

“The Location. The Luxury. The Life.”  
Deconstructing the Rhetoric of Intrawest Resort Real Estate

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Media Studies) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2004

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395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
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*Your file* *Votre référence*

*ISBN: 0-612-94612-6*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

*ISBN: 0-612-94612-6*

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## Abstract

### “The Location. The Luxury. The Life.” Deconstructing the Rhetoric of Intrawest Resort Real Estate

Elizabeth Adams

This thesis examines the notion of luxury living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the rhetorical creations of resort developer Intrawest Corp. The emphasis is placed on how Intrawest achieved the title of “world’s largest developer of village-centred destination resorts” and why its product offering resonates so deeply with its upper class clientele. Considered in light of historic perceptions of luxury, and its precursors in urban and resort development as well as contemporary theories of rhetoric, it is demonstrated that the Intrawest experience is invested with meaning because it responds to individual concerns surrounding identity, status and family values. Using campaigns and fantasy brochures created by communication and design firm Ryan + Deslauriers exclusively for Intrawest resorts, this study demonstrates that it is through the rhetorical creations of nostalgic settings and domestic ideals that these concerns are addressed and articulated. This reading of Intrawest resort real estate merges interests in rhetoric, luxury and the value system of today’s upper class.

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## Introduction

This thesis examines the notion of luxury: what it has meant throughout the history of Western civilisation and what it means today. Its main focus is specifically how, at the turn of the 21st century, luxury lifestyles are presented and sold as ideals by resort developer Intrawest Corp. I was plunged into the world of Intrawest real estate sales when I secured a copywriter position with Ryan+Deslauriers, a small communication and design studio that writes, designs and produces print sales material for a significant portion of the Intrawest resort network. Being a “creative”<sup>1</sup> so closely involved in the construction of some of the most beautiful, compelling and unique ‘fantasy brochures’ I have ever seen is an extremely rewarding occupation. Yet as my involvement increased and I became more and more responsible for the planning of Intrawest resort campaigns, I felt compelled to develop a firmer grasp on the particular type of rhetoric I was creating, and why.

I am a creator and writer of fantasy lifestyle brochures designed to sell millions in ‘luxury’ resort real estate across North America. In essence, I am a ghostwriter, one of several Sophists spinning fantastic tales for a faceless corporate entity. A product of Intrawest’s mission, philosophy, and global offering, the fantasy life I help construct is based on an ideal as old as human civilisation, one that in North America dates back to the late nineteenth century. While the notion of luxury living is far from new, throughout the majority of human history it has been reserved for a precious few. Today, the notion of luxury encompasses an ever-growing variety of definitions, from therapeutic bodily treatments to coffee, and its reach has expanded to include an unprecedented portion of

the population. This recent surge in demand for leisure lifestyles has enabled Intrawest to build and operate 10 mountain resorts, one warm-weather resort, six resort villages and become involved in the marketing of a half dozen others in some of the world's most spectacular locations. Intrawest's climb to "world's leading developer" of resort real estate points to a bright era for capitalism – a period in social history where the right to luxury items and leisure activities is affordable for more people than ever before.

This thesis will reveal the values presented to, and held by, today's leisure class. I will attempt to do so by studying the rhetorical means used in guiding this audience towards their lifestyle ideal. Chapter One will offer a contextual framework for the core of the thesis, which will be an analysis of Intrawest's rhetorical creations. Chapter One will refer to the work of Thorstein Veblen and John K. Galbraith, and the evolution and major turning points of the notion of luxury in human society in order to provide a background for understanding Intrawest and its precursors, North America's first resort developers. Chapter Two will then examine "The World of Intrawest" as a rhetorical creation and analyse the sales tools that promote it. The analysis will be based in the classical rhetorical theory of Aristotle, contemporary theorists Lloyd Bitzer, Richard Vatz and Barbara Biesecker, as well as "postmodern" critics Jean Baudrillard and Walter Benjamin. Chapter Three will explore today's audience for luxury lifestyles and certain issues surrounding the particular type of experience Intrawest provides.

Lloyd Bitzer defines rhetoric as "a mode of altering reality" through discourse (Bitzer 219). Indeed, it is this "altered reality" of which I write professionally that prompted me to write this thesis. The notion of a fantasy-based reality is at the heart of

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<sup>1</sup> The title "creative" is a term used in the advertising industry to identify members of an agency's creative team, generally consisting of copywriters, designers, artistic directors and creative directors.

the Intrawest concept. Where this fantasy stems from, who shares it and why, are what I am attempting to uncover. According to Bitzer, “rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation” (220). This would imply that Intrawest’s rhetorical creations come as a response to a situation wherein resort lifestyles are perceived as the solution to specific needs: for escape, reconnection with nature and family, greater social status, a legacy to pass on to future generations, etc. All these themes are found within Intrawest’s rhetorical texts. However Richard Vatz argues the opposite, stating that “rhetoric controls the situational response” (Vatz 229). This implies that Intrawest and other luxury rhetoric deliberately create, encourage and reinforce the perceived need for all these ideals through specific rhetorical tactics.

While Bitzer states that the “exigence (a need of some kind) strongly invites utterance” (Bitzer 219), Vatz asserts that “utterance strongly invites exigence” (Vatz 229). One theorist could argue that a pre-existing need for luxury lifestyles triggered an Intrawest-like response, while the other could argue that rhetoric similar to that produced by Intrawest brought about a perceived need for its lifestyle product. Bitzer’s theory rests on the fact that every event or situation contains a meaning intrinsic to itself, from which rhetoric inexorably follows. Vatz, on the other hand, insists that a situation’s meaning can not exist independently of the perspective of its interpreter. To Vatz, there are no “real” situational characteristics or meanings - only those ascribed to them through rhetoric. If we are to view situations and their meaning as consequences of rhetorical creation, then our paramount concern should be “how and by whom symbols create the reality to which people react” (229).



According to Bitzer's theory, an analysis of Intrawest resort rhetoric should begin by determining the nature or characteristics of the context in which these resorts thrive. This would provide us with the "why" and "how" for their resulting rhetorical creations. However, if we were to follow Vatz's theory for rhetorical analysis, our starting point would be to identify the rhetoric that gave salience to the situation from which Intrawest resorts arose. This approach positions the rhetor as ultimately responsible for the meaning attributed to his rhetorical creations. However, as Chapter One will demonstrate, both origins are so inexorably intertwined, that attempting to determine which gave rise to the demand for Intrawest resort real estate – the historical context or the rhetoric surrounding it – presents us with something of a "chicken or the egg" conundrum.

Therefore, Chapter One is dedicated to tracing the origins of the situation that gave rise to the demand for Intrawest resorts, as Bitzer would do, by identifying their early precursors and the various residential development movements that inspired them. By providing this broad historical context, our goal is also to uncover the relationship between rhetoric and the situation at hand, which to Vatz, is the essential issue. From there, we will have a clearer understanding of whether Intrawest rhetoric should be viewed, as Bitzer could argue, as a reflection of reality, or, as Vatz could argue, a creator of reality and meaning.

## **Chapter I.**

### **Luxury & 'The Good Life': Evolution of a Notion**

#### **Early Ideas of Luxury**

The notion of luxury is as old as the organisation of human society. This statement is supported by one of the most brilliant and acclaimed applications of an evolutionary approach to the concept of leisure, The Theory of the Leisure Class by Thorstein Veblen (1857 – 1927). The central point of Veblen's theory is how changes in means of production "perverted" man's instinctual workmanship and general approach to life within a society. The first major change, the starting point if you will, was the simple invention of tools. Their use changed the material facts of life of any human group, which in turn would have affected the spiritual attitude of the group as a whole. With various groups achieving advanced means of procuring the material means of life, man evolved from the peaceful, sedentary creature he was into a predatory phase of existence. From this point forward, Veblen hypothesises that each individual sought to emulate the behaviour of the group within the community that was most successful at procuring the material means of life. Such behaviour signalled the beginning of "pecuniary emulation", the central topic of Veblen's second chapter.

The tools used to procure early man's material means of life, while a far cry from luxury items by today's standards, were likely the most coveted objects of the group at that time. This speaks to the relativity of luxury – what is a luxury to one may be an ordinary, everyday item to another, just as what was a luxury yesterday may be ordinary today. The definition of luxury has varied slightly throughout the ages, but has always

remained centred around wants or desires versus needs. Food, clothing and shelter have been cited as the basic needs since Plato's day. However, far more problematic is the category of leisure – the sphere of life that remains after the basic necessities are taken care of. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the question of what to do with leisure time was a luxury in itself, granted only to the ruling class, which in essence was the leisure class.

In his book The Idea of Luxury, Chris Berry identifies the four categories of luxury as sustenance, shelter, clothing (or apparel) and leisure. While these categories have remained constant, what changes is the societal value placed upon the goods within them. The word “luxury” comes from the Latin “luxus” meaning abundance. The early Greek definition of luxury as a verb conveyed “living softly and feasting sumptuously” (58). In ancient Greek society, feasts were an essential aspect of social life, especially among the political and intellectual classes. The “soft” quality of luxury was thought to reflect the type of man who indulged in a luxurious lifestyle – a man looked upon with considerable disdain. According to Aristotle, men who lived in luxury became “soft” i.e. emasculated, cowardly, unable to endure pain and unfit for military service, which was the ultimate demonstration of a commitment to the common good of the State.

Usury, or *tokos*, the pursuit of money for its own sake, was considered an unworthy activity by ancient Greek philosophers. The money-maker was someone preoccupied with the subordinate concerns of life, rather than the nobler, human concerns of the “good life” involving the household and village, i.e. a political life (Berry 53). Furthermore, the pursuit of money was considered limitless – insatiable – and said to give rise to competition and envy, leading to an inflamed, unbalanced society. Indulgence in luxury was considered evidence of the dynamic of human desire. Inflamed desires were

considered to have taken society beyond basic need-satisfaction, and if left unchecked, would eventually lead to the ruin of both society and its citizens (a rather prophetic declaration given the effects of consumerism on the world today). This theory was upheld by Roman ideology, and the Romans were the first to engage in a concrete attempt to police and institutionalise the practice of luxury.

### **Regulating Luxury**

Until the eighteenth century, the Roman response to luxury was presented as a model where discussions of virtue and corruption were concerned. The Romans perceived the pursuit of luxury as a disruptive aspect of human ambition, and it therefore was considered a political as well as moral problem, “a power which must be policed” (63). Luxury quickly became a standard topic in the rhetoric of Roman corruption, and a perfect example of Vatz’s theory where rhetoric attempts to control the situational response to the notion of luxury.

The Roman attempt at regulating man’s insatiable desire for luxury began with the institution of sumptuary laws. Most were aimed at women, as luxury was associated with the characteristic of feminine “softness” and women’s “uncontrollable natures.” For example, women were forbidden to wear coloured robes, fearing they would attempt to outdo each other in “conspicuousness.” Other laws were designed to curb excessive displays of consumption. Feasts played an important social role and were often used as occasions for prominent members of society to engage in impressive acts of conspicuous consumption in order to woo political support or flatter higher-ranking figures. “The lex

Orchia law of 182 BC limited the number of guests who could be invited for dinner. Later laws went into detail about costs and menus” (77). The Roman attempt at regulating human desire through political control ultimately failed, but the battle to save society from the perniciousness of luxury carried on into feudal Europe.

In England, from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, sumptuary laws were applied to food and dress, but were aimed primarily at men. The sumptuary laws of 1336 made it forbidden to serve meals consisting of more than two courses (except on certain feast days) and no course should consist of more than two sorts of food without sauce. In 1363 the Apparel Act was passed, wherein society was divided into seven classes, each of which was given specific limitations as to what kind of garment was permissible, down to a thread count. For example, grooms and servants were forbidden to wear gold or silver, while labourers were only allowed to wear blankets costing no more than 12 pence per yard. In order to protect local trade, foreign cloth was prohibited by law except for royalty.

The obvious class character of these laws pointed to the hierarchical stratification of society, wherein luxury was seen as a distinct and serious threat to the very constitution of that society. It was this sense of threat that gave luxury its political dimension. The distribution and regulation of luxury was one way the ruling classes used to safeguard class distinction. Yet what Berry terms as the “Christian contribution” or, the Orthodox approach to luxury, subsumed the Roman response under a much heavier set of moral prohibitions. In his fourth chapter, Berry underlines the moralistic adaptations in the language of luxury across key works of literature. For example, he cites from Chaucer’s Man of Law Tale the line “O foule lusts of luxurie” which became “O

foule lusts of lechery” in the fourteenth century edition (87). In various other works, luxury as a term becomes interchangeable with “lechery,” “lewdness” and “lust.” In other words, Christian writers had begun equating the pursuit of anything outside the realm of basic needs with sin and vice, making luxury the scapegoat for a variety of social ills.

For centuries, both government and church vehemently condemned luxury and its pursuit, with opinion of the latter outweighing that of the former in the very Christian times of Feudal Europe. Both clergy and government were well served by this heavy condemnation of indulgence. For one, it served to keep the working masses in their place in body and in spirit. Humble acceptance of one’s lot in life promised heavenly reward, while aspirations to better oneself were considered inappropriate ambitions that paved the way to hell. Maintaining such an ideology kept the masses pacified and the upper classes safe from any infiltration by the lower ranks. Yet as with any unbalanced situation, the tables would eventually turn. Ambitions increased once again with the invention of more innovative production tools, improvements that would bring about the era known as the industrial revolution. The ruling and wealthy upper class, never satisfied, would continue vying for bigger, better and more exotic goods. As trade made its entrance into a previously isolated market, the first taste of consumer frenzy infected the constituents of this regulated society. Change – in wants, needs, desires and ambition – was inevitable, and necessary to maintain this economic upsurge.

Bernard Mandeville, in his didactic poem The Fable of the Bees, was the first to publicly declare luxury no longer the indulgence of the very rich, but an important factor in promoting national prosperity. The essential message of the work, written in 1705, places human vice at the root of social welfare and progress, riches and benefits.

Basically, people work out of greed, are polite out of self-interest, and obey the law out of cowardice.

The Root of evil Avarice,  
That damn'd ill-natur'd baneful Vice,  
Was slave to Prodigality,  
That noble sin; whilst Luxury  
Emply'd a Million of the Poor,  
And odious Pride a Million more.  
Envy it self, and Vanity  
Were Ministers of Industry;  
Their darling Folly Fickleness  
In Diet, Furniture, and Dress,  
That strange, ridic'lous Vice, was made  
The very Wheel, that turn'd the Trade. (16)

To Bitzer, The Fable of the Bees would be an example of rhetorical discourse created as a response to the situation of luxury and its relationship to society at that time. It was in effect, a call to action designed to incite people into seeing the concept of luxury for the social construction it was. The fable was declared a public nuisance by the Grand Jury of Middlesex in 1723 on grounds that it posed a threat to the overall class system (Mason 32). Yet what the class system would soon learn is that progress depends on the ambition – and thus, vice – of many.

## **The First Major Change**

The first major shift in the meaning of luxury came about with the sudden increase in trade. Toward the latter half of the eighteenth century, the wealth of certain national communities of Western Europe began to show a steady and persistent improvement. John Kenneth Galbraith, in his critically acclaimed The Affluent Society points to this moment in history as the beginning of serious economic study. “This change, which in advanced countries like England and Holland came some time in the eighteenth century, must be counted one of the momentous events in the history of the world” (21). As the industrial revolution flourished, the centre of productivity shifted from the household to the factory, and a new class began to emerge.

In the early years of the industrial revolution, the contrast between rich and poor was extreme, and growing faster than worker wages. Entrepreneurs were growing rich fast, while workers were still barely able to subsist on the pittance they received for wages. The situation was rapidly breeding an entrepreneurial middle-class with higher lifestyle ambitions than ever before. Adam Smith was the first great figure in what Galbraith has coined the “central economic tradition” (24). While Smith admitted that the desire to better one’s condition was “natural,” he also contended that worker wages should only be slightly more than needed to maintain life. The views of the two other founding members of economic theory, Robert Malthus and David Ricardo, were equally bleak with regard to the masses.

Malthus took the Social Darwinist position, stating that inequality was rooted in biology, that what ultimately mattered was the progress of a few, and that misfortune was simply the norm. For both Malthus and Ricardo, the normal expectation for the masses



was life on the edge of starvation – anything better would be abnormal. Economic progress due to trade was reserved for the already rich, while common men lived by their work with wages barely sufficient to sustain a man and his family. This was the “iron law” of the founding trinity of economic theory that would eventually figure at the core of Marx’s ideological assault on capitalism (Galbraith 26).

In North America, the industrial revolution was having an equally explosive impact on late nineteenth century society. Advances in production tools had drastically changed the material means of life for American entrepreneurs as well. So much so, that the last quarter of the nineteenth century hailed the beginning of what would come to be known as America’s Gilded Age. During this period, bankers and business tycoons ruled America as well as any established aristocracy had Europe. They were the first American celebrities and were regarded as the embodiment of everything good and noble. Their *laissez faire* economic notions were carried over from Europe in the ideas of Smith, Ricardo and a certain Herbert Spencer. The attitude most eagerly adopted by affluent Americans was the notion of Social Darwinism, whose main protagonist was Spencer. It was he who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” (57). According to Galbraith, affluent Americans of the time truly believed themselves to be biologically superior to the working masses, and so Spencer became a very popular man in America.

Thorstein Veblen on the other hand, gained little to no notoriety until after his death, when the genius of The Theory of the Leisure Class was finally acknowledged. His views were shunned by high society of the time for obvious reasons. Veblen’s portrayal of big businessmen was far from saintly. He made it clear that they were nothing more than “parasites” who fed off the work of the labourer, farmer, and technician. He urged

workers to go on strike until a new order – which he termed “technocracy” – was put into place. “The establishment of this new order, he stated, would insure the full and coordinated use of American industrial capacity and the equitable distribution of its benefits” (Kahn 4). Veblen’s evolutionary approach to economics wanted society to pay more attention to the very thing responsible for the major changes in society – technology, what was responsible for all the new and improved tools of production. His ideas are progressive even today.

### **America’s Gilded Age**

The era known as the Gilded Age, which lasted roughly from the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the first decade of the twentieth century, was one of great contrasts, contradictions and infinite possibility for entrepreneurs. The *laissez-faire* attitude that characterised economic practices of the time meant government toleration of monopolistic business practices and the ongoing exploitation of workers. The hallmark of the period was the creation of holding companies. Within less than three years, less than six firms controlled over half the steel industry (7). Jonathan Kahn, in The Political Economy of Thorstein Veblen and John Kenneth Galbraith details how controllers and stockholders in the iron and steel industries created “The Steel Trust” in order to ultimately “enrich its underwriters and promoters through the issuance of vast quantities of watered securities” (6). As it happens, America’s very first network of resort hotels was funded by this same type of “trust” formed by two tycoons of the oil industry.

As investment bankers and big businessmen were fattening their bankrolls through monopolistic practices, a handful of individuals came to own and operate the majority of the country's real estate and industrial assets. "By 1928 holding companies accounted for 395 of the 593 corporations listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Of these 395, 338 held industrial corporations; 44, railroads; and 13, public utilities" (7). With such a tiny percent of the population belonging to this exceptionally exclusive group, new social needs began to manifest themselves. As Bitzer could argue, exigencies surrounding confirmation and acknowledgement of belonging to this exclusive group became felt, which invited new types of utterances, or responses. An entire world revolving around wealth and leisure pursuits emerged, with all the whistles and bells they could muster.

Two major topics of Veblen's writings on affluence are "conspicuous consumption" and "pecuniary emulation." As the upper class became disproportionately wealthy by monopolising and capitalising on trade, the practice of displaying personal riches became something of a sport. Affluent Americans took to unheard of heights the kind of competitive display the Romans feared would consume women through the wearing of coloured robes. During the heyday of New York City's Gilded Age, conspicuous consumption reached unprecedented levels of spectacle via the two most important vehicles of personal promotion: property and leisure.

As Veblen notes in his account of the origins of leisure, the idea of ownership was a major turning point in the establishment of a leisure class. The rhetoric of ownership, Vatz could argue, is what brought about the need for property. "In the sequence of cultural evolution the emergence of a leisure class coincides with the

beginning of ownership” (Veblen 22). In earlier human civilisations, property included people. The number of slaves in a household was a good indication of the owner’s social ranking, the number and “quality” of the female slaves even more so. In early twentieth century America, paid servants had replaced slaves, and idleness – especially that of the woman of the house – conferred status on the entire household. Some of the most impressive New York mansions were built during this period of excessive wealth, the most elaborate parties thrown, and the largest sums of money squandered on frivolities. In a fashion not unlike Aboriginal potlatch ceremonies, affluent wives would spend enormous sums from their husbands’ seemingly infinite fortunes on fantastic displays of conspicuous consumption in order to maintain their status among the leisure class. As Veblen notes, “The motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation; and the same motive of emulation continues active in the further development of the institution to which it has given rise and in the development of all those features of the social structure which this institution of ownership touches” (26).

Susan Braden’s The Architecture of Leisure examines the architecture of the most popular locales for the leisure class of the Gilded Age, Florida resort hotels. To understand the context of her analysis, Braden precedes as Bitzer would, devoting several chapters to recounting the situation: the lifestyles and pastimes of the American leisure class of the Gilded Age. An entire chapter is devoted to describing the most ostentatious property and social displays of conspicuous consumption performed by New York’s elite. Compared to other major US cities of that era, New York City most honoured and rewarded the distinction brought by personal wealth in the Gilded Age. “Unlike more staidly traditional Boston and Philadelphia, where the citizens merely tolerated

capitalism, New York encouraged the worship of wealth and in return offered all the social mobility that money could buy” (141). Descriptions of mansions built for the Vanderbilts, Rockefellers and Villards are impressive in themselves, but it is in two examples of public displays that the extent of New York’s high society performance is truly captured.

The first example is a dinner catered by Louis Sherry’s restaurant on Fifth Avenue for Chicago businessman C.K.G. Billings. This was no ordinary dinner, but one designed for gentlemen and their horses. Decorated with murals of fox-hunting, potted plants and a sand floor, guests assembled on horseback, were served by liveried waiters and sipped champagne through straws from bottles stored in their saddlebags. The second example is another gala at Sherry’s, hosted by James Hazen Hyde, heir to the Equitable Life Assurance Company. “Under Hyde’s direction, designers transformed one of the restaurant’s rooms into a mirrored ballroom decorated to resemble the gardens at Versailles. Appropriately, Hyde’s guests wore costumes in the style of Louis XVI. Caviar and diamondback terrapin sated the cinched and powdered revellers as they delightedly inspected themselves in a reproduction of the Hall of Mirrors. Hyde reportedly spent \$200,000 on his affair, a scandalous amount because it equalled what many society hostesses budgeted for a whole summer’s entertaining in Newport” (142). A precedent such as this, where one individual might spend roughly five times the average salary of a middle-class citizen of a century later, inevitably foreshadows a future era of widespread extreme consumption.

While the above examples were organised and hosted by men, social gatherings were primarily the preoccupation of women, and while affluent wives busied themselves

outdoing each other, other industrious entrepreneurs were ensuring they would have equally stunning places in which to recuperate from all the excitement of city life. Soon enough, America's first luxury hotels and resorts were being constructed to serve the leisure class in their second preferred method of displaying wealth: non-productive consumption of time. Luxury hotels and resorts became the ideal places for upper class men and women to present further evidence of their ability to afford a life of idleness.

Initially, well to do Americans sought retreats in nature, seeking clean mountain air and fresh water. Favoured locations included New Hampshire's White Mountains, the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts and New York's Adirondack and Catskill Mountains. "Mineral springs, probably the continent's first resorts, because they were frequented by the earliest Native American inhabitants, appeared in a number of places" (Braden 51). Of the most popular early mineral springs resorts were Saratoga Springs and Ballston Spa in New York. However during this early period for the concept of "resorting", guests usually consisted of invalids and those seeking naturally palliative environments for chronic health ailments. To this point, the main attraction at resorts was nature – calming landscapes and healing air. "At resorts, visitors typically sought a restorative, romantic, picturesque experience with nature" (50). It would take an entrepreneur with true vision and a solid concept to change the perception of resorts from places to heal, to places to go to see and be seen, socialise and engage in conspicuous leisure.

## **Intrawest's Predecessor: America's First Resort Baron**

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, technology and the means of production continued to improve. Gilded Age entrepreneurs were applying their advances “to the betterment of life and to the creation of more leisure time for all Americans” (40). At the end of the nineteenth century movement towards more leisurely living were businessmen and entrepreneurs who had set their sites on developing America's gentler, southern climes. Henry Flagler and Henry Plant became the first resort barons of North America, following successful careers as Gilded Age businessmen. Of the two, Flagler's resort hotel legacy more closely resembles that of Intrawest, and will therefore be the one examined here. Similarities between Flagler's and Intrawest's marketing strategies – from brochures to architecture – will later be analysed for the generic elements of the rhetoric of leisure.

Born in the Finger Lakes district of New York State to a Presbyterian Minister father and thrice married mother, Henry Flagler's beginnings were decidedly humble. It was through relationships forged with relatives from one of his mother's previous unions that Flagler got his start in business and management. After overseeing family salt mine operations until after the Civil War, when the family was forced out of the business by monopolistic competitors, Flagler caught the attention of a young Cleveland businessman named John D. Rockefeller. In 1867, with an infusion of family money, Flagler and Rockefeller became partners in the oil business and in 1870, with four others, formed the Standard Oil Company, with Rockefeller acting as president and Flagler as secretary-treasurer. Together, the partners invested one million dollars in the joint-stock company,

and would eventually form the Standard Oil Trust, which would allow them to form a monopoly of companies.

The year prior to the creation of the Standard Oil Trust, Flagler lost his first wife Mary to tuberculosis. Her death was cited as one of the deciding factors in Flagler's shift from oil to Florida. Others included a desire to succeed outside of Rockefeller's shadow, as well as escape the severe criticism levelled at Standard Oil. "In her critical history of Standard Oil, the progressive reformer Ida Tarbell exposed and charged Flagler and Rockefeller with being ruthless and greedy businessmen. About Flagler, she stated that he had no "scruples to make him hesitate over the ethical quality of a contract which was advantageous" to his own interests" (24). Remorse, guilt over not having spent more time in Florida's healthy climate with Mary, and a new found love for St. Augustine, were all cited as reasons for Flagler's decision to turn his attention to the development of Florida.

Taking his fortune amassed from Standard Oil, Flagler began distancing himself from the company to invest in Florida hotels and railroad. "The year 1885 marked the beginning of Flagler's active involvement with what became the Flagler System of railroads (The Florida East Coast Railway, known as the FEC), hotels (the Florida East Coast Hotel Company), and real estate (the Model Land Company)" (25). Over the course of his lifetime, Flagler's empire would include eleven large hotels. As with the Canadian Pacific hotels across Canada, those that would rise along Flagler's railroad would lure more and more visitors to the south, tempted by the luxury and excitement promised by these exotic escapes.

Flagler's mission with his hotels was that they "create in St. Augustine a winter playground for the American people, which should surpass anything that had been



attempted before” (28). The perspective that the upper classes literally needed grand places in which to enjoy their leisure time was strongly reinforced by Flagler and other early resort developers. However, the main difference between Flagler and Intrawest, is that Flagler approached his hotels as a “hobby.” While not necessarily profitable, Flagler’s hotels succeeded in other ways, most notably as major influences for architects and future resort and hotel owners. To Vatz, such leisure entrepreneurs are responsible for generating the rhetoric that stimulated the need for resort playgrounds and eventually resort real estate.

### **The First Fantasies**

Improved transportation, the printing of informative guidebooks, descriptive posters and magazine articles about new resort hotels began to pique the interest of the leisure class. Railroads became the yellow brick road to adventure and fantasy. Hotels built in collaboration with railroads would advertise on posters and train schedules. Yet the true key to success in luring Gilded Age pleasure-seekers lay in architecture. For an audience that revelled in masquerade and the portrayal of the “exotic”, it was important for the architecture of a hotel to inspire the fantasy of another place, another culture, another time. As Braden puts it:

“Fantasy played a surprisingly prominent role in the development of the Gilded Age resort hotel – as, indeed, it played an important part in the era’s cultural life and taste. No single function building type offered members of the leisure class a

better stage for their fantasies or a more visible opportunity to display themselves conspicuously than a resort hotel” (52).

The Spanish Renaissance forms of Flagler’s Ponce de Leon and Alcazar hotels, and the Colonial Revival style of his Royal Poinciana (one of the world’s largest hotels) were centrally featured illustrations in Flagler’s promotional booklets and brochures. Flagler’s imaginative flair for marketing his hotels succeeded in luring a great number of guests. One of his earliest publications in 1887 to introduce his hotels in St. Augustine was titled “Florida, the American Riviera; St. Augustine, the Winter Newport: The Ponce de Leon, the Alcazar, the Casa Monica” and featured beautiful renderings of each hotel. In 1903, Flagler’s hotel company published “Seven Centers in Paradise”, a series of seven romantic and exciting tales set at the Florida and Nassau hotels. One described a love story between a woman staying at the Ponce de Leon and a young Prince. Others recounted tales of fishing excursions enjoyed by guests at the Royal Palm in Miami. Such evocative tales of fantasy and adventure proved highly effective, and can also be found in Intrawest’s collection of twenty-first century brochures.

Braden identifies three distinctive features of these luxury winter resorts that contributed to their popularity and success. The first, as described above, was the use of historically derived architectural styles. The appropriation of exotic styles associated with foreign fantasy has as rhetorical effect the constitution of a desire for fantastic experiences. We will see the same kind of architectural rhetoric in the master-planned design of Intrawest Villages. The second distinguishing feature of Flagler’s hotels was their independence. While most hotels of the time relied on local producers to stock the pantries, provide the linens, furniture and other amenities necessary to operate a hotel,

Flagler financed and built his own infrastructures. His railroads brought in food, employees, supplies and luxuries from the North. They became independent destinations in their own right, offering golf, tennis and other sports, where visitors came to be seen at the hotels, not to discover the towns in which they were located. This type of all-encompassing experience, where guests never need leave the boundaries of the resort, is very common today. From extreme examples like Las Vegas, to the countless brochures for packaged vacations on impoverished Caribbean islands, to popular networks like Club Med, the “total experience” promise also underlies the Intrawest product offering.

The third, and perhaps most important characteristic of the winter resort hotel, is its aura of conspicuous luxury. As opposed to a visit to a summer resort, during the Gilded Age, a stay at a winter resort was considered more indicative of luxury. As Braden puts it, “a long stay at a winter resort implied vast wealth (conspicuous consumption) and enough free time to travel great distances (conspicuous leisure) in order to be seen prominently enjoying evocative, amenity-rich architecture in a warm and beautiful setting (conspicuous luxury)” (15). This same aura envelopes the world of Intrawest, where winter resorting takes place in both warm and cold climates. Often, a resort’s claim to being ‘amenity-rich’ refers to the available outdoor recreation to enjoy at the site, sports that often require extravagant amounts of land and expensive equipment.

It was during the Gilded Age that Americans began using their leisure time for recreational activities. Archery, lawn tennis, swimming, croquet, polo and horse racing all became popular during the 1860s and 70s. Although golf arrived from Scotland before the Gilded Age, it caught like wildfire among upper-class Americans during the late 1880s, and by 1900 more than 1,000 golf courses existed in the United States. “Certainly

golf satisfied Veblen's criteria for conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure. The game required costly accessories, a considerable amount of leisure time, and showily expansive stretches of idle countryside" (49). Throughout the century, golf has maintained its cachet as a pass time for the successful and wealthy. Still today, entire communities are built around golf courses, and are often the focal point of a luxury resort.

### **A Woman's Place in a Resort**

Perhaps one of the most remarkable differences between the master planning and marketing of resorts from the Gilded Age versus today, is the gendered quality of early resorts. During the Gilded Age, leisure was taken very seriously indeed and was often the responsibility of the woman of the house. Women managed the social calendars of their families, arranged introductions and 'calls' on important members of society. "Whether at home or at hotels, women acted as social catalysts. In matters of high society, they also functioned as gatekeepers, maintaining a select crowd of "in" people. New York's elite "400" owed its supposedly finite number to the number of people who could fit into Mrs. William Astor's New York ballroom" (109).

In many ways, women were more important than men to high society. Their influence helped shaped Gilded Age culture, down to the architecture, decoration and floor plans of luxury hotels. This was an especially important era for women, as the increasing practice of conspicuous leisure offered them an escape from the confines of the home for the more public space of the resort hotel. The display of idle, upper-class

women in conspicuous leisure settings was a way of conveying aristocratic gentility in a culture that lacked an aristocratic upper-class, while polishing the images of their absent, working husbands. Women often outnumbered men at resorts, as the freedom and independence found there appealed directly to women. In these relaxed settings, women were able to participate more freely in recreational activities and roam the grounds unaccompanied by men. Although restrictions still remained, and public rooms used by men to relax and engage in society games like pool, as well as rooms used to conduct business, were off limits to women.

However much women's roles were recognised as directly affecting the status of their families, their activities were nevertheless deemed inferior to those of men. A reflection of this can be found in the design of public spaces in resort hotels. Women's parlours and dining rooms were often smaller than those designated for men and were removed from the main entrance, making them less accessible. Far from the utopia described by early feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her book "Herland" (1915), the apparent freedom available to women at resort hotels contained many of the oppressive undertones so much a part of city life. "This gendering of women's spaces has been interpreted [by Gilman] as restrictive, patriarchal, paternal, patronizing, and controlling" (119). This "Discrimination by Design"<sup>2</sup> became less and less tolerable as women gained more ground in urban public spheres. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, there began a severe decline in numbers of female visitors at resort hotels, an occurrence that prompted owners to rethink their approach to public leisure spaces.

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<sup>2</sup> Title of a book by Leslie Weisman that discusses how social inequalities are revealed in the design and use of public spaces.

The influence of women on resort culture and real estate remained unwavering to this day. Flagler and other resort hotel managers eventually adjusted spaces according to women's increasing demands for participation in the public sphere. Promotional materials were also often directed at women. In her fifth chapter, Braden quotes a work by Helen Ingram "Florida: Beauties of the East Coast" (1893) that recommends Flagler's Hotel Ormond to what would seem to be a female audience; "fine fruit, good fishing, safe boating, pleasant walks, the curious treasures of the beach, sea-bathing and driving" on "hard," "smooth" roads (117). Ingram then goes on to describe in detail the luxurious beds and linens that await her supposedly female audience after a full day of activity. Another attention paid for the benefit of the hotel's female guests were special accommodations for children. Some of Flagler's hotels even boasted their own herd of dairy cows to guarantee the freshest milk. Separate dining rooms were available for children and their nannies, activities and educational facilities, all welcome conveniences for parents.

### **Extending Exclusivity to the Everyday**

A strong sense of exclusivity reigned even over America's first resorts, and was reflected in the rhetoric that accompanied them. In what follows, we will examine one of the most prevalent and physical forms of exclusion employed throughout the history of organised society: the walled or gated city. Perhaps the most notable symbolic feature in the design of early resort hotels, and one that has remained strong well into the twenty-first century, is the gated entrance. Entry pavilions, gatehouses, guard boxes, walls and

fences, all are traditional symbols of exclusion, grandeur and prestige, a concept as old as the art of city building. The first walled cities were built by the Romans around 300 BC in occupied England as a defensive measure, a guard against infiltration by local villagers. They were and remain a social and physical means of exercising territorial control. For guests of early resort hotels, the gate was another way of representing a world apart from the rest, and providing guests with a sense of privilege and status. “Entry pavilions and gatehouses signalled to guests that they had left the ordinary behind and also alluded to the safety, security, and exclusivity of the hotel” (87).

It wasn't long before the ultimate symbol of exclusivity and prestige made its way into the everyday of the very wealthy. The first purely residential gated community appeared just outside of New York City in the late nineteenth century, in an area called St. Louis. It was, needless to say, an enclave for the extremely wealthy, but it set an exclusionary precedent for the future. A combination of fear for personal security and maintaining social status among one's peers eventually spread the trend of gated communities across America. As I will examine further in Chapter two, Intrawest resorts are also composed of small gated communities. To better understand the Intrawest neighbourhood, in what follows we will consider the types of gated communities that inspired the Intrawest model.

In their book Fortress America: Gated Communities in the US, Edward Blakey and Mary Gail Snyder offer detailed insight not only into the motives and structure of gated communities, but also the politics involved in their self-governance. Through interviews with mayors, residents and children of gated communities, they offer revealing insights into the motivations for, and experience of, living behind the gates. While

outward similarities exist between the resort and the traditional gated community, the situations that led to their emergence are entirely different. Intrawest homeowners already belong to affluent societies. Having already secured a safe and satisfactory primary residence, their choice of a second resort home revolves around reasons pertaining to personal status and enjoyment. Yet certain types of gated communities that serve as the primary residence for Intrawest's target audience have become the archetypal models on which Intrawest neighbourhoods are based.

Blakely and Snyder identify three types of gated communities: the Lifestyle Community, the Prestige Community and the Security Zone Community. Lifestyle communities are divided into three sub-categories: retirement, golf and leisure and the suburban new town. The Security Zone Community also has sub-categories, all essentially consisting of low-income suburban neighbourhoods around which residents opt to erect a barrier in order to enhance the perception of security and belonging. The types of gated communities most relevant to this study are the various Lifestyle Communities and the Prestige Community.

Gated communities were rarities until the master-planned retirement developments of the late 60s and 70s. "Leisure World" in Silver Spring, Maryland was among the first and best known gated retirement communities in the US. It and others like it served as the original prototypes of exclusionary living for the middle class. They also presented a substantial opportunity for real estate developers across the country. Statistics show that in the last ten years, the average age of retirement has dropped while life expectancy and income levels have risen. Retirees today are living longer and better than ever before, making them an ideal target market for resort real estate developers.



The gated golf course community, essentially a neighbourhood built around a golf course, became a popular trend in the 1980s. Originating in the Sunbelt, golf communities have now spread across many of the northern states. The main attraction of the golf community is the prestige offered by association with the game itself, and the 'country club' lifestyle that accompanies it. The 'club' phenomenon is so deeply linked to an individual's need to belong that the word 'clubhouse' is often enough to lure people who don't even play golf. "It goes back to when we were kids and all wanted to belong to a special club – a place where you feel special and not everybody can come into. That's the basis you start with, and it works whether you are talking about a club like this or your favorite neighborhood bar" (Blakely 57). This sense of belonging to a "special club" begins at the gates to the community and continues throughout the development.

The suburban new town is a larger type of community, often self-governed, comprising residential and commercial areas, schools, churches and other social organisations. What is being sold is community, in the most nostalgic sense of the term. The suburban new town offers residents a 'total package' – a complete living experience. In terms of product offering, this is perhaps the most extreme example of the 'experience economy' trend I will examine further in Chapter Two, but for now it will suffice to say that in this case, the commodity is community. The most popular example of this large-scale type of development is 'Celebration' the city built entirely by Disney.

Prestige Communities are the fastest growing type of gated community. The only commonality among residents in these communities is their economic status and class. Devoid of amenities, they often feature elaborate gatehouses, designed both to project an image of exclusivity and to control housing values. Often featuring private lakes, Prestige

Communities are much like the very first gated community outside of New York City, for they provide a secure place on the social ladder for the extremely rich. Today, there are three different types of Prestige Community, divided by income level: “enclaves of the rich and famous, those at the extreme top of the income scale; next are the top-fifth developments, for the affluent; and last are the executive developments, for the middle class” (75).

### **The Fantasy City**

In identifying the precursors and inspiration for Intrawest’s rhetorical creations we have looked at the evolution of the notion of luxury, the rise of America’s first resort hotels, and discussed the extension of this lifestyle into the residential trend of the gated community. The third and final development phenomenon relevant to the discussion of the Intrawest offering is the emergence of the Urban Entertainment Destination (UED) and the “Fantasy City”, a term coined by John Hannigan in his book Fantasy City: Pleasure and profit in the postmodern metropolis. These themed environments are in many ways urban versions of the main Intrawest offering: the Intrawest Village.

Hannigan’s book begins with an analysis of the situation that created the need for UEDs. In his first two chapters Hannigan describes in detail the golden age of urban entertainment (1895 to 1925, essentially America’s Gilded Age) and the rhetoric used to lure the new middle classes into the downtown areas of American cities. Notions like “democracy’s theater” and “the good-natured crowd” were intended to simultaneously make the working class feel welcome, and promise the upper-class a civilised,

respectable environment in which their families could comfortably enjoy entertainment spectacles. Such “utterances” would, according to Vatz, invite an exigence for these types of social outings.

Eventually, the impossibility of creating a truly democratic downtown, wherein entertainment was universally affordable and all classes mingled peaceably became evident. By the 1930s the signs of decline were obvious, “Vaudeville and live theater had given way to burlesque and cheap “B” movies. By 1931, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York had become a working-class male domain, dominated by a “rough trade” in male prostitution” (Hannigan 30). As America’s downtowns began their slow and steady decline, the final nail in the coffin came when the upper-classes began fleeing the unseemly crowds and rising crime for the safe, suburban utopia of backyards, rec rooms and gated entrances.

After WWII, American cities faced their most serious crisis. The urban centre had transformed itself into the “inner-city.” It was a place middle-class workers deserted as soon as the workday was over, and came to be associated with violence, crime and the poor (often immigrant minorities) who were unable to afford life in the suburbs. Until the early 1970s, downtown development was a daunting endeavour, replete with obstacles that included: “rigid building codes, bureaucratic red tape, difficulties in assembling land, continuing fallout from the neighborhood destroying urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s” (52). Development entrepreneurs needed to find a new way of luring the upper classes back to the downtown core. The situation called for a new model of entertainment, one that guaranteed an environment as safe and predictable as the suburbs their audience would be required to leave.

As Veblen might have predicted, this new model was made possible by another wave of advances in production technology. UEDs include everything from the festival markets of the 1970s, the first successful attempts at renewing urban entertainment conceived by “maverick” developer James Rouse, to Disneyland and Las Vegas casinos. Examples of Rouse’s creations include New York’s South Street Seaport, Union Station in St. Louis, Bayside in Miami and Aloha Tower in Honolulu. Festival markets differed from the suburbanite’s most common distraction - the mall - by keeping retail dynamic (leases were limited to periods of up to six months), focusing more on eating and entertainment, and most important of all, unifying the entire affair with a historic and/or architectural theme. Albeit innovative and popular, the Festival Market proved unrewarding financially. It did however spawn a whole new approach to urban entertainment.

Hannigan outlines six defining features of the Fantasy City: it is theme-o-centric, branded, operates day and night, is modular, solipsistic (meaning isolated physically, economically and culturally) and postmodern (meaning it is constructed around the technology of simulation, virtual reality and the thrill of the spectacle (3). Examples of UEDs include themed restaurants like the Planet Hollywood and Hard Rock Café chains, virtual reality arcades, and experiential retail outlets like Niketown. The people behind actual Fantasy Cities like Celebration, are generally large-scale real estate developers who made it through the 1990s downturn with a proven track record and partnered with some of the world’s most influential entertainment companies (Disney, Universal, Sony, Warner Bros. and Sega).

The concept and characteristics of the Fantasy City will be further touched on in the following chapter, but for now it will suffice to note the ultimate reason for the rise of the Fantasy City in the final decade of the twentieth century. According to Hannigan, the phenomenon is a result of the convergence of three major corporate trends. First, the increasing dominance of rational techniques of production, or what George Ritzer (1993) termed as the “McDonaldization” of the market place. By this, Ritzer was referring to a rationalised society that adheres to the principles of the fast food restaurant: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. Cited among the type of businesses that follow such a formula are theme parks, shopping malls, professional sports venues and tourist resorts (81). The second trend to lend a helping hand to the Fantasy City was the proliferation of themed environments referred to earlier. Third, is the all-important and profitable concept of “synergy” as the key logic in the entertainment and development industries. The concept of “synergy” is simply an effort to further converge the four pillars of urban entertainment (shopping, entertainment, dining and education or culture) into new hybrids, known as “shoppertainment”, “eatertainment” and “edutainment.”

What Hannigan concludes to be the ultimate *raison d'être* of the Fantasy City, something that could also be attributed to the resort hotel and the gated community, is “a long-standing cultural contradiction in American society between the middle-class desire for experience and their parallel reluctance to take risks, especially those which involve contact with the “lower orders” in cities” (7). While segregation among the classes is not a new social phenomenon, the creation of entertainment cities dedicated to providing a themed escape for people with a minimum degree of wealth, is a very recent trend. And as we move deeper into the twenty-first century, this trend shows no sign of slowing

down. The middle and upper-class desire for risk-less experience is creating a demand for a type of postmodern environment that many find problematic. The issue of authenticity arises frequently in criticism surrounding the Fantasy City, as well as questions of what is real and what is fake and whether or not it ultimately matters to the postmodern consumer of leisure lifestyles.

### **A New Leisure Class**

As we have witnessed since the earliest of human civilisations, changes in the means of production are responsible for the major distinctions among socio-economic classes. The latter half of the twentieth century saw a growing middle and upper-middle class closing the lifestyle gap that existed between the original leisure class of the Gilded Age and the working classes. After WWII, America enjoyed an economic expansion unparalleled in world history, “in particular with respect to the breadth and depth of its effect on the national social order” (Blakely 47). Over sixty-five percent of Americans owned their own homes and automobiles. Once reserved for the upper class, these became symbols of middle class status. This phenomenon was in large part due to government subsidies for home loans, increased income and real wealth. For the first time ever, hard-fought labour negotiations and the advent of Social Security meant working class Americans were able to accumulate savings toward retirement. Suddenly, the working class became the middle class, empowered with disposable income and leisure time.

These major changes in standards of living contributed to a market for luxury lifestyles and resort real estate. Or as Bitzer would put it, the market for luxury living came into existence as a response to a new situation in living standards. "Between 1973 and 1993 the average individual after-tax income, in constant dollars, has nearly doubled... Not only has disposable income risen dramatically; so have the conditions associated with having money: we live longer, consume more, and live healthier lives. The American middle class has become to some extent a leisure class" (48). Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the type of conspicuous consumption engaged in by this new leisure class. Automobile manufacturers began producing new vehicles designed for vacationing, such as station wagons, minivans and SUVs. Gated lifestyle communities are developers' response to this explosion in leisure living. Most incorporate wooded areas, artificial lakes and man-made streams to simulate restful natural environments.

In terms of identifying the factors that led to the huge demand for resort real estate, we must also consider societal changes that affect the collective psyche. Changes in spiritual attitude, whether linked to production or not, are also major factors in our perception of identity and the shaping of our ambitions. The 1970s saw a major shift in North America's social fabric, one which would affect luxury consumption to almost the same extent as WWII: the Women's Movement. With women entering the workplace, family incomes began doubling and lifestyle options increased for the working classes. While the phenomenon of two working parents generated a slew of other social issues, mostly surrounding child rearing, families were able to enjoy their leisure time in increasingly luxurious ways, and in many cases invest in a second home to do so. "Leisure lifestyles created a demand for second-home housing developments away from

the primary domicile”, “Their second homes, used for vacations during middle age, often became their permanent homes after retirement. Housing designed for part-year use was being converted to year-round occupancy” (48).

All the major technologic and socio-economic changes, as well as shifts in attitude towards luxury touched on in this chapter have paved the way for Intrawest’s success. “Although developers are finding it hard to build affordable homes for the average American, there is no dearth of market for resort properties” (56). For a resort real estate developer with a solid vision, strong financial backing and rhetorical creations that tap into the value system of this new, postmodern leisure class, the future seems bright indeed.

## **Conclusion**

By attempting to trace the specific situation that gave rise to Intrawest resorts as well as identifying the rhetoric that helped create the situation we began our rhetorical analysis from both Bitzer and Vatz’s perspectives. What the historical context shows us, is that luxury is far more than just a notion. Luxury is also a situation. It is a state in which one can live, a circumstance one can aspire to. Its meaning or characteristics are intrinsic only insofar as they lie outside the realm of basic need. Beyond this, luxury is as dependent on the perception of its interpreter as any other situation. A home with four solid walls, windows and plumbing would be considered a luxury by a large segment of the world’s population. Yet to Intrawest’s target audience, such amenities are so obvious and expected as to not be worth mentioning. The meaning of a luxury home is to Vatz,



ascribed by the rhetoric surrounding it, in this case, the values Intrawest bundles with its real estate offering.

As a situation, luxury has always held a direct correlation with advances in technology, which in turn have correlated with increases in a human ambition for better living conditions. Just as the invention of tools made the lives of early humans easier, ongoing advances in production technology have consistently opened the door to luxury living for ever-increasing portions of the population. To examine the context of the situation from Bitzer's perspective, it is necessary to recognise that luxury and technology are inseparable. Technology is the agent that brings luxury situations to life. These situations, desirable as they are, create an exigence, which in turn provides an opening for all manner of rhetorical response.

However, Vatz's reasoning *vis-à-vis* the rhetorical situation holds as much validity as Bitzer's. As we saw with America's first resort hotels, rhetorical creations conjured luxury ideals to which many responded. Through the symbolic rhetoric of architecture, locations shrouded in fantasy were presented to a class of people already predisposed to indulging in fantastic lifestyles. Using symbols like gated entrances, auras of exclusivity were created, further enhancing the prestige and desirability of these locales.

In the conclusion to Vatz's essay, Murray Edelman is quoted as stating, "Language does not mirror an objective 'reality' but rather creates it by organizing meaningful perceptions abstracted from a complex, bewildering world." Indeed, the language of luxury does not mirror reality. Rather, it mirrors human ambition. It takes the most fundamental exigencies of our time - ranging from material desires to intangible,

emotional and personal dreams - and creates a perfect reality in which all our needs are met, and all our dreams come true. How this luxurious reality is created by Intrawest resort rhetoric is the focus of Chapter Two.

## Chapter II.

### **The Location. The Luxury. The Life.**

According to their 2003 Annual Report, Intrawest Corporation is “the world’s leading developer and operator of village-centered resorts.” It also claims to be “redefining the resort world with its 10 mountain resorts, one warm-weather resort, 29 golf courses under management, a premier vacation ownership business – Club Intrawest, and six world-class resort villages at other locations, including one in France.” The company goes on to boast of its expertise in “all aspects of resort living including lodging, food and beverage, themed retail, animated operations and real estate development” (1).

To make such claims to shareholders and the general public implies a level of success unprecedented in the resort development industry. In Chapter One, we examined the situation of luxury living on which the resort concept rests, as well as Intrawest’s precursors. America’s first resort hotel network, the gated communities that emerged out of its symbols of exclusivity and the Urban Entertainment Destinations that succeeded in reviving many of America’s deserted downtown areas, all have aspects in common with the Intrawest resort model. Combined, all this evolutionary information provides us with a valuable context by which we may better understand the exigence for resort lifestyles – an enormous opportunity that Intrawest has managed to seize upon in no uncertain terms. Yet as history has shown, exigencies on the lifestyle scale are not easily solved, and those who attempt to provide such solutions must tread carefully. Powerful rhetorical strategies

are required for such an enormous task, and as we shall see in the ensuing chapter, Intrawest seems to have found the magic formula.

Aristotle sums up the art of rhetoric with the following statement: “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle Book 1, Part 2). After close investigation of the total Intrawest offering, I have narrowed down Intrawest’s most important available means of persuasion to six, which provide us with six distinct topics for analysis. In order of discussion, these available means are: location (natural setting), the Intrawest Village as a rhetorical creation, Intrawest neighbourhoods, real estate project names and themes, materials and textures used in sales materials, and language and imagery. The following chapter will be an examination of each of these available means, with consideration for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postmodern audience for which the complete offering is intended.

Discussion of the audience or rather, Intrawest’s “target market,” is a topic that we will treat differently from the traditional humanistic conception proper to Bitzer and Vatz’s theories. Traditionally, the audience is regarded as either an objective, literal extension of “person,” or as a mob of gullible individuals incapable of logical argument. Alternately influenced by discourse, and mediators of change, the audience is positioned as a stable given entity whose behaviour is either dictated by rhetoric, or the inspiration for the creation of rhetoric. Through Derrida’s complex notion of *differance*, Barbara Biesecker challenges the feasibility of this notion of “audience as sovereign subject” and offers an alternative to the logic of influence. By treating the audience as an ever-shifting and unstable subject (constituted in and by the play of *difference*), we “read the rhetorical situation as an event structured not by a logic of influence but by a logic of articulation”

(Biesecker, par. 37). From this perspective, the rhetorical situation becomes linked to the constant production and reproduction of subject identities and social relations.

“*Difference* obliges us to read rhetorical discourses as processes entailing the discursive production of audiences, and enables us to decipher rhetorical events as sites that make visible the historically articulated emergence of the category ‘audience’” (Biesecker, par. 37). In other words, Intrawest rhetoric does not respond to a particular audience, it builds its audience one identity at a time, through rhetoric. How this interpellation takes place, how it contributes to the construction of individual identities and social relations, is an intrinsic dimension of each rhetorical creation, and as such, of its analysis.

### **The Location: Stunning Natural Environments**

Since the earliest human civilisations, nature has provided mankind with the most fundamental aspect of resorting – a setting. People have always gravitated toward spectacular natural settings in search of respite, relaxation, enlightenment, privacy, freedom, rejuvenation, etc. From the early palliative retreats centred around naturally healing environments like mineral springs, resorts have always achieved a certain amount of notoriety from the environment in which they are located. The more beautiful the landscape, the more comfortable the climate, the warmer the water, the greater the popularity of the resort. Location is perhaps the most important element in the assessment of a resort’s potential, a fact that obviously didn’t escape the authors of the Intrawest experience. In his opening comments on an article in the Intrawest Resort Life magazine entitled “Resort Alchemy,” Michael Coyle, Senior Vice President of Intrawest Marketing

tells us that Intrawest is all about “recognizing diamonds in the rough and transforming them” (Cohen 2).

The Whistler Blackcomb ski centre was the first “diamond in the rough” to be recognised and transformed by Intrawest. Nestled high in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, Whistler was a modest ski station frequented mostly by surrounding locals. In 1990, Intrawest came to Whistler, invested enormous sums in the revamping of ski operations and constructed an entire village at the base of the mountain. The investment justified higher lift costs and real estate began to move. Suddenly, Whistler became a destination for millions. Using the Whistler success as a benchmark for the Intrawest resort experience, the company began acquiring existing resorts in other spectacular locations and transforming them in the same fashion.

“Diamonds in the rough” is how Intrawest describes the independently run resorts it acquires and adds to its network. Natural beauty and developable land are its base criteria. Intrawest tends to acquire resorts that either have a long history with the upper classes, such as Tremblant, Quebec and Stratton, Vermont, or the prestige of their natural environment, like Whistler, BC or Snowshoe, West Virginia. Naturally, Intrawest’s upper class destinations tend to include the highest peaks, the richest lands and the most spectacular views. From the outset, before Intrawest begins “weaving its magic” on a resort, it has often inherited an audience whose identity is already established. An Intrawest person is someone familiar with these destinations, someone who knows what it means to have a season’s pass to Tremblant, Stratton or any of the other expensive and coveted resorts Intrawest acquires. This knowledge invests the audience with the power of judgement, for they are in a position to determine whether Intrawest’s involvement

with their privileged leisure escape enhances the overall experience or takes away from it. In a manner of speaking, Intrawest is put to the task of proving itself to the critical eye of the habitual resort frequenter.

There has yet to be an Intrawest resort rejected by its former clientele, which speaks to the successful appeal of the “Intrawest experience.” It also speaks to the importance of the relationship between Intrawest and its resort locations. It is one that bestows upon its audience a presumed authority, a sense of empowerment and knowledge that flatters the bourgeois sensibility. Location alone tells Intrawest’s audience that it recognises who they are, i.e. upper class leisure enthusiasts, and what kinds of environments they enjoy. The relationship is deepened by the substantial investments in resort operating equipment, such as ski lifts and snowmaking technology which are part of the Intrawest “experience enhancement” program, along with partnering with world-class golf course developers to improve the golf experience. The rhetoric of Intrawest’s resort locations has enormous constitutive power. By identifying itself first and foremost with luxury locales, the rhetorical situation makes possible the production of multiple identities and social relations grounded in and around an already familiar experience.

Intrawest is perhaps most famous for its mountain destinations, which include Whistler Blackcomb and Panorama Mountain, British Columbia; Tremblant, Quebec; Mammoth, California; Snowshoe, West Virginia; Stratton, Vermont; Mountain Creek, New Jersey; Copper, Colorado; and Blue Mountain, Ontario. Sandestin Golf and Beach resort on Florida’s Emerald Coast is currently Intrawest’s only complete, warm-weather, village-centred resort. With a few exceptions, each resort has an aristocratic legacy, which is adopted as an important rhetorical element in the overall Intrawest strategy.

Each location's reputation for spectacular scenery and outstanding leisure activity lends *ethos* to the Intrawest name, providing a level of credibility that would normally take decades to build.

Tremblant, for example, Canada's first ski resort, was uncharted mountain wilderness before its first visionary arrived. Philadelphia millionaire Joseph Bondurant Ryan was the first to see its potential as a world-class destination when he visited the resort in 1942. Together, with local priest Curée Hector Deslauriers, Ryan bought the resort and invested badly needed money to repair and upgrade operations. Soon after, Tremblant became a destination for some of Eastern North America's wealthiest leisure enthusiasts, and its new-found success brought prosperity to the small towns surrounding it. The story of Ryan and Deslauriers is recounted as part of Tremblant resort lore in every biannual Intrawest real estate magazine distributed on the resort, in an article entitled "The Legend. The Landmark. The Legacy." In reading about "the mountain that inspired a vision," potential homeowners are offered a very elitist identity. They are asked to look around them and contemplate the resort from the perspective of a great visionary, because as homeowners, all the potential they see is rightfully theirs.

The recognition and glorification of each resort's heritage turns their history into another aspect of the "Intrawest experience." Black and white photos often accompany stories of the resort's founders, providing a feeling of nostalgia through notions of ancestry and establishment – as though the spirits of the resort's original founders were in partnership with Intrawest. They provide what Walter Benjamin describes as "historical testimony," which provides a certain authority to the place. It is a rhetorical



strategy that imbues each resort with a sense of meaningful legacy; something one supposedly inherits when one becomes an Intrawest homeowner.

Mountain Creek in New Jersey is a fairly recent Intrawest resort endeavour, and arguably the weakest in terms of location and legacy. Albeit located in picturesque Vernon Valley along the Appalachian mountain range, Mountain Creek is not an exceptionally high mountain and, given its mild climate, can only offer at most four months of skiing per year. Area golf courses are far apart, and the only other attraction is a water park renowned for serving a primarily biker clientele and battling law suits from visitor injuries. One immediately wonders why Intrawest would bother with such a risky investment? The answer lies less than fifty miles East – New York City. With the credibility of a string of successful resorts behind it, and the potential of tapping into one of the world's richest and densest markets before it, Intrawest decided that Mountain Creek was a risk worth taking. After five years of deliberations, fighting environmental lawsuits and low sales team morale, the first neighbourhood is finally complete and partially sold, and the Village at Mountain Creek is under construction. As one can well imagine, the future of Mountain Creek will be closely watched.

### **The Location: The Intrawest Village**

The Intrawest village is a shining example of the type of all-encompassing environment typical of what James Gilmore describes in his book The Experience Economy. The themed experience offered by the Intrawest Village falls into the same realm as the Forum Shops in Las Vegas and to a certain extent has much in common with

the motives behind Disneyland. Incorporating aspects of early resort hotels, UEDs and themed retail, the Intrawest Village is a unique expression of Mark Gottdiener's "built environment" as described in his book The Theming of America. Out of Gottdiener's top ten list of the kinds of experiences most often staged<sup>3</sup>, the Intrawest Village offers two: status and nostalgia. Gottdiener lists five paramount principles of themed developments. The first is "an engaging theme that alters guests' sense of reality." The second focuses on fully affecting that sense of reality through the affectation of space, time and matter. The third principle is the integration of space, time and matter into a realistic whole. The fourth is "the creation of multiple places within a place" and the last is the execution of a theme, the more sensory, the more memorable (Gilmore 59). The Intrawest Village follows all these principles to a certain extent, yet is a hybrid, an environment unlike any other themed experience in North America.

The very word "village" contains deep, human connotations. It is a word that conjures nostalgic images of tiny, close-knit rural communities where shopkeepers greet residents by name, stories are traded at the General Store, and children are reared communally in a safe and natural environment. It is a word that, in a world where rural living is fast becoming a thing of the past, has become highly romanticised. The sense of community that a village communicates is not an experience proper to the day to day lives of Intrawest's target audience, the majority of whom live in gated communities and suburbs. For middle to upper class families, rubbing shoulders with people like themselves generally requires personal social effort along the lines of organising barbecues and backyard parties. Excursions into the "community" at large are generally

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<sup>3</sup> Gottdiener's top ten list of most often staged experiences is, in order: status, the tropical paradise, the "Wild West", classic civilization, nostalgia, Arabian fantasy, urban motif, fortress, modern progress, and

restricted to the impersonal environment of the local mall. Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Peck, the planners behind over two hundred new neighbourhood and community revitalisation plans, most notably Seaside, Florida, collaborates on Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream. The book offers a thorough critique of suburban planning and presents a strong case for traditional neighbourhood design, which is centred around a town or village. They site the presence of a town as a major factor in purchase decisions, a factor that can justify exorbitant price tags in remote locations. The difference is not age, or location, but design: the fact that the properties at Seaside and Kentlands are part of a town, a place where people want to be” (Duany 107).

In “Interview,” a piece for Intrawest-owned Resort Life magazine, Joe Houssian, the Chairman, President and CEO of Intrawest speaks candidly about the keys to his company’s success. In response to the question of accounting for the continual growth of the Intrawest resort network, Houssian boldly states that “the company’s financial success comes from creating a truly memorable experience for our guests” (9). He speaks of the importance of the direct relationship between leisure activities and the village experience. “We’ve seen the way the village acts as a magnet that draws people together. It’s magical. So a key reason we build villages is to create an experience for people” (9). This statement begs two questions; what type of experience does the Intrawest village create, and how does it create it?

As we saw in Chapter One, America’s first entertainment destinations located in the downtown core of major cities lost their upper class clientele due to an impossible attempt at the harmonious mixing of all classes. In an Intrawest village, guests need never

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the representation of the unrepresented (ex. The Vietnam Veteran’s Wall)

fear such integration attempts. Protected by distance and no public transportation to the site, not to mention prices that would deter even most middle class citizens from entering, Intrawest villages cater to a public that resides well within the upper financial brackets. Implicitly, guests are guaranteed to rub shoulders with people who appear not unlike themselves, people who share the same social status. They are able to experience the refreshing atmosphere of the great outdoors in a setting designed to create a sense of intimacy, friendliness and good, old-fashioned community. This kind of social security, where undesirables have been “magically” removed is a primary characteristic of the “urbanoid environments” Goldberger discusses. Intrawest resorts are in effect sealed-off, private environments pretending to be public spaces. They are another incarnation of the trend toward “private cities.” The only difference being that Intrawest is the first to offer the experience in the nostalgic setting of a simulated, “Old World” village.

The so-called “magic” of Intrawest villages, the qualities that guests find so inviting are all rhetorical creations loosely based on the *pathos* inherent to authentic human villages. To create these magical places, Intrawest employed the services of architect and village designer Eldon Beck. His village design strategy, as described by Hal Clifford of *Ski Magazine*, is to “meld local heritage and environmental attributes into an urban plan deeply influenced by the organic nature of European villages.” To “import the best elements of Old World villages, then tweak them to their specific locales” (Clifford 7). Claiming Mother Nature as his major influence, Beck also uses a “creek” analogy to describe the overall layout of his villages. In designing the pedestrian walkways, he creates “eddies” which amount to small, intimate spaces off the main “stream,” where people find terraces, shops and places to rest. The main “streams” are

designed to keep the pace flowing and float people past the abundant retail experience. In his book Fantasy City, John Hannigan notes that “high-end” shops are an integral part of the “Fantasy City.” Beck, understanding that the most important aspect of a ski village is at eye level, i.e. store fronts, aids in drawing people’s attention to shops using wooden, colourful, hand-painted, hanging signs. Beck also claims to pay special attention to sun exposure and views, ensuring that all areas maximise available daylight and lead people to the best mountain views. The atmosphere, designed to alter one’s sense of time by slowing down the pace of life, corresponds to Gottdiener’s first paramount principle of themed developments.

Let us take Tremblant village as an example. The architecture bears at best a passing resemblance to the sloped rooftops and dormer windows found in Quebec City’s old quarter. Beck has “tweaked” the Old World aesthetic using a rainbow of bright, fanciful colours. Rooftops, windows and balconies are dressed in loud ruby reds, gaudy pastel greens and electric blues. Beck supports his design by saying “Visitors want an experience that is not typical of their daily lives, they want a place to go to that is different and memorable. If we bring to the mountains the trappings of an urban or suburban area, I think we’ve really blown it” (8). Even though Intrawest Villages do share some of the trappings of urban and suburban areas, Beck’s use of colour follows Baudrillard’s theory on the particular atmosphere of holidays, which thrives not on ‘real’ nature, but on the “Idea of Nature.” With regards to the use of loud, primary colour, Baudrillard states; “It is holidays that serve as a model here, holidays whose colours devolve into the primary everyday realm. And it is in the fake natural environments of holidays, with its caravan, tents and camping gear, experienced as a model and as a zone

of freedom, that the tendency towards bright colours, to plasticity, to the ephemeral practicality of labour-saving gadgets, and so on, first came to the fore” (Baudrillard 34). Tremblant Village and the others like it, arguably qualify as “fake natural environments.”

In Tremblant Village, each hanging store sign and storefront is designed in the same aesthetic, avoiding any indication of individuality. The result is a village of quaint cookie-cutter buildings that look more like a child’s fairytale come to life than any real village grown out of chance and time. Despite its organic layout, sun-splashed pedestrian “eddies” and Old World inspiration, Tremblant village has a decidedly “Disney does Europe” feel. Ultimately, like all IntraWest Villages, Tremblant is another form of the Fantasy City, a destination which according to Hannigan is postmodern “insomuch as it is constructed around technologies of simulation, virtual reality and the thrill of the spectacle” (4). Set before the backdrop of a majestic mountain, a spectacle unto itself, the IntraWest Village is a virtual collage of themed environments, coming together to form its own version of the “Magic Kingdom.”

While Beck may argue that he has avoided the trappings of your typical urban or suburban destination, he is in many fundamental ways mistaken. IntraWest villages, as unique as they claim to be, are further examples of Ritzer’s “McDonaldization” model. The IntraWest village remains an efficient, calculated, predictable and controlled environment. It offers a form of “affective ambience” that is the main characteristic of the typical postmodern, themed environment. Beck, who has travelled extensively throughout Europe, Australia and Mexico, often emphasises the “authenticity” of his village creations. As though the application of his interpretation of a European village will yield

an equally authentic end product. What Beck is in fact doing is perpetuating the “riskless risk” factor that is at the heart of the postmodern exigence.

In Fantasy City, Hannigan quotes Firat and Venkatesh to explain the profile of the postmodern consumer. “The “postmodern consumer” is commonly depicted as elusive: a free soul who darts in and out of arenas of consumption which are fluid and non-totalizing. He/she eschews loyalty to brands while constructing individual identity from multiple images and symbols; subverting the market rather than being seduced by it. Instead of going along with the American Dream, as previous generations had done, postmodern consumers are said to be unabashed hedonists, living for the thrill of the spectacle without feeling the necessity to relate such fragmented moments to a large direction of progress” (67). As a postmodern rhetorical creation, the Intrawest Village constructs bourgeois identities unconcerned with authenticity in any real sense. The new, postmodern bourgeois is someone who delights in riskless social mingling, the opportunity to consume designer products, parade designer retail and sip designer coffee, knowing their children are safely playing with other designer-clad children. The Intrawest Village responds to a set of presumed, postmodern bourgeois concerns. It provides that fanciful, entertaining, non-totalizing environment to which they can return to day after day of hedonistic thrill seeking. Is it any wonder they are so popular?

## **The Luxury: IntraWest Neighbourhoods.**

IntraWest neighbourhoods respond to the fourth of Gottdiener's paramount principles of the themed development - the "multiple places within a place." Tremblant resort is also an ideal example for the study of IntraWest neighbourhoods. As IntraWest's second resort, it is one of the most developed residentially. The entire area, including neighbourhoods, was mapped out and drawn according to IntraWest's "master plan" for the resort. Developing each neighbourhood in phases that match a family's life cycle, Tremblant is based in an economical strategy used in traditional neighbourhood development. "Smart developers do their best to serve many different market segments at once - "starter," "move-up," "family," "retirement," and so on - but in suburbia they must build an independent pod for each market segment, since different incomes must never mix" (Duany 108). As such, each Tremblant neighbourhood is designed to appeal to a certain market at a certain phase in life. With only one final neighbourhood at the pre-construction phase, the rhetoric of the "Tremblant community" is reaching its full potential. Using the IntraWest: Mountain Homes at Tremblant real estate magazine as our guide, we will take a tour of these typical IntraWest neighbourhoods and explore the rhetoric surrounding, and inherent to, these creations.

Written atop the stylised illustration of the entire Tremblant resort is the title "Your Map Home." Immediately following are the lines, "Take a look. Take your time. Somewhere within this carefully master-planned community, there's a condominium, townhome, cottage or estate in a neighbourhood that's right for you and your family!" (25) Below, spread across two pages, is a map of Tremblant's neighbourhoods with



numbers corresponding to each specific real estate project. The *Intrawest* real estate magazine is the only marketing piece where one can find such a detailed depiction of Tremblant's impressive array of residential projects. Interpellating the reader right from the start with a title that immediately communicates the notion of ownership, the audience is not asked, but told to take the time needed to find the neighbourhood that best suits them. Mention of the "master-planned" quality of the resort reassures the audience that nothing has been left to chance. By simply browsing this map of the resort, the audience is immediately awarded the identity and status of potential homeowner, within a safe and exclusive community, which according to Veblen, is a much-coveted title among the upper class.

At Tremblant there are four distinct neighbourhoods themed according to location and lore. The first, *Domaine du Village*, essentially consists of condominiums and resort hotels located in and around the village at the base of the mountain. This neighbourhood, as described in the *Intrawest* magazine, is "the best spot for people who are here for a good time, if not a long time" (23) and geared toward a "starter" market, i.e. singles and first-time buyers. Indeed, village real estate is decidedly at the heart of the action, and as with every Tremblant neighbourhood, there is a pre-determined identity created for its residents. As its descriptive paragraph proclaims, "Varied and colourful village homes preside atop cafés, boutiques and galleries, within five-star hotels, at the foot of the slopes - even lakeside!" (23) Village homes range in price from slightly more than \$100,000 for a 300-square-foot studio, to over \$400,000 for a two-bedroom in the Fairmont, a luxury hotel. Between the magazine copy and what one can glean just by venturing through the resort village on a busy weekend, it becomes clear what type of

people are encouraged to own in this neighbourhood. People who identify themselves by an active social life, who appreciate music and the arts, riskless social mingling and being seen enjoying their master-planned resort lifestyle.

Located just above the village, on the mountainside is *Domaine de la Forêt*. Considering the sparseness of trees found within the neighbourhood itself, one can only presume that its name (“Forest Domain”) is a reference to the forested mountain behind it. Among the most expensive residences on the mountain, prices for a two-bedroom of less than 1,200 square feet cost up to \$600,000. With no studios or “bachelor pads” to be found here, this could be considered a “move-up” or “family” neighbourhood. This neighbourhood description reads, “Overlooking the resort village, these neighbourhoods appeal to active families, big or small. Proximity to the village means the action is never far, and location right on the mountain spells ski-in/ski-out access for most homes here” (23).

A seemingly minor error in the copy reveals an important distinction within this particular neighbourhood. The copy refers to “these neighbourhoods” in the plural, implying that there are several when in fact we are reading about just one. As Edwin Black so insightfully explains in his essay *Ideological Justifications*, “Sometimes the language tears the truth from our lips even when we think we do not know it, or know it, but intend not to say it” (Black 148). While this minor mishap does not reveal any deep-rooted ideological attitude on behalf of the ghostwriter, to a careful reader it would signal the reality of this neighbourhood. That it consists of a series of small, closed off neighbourhoods that can in no way be lived as a connected whole. What in fact we find in this so-called neighbourhood, are thirteen variations on a lifestyle community.

Blakey and Snyder's lifestyle communities revolve around one central leisure attraction such as the golf course. With the advent of Intrawest's master-planned communities, we may now add the "Ski Community" to the list. At Tremblant, as with Intrawest's other mountain resorts, "ski-in/ski-out" access is ranked among the most coveted features in real estate. Presented as an ideal "family" community, most Domaine de la Forêt of homeowners are able to ski straight to their door from one of Tremblant's many trails. Most of the thirteen individual projects share additional amenities, such as hot tubs or swimming pools. Altitude, a small development of four buildings with two to four residences each, has private amenities within each home, and is closer in nature to the Prestige Community. Le Plateau sur la Montagne is the furthest project, an enclave of homes with a private entrance. As most of the real estate projects in Domaine de la Forêt must be accessed via a private driveway, the feeling one gets is not of a neighbourhood per se, but of a series of gated Lifestyle and Prestige Communities. Residents are segregated from one another by what now appears to be the most widespread phenomena in twentieth century real estate development.

Domaine du Géant is the largest Tremblant neighbourhood and the furthest from the mountain and village. At a glance, one can immediately see that this massive "Domaine" is composed of five smaller neighbourhoods. At this point in the descriptions, any allusion to a Domaine representing a single neighbourhood is dropped. "Opposite the resort village, this is the domain for those wishing a quieter Tremblant experience. Each of its five intimate neighbourhoods has its own distinct aura, ranging from the ethereal, spa-like setting of Tremblant-les-Eaux, to the stately homes lining the fairways of Le Géant golf course" (Intrawest 23). Although named for the golf course that winds among

the five neighbourhoods, none of these communities can actually claim the title of “Golf Course Community.” They are all essentially Prestige Communities, with the exception of Tremblant-les-Eaux, a Lifestyle Community centred on a “hot springs” experience consisting of a variety of communal hot tubs and swimming pools. Again, each community is accessed via a private road and entrance. Although access to each of Tremblant’s private communities is not gated or manned, elaborate entranceways are nonetheless created to satisfy the symbolic meanings such structures represent. In essence, Tremblant neighbourhoods and communities hold all the trappings and rhetoric of traditional gated communities, but are able to execute this type of development without the added need for real security measures.

Domaine Nansen is the last of the Tremblant neighbourhoods and is still at the conceptual stage. Named after a character from Tremblant’s history and the existing community of the same name that borders it, this domain will encompass only one community called Panache, which promises to be the most expensive and exclusive Prestige Community on the resort. Its description touts it as the “newest and most wildly civilized domain at Tremblant. Removed from the bright village lights, yet accessible from the slopes, Panache is the first and only Intrawest resort neighbourhood on this side of the mountain” (23). When complete, Panache will be a mountainside enclave containing eight buildings of three homes each. It will be a hybrid of the Lifestyle and Prestige Community types, as its main amenity is the ski-in/ski-out access to the mountain, and its distinguishing characteristics are exclusivity and price.

Offering the largest square footage on the resort, Panache was created with very wealthy families in mind. It is presented as the ultimate “retirement” enclave for retirees

with large families who expect to receive up to three generations during the holidays. Being so removed from the rest of the resort with no other neighbourhoods within view, Panache lures its audience ideal with the pathos associated with the traditional country retreat, a home secluded in nature. Ironically, despite the fairly remote location of the resort (close to two hours by car to Montreal, the closest metropolis), there is only one Tremblant resort community where one might find true seclusion, and it is not Panache. It is called La Réserve, located in Domaine de la Forêt and unlike every other community, it consists solely of plots of land. Touted as “the perfect place to express your individuality” and offering “spectacular views that make you king of the resort!” for a mere \$310,000 you can buy the priceless privacy of a foundation on which to build the home of your dreams.

For every Intrawest neighbourhood, there is an Intrawest audience waiting to be identified. A target market that defines its happiness around ski-in, ski-out access, proximity to a private fantasy village, access to luxury water amenities, natural beauty and all the other perks that come with ownership at a world-class mountain resort. These are the kinds of dreams the Intrawest Tremblant community sells, and these are the ideals its audience buys.

### **The Luxury: Project Names and Themes**

As we saw in the previous section, Intrawest neighbourhoods do not grow naturally from long-established human settlements. They are carefully planned clusters of carefully designed homes, rhetorical creations conceived for a pre-determined audience. In discussing the creation of each resort real estate project, each place within this place,

whether condominium building or gated enclave of single family homes, we might use as an analogy the concept of cloning. Each project is first born from technical drawings and given a precise location within the resort. Location and development goals dictate whether the project will consist of a building with multiple units, a series of townhomes or single family homes. Aside from spatial and technical details, each project begins with a clean slate. Following this is a process to determine the overall look, feel and character of the project. After an intense, two-day meeting between the architects, developers, sales and marketing teams, a vision for the project is created. Out of this creative “brainstorming” session referred to as a “charette,” the project is baptised with a name, a theme or personality of sorts, a sense of place amid the other resort projects and an interior and exterior aesthetic – looks, if you will.

A major focus of the “charette” process is determining the target audience for each project. From demographics to tastes and attitudes, consideration for the kind of people destined to be seduced by the project drives the creative process. As with the concept behind each Intrawest village, real estate concepts take their inspiration from their respective resort’s local culture and heritage. Often, the first generation of real estate is steeped in traditional themes that evoke an upper-class past. However, Intrawest strives to stay on top of changes in attitude and trends, and adjust its offerings accordingly. In this section, we will look at project names and themes that typify certain Intrawest resorts, with a more in-depth analysis of real estate projects that illustrate Intrawest’s understanding, or lack thereof, for its target market.

Blue Mountain resort, located two hours north of Toronto in the Georgian Bay area of Thornbury and Collingwood has a long history with the locals. Before Intrawest’s

arrival it was a favourite area for vacationing Ontarians and enjoyed a rich family history. Jozo Weider, a veteran skier and early immigrant to the area, was the original founder of Blue Mountain as a ski station. When Intrawest arrived, the first real estate project was called Weider Lodge after the founder, a building that mimics the aesthetic of the traditional ski lodge. Other Blue Mountain projects include The Grand Georgian, one of the most expensive village condominium buildings, and Historic Snowbridge, a neighbourhood of traditional Victorian town homes. Naming buildings after resort founders is a common Intrawest practice mentioned earlier in the chapter, that uses the rhetoric of history, legacy and nostalgic architectural aesthetics to sell ideal vacation homes. Another rhetorical naming strategy is employing the romance and strength of natural symbols to evoke atmosphere or status. At Mountain Creek resort for example, the building destined to become the resort's flagship home is named The Appalachian after the mighty mountain range on which the resort is built. Further away from the mountain, the first neighbourhood at Mountain Creek was named Black Creek Sanctuary after the quiet, wooded area that borders it.

At Sandestin resort in the Florida panhandle, real estate projects carry names that ring with Southern hospitality and mentality, such as The Grand Sandestin, Club Estates, One Beach Club Drive, Bayou Villas, Legend Creek and Grand Harbour. Ownership opportunities range from golf course communities to beachside, bay side and village homes. The notion of "private club" is often evoked in Sandestin project names, as with notions of history, nature and grandeur. The reigning architectural style throughout Sandestin's residential buildings is "Southern plantation," while the commercial

buildings of The Village of Baytowne Wharf are modelled after turn-of-the-century fishing villages.

One of the most obvious examples of the leveraging of a high-status name for a real estate project is Tremblant's Bondurant. As with many of Tremblant's founders, whose names and likeness can be found on street signs and scattered throughout the resort, "Bondurant" is a mythical name at Tremblant. A village building perched on the shores of a man-made pond called Lac Miroir, Bondurant is a fairly large construction encompassing fifteen luxury town homes. Judging by the image of the project, the audience for whom these homes were created is among the wealthiest on the resort. They are people extremely concerned with status and are likely to be quite conspicuous in their consumption habits. Prospective Bondurant homeowners are solicited with calls to "Live his spirit and his style" and to "Live his legend and his legacy." There are in fact fifteen legacies to choose from at Bondurant, as each townhouse is individually named after a character from Joe Ryan's day. One might live the spirit of Mary Ryan, Joe's wife, or the legend of Jackrabbit Johansen, an early trailblazer, as well as thirteen other colourful and storied characters. The amount owners are asked to pay to live the myth of Joe's unique spirit, style, legend and legacy starts at one million dollars. What they receive in reality is a spacious town home in one of the most crowded areas of the resort village, sandwiched between the real estate pavilion and a street that services the Westin Hotel parking garage and a resort exit.

Bondurant does however carry all the status symbols of the Prestige Community. Delineated by an imposing wrought iron gate, high-tech security system and one of the highest price tags on the resort, the status that comes with owning a Bondurant town



home is undeniable. Yet Bondurant remains one of the hardest sells on the resort. Perhaps the rhetoric of nostalgia in this case is not persuasive enough to overshadow its awkward placement and huge price tag. Perhaps its modern interior, faux antiques and spanking new appliances halt the progression of the sense of nostalgia and memory evoked by the name and theme. Clearly the myth of the origin of this project, which Baudrillard cites as the motive behind our attraction to anything *soit dit* antique, is never fulfilled. According to Baudrillard, the justification of the purchase of such a home would require a shard of “absolute reality.” This could include anything from an actual antique chair once owned by Joseph Bondurant Ryan to materials from his original home incorporated into the new construction. Without any such components, the rhetoric of nostalgia begun in the name is rendered meaningless by the physical product (Baudrillard 76).

Following Bondurant, Intrawest introduced a new village condominium project with a far more hip and contemporary feel to it. Ermitage du Lac is a sixty-four-unit condominium hotel located across the pond from Bondurant and offering the only “boutique hotel-style” residential experience on the resort. “Boutique hotel” is a style developed by hotel designer Ian Schrager that became popular in the mid-1990s. It is another expression of the themed urban environment, albeit one of a far more subtle and stylish execution. The original concept behind the “boutique hotel” is an environment of designer objects where everything can be bought, i.e. the hotel as boutique. The approach was made famous by Schrager’s innovative usage of small spaces, minimal furnishings and dramatic atmospheres. The theme of Ermitage du Lac is implied in its marketing tagline; “The reflection of refinement.” It is carried through to its interiors in a design concept dubbed “Wilderness Chic.” Despite the project’s adherence to a real and popular

contemporary trend, it too has struggled to sell the majority of its sixty-four units. At Tremblant, there does not appear to be much of an audience for 300-square-foot studios starting at \$189,000, no matter how chic they claim to be.

Where traditional luxury and the status of a name does appear to have an audience is at Blue Mountain in Ontario's Georgian Bay area. A little over a year ago, Intrawest unveiled a real estate project that was strategically planned to become the resort's landmark – the epitome of luxury and status at Blue Mountain. The grand resort hotels that line the CP railroad served as inspiration for the vision and theme of the project. Its name, "Trillium House," is a combination of Ontario's signature flower and a traditional appellation for prestigious and private social institutions. The name in fact reflected the desired aura so effectively, that when the Westin Hotel chain bought the project after its official launching, it kept the original name – a first in the history of Westin Hotels. The accompanying tag line for the project, "A Landmark Moment" is followed by "A Landmark Opportunity." This tag line presents the building as marking a turning point in the resort's evolution, a "once in a lifetime" event that offers owners the opportunity to be part of something bigger than simply homeownership.

Unlike Bondurant, whose rhetoric relied on the desire to own a symbol of the visionaries who first founded the resort, The Westin Trillium House offers its audience the opportunity to be the visionaries. In buying at The Westin Trillium House, owners are not only acquiring the prestige and status of Blue Mountain's most distinguished real estate project, they are also making a lavish statement of their belief in the future success of the resort. Of course, with the addition of the Westin brand, they are also getting a few internationally recognised perks. Known for first class service and accommodations, the

Westin has two brands all its own. “The Heavenly Bed™” and “The Heavenly Bath™” are both trademarks of the Westin brand, and represent sleep and shower experiences that are exactly what their names imply. It is hard to say whether the complete sell out of The Westin Trillium House Phase I was entirely due to the addition of the Westin brand to its name, or the promise of what the name itself, *sans* the Westin brand, represents.

In David Brooks’ best-selling book Bobos in Paradise: the new upper class and how they got there, the author traces the evolution of North American society’s definition of status. In his documenting of the massive change from aristocracy to meritocracy, Brooks remarks that the former markers of individual status, i.e. religion, family name, skin colour, language skills, gender, schooling, accent, etc. have today been replaced with luxury consumption. In other words, to the very diverse and cosmopolitan Toronto market closest to Blue Mountain, the value of owning not just any resort home, but a Westin resort home in Blue Mountain’s landmark building represents a status that some may have otherwise been denied, based on the xenophobic criteria mentioned above. In many ways, resorts and resort homeownership have become the new social clubs of the twenty-first century. Associating oneself to a resort, whether as a regular guest or better, as a homeowner, offers the status and respect once reserved for members of exclusive social clubs, an exclusivity easily communicated through a name.

### **The Luxury: Materials and Textures**

We have now observed four of the six most important means of persuasion available to Intrawest resort real estate: the natural luxury of geographical location, the

private fairy-tale world of the fantasy village, the sense of place within a place afforded by resort neighbourhoods, and the names and accompanying themes that qualify the status of ownership. The last two sections of the chapter will focus on the world of discourse, and the packaging of this discourse created by R+D to appeal directly to Intrawest's chosen target markets. In this section we will look at how the choice of packaging materials is the first element in a very important and powerful rhetorical strategy of interpellation. We will see how different materials can communicate the *ethos* or *pathos* of a project before one written word has been seen. In The System of Objects, Baudrillard discusses the rhetorical value of materials within the atmospheric framework of the home. Taking his analysis of wood as a material for example, we will analyse in the same way other materials used to package and sell Intrawest homeownership opportunities.

Baudrillard draws two atmospheric distinctions based on "hot" and "cold." To him, the structure of atmosphere whether through colour or materials is divided along these lines. Wood, as a material relating to the home, falls in the "hot" category. "Wood draws its substance from the earth, it lives and breathes and 'labours.' It has its latent warmth; it does not merely reflect, like glass, but burns from within. Time is embedded in its very fibres, which makes it the perfect container, because every content is something we want to rescue from time. Wood has its own odour, it ages, it even has parasites, and so on. In short, it is a material that has *being*. Think of the notion of 'solid oak' - a living idea for each of us, evoking as it does the succession of generations, massive furniture and ancestral family homes" (37).

Baudrillard's rather thorough elaboration of the atmospheric values of wood characterises the material and highlights its qualities as a living entity interacting with other living beings. Wood does not lose its life force, even after being disconnected from its roots and the earth, it still "burns from within," maintains its unique odour and continues to age, acquiring patinas that only add to its object value. Wood, as a living, organic material, has an innate and powerful rhetoric when applied to matters of the home. It is however, a difficult material to employ in the construction of real estate sales collateral, except in its more processed form of paper. Despite the logistical barriers involved in using wood in brochures, R+D has managed to utilise its powerful rhetorical properties in a piece used in the early development stages of a project.

The "Brand Landscape" is a signature R+D document created for the developers and potential partners involved in resort community development. As a document, it contains a grandly illustrated vision of the project or community in question, and is designed to represent the essence, experience and relevance of the project to an exclusive group of potential investors. Since only a limited number of Brand Landscapes are ever produced (usually a dozen or less), R+D is able to invest in expensive and at times bulky materials to package the document. In the case of "Red Leaves," a resort community planned for the Muskoka area and marketed by Playground<sup>4</sup>, wood was used to contain the Brand Landscape. Varnished, solid mahogany pieces were used to build the front and back cover of the document. On the front, the cover was hinged to a wooden margin and opened like a door, with a polished brass cleat<sup>5</sup> wound with a knotted nautical rope as a

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<sup>4</sup> Playground is a division of Intrawest that specialises in the strategic marketing of non-Intrawest owned resorts, and who also relies on R+D for producing its print sales pieces.

<sup>5</sup> A "cleat" according to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary 2001 edition is: "a metal or wooden fitting with two projecting horns, fastened to a flagpole, boat, etc., around which a rope may be made fast."

door handle. The use of wood was intended to represent the traditional, wooden Muskoka boats and the accompanying lake experience inextricably linked to the regattas and lifestyle of the resort. It proved one of the most powerful Brand Landscapes ever produced.

Another material that shares many of the organic, living and emotional properties of wood, yet is light enough to use in a mass-produced brochure, is bamboo. For Veranda, a Playground resort community in the Turks & Caicos Islands, bamboo was used to create the cover of the fulfilment piece and the boxes that contained said piece, as well as invitations to the community launch. A fulfilment piece, also referred to as a “Discovery Kit” (hereon referred to as a DK) is an elaborately illustrated book about the project, complete with all the details pertinent to prospects: floor plans, site map, fabric options (if furnished) features and amenities, etc. A DK is sent only to serious prospects and those who respond to the initial, smaller Direct Mail piece (hereon referred to as a DM)<sup>6</sup> that precedes it. Generally restricted to about a thousand, the DK is intended as the final, most persuasive piece of the campaign. For Veranda, bamboo was chosen for what its look, feel and texture represents: the tropics.

Light and neutral in colour, like wood, bamboo is a “hot” material, organic and full of living qualities. It too has latent warmth, a memory of the sun-drenched equatorial environment from whence it came. What is embedded in its fibres is less a notion of time, but a notion of the exotic and with that, the historic fetishization of ‘primitive’ cultures by ‘civilised’ society. In his section entitled “Marginal Objects: Antiques,” Baudrillard

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<sup>6</sup> The “DM” or “Direct Mail” is the first project brochure mailed to prospects. Its purpose is to pique prospects’ interest by relaying the story of the project with little to no technical details. A “Business Reply Card” is included with every DM as a vehicle through which interested parties may request a Discovery Kit.

describes the similarities between the impulse that attracts a 'savage' to 'Western objects', versus that which attracts 'civilised' people to man-made antique objects and icons. "In both cases what is being acquired under the form of the object is a 'virtue': the 'savage' acquires modern technology, the 'civilized' person acquires ancestral significance." Whether power or origin, whatever man lacks, he invests in the object; "The 'underdeveloped' fetishize power by means of the technical object; technically advanced, 'civilized' people, for their part, fetishize birth and authenticity by means of the mythological object" (Baudrillard 82). Therefore, through its construction material, the Veranda DK became that mythological object. It became an icon fetishized by 'civilised' people for its origin, authenticity and the colonial legacy that is its context.

A third material, organic, living and invested with its own degree of mythological significance, is leather. Definitely belonging to the "hot" category of materials, like wood, the notion of time is embedded in leather, although unlike wood, leather rarer and therefore invested with a certain amount of prestige. Having originated from the actual body of a living being, it too lives and breathes and "labours." Because of its past life, leather has an inherent authenticity to it, similar to that of the antique. "The tense of the mythological object is the perfect: it is that which occurs in the present as having occurred in a former time, hence that which is founded upon itself, that which is 'authentic.' The antique is always, in the strongest sense of the term, a 'family portrait': the immemorialization, in the concrete form of an object, of a former being – a procedure equivalent, in the register of the imaginary, to a suppression of time" (75). This immemorial, timeless quality of leather is used only for certain pieces and certain projects under specific circumstances.

Leather was used as a cover material in the Discovery Kit for Mountain Creek's The Appalachian. It was chosen because of the very specific positioning and characteristics of this project. The Appalachian is a project designed to symbolise the enduring, natural legacy represented in its name, and the romanticised, human legacy represented by its architecture and theme. Architecturally designed to mimic the traditional country lodges of early Adirondack mountain resorts, The Appalachian DK became an object invested with the value and mythology of traditional, upper class retreats. Here, the authentic and antique qualities of leather are used toward building a new family portrait - that of the potential buyer. The inherent value of leather makes it virtually impossible to throw away. In using it as a cover, R+D created more than just a brochure. They created a keepsake – an icon of value that represents a lifestyle of historic value. As a mythological object, it symbolises the rustic luxury associated with old mountain lodges, the natural comforts of an upper class retreat, and the “duel” that exists between a city home and a country home.

This “duel,” which Baudrillard discusses in his section on symbolic value and the “Myth of the Origin” is something often found among the objects of the upper class. It exists between objects kept for their functionality, such as washing machines and electric heaters, and objects kept for the mythical value of their origins, such as an antique washboard or warming pan. Whether a leather-bound brochure representing a mountain lodge-style home or an antique household appliance, whether genuine or fake, both objects are ‘perfect’ in the Baudrillard sense. ‘Perfect’ because they constitute an ancestral realm, “they are a way of escaping from everyday life, and no escape is more radical than escape in time” (80). And what the duel between these ‘perfect’ past objects



and the functional, present ones ultimately comes to represent is a failure, or lack. “This duel between objects is fundamentally a duel of consciousness; it indicates failure - and the attempt to redress that failure in a regressive fashion” (81). Starting with its cover, the rhetoric of *The Appalachian* piece directs its audience to a solution for resolving that failure, a way of restoring balance to their lives through the purchase of a mountain lodge-style home at Mountain Creek.

Moving away from the “hot” world of organic materials, the use of synthetics and metals can also contain equally powerful symbolic connotations. Let us return to *The Westin Trillium House* for an example of the use of “cold” materials. Because of the stature of this project, its “landmark” story and high-end hotel association, a specialised campaign was developed to spread the word of the project to a hand-picked audience, across various stages. The campaign contained four pieces in total, twice as many as usual. The first piece was intended for a short list of VIP prospects, often owners of other real estate on the resort. This initial piece, called a “teaser” for its lack of concrete information, consisted of a silver spoon, moulded and emblazoned with the Trillium House flower logo, packaged in a white box that was then tied by a silver rope inside a black, velvet bag, with an embroidered logo. The spoon was accompanied by merely a note, stating that Blue Mountain’s “landmark moment” was imminent.

Aside from the obvious connotations of the silver spoon, an age-old icon of aristocracy and the “higher born,” there is an equally powerful symbolism inherent to the embroidered velvet bag. While not an antique in the way leather or an actual relic may be, velvet represents the sensuous materials of luxury traditionally reserved for the upper class. The embroidered logo, regardless of whether it was hand or machine-sewn, only

adds a deeper dimension to the material. By branding it in this way, it is accorded the quality of a keepsake, a physical marker of the moment when luxury came to Blue Mountain. The bag with its silver, silk rope, may be new, but both materials contain a high-end legacy that invests the promotional object with mythical status. Both indicate a level of exclusivity and value that automatically transfer onto their recipients a sense of privilege and place. The silver spoons were followed by a promotional DVD of the project, encased in stainless steel boxes embossed with the project logo, also delivered in black velvet bags. Again, the combination of embroidered velvet and silver continued the theme of the campaign, ending with a hard cover, silver book brochure, also packaged in its own larger, black velvet bag.

This “Westin Trillium House” silver and velvet campaign in essence created objects of value. Antique-like objects invested with the myth of luxury. Velvet bags that could be used for other purposes, ideal for storing small personal objects of worth. The silver spoon could be added to an existing collection, prized as an heirloom. It is a piece rendered all the more appropriate and special when it comes to represent ownership of a luxury property. In Baudrillard’s chapter “A Marginal System: Collecting,” he extrapolates a definition for the French word *objet* from Littré’s dictionary which translates into “the loved object” (85). Here, he recognises the value of property as object: “Let us grant that our everyday objects are in fact objects of a passion – the passion for private property, emotional investment in which is every bit as intense as investment in the ‘human’ passions. Indeed, the everyday passion for private property is often stronger than all the others” (85). The combination of a collection of objects representing private property taps into a passion for collecting that has been linked to

men over forty, and said to be connected to sexuality and the desire to master the outside world<sup>7</sup>. For a VIP audience member, to accumulate these collectable symbols of private, luxury property and not own said property, could become almost unbearable, regardless of the average price of a home set at \$385,000. The success of the campaign was covered in a Toronto Star press release: “Vancouver-based Intrawest Corp. has expedited the release of Phase 2 of its upscale Westin Trillium House hotel project at Blue Mountain by 12 months following the "astounding" success of the launch of the first phase last month. Purchasers, who came from across North America, even Hawaii, snapped up 109 condo units representing more \$40-million worth of real estate in less than seven hours” (Avery).

### **The Life: Language and Imagery**

The sixth, last and arguably most potent means of persuasion for Intrawest, is the marketing campaigns produced by agencies like R+D. Within the fantasy brochures created for every project, targeted audiences find illustrations and moving descriptions of the rhetorical creations that make up the magical world of Intrawest. While the previous section explored the types of packaging and cover materials chosen to turn these brochures into collectible objects, the following section will look at the type of language and imagery contained within, basing ourselves once again in Aristotle’s theories on rhetoric and happiness.

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<sup>7</sup> Concepts taken from the theory of Maurice Rheims, as described in Baudrillard, The System of Objects p.87

In Aristotle's time, brochures did not exist. Rhetors spoke their arguments before their target audience. Times have changed. The rhetor is often no longer an individual but a corporation and printed brochures have largely replaced the spoken word. Yet as we shall see, the same principles that apply to spoken rhetoric apply to the written word. Aristotle states; "Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself" (Aristotle, Book 1, Part 2). These are usually rendered as ethos, pathos and logos respectively.

In this case, the character of the speaker, or ethos, would be the credibility of Intrawest. As noted in the first section, Intrawest's choice of resort location provides its first level of credibility. The Intrawest Village experience builds on this, and as the network grows to encompass more and more desirable locations and fantasy villages, its credibility increases in conjunction. Intrawest's ethos, its character or reputation, while persuasive, is not sufficient in itself to transform its audience into major investors. For that, pathos and logos are also needed, and these depend upon specialised campaigns. Print campaigns reach each audience member individually and offer proofs based on storytelling and compelling imagery. These fantasy brochures are the most powerful weapons in Intrawest's rhetorical arsenal. They articulate a solution to the exigence of luxury living in a way that exploits all of Intrawest's available means of persuasion as well as the concerns of the postmodern audience.

Through ownership of real estate on its various resorts, Intrawest is ultimately selling an ideal of happiness. As old as the notion of luxury, happiness is an ancient

human pursuit often confused with ambitions of luxury. “It may be said that every individual man and all men in common aim at a certain end which determines what they choose and what they avoid. This end, to sum it up briefly, is happiness and its constituents” (Aristotle, Book 1, Part 5). After establishing happiness as the common aim among men, Aristotle lists its constituent parts: “good birth, plenty of friends, good friends, wealth, good children, plenty of children, a happy old age, also such bodily excellences as health, beauty, strength, large stature, athletic powers, together with fame, honour, good luck, and virtue. A man cannot fail to be completely independent if he possesses these internal and these external goods; for besides these there are no others to have” (Book 1, Part 5). Wealth and children are among the first elements Aristotle lists as essential components to happiness, and are essential threads throughout each Intrawest campaign. It is interesting to see how little values have changed since Aristotle’s time.

As one might glean from the audience to which most Intrawest neighbourhoods are targeted, Intrawest resorts are first and foremost family destinations. One need not necessarily have children to own or frequent one, but they are presented as destinations that most appeal to families. The notion of wealth is just as inseparable from the Intrawest experience. A certain level of wealth is a prerequisite to participation in the resort on any level, whether as a guest or homeowner. What is most interesting in Aristotle’s theory of happiness is his definition of what constitutes wealth. “The constituents of wealth are: plenty of coined money and territory; the ownership of numerous, large, and beautiful estates; also the ownership of numerous and beautiful implements, live stock and slaves” (Book 1, Part 5). As with Veblen’s theory, property ownership is at the root of affluence. Aristotle then makes a distinction between

‘productive’ versus ‘enjoyable’ kinds of property, the former being a source of income while the latter represents nothing more than the personal fulfilment derived from its enjoyment. To Aristotle, what ultimately constitutes security in a man’s life is “the ownership of property in such places and under such conditions that the use of it is in our power; and it is ‘our own’ if it is in our power to dispose of it or keep it.” Here, disposing refers to exercising the option of either giving it away or selling it – a choice made possible only when something is “our own.” “Wealth as a whole consists in using things rather than in owning them; it is really the activity – that is, the use – of property that constitutes wealth” (Book 1, Part 5). Few real estate offerings can claim to respond to this ideal of property ownership as wholly and completely as Intrawest resort real estate does.

The beauty of the Intrawest offering is that it combines Aristotle’s two essential functions of property. The vast majority of Intrawest prospects view their resort property as an investment in both their financial and emotional futures. These homes become part of a much larger portfolio. Often, they either begin or become additions to a collection of second homes (in the case of Intrawest’s wealthier clientele), in which case they satisfy a need for status, while offering the possibility of financial gain. They also hold the promise of quality time among family members and friends, fulfilling basic emotional needs. Yet the real beauty of these properties is their locations on world-class resorts – a positioning that virtually guarantees their enjoyment, and one best articulated in their accompanying sales collateral.

The Intrawest target audience is composed of wealthy families who, despite their children and wealth, still feel lacking – incomplete – in some way. Either their investment portfolios are not yet to their satisfaction, or the exigence they feel is rooted in the

enjoyment aspect of ownership. Either way, Intrawest presents its product as an answer to both. It appeals to the incomplete, unsatisfied “self”, offering a complete solution to an exigence that has always existed among the upper class. For the true key to the Intrawest fantasy is that it exists both in the past and the future. It cloaks itself in the nostalgia and romance of how the upper class used to live, and provides an equally romantic future for the new upper class to look forward to. How Intrawest makes luxury living seem like a very real need is the focus of this section.

In the second chapter of James B. Twitchell’s book Living it Up: Our love affair with luxury, the author discusses the social construction of luxury alongside research by cultural analyst David Frum that points to an explosion in the number of wealthy families in America. What Frum refers to as the “mass upper class” and Money Magazine calls the “ultra class” is a reference to the increasing number of US households earning over one million dollars annually. Such labels are also an effort on behalf of popular rhetoricians to understand and categorise today’s upper class. Twitchell focuses on the complexity of this much larger, new upper class. Attributed to the new meritocracy described by David Brooks, the “ultra class” is not perceived as sharing the same values as the upper class of the early twentieth century. According to Twitchell, what characterises this new generation of affluent families is the buying of social place, and feeling good about it. Twitchell uses an American Express ad as an example of his theory. The campaign, entitled “People and Their Stuff” features celebrities surrounded by their prized personal objects. What the ad implies is that “in consumption we resolve our differences. By getting and spending we are held together. The family that pays together, stays together” (Twitchell 51). In terms of consumption as a family, Intrawest

resorts present no better opportunity. To the question of how advertisers make people feel good about their consumption, Twitchell's conclusion is: "They tell a good story."

Storytelling, according to Twitchell, is how today's marketers turn luxuries into necessities, and it is a rhetorical means beautifully wielded in practically every Intrawest real estate brochure.

The biggest reason for R+D's successful relationship with Intrawest is its original and powerful creative campaigns. Ultimately what any advertising agency becomes known for, "creative" is a marketing company's greatest asset. R+D's original creative team was composed of Creative Director and writer Dianna Carr, and a small team of designers headed by Chief Creative Officer and graphic designer Tom Pedriks. Together, they produced Tremblant resort's first real estate brochures, building their own legacy of successful Intrawest fantasy brochures. At the heart of each project's success is a story that takes each prospective buyer on a tour of the emotional return on investment each project promises. For no matter how great the expected financial return of these homes might be, emotion drives the majority of sales, a realisation most evident when one begins to browse the pathos-riddled brochures that turn prospects into homeowners.

Dianna Carr is renowned in the industry as a gifted storyteller. Through her powerful and concise style of writing, she has set a precedent of moving narratives difficult to match. An excellent example of Carr's style is found in a small Direct Mail piece produced for Lodge de la Montagne, one of Tremblant's first real estate projects in the Village. The piece is based entirely in the rhetoric of nostalgia – the pathos of memory. Beginning with the tagline "Where Memories are Made," the four-page piece consists of three moving stories on life at Tremblant resort. Each one articulates an ideal



identity, a “self” made complete by memories of experiences in a home that has yet to exist. Three simple stories relate the personal challenge of skiing moguls, the simple joy of playing in the snow, and the moving story of a boy’s first catch on a father-son fishing trip. Each strongly conveys the enjoyment of ownership and is accompanied by images of people “using” their property which, because of its location on a resort, can include the use of any number of natural and man-made amenities. The key is to make its usage meaningful, and storytelling can be an exceedingly effective means of doing so.

Was he eight or nine? That day, the trout struck his line like a thunderclap, and you felt it. You felt his heart race and his arms ache and you felt the brave pull and twist of the fish. And you stopped yourself from helping him, except to land it (a rainbow! a beauty!). and as small, shaking fingers touched the cool, slippery skin, you looked down... and saw your own hand trembling. (6)

The story is accompanied by a poignant image of a father and son, his line cast from a small fishing boat on a still lake with mist-covered mountains in the background. The two preceding stories recounted a ski experience, accompanied by a close-up image of a woman taking a mogul, and a family at play in the snow, illustrated by a caucasian family, happily building a snowman together. Each in its own way articulates three idyllic situations and identities that interpellate the reader through pure pathos.

The experience of teaching your child to fish plays on a very real, modern exigence: the need for quality family time. This emotional need is exploited throughout this and many other brochures like it, using the logic of pathos. Only on the back cover under the Intrawest logo, completely removed from the emotional content of the inside

pages, is there a mention of the rental pool each property can belong to. There is no boasting about the success of Intrawest (which at the time of this publication had yet to be proven), nor the popularity of Tremblant as a high-end resort. Credibility exists in the shared knowledge that these are desirable experiences. Through storytelling and imagery, the piece achieves what Twitchell claims is the key to today's upper class. It makes the experience that comes with Intrawest ownership – the challenge of an upper class sport, the interaction with nature and family – seem necessary to a truly happy life. And that is what makes the prospect feel good about buying.

As with every type of performance, some audiences are tougher to move than others. In the case of Mountain Creek's "Appalachian" project, the audience in question is composed almost entirely of New Yorkers. Notorious for their scepticism, worldliness and tough attitude, R+D knew it would take more than touching storytelling to pique their interest and win their patronage. For this audience, reputation and credibility go a long way, so R+D chose to bring the ethos of the Intrawest story to the forefront, placing it as the introduction to the piece. With Mountain Creek being less than a two-hour drive from the city, the logos of proximity was also highly emphasised early on in the piece. The pathos was developed through a seemingly innocent theme that exploited a particularly sensitive spot in the post 911 New York psyche. The logo-branded, leather-bound Appalachian DK opens to reveal the line: "Life is too short." Opposite, a semi-transparent vellum page covers a close-up of a blond-haired, blue-eyed girl looking skyward. Across her face, the copy doesn't ask, but tells the reader to: "Ask why Intrawest is on a mission to create some of the greatest playgrounds in the world." The answer, found by flipping over the half-page flap, is written in block letters across a

mosaic of colourful Intrawest resort pictures: “Because life is too short.” The point is further driven home through repetition on the next spread: “Too short to not take every opportunity for escape,” and on the following: “Too short to spend the whole weekend just getting there,” and finally: “Especially when getting there is easy as pie.”

Given the inherent weaknesses of the Mountain Creek resort mentioned earlier, R+D chose to use two premises held by its audience. Few New Yorkers could argue with the statement “Life is too short,” especially with the daily reminder of thousands of lives having been cut short in their very city. The second pertains to the amount of time many New Yorkers spend travelling out of state to reach their favourite resort. Driving eight hours for a weekend no longer makes sense when ostensibly the same experience can be reached in a quarter of the time. Here, black and white images of children looking forlornly out the window of a car are juxtaposed with people enjoying the great outdoors. Unlike most pieces, the audience here is given an identity to reject, in order to reinforce the identity they are encouraged to adopt. The fundamental message of the piece can be summed up thus: to opt for Mountain Creek means more time spent enjoying your resort property with your family and less time in the car.

A less controversial example of interpellation can be found in the fantasy brochures for the Sandestin resort project Bahia. Having saturated their audience with Southern style home concepts, the Sandestin team proposed a boutique-hotel style for this bay front Village project. Utilising its unique, contemporary nature to the fullest, the Bahia DK presents one of the most compelling examples of the creation of what Biesecker describes as “provisional human identities.” Dominated by a second person narrative throughout, the reader is offered a series of distinct identities to adopt in the first

double-page spread of the DK, which opens with the statement: “Your choice of resort home is a profound reflection of who you are.” The options, contained in the paragraph below, are as follows:

You might be an early morning jogger on powder-soft sand, or a dipper of toes in the salt-water surf.

You might be a master of concentration, focused on a flag across yards of lush fairway. You might be a lover of fine art, fine food, live music and all things cultural.

And you might be a parent or grandparent, with active, inquisitive children with whom you hope to share all that you are. (3)

These words are accompanied by images of happy families by the sea. The biggest image shows five family members spanning three generations. Each member is the picture of health and happiness. The grandfather has his arms around his wife and grown daughter, the grandmother has her head thrown back in a wide, laughing smile, while grandfather and daughter gaze lovingly at the young son who is riding piggy-back on his handsome father. Well-dressed and impeccably groomed, they form an evocative portrait of domestic happiness. Since “who you are” for the upper class is so entirely wrapped up in “what you own,” Bahia suddenly becomes more than just another property to add to their portfolio. It becomes a means of personal expression, of establishing a distinct identity – something that strikes at the heart of the incomplete self.

Bahia copy also speaks to Schor’s “overworked American” through references to its soothing atmosphere; “Behind its sweet, southern façade, Bahia reserves the ultimate place for relaxation and rejuvenation.” Such promises aim to fulfil a very contemporary

need for pampering and self-indulgence that has become quite predominant in popular social discourse. According to Karen Springen of Newsweek, “Pampering has grown increasingly popular, and increasingly mainstream” (Springen, par. 2). It is no longer unusual for middle-class Americans to spend \$35 on a pedicure or \$90 for a massage. And where private property is concerned, hot tubs are being installed in record numbers; “Last year they bought some 300,000 of them [hot tubs] (about 10 percent more than in 1997), mainly to reduce stress and “build relationships,” says Suzanne Stearns of the National Spa and Pool Institute” (Springen, par. 8). For the wealthiest, the ultimate self-indulgence is to own a home like Bahia, designed entirely around pampering, style and escape.

In Bahia we also find an example of a rhetorical strategy not often, but effectively used in Intrawest brochures – the credibility quote.<sup>8</sup> Located on a four-page spread on Bahia’s interiors, a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupery lends support to a new design concept somewhat foreign to the Sandestin customer database. Under a computer drawn concept of a Bahia living room the Saint-Exupery quote reads: “A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.” This little nugget of design wisdom lends further credibility to the project by assuring the prospect that the interior design is based in a concept that strives for perfection through minimalism. Bahia is ultimately defined at the end of the last spread on the project itself as “A place for those who seek reflections of style at every step in life, wherever they choose to be” (Bahia 7). Viewed with the eye of a critic, the Bahia

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<sup>8</sup> The “credibility quote” refers to a literary quote used rhetorically to reinforce a project, or an aspect of a project’s credibility.

DK could virtually be considered a manual for individuals seeking to construct their identity on contemporary ideals of freedom, affluence and style.

The Bahia DM and DK, like all Intrawest pieces, offer a statement on the rarity of the project and an urgent call to action. The notion of scarcity has always gone hand in hand with the notion of luxury. On the topic of scarcity, a study of luxury brands in the *Journal of Advertising Research* provides empirical evidence to support Veblen's "rarity principle." In a study of the "purchase-dream" relationship, it is shown that "over diffusion" of a luxury brand can adversely affect its "dream" appeal. Referring to Veblen's theory, the report claims that "luxury products are perceived by consumers as rare products' when overdiffused, they gradually lose their luxury character" (Dubois 72). Juliet Schor refers to the "psychology of scarcity" in her book *The Overworked American* as a type of hard sell tactic used in advertising to scare people into buying. For Intrawest, scarcity is an essential rhetorical component used to persuade prospects to commit themselves to a project sooner rather than later.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, like Bahia or The Westin Trillium House, which both sold out in a matter of hours, the urgency is justified. In markets such as Ontario and Florida, where the number of wealthy families are high, acquiring ideal vacation homes and their accompanying lifestyles has become something of a race. Every time a project completely sells out at a launch, press releases are written to spread the word across the market. This prepares the target audience to act quickly when the next offer becomes available. The more compelling the story of the subsequent offer, the more urgent it becomes to own the product.

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<sup>9</sup> With the majority of Intrawest real estate projects, a certain number of homes must be sold prior to being built in order for construction to move forward.

Stating the number of homes available in any given project is another way of conveying scarcity. Often, only “64 fortunate families will ever own,” or “only 84 opportunities to own exist.” Specific numbers are finite and exclusive. To be one among the very limited number of families to own at an exclusive resort residence presents a clear opportunity to purchase social status and prestige. Also, the ability to purchase immediately, without requiring time to amass the requisite down payment amount indicates a level of wealth and freedom. In other words, there is prestige inherent to the action of purchasing a property at its launch. Urgency is also reinforced by the creation of “Limited Priority Reservation Programs,” where a prospect must get in touch with a sales associate to be registered with the program. As a member, they then receive priority bidding on home selection at the launch. When a prospect is registered for this program, they are given a sense of importance and belonging. In the race to acquire the ideal home in the best possible project within a prestigious resort, members of the reservation program are awarded a head start, a position that stacks their odds of purchase overwhelmingly in Intrawest’s favour.

The examples given throughout this section represent the themes of the vast majority of imagery used in Intrawest brochures. With the exception of architectural renderings, site maps, floor plans and other technical representations of the physical project, visuals revolve around people using their property to the fullest. Depictions of blissful family life are scattered throughout every brochure. For projects in neighbourhoods designed for a younger audience, stylish couples from a Ralph Lauren catalogue grace every other page. For projects in neighbourhoods geared toward large families, images of family members span up to three generations: A young girl shares a

quiet moment with her mother on a rustic porch step. A grandfather teaches his grandson to fly fish. A spry elderly couple walks hand in hand along a beach. Three cousins or sisters giggle conspiratorially on a dock. A couple gaze hand in hand at a sunset over a lake. Each of these images rhetorically invokes the possibility of a nostalgic moment, and offers the promise of memories to be made. Let us contemplate these once again through Bitzer and Vatz's theories on the rhetorical situation.

## **Conclusion**

According to Bitzer, meaning resides in events, such as the ones depicted in Intrawest brochures, which have an intrinsic nature from which rhetoric follows. The exigence stimulated by the viewing of such events is to Bitzer, "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing that is other than it should be" (Bitzer 227). The exigence is by nature an ethical imperative independent of its interpreter. To Bitzer, a situation is rhetorical only if something can or should be done. Therefore, if an exigence felt following the viewing of an Intrawest brochure can be sated through the purchase of a home, this proves that the Intrawest experience is a rhetorical situation. Vatz refers to this as an example of Richard Weaver's "melioristic bias." According to Vatz, meaning is not intrinsic to events, facts, people or situations. Facts are not "publicly observable." All facts or events communicated to an audience are chosen by the rhetor in question, then imbued with salience. The very choice of what events are communicated becomes an indication of their pertinence. In the case of Intrawest brochures, images of families bonding in a resort setting immediately



acknowledges the importance of family time. However, the story component is an essential accompaniment. According to Vatz, “To the audience, events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction” (228). And because of the value-laden nature of language, any translation of an event cannot be the “real situation,” i.e. for a reader to believe that the events they see depicted in an Intrawest brochure are guaranteed to his family through the purchase of a home would be naïve. Vatz concludes with the idea that concern should ultimately be with the responsibility of the rhetor, with how and by whom symbols create the reality to which people react.

In Chapter Two we looked at how Intrawest presents the idealised luxury lifestyle to which so many aspire and the family-oriented values it reinforces. We saw how Intrawest’s choice of location lent it the credibility necessary to establish a “high-end” clientele. We then examined The Intrawest Village, which within these coveted locations provides the perfect “postmodern” experience to justify homeownership. From there, we saw how neighbourhoods and project names invest each real estate project with a personality and exclusivity all its own, which to a certain degree extends to owners. Finally, we saw how the ultimate means of persuasion culminates in fantasy brochures, tying together the essential aspects of Intrawest ownership into an appealing, emotional whole.

Moving away from Bitzer and Vatz’s traditional perspective on the audience, we saw how Biesecker’s treatment of the relationship between rhetoric and the audience focuses on the articulation of identities, and paralleled this discussion with the types of identities Intrawest creates for its target market. Biesecker’s take on the audience-rhetoric relationship also serves to underline the importance of storytelling. In not regarding the

audience as a mindless mass waiting to be influenced, nor the rhetor as influenced by the whims of its audience, we recognise the Intrawest offering (and others like it) as a rhetorical situation that makes possible the production of distinct identities and social relations. Storytelling thus reveals itself as an effective technique to this end.

However, Biesecker's position also concurs with Vatz's, and logically places responsibility for the implications of the situation on the rhetor. If we recognise the rhetorical situation as an opening for the production of meaningful identities and social relations, then our concern should also be with the ethical implications of the meanings created, i.e. the types of identities included and excluded, and the social relations the rhetor chooses to make salient. This, and other issues arising from the continued expansion of the Intrawest network, will be the concluding focus of Chapter Three.

## **Chapter III.**

### **Reconciling Luxury Living in the 21st Century**

The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in a renewed social concern around the notion of luxury, and more specifically, with entitlement. Discourse surrounding class, status and the definition of “Bourgeois” began to surface during the ascension of North America’s new upper class, as the face of affluence was being forever altered. This same group of people, among them those who began buying Intrawest real estate in earnest throughout the 1990s, also initiated a change in the perception of what constitutes luxury. As with every sudden increase in social wealth, technology and attitude were at its root. Significant advances in production and communication technology gave people from all manner of background the tools to become entrepreneurs, while major shifts in attitude helped many overcome traditional obstacles of race, class, religion and even language. People who, fifty years ago, would have been relegated to the ranks of second class citizen, today can achieve levels of wealth and social status beyond the wildest imaginings of their forefathers. Contemporary journalists, writers and social theorists began coining titles for these changes such as “the democratization of luxury” and “the democratization of status.” From them, new movements centred on lifestyle, such as “New Authentic” and its counter, “New Realism” emerged. This final chapter will, among other issues, examine the construction and categorisation of today’s moneyed class, and offer an original perspective on the evolution and expression of contemporary upper class values based on conclusions drawn from this study of Intrawest and its audience.

## Understanding the New Upper Class

As North America approached the year 2000, the challenging of notions of status and class suddenly surfaced as issues of popular concern. Journalists like David Brooks began writing books on the topic and coining new terminology to better identify and understand the new faces of affluence at the turn of the millennium. At this particular stage in human history and for the first time, changes in production technology were rivalled only by changes in social attitude. The force with which the Industrial Revolution and the Women's Movement impacted society during their respective eras, is once again being felt by advances in communication technology. It seems as though a new class system is upon us, one where xenophobic mores of the past are rejected to more fully embrace McLuhan's original notion of the global village both spiritually and technologically speaking. At the heart of it all, is the overthrowing of outdated notions of luxury, status and class.

In November of 1998 The New York Times Magazine published an entire issue devoted to the notion of status. Through a series of articles on what constitutes status to whom, it became increasingly clear that old aristocratic European norms were out, in favour of newer meritocratic values. In an article entitled Taking the Starch out of Status, Alan Wolfe declares that old notions of status are now perceived as sinister. The exclusion of Jews, women and blacks from top schools is unacceptable, the "old boy" network that promoted their own into corporate boardrooms is decried, private clubs are sexist, racist or both, and status can no longer be handed down – it must be earned. From

now on, status is to be determined by the new “meritocracy.” The application of these revolutionary ideals, referred to as “the democratization of status,” to Wolfe, constitutes “the revenge of the bypassed.” “Kids from the inner city who lacked the educational credentials so valued by our society not only entertain us with their athletic or musical ability but also become taste makers for the society as a whole. Celebrities like Roseanne flaunt, rather than hide, their white-trash backgrounds. Your publisher suddenly wants you on Oprah, not The New York Review of Books” (Wolfe 63). Suddenly people with no social ancestry to speak of, are dictating taste and trend for the masses. Meanwhile, popular rhetoricians are constructing new profiles and terms to better understand and organise this complex, new bourgeoisie.

What Money Magazine refers to as the “ultra middle class” in the December 2000 issue cover story What is Wealth? by John Gertner, is the top 5% of people earning upwards of \$150,000. To belong to the top 1% one would need to earn upwards of \$250,000. Therefore, Intrawest’s target market hovers somewhere between the “ultra middle class” and the “ultra class.” According to Madelyn Hochstein, president of DYG, a market research firm that specialises in analysing social consumer trends, the major difference between economic classes tends to be confidence levels “What we seem to see is that in households over \$150,000, there’s a high level of confidence in the financial future.” Whereas for those earning anywhere between \$75,000 and \$150,000, “Hochstein says that they can’t shake a certain market anxiety and fear of being ‘left behind’ in terms of income and skills” (Gertner 99).

Money Magazine also presents a certain perception of the values held by the new moneyed class, values indulged by Intrawest’s focus on family and quality of life. As

Gertner puts it, “What seems clear is that the ultras have gotten to the point where they’ve built their American dream; now it’s time to make it more meaningful” (100). The challenge now becomes gauging their priorities. He presents an example of an “ultra class” family who took a significant decrease in income (down to \$150,000) to adopt a less stressful lifestyle that allowed more time spent with the family. In another example, Daryle Jordan, a 41-year old, black Washington lawyer with a household income somewhere between \$150,000 and \$200,000 explains that the things he wants now are more “intangible.” His wife Paula adds, “We want to pass something on to our children” (102).

One major difference between today’s resort market and that of a century ago, is the influence of women. The emphasis on family values is a direct appeal to a female audience that according to market statistics, wields more purchasing power today than ever before. According to Fast Company magazine, boomer women are the biggest, richest and most lucrative market of the future. In an article entitled “Where the Bucks Are,” senior writer Linda Tischler drives the point home. “Regardless of age, women in America disproportionately decide where a family’s funds will be spent. According to Martha Barletta, author of *Marketing to Women: How to Understand, Reach and Increase Your Share of the World’s Largest Market Segment* (Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2003), women control or influence 80% of all purchases of both consumer and business goods and services. They have sole or joint ownership of 87% of homes and buy 67% of major home-improvement products” (Tischler 71). Intrawest may have mastered the art of creating meaningful rhetorical experiences, however it should be noted that the vast majority of families we see in Intrawest brochures are of Caucasian descent. Should this

new and diverse “meritocracy” begin to make its presence felt in the resort real estate market in a measurable way, Intrawest will have no choice but to reflect this diversity if it hopes to maintain its current standing.

It is pointed out that many in the new “ultra” and “ultra middle classes” grew up with very little materially speaking, and inherited nothing. Now that they have achieved a certain level of wealth, the age-old moneyed-class desire to pass that wealth along to the next generation is as keenly felt. In an article in Coastal Living magazine, Michael King, director of real estate sales for Grande Dunes in Myrtle beach refers to this desire among Baby Boomers. “Their parents used to take them to Myrtle Beach. They’ve gone out and become successful, and now they want to create the same memories for their kids” (Seaside Living 86). This perceived new upper class desire to create a legacy is, in so many brochures, and in so many words and ways, exploited by Intrawest. Articles like the ones mentioned above accomplish what Vatz views as the objective of rhetoric: By uttering these statistics and “facts,” they create the needs that Intrawest seems prepared to meet.

Gertner suggests that one of the key differentiators between the old upper class and the new “ultra class” is self-perception. Many “ultra class” people do not consider themselves as “upper class.” Neal Simon, an “ultra class” CEO of an online legal service expresses this attitude thus; “I think we understand that statistically we’re not middle class, and we understand the reality of what an average income is in America. At the same time, we’re not people who live extravagant lives, and don’t consider ourselves upper class in any way” (Gertner 101). David Brooks echoes this sentiment in his study of the new upper class, pointing out that “while bobos might take elaborate vacations and

spend outrageous sums on restaurant-grade kitchens, their ethos leads them toward a “financial code of correctness.” That might give them license to spend lavishly on anything that fits under a “need” (Brooks 103). According to Brooks, bobos, or the “ultra class,” differ from their predecessors in that they have found a way to fuse artsy, creative values with the traditional mores of professional ambition and success. To them, affluence becomes both a goal and a moral problem; “They’re desperate to show they’re not corrupted by their money, so they’re eager to spend it in ways that prove they reject materialism and grubby greed” (103).

In the article Economic Scene from the August 10, 2000 edition of the New York Times, Virginia Postrel highlights the fact that thanks to technical and economic progress, people increasingly earn more, work less and live longer. According to a chart supplied by Robert W. Vogel’s work The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism, the average male head of household in 1880 enjoyed 1.8 hours of leisure time versus 8.5 hours of work time. In 1995 it was 5.8 hours to 4.7, and in 2040 he will enjoy 7.2 hours of leisure time after only 3.8 hours of work. “Life expectancy, meanwhile, has increased 10 years just since 1950, mostly because people over 65 are living much longer.” “This trend means many more active retirement years, which further adds to the huge increase in free time” (Postrel). Combine this with the overwhelming increase in salaries, and people today have the same problem only the rich had, “and that is, what do you do with your life? What is the good life? That was, from Socrates’ time until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only an issue for the rich” (Postrel).

For the young and wealthy and retiring Baby Boomers, a generation in its peak earning years, most with grown children and a reputation for spending their wealth



on their dreams, resort living seems to be the resounding answer for what to do with all that free time. “Boomers don’t see themselves as future “golden agers.” If and when they leave the workplace, they’ll just be shifting gears, devoting their resources to what gives them the most pleasure. Many real estate pros are convinced the surge of ageing boomers, with their love for outdoor recreation, will help drive the market for main residences on the coast, as well as second and even third homes” (Seaside Living 86).

Deciding what to do with one’s spare time is a definitive way for the upper class to distinguish themselves through lifestyle choices and tastes. As Bourdieu describes it in his essay Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, “Taste, the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style” (504). The upper class has always engaged in distinguishing practices, such as golf, polo, yachting and other exclusive sports. Today, stylising one’s life according to taste involves physical activity more than ever – not only for the prestige associated with elite sports, but also for their contribution to health and longevity. Since enjoying sports in the great outdoors is a perfectly plausible reason for purchasing a resort home, it also becomes an opportunity to make a strong statement of one’s commitment to a healthy lifestyle. As Bourdieu so aptly puts it: “The system of matching properties, which includes people – one speaks of a ‘well-matched couple,’ and friends like to say they have the same tastes – is organized by taste, a system of classificatory schemes which may only very partially become conscious although, as one rises in the social hierarchy, life-style is increasingly a matter of what Weber calls the ‘stylization of life’” (505). Therefore, to someone with “bobo” sensibilities and an “ultra class” income, an Intrawest home can easily present the perfect

opportunity to stylise their lives in a way that proves how non-corrupted they are by their money, while still indulging in extreme conspicuous consumption. Therein lies the irony of resort homeownership.

### **The Hurried Class**

In our analysis of the IntraWest Village, we discussed how this rhetorical creation so accurately fulfils the desires of the elusive, free-spirited “postmodern,” nouveau riche consumer, as defined by Firat and Venkatesh in Chapter Two. Ritzer’s “McDonaldization” model, used to describe the fundamental characteristics of the IntraWest Village environment, coincides with another suggested trend among the “ultra class.” In a short article on what status is for the 90’s nouveau riche, Steven Gaines, a New York Times journalist, claims that emphasis is now on the “velocity” of money. In Getting what you want in a snap, Gaines writes about the class of people responsible for the “\$1.4 trillion in new wealth in America last year alone, bringing the total number of American millionaires to four million” (Gaines 80). This represents the highest number of nouveau riche at one time since the Industrial Revolution. What Gaines claims as one of the defining characteristics of this new class is their insistence on immediacy. Trophy habitats, or “McMansions” as Gaines calls them, are prime examples of the consumption habits of new money, based on his claim that “the nouveau riche are generally free of provenance, heritage and tradition, and untied to the baggage of family homesteads” (80). Rather than start a legacy from scratch and painstakingly accumulate the trappings of traditional domestic luxuries, this class opts for the ready-to-move-in product, complete with fully matured landscaping.

While most Intrawest homes do not qualify as mansions, they do meet this last exigence in that they come completely furnished and decorated. Intrawest neighbourhoods are constructed so as to preserve as much of the existing mature landscaping as possible, and once the Village is complete, real estate sales tend to skyrocket. A completed Village is the perfect accessory to Intrawest's *prêt à porter* real estate offering. Homeowners move into a fully appointed home, expect to live the lifestyle offered by a world-class resort, and enjoy the retail, dining and social experience of a new, "Old World" village. Intrawest could arguably be the purest incarnation of the postmodern, nouveau riche ideal, as presented by today's popular culture. In a world where, for \$250 a plant, ivy can be hand-attached to a home's exterior to give it that "old-family, old-money look" (Connor 101), it would seem that authenticity is as useful to the new upper class as SAT scores were to the old. However the idea that one can purchase class, vulgar as that may appear to some, is to writer Charles McGrath a defining American trait that dates back to the Gilded Age. In his article The Decline of Wasp Reserve, McGrath sums up how the early American elite fulfilled the exigence for an upper class legacy: "They wanted palaces and noble lineage, and they wanted real history, so they went to Europe and brought it all back – instant class. Such is the miracle of America: you can get it now in a good department store in the Ralph Lauren boutique" (McGrath 68).

While all of the above opinions on, and perceptions of, today's upper class stem from the claims of rhetoricians not unlike myself, it is difficult not to notice the similarities between their depictions of upper class desires and the fantasy lifestyles presented by Intrawest. Which begs two questions: Is the increase in spending on leisure

products and lifestyles simply a result of an increase in the amount of people with disposable incomes (and the size of their disposable incomes), or is it a hallmark of today's so-called wealthy, "postmodern" consumer tendencies? And how is the fantasy leisure lifestyle offered by Intrawest village resorts so different from the fantastic lifestyles enjoyed by the Gilded Age moneyed class?

### **New Authentic vs New Realism**

As we have seen, the North American practice of constructing exotically themed environments for the enjoyment of the leisure class dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through architecture, elaborate costumes, props and old-fashioned craftsmanship, early resort-goers were able to carry on the fantasy lives they created for themselves in the city. The freedom to lavish enormous sums of money on elaborate constructions of pure fancy has always been a distinct marker of class division, and the taste for elaborate fantasy has always been a bourgeois characteristic. It is another example of one of the many symbolic expressions of a privileged lifestyle. "Taste is thus the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class of existence" (Bourdieu 505). In essence, the elaborate balls hosted by Louis Sherry in Gilded Age New York, the Spanish Renaissance architecture of Henry Flagler's Ponce de Leon hotel and the Old World villages of Intrawest resorts are all in keeping with an age-old bourgeois taste for fantasy.

Like most notions of luxury, the taste for fantasy eventually caught on with the "lower ranks" and themed environments quickly became *de rigueur* among the middle

and working classes. So how does a nouveau riche individual reconcile his or her identity among the plethora of virtual and simulated environments? How does the Intrawest village manage to win the patronage of a distinguished upper class, while simulated environments such as Las Vegas and Disneyland remain in the ranks of the 'vulgar'? Let's use a contemporary example of a much smaller scale as an example of popular opinion on the postmodern trend of simulated spaces.

In a 2004 edition of Surface design magazine (a literary must-have for design professionals and fanatics), Timothy Jack Ward explains the phenomenon and appeal of the "New Authentic" space. The subject of the article is Schiller's Liquor Bar, a new brasserie in Manhattan's booming Lower East Side owned by Keith McNally. Schiller's design is what one might call "Mock Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Prague." From the "oh-so-rusticated vintage metal park bench" to the checkerboard floors, cracked porcelain tiles and rows of wine bottles, Ian McPheely, Schiller's designer, took great pains to recreate the look and feel of a 1940s artsy Czech hangout. Ward describes how the combination of an order of Welsh rarebit and glass of Shiraz, the amiable commotion, warm aura and vintage feel of the place transports him back home, to a more comforting time and place. Noting that the food is not so different from that served in other New York brasseries, Ward wonders what it is that makes such places feel so real.

Ward turns to architect Johnny Grey to explain this phenomenon. Grey claims that the appeal of spaces like Schiller's is their universality, their allusion to a near history. "Grey notes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning of comfort expanded from "to give strength" to "affording pleasure and delight." Today, Grey says, the New Authenticity in design adds "the luxury of embracing our near history" (Ward 33). In this

upper class, New York City design world, a distinction is made between the New Authentic space and Disneyfication. Defining the latter as “designer shorthand for superficial, fake and impermanent” (33), what seems to define the former as acceptably deep, real and enduring is feeling. It’s a vague distinction of personal pathos, echoed by architect and design critic Marco Pasanella. “As a designer, one of the most intriguing/disturbing things I could object to is Disneyfication. I’d love to dismiss it as the worst kind of retro thinking. But do I like to sit at Odeon, Balthazar, Schiller’s? Yes. Those rooms just feel right” (33).

The ‘aura’ that Pasanella alludes to and Ward refers to earlier in the article, reminds one of Walter Benjamin’s definition of the unique attribute of an authentic work of art. Schiller’s does not possess the elements that render it authentic according to Benjamin. “The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” (Benjamin II, par. 3). Schiller’s is a recently transformed pharmacy. Its historic testimony bears no link to the space it purports to be today. Like the Intrawest village, it offers a nostalgia that was never really there to begin with. Yet while Benjamin claims that techniques of reproduction detach the reproduced object from the domain of tradition, and that the ‘aura’ of a work withers through mechanical reproduction, Schiller’s has managed to create a sense of tradition and aura all its own. Perhaps therein lies the key. The trend of creating spaces inspired by our recent past is not based in the reproduction of an object or space per se, but in the recreation of an aura. It is a concept based in the rhetoric of nostalgia – the memory of that which has yet to happen.

The aura of an Intrawest Village owes as much to the people running it as it does to the architecture and design. At Tremblant, the *joie de vivre* of the people of Quebec is often cited as a reason for visiting. The same is said of the Southern warmth and hospitality of Sandestin's Village of Baytowne Warf. Like Schiller's, the presence of an upper class clientele eager to accept and revel in fanciful locations helps cast and keep the spell that Ward refers to as "aura." It may not be the 'aura' of authenticity of which Walter Benjamin discusses, but to the fantasy-seeking upper class of today, it certainly seems authentic enough. As for Intrawest villages, they do manage to recreate the intimate sense of space proper to real villages, although their obvious newness, bright colours and lack of the type of attention to detail lavished on cafés like Schiller's, do smack of the Disney dreamscape. Ultimately, the Intrawest village responds to the fantasy of what an ideal village would be, just as Schiller's responds to the fantasy of what a real Czech café would be.

Is the Intrawest Village superficial, fake and impermanent? Yes, yes and no. Considering layout is first and foremost designed to drive people toward retail experiences than provide a sense of comfort, they could be accused of superficiality. Modern materials, interiors and the speed with which they spring to life does give them a fake feeling (how well they weather over time remains to be seen). In terms of permanence, Intrawest Villages will exist as long as the ski stations, golf courses and beaches they are adjuncts to exist, because location is the primary draw. Regardless of how authentic they are, Intrawest Villages do provide enough of an aura to serve as a marked contrast to the virtual reality experiences and overly themed pop culture destinations. And like the upper class of old, today's bourgeoisie craves their own

company. Perhaps separated too long by the isolation of suburbia, the type of comfort today's upper class seeks is ultimately social. Regardless of their aesthetic, Intrawest Villages offer them a safe place to connect with each other, if only in passing. As Ward and interior designer David Rockwell put it, "ultimately, gathering spaces are more important than ever: "The bottom line is, we are trying to get more connected" (33).

Contemporary designer's disdain for the virtual world of pop culture is extremely reminiscent of Baudrillard's famous essay, The Ecstasy of Communication. A new voice within this school of thought is David Boyle. An excerpt from Boyle's book Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life is presented as a kind of explanation for Schiller's and others like it. "We live in a world dominated by spin-doctors, advertising, virtual goods and services, by the shoddy and the unreal, and by a global economy determined to foist it on us. That trend has begun to spawn its opposite" (33). What Boyle seems to be suggesting in his book, is a backlash to McLuhan's notion of the Global Village. A trend wherein physical villages, whether created slowly over time, through real human experience or not, and places like Schiller's or Intrawest Villages, based in the rhetoric of nostalgia, become society's new comfort zones. Or rather, they will become the upper class' new comfort zones. The virtual world and Global Village ultimately belong to those who can afford the technology required as the admission fee. Consequently, the counters to these virtual spaces are being built by and for those fleeing them. Ward makes a point of noting the crowd at Schiller's, "the boisterous 2,500-square-foot room was warmly crammed shoulder to shoulder with a stylishly bohemian array of pierced artists, suited traders, lanky models, locals, and interlopers, all talking and laughing in relaxed fabulousness" (32). Places like Schiller's belong to today's Petit



Bourgeois, while Intrawest Villages bask in the relaxed fabulousness of the Bourgeoisie. If this movement qualifies as a revolution, it certainly belongs to the rich. Yet by some miracle of enlightenment, there remains a distinct possibility that the rest of us will benefit from it.

Boyle envisions a future where globalisation spars with localisation, where the virtual and the real are constantly undermining each other. In this future, the New Realists will be the ones fighting for “real food” – food that actually tastes like something and doesn’t contain the genes of another species for temperature control – “real sounds,” not recordings of atmosphere, “real smells” emanating from “real places.” They will reject chains that recreate the same storefronts in every town and city across the world “in the cheapest style of glass and concrete.” They will also reject fake community activity where every person gazes at their own personal television screen.<sup>10</sup> What Boyle is driving at and what he covers in his eleventh chapter entitled “Authenticity Wars,” is the eventual return to a new kind of humanism, one that respects and cherishes the energy, imperfections and artefacts produced by human hands. In this future, luxury will be returned to the hand-embroidered blouse, the hand-carved wooden chair, the crocheted scarf and the log cabin.

## **Conclusion**

After such an extensive study of the rhetorical situation, exigence and audience, we might now attempt to settle the original Bitzer vs Vatz debate. Should the rhetoric of

Intrawest resort real estate be viewed, as Bitzer could argue, as a reflection of reality? Or is Intrawest, as Vatz could argue, a creator of reality and meaning? With a better understanding of the Intrawest audience, their values and desires, it seems clear that Intrawest in many ways, represents an ideal “altered reality.” However, the exigencies felt by today’s upper class are a result of a variety of factors. Veblen would point to the implications of advances in technology and major changes in attitudes. It would be unrealistic to argue that Intrawest and other luxury rhetoric are solely responsible for making outdoor adventure, family fun and nostalgic village settings among the most coveted luxuries today. On the one hand, Bitzer’s argument of Intrawest’s rhetorical discourse coming into existence as a response to the situation of changed upper class values holds ground. On the other hand, through its campaigns and marketing tools, Intrawest does encourage and reinforce the need for such luxuries. Combined with contemporary rhetoric surrounding luxury living, the values generated become cultural truisms, which to a certain extent control the need. Essentially, both Bitzer and Vatz’s theories contribute to the study and understanding of the complexities surrounding today’s need for luxury living.

In this last chapter, other issues and questions surrounding the rhetorical situation arose from our exploration of today’s upper class values. For instance, would Intrawest survive a return to David Boyle’s version of reality? That remains to be seen, although the odds are considerably in Intrawest’s favour. This predicted return to what’s “real” will invariably include excursions into nature, which itself is increasingly becoming a luxury. With Intrawest’s foundations firmly entrenched within some of the world’s most

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<sup>10</sup> All references to David Boyle’s book Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life were taken from excerpts from chapters published on the web at <http://david->

naturally beautiful locales, it will always have an edge on other types of themed environments. And with an offer as permanent as homeownership, it guarantees its clientele a place to enjoy all the free time they can expect out of life.

Perhaps the major difference between today's upper class and that of the Gilded Age, is identity. The old bourgeoisie was a predetermined group of "higher born" individuals who could prove their belonging to the upper class through birth, marriage, and self-made fortunes. Once "arrived," they needed only keep up with pre-existing codes of social conduct, which encompassed everything from leisure activities to neighbourhoods in which to live. Being a bourgeois in today's world is far more complex. Status is now something you can earn, and class can be faked. What determines an individual's belonging to a certain group is taste and lifestyle choices. It is now through association with certain brand names, leisure activities and locales that today's upper class can affirm their identity as a member. Tiger Woods brought the upper class sport of golf into the popular spotlight, making it somewhat "cool." Taking up snowboarding indicates an ability to keep up with younger sporting trends while maintaining the status brought by memberships to certain ski hills. Choosing an African safari adventure over a trip to Disneyland says something about your taste for "real" adventure. Today's upper class builds their status through the adoption of identities articulated by experiential brands, based on the exigencies proper to their perception of themselves within society.

The blurring of class lines allows experiential brands to construct ever more diverse and specific identities for people to adopt. As we saw with Intrawest, successful brands manage to create and maintain very focused identities for their target market.

Intrawest real estate anchors itself in one of the most important concerns to today's upper class. While Gilded Age resorts made a point of providing distinctly separate spaces for women and especially children, today's bourgeoisie wants to be reconnected with their family. They want family entertainment, family sporting, family dining and to experience the "thrill of the spectacle" *en famille*. It is a desire that certainly does not require places like Intrawest resorts to be fulfilled, although as we have seen, the arguments to the contrary are compelling. So compelling in fact, the Intrawest success story shows no signs of slowing down. In a press release dated August 10<sup>th</sup> 2004, Intrawest announced a \$1 billion expansion for Tremblant resort, with an additional \$95 million in contributions from the Federal and Provincial governments. "The president and chief executive officer of Intrawest Corporation, Mr. Joe S. Houssian, and the president of Mont Tremblant Resort, Mr. Michel Aubin, confirmed today a \$1 billion expansion over the next ten years to develop Mont Tremblant Resort's Versant Soleil and Versant Nord by Intrawest and its partners. In the tradition of the Versant Sud, which was developed between 1991 and 2004, this is the largest tourism project currently underway in North America" (Intrawest).

The expansion will bring two more villages to Tremblant, and a significant amount of work to R+D. It will bring more, handsomely packaged, idyllic family stories. More fantasy brochures that, like a film camera filter, project a romantic, fantastic, nostalgic haze over some of the most expensive, experiential real estate in North America.

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