Contents

Images

Acknowledgments

City Ubiquitous was founded in an Ohio University classroom.

Working to complete a graduate course assignment for Jenny Nelson more than a decade ago, I wrote a paper about the opening theme to *The Simpsons* and concluded my draft with some nascent thoughts about Springfield as a sort of all-place. Wrapping up the paper, I mused that the cartoon city that seems to exist simultaneously in multiple places ought to be called "omnitopia." Offering that playful *portmanteau*, I submitted my paper and moved on. A few weeks later, I was surprised to find that my professor, not one for effusive praise, had written some marginalia next to that word, inviting me to explore it further. A scratched line on a graduate paper set forth the process that led to this book.

Even so, my first years on the tenure-track drew me far from omnitopian fields; I'd chosen to dabble in all manner of smaller projects. But Lela Noble, my dean at the time, recommended that I focus forthwith on producing peer-reviewed publications (assuming I still hoped to earn tenure at San José State University). Sharing a meal with my former office-mate and continued close friend, Phil Wander, I reviewed a number of incomplete manuscripts that might serve this purpose, and I received encouragement that omnitopia was a worthy site to apply my efforts. His advice, most notably to abandon lengthy literature reviews before I could first say something meaningful in my own voice, inspired me to imagine the omnitopian framework.

Before long, concerns about tenure gave way to a scholarly agenda that continues even now. The journal publications that followed offered me the space to try out ideas that became the foundations of *City Ubiquitous*. I gratefully acknowledge a number of editors and publishers who encouraged me and allowed me to reprint portions of several articles for this book. Specifically, a substantial amount of Chapter 4 and a small part of Chapter 5 first appeared in *Communication Theory, 13*(3), published by Oxford University Press/Blackwell. Other parts of Chapter 5 also appeared in *Space and Culture, 8*(4), published by Sage. And a substantial amount of Chapter 7, the Part II overview, and some of the introduction first appeared in *Text and Performance Quarterly, 25*(4), published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis (informaworld.com).

Regarding this last journal, I am particularly grateful to Michael Bowman, who recognized the undeveloped nature of my initial manuscript submission and

chose nonetheless to offer me an opportunity to grow as a scholar. Professor Bowman's willingness to provide a list of essential readings, a veritable master's class in tourism and performance, reflects the highest caliber of collegiality, one I hope to emulate.

I am also indebted to Anne Marie Todd, co-author of the *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 22*(3) piece that introduced much of the omnitopian framework I adapt in chapter 3.

I would add that some preliminary materials have also appeared on my blog, *Woodland Shoppers Paradise* (woodlandshoppersparadise.com), and from class notes maintained on my personal website, *Wood Valley* (omnitopia.com).

A number of other professional colleagues guided me to this place. Specifically, I thank Greg Dickinson, Hanns Hohmann, Wenshu Lee, Carolyn Marvin, and Matthew Spangler for their advice, support, and inspiration.

I also offer special appreciation to Roger Aden, Judith Yaross Lee, Raymie McKerrow, Tim Simpson, and Julie White, who collectively opened the door to the world I still love to explore; Anita James, whose tough question at a colloquium on my research pushed me into fruitful and necessary directions; and to my department chair, Dennis Jaehne, who demonstrates a balance of gentle humor and ferocious intelligence that continues to boggle my mind.

I also would like to recognize the SJSU Department of Communication Studies and College of Social Sciences for grants and assigned time through the years that made this book possible.

Thanks also to students of my classes, particularly Rhetoric and Public Life, Visual Communication, and Communication in the Age of Mobility, where I developed ideas that led to this book. Special thanks to Dana Morella, who helped me think more carefully about Starbucks, and to Alison Perez, who provided thoughtful commentary on Chapter 6.

I offer my gratitude and admiration to Susan Morreale (Partners Composition) for her seemingly limitless patience, kind support, and expert skills in crafting this effort. I am also grateful to Barbara Bernstein at Hampton Press for her creation of a collaborative environment in which I could work productively and sanely. And, of course, I thank Gary Gumpert for taking a chance on this manuscript.

I also wish to express my love, respect, and appreciation to Jenny Wood and Vienna Wood. Our conversations in airports, on highways, and at the dinner table helped shape the contours of omnitopia. I should add that Jenny's willingness to plow through various drafts of this book saved me from countless errors. Naturally, any mistakes that remain are my own.

One final note: For purposes of illustration, comment, and scholarly analysis, I refer to a number of trademarked names throughout this book. I affirm that these marks remain the property of their respective owners, and I emphasize that my opinions and interpretations (excepting those otherwise cited) do not reflect those of any other person or entity.

Introduction

> The true has no windows. Nowhere does the true look out to the universe. And the interest in the panorama is in seeing the true city. "The city in a bottle"—the city indoors.
>
> —Walter Benjamin (1999, F°, 24/840)[1]

Nostalgic images of public life reside within hazy fantasies of place: the village green, the town hall, the local pub. We celebrate these places with some fondness, even while employing a certain degree of strategic ambiguity in recollection. Our images of these places involve families listening to brass bands on a cool summer evening, neighbors working together to fashion public policy, a friendly greeting at a favorite café where the pie is homemade. In this reverie, one may choose to obscure the darker aspects of those places: the provincial fears of outsiders, the incessant obligations of social life, and the petty exclusions wrought by small-town prejudices. In this forgetting, many people yearn even now for a place "where everyone knows your name." Yet these sorts of places have receded from contemporary life, replaced by the multiplex, the shopping mall, and the office park, and we wander the broad boulevards of a new sort of polis that is more enclavic than any small town, even as its borders and contours become more difficult to discern. We know the names of today's common places, but we do not know the name of this "place."

I reflected on this one evening as my students and I discussed Starbucks.[2] In this conversation, we debated whether this ubiquitous coffee shop chain might be considered a "meaningful place," a locale that exists for purposes beyond mere commodity exchange. Some students replied that this site of commodity exchange *is* meaningful. They had a point, especially because Starbucks seems hell-bent on inserting itself into every crevasse of urban life (a goal that, despite fierce battles with McDonalds and Dunkin' Donuts, the company is beginning to realize). More intriguingly, my students proposed that Starbucks should be viewed

as a broadly open place, a contemporary agora where anyone from corporate executives to construction workers to soul-patch poseurs with a few bucks to spare may grab a caffeine jolt. That broad spectrum of personalities must mean something. Yet something about this conclusion felt wrong to me. With the fervor of one whose faith was not yet firm, I replied that this kind of "agora" is meaningless, or at least it should be viewed as such. Meaningful places require human interaction, not just the passing of dollars for things, I argued. "Why," I said, "I could buy a cup of coffee at Starbucks without uttering a word to a single person. And if I could, that would illustrate my point. How meaningful can a place be that would permit such anonymous exchange?" I felt that I had made my point, but my students called my bluff. Okay, professor, engage the ritual of coffee at Starbucks without uttering a word. Just try.

Soon after accepting my students' challenge, I found myself waiting in a Starbucks queue, wondering whether I could maintain a vow of silence in even this forcibly social place. Grinding along with a multiclassed queue of caffeine lovers, I knew that my solitude could be pierced by psychological interrogation. Am I smooth or intense, elegant or bold? Do I possess a sparkling acidity or am I caramelly sweet? Surely someone might ask, "May I suggest Ethiopian Yergacheffe?" Staring at the huge price board that demanded some manner of interaction, I wondered whether I could order a coffee without a word being exchanged. Perhaps this experiment was destined for the growing pile of promising notions that fail in execution. But then I got an idea. What if I attempted some form of anticipatory disengagement? With a mobile phone cupped to my ear and detached gaze in my eyes, I would manage the exchange by placing my Starbucks debit card and a cardboard coffee holder on the counter. On the cardboard I wrote "T" and "CM," the universal symbols for a "tall" Caramel Macchiato, and my name. I smiled at the kid who received my paper and plastic before turning my gaze toward the phone. The phone was not even switched on, but its presence provided a potent aural enclave.

I can't help but laugh at the self-indictment inspired by the term for this practice. I have become one of a growing cohort of "cellphonies" (Harmon, 2005), and as a southerner by birth and culture, I feel guilty for this subterfuge. Where I was raised, one learned to "know one's place," yes, with all the history stirred up by the phrase. This place calls for at least some kind of human interaction, doesn't it? When I ride the bus, I create another aural enclave with the aid of my iPod earphones. But I remove one bud to say thanks to the driver when I depart. It is a small gesture, but one that is important to me. So I stood there in Starbucks, feeling guilty about more than my purchase of overpriced coffee. But the kid behind the counter was well versed in this exchange. He merely smiled and swiped my card, his eyes already searching the line behind me as he passed my cardboard instructions to the barista. Using the recycled coffee holder saved me a dime, and I didn't have to spend a word on communication

with strangers. A few minutes later, I heard my name called, but the coffee sat atop the counter alone. I picked it up without the need for thanks. Finding a seat amid an amalgamation of laptop and mobile phone users, some reading, others chatting with friends, I gazed through the plate glass window: Wal-Mart to the right, an interstate highway straight ahead. I sat in the California town of Salinas along Highway 101, but I could be anywhere.

Looking down the road, surveying its bland interchanges, I began to think of my Starbucks exchange as a first step on a larger journey, and I wondered: Could I extend this experiment beyond the walls of a single stop along the highway? Perhaps with some luck, I would not simply visit this continuum; I would inhabit it. With a little planning and a willingness to travel a long distance, I could visit a place marked by disparate structures and common practice, a ubiquitous city. Finding this place would require a fair amount of research and planning, and some funding, too. Fortunately, around my university, I am known as a road tripper. Although my scholarly pursuits attempt the kind of esoteric musings befitting an academic trying to go places, my passion involves long journeys down rural highways. I will bypass 100 chain restaurants to savor a humble cup of coffee at a small-town diner. I have driven 1,000 miles over a day to photograph an exquisite piece of motel signage. To the many colleagues who asked whether I saw the Disney/Pixar film *Cars*, I replied: Sure I did, and I loved it unabashedly. My eyes glistened when the sleepy town of Radiator Springs transformed itself into a neon Route 66 fantasy. I thrilled to each image from the Mother Road that I could spot in the film; every shimmering piece of architecture glowed like one of William Gibson's (1981) semiotic ghosts that only a fortunate (or haunted) few could see. But this trip would not be about visiting those sorts of places or living those kinds of media-fed fantasies. Instead, this drive would call forth a structural and perceptual enclave whose apparently distinct locales convey inhabitants to a singular place, a place I call *omnitopia*.[3] I planned to travel the country without leaving the confines of this place.

My itinerary called for me to fly from San José, California to New York City; rent a car; and drive west toward the Pacific coast along Interstate 80, a cross-country trip of approximately 3,000 miles over $4^1/_2$ days. My goal was simple: I would cross America without speaking to anyone. After all, omnitopia is a place where human communication follows different rules, when it does not become irrelevant. To accomplish this task, I employed a growing range of mediating technologies such as online registration, self-service kiosks, and after-hours key dispensers. Assuming that these technologies could not help me avoid all human interaction, I allotted myself 10 words to speak with other people per day. As it turned out, I greatly overestimated my word budget. Instead of requiring 10 words a day, I spoke 5 words to other people during the entire trip. As a student of human communication, I found the effort to craft an itinerary that would remove me from human interaction to be personally difficult. I also found the

trip to be lonely and disorienting. I cannot say it was a pleasant trip. Even so, I believe the trip was necessary to illustrate my growing unease at the design and practice of omnitopian expansion that increasingly works to make strangers of us all. To describe omnitopia, not merely as a brief coffee shop vignette, but as an embodied performance, I will assume the voice most appropriate to discussing this kind of experience, always in the present tense.

On the Road Again

My trip begins by passing through the regulated terrain of San José's (SJC) international airport. Unlike other airports, SJC is woven into the urban fabric, practically downtown, and a convenient node to the Silicon Valley network. Entering that node, however, demands a remarkably complex interplay of electronic and physical identity checks. The spectacle of search and frisk marks this place, more than the personal interrogations ("Are you carrying any explosives") that reflect a sadly naïve pre-9/11 age. At various checkpoints, technologies of surveillance are woven tightly into the labyrinth. The traveler learns to pack light, wear flip flops, and carry major documents at all times, even to wear them around the neck like a chain of office. Once admitted into the inner sanctum, the airport traveler senses a muffled silence as people become isolated cars on a snowy day, trying to avoid collisions. Airports transform us into strangers even in the midst of the cities we call home. Passing through the whooshing doors, passing the ticket-dispensing kiosks, and breezing by the skycaps, frequent travelers embody a kind of corporate asceticism marked by a new set of values: keep moving. Airborne, I cross the continent, either asleep or watching satellite TV. A smile and curt headshake evade the possibility of a drink order. The cabin lights dim, and I sleep, lulled by the hum of distant iPods. Hours later, I arrive in New York, gliding on moving pathways while raindrops beat against plate-glass windows.

I now will find and occupy my mobile enclave, a mid-size rental car with no deductible, and start heading west. At the car rental site, I am known by my credit card. Only four words, my name spoken twice, put me in the driver's seat. Passing through New Jersey, where legally mandated full-service gas pumps would threaten my bubble of silence, I head for Pennsylvania in search of a fast-food shop where I can use an electronic kiosk to purchase a deli sandwich. Hundreds of these shops have begun experimenting with kiosk technologies, and the larger fast-food restaurants like McDonald's rolled out prototypes in Chicago and Denver. Although the larger fast-food chains have been slow to expand the use of this technology, convenience stores such as Royal Farms, Sheetz, and Wawa have embraced self-service kiosks to increase order accuracy, improve efficiency, and enhance sales (Liddle, 2004). Learning the rules of the machine, I discover that each selection branches into contextually connected choices such as size

and condiments until I have assured the machine that, no, I do not want a side order. Okay, yes, I want fries. I receive a receipt printout while the folks behind the counter race to complete my order. Incidentally, the fifth word of my trip, also on the first day, is the most banal: "sauce." When I select horseradish for my roast beef sandwich in a Wawa, the teenage deli chef leans over the counter to clarify what the kiosk does not convey: "real or sauce?" In omnitopia, it is best to keep your tastes simple.

That night, I sleep in an extended-stay hotel in Cleveland. I arrive after the lobby has closed and find that my key resides behind a button punch-pad. Just type my name and a comfortable bed awaits me. The next day, I stumble back onto the interstate in the pouring rain. That afternoon, traveling west of South

Image 1: Signs of the Times. *Photograph by Andrew Wood*

Bend, Indiana, I am delayed by a traffic jam with virtually no movement for about a half hour. Referring to my map, I discover that I can leap onto Highway 20. Before long, I am cruising along a great old road through the downtowns of the Hoosier State with red, orange, and yellow leaves of fall scattered among the front lawns. In New Carlisle ("A nice place to visit, a great place to live!"), the porches are festooned with jack-o-lanterns. I dial my iPod to John Mellencamp and sing about little pink houses while rolling past a main street café decorated with American flags. I yearn to stop for a hot cup of coffee and some friendly banter and cherry pie. But tonight I will sleep within a maze of office parks with tinted glass, a culture colored beige. I will dream scenes from *Office Space* and rise the next morning without remembering where I am.

My Internet tendrils connect me to distant beds, secured with credit and opened through key combinations when the lobbies have closed. Upscale hotels have begun to employ the same kiosk technology to provide plastic keys that open multihundred dollar doors to a night's rest. But all manner of hotels have begun to acknowledge that folks do not want conversation after a day on the highway; they want cable TV and wireless Internet access. I awaken to *Cable News Network* and *USA Today*. One day I am in Omaha, the other I am in Cheyenne; another, I am in Salt Lake City, but I am never really there.

I travel self-contained, dropping my keys in the slot before heading back to the highway. Only rarely does anyone invite the heat of what Kenneth Gergen (1991) calls a *microwave relationship*: one that pops quickly but cools fast and offers little nutritional value. In an edge city ringing the Omaha downtown, after I have processed my plastic-sheathed chicken Caesar salad through a UPC scanner at a Wal-Mart self-service checkout stand, an older woman drops her bag. My southern instincts call for quick action, but she is faster. As she scoops up her possessions, she glances at me and smiles: "It gets harder when you get older, huh?" What follows is an invitational silence, not a demand, but an opportunity. I smile back with falsely knowing disengagement, and the moment is gone. After a couple of days, I discover a frantic love for talk radio. Using my mobile phone to e-mail text messages and blurry photos to my wife fails to fill the void I feel. I hunger for human voices. Rush Limbaugh speaks and for once I listen. The lack of conversation has transformed me into a deep ocean diver feeling that panic of oxygen deprivation. I catch gulps in discrete rest stops, listening to families squabble over ill-folded road maps. My nods to strangers become more pronounced, my smiles more apologetic.

One evening in Cheyenne, I take pictures of gas stations drenched in rainy fluorescence and head for a motel. This place has no kiosks, no mediating technology between me and the counter person. I have dreaded this night. I could not find an extended-stay inn nearby, and I am certain that I will spend scarce words from my budget speaking with a friendly manager who has just returned from a motivational conference. I signal my anticipatory disengagement with a

Image 2: Cheyenne Gas Station. *Photograph by Andrew Wood*

mobile phone covering one ear. I think about college students who signal the degree to which they are willing to engage in conversation by whether they leave one of their earphones dangling. We are building a practical etiquette in this new world of aural enclaves. Fortunately in Cheyenne, the manager is also on the phone. I provide my tokens: a driver's license, my reservation printoff, and my credit card. She hands me a receipt and room key without a word.

The ritual is fixed now. I drive a few hundred miles, swipe my card at a gas station, navigate the cavernous expanses of a Wal-Mart in search of deli food and bottled water, and cruise a few hundred miles more toward an extended-stay hotel where my room key awaits my tapping of a keypad. Dropping into Salt Lake City, I have grown so accustomed to the continuity of anonymous travel that I decide to take a vacation from my vacation. It is time to see a movie. If my instinct is correct, omnitopia has expanded away from the highway into more presumably public places. By chance, I park near a metroplex and peer into the lobby. Sure enough, I can use a kiosk to purchase movie tickets in the lobby and even check my e-mail at an Internet terminal. Before the show starts, teenagers tap away on mobile phones, and the darkened arena glows purple and green. Returning to the hotel, I visit a "cupboard" room where all manner of

snacks are on display. I can drop my money in a box, charge the food to my room, or not pay at all. No one would know my choice. I am on the honor system. The next morning as I prepare to head for Nevada, I drop my plastic key in the basket. The lobby is empty.

Driving through the Nevada desert on my way toward sunset and the Pacific coast, I spot anonymous words written in the piles of stones. Lovers and enemies leave markings on the near-moonscape, telling us they were there. Apparently "Doug + Rita." Along the roadside, simple crosses mark violent deaths. Voices remind even the silent traveler that we all pass each other through the eternities. These monuments and memorials convey a similar need to affirm our mutual humanity, to leave traces that might prove permanent. I smile to think of Doug and Rita, whomever they are. I contemplate the death of a stranger whose life is marked by whitewashed wood and a teddy bear. I enter California with confidence that no one will ask my business at the agricultural inspection station. Sure enough, no one is there.

Across 3,000 miles of interstate over some 108 hours, I have bypassed America even as I crossed its length. I have never met a single person who could touch me, and I rarely get the sense that one might try. This post-public America does not resemble the alienated strangers of an Edward Hopper painting; we are not lonely nighthawks in an after-hours café. In fact, we are more connected to more people in more ways than any other civilization in human history. However, the nature of those networked communications, their ubiquitous nature and simultaneously Balkanized specificity, has fashioned a new kind of polis: not an agora where strangers mix and mingle, but something entirely new. This ubiquitous place, this omnitopia, is growing beyond interstates and airports. It is colonizing coffee shops and bookstores, and it is changing the rules of discourse. This place reflects a certain degree of wealth and privilege, but it is growing beyond the rarified pleasantries of airport "clubs" and hotel concierges who efficiently rid the road of its bumps and surprises. In this city ubiquitous, we can carry countless voices with us, but we never must speak with a neighbor. Aided by peripatetic technologies, we are never lost, but increasingly distant.

A Rhetoric of Ubiquity

This book offers an effort to understand omnitopia as a lens upon our age of ubiquity, a period in which all peoples, places, and things become accessible from any point in a global network. In the age, traditional distances recede, enabling a sphere of interaction that renders each point equidistant from every other point.[4] This age of ubiquity is both structural and perceptual. It requires

physical places and technologies to collapse those distances into manageable relation. But it also demands perception that these points are accessible and desirable. Such an age is consequently a rhetorical notion, enacting a vision of public life that one enters through communication, specifically the identification of oneself as an occupant of an idea.

Given its rhetorical origins, this work draws most directly from a subset of communication scholarship focusing on space and place. This kind of scholarship owes a special debt to Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Michel de Certeau (1984), who, while arriving from different directions, helped introduce the field of communication studies to cultural geography. Presaging the field's embrace of that framework, Darryl Hattenhauer (1984) argued for the embrace of semiotic theory to read human-made structures, stating, "[a]rchitecture not only communicates, but also communicates rhetorically" (p. 71). From this dictum, Hattenhauer advocated the study of ceremonial and memorial architecture while proposing that postmodern sites would play a role in our inquiries as well. Thereafter, communication scholars have sought to study the structure, design, and planning of place and the psychological, social, and improvisational components of space, the intersection of these two being mediated through authorizing discourse, unspoken ideology, and human interaction.

So far, the results are promising. One of the richest lines of communication scholarship emanating from this study has focused on the Washington, DC Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a place that intersects with a space of overlapping narratives about the war and our public memory (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Carlson & Hocking, 1988; Ehrenhaus, 1989; Foss, 1986; Haines, 1986). Inspired by this conversation, communication scholars have focused on other memorials, about the Holocaust (Hasian, 2004), the civil rights struggle (Armada, 1998), Martin Luther King, Jr. (Gallagher, 1995), Buffalo Bill (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005), and Israeli settlements (Katriel, 1994). Adding to this commemorative turn, communication scholars have also broadened their focus on even more complex constellations of texts related to the meaning of World War II (Biesecker, 2002), the "place" of Sojourner Truth (Mandziuk, 2003), and the ways in which we mourn at sites of violent death (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998; Trujillo, 1993). Beyond commemoration, communication scholars have also investigated places as intersections of tourism, community, and media-fantasy fulfillment (Aden, Rahoi, & Beck, 1995; Clark, 2004; Goodstein, 1992; Makagon, 2003), not to mention sites of consumerism (Dickinson, 1997, 2002). From this perspective of communication scholarship, we find that places do not simply contain the stages on which we speak; they are messages themselves. Although these works inspire this book, I believe we can also focus less on sites as locales, differentiated places of time and character, and learn more about the process through which places become omnitopia.

Expanded Definition of Omnitopian Framework

As noted earlier, omnitopia enacts a structural and perceptual enclave whose apparently distinct locales (and locals) convey inhabitants to a singular place. For a growing number of people, it is like a wireless "cloud" that is accessible to some and invisible to others. The typical omnitopian may be the conventioneer who flows from international airport to atrium hotel to shopping mall to theme restaurant without ever walking the streets. Moreover, as our archetypal omnitopian flows from convention to convention, she or he begins to view them as terminals to the same place. An imperfect amalgam of Greek and Latin roots constructing an "all-place," the term *omnitopia* draws its lineage from utopia (not-place) and heterotopia (other-place) to reveal the shift from totalizing narratives to overlapping contradictory narratives. A key distinction from heterotopia, however, is the shift from separate locale (park, church, graveyard, motel) to a complete enclave that approximates all of urbanity. Omnitopia does not reside elsewhere, but "everywhere." Whereas heterotopia offers a social safety valve from public life (Foucault, 1986; see also Hetherington, 1997; Soja, 1995, 1996, 1997; Wood, 2003a, 2004), omnitopia constructs a reproduction of the world that is necessarily and strategically incomplete. Although the "entire world" cannot reside within the omnitopian field, one glimpses enough of the world to ignore what has been elided. As we will see, that smaller mirror world reflects much about the larger one; the connection flows both ways.

I have surveyed the contours of omnitopia in several venues, trying to develop a coherent yet flexible framework for this concept. In previous efforts, I studied "aspects" of omnitopia in airports (Wood, 2003b) and "strategies" of omnitopia in motels and hotels (Wood, 2005a). I have expanded on this notion of strategies by surveying depictions of omnitopian urbanity (Wood & Todd, 2005) and unpacking performances of omnitopia within tourist enclaves (Wood, 2005b). Most recently, I have revised the initial omnitopian framework by its application to the film *Dark City* (Wood, 2008). In these works, I have proposed five components to omnitopia: dislocation, which detaches a site from its surrounding locale; conflation, which merges disparate experiences into a whole; fragmentation, which splits a singular environment into multiple perceptions; mobility, which orients a place around movement rather than stasis; and mutability, which enables the perpetual change of a place. However, in this book I transcend mere categorization. Instead, I hope to survey the design and communication of this ubiquitous age, revealing its troubling implications for meaningful human interaction while also noting the bounds and limitations to this phenomenon.

Reflecting on the limitations of this project, I freely admit that my efforts to offer a name and grammar for omnitopia risk creating a lens that is custom

designed. This lens may reveal only what I choose to see. Henri Lefèbvre (1991) offers fair warning:

> When codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces—urban spaces, say—we remain, as may easily be shown, on a purely descriptive level. Any attempt to use such codes as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of a *message*, and the inhabiting of it to the status of a *reading*. This is to evade both history and practice. (p. 7)

Respecting this concern, it is my hope that this project will reflect a way of seeing modernity that does not create a sensibility, but rather illuminates what might otherwise be obscured. If successful, writing about omnitopia will result in a moment of recognition that renders the familiar to be profoundly strange and therefore worth our attention.

Here we must consider the limits of that recognition. Being intentionally limited, omnitopia is inevitably limiting. Two people moving through the same geographical location may nonetheless occupy entirely different spaces: one in omnitopia, the other being elsewhere. Certainly both are subject to similar globalized flows of commerce and power, "[b]ut even if . . . bourgeois travelers can be 'located' on specific itineraries dictated by political, economic, and intercultural global relations (often colonial, postcolonial, or neocolonial in nature), such constraints do not offer any simple equivalence with other immigrant and migrant laborers" (Clifford, 1997, p. 35). The "world" afforded the inhabitant of omnitopia is essentially an enclave of privilege, its fluid mobility enabled through the totems of successful credit checks, keycard swipes, password confirmations, and security profiles, at least when seeking entrance into its domain. As such, an inquiry into omnitopia appears to valorize an artificial world of "a few itinerant elites," employing James Weiner's (2002) caustic reading of Clifford's (1997) *Routes*, a project that Weiner dismisses as "ludicrously subjective, superficial, and . . . irrelevant . . . a meditation that can only take place within a corklined room or a tastefully-appointed museum foyer, under privileged conditions of institutional support which can afford a total disengagement from the world" (pp. 25–26). While reminding such critics that most any kind of academic prose rests on a foundation of privilege, I would emphasize that the study of omnitopia does not covet some sort of business-class disengagement from the real world. Instead, this project arises from a passionate concern about the consequences of an omnitopian sensibility that has begun to colonize itself beyond the domains of well-heeled movement, metastasizing into all manner of everyday places. This analysis, this act of naming, follows a personal belief in the value of meaningful places, particularly those that reside outside the realm of privileged mobility. Accepting Larry Ford's (1998) comment that "we see what we have words to

describe" (p. 528), I would add that to name a thing is to propose its undoing, even if the act seems to perpetuate its power for a time.

In naming omnitopia, I should share a final comment on its similarity and simultaneous distinction from a related term: *non-place*. Omnitopia can be situated in conversation with non-place, but it should not be confused with the term that French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) deploys to represent fleeting sites of "supermodernity," in which place becomes distilled into text without human meaning.[5] Augé writes, "[i]f a place can be identified as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (pp. 77–78). Certainly, journalistic accounts of new media are replete with descriptions of such non-places that seem interchangeable with omnitopia. For example, Parvaz (2005) of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer Reporter* laments the implications of *techno-cocooning*:

> This eliminates the charm of being on a trip, the chance meetings we have with each other, the jokes we overhear, the serendipitous connections that make leaving one's home and going outside worth it. It wipes off all social fingerprints from ourselves, leaving us untouched and alone. (¶ 14)

Writing about the introduction of fifth-generation video iPods, *New York Times* columnist David Carr (2005) adds:

> So this is how we end up alone together. We share a coffee shop, but we are all on wireless laptops. The subway is a symphony of earplugged silence while the family trip has become a time when the kids watch DVD's in the back of the minivan. The water cooler, that nexus of chatter about the show last night, might go silent as we create disparate, customized media environments. (p. 3)

I am drawn to these perspectives; they make plenty of sense to me. But my project does not concentrate on discrete non-places. Rather, I articulate a perspective of "the world" that has become condensed (for a growing number of people, yet hardly all) into an enclosure of the *same place*. This is not to announce, literally, the death of specific cultures. Although a number of places certainly resemble one another, the study of omnitopia does not assume that all places are the same (except, perhaps, to the lazy tourist who never leaves the hotel pool). Any serious traveler of even the most banal places can spot unmistakable utterances of "here" and "now" anywhere, and, undoubtedly, all places are real and meaningful to someone (Kincaid, 1989). Thus, omnitopia is not about the alleged homogeneity of globalization. Instead, this project advances a perspective

in which, for many people, a growing number of places are becoming nodes[6] to an enclave that is designed to resemble the real world, but not so accurately as to hinder consumer behaviors.

Omnitopia is the cavernous, airy enclosure that presumes to contain the world entire in an endless interior, a world seemingly without frontiers. Perhaps a more appropriate inspiration for this project comes not from Marc Augé but from Jean Baudrillard (1989):

> America is a giant hologram, in the sense that information concerning the whole is contained in each of its elements. Take the tiniest little place in the desert, any old street in a Mid-West town, a parking lot, a Californian house, a BurgerKing [sic] or a Studebaker, and you have the whole of the US—South, North, East, or West. . . . The hologram is akin to the world of phantasy [sic]. It is a three-dimensional dream and you can enter it as you would a dream. Everything depends on the existence of the ray of light bearing the objects. If it is interrupted, all the effects are dispersed, and reality along with it. (pp. 29–30)

Although I would define *omnitopia* as a smaller version of the world than Baudrillard's holographic "America," including only enclosed simulacra of the totems he cited within its entirety, I find it useful to employ Baudrillard's emphasis on ephemerality. Omnitopia, after all, appears and fades in a manner dependent on perception. To bring omnitopia into sharp relief, this book advances along three vectors: its historical origins, its structural performances, and its inevitable collapse.

In that spirit, this book is organized into three parts: Imagining Omnitopia, Visiting Omnitopia, and Challenging Omnitopia. Part I outlines a historical trajectory of omnitopia, noting its appearance in 19th-century arcades, department stores, and world's fairs (chapter 1: Emergence), its United States expansion along the ribbons of prewar and interstate highways (chapter 2: Construction), and its contemporary manifestation as a constellation of components illustrated by cinematic depictions of urbanity (chapter 3: Framework). Part II shifts our attention from historical and conceptual perspectives to a survey of sites that currently demonstrate an omnitopian way of living. The tour begins with a study of air terminals as detached enclaves (chapter 4: Airports), pauses to examine highway and city spots of temporary domesticity (chapter 5: Hotels), and then enters the urbanized simulacra of fantasy and commerce found in various shoppers' paradises (chapter 6: Malls). Part III advances a postomnitopian agenda by first considering the potential for pleasure, if not resistance, illustrated by Las Vegas-style post-tourism (chapter 7: Performance), the gradual abandonment of heretofore totalizing places by way of placeless enclaves (chapter 8: Convergence),

and the remaining desire of people to exit omnitopia in search of genuine locality (chapter 9: Reverence). As a whole, this book offers an evaluation of design, performance, and transcendence that rests on confidence that no place is more powerful than the individual and collective will of those who carve windows from walls.

Notes

1. Unless noted otherwise, all quotations from Walter Benjamin are taken from Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin's translation of *The Arcades Project* (cited as Benjamin, 2004). These quotations include in-text references to the Tiedemann notation system and page numbers from the English translation.

2. All trademarked terms are used for purposes of academic analysis. None of their uses represent the opinions or policies of their owners.

3. After deciding to organize my research around the term *omnitopia*, I learned that Nintendo used the same word in its 1995 game, *Secrets of Evermore.* My usage of the word does not reflect any connection to that company or its game.

4. I am drawn to Sorkin's (1999) description, "In this new city, the idea of distinct places is dispersed into a sea of universal placelessness as everyplace becomes destination and any destination can be anyplace" (p. 217), although the notion of "placelessness" does not quite jibe with the omnitopian conception of dislocation. In this enclave, one is detached from local geography, but the experience of "place" is not necessarily "dispersed." It is more appropriately viewed as being transformed into a "place unto itself."

5. It bares merely a brief reiteration here that, although Augé has popularized study into non-place, he continues a well-established intellectual tradition advanced from different trajectories (and subtly distinct articulations and translations) by Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Paul Virilio, among others. In fact, Bosteels (2003) reminds us, "almost *all* contemporary French thinkers whom English-language commentaries associate with so-called poststructuralism and the critique or deconstruction of humanism, at one point or another in their trajectories, assign a central role to a certain notion of the nonplace" (p. 119). Meanwhile, in the United States, Melven Webber employed non-place (specifically the "non-place urban realm") as a way to articulate the means through which communities arise via media of common interest more than the limits of local geography, whereas Paul Fussell employed the term when commenting on the placelessness of contemporary tourism. See Gumpert (1987) for another fruitful application: "In the contemporary urban/suburban world most people are potential members of a series of 'non-place' communities. Such multiple membership in non-place communities constitute a person's 'media community.' Such communities do not require the simultaneous physical presence of its members since they are connected by print an electronic media" (p. 178).

6. My reference to node is not original. In a recent example, Jenkins (2002) describes buildings as nodes within a network, arguing that individual spaces are less meaningful than their flowing relationships with other spaces: "The building as a permeable entity becomes less an individual building block in a collection of blocks, but rather it becomes

an unstable assemblage that is intimately connected to and renegotiated by the surrounding buildings, streets, communities, and economies and the world beyond" (p. 232). As such, nodes are malleable, easily edited according to whims of design or perception. Nodes are pliable entrances to fixed locations.

References

Aden, R. C., Rahoi, R. L., & Beck, C. S. (1995). "Dreams are born on places like this": The process of interpretive community formation at the *Field of Dreams* site. *Communication Quarterly, 43*(4), 368–380.

Armada, B. J. (1998). Memorial agon: An interpretative tour of the National Civil Rights Museum. *Southern Communication Journal, 63*(3), 235–243.

Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (J. Howe, Trans.). New York: Verso.

Baudrillard, J. (1989). *America* (C. Turner, Trans.). New York: Verso.

Benjamin, W. (2004). *The arcades project* (H. Eiland & K. McLoughlin, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Biesecker, B. A. (2002). Remembering World War II: The rhetoric and politics of national commemoration at the turn of the 21st century. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 88*(4), 393–409.

Blair, C., Jeppeson, M. S., & Pucci, E., Jr. (1991). Public memorializing in postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as prototype. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 77*(3), 263–288.

Bosteels, B. (2003). Nonplaces: An anecdoted [sic] topography of contemporary French theory. *Diacritics, 33*(3–4), 117–139.

Carlson, A. C., & Hocking, J. E. (1988). Strategies of redemption at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. *Western Journal of Communication, 52*(3), 203–215.

Carr, D. (2005, December 18). Taken to a new place, by a TV in the palm. *The New York Times*, Ideas & Trends, p. 3.

Clark, G. (2004). *Rhetorical landscapes in America: Variations on a theme from Kenneth Burke*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dickinson, G. (1997). Memories for sale: Nostalgia and the construction of identity in Old Pasadena. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 83*(1), 1–27.

Dickinson, G. (2002, Fall). Joe's rhetoric: Finding authenticity at Starbucks. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 32*, 5–27.

Dickinson, G., Ott, B. L., & Aoki, E. (2005). Memory and myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum. *Western Journal of Communication, 69*(2), 85–108.

Ehrenhaus, P. (1989). The wall. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 6*(1), 94–98.

Ford, L. R. (1998). Midtowns, megastructures, and world cities. *Geographical Review, 88*(4), 528–547.

Foss, S. K. (1986). Ambiguity as persuasion: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *34*(3), 326–340.

Foucault, M. (1986). Of other spaces. *Diacritics, 16*, 22–27.

Gallagher, V. J. (1995). Remembering together? Rhetorical integration and the case of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. *Southern Communication Journal, 60*(2), 109–119.

Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.

Gibson, W. (1981). The Gernsback continuum. In T. Carr (Ed.), *Universe 11* (pp. 81–90). Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company.

Goodstein, E. S. (1992). Southern Belles and southern buildings: The built environment as text and context in *Designing Women*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 9*(2), 170–185.

Gumpert, G. (1987). *Talking tombstones and other tales of the media age*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Haines, H. W. (1986). "What kind of war?": An analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 3*(1), 1–20.

Harmon, A. (2005, April 14). Reach out and touch no one. *New York Times*, p. G1.

Hasian, M., Jr. (2004). Remembering and forgetting the "Final Solution": A rhetorical pilgrimage through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial museum. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 21*(1), 64–92.

Hattenhauer, D. (1984). The rhetoric of architecture: A semiotic approach. *Communication Quarterly, 32*(1), 71–77.

Hetherington, K. (1997). *The badlands of modernity: Heterotopia and social ordering*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, L. (2002). 11, Rue du Conservatoire and the permeability of buildings. *Space and Culture, 5*(3), 222–236.

Jorgensen-Earp, C., & Lanzilotti, L. A. (1998). Public memory and private grief. The construction of shrines at the sites of public tragedy. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 84*(2), 150–170.

Katriel, T. (1994). Sites of memory: Discourses of the past in Israeli pioneering settlement museums. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 80*(1), 1–20.

Kincaid, J. (1989). *A small place*. New York: Plume.

Lefèbvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Liddle, A. J. (2004). Computerized kiosks let c-store customers help themselves. *Nation's Restaurant News, 38*(2), 48.

Makagon, D. (2003). A search for social connection in America's town square: Times Square and urban public life. *Southern Communication Journal, 69*(1), 1–21.

Mandziuk, R. M. (2003). Commemorating Sojourner Truth: Negotiating the politics of race and gender in the spaces of public memory. *Western Journal of Communication, 67*(3), 271–291.

Parvaz, D. (2005, February 7). Living in a bubble: Our love of techno-gadgets is insulating us from the real world. *The Seattle-Post Intelligencer*. Available from http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/lifestyle/210821_popoff210807_copy.asp.

Soja, E. W. (1995). Heterotopologies: A remembrance of other spaces in the Citadel-LA. In S. Watson & K. Gibson (Eds.), *Postmodern cities and spaces* (pp. 13–34). Oxford: Blackwell.

Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Soja, E. W. (1997). *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory*. New York: Verso.

Sorkin, M. (1999). See you in Disneyland. In M. Sorkin (Ed.), *Variations on a theme park: The new American city and the end of public space* (pp. 205–232). New York: Hill and Wang.

Trujillo, N. (1993). Interpreting November 22: A critical ethnography of an assassination site. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 79*(4), 447–466.

Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Weiner, J. (2002). Between a rock and a non-place: Towards a contemporary anthropology of place. *Reviews in Anthropology, 31*(1), 21–27.

Wood, A. (2003a). The Middletons, Futurama, and Progressland: Disciplinary technology and temporal heterotopia in two twentieth century New York world's fairs. *New Jersey Journal of Communication, 11*(1), 63–75.

Wood, A. (2003b). A rhetoric of ubiquity: Terminal space as omnitopia. *Communication Theory, 13*(3), 324–344.

Wood, A. (2004). Managing the Lady Managers: The shaping of heterotopian spaces in the 1893 Chicago exposition's Woman's Building. *Southern Communication Journal, 69*(4), 289–302.

Wood, A. (2005a). "The best surprise is no surprise": Architecture, imagery, and omnitopia among American mom and pop motels. *Space and Culture, 8*(4), 399–415.

Wood, A. (2005b). "What happens [in Vegas]": Performing the post-tourist *flâneur* in "New York" and "Paris." *Text and Performance Quarterly, 25*(4), 315–333.

Wood, A. (2008). "Small world": Alex Proyas' Dark City as omnitopia. In J. Perlich & D. Whitt (Eds.), *Sith, slayers, stargates and cyborgs: Modern mythology in the new millennium* (pp. 121–142). New York: Peter Lang.

Wood, A., & Todd, A. M. (2005). "Are we there yet?": Searching for Springfield and *The Simpsons*' rhetoric of omnitopia. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 22*(3), 207–222.