴ As of May 2008, two tenants, Rona and Wal-Mart, have opened operations in Cowichan Commons. More than double the size of the former site in Duncan Mall, the Wal-Mart Supercentre contains a standard discount department store, along with an automobile garage, garden centre, grocery supermarket, pharmacy, and hearing-aid & vision centre. The grocery section alone is the largest supermarket in the entire regional district.⁴⁴⁵

In addition to Cowichan Commons, two other NRF developments are proposed for the CVRD. The first is an \$11 million redevelopment of the Duncan Mall, which would entail new construction, the addition of a multiplex theatre, and the arrival of Winners, the big-box store chain to the region.⁴⁴⁶ The second project envisages a 70,000 square foot strip centre at the site occupied by the Village Green Inn (behind the Duncan

⁴⁴² Andrea Rondeau, "New mall exciting but competition a worry", *Cowichan Valley Citizen* (February 9, 2005), 1,4.

⁴⁴³ Peter Rusland, "RONA store first to open at Commons mall", *Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial* (March 19, 2008).

⁴⁴⁴ Carla Wilson (2008), B1.

⁴⁴⁵ Peter Rusland, "A giant awakens at Cowichan Commons", *Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial* (April 23, 2004).

⁴⁴⁶ Carla Wilson, "London Drugs to anchor new development", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 4, 2008)

Mall), which would include a large liquor store and be anchored by London Drugs.⁴⁴⁷

Both of these proposals are on land owned by Cowichan Tribes and, as such, represent an example in which NRFs are used as vehicles to increase development on First Nations land. That political dynamic will be considered in chapter five.

Capital Regional District

Big-box stores in the CRD are spread along or closely adjacent to Highway 1, and have been built, with one or two exceptions, outside Victoria, in Saanich, Colwood, View Royal, and especially Langford (**Map 5**). Their locations and configurations in the CRD are diverse: stand alone sites, power centres, shopping centre additions, and renovated older buildings. The NRFs that have been built in Victoria are untypical big-box stores in their design and size, while those in Saanich have been mostly attached to older shopping centres (**Map 6**). The central concentration of NRFs in the CRD has occurred in Langford, in two clusters, to the north and south of Highway One (**Map 7**). The table below (**Table 3**) presents the NRFs, and their configurations, in the CRD.

Table 3 - CRD Locations			
Retailer	Type	Configuration	Municipality
The Brick	CK	SA	Saanich
The Brick	CK	RSC – West Shore	Langford
The Brick	CK	SA	Victoria
Canadian Tire	CK	SA	View Royal
Canadian Tire	CK	RSC – University Heights	Saanich
Canadian Tire	CK	SA	Victoria
Canadian Tire	CK	SA	Saanich
Canadian Tire	CK	RSC – West Shore	Langford
Chapter's-Indigo	CK	SA	Victoria
Chapter's-Indigo – Coles	CK	RSC - Bay Centre	Victoria
Chapter's-Indigo – Coles	CK	RSC – West Shore	Langford
Chapter's-Indigo – Smiths	CK	RSC Tillicum	Victoria

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

Costco Wholesale	WC	SA	Langford
Future Shop	CK	PC - Island Home Centre	Victoria
Future Shop	CK	PC - Gateway Station	Langford
Real Canadian Superstore	DDS	RSC – West Shore	Langford
Home Depot	CK	SA	Langford
Home Depot	CK	SC- University Heights	Saanich
Home Outfitters	CK	PC - Gateway Station	Langford
Home Sense	CK	RSC – West Shore	Langford
Michael's	CK	PC - Island Home Centre	Saanich
Michael's	CK	PC - Millstream Village	Langford
Office Depot	CK	SA	Victoria
Petcetera	CK	RSC – Tillicum	Victoria
Pet Smart	CK	PC - Millstream Village	Langford
Pier I Imports	CK	PC - Millstream Village	Langford
Pier I Imports	CK	SA	Victoria
Real Canadian Superstore	DDS	RSC – West Shore	Langford
Real Canadian Warehouse Club	WC	SA	Esquimalt
Rona Home Centre	CK	SA	Victoria
Rona Home and Garden Centre	CK	SA	Langford
Sleep Country	CK	SA	Saanich
Sleep Country	CK	PC - Gateway Station	Langford
Sleep Country	CK	SC - Broadmead Village	Saanich
SportChek	CK	PC - Island Home Centre	Saanich
SportChek	CK	RSC - Bay Centre	Victoria
Staples	CK	PC - Island Home Centre	Saanich
Staples	CK	SA	Langford
Staples	CK	SA	Victoria
Toys R Us	CK	RSC – Mayfair	Victoria
Wal-Mart	DDS	RSC – Town and Country	Victoria
Wal-Mart	DDS	SA - West Shore	Langford

In the case of the CRD, we can get a clear picture of the retail landscape through the two volumes of the *Retail Centre Inventory*, published in 1986 and again in 1989.⁴⁴⁸ The inventory lists all retail centres in the CRD with a minimum of 10,000 square feet, which include on-site parking.⁴⁴⁹ The second edition mainly updated the first, incorporating locations built after 1986, and re-tabulated the comparative regional data. In both inventories, Victoria is the dominant municipality. By 1989 it accounted for over

⁴⁴⁸ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Vol 1 (Regional Information Service: CRD, 1986); *Retail Centre Inventory*, Vol 2 (Regional Information Service: CRD, 1989).

⁴⁴⁹ *Retail Centre Inventory*, Vol 2 (1989), iii. Reflecting the influence of the US, shopping centres and other retail buildings are still described in terms of Imperial measurements.

41% of retail centres, although much of this was due to the amounts of retail space in the region's three largest centres: the Victoria Eaton Centre, Mayfair, and Hillside.⁴⁵⁰

Following Victoria's 1.7 million square feet of retail space was Saanich with 1.3 million square feet; Langford, at the time, featured just 321,000 square feet, two thirds of it in a single regional centre, the Can West Shopping Centre.⁴⁵¹ But the regional focus of retail space began to shift dramatically with the arrival of big-box stores in Langford in 1998. It is worth noting in the second edition the presence of the Island Home Centre in Saanich, which had only been approved in 1989 and was classified as a shopping centre, a site that was later converted into a power centre.⁴⁵²

Now, the centre for NRF development in the CRD is Langford, which has been labeled in the press the "Big-Box Capital of Vancouver Island."⁴⁵³ Langford covers 42 square kilometers, and has a population of close to 19,000, living on farms and in subdivisions.⁴⁵⁴ Well known for its pro-development City Council, the city is home to the majority of big-box stores in the CRD. Six-term mayor Stewart Young is a growth-machine politician well known for vigorously courting retail developers. He has been outspoken in his impatience regarding with impact studies and the kind of protracted consultation that accompanies development. He told one reporter: "Democracy kills free enterprise. The most important thing for any politician is to get things done."⁴⁵⁵ With its streamlined, fast-track approval process, Langford has become home to a litany of NRFs that includes Costco, Home Depot, Staples, Future Shop, Home Outfitters, Canadian

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, 1-3.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 1-8, 1-9.

⁴⁵² Ibid, 3-27.

⁴⁵³ Judith Lavoie, "West ready for boom in building", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (August 20, 1997), A1.

⁴⁵⁴ "Capital Regional District 2001 Statistics", *2000 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, Capital Regional District, Victoria, 2001. 6.

⁴⁵⁵ Jody Paterson, "Langford reborn", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 21, 2002), C7.

Tire, Rona, The Brick, Great Canadian Super Store, and Wal-Mart. In terms of architecture, Langford provides an excellent range of examples of recently constructed NRFs, as stand-alones and in groups, concentrated in the two areas: around Millstream Road north of Highway 1, and the Westshore Town Centre (formerly CanWest Mall), south of Highway 1.

Langford's big-box stores have their origins in 1997, just three years after the municipality was incorporated. Langford's first city council, led by Mayor Young, was dominated by growth-machine advocates who actively sought out new business development for the city.⁴⁵⁶ One of their goals was to bring in money needed for infrastructure and other urban improvements - at the time, specifically new sewers - without having to raise property taxes.⁴⁵⁷ One solution they chose was to promote large retail development around the established CanWest shopping centre and on Millstream Road north of the Highway 1. The latter area had been recently transformed by a new highway interchange, making it highly desirable to NRFs. The first big-box retailer in the Millstream Road area was Costco, whose development was approved by council in April 1998.⁴⁵⁸ Construction was delayed by environmentalists who chained themselves to construction machinery to protest the loss of a local ecosystem.⁴⁵⁹ The land proposed for the warehouse club development included five hectares of Garry Oak meadow, along with numerous arbutus trees.⁴⁶⁰ At one anti-Costco rally in Langford in 1998, a protestor held a sign that read: "Stop the Nanaimoization of Victoria", in reference to Nanaimo's

⁴⁵⁶ Norman Gidney, "The New Langford: Model of Livability", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 22, 2005), B1.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*; Lavoie (1997).

⁴⁵⁸ City of Langford, "Minutes of the Regular Meeting of Council", (April 20, 1998).

⁴⁵⁹ Bill Cleverley (2000) A2.

⁴⁶⁰ Curran (2002), 10.

already established reputations as Vancouver Island's city of shopping centres and sprawl.⁴⁶¹ Ten years later, anyone protesting an NRF development might be expected to hold a sign reading "Stop the Langfordization of...(insert city name here)". Despite this controversial beginning, other big-box stores followed Costco to Langford: Home Depot (1999), Staples (2000), Future Shop (2001), and Home Outfitters (2002). Surprisingly, opposition was muted during public hearings for Home Depot although the project would be built over four hectares of arbutus and fir forest.⁴⁶² As Mayor Young continued to argue that big-box stores are funding city projects, including the acquisition of parkland, Millstream Road became the centre of value retailing, and value consumption, in the CRD.

The Langford's NRFs are now a fixed part of the retail landscape of the CRD. In Langford, city officials continue to laud big-box stores as economic engines of urban redevelopment and improved amenities. In 2005, Langford planner Rob Buchan led a workshop at a conference of the Planning Institute of BC titled "Leveraging Opportunity for Community Benefit", on the lessons to be learned from Langford's negotiations with value retailers.⁴⁶³ Buchan, like Mayor Young, argued that the economic contributions of the NRFs counter-balance any of their perceived negatives. He suggested that while the stores may be ugly, they help pay for the city's first public art purchases.⁴⁶⁴ This promotion of the "Langford Model" received support from McGill University's Avi Friedman. A recognized national expert on urban planning, Friedman applauded Mayor Young and the urban improvements achieved in Langford that were funded by business

⁴⁶¹ Martha Tropea, "From corner stores to malls" *Nanaimo Daily News* (August 11, 2006) A3.

⁴⁶² *Ibid*; Dutton (1998).

⁴⁶³ Norman Gidney, "The New Langford: Model of Livability", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (April 22, 2005), B1.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

taxes.⁴⁶⁵ After touring the Millstream Road area, Friedman suggested adding residential floors to the NRFs to create density and vibrancy. This suggestion was built, in part, on other existing and proposed mixed-use retail-residential buildings, though whether such floors are ever built onto Langford's Costco or Home Depot remains to be seen.

Summary

Big-box stores are classified according to size, merchandise, retail format, and locational context. The three regional districts of Southern Vancouver Island contain examples of nearly all the NRF types that have appeared in North America. With the Wal-Mart Superstore to the CVRD, another new format has recently joined the retail landscape of the island. They may be bland, but the big-box stores of Southern Vancouver Island present a subtle variety in appearance and location. The general form - a massive, horizontal one-part commercial block - is repeated, but the more one examines these outlets the more unique details emerge. A review of the images provided in this study, for example, shows that each operation employs distinctive colour schemes and surface treatments. Despite the reputation for functional efficiency, the big-box stores are decorated and designed to appease planners and appeal to consumers. Their locations tend to stick to highways or interchanges, but NRFs have been built in more urban sites, too.

The aim of this chapter was to define and describe, in terms of architectural appearance and geographical distribution, the value architecture of Southern Vancouver Island. The analysis of retailers and consumers, and the production of social space, in the

⁴⁶⁵ Joanne Hatherly, "Thinking outside the box", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (Feb. 20, 2006), B3.

next chapter will build upon the formats defined and spaces located here. It is clear however at this point, that big-box stores are neither uniform nor entirely predictable in appearance and distribution. One feature that is true of all NRFs is the use of repetition in terms of form, and of location. As previously stated, repetition points to the role played by big-box stores, along with their retailers and consumers, in the active reproduction of normative economic and social practices.

Chapter Five: Value Retailing, Consumption, and Space

Value architecture is the building format and location for “value retailing”, “value consumption”, and “value space”, terms that will be defined and discussed below. This chapter will describe and interpret the practices of retailing and consumption as they exist in value architecture today, and how together these three value operations produce, consume, and reproduce (or “reconsume”) a unique social space – “value space”. In Lefebvrian terms, this is a perceived, conceived, and lived space in society that is defined by economic and cultural function. Value space is the social and spatial product of big-box store development. It consists of the spatial practices, representational spaces, and representations of space perceptible in the building types and retail formats discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will consider the modes of retailing and consumption currently practiced in big-box stores. As with the discussion of value architecture, the traditional and innovative approaches of value retailing and consumption will be emphasized.

Value space is not limited to retailing and consumption. It has also affected urban politics, planning, and development, often in controversial ways. A common criticism of NRFs, as discussed in chapter one, is that they are homogenous, and thus have the capacity to erode a community’s distinct and unique appearance. The repetitive practices of retail development and operations can visually and culturally reduce a sense of place, replacing it with a sense that the area is “like everywhere else”. Lefebvre argued that repetition is symptomatic of capitalism’s reproduction. Repetition also characterizes reconsumption, and NRFs are, in their built forms, locations, social function, highly repetitive. This chapter will argue that NRFs are central locations for the production,

consumption, and reconsumption of the normative relations of economic and social capitalism on Southern Vancouver Island. These relations are dialectical, and operate within value architecture, value retailing, and value consumption. I will consider these operations in terms of the following dialectical pairs: global and local; spectacular and mundane; scarcity and abundance; obsolescence and durability; value and waste. These pairs will be used to organize my articulation of value space in examples from the study area. I argue that big-box stores are engines of retailing and of urban development; they are also, in the post-industrial era of local communities, key locations for the practices and reproduction of capitalism. The ideas, and values, of NRFs have already had impacts, some planned, some not, on the politics and planning of all three regional districts. NRFs, in all their types and formats are symbolic and real engines of the global and local economy, and of consumer society, what Lefebvre called the “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption”.⁴⁶⁶

Value Retailing

Retail activity is among the most influential factors in the economy and social organization of Canada. In 2000, commercial activities, defined as businesses serving consumers, became the single most important component of the Canadian economy, measured in jobs, capital investment, and contributions to gross domestic product, at almost 40%.⁴⁶⁷ Figures from 2004 showed these numbers increase to 47.9% (jobs) and

⁴⁶⁶ Lefebvre (2000), 68.

⁴⁶⁷ James Simmons, Shizue Kamikihara, *Commercial Activity in Canada, 2000* (Toronto: Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, 2001), 9.

48.3% (contribution to GDP).⁴⁶⁸ Retail activity constitutes the second largest component of commercial activity, and Statistics Canada estimates that large retailers (supermarkets, department stores, NRF's) represent 35% of total annual sales.⁴⁶⁹ As of 2005, there were 2,298 shopping centres in Canada, providing 423,459,125 square feet of gross leaseable area, which generated 242.6 billion in sales, and 16.2 billion in Provincial sale tax revenue.⁴⁷⁰ Within these numbers, big-box stores dominate in terms of new investment and construction.⁴⁷¹ Between 1991 and 2008, thirty retail chains new to Southern Vancouver Island, constructed seventy NRFs across the three regional districts. This period of expansion pushed big-box store development to the forefront of urban and commercial development, making them a symbol of capitalism in Canadian cities and towns.

The location of big-box store developments has primarily been in, or around, pre-existing retail centres and markets. With exceptions in Langford and North Cowichan, NRFs in the study area have neither innovated in terms of location, nor have they been tied to suburban developments. Instead they have been clustered around shopping centres in close proximity to Highway One, as in the case of the Woodgrove Urban Node in Nanaimo (**Map 3, Figure 5.1**). As the map illustrates, the big-box stores have been developed around Woodgrove Shopping Centre, as stand alone sites and in power centres situated to the north, south, and east of the mall. The aerial photograph shows the NRFs that are attached to the mall (Wal-Mart, Toys-R-Us), and those that are pad developments

⁴⁶⁸ James Simmons, Shizue Kamikihara, *Commercial Activity in Canada, 2004* (Toronto: Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, 2005), 9.

⁴⁶⁹ "Monthly Survey of Large Retailers (LMR), March 2007", Statistics Canada Report #5027 (May, 2007).

⁴⁷⁰ "Scope of the Shopping Centre Industry in Canada", International Council of Shopping Centers, 2005 (<http://www.icsc.org/srch/rsrch/scope/canada/current/index.php>) [accessed December 16, 2006].

⁴⁷¹ Simmons and Kamikihara (2001), 9-12.

built on the north side (Chapters, Pier 1 Imports). Clustering NRFs around malls is advantageous for value retailers, who are able to directly compete on price with the shopping centre for an established market without increasing travel times or distance. Such clusters are called “power nodes” by the CSCA, defined by stand-alone big-box stores and power centres built with one kilometre of a regional shopping centre.⁴⁷² This retail development pattern is also observable in NRF developments in the CVRD around the Duncan Mall, Duncan Plaza, and Village Green Mall, adjacent to Highway One, south of Duncan’s historical downtown (**Figure 5.2**). The current redevelopment of the Village Green Mall will expand the number of NRFs in this power node, with the addition of a 70,000 square-foot, power centre to the south-east of the present mall (**Figure 5.3**).⁴⁷³ In the CRD, there are examples of NRF power nodes in Langford, around the Westshore Town Centre (**Figure 5.4**), in Victoria, around Mayfair Shopping Centre, and in Saanich, around Town and Country Shopping Centre. Two examples where NRFs have not been built in direct proximity to shopping centres are North Cowichan’s Cowichan Commons, and the big-box stores around Millstream Road in Langford. The Cowichan Commons development is a power centre, while the Langford situation is a cluster of stand alone big-box stores, a power centre, and a lifestyle centre, built north of Highway One (**Figure 5.5**). The latter has developed into the premiere value retailing location in the CRD, aided by the fact it is only a few kilometres north of Westshore Town Centre, and accessible from Highway One (Island Highway) and Highway Fourteen (Veteran’s Memorial Parkway). The locations of NRFs and the cluster patterns of their developments have added to regional markets by adhering to pre-established

⁴⁷² Simmons, Hernandez (2006), 474.

⁴⁷³ Sarah Simpson, “Village Green Inn on its way out, White Spot stays”, *Cowichan Valley Citizen* (March 5, 2008), 7.

shopping locations and by accessing markets through their proximity to major roads and highways.

The big-box store is a building format that is used by, and identified with, discount retail chains. While NRFs were new to Southern Vancouver Island, this type of retailing was not. Canadian Tire, as mentioned in chapter four, is one example of a discount retailer that is a Canadian forerunner of NRFs in many ways. Over its history, the chain adopted numerous formats and innovations over its history, including catalogue-retail, automotive specialists (category killer), and discount department store. In the 1960s, other Canadian discount department stores, such as Sayvette and Woolco, presented consumers with plain, undecorated store environments and deeply discounted commodities.⁴⁷⁴ While Canadian Tire has continued to adopt the “Next Big Thing” in retail formats into the present, other Canadian retailers have closed down or have been purchased by other chains. Discount retailing has also changed with big-box stores. NRFs are different from older discounters in the scale of their operations, the size and number of their stores, the breadth of their distribution, and their ties to the global economy. For these reasons, I have chosen to refer to this current form of discounting as “value retailing” to stress its differences from what came before, and its identification with the consumer idea of “value”, as in “good value for money”. Value retailing entails the Lefebvrian practices as they are produced, consumed, and reproduced and reconsumed in spaces of value architecture. Each NRF produces and is produced by spatial practices (retailing format), representations of space (retailing models), and representational spaces (retail behaviours). The history of value retailing will clarify these spatial productions.

⁴⁷⁴ Simmons, Hernandez (2006), 467.

Value retailing has its ancestry in the American chain store, specifically the five-and-dime stores and wholesale clubs. Woolworth's and Kress Stores, both established in 1879, and S.S. Kresge, established in 1899, created retail practices that still resonate in today's big-box stores, such as standing discount prices on select commodities and simple store interiors.⁴⁷⁵ While the direct heir of the five-and-dime store today is the dollar store, both Woolworth's and S.S. Kresge's founded discount chains, Woolco and K-mart, which were dominant in their retail category well into the 1990s.⁴⁷⁶ This same path of five-and-dime to discount store was also taken by Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart. He was a former J.C. Penney employee who managed a five-and-dime store in the Ben Franklin chain before establishing Wal-Mart's precursor, Walton's Five-and-Ten stores in 1950.⁴⁷⁷ The other precursor to NRFs is the wholesale club format.

The wholesale club, also known as a membership or warehouse club, is distinguished by its combination of membership cards, discount pricing, and unadorned presentation of goods in boxes or on pallets. The original use of membership cards by discount retailers in New York City was tied directly to the anti-discounting legislation that was part of the anti-monopoly Robinson-Patman Act of 1936, aimed at regulating prices of goods in retail chains.⁴⁷⁸ The first discount membership-club was E.J. Korvette, later known as Korvette's, established by Eugene Ferkauf in 1948.⁴⁷⁹ Since Korvette's had membership criteria and lacked a store-front - meaning it was not open to the general public - it evaded the Robinson-Patman Act. However, other retailers, especially Macy's,

⁴⁷⁵ Bernice Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 5; Spector, 116

⁴⁷⁶ Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 124; Dicker, 43; Spector, 20-21

⁴⁷⁷ Dicker 34-36, 41-43.

⁴⁷⁸ Hicks, 20-21; Spector, 14-17.

⁴⁷⁹ Spector, 18-19.

argued that since the memberships were free and cards were handed out on the street, Korvette's, in practice at least, was breaking the law.⁴⁸⁰ Despite such protests and threats of legal action, Korvette's grew steadily until the 1960s, expanding from Manhattan into suburban locales across the U.S., culminating with Ferkauf's appearance on the cover of *Time* in 1962. Posed before sign-posts showing 5th Avenue at 46th Street, and amid a flurry of price-tags and sale banners, Ferkauf smiles out at the viewer from under the headline "Consumer Spending: Discounting Gets Respectable".⁴⁸¹ The membership club, originally a response to anti-discounting laws, has since developed into something else – a form of consumer as identity. Today, club members share a common focus on sales and bargains, while also enjoying the sense of exclusivity that comes with any form of membership. In terms of retail and consumption, they can feel that they are "in on it" and are getting deals not available to everyone.

While 1962 was a high-point for Ferkauf, it was the year that also saw the founding of several discount chains: Wal-Mart, Woolco, K-mart, and Target - stores that would surpass Korvette's, which shut down in 1980, and become the market leaders in value retail.⁴⁸² The first Wal-Mart location in Rogers, Arkansas, set in place a retail model to which the chain still largely holds: a 16,000 square foot, single-storey building located at a major intersection outside downtown, which employed a mainly female staff whom Walton, through various legal loopholes, was able to pay less than minimum wage.⁴⁸³ Everyday commodities, such as toothpaste and paper-towels, were heavily discounted and even sold at a loss, costs that the store recovered via other bigger, items

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ *TIME Magazine* (July 6, 1962), cover.

⁴⁸² Mitchell, 8; Dicker, 2-3.

⁴⁸³ Mitchell, 7; Dicker, 45-46.

that were marked up and priced for profit.⁴⁸⁴ With this model Wal-Mart began its much debated march to its status as the world's largest retailer. Both the chain and the stores themselves expanded quickly in the decade that followed, and by 1973 there were fifty-five Wal-Mart's in five states, the newest stores enclosing up to 45,000 square feet.⁴⁸⁵ However, it would remain second to K-mart into the 1980s, before embarking on an aggressive and international expansion that made Wal-Mart both the largest retailer and the largest private corporation on earth.⁴⁸⁶ The expansion of Wal-Mart, along with its competitors and imitators, has been accomplished using NRFs. Spread across North America in large numbers, big-box stores have become the format of choice for discount chains, making value architecture the site and sign of value retailing.

Canada's experience with discount chains and value retail did not begin with the arrival of NRFs in the 1980s and 1990s. As in the U.S., there were retailers and wholesalers who promoted discount pricing and experimented with retail formats prior to the arrival of the large retail chains. Jones and Doucet observe that "big-boxes, in fact, existed before the relevant terminology was coined."⁴⁸⁷ An early big-box-style operation in Canada, recognized in hindsight, was Knob Hill Farms, which opened a 19,000 square-foot discount supermarket in Markham, Ontario, in 1963.⁴⁸⁸ The previous year had seen the founding of Wal-Mart, Target, K-Mart, and Woolco in the U.S., and the opening of Canada's first IKEA store. Another example is the "furniture show-room" format, used by The Brick in Edmonton in 1971, and Leon's Furniture in Toronto in 1973, the latter a 150,000 square-foot location the company today promotes as Canada's first big-box

⁴⁸⁴ Mitchell, 7-8.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Dicker, 2-3.

⁴⁸⁷ Jones, Doucet (1998), 6.

⁴⁸⁸ Jones, Doucet (2001), 499

store.⁴⁸⁹ The Brick and Leon's remain major players in Canadian retail, and both have adopted further big-box-store innovations.

In addition, the discount department store and, to a degree, the category killer has a particularly Canadian forerunner in the Canadian Tire Corporation. Canadian Tire was founded in 1927 in Toronto as an operation focused on automotive retail.⁴⁹⁰ The company broadened its range of merchandise, however and, building on the growth of catalogue sales in the 1930s, expanded to include house-wares and sporting goods. Eventually, Canadian Tire stores would sell tools, electronics, clothing, and toys, becoming the discount alternative to Canadian department stores chains Eaton's, Simpson's, and the Bay; in the 1980s the company's advertising slogan, "There's a lot more to Canadian Tire than tires", aimed to reflect this expansion of stock. The founders of Canadian Tire, William Jackson Billes and his brother Alfred Jackson, were highly competitive retailers, who fought with wholesalers and suppliers and built a reputation for cornering markets and for offering regular low prices. The Billes brothers began franchising their stores in 1934 as dealer-owner operations and in 1958, created one of the first customer loyalty programs - issuing "Canadian Tire Money", itself a Canadian institution. By the late 1980s, on the eve of the arrival of American big-box chains, Canadian Tire claimed that 80% of Canadians lived within fifteen minutes of a store, and that of those, 80% visited those stores once every six weeks.⁴⁹¹ Since the arrival of U.S. chains and new Canadian NRFs, Canadian Tire has increasingly promoted itself as being distinctively Canadian. In its television advertisements for snow-blowers or ice-resistant windshield wipers,

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid; Marina Strauss, "Leon's furnishing an expansive strategy", *The Globe and Mail* (May 10, 2002), B9.

⁴⁹⁰ Brown (1989), 19-20.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 87.

Canadian Tire customers are portrayed as plucky, can-do folks trying their best to master the challenges of life in a Northern climate. Canadian Tire is also a major retailer of hockey equipment. The latter is, of course, especially powerful in economic and symbolic terms in Canada; not insignificantly, Canadian Tire is a television sponsor of CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada*. Despite these image priorities and strong market presence, in 1993 Canadian Tire hired Stephen Bachand, an American, as CEO to help the company compete with US competitors. Bachand did this by aggressively adopting new store formats and expanding into power centres.⁴⁹² Canadian Tire opened forty-five "new generation" stores across Canada in 2000, the company's name for a big-box store, and began a new expansion plan in 2008, which will include new store concepts.⁴⁹³ The new store under construction at Cowichan Commons, North Cowichan, is part of the latter campaign (**Figure 4.19**).

The presence of retailers like Canadian Tire and Leon's makes defining the term "big-box store", even in terms of retail practices, a challenge. Hernandez and Simmons have written that, based on criteria of size or retail format, numerous older North American retailers could retroactively be considered big-box stores.⁴⁹⁴ The CSCA has sought to avoid such dilution of the term "big-box stores" by limiting its use to retail chains and store locations which, in Canada, date to after 1985. These are also the chains, such as Home Depot, Staples, Best Buy, and Costco, which dominate their respective retail categories, and include Wal-Mart, today the largest retailer in Canada.⁴⁹⁵ Since their first appearance, big-box stores across the country have grown prodigiously.

⁴⁹² Jones, Doucet, 505.

⁴⁹³ Sarah Cox, "Chain Reaction." *Monday Magazine* (Nov.30-Dec.6, 2000), 10; Marina Strauss, "Canadian Tire to launch new store concepts", *The Globe and Mail* (May 9, 2008), B7.

⁴⁹⁴ Hernandez, Simmons, 467-468; Jones, Doucet (1998), 6.

⁴⁹⁵ Mitchell, 16.

Between 1990 and 1999, the Greater Toronto Area witnessed a 378% growth in big-box stores, from 93 to 445 sites.⁴⁹⁶ In 2004, competing category killers Home Depot and Rona both pursued new expansion plans that included, along with the acquisition of smaller competitors, the construction of multiple new stores in locations across Canada.⁴⁹⁷ The number of NRFs on Southern Vancouver Island rose between 1992 and 2007 from zero to seventy-five. In each of the regional districts under consideration, the impact of these new retailers has been economically and culturally significant.

Writing in 2001, Jones and Doucet described this growth of big-box stores as the “Americanization of the Canadian retail sector.”⁴⁹⁸ This was not due simply to foreign ownership – big-box stores signalled major changes to the structures of retail distribution, demand, and marketing, which were based on innovations developed in the U.S. Most especially, it brought a trend to value retailing and consumption and new warehouse-style discounters to urban and suburban Canada. The growth of American chains was visible in new construction and had major impact on Canadian retailers, suppliers, and consumers.

The popularity of value consumption and the expansion of value retailers have been blamed for the closing of Canadian stores, such as Eaton’s, Woolco, and the catalogue-outlet Consumer’s Distributing.⁴⁹⁹ While the causal relationship is debated, in the everyday perception of the 1990s American big-box retailers seemed to be replacing Canadian discount and department stores.⁵⁰⁰ In the case of long-standing discounter Woolco, 122 of its locations were sold in 1994 to Wal-Mart, which refurbished the stores

⁴⁹⁶ Jones, Doucet (2001), 495.

⁴⁹⁷ Marina Strauss, “Home Depot puts the moves on Canada”, *The Globe and Mail* (November 11, 2003), B7; Marina Strauss, “Acquisition helps Rona buildup savings”, *The Globe and Mail* (February 26, 2004), B13.

⁴⁹⁸ Jones, Doucet (2001), 506.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 498.

⁵⁰⁰ Jim Simmons, “The Economic Impact of Wal-Mart Stores”, Report (Toronto: Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, 2001), 1.

and reopened them as Wal-Mart Canada.⁵⁰¹ Fourteen years later, Wal-Mart Canada had grown to 236 stores and has become the country's leading retailer.⁵⁰²

The expansion of value retailing created the perception that big-box stores were particularly American, something that impacted Canadian retailers. Lawrence Stevenson, past-CEO of Chapter's Books, experienced that perception during his company's expansion in the 1990s:

A lot of people think I'm American and that Chapters is American. I think it's because we're new and we're big and people assume that all of the big new stores are American, as they mostly are. We've been caught up in that sweep.⁵⁰³

This perception was also due to Chapter's business practices, similar to those used by U.S. retailers, such as Border's, and Barnes & Noble. In the book *Power Retail*, Stevenson summarizes the essential principles of value retailing: dominate geographic markets and categories; operate a highly efficient management of employees, technology, and costs; be open to change and reinvention; and, deliver superior shopping opportunities based on selection, experience, convenience, and price.⁵⁰⁴ These latter four categories constitute what Stevenson calls the "retail value proposition" (RVP) that big-box stores offer to consumers, writing: "For the customer, value (RVP) is a ratio between the perceived benefits offered by the retailer (selection, experience, convenience) and the perceived cost exacted from the customer (price paid)."⁵⁰⁵ Value retailers, like Stevenson, argue, that big-box stores offer superior value than either department stores or shopping centres, by offering low prices in a minimal setting. Costco is an example of a big-box

⁵⁰¹ Jones, Doucet (2001); Spector (2005), 127.

⁵⁰² Spector (2005), 127; Mitchell, 16.

⁵⁰³ Quoted in Jones, Doucet (2001). 495.

⁵⁰⁴ Lawrence N. Stevenson, Joseph Shlesinger, Michael Pearce, *Power Retail: Winning Strategies from Chapters and other Leading Retailers in Canada*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 3.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 60.

store whose RVP emphasizes price over selection, experience (customer service), and convenience (travel time).⁵⁰⁶ As previously noted, Costco customers are members, who are given access to a wholesale-environment, and the feeling of “being in on it”. Other NRFs, such as Rona, enhance experience by having numerous floor-staff, large displays of merchandise, and shorter aisles (**Figure 5.6**). One result of Rona’s RVP is that its stores have gained a reputation for being “softer” than those of its rival, Home Depot, and more appealing to female consumers.⁵⁰⁷ Home Depot’s “urban store”, discussed in chapter four, is aimed in part to compete with Rona for female consumers.⁵⁰⁸ Experience is generally being re-emphasized by value retailers, who are aiming to reduce the intimidating size of their buildings and stock by creating smaller big-box stores.⁵⁰⁹ Along with lifestyle centres, small-box stores have been envisaged as a new format with which to continue NRF development.

The successful construction and operation of NRFs on Southern Vancouver Island have in part depended on building stores in pre-existing retail locations and defined markets, and in part on the reputation for low prices. The success of NRFs has often been credited to Sam Walton, or Sol Price of Price Club, although neither invented big-boxes nor discount retailing. In fact, the characteristics of value retailing, such as those identified by Stevenson, were not unheard of in Canada before Wal-Mart, Price Club, Costco, and the others arrived. It was the efficiency by which big-box stores operated these retail characteristics that made them models to be copied.⁵¹⁰ Similar to Chapter’s, several existing Canadian chains adopted value retailing, such as Loblaw’s and Canadian

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 61.

⁵⁰⁷ Strauss (April 7, 2004), B6.

⁵⁰⁸ Constantineau (January 15, 2005), F3.

⁵⁰⁹ Strauss (November 16, 2006), B11.

⁵¹⁰ Hicks (2007). 22-23.

Tire, in order to compete with the larger U.S. chains. The ongoing development of NRFs in the three regional districts illustrates that their continued status as the “Next Big Thing”.

Value Consumption

The successful expansion of value retailing described above has been tied to the receptivity of consumers to discounted merchandise procured in warehouse ambience. NRFs have built upon, and also refined, the older practice of “bargain hunting” into what I call “value consumption”. This can be defined as good quality, low prices, broad selection, and minimal, if not self- service. It is this stress on value that constitutes the “new” in NRF, and its popularity has been illustrated by the growth of discount shopping for everyday items that began in the early 1980s.⁵¹¹ To consumers, the combination of value architecture and value retailing produces low prices and promotes large shopping trips. Researchers interested in consumer credit and debt such as Ritzer, have questioned whether or not consumers can actually afford such shopping trips, and whether the desired commodities are bargains at all. Writers such as Schor and Sennett, have each questioned the political, environmental, and cultural costs resulting from the mass consumption of discounted commodities.

As discussed in chapter two, consumption, specifically the consumer, is situated at the core of the retail environment. Geographers, such as Jones and Simmons, and retail analysts, such as Underhill, have attempted to explain the “mystery of consumer behaviour” through the study of tracking statistics and market-based consumer profiles. Sociologists, such as Corrigan, Paterson, Baudrillard, and Ritzer, have also closely

⁵¹¹ Gelbtuch (1996), 173.

studied contemporary consumer behaviour, and have perceived in it physical and mental habits that have developed over the past two centuries. Corrigan contrasts shopping habits before and after the advent of department stores, noting, for instance, shifts from: obligatory to optional purchasing; stock specialization to stock diversification; and, negotiable to fixed prices.⁵¹² Paterson similarly finds in the department store the roots of much contemporary consumption behaviour. He outlines four tendencies, quoted in chapter two, that illustrate the changes inaugurated by the department store, by which shopping became focused on browsing, leisure, desire (not need), and women. These four tendencies are perceivable in the dialectical operations of the production and consumption of value space.

In studies, consumers have been characterized as both empowered and disempowered. The latter view adheres to the view of consumers as dupes. However, the former recognizes the agency of the consumer, which can lead to an alternate view: consumers are creative and active people who individualize commodities, evade media manipulation, and make choices that are central expressions of self-image.⁵¹³ As presented in consumption literature, this is the “savvy” consumer, as opposed to the “sucker”.⁵¹⁴ However no amount of creativity can completely free the consumer from participating in the controlling discourses and social structures of market capitalism. This is a “consumer paradox” – any individual expression or personal fulfillment obtained through consumption is off-set by the conformity of shopping practices and the

⁵¹² Corrigan (1997), 61.

⁵¹³ Ideas about “creative consumption” are presented in: Mark Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jayne (2006).

⁵¹⁴ Paterson (2006), 6-7.

manipulation of desire and taste.⁵¹⁵ The consumer is free, with limited freedom.

However, the consumer who is both savvy and sucker, can also create resistance through unpredictable actions – these might be as simple as not purchasing anything, or waiting to make purchases.

Ritzer argues that big-box stores, through pricing strategies and credit cards, exploit consumers by facilitating overconsumption. Ritzer observes: “consumers can be said to be exploited by the new means of consumption by being led to buy more than they need, to pay higher prices than need be, and to spend more than they should.”⁵¹⁶ The criticism that big-box stores exploit consumers is difficult to sustain because, unlike workers exploited at their workplace, shoppers choose to visit a store or mall, and make choices about using credit and debt. A different form of exploitation that might be considered is shopping as a form of labour, exemplified in the self-service formats used in most NRFs.

Shopping is part of the production of the commodity. It is as much part of the “life” of the commodity as are the processes of manufacturing, transport, and retailing. It also can be, as Goss and Sharon Zukin both observed, a lot of work.⁵¹⁷ The research, the preparation, the transportation, the operation, and the purchasing of commodities takes time and effort. In the act of value consumption some types of labour are acceptable to consumers. Self-service formats are accepted by consumers who don’t wish to wait for sales attendants, who have limited time, or who have a clear plan. However, the self-service format does come with conditions – savings are paid for in part by consumers

⁵¹⁵ Steven Miles, *Consumerism: as a way of life* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 147.

⁵¹⁶ Ritzer (2001). 112.

⁵¹⁷ Jon Goss, “Geographies of consumption: the work of consumption”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 30:2 (2006), 237-249; Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

through their unpaid labour. Ritzer observed that the increasing amount of work performed by the consumer is symptomatic of an activity's rationalization, or McDonaldization.⁵¹⁸ He argues that the phenomenon of consumer labour was initially exploited by fast-food restaurants but has since insinuated its way into a range of consumption activities. Journalist Karen van Hahn observed: "almost everything that was once somebody's job is being offloaded onto the already overburdened shoulders of consumers."⁵¹⁹ Value consumption includes work, in the form of this unpaid labour done by consumers in the big-box store.

From the perspective of Lefebvre, this unpaid labour is about more than just bussing your own table at McDonalds. It is part of the reproduction of the relations of production – that is, the actions that perpetuate and, on a daily basis, recreate the social production of wealth and its attendant, order.⁵²⁰ Present shopping contains the seeds for future shopping. Commodities that provide only passing satisfaction ensure ongoing need and the production of additional commodities. As Goss observes: "Consumption treads the dialectical knife-edge between actual realization and rational manipulation of desires."⁵²¹ Desires are not intended to be satisfied, merely dulled by the circulation of goods designed with planned obsolescence. Shopping budgets are further enlarged through the strategic promotion of impulse purchasing. For instance, Costco deploys displays items on the store floor in hopes of sparking unplanned consumption. The shopper will be soothed by familiar messages of saving money while spending beyond the planned budget. Part of the physical and mental fatigue associated with shopping by

⁵¹⁸ Ritzer (1996).

⁵¹⁹ Karen van Hahn, "Self-serving propaganda", *The Globe and Mail* (August 11, 2007), L3.

⁵²⁰ Discussed in Lefebvre (1976), (1991), (2000).

⁵²¹ Goss (1999), 49.

Goss and Zukin is surely caused by knowing that no shopping trip is the final shopping trip – every day, that is everyday life, is made for the consumption of value.

Value Space and NRFs

Value architecture, value retailing, and value consumption combine in the big-box store, creating a set of physical-mental, spatial-social practices and habits I have named: “value space.” This is the physical and mental space of NRF’s as experienced in everyday life. It is produced, consumed, reproduced, and reconsumed by and through the modes of retailing, consuming, and building utilized in big-box stores. Value space is the social and spatial product of big-box store development and use. It can be considered in terms of Lefebvre’s spatial practices, representational spaces, and representations of space, all of which are experienced through the economic and cultural use of social space. The architecture, for example, is comprised of: physical, built-forms designed for specific functions (spatial practices); plans and ideas about the space’s uses and meanings (representational space); and, the lived experience, or “life”, of the architecture, including adaptations and unforeseen uses (representations of space). Value retailing and value consumption similarly contribute to all three of Lefebvre’s spatial elements, and together with value architecture produce value space. While forms of retail and consumer space have long histories, value space is different because of its scale, illustrated by the size of the stores, their numbers and regional diffusion, their use of global commodity-chains, along with the broader cultural expansion of consumption activities during this time. While it might not constitute a “Global Meltdown”, the recently-achieved ubiquity of big-box store development is a highly visible sign (and symbol) of the expansion of

capitalism and consumer society on Southern Vancouver Island. This is part of broader, North American urban trends towards heightened commercialization and novel forms of consumption. Reflecting on this commercial expansion and the current state of the consumer society in the U.S., Thomas de Zengotita writes: “Yes, there were ersatz environments and glitzy ads back in the fifties, but this is a new order of quality and saturation. Saying that it’s just more of what we had before is like saying a hurricane is just more breeze.”⁵²² This commercial “saturation” sees retail concepts and consumer models applied to other parts of social life, and value space comes to influence non-retail aspects of urbanism, such as residential planning or relations with First Nations. For city planners, politicians, business-owners, neighbourhood groups, and citizens in the three regional districts on Southern Vancouver Island, the past sixteen-years has been a period of innovation, adaptation, and confrontation as related to big-box stores.

The rise of consumption as a social activity, and the growth of big-box stores, has led several authors to attempt to conjure a label that conveys this cultural significance. The name “cathedrals of consumption” is one that has seen some wide use. For example, Lauren Langman and Ritzer both use it to describe enclosed shopping centres.⁵²³ More recently it was applied by Barney Warf and Thomas Chapman to the discount department store, specifically Wal-Mart, to stress that retailer’s centrality in today’s culture of consumption, and its political and social impacts.⁵²⁴ I do not, as an architectural historian, favour the phrase “cathedrals of consumption” for several reasons: it generalizes the historic functions of cathedrals; assumes shopping is a form of worship; and, tends to

⁵²² Thomas de Zengotita, “The Numbing of the American Mind: culture as anesthetic”, *Harper’s Magazine*, -- 304: 1823 (April 2002), 36-37.

⁵²³ Lauren Langman “Shopping for subjectivity”, *Lifestyle Shopping*, 40; Ritzer (1999).

⁵²⁴ Barney Warf, Thomas Chapman, “Cathedrals of Consumption: A Political Phenomenology of Wal-Mart”, *Wal-Mart World*, (Ed) Stanley Brunn, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 163-178.

characterize consumers as less-than-critical believers. The metaphor “cathedrals of consumption” suggests that big-box stores are a force for secularism, even though Wal-Mart regularly invokes “family values” - conservative, Christian morals - to explain its stock strategies, such as not selling music CDs with parental warning stickers or suggestive cover art.⁵²⁵ This name also ignores other buildings, such as churches, that are in fact better suited to the title “cathedrals of capitalism”. For example, Philip Johnson and John Burgee’s Crystal Cathedral (1977-80) was built for tele-evangelist Robert Schuller, and was funded through popular donations, some solicited through reenactments of the “Cult of Carts”, a ceremony associated with the construction of Chartres Cathedral.⁵²⁶ The scale of the Crystal Cathedral has since been emulated in the development of “megachurches”, which are also tied to tele-evangelical ministries. Willow Creek Community Church, a megachurch in Chicago that attracts roughly 15,000 congregants per weekend, employs marketing techniques to attract new members and increase, in the words of Pastor Bill Hybels, its “market share”.⁵²⁷ There is also the case of Westchester Mall, a shuttered shopping centre in High Point, North Carolina that was bought by the First Wesleyan Church and reopened as Providence Place Church and Christian Centre.⁵²⁸ The Vaughan Mills Shopping Centre north of Toronto includes the 2,400 square-foot New Hope United Church, considered to be part of a Canadian trend towards “big-box churches”.⁵²⁹ These examples, in which churches have adopted the practices and sometimes the architecture of contemporary capitalism, seem better

⁵²⁵ Ibid, 176.

⁵²⁶ Janet Marquardt, Stephen Eskilson, *Frames of Reference: Art, History, and the World* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 2003), 118.

⁵²⁷ Sze- Tsung Leong, “The Divine Economy”, *Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2*, (2001), 303.

⁵²⁸ Underhill (2004), 204.

⁵²⁹ Bill Taylor, “Christ comes back to market”, *The Toronto Star* (September 1, 2007), B2.

candidates for the title “cathedrals of capitalism”. If an architectural metaphor is needed for big-box stores, I would propose the “exhibition halls of capitalism”, with Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace as the specific historical forerunner of NRFs.

The exhibition hall of the 19th century was a secular space focused on the production, presentation, and consumption of modern machines and commodities. As noted in chapter three, Benjamin sees the exhibition hall as directly contributing to modern shopping spaces through architectural designs and forms of behaviour; Adorno and Horkheimer also argued that the modern home, filled with appliances and consumer goods, is one person’s own exhibition hall, reflecting their experience, and consumption, of the modern world around them. The Crystal Palace, as the site of the first modern international exposition, is the exhibition hall that has been the most influential on subsequent consumption; Louise Wyman writes ““the open display of commodities in a spectacular environment pre-empted the modern shopping experience”.⁵³⁰ However, the repetitive design and materials of the Crystal Palace, along with the vast scale of the exhibition, left many visitors feeling disoriented by the architecture, and overwhelmed by the numbers of displays and groups of people moving within the hall.⁵³¹ The busy, loud, and eclectic atmosphere of the Crystal Palace is found today in shopping centres and NRFs. In particular, the Wal-Mart superstore format is a space in which the viewer may be both amazed and bored by the amount and comprehensibility of the stock on offer. The amount of interior space creates excitement and fatigue – looking from one end of

⁵³⁰ Louise Wyman, “Crystal Palace”, *Harvard School of Design Guide to Shopping: Project on the City 2*, (Ed.s) Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, Sze Tsung Leong (New York: Taschen, 2001), 229.

⁵³¹ *Ibid*, 240.

the store toward the other, the superstore appears to be an endless space for consumption (Figure 5.7).

The big-box store is both a production of space and a location for the reproduction of the relations of production. In the case of the former, the big-box store illustrates Lefebvre's triad of social space, discussed in chapter three: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. The physical aspects constitute the spatial practices: walls and frame, technology and inventory, location and retail landscape. The theories, planning codes, and laws that operate within and without these spatial practices are Lefebvre's representations of space. These two aspects of spatial production are controlled, or influenced, by developers, builders, planners, and city politicians. The third element of Lefebvre's triad - representational space - is by contrast controlled, or influenced, by patrons and the everyday use of the sites. This makes Lefebvre's representational space similar to Zevi's "architectural space" - the experience of the architecture, which is shaped by spatial practices and representations of space.

How can value space be illustrated? One way is by considering representations of consumers engaged in value consumption. A poster from 2004 for the warehouse club Costco that appeared on the campus of the University of Victoria featured the following images: a man testing a personal computer; a family looking at developed photographs; a senior purchasing freshly baked bread; and, a middle-aged woman closely examining a sweater. The images convey an upbeat, heteronormative atmosphere of fun, variety, discernment, leisure, and, above all, abundance. Here, value space is presented as an ideal shopping consumption environment. A considerably different representation of value space is perceptible in the behavior of consumers at annual sales events, such as Boxing

Week in Canada and “Black Friday” in the U.S. - the name given to the Friday that follows American Thanksgiving that is considered the first day of Christmas shopping. The stampede of consumers that ensues at store openings on such dates, and the chaos and injuries that follow, vividly illustrate another form of value space: a blind and unhealthy consumer frenzy driven by savings. This frenzy can have serious consequences. In 2003, a Florida woman was trampled and left hospitalized as a result of a store-opening stampede at a Wal-Mart Supercentre sparked by the sale of DVD Players.⁵³² Patricia VanLester ran to the electronics area, grabbed a DVD player, and was then knocked down and trampled by other shoppers, who, in the words of her sister, “walked over her like a herd of elephants.”⁵³³ Some people did try to help VanLester, but most simply rushed towards the merchandise. Syndicated to newspapers world-wide, the story provoked many articles decrying the consumer madness that sets the value of a good deal over the value of a person’s life. Sadly, these articles appear to make little impact and, indeed have become as predictable as the annual events they decry. In 2008, a “Black Friday” stampede resulted in the death of a Wal-Mart employee: Jdimypai Damour, a temporary store clerk, was trampled to death after consumers lined up outside caused the doors to break off their hinges and raced en masse into the store.⁵³⁴ In cases such as these, in which injury and even death result from shopping, value space demonstrates its potential to produce extraordinary behavior in people otherwise presumed to be normal.

⁵³² Michael Kesterton, “Holiday Shopping”, *The Globe & Mail* (December 2, 2003), A18.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Jack Healy, Angela Macropoulos, “Wal-Mart Employee Trampled to Death”, *The New York Times* (November 28, 2008), B1.

Despite Costco's claims to an ideal shopping environment, the chaos and frenzy of the sales rush clearly correspond more to the reality of NRFs. More than the discount department store or category-killer, the warehouse club is especially different from the retail approaches formerly used in department stores and shopping centres. The format and related practices of the warehouse club mix old and new ideas - some come from wholesaling and discount traditions, while others derive from technological innovations and developments in global transportation. The resulting architectural and social spaces produced by the warehouse club are unique to our time and place, combining bargain prices with high-tech gadgetry, and luxury items with warehouse pallets. With sixty-one locations across the country, Costco is the largest warehouse club operator, and third largest retailer, in Canada.⁵³⁵ Its warehouse clubs provide a very clear example of the production and consumption of value space.

Costco warehouse clubs stock groceries, office supplies, jewelry, clothing, home supplies, appliances, hardware, electronics, sporting-goods, and furniture. This makes the warehouse club the rival the department store, the discount store, the supermarket, and indeed the shopping centre. At the same time however, warehouse clubs carry much smaller stock sizes than other retail types: a Costco store will typically carry 4,000 products or stock-keeping units (SKU's) while a discount department store, such as Wal-Mart, carries between 80,000 and 100,000.⁵³⁶ This stock strategy is considered to be one of the keys to the ongoing success of warehouse clubs. In Canada, Costco's 61 locations bring in an estimated \$8 billion in annual sales, making the company the 3rd largest

⁵³⁵ Mitchell (2006), 16.

⁵³⁶ Marina Strauss, "A looming warehouse war keeping Costco on its toes", *The Globe and Mail* (October 18, 2003), B4; Spector 5.

retailer in the country. Costco plans to bring its number of locations up to 90 in Canada by 2013.⁵³⁷

Within literal warehouse settings, these clubs offer members the chance to buy items at prices close to wholesale. Costco, for instance, keeps to a maximum mark-up of 14% on goods in stock – if an item requires more to be profitable, then it is not carried by the club.⁵³⁸ The name Costco was short for “The Cost Company”, as in getting goods at cost, or wholesale.⁵³⁹ In fact, these operations have their origins in the wholesale restaurant and office trade, and their initial consumer targets were small business owners looking for deals, not ambience or service.⁵⁴⁰ In the US, Price Club opened to non-business members in 1976, followed by Costco in 1983; the two retailers would merge in 1993.⁵⁴¹

A crucial spatial practice in Costco’s operation, and in the production of value space, is membership. Warehouse clubs are destination retailers to which consumers make planned trips.⁵⁴² The clubs are not retail locations one may casually encounter in the urban environment and decide to pop into and browse. For one thing, they are housed in enormous buildings situated on the outskirts of municipalities, and/or by highways. Second, they are membership organizations. Club members pay an annual fee: Costco’s individual membership is \$50 a year. The warehouse club’s success is based on high turnover and low operating costs.⁵⁴³ Costco uses a self-service format with minimal, non-union staffing. The clubs negotiate bulk discounts with suppliers and so keep mark-ups

⁵³⁷ Marina Strauss, “Retailers brace to battle Sam’s Club”, *The Globe and Mail* (October 27, 2003), B3.

⁵³⁸ Spector, 49.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Gelbtuch, 26.; Spector, 48.

⁵⁴¹ Chung (2001), 35; Lyons (1994), 3; Ritzer 17

⁵⁴² Gelbtuch 176-177.

⁵⁴³ Marina Strauss, (October 18, 2003), B4.

below market averages. Non-typical retail locations on municipal boundaries usually permit low property taxes. Advertising is nationally coordinated and focused on members. Membership is thought to reduce the incidence of bad cheques and shoplifting, something I think is aided by extra-large items.

Shopping in Costco differs markedly from that in a shopping centre or department store. For instance, the club sells products in only one size - extra-large. Although stocking one size prevents comparison shopping, consumers accept this with a tacit understanding that everything is as inexpensive as possible; the single size is a sign of this value. Costco members purchase large quantities that are expensive, yet are presented as cost-effective when compared to the costs of numerous purchases of the same items in smaller quantities. This economic formula is a key rationale in value retailing and value consumption. That is why people like big-box stores. Simmons and Hernandez express this in terms of difference with older retail formats: "The department store offered greater variety, the shopping centre provided all the predictable goods that the family required, but the big box store displays bargains that you did not think you could afford."⁵⁴⁴ This is the presentation of value, which applies to all items within the warehouse club.

The consumer's perception of value is manipulated by the retailer through stock turnover strategies. While typical discount stores follow stock cycles of three months, warehouse clubs can turnover stock every three weeks.⁵⁴⁵ This turnover is possible because of the previously mentioned small stock strategy of the warehouse club in contrast to discount department stores. The purpose of this quick turnover is to increase consumption by providing a steady stream of new products which have a short shelf life.

⁵⁴⁴ Simmons, Hernandez (2006), 467.

⁵⁴⁵ Marina Strauss, (October 18, 2003), B4.

Club members come to understand that certain items are one-time-only sales; that encourages them to consider unplanned consumption. The impulse purchase is made even more tempting in that it seems unlikely members will visit the club more than once a month. Along with product size, stock strategies foster heightened and unplanned consumption. In promotional material, Costco describes store visits as “treasure hunts”, representing shopping as a form of fun.⁵⁴⁶ Unlike the experience of a shopping centre, big-box pleasure is derived not from spectacle but from the experience of value.

Ritzer argues the “warehouse club” is the most rationalized and disenchanting big-box store format.⁵⁴⁷ Unlike its forerunner the department store, the warehouse club does not flatter its customers with elegant surroundings, or enchant them with displays that allow them to imagine the goods in their own homes. Instead, they are the opposite: plain, industrial, and un-cosmetic. From a design perspective, the consumer is almost an afterthought in the warehouse club. This points to their unique form of enchantment, that is the production and consumption of value space. In this setting, consumers are enchanted by the low prices and also by the sense of belonging that derives from their access to the warehouse itself. Once inside customers, who are actually members of the warehouse club, are surrounded by goods that are efficiently stacked (often on shipping pallets) and are bargain priced. As Ritzer describes, the warehouse clubs presents the enchanting fantasy of “finding oneself loose in a warehouse piled to the ceiling with goods that, if they are not free, are made out to be great bargains.”⁵⁴⁸ The consumer is enchanted, via membership and spectacle, by the warehouse club as a place where they can be in on great deals and offers. However, such enchantment is temporary and needs

⁵⁴⁶ David Fuller, “Treasure Hunts”, *The Costco Connection* (February, 2003), 5

⁵⁴⁷ Ritzer (1999), 100-101.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 101.

to be renewed via regular shopping trips, which themselves become, through repetition, disenchanting. This disenchantment is set against escalating spectacles and ongoing banality, and ends when the new means of consumption are replaced by the next means of consumption, which include new forms of enchantment - the "Next Big Thing" will produce new forms of value space.

Value space is made up of dialectical operations that inform and shape the spatial practices, representational spaces, and representations of space of big-box stores. While these dialectic pairings co-exist, they may be described in a rough sense of descending scale, from globalization down to the single commodity. Big-box stores are locations where local and global issues and concerns meet, compromise, and clash. As with Merrifield's dialectical urbanism that sees the clash of urbanization and urbanism, the local-global dialectic similarly situates development against community. At this macro-level, NRFs bring globalization (international corporations and geo-economics) into communities, where they conflict with local issues, planning, neighbourhood groups, and political activists. The bog-box stores connects these neighbourhoods Levinson's "just-in-time" manufacturing and transportation economy, which increases access to more and usually cheaper goods while also increasing the consumption of resources and adding to the social and environmental costs of consumption. At a slightly closer level, NRFs both spectacular and mundane, a dialectic Ritzer has emphasized. Architecturally, the big-box store is a simple form that has been greatly enlarged, creating a spectacle of the mundane, or a mundane building of spectacular size. Ritzer argues the consumption of low-priced commodities is the prime spectacle within the big-box store, one that is more price-driven than the McDonaldized spectacle of the enclosed shopping centre. The constant access to

“spectacular savings” and everyday low pricing makes both increasingly routine, especially when they are reinforced through advertising. Shopping centres undertake regular renovations to counter the mundane, as described in the previous chapter. Big-box stores, such as in the case of Wal-Mart in the CVRD, instead close down older stores and replace them with new, larger buildings. Value retailing responds by increasing the scale of value space, with more stock in more space. The disposability of older stores points to similarities between value architecture and the commodities that it shelters.

Within big-box stores, commodities dominate the architectural space. Their large interiors and repetitive rows of products convey an image of abundance. In the case of Costco, this image is heightened by the stocking of commodities in extra-large quantities. The number of products and their range convey an image of abundance and a future of consumption. Baudrillard wrote that the consumer society surrounds itself with an abundance of objects, a characteristic he observed in its stores:

There is something more in this piling high than the quantity of products: the manifest presence of surplus, the magical, definitive negation of scarcity, the maternal, luxurious sense of being already in the Land of Cockaigne. Our markets, major shopping thoroughfares and superstores also mimic a new-found nature of prodigious fecundity. These are our Valleys of Canaan where, in place of milk and honey, streams of neon flow down over ketchup and plastic. But no matter! We find here the fervid hope that there should be not enough, but too much- and too much for everyone.⁵⁴⁹

Baudrillard draws attention to the opposite of abundance, scarcity, and how its negation seems complete in the tremendous amounts of stock displayed to consumers. Yet, scarcity remains, and is the dialectical partner to abundance. Despite all appearances, some goods may not always be available in the big-box store. Costco’s quick-turnover stock strategy conveys a sense of timeliness, if not urgency, to potential purchases.

⁵⁴⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, (trans.) Chris Turner, (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 26.

Further, the escalating spectacle of low-prices and special offers are often presented as time-limited offers, making the price, not the goods, potentially scarce. The commodities themselves remain endowed with Marx's fetish-status, although this has been altered in NRFs, as described in chapter three. Exchange-value, based on utility and quality, has remained high even as goods have become less durable. Commodities are no longer designed to last. The needs of reproduction and reconsumption have made obsolescence a necessary part of commodity production and consumption. The planned obsolescence of products is one of the most visible manifestations of capitalist reproduction today. The dialectic of durability and obsolescence operates within the retailing and consumption of nearly all products available in NRFs.

At the core of value space is the dialectic of value and waste. Both influence the preceding pairings of operations, and take on their properties: local and global; spectacular and mundane; abundant and scarce; and, durable and obsolete. The focus on price, on getting "good value", is part of value architecture, retailing, and consumption. This is the big-box store's virtue to consumers: its value. The opposite of value is waste, and the mass consumption of commodities has produced massive amounts of garbage. Put another way, spectacular value produces spectacular waste. Writers, such as Jennifer Clapp, Martin O'Brien, and K.A. Gourlay, who study contemporary issues of garbage and waste, emphasize the negative environmental-impacts caused by the consumption of commodities.⁵⁵⁰ Perhaps the most visible form of waste in the commodity is its

⁵⁵⁰ Jennifer Clapp, "The Distancing of Waste: Overconsumption in a Global Economy", *Confronting Consumption* (eds) Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 155-176; Martin O'Brien, "Rubbish-Power: Towards a Sociology of the Rubbish Society", *Consuming Cultures: Power and Resistance* (eds) Jeff Hearn and Sasha Roseneil (London: MacMillan Press, 1999), 262-277; K.A. Gourlay, *World of Waste: Dilemmas of Industrial Development* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

packaging. Because the goods are manufactured off-shore and are shipped long distances, they require considerable amounts of protective packaging. Whereas a department store might remove (and thus dispose of) such packaging, the self-serve, warehouse-style of the big-box store means much packaging is not removed. The price of waste is passed onto the consumer, who is now responsible for an immediate amount of garbage. As the commodities are consumed, waste is produced, eventually replacing the object's original value. Not all of this value is consumed however. Commodities can be reconsumed, and their waste-status converted back into value. Recycling programs and industries provide the social mechanisms for the reconsumption of commodities and industrial materials. They also offer retailers and consumers options about the production and reconsumption of their waste. In the retail landscape of NRFs, the dialectic of value and waste is manifest in all things (architecture, retailing, consumption), and forms the core of value space.

Value Space and Urbanism

Passionate debates and protests have accompanied big-box store construction across North America. Opponents of big-box stores bring a range of concerns, including: urban sprawl; preservation of regional, usually rural, land-use and character; protection of local retailers and small businesses; consumer culture; capitalism and globalization. NRF criticism has, of course, grown in size and scale alongside the big-box store itself. Two early, and different, responses to the big-box store were written in 1994. In a report prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs on NRF developments, the authors explained the opposition to NRFs in the following terms:

Much of the debate concentrates on the nature of competition between established and incoming uses, on equality of planning treatment, on the fairness of the perceived advantages available to one competitor over another through land use designations through the description of uses and property taxation.⁵⁵¹

Here opposition is considered in terms of fair business practices and government transparency, though the authors do later admit that some critics warn the arrival of big-box stores will precipitate local business closures.⁵⁵² Writing in the same year, Constance Beaumont of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the U.S., had a much more alarming impression of the big-box debate. She acknowledged NRFs offer affordable merchandise, create local jobs, and produce property and sales tax revenues for local governments. However, Beaumont argued, such benefits are outweighed by the negative impacts of environmental destruction, the cannibalization of regional retail markets, an expansion of sprawl, and erosion of community uniqueness.⁵⁵³ These arguments remain at the core of opposition to big-box stores, and they have been augmented and expanded on by numerous authors over the past thirteen years.⁵⁵⁴

In B.C., community opposition groups have met with both success and failure fighting developments in recent years. In 2005, city councillors in Vancouver voted down a proposed new Wal-Mart, citing the strength of community-based opposition along with concerns about traffic, road costs, and the socio-economic impact on the South Marine Drive community. It is worth noting that the proposed building, designed by Busby,

⁵⁵¹ Lyon (1994), 5.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 7-8.

⁵⁵³ Beaumont (1994), 7-12.

⁵⁵⁴ Some representative examples are: Constance Beaumont, Leslie Tucker, "Big-box Sprawl (and how to control it)", *Municipal Lawyer*, 43: No.2 (March/April 2002), 6-9, 30-31. Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2002; Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zybeck, Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000); Deborah Curran, *Challenging the Sprawl of Big-box Retail: The Smart Growth Approach to "Zone It and They Will Come" Development* (Victoria: Polis Project on Ecological Governance and Smart Growth BC, 2002); Stacy Mitchell, *Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2006).

Perkins, and Will architects, was a “Green Wal-Mart”, incorporating sustainable design features, including rainwater collection, green roofing, and roof-top wind turbines to power mechanical systems.⁵⁵⁵ Over a year later, and following municipal elections that saw the left-wing COPE majority on council replaced by the right-wing NPA, Wal-Mart reapplied and the proposal was accepted.⁵⁵⁶ In a second instance, reaction to a proposed 116,000 square foot Wal-Mart, Sunshine Coast Regional District directors have proposed changes to the zoning code that would restrict retail developments to a maximum of 25,000 square feet.⁵⁵⁷ While not all big-box applications or operations succeed, clearly many do and are supported by politicians and citizens. Journalists and authors have praised and defended value retail, as in, for example, Steve Maich’s widely discussed article “Why Wal-Mart is Good”, Larry Stevenson’s *Power Retail*, and the vaguely hagiographical *What I Learned from Sam Walton* by Michael Bergdahl.⁵⁵⁸ Big-box stores represent market opportunities for local growth machine supporters to ponder, as they worry about what rival towns and cities are willing to offer developers.⁵⁵⁹

Competitions between cities for big-box developments can be intense and are fuelled by the retailers, who look for the best offer of concessions and/or subsidies.⁵⁶⁰ This is an important dynamic in what has been called the “new urban politics”, which developed in response to the decline of industrial production in North American cities

⁵⁵⁵ Lynda Challis, “Policy Report, Development and Building: CD1 – Rezoning 86 SE Marine Drive/101 East 69th Ave (Wal-Mart)”, City of Vancouver, (April 29, 2005), 8.

⁵⁵⁶ Glenn Bohn, “Wal-Mart prepares to submit proposal”, *The Vancouver Sun* (July 19, 2006), B1.

⁵⁵⁷ Randy Shore, “New zoning bylaws to thwart Wal-Mart”, *The Vancouver Sun* (March 3, 2007), B5.

⁵⁵⁸ Steve Maich, “Why Wal-Mart is Good”, *Maclean’s Magazine*, 118: No.30 (July 25, 2005), 26; Stevenson, *op cit*; Michael Bergdahl, *What I Learned From Sam Walton: How to Compete and Thrive in a Wal-Mart World* (J. Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, 2004).

⁵⁵⁹ H. Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 82:2 (1976), 309-332.

⁵⁶⁰ Inter-city competition is addressed from an activist and theoretical position in the following: Constance Beaumont, Leslie Tucker, *op cit*, 30; D. Harvey, “From space to place and back again; Reflections on the condition of postmodernity”, *Mapping the Futures: local cultures, global change*. Eds. J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, K. Tickner. New York: Routledge, 1993. 7-8.

and the recession of the late 1980s.⁵⁶¹ In Canada, municipalities, under pressures from fiscally conservative provincial and federal governments, actively sought to attract developers and investors and promoted their cities as business-friendly. Inter-city competition and business-friendly promotions accompanied the arrival of NRFs in the CRD. Costco tried to put Sidney and Central Saanich into competition by filing development applications in both when considering a CRD warehouse club in 1995.⁵⁶² In the end both applications were rejected, and Costco instead opened in Langford in 1999. Langford Mayor Stewart Young likes to remind big-box opponents that Costco contributes an average of \$400,000 in property taxes to his city.⁵⁶³ In 1994, View Royal City Council turned down a proposed 125,000 square-foot Home Depot. Langford promptly invited the retailer to a Millstream Road development site, offering a smooth process with a fast six-month approval time-line.⁵⁶⁴ Two years later, View Royal approved a 72,000 square foot Canadian Tire big-box store for the same location proposed by Home Depot.⁵⁶⁵ Fearing the loss of another major development, growth machine councillors worked with Canadian Tire officials to sell the deal to Council. Despite the protests of people living near the proposed site, the Canadian Tire opened in the summer of 2003.⁵⁶⁶

New retail developments have had many directly impacts on residential areas in each regional district. Contacts and conflicts between big-box developers and residents on Southern Vancouver Island have been especially illustrative of Merrifield's dialectical

⁵⁶¹ Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption*, New York: Routledge, 2006. 58-65.

⁵⁶² Bill Smith, "Costco wins one, waits for choice", *Victoria-Times Colonist* (May 3, 1995), B3.

⁵⁶³ Bill Cleverley, "New Life for Langford", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (November 14, 2000) A2.

⁵⁶⁴ Ian Dutton, "Home Depot goes shopping in Langford", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (Nov.11, 1998), B2.

⁵⁶⁵ Sarah Cox, "B.C.'s Big-Box Backlash", *The Georgia Straight*, 35: No.1733 (Mar.8-15, 2001), 17-18.

⁵⁶⁶ Bill Cleverley, "New Life for Langford", *Victoria Times-Colonist* (November 14, 2000) A2.

urbanism, setting new retail developments (urbanization) against old residential neighbourhoods (urbanism). In some cases, such as Langford's Sunshine Terrace, the results of this dialectical urbanism have taken form over several years, and have resulted in an urban anomaly. NRFs present planners and to city councillors with a challenge. Both are under pressure to make their municipalities succeed financially while working with existing bylaws and zoning regimes. Retail developments present opportunities for investment and increased tax revenues. Inner-city competition, also already seen in the case of View Royal, has influenced decisions regarding NRFs. Some, however, have attempted to make retail developments either an engine for or a site of residential development. The case of Town and Country in Saanich, connected to the Uptown Downtown vision for the town centre area, has planners attempting to get the developer to consider mixed-use elements and harmonizing the streetscape and scale of their developments with existing housing.

Residential and Retail

Big-box store and power centre construction has had different impacts on residential neighbourhoods across the study area. The most common experience is that of pre-existing residences becoming neighbours to NRFs that have been built on undeveloped or rezoned, adjacent properties. At Cowichan Commons in the CVRD, two big-box stores are being constructed on either side of a single, fir-lined residential property at 2958 Drinkwater Road (**Figures 5.8– 5.9**). The owner, Nora Cuthbert, is a ninety-two year old widow who has lived in the house for sixty-two years, and who

declined to sell her property to the mall development.⁵⁶⁷ The result of this will be the eventual flanking of her home and tree-lined backyard by a Home Depot and a Future Shop. Luckily because of the sloping site, neither big-box store will loom over the house or trees. One unforeseen result of this situation is that Mrs. Cuthbert is one of very few people who can, and in her case has, *walked* to the supercentre.⁵⁶⁸

In the RDN, the construction of NRFs in the Chase River neighbourhood of South Nanaimo, clustered around Southgate Mall and South Park Plaza (**Figure 5.10**), began in 2007 following city council's decision to rezone 293 hectares of land that had previously formed part of the city's urban containment boundary.⁵⁶⁹ For Chase River residents, especially those living in houses adjacent to the affected property, this decision means their homes will eventually face several hundred acres of retail development and asphalt parking lots; one homeowner, Peter Sterczyk complained that he bought his house in 2002 specifically because it was on the urban containment boundary and thus bordered land that would remain undeveloped.⁵⁷⁰ The commercial development of Chase River has been supported by the Chase River Community Association and the local Snuneymuxw First Nation, who are partners in the planned "Sandstone" town centre development.⁵⁷¹ Such partnerships between retail developers and First Nations will be considered in detail below. Since 2007, several NRF developments have been initiated in Chase River, including a Rona superstore, and one, The Chase River Market Place, has opened (**Figures 5.11–5.12**).⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁷ Peter Rusland, "Meet Rona's Neighbour", *Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial* (May 24 2008), 1.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Martha Tropea, "Big south-end development moves forward; First Nation says project will help band's economy", *Nanaimo Daily News* (October 31, 2007), A4.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Toby Gorman, "Chase River sees rapid development", *Nanaimo News Bulletin* (January 21, 2009), 3.

A final example of retail-residential conflict stemming from big-box store development is the case of Sunshine Terrace in Langford. In November 2001, city councillors approved the rezoning of twenty-eight acres off Millstream Road for a proposed NRF, the Langford Power Centre.⁵⁷³ This NRF development was particularly controversial because site preparation would include blasting, removing numerous trees, and demolishing up to thirty-seven houses, some barely four years old (**Figure 5.13**).⁵⁷⁴ These houses, located on Sunshine Terrace and Selwyn Road, had been built in accordance with the city's Official Community Plan (OCP), which designated the twenty-eight acres for cluster housing (**Figure 5.14-5.15**).⁵⁷⁵ Furthermore, the houses on Sunshine Terrace were built in 1998 as affordable housing - nineteen 1,600-square-foot homes situated on 4,000-square-foot lots on a sloping cul-de-sac which has sold for roughly \$160,000.⁵⁷⁶

A \$56-million, 350,000-square foot project, the Langford Power Centre, was intended to be built on twenty-eight acres of land previously zoned for housing and hotel use. Home-owners on Sunshine Terrace were offered prices above market rate for their houses; many supported the project. Opponents to the power centre included local home-owners, including some on Sunshine Terrace, whose properties would border the power centre, and in fact be surrounded by retail facilities. Other municipal representatives, such as then Highlands Mayor Karel Roessingh, for one sees the power centre development as running counter to proposed regional growth strategy of the CRD, stating: "The whole

⁵⁷³ Carla Wilson, Bill Cleverly, "Power Centre raises concerns" *Victoria Times-Colonist* (November 16, 2001) B1.

⁵⁷⁴ Malcolm Curtis, "Mega-mall in, houses out" *Victoria Times-Colonist* (November 30, 2001), B1

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Shannon Moneo, "In the shadow of retail giants: residential block turned business hub offers residents headaches, convenience", *The Globe and Mail* (December 26, 2006), S1.

Langford development is completely auto-oriented. There will be tons and tons of traffic.” The counter-argument is that there already is a ton of traffic due to the power node and that it is better concentrated in one area than spread across the region. Despite the support of the city of Langford, Millstream Properties, the developer, failed to meet the deadline for purchasing the Sunshine Terrace homes in 2002. As of 2008, the houses and their residents remain. In fact, the Langford Power Centre proposal was never carried forward and instead, a lifestyle centre was proposed and constructed, the parking lot of which encloses Sunshine Terrace. The Langford Power Centre is a good illustration of how retail developments and municipal politics can work together to overcome either local resistance or zoning restrictions, even if it requires the demolition of a relatively new subdivision. In this case, long-term planning appears to fold in the face of financial investment and the pressures of inter-city competition.

First Nations

Another development has been attempts by Wal-Mart to partner with BC First Nations in constructing NRFs on native land. At a time of limited investment and economic development on reserves, such proposals represent a profitable opportunity for First Nations. For Wal-Mart, it means avoiding lengthy approval processes, and city council votes, and, most especially, evading municipal taxes.⁵⁷⁷ Beginning in 2004, Wal-Mart entered into negotiations with two BC First Nations: the Adams Lake Band of Salmon Arm, and the Cowichan Tribes Band of Duncan. In both cases, Wal-Mart proposed that the money they would have paid annually in city taxes be given to the bands instead. In both cases, the municipalities were alarmed and dismayed by prospects

⁵⁷⁷ Sarah Cox, “Wal-Mart on the Rez: Tyee Special Report”, *The Tyee* (www.tyee.ca), June 7, 2004.

of lost revenue and major developments constructed outside planning regimes, yet requiring infrastructure servicing. In Duncan, amid the resulting conflicts between the bands and local governments over jurisdiction and control of planning, the negotiations with Wal-Mart stalled and, by 2006, had collapsed. Wal-Mart, which relocated to North Cowichan, argued afterward that a deal with the Cowichan Tribes collapsed over a demanded \$500,000 payout by the band to complete negotiations.⁵⁷⁸

In another, more recent example, the Tsawout First Nation of the Saanich Peninsula announced in February 2007 a proposal to build a power centre, with a membership warehouse club and one or more category killers, on lands adjacent to the Patricia Bay Highway in Central Saanich, BC.⁵⁷⁹ The Tsawout argue the project is a means towards financial independence and participation in the regional market economy, as well as improved social services and living conditions on the reserve.⁵⁸⁰ While the proposed location is First Nations land, it is also in the Agricultural Land Reserve, an area of provincial jurisdiction meant to protect farmland and green spaces. This is very significant as Central and North Saanich have considerable amounts of working farmland, and the preservation of the agricultural economy and the rural character of the communities are long established principles of governance. There is also simple neighbourhood opposition to new big-box stores in this part of the CRD. The Tsawout power centre debate began in 2007, and has yet to be concluded. However, it seems unlikely to succeed in the face of serious opposition. If it does fail, the result will be difficult for local and provincial officials, since they may be accused of denying the

⁵⁷⁸ Brian Wilford, "Tribes wanted \$500,000 to seal Duncan Mall deal", *Cowichan Valley Citizen* (October 8, 2006), 4.

⁵⁷⁹ [Editorial], "Big-box dreams on the peninsula", *Victoria Times Colonist*, (Feb.11, 2007), D2.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Tsawout the freedom for economic opportunities and of perpetuating social inequities. In order to prevent this, these officials will likely discuss alternate proposals for improving the socio-economic conditions of the reserves. In these cases, the big-box store is a capitalist, postcolonial vehicle of First Nations financial and political independence.

Even in failure, these proposals put a spotlight on the many unresolved issues between First Nations and Canadian governments, especially if the two parties are engaged in the treaty process. It is worth noting that, currently, the BC Treaty Commission is negotiations with fifty-eight First Nations, including the Cowichan Tribes.⁵⁸¹ The Tsawout on the other hand are signatories to one of the earliest, and least fair, treaties negotiated in the 1850s by Governor James Douglas.⁵⁸² While the big-box store can be a tool or a bargaining chip used by First Nations in treaty negotiations, playing it comes with risks. Along with potential business and investment failure, the big-box store is also a postcolonial vehicle of cultural conformity via its promotion of mainstream modes of consumption, a consideration that counter-balances the benefits. Any increase in political and economic freedom brings with it deeper ties to, and increased participation in, the “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption”, whose institutions produce, and reproduce, practices of conformity.⁵⁸³ For both First Nations and anti-big-box organizations, this production of physical and social sameness is one of the least desirable effects of big-box development.

⁵⁸¹ “Negotiation Update”, BC Treaty Commission (www.bctreaty.net), (Apr.25, 2007).

⁵⁸² Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992, 66-68.

⁵⁸³ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch, London: Athlone Press, 2000, 68.

Environmental and Political Concerns

In their article “Why Study Consumption?”, Betsy Taylor and Dave Tilford answer by that question by arguing that Western consumer culture is environmentally destructive and perpetuates social inequities and injustice around the globe.

Environmental concerns are foremost for Taylor and Tilford: “Skyrocketing consumption is rapidly depleting the Earth’s ecosystems, robbing future generations of vital life-sustaining resources. We are currently using far more of the Earth than the Earth has to offer.”⁵⁸⁴ Taylor and Tilford are not alone in drawing attention to the environmental costs of industrial production and consumption, or what is usually called “overconsumption.” In *Wasted: Counting the Costs of Global Consumption*, Michael Redclift’s assessment of the environmental impacts of contemporary capitalism and globalized consumption trends raises a similar alarm.⁵⁸⁵ Big-box stores provide an example where such large subjects and global issues can be located in a local, Canadian context. In their construction and everyday operations, big-box stores have significant social and environmental impacts on their communities. For these reasons, these buildings need to be understood in terms of economics and politics.

In a widely read and much debated essay “The New Politics of Consumption”, Juliet Schor presents an economic analysis of, and political prescription for, contemporary consumption.⁵⁸⁶ Like many of the scholars who have been considered in this dissertation, Schor stresses the increasing ubiquity of consumption in everyday life:

⁵⁸⁴ Betsy Taylor and Dave Tilford, “Why Consumption Matters.” *The Consumer Society Reader*, (ed.s) Juliet Schor, Douglas Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 484.

⁵⁸⁵ Micheal Redclift, *Wasted: Counting the Costs of Global Consumption* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2001).

⁵⁸⁶ Schor (2000).

Advertisements, getting a bargain, garage sales, and credit cards are firmly entrenched pillars of our way of life. We shop on our lunch hours, patronize outlet malls on vacation, and satisfy our latest desires with a late-night click of a mouse.⁵⁸⁷

Despite this shared culture of consumption, Schor points out the absence of a shared political critique. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, when the New Left sustained a political critique of market capitalism, at the start of the twenty-first century Schor perceived no equivalent, despite the dramatic increase in rates of consumption and retail development. She suggests that this may be a result of consumption itself.

Changes at the workplace and home, especially the increase of consumer credit and corresponding debt, have replaced the industrial “work-and-leisure” mode of living with a post-industrial “work-and-spend”. Schor argues this produces high levels of anxiety and robs citizens of the time and energy to formulate or defend an anti-capitalist critique.⁵⁸⁸ It is also the case, in both Canada and the United States, that such critiques were considered, especially by conservative critics, to have been made obsolete following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc of Communist Nations in the late 1980s and early 90s. Schor proposes to fill this critical gap with a “New Politics of Consumption”, based on seven “elements” or arguments with which to debate consumerism. These are: “A right to a decent standard of living”; “Quality of life rather than quantity of stuff”; “Ecologically sustainable consumption”; “Democratization of consumption practices”; “A politics of retailing and the cultural environment”; “An exposé of commodity fetishism”; and “A consumer movement and governmental policy”.⁵⁸⁹ In the years since the publication of

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 5.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, 28-31.

her essay, Schor's seven arguments have been adopted by critics of consumption, and sharply criticized by others.

Although Schor proposes these arguments for the United States, it seems clear that they can be adapted for use in Canada. "Ecologically sustainable consumption" is one for instance, that has become a widely discussed in the years since she wrote this essay. Environmental concerns and interest in sustainable development have gained sufficient popularity to influence mainstream political parties. The current Provincial Government of British Columbia, though ideologically neo-conservative, has begun to promote "green" programs aimed at alleviating worries over environmental damage and destruction. This, it should be noted, has not yet led to fewer big-box stores or less consumption.

Schor's "new politics of consumption" has not been universally embraced. Her essay and seven arguments have been labelled elitist and moralizing; Craig Thompson dubs them "The New Puritanism".⁵⁹⁰ An especially vociferous and sarcastic critic is James Twitchell. Considering Schor to be a "cultural pessimist" and a "scold", Twitchell argues that greater affluence and broader class participation in consumption are better, in that they foster more happiness than less affluence and fewer shoppers.⁵⁹¹ He also decries the elitism of academics that apparently have the power to emancipate "the masses" from the opiate of consumption by being somehow on the outside of consumer culture.⁵⁹² Although I cannot support Twitchell's "freedom through materialism" perspective, I do appreciate the unpretentious manner in which he situates himself as a member of the

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, 69.

⁵⁹¹ James Twitchell, "Two Cheers for Materialism" *The Consumer Society Reader*, (ed.s) Juliet Schor, Douglas Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 285.

⁵⁹² Ibid, 287.

consumer society – for instance, he is an academic unafraid to admit (in print!) that he watches television.⁵⁹³ However his “optimism” concerning consumption is harder to accept. In her response to his criticisms of “The New Politics of Consumption”, Schor writes:

It’s not particular commodities that worry me. It’s really the “Big Points” that Twitchell doesn’t want to talk about. Like Destroying the Planet. Or Not Having Time to Know Each Other. Or Not Having Decent News Because Advertisers Control Content.⁵⁹⁴

These are the points that a socio-environmental critique of consumption and market capitalism needs to argue. While Twitchell contends consumption critics are snobs or scolds, he offers no answer to worries about environmental damage and economic sustainability. While appreciating his points of criticism concerning author positionality, I cannot accept Twitchell’s call for more materialism, whose “fairness” is limited to Western nations and whose long-term prospects are remote.

In different ways, architecture gives shape to the cultural identity of Southern Vancouver Island. Since questions about Canadian identity continue to be asked, we might try to seek answers in places beyond what normally constitutes heritage. Identity construction is an everyday process, something that is grounded in routine but allows for unique and/or unplanned events. Culture similarly proceeds from such a combination of unique and everyday events, ideas, and routines; it is unfixed and constantly in a state of reactive formulation. Like the neighbouring one to the south, Canadian society evolved into one increasingly built around the “mass consumption of cars, houses, and manufactured goods, many designed for rapid obsolescence.”⁵⁹⁵ Perhaps we are - with a

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Schor (2000), 97.

⁵⁹⁵ Hayden, 8.

nod to Lizabeth Cohen - the "Consumer's Dominion". Is it fair to accuse the big box of being a vehicle of Americanization, or of chipping away at a sense of being Canadian? Are they bad for our identity? In terms of organisation and operation, American big-box retailers have brought the corporate structure and strategies that were used successfully in the U.S. market. Canada is not an unfriendly retail place, nor does it lack its own retailers who have much in common with their U.S. counterparts. If ever a nation was created by a corporation, it was Canada and the Hudson's Bay Company. Architectural historians are aware that strip-malls, shopping centres, and megamalls developed in Canada close to the same time as in the United States.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study has argued that new retail formats have changed the social spaces of consumption and urban development on Southern Vancouver Island. It has considered how new locations, designs, and operations have affected communities and the retail structure of a defined geographical area. Increases in building size, new patterns of land-use and ownership, consumer shifts to value-driven shopping and warehouse-style facilities have been presented in order to document this new retail development. Areas of specific impact have included local retail economies, patterns of urban development, municipal and regional politics, and regional planning. As well, the impact of retail facilities on everyday issues of cultural identity, mass consumption, and globalization are of equal importance. The role played by an urban region's retail structure in politics, land-use policies, economic health, and patterns of residential development is extremely influential and has been linked here to Lefebvre's production of social space and the reproduction of the relations of production.

Value retailing and consumption today dominates the Canadian retail sector in terms of operations, new investment, and profits. No longer banished to department-store basements or off-price mall outlets, the old stalking grounds of bargain hunters, value consumption is housed in value architecture. Value architecture marks a significant departure from the regional shopping centres and local strip malls of the 1960s and 70s that previously defined the retail landscape. NRFs are larger, with dramatic increases in floor size and inventory, but simpler in architectural detailing. Generally, value architecture stresses scale over style, reinforcing the notion, in Williams' sense, that it is a space for consumers not a place for customers.

My approach to big-box stores on Southern Vancouver Island has been to focus on their forms in everyday life, and in Marxist theory. My goal has been to contribute to contemporary studies of architecture and theory, specifically vernacular architecture studies and architectural geography. It is clear that the subject of big-box stores, and the numerous ways that they are tied into contemporary urbanism, has great social importance for scholars researching contemporary life on Southern Vancouver Island. This study aimed to demonstrate how the reconsumption of the relations of consumption operates within NRFs and it has influenced retailing and consumption in the three regional districts. They are the sites where Merrifield's urbanization and urbanism clash, not simply in the battles that precede their construction, but in their ongoing operations, by which big-box stores become part of each region's routines of everyday life. The longer the big-box stores are in existence, the more they fall onto the side of everyday life (urbanism), to be opposed in the future by new forms of buildings (urbanization). Yet it is hard to imagine a time in the future when community activists mobilize to "save our Home Depot" or local power centre. Designed themselves with planned obsolescence, NRFs are not meant to last long enough to produce such emotional attachments. Given their brief history on Vancouver Island, however, this remains to be seen.

My perspective has been shaped by architectural geography, an interdisciplinary combination of human geography, architectural history, and cultural theory. This has made me consider NRFs in terms of space, place, and social practice, along with other non-architectural factors. Architectural geography, Ford's merging of "space and place" requires the consideration of all such factors, which can be considered in terms of space. The location of the sites and position within the regional retail structure, including

transportation routes and market demographics, constitute “geographic space.” The communities surrounding the location, and the types of local neighborhood plans meant to guide development, constitute “residential space.” Retail operations are key elements in the creation of “economic space”, shaped by relations with other businesses and patterns of employment. Politicians, planners, and civil servants, especially at the municipal level, contribute “political space” through their role in the approval process of development, in overseeing zoning regulations, and in negotiating concessions with the developer. These spaces are interwoven in the location, the history and everyday use of retail locations- that is the space, place, and social practices of value architecture, retailing, and consumption, producing and consuming value space. Value space is the social, economic, and cultural setting produced and experienced through planning, design, construction, and use of big-box stores. It is made up of physical spaces (such as buildings), mental spaces (such as zoning), and lived spaces (such as social customs). Together, these spaces constitute the shape of social order experienced in everyday life. The lived experience of the big-box store (Lefebvre’s representations of space) is both predictable and unknown, being open to changing conditions. In Lefebvre’s terms, it is these spaces that cannot be wholly predicted or controlled on the basis of either spatial practices or representational spaces. The production of value space is conceived in marketing and design plans, perceived within the built environment, and animated through everyday life.

Value space is more than simply the latest trend in shopping or the newest cultural import from the United States. It should be clear that the national differences are extremely slight when it comes to retail and consumption. Big-box stores and their

attendant developments are, instead, representative of the dialectal struggle between developers and residents, and urbanization and urbanism. The buildings are engines and symbols of consumer culture, sprawl, and growth machine politics. For this reason they have become an apt and highly visible target of anti-sprawl, anti-capitalist politics; not only are they opposed by community activists, frequently, big-box stores face considerable challenges and debates when seeking development approvals from municipal governments. This opposition has not stopped their development, as has been described here. However, this opposition has articulated a number of socio-environmental criticisms and arguments that NRF developers have been forced to either counter or to integrate into their plans. They are the sites at the centre of the new politics of consumption, and as such, are the building type whose future is tied to environmental politics and the planning of cities. After considering the similarities and differences observable in examples drawn from the three regional districts of Southern Vancouver Island, it is clear that big-box stores constitute the architecture of capitalist reproduction and a central site for reconsumption at the start of the twenty-first century.

Big box retailers and their buildings need to be accounted for when considering what it means to be Canadian in the 21st century. The RAIC notwithstanding, retail architecture in 2009 better illustrates the way Canadians actually live their social and cultural values than all the picturesque rural churches and post-offices put together. The latter are nostalgic contributions to Canada's real and imagined self, elements of a shared cultural mythology. They are architectural components of "The True North Strong and Free," the national "space myth" analyzed by Rob Shields in relation to development,

politics, and culture.⁵⁹⁶ Shields notes, as others have before him, the North or Nordicity has long been used as a defining aspect of national character, even if most Canadians live in the South and have no experience of traveling in Northern Canada.⁵⁹⁷ As a myth the “True North Strong and Free”, Shields writes: “is a masculine-gendered, liminal zone of *rites de passage* and re-creative freedom and escape. It is a resource and economic hinterland which is simultaneously incorporated into a social spatialisation as a mythic heartland.”⁵⁹⁸ The North to most Canadians is an imagined place, one that counters both the urban reality of the Canada, and also the cultural influence of the US. The myth of the North and the reality of the South is a Canadian dialectic that may be cast as Nature versus Civilization, or as Nationalism versus Continentalism. As a symbol of the American-influenced, urban lifestyle of Canadians, the big box is a counter to the rural church or the igloo. We might collectively long to live in the True North, but we instead spend out everyday lives in something closer to “Big Box Land”. If ever a nation was created through the operations of commodity consumption and retail structures surely it was ours. Codfish, beaver pelts, lumber, gold, the Hudson’s Bay Company – all are irreducible elements in the historical development and image of the country. As Harold Innis first argued, the fur industry largely determined the borders of Canada while also shaping the unique character of its socio-political institutions.⁵⁹⁹ This is particularly evident to those of us, including myself, who live in cities that begin as HBC forts and trading posts. In the fabric of everyday life, the history of Canada has been, and continues to be, the consumption of Canada.

⁵⁹⁶ Rob Shields, “The True North Strong and Free”, *Places on the Margins: Alternative geographies of modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 162-199.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 163-165.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁹⁹ Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 391-392.

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Figure 1.1 Staples, Fort Street, Victoria.

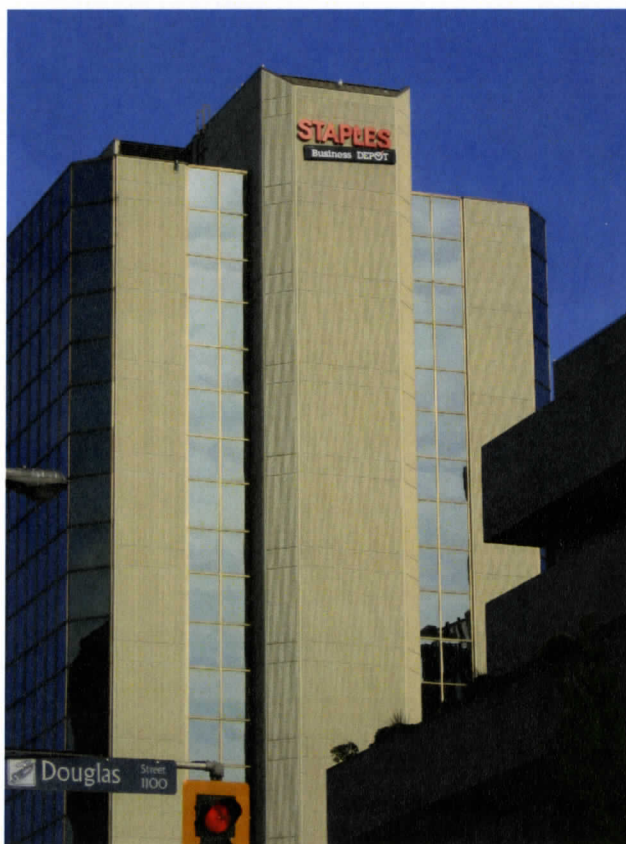


Figure 1.2 Staples Sign, Rohani Building, Victoria.



Figure 1.3 RONA, Langford Parkway, Langford.



Figure 1.4 Wal-Mart, Woodgrove Centre, Nanaimo.



Figure 1.5 Staples, McCallum Road, Langford.

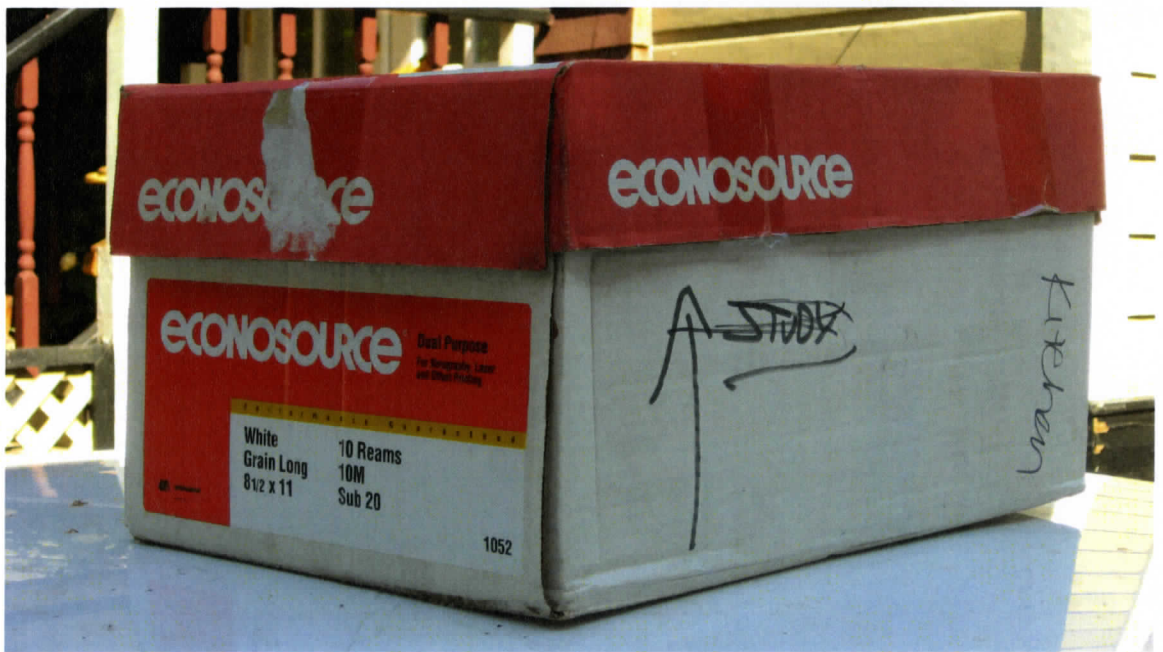


Figure 1.6 Paper Box.



Figure 1.7 Future Shop, Country Club Centre, Island Highway, Nanaimo.

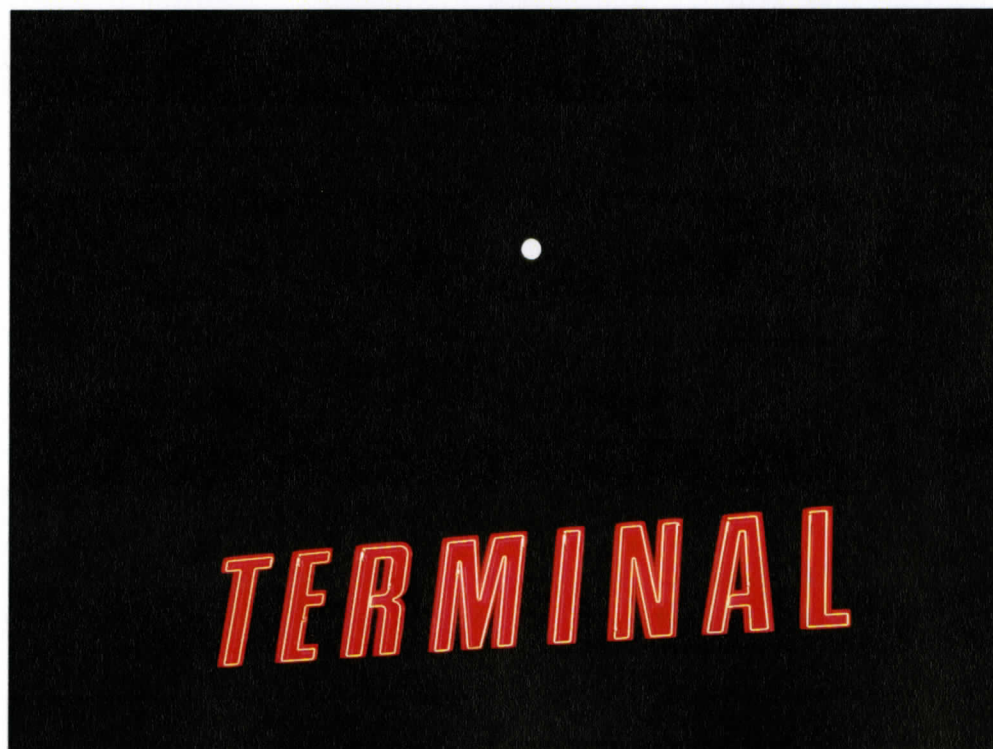


Figure 1.8 Terminal Mall, Island Highway, Nanaimo.



Figure 2.1 Tuscany Village, Mackenzie Avenue, Saanich.



Figure 2.2 Fountain, Tuscany Village, Mackenzie Avenue, Saanich.



Figure 4.1 Former Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Quadra Street, Saanich.



Figure 4.2 Former Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Wellington Road, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.3 Former Wal-Mart, Duncan Mall, Duncan.



Figure 4.4 Vancouver Island Study Area (NRF Locations).



Figure 4.5 The Fourth Street Store, Nanaimo



Figure 4.6 Whippletree Junction, Island Highway, Duncan.



Figure 4.7 Government Street, Victoria.



Figure 4.8 Bank of British Columbia, Government Street Victoria.



Figure 4.9 Weiler Building, Government Street, Victoria.



Figure 4.10 Hudson's Bay Company Store, Douglas Street Victoria



Figure 4.11 Burnside Plaza, Burnside Avenue, Saanich.



Figure 4.12 Woodgrove Centre, Island Highway North, Nanaimo



Figure 4.13 Terminal Park Mall, Island Highway, Nanaimo

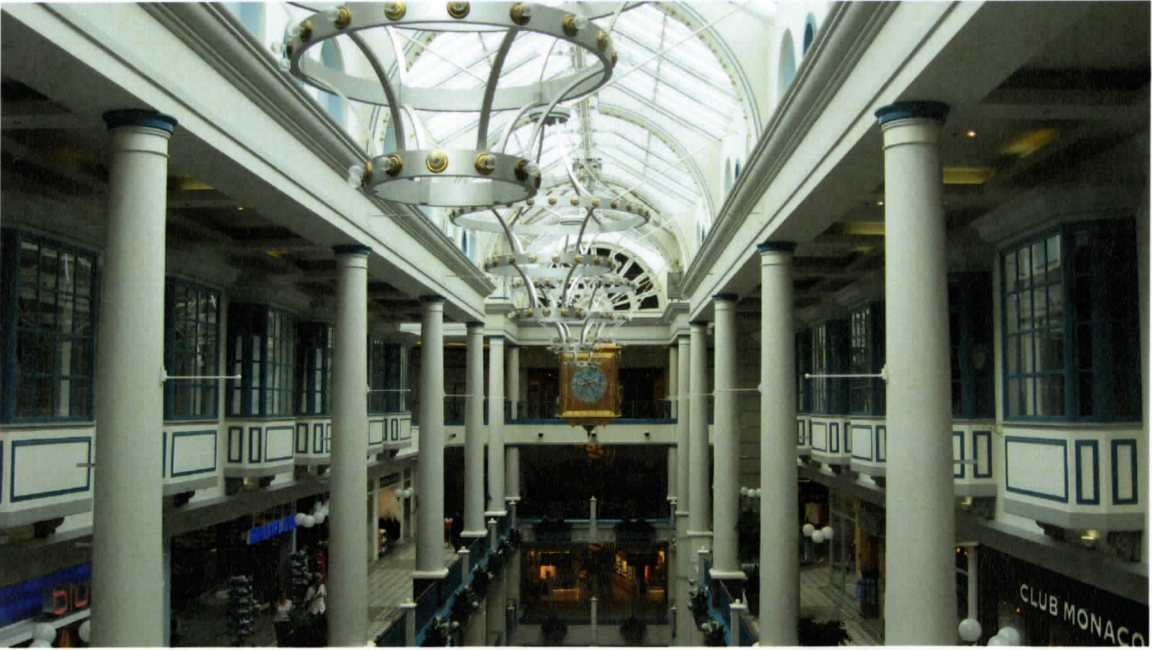


Figure 4.14 Interior Galleria, The Bay Centre, Victoria



Figure 4.15 Lower Level Façade, Tillicum Mall, Saanich.



Figure 4.16 Interior, Lower Level, Tillicum Mall, Saanich.



Figure 4.17 Upper Level Façade, Tillicum Mall, Saanich.



Figure 4.18 Aerial Photograph, Woodgrove Urban Node, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.19 The Brick, Hammond Bay Road, Nanaimo



Figure 4.20 The Brick, Keating Cross Road, Saanich.



Figure 4.21 Canadian Tire, Island Highway, North Cowichan.



Figure 4.22 Canadian Tire, Island Highway, North Cowichan.



Figure 4.23 Facade, The Brick, Frontage Road, Duncan.



Figure 4.24 Detail, Facade, The Brick, Frontage Road, Duncan.



Figure 4.25 Flat False Front, Pet Smart, Island Highway. Nanaimo



Figure 4.26 Flat False Front with Cornice, Chapters, Island Highway, Nanaimo



Figure 4.27 Gable False Front, Linens-N-Things, Tillicum Mall, Saanich.



Figure 4.28 Crow Step False Front, Staples, Duncan Mall, Duncan.



Figure 4.29 University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich.



Figure 4.32 West Wall, Home Depot, University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich.

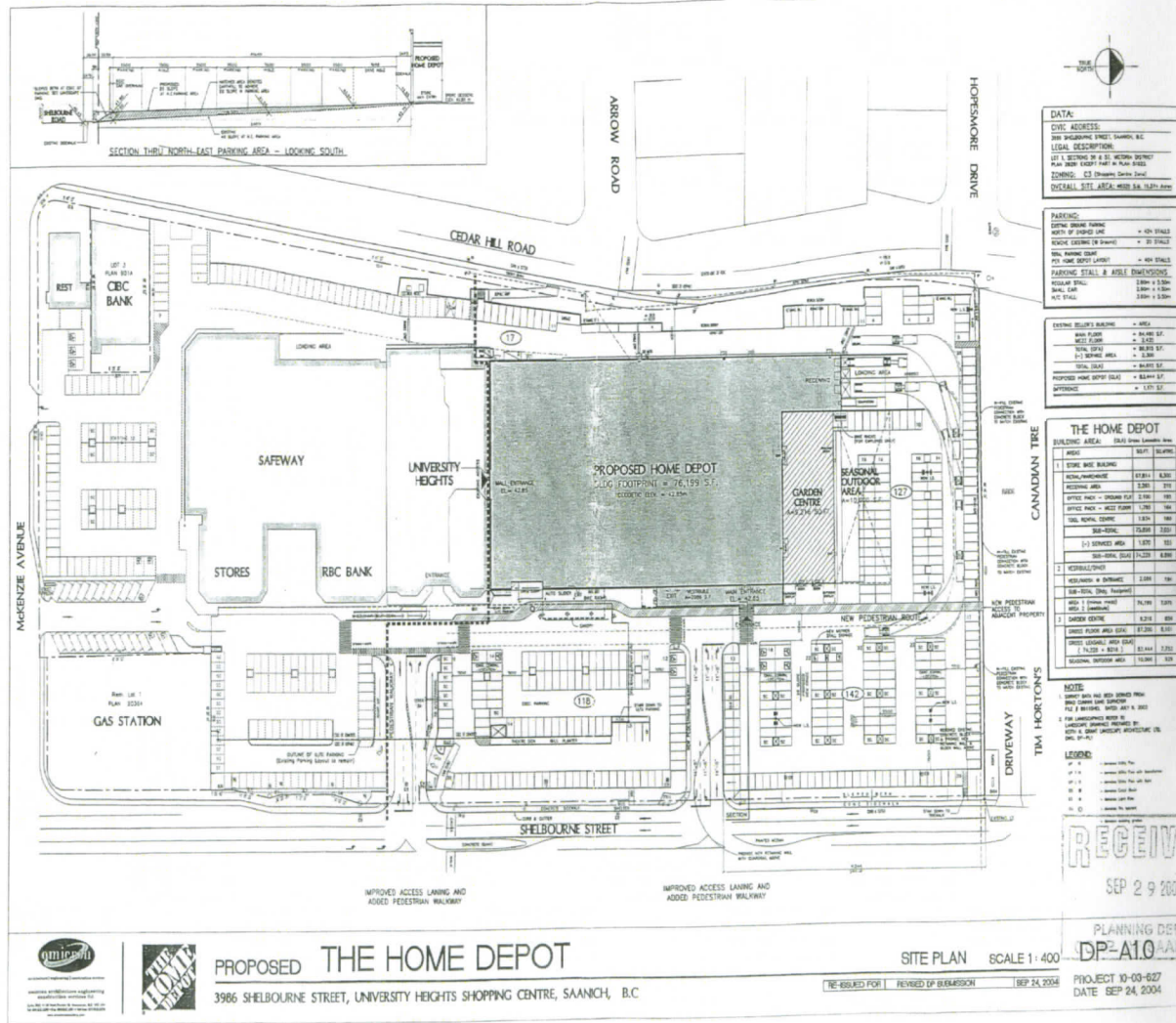


Figure 4.30 Site Plan, Home Depot, University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich



Figure 4.33 Garden Centre, Home Depot, University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich.



Figure 4.34 Steel Frame, Garden Centre, Home Depot, University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich.



Figure 4.36 Façade, Home Depot, University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich.



Figure 4.37 Façade, Home Depot, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.38 Façade, Home Depot, Metral Place, Nanaimo



Figure 4.39 Façade, Home Depot, University Heights Shopping Centre, Saanich.



Figure 4.40 Hudson's Bay Company Store, Mayfair Shopping Centre, Victoria.



Figure 4.41 Former Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Quadra Street, Saanich.



Figure 4.42 Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Viewfield Road, Esquimalt.



Figure 4.43 Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Viewfield Road, Esquimalt



Figure 4.44 Entrance, Costco, Island Highway North, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.45 Entrance, Costco, McCallum Road, Langford.



Figure 4.46 Shopping Cart Shelter, Costco, McCallum Road, Langford.



Figure 4.47 West Curtain Wall, Costco, Island Highway North, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.48 West Curtain Wall, Costco, Island Highway North, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.49 West Curtain Wall, Costco, McCallum Road, Langford.



Figure 4.50 North-west Corner, Costco, McCallum Road, Langford.



Figure 4.51 Wal-Mart, Woodgrove Centre, Nanaimo



Figure 4.52 Façade, Wal-Mart, Attree Avenue, Langford



Figure 4.53 East Wall, Wal-Mart, Attree Avenue, Langford



Figure 4.54 Façade, Wal-Mart, Drinkwater Road, North Cowichan



Figure 4.55 East Wall, Wal-Mart, Drinkwater Road, North Cowichan



Figure 4.56 South-west Entrance, Wal-Mart, Drinkwater Road, North Cowichan



Figure 4.57 Interior, Wal-Mart, Drinkwater Road, North Cowichan



Figure 4.58 Rona Specialty Outlet, Island Highway, Cobble Hill.



Figure 4.59 Rona Big-Box Store, Island Highway, North Cowichan.



Figure 4.60 Rona Superstore, Langford Parkway, Langford



Figure 4.61 Façade, Future Shop, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.62 Façade, Future Shop, Country Club Centre, Island Highway, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.63 Façade, Home Outfitters, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.64 Detail, Façade, Home Outfitters, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.65 Facade, La-Z-Boy, Saanich Road, Saanich.



Figure 4.66 Facade, La-Z-Boy, Saanich Road, Saanich.

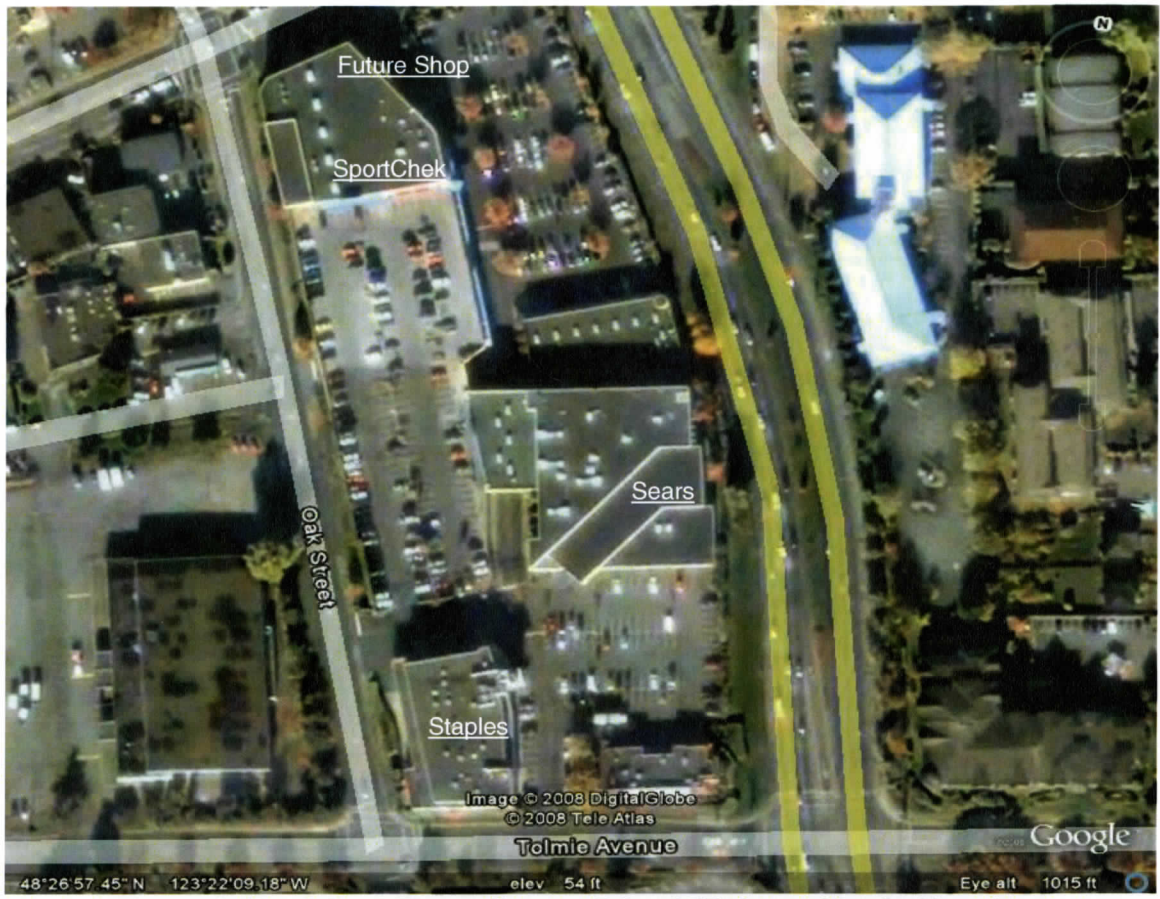


Figure 4.67 Island Home Centre, Island Highway North, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.68 Sport Chek, Island Home Centre, Island Highway North, Nanaimo. ...



Figure 4.69 Staples, Island Home Centre, Island Highway North



Figure 4.70 Future Shop, Island Home Centre, Island Highway North



Figure 4.71 Mary Ellen Crossing, Island Highway North, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.72 False Fronts, Mary Ellen Crossing, Island Highway North, Nanaimo



Figure 4.73 Home Power Centre, Island Highway North, Nanaimo.



Figure 4.74 Façade Details, Home Centre, Island Highway North, Nanaimo



Figure 4.75 Millstream Village Mall, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.76 Millstream Village Mall, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.77 North Wall, Millstream Village Mall, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.78 Retail Buildings, Millstream Road, Langford.



Figure 4.79 Map of Regional District of Nanaimo NRF Locations.

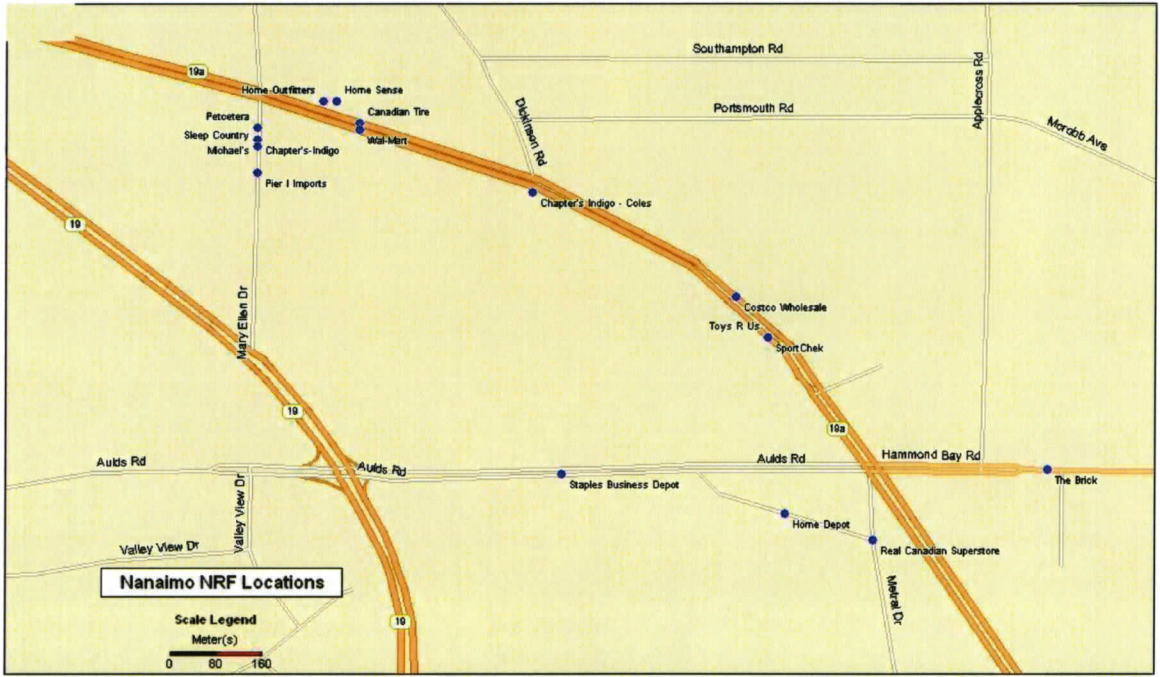


Figure 4.80 Map of Nanaimo NRF Locations.



Figure 4.81 Map of Cowichan Valley Regional District NRF Locations.



Figure 4.82 Map of Capital Regional District NRF Locations.

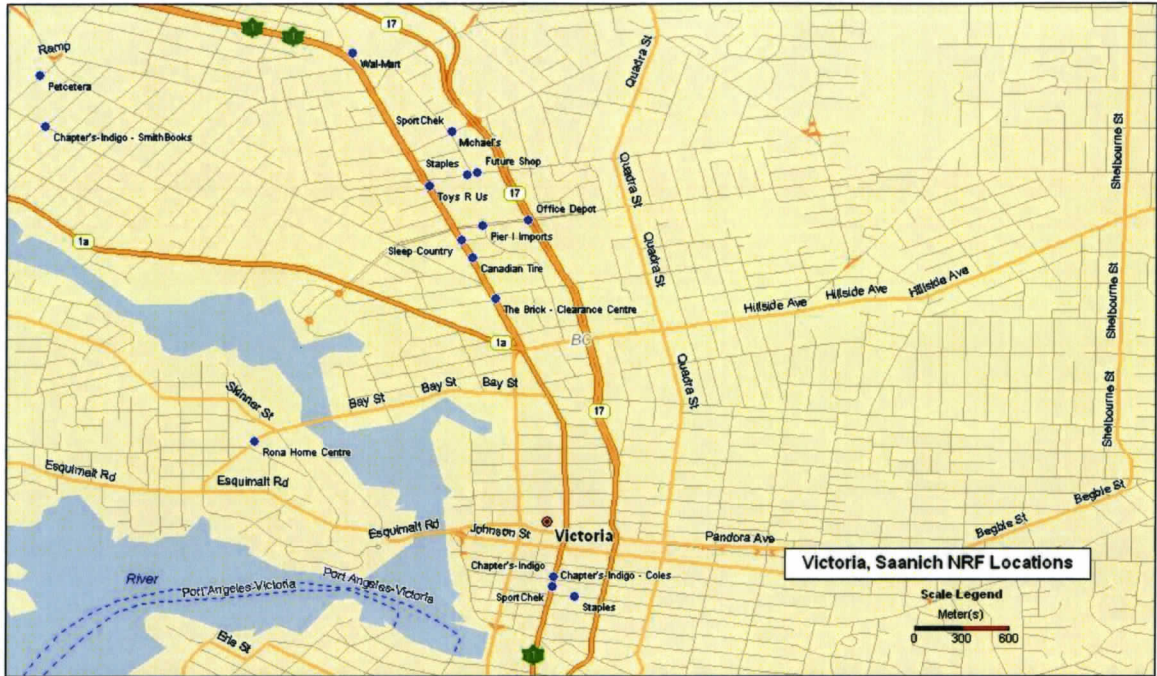


Figure 4.83 Map of Victoria, Saanich NRF Locations.



Figure 4.84 Map of Langford NRF Locations.



Figure 5.1 Woodgrove Urban Node, Island Highway, Nanaimo.

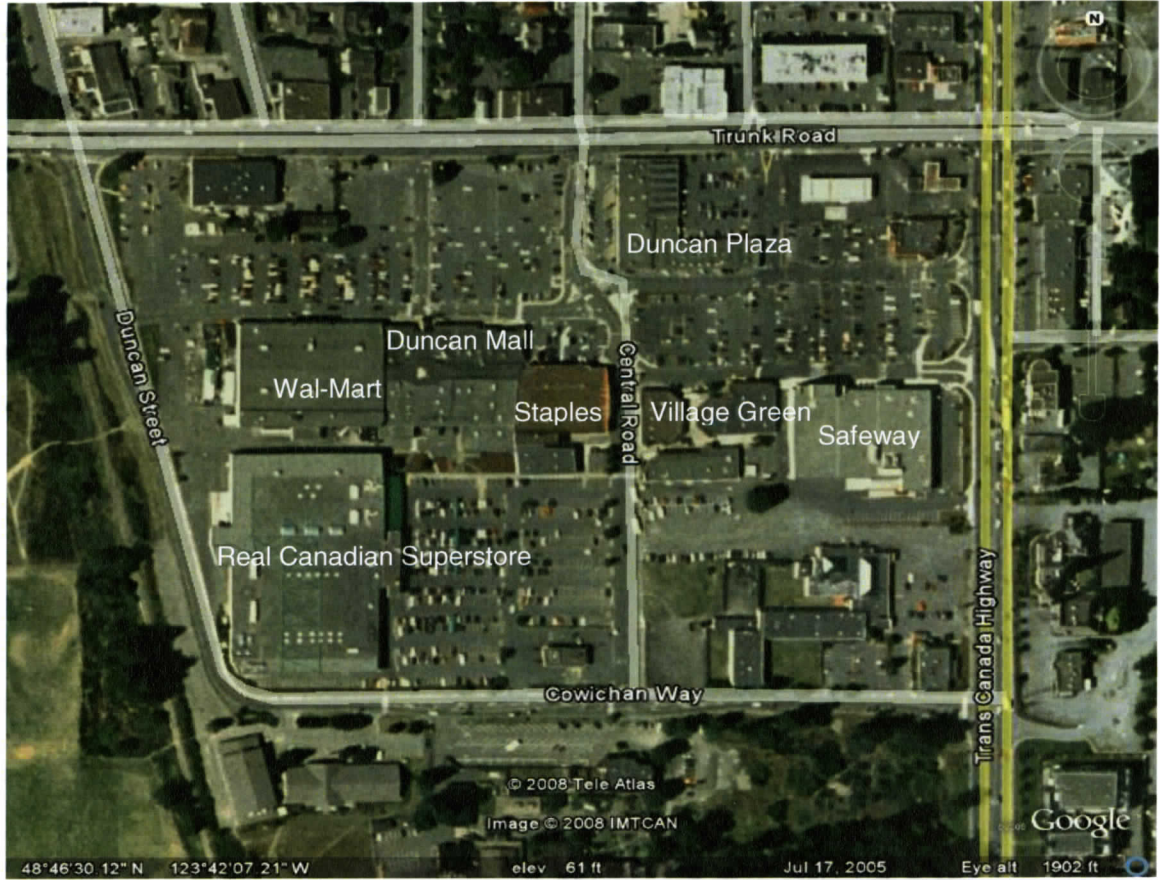


Figure 5.2 Duncan “Power Node”, Highway One, Duncan.



Figure 5.3 Power Centre Construction, Village Green Mall, Highway One, Duncan.

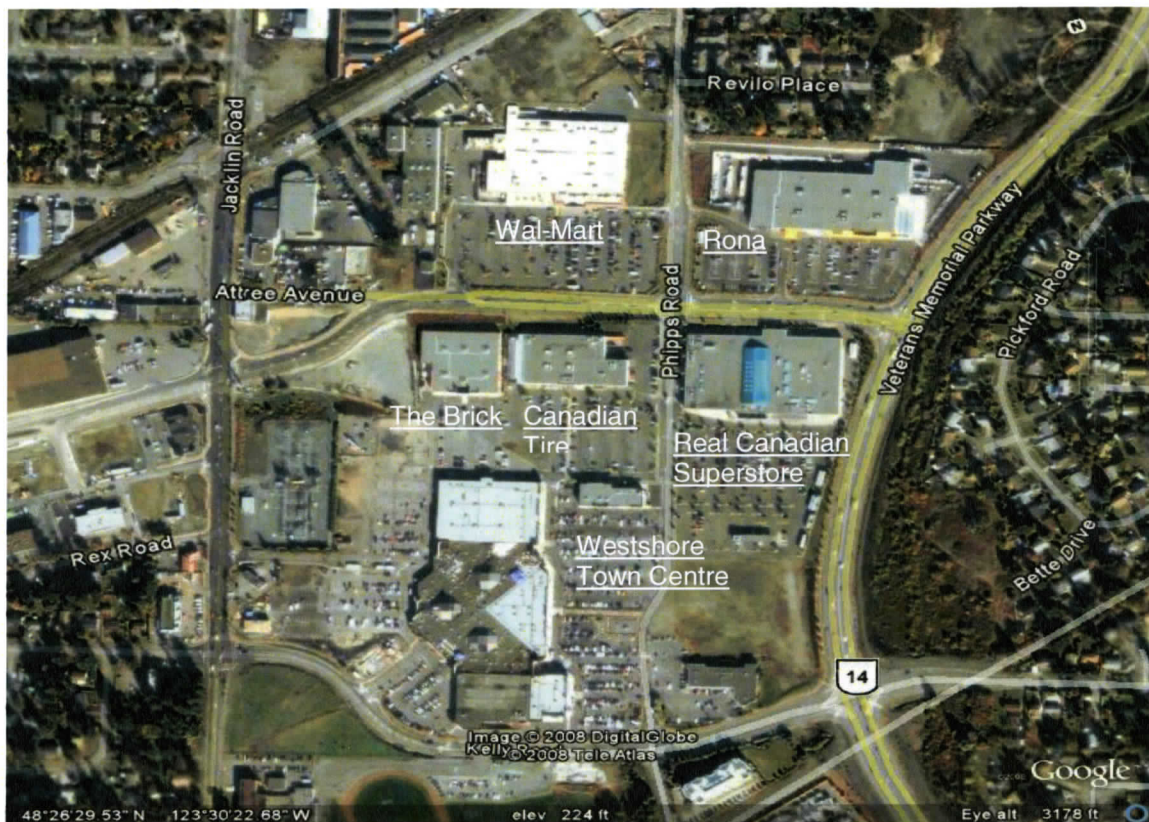


Figure 5.4 Power Node, Westshore Town Centre, Highway Fourteen, Langford.



Figure 5.5 NRF Cluster, Millstream Road/Highway One, Langford.



Figure 5.6 Interior, Rona Big-Box Store, Island Highway, North Cowichan.

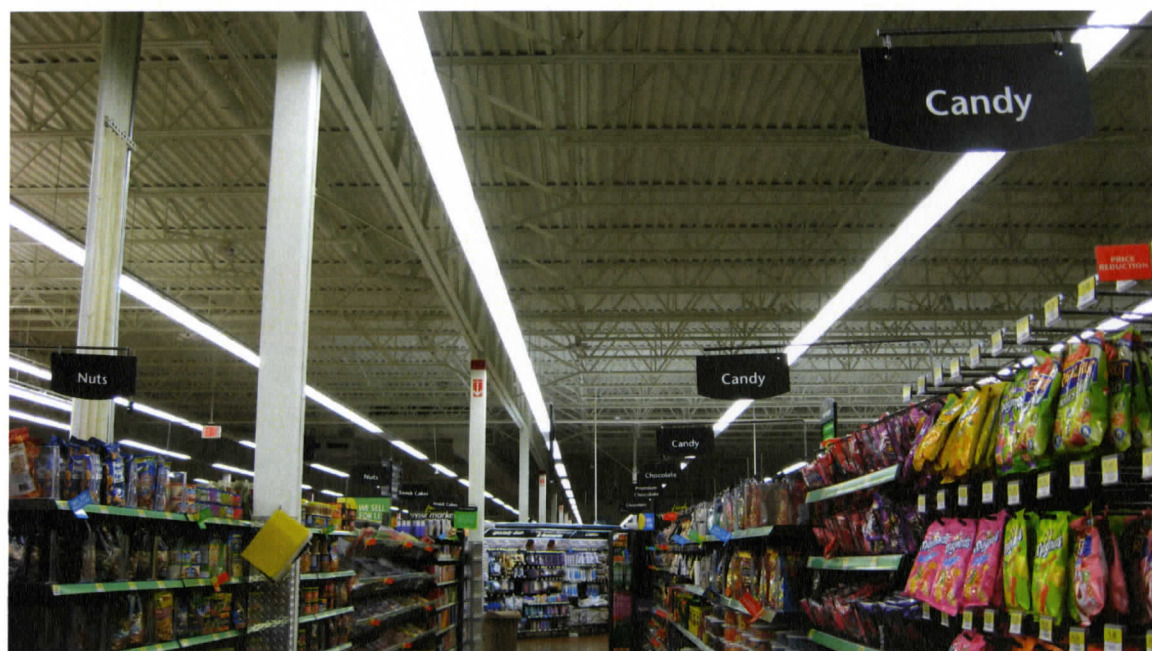


Figure 5.7 Interior, Wal-Mart Supercentre, Cowichan Commons, Island Highway, North Cowichan.



Figure 5.8 2958 Drinkwater Road, Cowichan Commons, North Cowichan.



Figure 5.9 2958 Drinkwater Road, Cowichan Commons, North Cowichan.



Figure 5.10 South Parkway Plaza, Island Highway, Chase River, Nanaimo



Figure 5.11 Chase River Market Place, Island Highway, Nanaimo



Figure 5.12 Country Grocer, Chase River Plaza, Island Highway, Nanaimo



Figure 5.13 Sunshine Terrace, Millstream Road, Langford



Figure 5.14 Sunshine Terrace (Arrow), Millstream Road, Langford

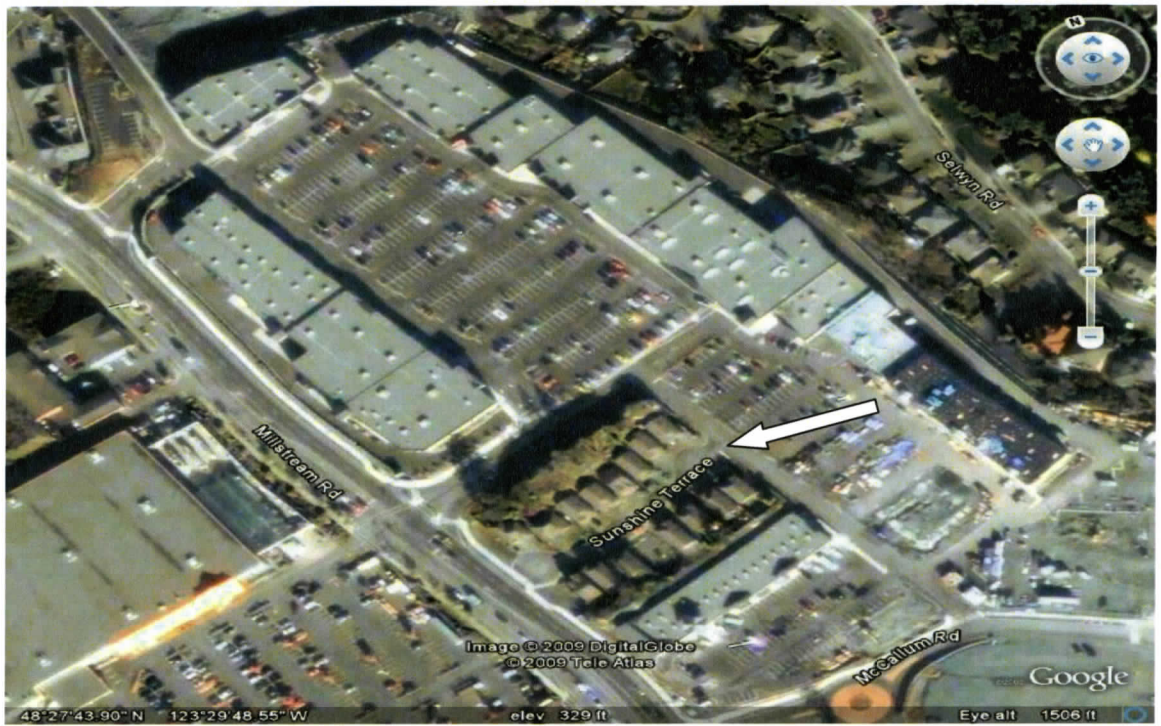


Figure 5.15 Sunshine Terrace (Arrow), Millstream Road, Langford