“Easton’s Us”
A Postmodern Critical Performance in Three Acts

Chanter
Retinue (5)
Gameshow announcer
Master of Ceremonies
Katrina Vandenhoevel

High Priestess
Amen Chorus (5)
Alex Trebek
Siskel
Interviewer

Partakers (3)
Votaries (5)
Jeopardy contestants (3)
Ebert
Seema Shapur, ‘critic’

Producer
Chuck (Announcer)
Stage director
Vanna
Jack Sajack

Act I, Scene i ‘Liturgical Service’

[House lights dimmed, solemn organ music.]

[Processional through the aisles, throwing confetti money, up to stage.]

CHANTER: All glory and power to you oh blessed symbol of success, joy, bliss, and happiness.

[Easton Mall banner flashes]

RETINUE: [echo]...happiness!

CHANTER: Grant that we may bathe in the light of your prestige and status.
RETINUE: ...status!

CHANTER: Give us the power to wear the most expensive designer labels.
RETINUE: ...designer labels!

CHANTER: Insure that our costs are held artificially low by exploited overseas labor forces including children.
RETINUE: ...and little babies!

CHANTER: And that we may live happily forever and ever.

[On Stage]

HIGH PRIESTESS: Please turn to page 4 in your hymnal and speak the words of glory along with me. A reading from the book of Wexner.

CHANTER: And he went before the board and said, “They will not read advertisements, they will become advertisements; They will not consume, they will be consumed; they will not wear designer labels, they will be designer labels. And the buyer shall lay down with the product, and they shall become one.” This is the word according to Easton.

[solemn organ music]

Act I, scene ii. Preachment

[High priestess mounts a platform]

HIGH PRIESTESS: Every once in a while, we get depressed, lonely, sad. It doesn’t have to be like that. [Happy organ music starts.] You don’t have to feel pain, you don’t have to feel bad! The mall is here for ya!

AMEN CHORUS: Amen, Hallelujah.
[Images on screen of Easton, Vanna with sign that reads “Paid Commercial Advertisement”]
HIGH PRIESTESS: Mama wants you to come home! [Holds arms up and looks up]

AMEN CHORUS: Hallelujah!

HIGH PRIESTESS: Daddy wants you to come home!...Come home, my children.

AMEN CHORUS: All praise.

HIGH PRIESTESS: Come home to Easton.

AMEN CHORUS: Amen, amen.

HIGH PRIESTESS: May the mall bless you and keep you. [bows to the east.]

AMEN CHORUS: Amen.

[High priestess grabs host-box and comes to front and center.]

HIGH PRIESTESS: All those who would like to receive ‘consumer-communion’ may now form a line.

[People jostle for position. High priestess gives out hosts with iconographic symbols, speaking the name of each:]

HIGH PRIESTESS: Michael Jordan, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger ....
May a peace of the action be always with you.

PARTAKER: And with your bank account.

HIGH PRIESTESS: May a peace of the action be always with you.

PARTAKER: And with your bank account.

[Easton security quietly remove two ethnic minorities from the line.]

HIGH PRIESTESS: May a peace of the action be always with you.

PARTAKER: And with your bank account.

[music]
Act I, Scene iii. Polyphony

[Five VOTARIES come forward. Contrapuntal round, drone:]

| J.Crew | Marco Triccoci Day Spa | Donna Karan |
| Perlmutter | Cheryl’s Cookies | Armani |
| Contempo Casuals | Maggie Moo's | Versace |
| Baby Gap | Starbucks | Nike |
| Abercrombie & Fitch | Hama Sushi | Bill Blass |
| Restoration Hardware | Brio Tuscan | Givenchy |
| Virgin Megastore | Johnny Rockets | Air Jordan |
| AmC/Planet Hollywood | Starbucks | Eddie Bauer |
| Gameworks | Harry London Candies | Brooks Brothers |
| Pottery Works | Aunt Anne’s | Chico’s |
| Ann Taylor | The Icing | Banana Republic |
| Funny Bones | Life Time Fitness | Gap |
| P.F. Chang's | Starbucks | American Eagle |
| Smith & Hawken | Victoria’s Secret | Abercrombie & Fitch |
| Williams-Sonoma | Around Midnight | Gucci |
| Barnes & Noble | Gallery of the Stars | Polo |
| Starbucks | Starbucks | Ralph Lauren |
| Starbucks | Starbucks | Calvin Klein |
| Starbucks | Starbucks | Martha Stewart |

[AMEN CHORUS form a half circle around High priestess, on their knees.]

HIGH PRIESTESS: Thanks be to Wexner.

VOTARIES: [bend down repeatedly, chant in monotone]: Easton! Easton! Easton! Easton! Easton!

HIGH PRIESTESS: [points at follower]: Pose! [Follower poses.] Pose! [Follower poses.] Pose!

STAGE DIRECTOR: Cut, that’s a wrap.
[Lights up.]

[Master of Ceremonies holds up applause sign. Stage crew rearranges set quickly. Master and Director enter from opposite sides of the stage.]

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: How’d that go?

STAGE DIRECTOR: [looks doubtful]

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: [as they slowly stroll off.] What you doin’ tonight?

STAGE DIRECTOR: Jeopardy.
[cue music]

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Idiot.
[music]

Act II, Scene i. “Jeopardy”

CHUCK (game show announcer): This is Jeopardy!!! Let’s meet the contestants. [Spot light on contestants, drum roll, music] Our returning champion a nuclear physicist from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology – ALBERT SPOHR, who has accumulated a two day total of $10,200. And the challengers – BURL BANDERSNATCH from sunny Los Angeles. [applause] And
JANICE CLEAVER from Poughkipsie, NY. [applause] And here is your host ALEX TREBECK. 
[applause. enter stage right]

ALEX: Hey, Chuck, thank you very much. [music fades out.] Our current champ has rolled the competition the past two nights. We'll have to see what BUFF and Janet [she corrects him: Janice] say about that. [spot light on board] The categories are Shopping. This mall is your mall, Objects of desire, Alien nation, Self-consumption artifacts. Buff, tell us where to begin.

BUFF: Self-consuming artifacts for 100 please.
ALEX: Answer: Instead of affordability of necessary goods for living, fantasies of self-fulfillment through consumption.
BUFF: What is a shopping spree?
ALEX: Sorry.
ALBERT: Uhuh, what characterizes the postmodern economy of symbolic value?
ALEX: Right, go again Albert.

ALBERT: Self-consuming artifacts for 200 please.
ALEX: Answer: The transformation of individuals into desiring free-spending consumers.
JANICE: What is the true dynamic of postmodern capitalism?
ALEX: Bingo, go again, please.

JANICE: Self-consuming artifacts for 300.
ALEX: Answer: Not industrial production and manufacturing, but the political economy of the sign.
[long pause]
JANICE: What is the true engine of capitalism?
ALEX: That's very good, Alicc, go again.

JANICE: Self-consuming artifacts for 400. Alex.
ALEX: Answer: The practice of consumption that raids 1st World economies.
JANICE: [Right away] What is the production of desire?
ALEX: Mmmmm. A homemaker AND a socialist.

JANET. Self-consuming artifacts for 500 please.
ALEX: Answer: Carl Lewis.
[long pause]
BUFF: Who is the only major Olympic Gold medalist not to appear on the cover of Wheaties?
ALEX: That's right Bufferoo. [disco Jeopardy] We're getting awfully close to the end of our game. Let's see if anybody can pull ahead. Buff-bad boy, you control the board. We'll be right back. [applause]

Act II, Scene ii. Commercial

VOICE-OVER: Tired of gritty city life or long commutes from podunk? Would you like to live in a world where all your pleasures are at your fingertips? Would you? Huh? huh? huh? [music] It's not a fantasy! It's Easton Town Center! Featuring "Best-of-class" premier dining, entertainment, shopping, and condominiums. You never have to leave home to go shopping, cause you ARE home! This luxurious destination will soon include soccer fields, an indoor/outdoor sports complex, and 150 acres of land preserved in its natural state. Call today at 555-5356. Have your checkbook ready!

[ALEX is standing with contestants.]

ALEX: [Alex is facing the contestants chatting quietly. He turns to the audience.] We're back with our contestants. And Albert, what is your occupation?
ALBERT: I'm a nuclear physicist at M.I.T.
ALEX: Whoa....And do you have any hobbies?
ALBERT: Mostly, reading the dictionary, dirt biking, ......parcheesee.
ALEX: [Do the Church Lady thing:] Well, welcome back to jeopardy. BUFF Bandersnatch is from L.A. BUFF, tell us what do you do for a living?
BUFF: I'm a model and actor.
ALEX: Mmmn. And what do you do when you're not bussing tables?
BUFF: That's funny Alex.
ALEX: Hobbies?
BUFF: Oh, windsurfing, scuba-diving...
ALEX: And, BUFF, something I always have to ask our contestants: Do you wear boxers or shorts?
BUFF: Neither.
ALEX: Checks or stripes?
BUFF: I'm not sure.
ALEX: Cotton or silk?

[Theme music interrupts ALEX]

ALEX: And Jodene Cleaver [JANICE corrects him] tell us about yourself.
JANICE: I'm a housewife....
ALEX: [interrupts her] We gotta pay some rent. Be right back.

Act II, Scene iii. Paid Advertisement

[Lavish music]
INTERVIEWER: Would you like to live in the perfect community? Would you like to? Huh? Huh? Huh? Well, it's not a dream. You can live in decadence and be a status symbol to your neighbors. Get your paper and pencil ready. [Everybody whips out paper and pencil.] In the late 1980s when billionaire retailer Les Wexner decided to build a new residential community in the small rural township of New Albany, he had a dream in mind.

LES WEXNER: 'I wanted a cradle-to-grave community that integrates education, business, health, recreation, and volunteer work.'

INTERVIEWER: Money can't buy everything, but it can get you connections, privilege, status, and good demographics.

INTERVIEWER: Les, does New Albany have any connection to the development of Easton Mall?

LES WEXNER: As a point of clarification, Easton is not a mall, it's an open-air pedestrian designed leisure time destination. I mention this only so you can make appropriate comparisons to interior, traditional malls.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Excuse me.

LES WEXNER: Yes, to answer your question, New Albany and Easton are nearly adjacent properties, and soon I intend to own the world.

INTERVIEWER: Operators are standing by. Certain restrictions apply. You must have a big bank account and look like one of us.

Act II, scene iv. Back to the Game

[Lavish music, fade out] [applause while spotlight turns on TREBECK]

ALEX: We're getting awfully close to the end of our game. Let's see if anybody can pull ahead.
BUFF: I'll have Objects of Desire for 100 please.
ALEX: According to Karl Marx, that which represents human labor in objectified form.
BUFF: What is...
ALBERT: What is a commodity?
ALEX: Albert, go again.
ALBERT: Objects of Desire for 200.
ALEX: In a system of wage-labor, that which itself becomes a commodity.
JANICE: [pause] What is wage-labor?

JANICE: Objects of Desire for 300 please.
ALEX: According to Marx, what happens when we allow ourselves to become commodified.
JANICE: [articulate clearly] What is a secular form of idolatry?

JANICE: Objects of Desire for 400.
ALEX: What happens when the market transforms relations between people into relations between products.
ALEX: "I'm not innocent."
BUFF: What did Britney Spears perform at the Grammys in see-through nylon?
ALEX: Right again, Buff 'n Go. [MUSIC]

Act II, Scene v. Public Service Announcement

[role the monitor to the center]
[Starting in close-up.]

KATRINA VANDENHOEVEL: We have become a society dominated by consumption. We live and work and play in places like this, places that cater to our every superficial, whim, every dream of status, wealth, pleasure. I call these places, desire communities.

[turns] We can't really buy happiness, so we buy its illusion. Symbols like Nike, Versace, and Givenchy have become more real, than the real things—food, shelter, family, community. Vast corporate resources are devoted to stimulating our desire to purchase these dreams.

[Slow zoom out. Behind him a kid with Nike shoes gets accosted by another kid, and then a gang of kids, who start a tug of war, and then a brawl.

"There's a price for this. The fabric of communities is being slowly drained away. True happiness is being replaced by fake-baked momentary pleasures. We're turning into the things we covet. We're fetishizing ourselves to death!"

[Bouncers come on stage and drag them all away.] [music][Spotlight up on TREBECK]

ALEX: By the way, Chuck, can you tell us what our contestants walk away with today?

CHUCK: [Jeopardy music. Powerpoint gift symbol.] "Today our 1st place winner gets three nights and four days at the wonderful Orlando Disneyworld. Our second place contestant receives a magical week at the new Universal Theme Park in Burbank California. Back to you Alex.

ALEX: This is the final jeopardy Lightning Round. Winner take-all sudden death final Jeopardy! The answer is: The most profitable item sold at Easton Town Center. Please right your answer and your wage.

[Jeopardy music]
ALEX: Albert, how much did you wager?
ALBERT: $2400.
ALEX: And you wrote?
ALBERT: What are Preparation H Medicated Wipes?
ALEX: [Just stares blankly at Albert for a few seconds.]...Oh, that's too bad Alex. How much did you lose?

ALEX: Sandy, how much did you wager?
JANICE: $800.
ALEX: And you wrote?
JANICE: What are Lady Godiva chocolates?
ALEX: Janice, you are the weakest link. [in unison with everyone:] Goodbye. [BOUNCER escort]

BOUNCERS: Goodbye! ..... Goodbye!

ALEX: Buffstuff, how much did you wager?
ALBERT: $3000.
ALEX: And you wrote?
BUFF: What is the Victoria Secret catalogue????
ALEX: That’s it! Buff Bandersnatch is our new winner! [Jeopardy Disco music & Chuck]

[Women crowd around BUFF and walk him off-stage.]

CHUCK: Guests stay in the luxurious EastonDisney Hotel. Gifts provided by Easton Management. Accomodations courtesy of Easton Hotel. Alex Trebeck’s suit courtesy of The Limited. This has been a production of Viacom International in association with The Limited. [Music out]

[MASTER OF CEREMONIES and STAGE DIRECTOR enter from opposite sides of stage.]

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: That was good.

STAGE DIRECTOR: I’m exhausted.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Better not be, you gotta another show!

STAGE DIRECTOR: Ohhh. [music]

Act 3 Siskel & Ebert

[Movie screen on back wall (rear projection). The stars sitting facing away from the audience, and then turn their heads around.]

SISKEL: Hello, I’m Gene Siskel
EBERT: And I’m Roger Ebert.
SISKEL, EBERT [in unison]: Let’s go to the movies!

SISKEL: Our first movie today comes from Columbus, Ohio, where an independent documentary producer from Denison U has created quite a buzz with a scathing indictment of local entrepreneur and business owner Les Wexner’s new Easton Town Center. You may not recognize that name, Roger, but you do have some of his clothing line.
EBERT: Are you talking about my tailor-made Gap jeans?
SISKEL: No, I’m talking about the Victoria’s Secret lingerie you keep in the bedroom.
EBERT: Ha, ha, ha. You’re a card.
SISKEL: Ohio filmmaker Seema Shapur has got a lot of local folks talking about her rant on life as a shopping experience. Let’s watch.

[film sound, monitor up.]

SEEMA: “The interesting thing about Easton is that, even though we’re distracted from the fact by so much exquisite scenery, by the largest square footage of space is devoted to parking. The truth of Easton is, when you boil it down to the fundamental reality of precious real estate, parking. You’ll notice that the sidewalks stop as soon as you get outside the faux town center of pedestrian shopping spaces. You’re only supposed to slow down to walk where you can buy. It is almost impossible, and very dangerous, to walk outside the mall area, where the traffic would regard a pedestrian as a very strange phenomenon. Just as with everything else, the ideal of a healthy village life is an illusion.”
EBERT: I like that. Parking. Good point.
SISKEL: Well, I don't. In fact, this is the most nauseating, self-righteous, liberal crap I've had to listen to in a long time. I'm outraged:

SEEMA: Easton is a pseudo-village where pseudo-feelings are stimulated with pseudo-experiences to create a pseudo-world of bliss and satisfaction. Easton is the social consumption of images, the accumulation of meaningless spectacles in which people do not actually experience events in temples of frenetic consumption. All that was once directly lived has become mere representation. The goal here is to restructure society without community. Easton represents the official language of enslaved thought, a thought underwritten by the State, a managed thought. Its motto: On this spot, nothing will ever happen. Easton represents the mindless twitchings of a brain-dead culture, artificially sustained by the intravenous feeding of undeserved wealth.

SISKEL: [whisper] What did she just say?
EBERT: [Turns to audience] I rest my case. By the way, Siskel, didn't you die a couple years ago?
SISKEL: Yeah, well this is a postmodern performance. We're running out of time. [stands up.] Stand up. OK, let's do it. You ready. On three.
EBERT, SISKEL [in unison, like WWF fighters] Thumbs down! [EBERT goes over to SEEMA in the audience and harrasses her.]
SISKEL: [music] And until next time, save us the aisle seats. [more lights out] Who turned out the lights?
[applause. music. Throw money.]

[finis]
Cast & Crew

Teacher
Master of Ceremonies
Applause sign holder
Chanteuse/Announcer
High priestess
Follower
Amen Chorus
Druids
Director
Security Guard
Wexner
Nike kids
Bouncer
Alex Trebek
Vanna
Janice
Albert Spohr
Buff Bandersnatch
Jerry Springer
Siskel
Ebert
Documentary Artist
Audio
Sound
Powerpoint
Sound FX
Artwork
drij
JT
Julie L
Curtis
Taylor
Ryan
Seema, Julie V, Dana, Steve
Seema, Julie V, Dana
Brant
Jason
Matt
Connor F., Ryan
Connor O
Travis
Jenny
Elizabeth
Ashish
Dan
JT
Ryan
Jeremy Miller
Seema
Belkis, Jessica
Ashley, Matt, Conor O
Jill
Megan D.
TJ, Ashley

Sing-Along

Chanters: All glory and power to you oh blessed symbol of success, joy, bliss, and happiness.

audience: happiness!

Chanters: Grant that we may bathe in the light of your prestige and status.

audience: status!

Chanters: Give us the power to wear the most expensive designer labels.

audience: designer labels!

Chanters: Insure that our costs are held artificially low by exploited overseas labor forces including children.

audience: and little babies!

Chanters: And that we may live happily forever and ever.

Works (Mis)appropriated


Gumpert, Gary & Drucker, Susan J. "Place as Medium: Exegesis of the Café Drinking Coffee, the Art of Watching Others, Civil Conversation - With Excursions into the Effects of Architecture and Interior Design."


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1 The text of "East of Easton" is a bricolage of quotes from the above sources, as well as advertising and PR materials from Easton, 'quotations' from popular culture texts, and assorted detritus from the postmodern world. Il y a rien dehors le texte.