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NOT IN MY BACKYARD! Finding the Potent Gaps in New Urbanist Development of Rural New York

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NOT IN MY BACKYARD!

Finding the Potent Gaps in New Urbanist Development of Rural New York

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Dorothea L. McRae

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

For the roads, mountains, and rivers,
Thank you leading me home.

Acknowledgements

In the spirit of truth and equity, it is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are gathered on the sacred homelands of the Munsee and Muhheaconneok people, who are the original stewards of this land. Today, due to forced removal, the community resides in Northeast Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We honor and pay respect to their ancestors past and present, as well as to Future generations and we recognize their continuing presence in their homelands. We understand that our acknowledgement requires those of us who are settlers to recognize our own place in and responsibilities towards addressing inequity, and that this ongoing and challenging work requires that we commit to real engagement with the Munsee and Mohican communities to build an inclusive and equitable space for all.

Land Acknowledgement courtesy of Montgomery Place

Sophia, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader and guiding me to the finish line. Duff, thank you for inspiring me to be the best ethnographer I can be. Yuka, thank you for challenging me to always go further. Laura, thank you for introducing me to the power of sound.

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To my dad, the man with the biggest heart who always has the answers. To my mom, a constant inspiration, thank you for always picking up the phone. I love you all very much.

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*Little boxes on the hillside
Little boxes made of ticky tacky
Little boxes, little boxes
Little boxes all the same
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.*

Pete Seeger, *Little Boxes*

*It's all true. It's all real. Nothing here is fake.
Nothing you see on this show is fake.
It's merely controlled.*

1998, *The Truman Show*

DEFINING TRADITION /

potent gaps between the histories and futures

Heading south down Route 9 in Red Hook, the town quickly turns from packed storefronts at its four-corner center, to residential streets, to the hushed establishments that you might expect: a laundromat and a diner or two. During this past year, I found myself here on the fringe of town, where the movie theater and barn-turned-antique shop jut up against this quietly bustling construction site. It's easy to miss, but if you're looking for it you might spot the small green arrow brandishing "Model Homes, Now Open" at Tradition at Red Hook, a Traditional Village Neighborhood. Directly above, the movie theater lists their showings on a fluorescent sign that's undoubtedly seen better days.

Above the communal mailhouse, an engraved "TRADITION" welcomes each visitor into this newly established neighborhood. Beyond, pristine homes border the edge of a manicured,

miniature town green. On days when the various construction crews aren't there, the air is deafeningly quiet. Although the rooms are filled with furniture, no one actually lives here.

Turning into the development for the first time felt like something out of a dream, or like driving onto the set of *The Stepford Wives*. Beyond the first row of houses is an expansive construction site; tucked behind this facade of perfect American life, are piles of rubble and stacks of PVC tubing.

In retrospect, it's hard to describe what exactly would continue to lure me into this place, but it might have been my initial, and decidedly founded, illusive disdain to it. *The Stepford Wives*, a 1970s novel with two film adaptations, follows one woman as she uncovers the horrifying truth of her idyllic Connecticut suburb: the women of Stepford have been murdered and replaced by their hyper-sexualized, docile, cyborg body doubles. The 1975 film's depiction of the plight of the middle-class housewife and critique of the nuclear family lead to a popularization of the concerns of the women's liberation movement. Like *The Stepford Wives*, Tradition's facade of perfection played into my own "suspicion that beneath the seeming order and neatness of the suburban neighborhood lurks something nasty, if dangerously indefinable" (Murphy 2011, 130). Maybe I wanted to lift the curtain of this fascinating mirage to find the deep, dark, inner workings of some higher power. Really, I think the reason I kept coming back was because I was obsessed with its unrealness.

The uncanny quality of roaming around the homes that each feel lived in and untouched at the same time only heightens the eerie quiet of the streets of Tradition at Red Hook. Before anyone actually moved in, Tradition decorated a few model homes with future residents in mind. They're modestly furnished just enough to imply that they're well lived in, so much so that

walking through each room feels almost like a violation of this imagined family's privacy. In the kitchen, the appliances sparkle, and while the brand new refrigerators are empty, the marble of the island is slightly humbled by their bowls overflowing with waxy fruit. Framed photos line the raw wood entry table, featuring families picturesque enough to convince you that their life is within reach.

The children's rooms upstairs only enhance my voyeuristic imagination of what their lives might be like. The boy's room is decorated with rockets, and there's a stethoscope on the landing. Llamas wearing glasses adorn almost every corner of the room across the hall, which I take to be his sister's. I spend so much time obsessing over who I imagine would live here, that I forget what I'm supposed to be thinking: I would love to live here.

Within a matter of months these few houses would quadruple in number, and a handful of families would become the first residents of Tradition at Red Hook. But it isn't stopping anytime soon; the developers, Kirchoff Company and Bonura Hospitality Group, plan to expand this neighborhood into one that eventually holds 102 homes.

Tradition is a "Traditional Neighborhood Development" (TND), a style of development that is modeled after a few key principles of New Urbanism. TNDs are a direct reaction to the rise of the suburban sprawl and resulting need for privacy and ownership over a domain. They value the communal, the traditional, and the pedestrian. They reject the separation of rural living and walkability; all New Urbanist developments should be conveniently seated within a five minute walk of all necessities. Porches are intentionally lower to the ground so that neighbors can communicate without having to look up or down upon each other. The wide sidewalks and narrow streets prioritize pedestrians while forcing cars to drive slowly. The aesthetic ideal is

parallel to larger moral motivations of the movement: cars and garages are all located in alleyways behind the homes, hidden from sight, the greenspaces are communal, and private lawns are minimal, and exterior color and outdoor decor must be approved by the Homeowners Association.

The mail house, located in the entrance to the development, allows neighbors to convene in a shared space. In picturesque digital renderings on their website, a mature maple tree shades the center green with luscious branches, while the tree saplings (which were planted last fall) are illustrated as a canopy that shades the sidewalks. I recall my conversation with one of the lead carpenters, who scoffed at the illustration. The way the saplings were planted restricts them from ever growing so big—at least not before busting through the perfectly cemented sidewalks.

Faux Rural Histories

One conversation that has stuck with me during my research was one that I had with Mary¹, one of the team leaders at the development. She explained to me that only a few years ago, this construction site was just a farmhouse and fifty acres of land. The family who had lived here for generations sold the land to Kirchhoff Developers. On the day they broke ground, one of the first things that they did was bulldoze the original house. In order to manufacture a community that is selling the ideals of farmhouse living, they had to remove the farmhouse. It is this simultaneous removal of and positioning in the past that allows Tradition to make room for the imagined. Like the full-grown maple tree in their models, and the imagined families that could someday live here, Tradition at Red Hook relies on the construction of a rural fantasy

¹ In order to preserve the anonymity of all participating interlocutors, names and identities have been changed.

where this development could exist. But this practice is not particular to this development. In fact, the style and structure of this development reflect a history of rural romanticism in the area.

The Hudson Valley has long been subject to the grips of romanticism. Red Hook and other surrounding towns were developed and settled by British and American elites who built the estates that we still see remnants of today (Torres 2015). Around the turn of the 19th century, industrialization was on the rise and, in the face of this change, artists and scholars felt a responsibility to preserve the American landscape. They captured both the powerful and the picturesque in their paintings of the area. Architects of the time worked to reject the rigidity of European styles, and designed with the natural elements in mind. This tendency toward preservation of an imagined rural lifestyle is arguably the foundation of many aspects of life here in the Hudson Valley, and it is what fuels the architectural style and overall design of Tradition. From the exposed beams, and the rustic table settings, down to the very names of each house, the aesthetics of this development lean into this imagined narrative of a traditional American pastoral lifestyle.

Through the theoretical scope of Eric Hobsbawm's introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, it is clear that tradition is made from a perceived continuity of the past. Since developments seem inherently future-focused, what would it mean for a project to be so decidedly rooted in an imagined past? Tradition is taken to be a natural thing, but “the historic past into which the new tradition is inserted need not be lengthy, stretching back into the assumed mists of time” (Hobsbawm 1983, 2). The intentional adoption of design practices and specific language reaches far beyond a clever marketing strategy. Tradition hopes to impact the way that people interact with these spaces and with each other.

In the planning and development of Tradition, there is often an emphasis on using the past as a guide for the future. Through physical features of the development, the style of individual homes, and the language that is used in promotional materials, the developers hope that they will be able to revive what has been lost in the rise of suburban sprawl.

This moral motivation aligns with the Town of Red Hook's own goals for growth. After the Town updated its zoning laws in 1993, they formed the Centers and Greenspaces Coalition, a group of Red Hook Town Board members that would work to "retrofit the South Broadway commercial strip into a mixed-use extension of the Village" (Town of Red Hook 2016, 1). Their solution was to create a TND District, and an Agricultural Business (AB) District. This zoning, along with the Pattern Book (a book of architectural guidelines for the town) was intended to uphold the town's rural values by "[providing] compatibility in site design and details with Red Hook's variety of historic building types and its best building traditions, without discouraging diversity and new development" (Town of Red Hook 2016, 1). This pursuit of gaining a foothold in between an historic ideal and desire for growth exposes the contradictions of this project.

When asked what values are particular to Red Hook, many of the residents I spoke with defined the town as being distinctly not like Rhinebeck, a neighboring village known for its quaint storefronts and tree-lined streets. One resident, who was born and raised on a farm in Red Hook put it this way:

It's a little more of a blue collar town than Rhinebeck, say for instance. Rhinebeck was always considered more of a carriage trade town, because they, this was years ago, they serviced all the estates and all the people from the estates along the River. We're more of a working town, and a farming town.

This linkage to the past is evoked even when identifying Red Hook in the present. Centuries after this relationship between estates and the towns was established, it is still centered in the

characterization of each place. In a public opinion survey, residents of the town and its surrounding area list agricultural lands and scenic vistas as top priorities for protection (Red Hook Town Board 2016, 4-5) These findings are consistent with another survey taken by Red Hook Town Board in 1989 that found “while only 0.1% of the town’s population engaged in farming, the vast majority of the town – upwards of 94% of the population – favored the preservation of agriculture and rural character” (Torres 2015). It’s not that the people of Red Hook support agriculture, they support the idea and ideals of it. The true tradition of Red Hook, and the Hudson Valley for that matter, is to constantly reference a fabricated past that satisfies a shared image of what a rural lifestyle should look like.

Potent Gaps

Being a TND means that Tradition is an embodiment of New Urbanist development strategies. Once it is built, the materialized plan is in the hands of the residents—it is their use of the space that determines whether the ideals of the developers will be upheld. Until then, the developers, the construction crew, and the sales team must work to assemble a community that people want to live in. This requires an unyielding dedication to their imagined future of these fifty acres, for they themselves must buy into this dream in order to sell it.

Between this dream of what will be and the reality of what is lie many gaps. The difference between what I saw, what my interlocutors said they saw, and what they hoped to see warrants examination. It’s not that they didn’t tell the truth. It’s that their truth not only differed from, but was at times contradictory to what was right in front of them. In some instances, all that matters is what interlocutors believe to be true. But, I believe that in this particular case the

potency of the gaps in these realities must be recognized. As a result, there were times when it was difficult to decipher these contradictory declarations.

Although the planning of this development began almost two decades ago, it is almost impossible to know when it will be fully completed. In the wake of coronavirus pandemic, Tradition faced some unforeseen challenges and advantages. While the pricing of materials skyrocketed, so did the real estate prices for the Hudson Valley; similar to the post-9/11 flight from urban areas to more rural ones, this past year's wave of newcomers drove the Dutchess County real estate market up 30.3% (Lasky 2021). The influx of residents helped to sustain local businesses, and new construction projects but at the same time, lead to ruthless bidding wars and inflated housing prices.

While more homes are being bought and built, with more people out of work many have turned to remodeling projects for their current home. But, the surge in demand along with the collapse of consistent supply has caused the prices for construction materials to skyrocket (Morris 2021). Construction companies across the country have borne the brunt of the 10 to 20% price increases of lumber, drywall, aluminium, and steel (Rappeport 2021). These shifts in the market are not lost on the staff at Tradition. In their HOA handbook, completion of the project is anticipated to be around 2026, "barring any unforeseen circumstances such as possible strikes, material shortages, acts of God or other unforeseen delays beyond the control of the Sponsor" (Homeowners Association 2019, 10). In the last year, these plans for the future have been turned on their head as all unforeseen circumstances came to fruition. Despite this, Tradition has continued to grow amidst the blessings and curses of uncertainty brought on by the pandemic.

At its core, the goal of this development is to sell 102 homes. In taking a stake in this goal, those involved in Tradition adopt the values of the project, and are left having to make sense of it all. But in all of their efforts to stick with one message, they inevitably left gaps in describing Tradition's imagined future. These gaps are potent, yet I struggled to pin them down. My interlocutors were always steadfast in their understanding of the intentions of the development. Still, so often I would find contradictions between the declarations of what they stand for, and what they are actually building. In each chapter, I will reexamine the very gaps that have been used to materialize Tradition.

The location of Tradition in relation to its dedication to walkability is one example of blatant contradiction. In theory, TND's are meant to be within a five minute walking distance of residents' everyday necessities, like schools and shopping centers. While Tradition claims to be "steps from the center of Red Hook," the walkability of that mile-long commute is less than practical; this area is devoid of pedestrians since cars normally drive well over the 35 mile per hour speed limit (Tradition at Red Hook 2020). While the developers hope that residents will utilize this feature, I can't help but think that in my four years of living here, I have never walked that mile stretch.

In 'Planning,' my first chapter, I lay the foundation of this project by going into the history of New Urbanist development through the story of stubbornness and infrastructure in the Town of Red Hook. I begin with a walking tour from the center of the village to Tradition and problematize common tools that claim to measure walkability, a lucrative feature in real estate that is constantly quantified despite being unquantifiable. Red Hook's identity is centered on finding the balance between rural and historic. For some residents, these qualities directly

conflict with growth and change. But, after decades of irresponsible development patterns which allowed precious farm land to be eaten up by housing sprawl, the Town turned its focus to creating a plan for the future that would protect the character of the community. This chapter focuses on the story of the Centers and Greenspaces plan, which illustrates this battle between protecting the past to make room for the future.

Throughout the second chapter, 'Building,' I engage with materiality and aesthetics of Tradition through an analysis of the customization and planning processes of each home. Tradition prides itself on its ability to work with customers to make each home meet their specific needs. When Tradition was working on their initial homes, the customization process was long; buyers had a lot of requests and changes to those requests, and it took the entire staff—designers, architects, and sales—to actually design one house. As the project has grown, this process has been forced to change. I talked a lot about this change with Brian, the project manager: "We're not just selling houses, we're selling a community." At Tradition, the structure of the community is not only dictated, but protected by material and aesthetic choices. By making each home customizable, Tradition is able to further itself away from the 'little boxes' of Levittown. And yet, they must limit these choices, in order to protect the future of the community that they are creating.

Tradition is looking to a design approach that was created in the 1940s in response to the beginnings of the American suburban sprawl. Although the principals of this movement seem positive, there are issues with New Urbanism itself. New Urbanism—TND's included—is based in a social ideal that believes that "community design can create or influence particular social patterns." To discuss this I will turn to critical writing about this architectural movement, like

Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of American Cities*, and James C. Scott's subsequent discussion of her work in his book *Seeing Like a State*. What does it mean to look to the past in order to build a future?

I conclude this project with 'Living,' an examination of what the future of Tradition may look like through a discussion of the promises of affordability and inclusion. In planning the TND District, Red Hook "intended to ensure an adequate supply of more affordable housing types in the Town" (Findings Statement 2011, 11). While "most New Urbanists claim to be committed to the concepts of strong citizen participation, affordable housing, and social and economic diversity," these ideals don't necessarily carry over into actual design practices (Fulton 1996, 1). Through an analysis of the terms of the Homeowners Association (HOA) and its relationship to the residents and the developers of Tradition, I find the ways that community has been used as a means of settler indigenization. This conclusion will also center around looking to the future of this development through a comparison to older developments of its kind. Will Tradition be able to actualize the goals set out by their ambitious plans?

At the outset of my fieldwork, I was concerned that what I would find would have very little to do with the actual people involved in the making of this neighborhood. But as I continued to visit Tradition I found that the developers' as well as outside residents' interaction with Tradition as it is planned, built, and sold was what made this project so significant. This ethnography is an exploration in the powers of performance in convincing us of our own belonging. It is also a discussion of intentions, and further, how projections of the future have a way of shifting as they are materialized. Given all the planning that went into this development, how will it impact the people who actually choose to live there? Will it affect them at all? How

will they change what has been made for them? My research has not afforded me time enough to answer these questions, but I can't help but imagine what Tradition will look like when I return in the coming years.

1 PLANNING /

reshaping landscapes of infrastructure

Growing up in the city of Boston, I rarely ever found myself in the car. I was used to walking miles in a day without really thinking twice about it. Since living here, in the pastoral landscape of the Hudson Valley, I use my car every single day. Rarely do I find myself walking to a destination. Instead I often take strolls around town purely for the sake of getting outside. So, in a test of walkability, I decided to make the trek from the center of the Village of Red Hook to Tradition at Red Hook. From inside my car, I felt more than familiar with the landmarks and curves of this stretch of road, but once on foot, it was as if I were in a completely different place. It soon became clear that this walk down Route 9 would be a challenge to my perception of scale.

The intersection of Route 9 and East Market Street is the cause of much frustration for anyone who finds themselves there; the single traffic light is slow, enough so that both the cars

and pedestrians are left feeling ignored. Given the high demand of commuters, it may even be the most congested area within a 15 mile radius. On foot, however, all of this can be ignored. I allow myself to slow down in the shade of the maple trees that line the street, providing shelter from the trucks that rumble and sputter as they pass. At this speed I can appreciate the brick patio that houses the bus stop and provides distance between the various businesses of the strip and the curb.

I pass the firehouse and the Bed and Breakfast, and hear the cars as they begin to get up to speed; this distance of road marks a transition for drivers as they move from a pedestrian area to a highway. As quiet restaurants and small businesses become more scattered between the growing number of homes, I notice that there are more cars in driveways and parking lots than those parked along the street. It's hard to know what exactly I should be focusing on, so my eyes settle on the road ahead.

Here I am no longer protected by the purposeful landscaping I found in the village center. The sound of the cars are overwhelming and I begin to feel less like a pedestrian and more like a hitchhiker. This feeling is only emphasized by the fact that practically no one else is on foot. As each car passes I feel more and more seen, and it makes me think about the times that I have whizzed by, wondering why someone would ever choose to walk in this part of town.

“State Law: Yield to Pedestrian in Sidewalk” reads the sign just ahead which is funny because you couldn't pay me to cross this part of the road. Passing the halfway point in my walk, I turn around only to barely make out the center of town. For a moment I appreciate the presence of sidewalks that line both sides of the street, something that was a point of contention in town meetings only a few years ago. Every hundred yards or so I spot a bench dedicated to a beloved

Red Hook resident of the past. I ponder stopping to take a break, but hesitate at the prospects of the surrounding landscape; driveways and parking spaces are slowly replaced by large, unwelcoming gravel lots. The benches remind me of a public comment from one of the village's monthly meetings, where one resident "thanked the Board for the new sidewalks, benches throughout the Village and the crosswalk. All makes it easier for seniors to get around the Village" (Town of Redhook 2016, 2). I notice an impulse to check the time every few minutes. By this point I've been walking for thirteen minutes, though it feels more like thirty. Perhaps it's the fact that I'm alone on the road, or it's the constant, deafening roars of cars as they speed by, maybe it's the absence of demarcated blocks as a measurement of distance traveled—nevertheless, this expanse of sidewalk feels endless.

The last ten minutes of the walk are a foggy confusion. As the buildings draw further back from the sidewalk and grow farther apart, I feel myself begin to lose my sense of place. Like some highway mirage, I see the Lyceum Cinema sign rise above the treeline. Turning onto Old Farm Road, I am reminded of my own walks home from school. Would I have walked this distance? Even more important, would I have chosen to walk over driving? This question gets at the core of the methodological and material connection between New Urbanism, Traditional Neighborhood Developments, and Tradition at Red Hook: walkability is the most important aspect of a newly built neighborhood.

Measuring the Immeasurable

As Tim Ingold writes in his extensive ethnographic work on walking, there is a kind of knowledge that is produced when we traverse the earth's surface on foot. The pedestrian experience is distinctly different from the passenger, in that the passenger moves along a

pre-destined path, ideally in as little time as possible. The pedestrian, however, can chose to wander, and has the ability to “negotiate or improvise a path as [they go] *along*” (Ingold 2010, 126). The environment which the pedestrian travels through is completely impactful on the experience of walking. As we walk, we reify our identity as social beings, because embedded in our path are “our ideas of the social and the symbolic within the immediate day-to-day activities that bind practice and representation, doing, thinking and talking” (Ingold 2008, 3).

As I made my way from the village to the development, the surfaces I traversed, the air I inhaled, the landmarks I observed seemed to say something bigger about the systems that paved the path before me. The presence of the sidewalk (which for years was highly contested within the local government bodies) offers a direct communication between town and citizen. For Tradition to claim the New Urbanist value of walkability (a claim that is evidently fully supported by local government), is to say that this area is meant for the pedestrian. This sidewalk represents the future of growth in Red Hook. It, as well as the development itself, is material evidence of the village’s efforts to expand the perimeter of the village center. Currently, this mile stretch is a gradient of concentration from field to outskirt to center. Until these outskirts are populated, the sidewalk will remain as a symbol of the awkward transition from unwalkable to walkable.

New Urbanism got its start in the early 1980’s when Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberg were hired as the lead architects on a new development project in Florida’s panhandle. Seaside, which was established as the first development of its kind in 1981, became a model of the New Urbanism’s principles due to its attention to design and function. It began as a small beach cottage community that emphasized the importance of accessibility to human

necessity. Seaside, which now boasts real estate prices upwards of \$10 million, is the first materialization of the ideals written in the current Charter for New Urbanism (Seaside 2021). By 1993, the Congress for the New Urbanism was founded by a group of architects alongside Duany and Plater-Zyberg. Now, when looking into any New Urbanist, or Traditional Neighborhood Development, *walkability* is the central concern. What makes something walkable? Can it be measured?

There are certain qualities of a neighborhood or a street that make the area walkable. While it is certainly noticeable when such qualities are present, it's difficult to measure the extent to how effective those qualities are. Despite this, the online tool Walk Score© claims to “measure the walkability of any address” through their algorithm that awards points based on the distance to amenities, like stores, schools, and other destinations (Walk Score 2021). Scores are given on a 100-point scale, and locations are awarded based on their proximity to amenities thus indicating the ease with which one could live in a neighborhood without ever needing a car. Locations with a high score of 90-100 are regarded as a “Walker’s Paradise,” while lower scoring neighborhoods are labeled as being “Car-Dependent.” When entered into the Walk Score© site, the village center of Red Hook receives a score of 51, making it “Somewhat Walkable,” while Tradition’s address receives no points at all. The algorithm that Walk Score© uses places value on the density of destinations, rather than the accessibility of the environment a pedestrian traverses.

For Red Hook, which finds itself in a transitional phase toward becoming more walkable, a tool like Walk Score© overlooks the incremental changes that are currently taking place in this

area. But in the eyes of some residents, these same changes are reminders of their own impermanence.

One rainy Sunday, I drive down to a small store at the ever-shrinking edge of town. My entrance into the store is announced by the small tinkling bell above the door. Seated behind a glass case of baseball cards and costume jewelry I find Doug and Iris Willaims. Once farmers, they now operate this shop. They stand as I approach the counter to introduce myself. As Doug and I discuss the effect Tradition has had on Red Hook, Iris, who is polishing a set of dinner plates, mumbles her own responses under her breath. Doug is kind, and makes an effort not to say anything that could offend. When I ask him about walkability, he takes his time with his answer:

They've done a tremendous amount of work with all their sidewalks and accessibilities. So it is very, very walkable that at points in time, we would think that, "Well, they're putting in about twice as many sidewalks as they truly need!" But people do use them. And so it's come together very nicely. So it is very walkable. You have to watch your crossings here and there is all, but other than that it's quite a distance you can walk safely in and around the whole community. They put a lot of energy into that.

Despite his evident appreciation for the town's installation of sidewalks, he still seems wary. His reflection on the incremental changes to the landscape illustrates an inner battle between stubbornness and compliance. He and many other residents of this area have had to choose between fighting change, or accepting it. Before leaving the store, I ask one final question: What do you think of the change brought on by the development? While Iris commented quietly for most of the conversation, this time she answered for both of them: "Our generation, we aren't here for much longer. I think it's good, the change, so Red Hook can survive. We want growth but we also want to maintain our character."

For residents of this area who have been witness to the tremendous growth that has taken place in this area over the past few decades, it is understandable to feel that change is a moment of loss as well as an opportunity. While a sidewalk indicates accessibility, it is also the first step toward a loss of rural identity. Many initially resort to stubbornness, (as seen in the decade long fight for a sidewalk), but eventually are able to appreciate the slow change. The difference is, do you fight your own impermanence, or accept it?

It's difficult to determine what exactly makes a place walkable. Through their algorithm, Walk Score© has deemed proximity to stores and other destinations as a way of measuring the walkability of an area. What Walk Score© fails to account for is the physical form of the built environment, or how buildings and streets relate to each other. In a recent article in *The Journal of Architectural Planning and Research*, researchers discuss the impact of design on “perceived walkability” (Oreskovic et al. 2014). Their argument centers around the fact that a combination of variations in building heights and planes, and a presence of a street focal point, in addition to plenty of windows are the criteria for making a built environment that encourages walking. While it may seem like an afterthought, the built environment that surrounds the sidewalk is what motivates the pedestrian, and may be the difference between deciding to carry out daily activities on foot or by car. If the main claim of New Urbanism is that their “designs foster more walkable environments that are less dependent on automobile use,” what would this mean for Tradition at Red Hook, which is located in an area that is less than pedestrian friendly (Oreskovic et al. 2014, 226).

Despite efforts to measure the immeasurable, the stakes of walkability are undeniable. Recent research reveals the numerous positive effects that come with living in more walkable

areas. The built environment has an impact on public health and physical activity, and influences local transportation patterns due to its level of accessibility by foot (Boyle et al. 2014). Higher walkability may also impact the social conditions of a neighborhood, for “a built environment that encourages walking improves the probability that residents interact with each other, and leads to a greater sense of community among residents” (Boyle et al. 2014, 854). In addition to the effects on residents’ social interactions and health, land values and the sales price of residential properties increase with walkability. The study concludes that walkability provides significant financial benefits, including better economic performance, lower transportation costs, more affluent citizens, and higher rents and home values than less walkable areas (Boyle et al. 2014).

New Urbanist developers see walkability as the keystone of Traditional Neighborhood Developments, without which the other features of these developments have less impact. Proximity to the town center, narrower roads, porches abutting the sidewalk, and garages hidden in alleyways are what make these neighborhoods particularly friendly to the pedestrian, and are the basic design elements of this architectural movement. New Urbanist planners, like Vince, believe that the design of the development directly impacts the way that people live. Unfortunately, no amount of new sidewalk will change the fact that Red Hook’s town center is past the “walkability threshold” of a quarter mile.

While some TNDs are built from the ground up, others, like Tradition, are shaped by their surroundings as a form of new growth. Most New Urbanist communities are mixed-use, closing the gap between the domestic and the commercial, the public and the private. Because the village of Red Hook has its own town center with plenty of shops and restaurants, Tradition

would come to be seen as a new neighborhood in an existing town, rather than a new town altogether. In fact, for Vince, this intent to make a neighborhood connected to the town can be seen in physical elements of the development: “So, if you look at the way it's designed, the first thing that you see as you approach is our community green. And that’s the intent, it’s to make it seem like open arms to the community and say, ‘Hey, you're welcome here. We're part of you.’”

At the core of New Urbanist developments is the idea that neighborhoods thrive when people are able to choose walking over other forms of transportation. Residents are healthier, friendlier, more environmentally conscious, and they save money. The task of creating a walkable environment is not easy; walkability itself is difficult to produce as it is reliant on so many environmental qualities. The walkability of Tradition’s neighborhood is determined by what is deemed within its bounds, and what isn’t. For, as walkable as Tradition and Red Hook are respectively, the distance between the two populated centers is not yet welcoming to the pedestrian. Until that distance becomes more densely populated, Tradition will continue to be isolated from the rest of town. While this isolation is a result of the physical distance between the Village of Red Hook and Tradition at Red Hook, it is also evident in the infrastructural barriers that were created along the way.

Histories of Growth and Stubbornness

Doug Willaims: I can remember cows being driven across the road and the traffic stopping, because that's what Red Hook was like before the damn bridge went in! Farms operated on both sides of the road. We're very lucky here on our road because our barns and our house are on the same side of the road! So Tradition, I hope the town, and everybody, the new generation coming in, will work together to make sure that when those parcels along route nine get redeveloped they get more areas, more walkability, more sidewalk—there was a huge fight over the sidewalk did you know that?

Me: No I didn't!

Doug: Oh my goodness. Yeah. There was a huge fight for years over the sidewalk with the sidewalk going in and that's you know, it's-- it's useful.

Me: Wait, when was this fight?

Doug: Oh the fight for the sidewalk on the east side of route nine from the village? You know where the emporium is, or was, that was the old soap factory. From there down to Hannaford was a huge brewhaha because some of the ladies, one lady in particular, didn't want the sidewalk to go in so there was a huge fight against the sidewalk which took much longer than it should have. People didn't want it because it was change.

Me: Do you know why?

Doug: 'Cuz it was you don't want a sidewalk, that's why, change! People don't want change, Thea. You know, it's nuts stuff! My goodness. So, now we have a sidewalk. And guess what? Now after a huge brouhaha, we have half of Red Hook having a sewer, the sewer when you go into the archives of the Red Hook Advertiser, you can go back to 1947 and see the first fight over the sewer. "Why, we don't need a sewer! Who needs a sewer?" Do you know that Red Hook and the village of Millerton are the last two villages in the county of Dutchess to have sewer systems?

Me: I didn't know that!

Doug: The sewer system is a godsend. Why? Because, because it grows— in Red Hooks' case, it will allow the restaurants to expand to seat more people. So the health regulations can be met. Because right now it's all on septic system. And in the old days, it was cesspools and a lot of the village and you could go through parts of the village in the old days, in the— especially in the 50s, and sniff sniff sniff and you'd get a sniff-full. You know,

Me: Why are people so against the sewer system? Is it just change, like you said?

Doug: "We don't need it." Right? "It's gonna cost me money." Give me a break! They won't send a dime.

After meeting Doug and Iris Williams in their store, I realized that we needed to speak again. I, of course, had to ask some more questions. Doug, who grew up in Red Hook and resides on the farm his parents bought in 1943, has been an active member of local government and considers himself to be “one of the locals.” Doug knows more about the history of the village of Red Hook, and U.S. in general, than anybody I have encountered in this research. He credits his knowledge to his seventh grade New York State history class from Red Hook Central School. One evening this winter, I called Doug to discuss his thoughts on the development. At the time, I was feeling extremely sceptical of the intentions of the project, and was shocked when I learned what an avid supporter he was. Speaking with him allowed me to realize how much my own protectiveness for the place (that I had decided was a victim of development rather than an actor

in it's planning) had informed my understanding of Tradition. The narrative I had pieced together was only one part of a much longer and more complex story of infrastructure and growth in this country.

After some light smalltalk, Doug launched into a history of the Hudson Valley. For Doug, he understands his personal history as rooted in that of the area. Before speaking about his own life, he wanted to provide sufficient context so I understood how he fit into it. The following is pieced together from his telling of the history of the Hudson Valley beginning 400 years ago:

Shortly after Henry Hudson's arrival to the area in the early 17th century, Dutch settlers landed in New Amsterdam and Beaverwick, which we now know as New York and Albany, respectively. Land grants of hundreds of thousands of acres were given to Dutch *patroons* (patrons) like Schuyler, and Van Courtland and Rensselaer, and then redivided amongst others like the Livingstons and Asters, and Beekmans—all the names that are now quite familiar and can be seen on the street signs in Tradition. Of course, this colonial occupation of the area resulted in the forced removal of Indigenous people, primarily of the Munape and Mohican tribes, who lived here for centuries. Their history has been perpetually silenced by a lack of acknowledgement of their presence. It is impossible to tell the story of this land without an acknowledgement of the people who shaped and maintained it for generations.

Many of these new arrivals farmed primarily on Chancellor Livingston's land. So, the first modern development of Red Hook was just that: A collection of small, 100 acre plots, cleared to make way for the agricultural boom that would soon take hold. Throughout the Revolutionary War, the Hudson Valley was the main supplier of the grain bin, sending wheat to support Washington's troops. Up until 1812, Red Hook had been known as the North Precinct of

Rhinebeck, but due to its economic and population growth, was then founded as an independent township with the two villages of Red Hook and Tivoli, and the hamlets of Annandale, Barrytown, and Upper Red Hook. This area then became a ready-market for the growing cities just north and south of it, that could be reached both by boat and by road. The small population of this farming community held out through to the early 20th century, surviving without notable growth or development except for the occasional house around the villages.

Doug's family history is a great example of what would turn out to be a tremendous growth spurt for the village. Following the close of World War II, there was, as Doug described it, "This huge burst of energy, postwar pent up energy, and we started to grow like mad." His parents, who were working in radio in New York City at the time, bought a farm here in 1943 and moved with their growing family up the Hudson to Red Hook. Doug's father felt that a farm would be the best place to raise a family, and his mother "went along with the gag." In the following years they, their children, and their children's children would watch as their small village transformed into what we see today.

The Willaims family weren't the only ones looking to the Hudson Valley for opportunity. Following the end of the war, IBM opened just across the river and began building the first semi-computerized air defense systems, bringing hundreds of employees and their families to the area. Their arrival also brought on the opening of the Kingston-Rhinebeck bridge in 1957. Up until that point, Red Hook had remained isolated and independent from the other side of the river. The center of town had everything one would need, from the shoemaker and post office, to the grocer and tailor. What was once a village comprising small farms and a population of about 4,000 suddenly began to turn into housing developments to make room for an additional 8,000 people.

Cars became more prevalent, and people began to have more expendable money than they once had. White flight from urban centers to suburban and rural areas changed the social, political, and physical landscape of Red Hook, and because zoning laws were not yet established, the town began to spread. Developers made room for the newcomers by buying up farmland and building cul de sacs. Within a decade, family owned farms transformed into residential developments that are now known as Forest Park, Linden Acres, and College Park.

In an effort to halt this pattern of eating up land for suburban sprawl, the town spent over a decade creating more forward thinking, “smart growth” zoning laws that would encourage more concentrated developments (Findings Statement 2011). The goal (outlined in numerous documents created by the Town Board) was for the town to be able to develop in a responsible way that would maintain its rural character and distinction as a small town. Through the implementation of this plan, the town could grow without infringing on the rights of farmers to their land, and the rights of non-farming citizens to their identity as rural people.

Starting in 2002, the Town Board formed the Intermunicipal Task Force composed of representatives from the surrounding municipalities. The result of over two decades of work was the “Centers and Greenspaces Plan,” which consisted of amendments to town zoning laws. For months I scoured the government website for their findings, which were published sometime in the mid 2010’s. I found traces of it in town minutes, alongside updates on budgets and public comments, where the announcement of its publication was recorded. With these documents I was able to piece together a chronicle of this bureaucratic battle over money and change that took place over the past two decades. What is left of their years of work can be found here, in the

archive, in the memory of my interlocutors, and on the construction site of Tradition at Red Hook.

Just as the town began to draft the “Centers and Greenspaces Plan,” Joe Kirchoff, CEO of Kirchoff Company, approached a farmer with an idea for a new development. In 2006, he proposed a plan for a TND with homes centered around a single greenspace. But, at the request of the town, Kirchoff waited to begin developing until the zoning laws were finally put into place. They waited over ten years to break ground. Although this cost them a monthly fee (allowing them to possess development rights of the property), the time waiting also gave them the opportunity to reimagine the plans for the development. The initial plan for what would later become Tradition, was first put together by a group of engineers. Engineers who were distinctly not aligned with New Urbanist development practices. Reflecting on the process one blustery morning in March, Vince, a member of the lead development team, felt as if the original designers were reading into New Urbanism literally:

It was like it was a box that they were checking off, “Okay, we have this we have this, we have this,” but there was no soul, because they didn't understand the, the, the psychological impacts of what a TND is supposed to do, and the community impacts, and the relationship that it's creating. So, I basically told them, throw the plan out.

Vince eventually brought on a planner who was connected to Duany and Platter-Zyberg, two of the founders of New Urbanist planning. The “Centers and Greenspaces Plan” proposed the zoning of two distinct districts, the Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) District and the Agricultural Business (AB) District. The purpose of this distinction would “promote agriculture as a component of the local economy now and in the future,” while simultaneously “[ensuring] that development adjacent to the Village of Red Hook is designed to conform to the Village’s traditional compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use neighborhood pattern” (Town of

Red Hook 2013, 10). This proposed plan would counteract the previous zoning law that allowed for the sprawl-type development across town. It would also enhance Red Hook's 'small town character,' by creating close-knit villages (centers) surrounded by rural countryside (greenspaces). Hopefully, this project would ultimately "reinforce Red Hook as a rural community, while allowing for a diversity of housing options" (Town of Red Hook 2013, 2).

I discussed the planning process with Paul, a longtime member of the Red Hook town board. For thirty years, Paul has navigated the messy politics and endless paperwork of local government, advocating for change that would also preserve the village's character. He was a part of the Centers and Greenspaces coalition, and a driving force behind a plan to upgrade the Town's septic system. He explained the Incentive Zoning Provision, a key element of the Centers and Greenspaces Plan. For every unit over the maximum 6-8 units per acre (a density that was only made possible by the planned TND district) developers and homeowners would now have to pay a fee. Because developers, like Kirchoff, make a profit by fitting as many units in as small a space as possible, the incentive benefitted both the Town and developers. The money the Town collected from the fee now goes toward the fund that purchases the development rights away from farmers. By doing this, farms are not in danger of becoming cul de sacs, and will instead be preserved as farmland. "The Centers and Greenspaces Plan," Paul explained, "became a kind of self fulfilling legacy of densifying near the urban areas where our commercial cores are [while] also protecting the farmland at the same time." So Tradition, just by the fact that they build so densely, has paid probably close to \$600,000 into the Incentive Zoning Fund. This money will be used specifically to save farmland from becoming developed.

With the prospect of an additional thousand residents, the Town realized that the infrastructure would also need to grow. In the ten years that it took to pass the new zoning laws, the town also received a grant for a \$9.2 million upgrade from septic to a sewage system that would span two municipalities, “creating a Traditional Neighborhood Development district to retrofit the South Broadway commercial strip into a mixed-use extension of the Village” (Town of Red Hook 2016, 1) Unfortunately, after going through the local legislature and public referendum, the proposal for the new sewage system failed to pass. In the wake of the plan’s defeat, Paul didn’t stop. The week after it was defeated, he began planning a sewer system for the village that cut out the Town altogether. The project has downgraded to a \$4.9 million plan, which went up for a vote this past March. In the Town’s original plan, the sewer would span from the center of town all the way past Tradition. Because Tradition lies outside the boundary of the Village, it is not included in the proposed sewage system. Instead, homes will be on a package septic system. The town’s failure to pass the proposed sewage system was disappointing for Paul, who had worked on the project for 16 years.

Paul: I think you'll see the differences in Tivoli with all the restaurants in Tivoli, which is definitely the big draw. We got to Traghaven for a burger, get ice cream over there, and they couldn't do it without this sewer!

Me: You'd think it was a given but I just don't understand why people are so against it.

Paul: Well, it costs money. So that would be the primary driver, and the first go around with the sewer, people were—There's a term called NIMBY—

Me: Oh, Not In My Backyard. Yes.

Paul: So they don't want this development in their backyard, they were fine with the way things were. Change is very hard. It's always talked about but it's very hard to implement. It just—like I said, 16 years, for me, of working on that project.

From the start, Red Hook citizens were concerned with the impact that a TND would have on their town, their resources, and their identity, the loss of which would be detrimental to

Red Hook's vitality. One of the things halting overall development of the town is the septic system which limits the amount of people that are able to be in the town at once. On a Friday night in the center of Red Hook, restaurants are at half their capacity, entirely because of the limitations on how many patrons can use the septic system at a time. An influx of people would overload the system, and endanger the aquifer—a precious resource for all of Red Hook. Until the “Centers and Greenspaces” proposal, Red Hook's expansion sat stagnant.

Scattered throughout the proposal are hints of tension between wanting to preserve the past, and meeting a need to make room for the future. This tension is tied up in changes in the infrastructure—tangled in the lengths of sidewalk and aspirations for a sewage system. These material forms of connection are threatening to the solitary life of a farmer; capsizing fantasies of independence, these communal systems shrink distances that are determined to be distant. The change brought on by this development has forced the residents of Red Hook to suspend their understandings of preservation and growth—which are oppositional in nature—and hold them together. Here they happen in tandem, though it does take effort, and communal support of those efforts. They can be held hand in hand through the same unshaken optimism, sometimes verging on delusion, that so many of my interlocutors displayed. In a project of this scale, such faith in the future is required.

2 BUILDING / materializing pastoral fantasies

I moved to this area a little less than four years ago when I began my time here at Bard College. After a few years of driving down backroads, wandering through the woods and along the river, and discovering the best place to get a tuna melt, I began to feel that I belonged here, and more, that this place belonged to me. Although I consider myself a transplant, at times I feel that my mere relocation to this rural town has earned me the authority of deeming what is or isn't authentic to this place. So, when a friend took me to see the new development in town, I was completely horrified. Back behind the movie theater and barn-turned-antique-shop was a bustling construction zone, putting up house after house without anyone noticing or caring to notice. How could they so swiftly destroy this quaint village I had come to love? My uncomplicated, immediate response was first outrage, and then curiosity. I wanted to know how a developer could trample a town without protest from the residents or hesitation from their own conscience.

At the time, I felt like I had come across a scandal, and I couldn't let it go. I was convinced that some developer had strong-armed this innocent town, planted a stake in the ground and declared it his own, without considering the consequences of such a destructive act. But, what I would come to learn in the next year would shift my understanding of how this development came to be, and what it says about change of place, identity, and politics in this small, rural town in New York.

As a New Urbanist development, Tradition distinguishes itself through its emphasis on the customization of each home. While this process was extremely individualized in the first few sales, as more buyers have entered the picture, it has become more difficult to keep up with unique orders. Despite their stark opposition to the 'little boxes' of Levittown, their streamlined approach to the building of over one hundred homes has, in a sense, flattened the rural characteristics of architecture in Red Hook. In this chapter, I will examine claims of authenticity, and the aesthetics of the faux and realness through an analysis of Tradition's customization process. This chapter problematizes the extent to which New Urbanist design impacts the daily choices made by residents who live in and around the development.

Fake or Faux?

One morning late last February, I decided to join the staff for one of their daily morning meetings. I arrive on the site just before sunrise and drive beyond the finished houses and prepped lawns—which are brown and dry now that they have been through their first winter—and through the fenced-off gravel lot where the trailers are set up. Hidden amongst the shipping containers of materials, piles of gravel and sand, the trailers stand in an L formation and look out onto the residential road that stretches just beyond the fence's border. I park my car next

to Greg's pick-up just as the sun begins to rise over the development. I'm two minutes late, so I hurry across the gravel and up the dusty steps into the trailer where Megan and Brian have set up their less-than-temporary desks.

Brian and Megan, both site managers, have been a part of the project since its beginning—in fact, Brian can be credited for connecting the previous land owner to Joe Kirchoff, the developer, in the first place. Here, every morning, Brian leads a meeting with the rest of his construction team to go over the projects for the day, and their plans of who will do what. Greg and Ned are both employed by Tradition and report directly to Brian, who is overseeing all of the current projects. Together they build, install, and prepare the projects for the hired subcontractors. Megan spends the day communicating between the construction team and sales, making sure that the materials needed for each project are supplied and delivered in time. She later tells me that this is her first major project, but you wouldn't know it from the way she keeps all the pieces in order. Seeing that they have been working together for over a few years now, they are quite the tight knit group, and know each other's strengths.

Inside the trailer, I find Greg and Ned chatting and waking up over a few cups of Stewart's coffee. In between sips they remark on how shocked they are to see a college student up so early. We talk about cold remedies and movies that I am "too young to know about," until Ron shows up with his Stewart's coffee in hand. They greet each other as Brian arrives with a vent for the dryer that will be installed later that day at lot 61. Brian begins by running through the plans for today, and what they should prioritize so that they won't waste the subcontractor's time. Over the course of this project, they have faced difficulties with subcontractors. Because Tradition can only begin building once a buyer has put down a payment, they don't receive bids

from subcontractors who want the job. This also means that Tradition supplies the materials for building to the subcontractors, making them less inclined to be conservative with the way that they use them. This is especially frustrating given the current market, and the fluctuations in prices of basic construction materials. Greg has acknowledged the tension between the hired subcontractors and the employees of Tradition, a dynamic that has encouraged resentment between those who are temporary, and those who are loyal to the project.

Brian: Are you comfortable getting a coat of paint? 'Cause that is a very critical spot on that fireplace and it cant look like a big bump.

Ned: No I know, that'll be way easier than the post office, cause that was where we had to cut that out and then put something back in.

B: And then you're gonna sheetrock and tape the fireplace... I will say this, if the fucking guys don't show up today who sold that fireplace I will. . .I allowed them to come back—

Greg: I'm pretty good at taping...

B: Alright, whatever you want, that's fine with me.

G: I do have all my taping tools at home...

N: Do you have them with you?

G: No—?

B: This is bold, this is a bold move to take on.

G: Well it won't help you until they install the fireplace anyway so...

N: That's true. [chuckling]

B: We gotta make sure that the hearth is installed, cause theres a hearth, a 60 by 20 hearth that's in front of the fireplace

N: Is it a fake stone, tile?

B: It's a real stone, I think it's slate, but we gotta make sure it gets installed today so we can floor up to it. [tapping quickly on his notebook, hesitating] Just a fake, [in agreement] it is fake, but--

N: Its all fake, everything's fake.

G: Faux. It's not fake, it's faux.

N: [chuckles]

B: It's real, it just doesn't have a real purpose.

While Tradition values the aesthetics of a luxury home, the sheer cost of undertaking such a project, in addition to the quality of contemporary decor aesthetics has resulted in their use of “fake” architectural aspects of a home. The requests of this customer highlight the prioritization of aesthetics over functionality. Authenticity of the fireplace is called into question

when they identify the fireplace as being “fake.” Shortly after joking about the fireplace’s fake-ness, Greg clarifies that it is “*faux*,” the fireplace is not quite fake, and is actually artificial. After thinking about it for some time, Brian seemed to back-track, admitting that there will be a fireplace, and that its purpose will be primarily visual rather than functional. I’m sure this isn’t the first time such a clarification has been made, as I am sure that this distinction is something that these men are conscious of each day they work on site.

Later, I spoke with Vince, who clarified that while some of the materials that Tradition uses are not “real,” they are considered to be much more sustainable than the materials that would normally go into home building. Today, farmed wood is grown so fast that the grain of the lumber is not as tight as it would be when grown at a slower rate, he explained. This grain makes it more vulnerable to rotting from moisture and bugs that would lead to a quick deterioration of the wood. Rather than using a traditional material, like wood, the development has opted for more contemporary ones as a way of investing in the longevity of the project. The siding on the homes is made of concrete, and is said to last at least twenty years. This is a much more sustainable option when compared to what would be used in a project of this size. By using the concrete siding, and PVC wood on the porches, Vince says these homes are built to last.

Longevity and Authenticity

The materials are not the only thing that is meant to last. Through their attentiveness to the architectural style of the area, Tradition hopes that the appearance of the neighborhood will outlast what is considered fashionable in design elements used today. During our interview Vince explains that the homes at Tradition will be considered the “classic” homes of tomorrow: “We wanted to design buildings, and homes that will be the *future historical*.” Tradition’s pursuit of

the ‘future historical’ thoroughly captures a wistful desire to bring the past into the future. Perhaps, it is this pursuit that exemplifies the tenuous relationship between the invention of tradition and authenticity.

As described earlier, traditions are merely inventions from a perceived continuity of the past. In the planning and development of Tradition, there is often an emphasis on using the past as a guide for the future. Through physical features of the development, the style of individual homes, and the language that is used in promotional materials, the developers hope that they will be able to revive what has been lost in the rise of suburban sprawl. Most of Tradition’s marketing features the phrase: “reclaim the past.” If developments are inherently future-focused, what would it mean for a project to be so decidedly rooted in an imagined past? In the introduction to his book, Hobsbawm argues that “‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented. . . In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (1983, 1). Tradition’s ‘reclaiming of the past’ is rooted in the performance of an invented past that satisfies the ideal rather than the reality of what the Hudson Valley, or rural life for that matter, is.

If tradition is truly just fabricated fantasies of the past, then it is quite possible for authenticity to be achieved through a careful emulation of historic architecture. When planning the TND district, the Town enlisted Paul, an architect by training, to write up a Pattern Book which would act as an architectural guide for new developments. This book outlines the importance of preservation of Red Hook building traditions, through a care for continuity between the old and the new. Thus, although Tradition does not use materials that are authentic to historical architecture of the area, its authenticity, or ‘realness,’ is achieved through an

aesthetic emulation of the homes surrounding the development. To understand this further, let's compare the characterization of Red Hook as a rural town. While only a small percentage of the Town's citizens actually engage in agricultural production, almost everyone champions "the preservation of agriculture and rural character" (Torres 2015). Red Hook is authentically rural because its citizens believe that it should be.

Each section of the Pattern Book illustrates significant architectural features of the Village, so that any new development acts as a continuation of the existing style. However, there is an important distinction made between honoring the architecture and making a 'copycat': "The buildings that have survived from previous eras do not have to be surrounded by half-hearted facsimiles of themselves; they may benefit more from the best efforts of our own era" (Pattern Book 2013, 24). Evidently, there is a difference between taking inspiration from the past and "cherry-picking architectural gestures from disparate sources to 'historicize' a new structure" (Pattern Book 2013, 12). By situating Tradition's architectural style within the 'future historical,' developers are skirting the line between replica and something authentically new. Their awareness of the marketability of nostalgia comes through in their emphasis on buyers' ability to 'reclaim the past' through the purchase of a home. At the same time, these emulations of the historical architectural style are authentic in that they also further Red Hook's building tradition.

The Pattern Book also highlights the importance of both variation and uniformity, two oppositional traits that New Urbanist development techniques afford Tradition the ability to hold both at once. Variation within the development is achieved through a commitment to not building a row of the same style home. In fact, two homes of the same silhouette, paint and roofing color, and facade cannot be seen within three lots of each other. At the same time, every aspect of each

home is controlled by the developers, and, once Tradition is completed, any changes made to a home will have to go through an approval process within the Homeowners Association.

Tradition's developers hope that this process will "protect the investment" that residents make when buying a home in this neighborhood. By living in Tradition, residents pledge to uphold this balance between variation and uniformity through a commitment to the aesthetics deemed acceptable by the developers and their neighbors.

Costs of Customization

When I arrive at the sales office one morning this past September, Megan is frantically searching for the changes in a customization for a house. She knows that it's somewhere, maybe in an email, or it was just never actually put in writing. "Maybe it was just in the meeting? He's just made so many changes, somehow this one got lost." She explains to me that this buyer has been particularly high maintenance especially during the building process. He comes in once a week to check out the progress on his house "He says, 'Oh, there's a rusty nail,' or 'I don't like how that looks. And you know,'" Megan explains, "he has OCD, so he's just been really high maintenance."

First he wanted a white house with a black trim on the windows, but because the black trim was on backorder, he had to change his choices. He then changed to a darker color exterior, and had to choose a different colored shingles for the roofing, to comply with the guidelines that Tradition has for designing the exterior of the homes.

At this point in the Fall, Tradition has seven complete homes that have been fully moved into. They have seven being constructed currently, and they will be building five specs. These are something that they weren't initially planning on doing because they don't sell already built

homes, but because of the pandemic, they are trying to get ahead of the market so that when there is a surge of cases in the winter, and a subsequent rush to buy homes outside of the city, they will have five houses that are ready to move into. This also will help with softening the blow if they get behind on building if there is another surge of the virus. It sounds like the pandemic didn't really slow them down in the building process.

Megan is trying to minimize confusion when it comes to the customization of each home. She worked with an interior design firm to create four different packages for each price range. On the lower end, there's the Classic package, which has the most basic furnishings. Then there's Premium, Exclusive, and Elite, each one with a \$25,000-50,000 difference in price. This will make it easier for the buyers, so that they don't get confused when ordering different things, but it will also allow for more transparency when it comes to pricing. There have been instances where people have gotten a little overzealous making additions to their houses, which add up really quickly (its additional cost on top of the price of the home) where once they saw the final cost, had to make the appropriate adjustments. As more people begin the process of buying and designing their home, the details become harder to keep track of, especially when they are building ten homes at once.

Megan then takes me around to look at the different stages of a Montgomery house, one of the more popular styles that Tradition has for sale. She apologizes about how hard it is to actually enter the house. Since the stairs aren't yet installed, I follow her hop up onto the porch which is a few feet above the gravel patch below. We enter the house just as someone is finishing up laying down the tile in the downstairs laundry room. The tile is evocative of a Persian rug, in

its pattern, and distressed look. Upon further inspection, it's clear that it's not actually painted, but printed.

We head over to the model home attached to the sales office. On my way through the sparkling kitchen (which I had toured maybe ten times before), I peek into the finished laundry room. A wave of uncanny familiarity washed over me as I realized that this was the exact spot where I had been standing in a home just a few minutes earlier. The same person who had just completed tiling the laundry room in the previous house, had laid the same thing here, just a few months earlier. I looked to my right, and I recognized everything in a new way: the kitchen island was parallel to the dining room; just off to the right the stairs wind up to the second floor where a set of windows look out onto the community green. All at once it was as if I were in both places at the same time. I later realized that this same layout might be repeated more than a dozen times, until all 102 homes are complete.

Although the theory behind Tradition is a rejection of suburban sprawl and the 'little boxes' of Levittown, they have been forced to flatten their pledge to customization in order to accommodate the many needs of their customers. Every aspect of TNDs, down to the paint color of each home, is born out of focus groups in an effort to capture the essence of what people will buy into. But, when faced with the physical, financial, and temporal costs of construction, Traditional Neighborhood Developments must choose between the theory driving them and efficiently yielding to these costs.

The Impact of Design

Unlike a lot of home buying experiences, Tradition is selling an idea of what will be, not what is. While there are prepared homes for potential buyers to tour, most homes are built once

they are sold. That way, Tradition can accommodate each resident with the physical layout and style of their preference. Although buyers have the option of fully customizing their homes, many opt for the prepackaged furnishing plans. The sales team at Tradition feels a responsibility to the collective group of residents buying into their project. “We’re not just selling houses,” Brian explains, “we’re selling a community.” In limiting people’s choices of paint color or roofing material, “it’s the fabric of the community that we’re protecting, so that it is a special place. . .we are creating a *place*, not just a house.” Despite their attention to the individual needs of their customers, Tradition understands their responsibility to satisfy the development as a whole. As a New Urbanist Development, Tradition prioritizes aesthetic continuity as a way of preserving the impact that the design of the development has on their residents.

Jane Jacobs, an activist, sociologist, and face of the New York Chapter of the Congress for the New Urbanism, wrote extensively on the benefits of neighborhoods built at the ‘human scale.’ Most TNDs are reminiscent of ‘the diverse neighborhoods’ that Jacobs describes in her extensive writing on urban planning: wide sidewalks and narrow streets force cars to slow, demonstrating a prioritization of pedestrians; porches are lower to street level for easy communication between neighbors; cars and their respective garages are located in alleyways behind each home rather than being an architectural feature of the facade; greenspaces are communal, and private lawns are minimal.

Jacobs writes about the many benefits of “the diverse neighborhood,” which, rather than just having one purpose, would have “many kinds of shops, entertainment centers, services, housing options, and public spaces” (Scott 1998, 138). Having multiple uses would allow for these neighborhoods to be active at all times as opposed to being useful for certain parts of the

day. For Jacobs, “the grave shortcoming of a planned city is that it not only fails to respect the autonomous purposes and subjectivity of those who live in it, but also fails to allow sufficiently for the contingency of the interaction between its inhabitants and what that produces” (Scott 1998, 144). Design alone could not be responsible for creating functional social order. While some planners saw these interactions as pure chaos, Jacobs would see a “complex and highly developed form of order” (Scott 1998, 137).

Confidence in the impact of design on residents’ daily routine is not unique to the developers of Tradition. In his book, *The Celebration Chronicles*, Andrew Ross describes his experience living at Celebration Florida, a TND built by Disney. On their website, Tradition summarized New Urbanism as “an approach to development that emphasizes people, relationships and a sense of community” (Tradition at Red Hook 2020). As TNDs, Tradition and Celebration alike credit the social connection between residents to the development’s design alone. Ross, in the spirit of Jacobs, challenges this notion, getting at the heart of the New Urbanist belief in the power design:

Given this glut of society-seeking residents in a fresh setting, the community’s early vitality owed as much to pioneer gusto to the streets, the lots, and the porches. The more involved residents became in the public life of the community, the less they were willing to credit the physical design for the riches of their social interactions. Naturally, they believed it was the residents, and not the planners or the street design, that made the community what it was. (Scott 1998, 85)

As Ross notes, in the cases where New Urbanism succeeds, it will be to the credit of the resident’s “pioneer gusto” and not developers’ calculated plans. At Tradition, the focus is on the aesthetic of building a ‘traditional’ *style* housing project, developers hope that social aspects follow. In every aspect of its design, Tradition must conform to the restraints of New Urbanist development practices, while simultaneously complying with the individual needs of their

residents. Tradition hopes that the constructed space will inform, and even control the interactions and actions of the residents who will soon occupy it. The question is, to what extent does the physical construction of the development impact the social patterns that will take place here? In the spirit of Jacobs, it seems inevitable that their interaction with the space will be what shapes it.

Tradition is a sales oriented development in that they only begin building once a lot has been sold, and the buyer has confirmed their choices for particular customization. The house that is currently being built is called “The Abbey,” it is dwarfed by the neighboring house which is almost double the size. I talked with a few of the subcontractors working on the site, one manned a table saw while the three others worked on the roof, bounding up and down a ladder to gather more shingles. Despite the noise from the tablesaw, one connects his phone to a speaker and sings along to some upbeat Bachata. Using a neighboring lot as a work and storage space, they have been able to build this house in just a few weeks. A makeshift dumpster—formed from a few pieces of plywood— overflows with plastic and debris, while a configuration of table saws, and workbenches line the outside of the house. I wonder what the conditions of building will be once there are eighty more homes, and more families are moved in. Will Tradition be a construction site for the next twenty years?

LIVING / the dust settles

Me: So, do you like being a member of this community? What is it like to be meeting people as they're joining or as they're seeking it out? What is that like?

Megan: Oh I love it. It's interesting for me. Because they feel, "Oh, she works here and lives here. So she gives us a good perspective of sales and also being a resident." So, and I'm honest, you know? Yeah. I tell people what it's like. And the question that I get the most is people say, "Well, what's it like to live in construction?" For me? I like construction. So I really don't mind it. Um, you know, they're finished by a certain time and on Sundays it's quiet. Um, and I, I like that part.

One sunny afternoon this past Fall, I sit down with Megan to talk about what it's been like to be one of the first residents of Tradition, especially with the construction going on all the time. She says that she thinks it's probably no big deal, and that she actually thinks that people like being able to watch stuff change. The one thing she thinks might be a bother is all the dust. The constant construction picks up dirt, and goes into the houses through the cracks in the doors and windows. New residents to the development are sold on the idea of what the future of Tradition will be, a future that will only exist after the dust settles, and construction is complete.

Right in the backyard of these residents' change is happening everyday, and will be for the next ten (or more) years.

I like to imagine the film of dust that coats everyone's beautiful brand new interiors. I think about how it's a constant, material reminder of Tradition's constant state of flux. I wonder what it's like having to constantly dust and wipe each surface of the brightly polished furnishings—a tangible reminder of one's physical and temporal position within this long term project.

Due to their focus on the future, Tradition has very little understanding of their project in the present moment. Construction forces that kind of forward thinking, as the imagined becomes materialized within a matter of weeks. Yet, there is a danger in having such an emphasis on the future when embarking on a large scale project like this. What is it like to be creating something permanent when you are determined to make your own presence impermanent? As much as they would like to think that they could be done with this development in a few years, some members of the team foresee this project lasting up to a decade.

In buying a property in Tradition, residents are not only subjected to this constant state of flux, they are also buying into the Homeowners Association (HOA), of which every household must be a member. The terms of the HOA Agreement affords community members leverage in determining how the developers' plans for the future, outlined in the document, are enacted. The town of Red Hook allowed for this project to move forward *on the condition that* it make spaces accessible to the wider community. And yet, for some residents the HOA fee is what legitimizes residents' homes as a private space.

One couple who recently purchased a home at Tradition described how they had seen a family picnicking on the communal green one weekend, and hadn't known what to do about it. "I just thought, who's that? They don't live here! It's not fair, it's not a public park." While they were tempted to intervene, and "ask them to leave, *nicely*," they were afraid that the family were another resident's guests. "Then again," listening in on our conversation, Megan noted it might be a nice visual to have people using the space for now. "You know people will drive by and see, 'Oh look how nice it is!' because there are people using the green. But it's not fair. It's just not fair." Here, the HOA, a monetary barrier, replaces the physical boundary of a wall, and continues to allow residents to separate themselves from those they identify as 'outsiders.'

Despite being a magnet to transplants (many of the new home owners are not from the area), the developers and residents of Tradition believe that their presence in Red Hook improves, if not reestablishes, its identity as a rural town. Much like the contradictory logics of white settlers in Zimbabwe that Yuka Suzuki describes in her book, *The Nature of Whiteness*, the people who live and work at Tradition use the qualities of the development as a means of legitimization. Within the gaps of their logics, it becomes clear that these reasonings—with each other, their surroundings, and within themselves—allow for them to avoid the uncomfortable truths of their presence. The aestheticization of 'tradition,' as well as HOA's becoming a tool for settler indigenization, function as modes for transplants to legitimize their locality. Although the logics behind this process are contradictory, it is in these gaps where these residents find reason to be where they are, and is what allows for them to believe that their actions are bettering the space beyond their neighborhood. By applying Suzuki's theories surrounding the imaginaries

that colonizers create in order to legitimize their presence, we may further understand the means of exclusion that give reason to the building of this development.

The “impossible contradictions” that make up the identity of white farmers in Zimbabwe run parallel to the logics of those who live and work at Tradition through their shared use of mission as a means of achieving rural identity (Suzuki 2017, 26). The aestheticization of ‘tradition,’ the HOA fee, and the moral high ground of preservation efforts become a means of settler indigenization are for transplants to legitimize their locality. In her chapter, ‘Reinstating Nature, Reinventing Morality,’ Suzuki uncovers the transition that farmers underwent during the rise of wildlife conservation. This shift “enabled farmers to reinvent their identities. . . recrafting themselves as public brokers of environmentalism” (Suzuki 2017, 24). The moral high ground of environmentalism is also characteristic of New Urbanism’s aspiration to “get things right in the belief that most other places are wrong” (Ross 1999, 51). At Tradition, 30 of the 50 acres will be preserved for wildlife trails available for residents’ recreational use. “By playing up their own role in conservation, wildlife ranchers,” and developers of Tradition alike, “strategically [portray] themselves as working wholeheartedly in the interest of nature and the moral good” which, in turn, “reinforces the argument for rights of tenure in one’s settled environment” (Suzuki 2017, 101-2). Despite all the inherent contradictions, by identifying their projects as conservation efforts, these colonial settlers are able to claim a moral superiority as a means of legitimizing locality.

The colonial imaginary that is evident in Tradition’s claims of restoring the land also appears in the weaponization of the Homeowners Association by settlers in their claiming of indigeneity. In her article, “Maintaining Whiteness: Fear of Others and Niceness,” Setha Low

chronicles various case studies that reveal the ways that gated communities are established and maintained as white spaces. Low posits that “the creation of ‘common interest developments’ provided a legal framework for the consolidation of suburban residential segregation” (2009, 81). Tradition at Red Hook is no exception. Although there is no physical barrier, the ‘niceness’ of Tradition—in its physical upkeep, assertion of the home as a financial investment, and efforts to keep unwanted others out—is what “retains its whiteness and privilege” (Low 2009, 87).

Each resident of Tradition pays a monthly fee toward the HOA to cover maintenance of their property and of various communal spaces. Because the neighborhood is easily accessible, people that don’t live there often use these spaces. Those that do live at Tradition, feel it is unfair for ‘outsiders’ to use the center green because they do not pay the fee. In other conversations, residents and developers have expressed that they were excited about how the dog park, playground, soccer field, and wilderness trails would be a way for Tradition to bridge the gap between the town and the housing project. Despite the architect’s effort to make Tradition’s public spaces accessible to the town, “the physical organization of the street pattern. . . enables residents to monitor their neighborhoods and to spot outsiders who linger” (Low 2009, 85). In my time at Tradition, I have overheard discussions where residents deliberately commonly observed strangers seen wandering the neighborhood. One notable interaction centered around identifying a family who had decided to play frisbee on the town green. The absurd intensity and frequency of these speculative conversations support the notion that “the more ‘purified’ the environment, the more homogeneous and controlled, the greater residents’ ability to identify any deviant individuals who should not be there” (Low 2009, 85).

Due to the lack of public spaces in rural areas, “the relative isolation and homogeneity discourages interaction with people who are identified as the ‘other’” (Low 2009, 85). Payment of the fee affords the residents belonging to a place where *they* would otherwise be seen at the outsiders, as well as a motivation to push those that they see as non-residents out. By paying a monthly fee of around \$320, residents are not only affording the upkeep of common green and indoor spaces alike, they are also purchasing belonging and with it, exclusivity. Some residents believe that the HOA guarantees their privacy from the surrounding area, yet the planners and town agree that Tradition’s openness is key to being accepted into the broader community. For some, ownership of communal spaces is determined by an ability to keep other people off of it, and let other people in.

Another gap that has proven quite difficult to ignore is their simultaneous emphasis on communal as well as private spaces. The ideals behind communal living are in direct conflict with suburban notions of privacy and ownership. Much of what Tradition offers to its prospective residents explicitly requires cohabitation; the communal garden, the club house, and the mail building are all places where neighbors can—and will—convene. Even though individual lots are merely feet apart from each other (allowing for you to easily look into neighboring homes), a white picket fence lines each property. TNDs *claim* to firmly reject suburban sprawl by shrinking lawns, and putting garages behind homes, and yet I can’t help but feel that they are what they despise.

Ross, who lived at Celebration, Disney’s infamous TND, identifies the ethos and style of New Urbanism as being of “neotraditionalism,” which consumer reports of the firm responsible for Celebration define as “combining the security and responsibility of the 50s with the

individual freedoms and personal choice of the ‘Me Generation’” (Ross 1999, 27). The aesthetics of neotraditionalism are largely based in an amalgamation of western styles and architectural references in an effort to satisfy the preferences seen in consumer science. Ross lists the six selected housing styles (and the feelings they evoke) adopted for the traditionalist offerings: Classical, Victorian, Colonial Revival, Coastal, Mediterranean, French (1999, 26). At Tradition, prospective home buyers are also encouraged to pick from a set number of styles, such as Montgomery, Baldwin, or Schuyler. For the interiors, buyers can select from the four design packages: The Classic, Premium, Exclusive, or Elite (listed in order of price from least to most expensive). Much like the physical planning of developments, language choice of TNDs is intended to dictate the experience of residents. While the styles of homes at Celebration are based on locations, at Tradition every word seems to be an effort toward establishing the development as something to be aspired for, as if through the purchase of a home at Tradition, residents are achieving upward socioeconomic mobility.

Affording Inclusivity

As outlined in the “Centers and Greenspaces Plan,” the proposed TND Residential Subdistrict would be required to consist of a minimum of three different housing types (such as houses, duplexes, multi-family, townhouses, etc.). These measures were intended to ensure an adequate supply of more affordable housing types in the Town (Centers and Greenspaces 2011, 11). Many residents who I spoke with were under the impression that these homes would be an opportunity for them to downsize. “But from what we're seeing,” one resident explained to me, “you know, they're not affordable housing for first time homebuyers.” Truthfully, these homes are not affordable for many of the residents in Red Hook. Due to the rise in costs of construction

due to the pandemic, Tradition claims that the ultimate selling prices of the homes are much higher than what was originally anticipated. Despite the apparent “realities of construction,” for some, this was just another example of the town heading in the wrong direction, leaving behind those who have made it what it is. Although there aren’t any walls, there are clear expectations of who will be included in the future of Tradition.

It’s impossible to know what exactly Tradition’s future will look like, however being a part of a larger architectural movement means that we can imagine it by comparing it to developments of its kind. Seaside, which was the first TND and the primary set of the 1998 film *The Truman Show*, was designed by the same architects that trained the New Urbanist developers who can be credited for creating Tradition. According to Zillow, the typical value of homes in the area surrounding Seaside is \$646,624, while the average listing price of homes currently on the market within the development is well over \$3 million, with one unbuilt six bedroom home priced at \$11,995,000. While the prices of these homes are exorbitantly higher than those currently on sale at Tradition, it’s not difficult to imagine that in just a few years, they could be the same. According to Vince, Warwick Grove, a TND that inspired much of Tradition, “Holds the highest resale value right now in that area, and there's almost a waiting list for people that want to move in.” The desirability of being a part of one of these TNDs, including Tradition, is so high that it becomes increasingly inaccessible to the people they were initially designed to serve.

Each time I return to Tradition I am shocked at how much it has changed. As more families move in, construction forges on. From last winter to now, both the physical landscape and my understanding of this development has transformed. The story of Tradition is a larger

account of change in this area. Red Hook's identity is rooted in the balance between preservation of the past and expansion toward the future. Being a part of change here means taking stock in the history of this area. Authenticity to the area is important for both the Town and Tradition, so that this new neighborhood can be seen as the first step in the direction of continuous new growth. Thanks to all of those residents, new and old, who have allowed for this change to take over their backyard, Tradition may be able to preserve Red Hook's history and bring it into the future. For now, all we are left with are our imaginations of what could be.

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