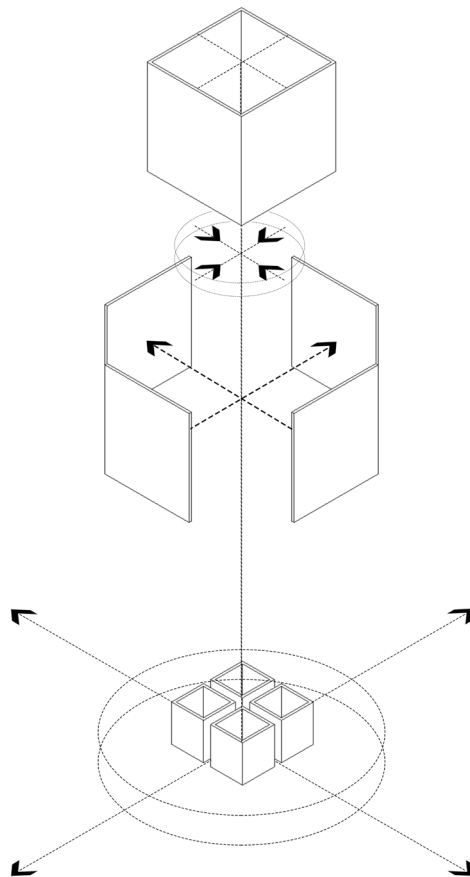


[de]BOX

An alternative retail typology for Silverton



Location: The Pioneer Museum, Silverton, Pretoria
Programme: Retail Space
Study Field: Human Settlements and Urbanism

By Juan Cloete

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree: Master in
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Course Co-Ordinator: Dr Arthur Barker



Declaration

In accordance with Regulation 4€ of the General Regulations (G. 57) for dissertations and thesis, I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Master of Architecture (Professional) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I further state that no part of my thesis has already, or is currently being submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

I further declare that the thesis is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the work of others, the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and fully acknowledged in text and list references.

.....
Juan Cloete

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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and always believing in the project.

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For supporting me throughout the year and always keeping me
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Leatitia and Nellis

For the help with the model.

All the studio friends.



“As much as we may deny or refuse it, shopping has become one of the only remaining means by which we experience public activity. It in many cases determines, sustains, and often defines the identity of an institution and or city.”

Rem Koolhaas (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 130)

SAMEVATTING

Markte, arkades en afdelingswinkels word oor die algemeen in die middel van stedelike gebiede aangetref en dien as die dryfveer vir stedelike ontwerp en sosialisering. Die oorspronklik Amerikaans geïnspireerde “ingeslote inkopiesentrum” argitektoniese konsep, het verder spoedig deur metropolitaanse gebiede reg deur wêreld versprei, waar dit ‘n onvergelykbare dryfveer van handel geword het.

Volgens Michael Beyard (2006:5) is die probleem met inkopiesentrums agter dat hulle mank gaan aan diev sogenaamde eiland sindroom en geneig is om oorgrote dose met leë fasades te wees. Die onderliggende probleem met kleinhandel spasies in stedelike gebiede is verder dat hulle inwaarts neig met streng beheerde klimaatstoestande wat grense en ‘n sosiale ruimte skep waar geen interaksie met die gemeenskap wat dit poog om te dien, kan plaasvind nie.

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die manifestasie van ‘n alternatiewe kleinhandel tipologie in die voorstelike gebied van Silverton, oos van Pretoria. Die voorstel wat gemaak word poog nie om ‘n winkelsentrum te herskep nie, maar volg die teoretiese uitgangspunt as riglyn om ‘n kleinhandel tipologie te skep wat verteenwoordigend is van die konteks van Silverton. Dit poog verder om ‘n argitektuur te skep wat beide kontekstueel en inklusief is binne dieteoretiese uitgangspunt van ‘n kritiese ontleding van die “boks-tipologie wat alternatiewe denke en metodes van kleinhandel Argitektuur binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks tot gevolg het.

MALL- STAD - SILVERTON- HANDEL - PUBLIEK

ABSTRACT

At the centre of our urban areas, there is the market spaces, arcades and department stores, which have always been the driving force for urban design and central spaces for socialisation. In the 21st century, the enclosed shopping mall concept, an initial American architectural invention, spread to metropolitan areas across the world, where it is an unparalleled engine of commerce.

The problem with shopping malls, is that they, as Michael Beyard explains, suffer from island syndrome and tend to be oversized boxes with blank facades (Beyard et al. 2006: 5). The fundamental problem retail space produce in our urban context is that they are turned inwards towards vast climatic controlled spaces. This creates borders and a social space that has no interaction with the community it intends to serve.

This dissertation investigates the manifestation of an alternative retail typology in the neighbourhood of Silverton, East of Pretoria. The proposal does not intend to recreate the mall in essence, but to follow the theoretical premise as guideline in order to produce an appropriate retail typology that is representative of the context of Silverton. Intending to produce an architecture that is contextual and inclusive the theoretical premise is a critical analysis of the “box-typology” that explores method of rethinking retail Architecture in the context of South Africa.

MALL - URBAN - SILVERTON - CIVIC - COMMERCE

LOCATION



Figure 1.1 Site Location (Author)

THE SILVERTON MERCHANT

The merchant is the middleman between the consumer and merchandise, the person who turns trade into commerce. Wherever he settles he becomes an integral part of urban life. In the ancient Greece, merchants spread their wares under the colonnades of the Stoa, which was designated for their activity (Gruen 1960: 17). In the peculiar neighbourhood of Silverton, east of Pretoria, the result of industrial activities happening in close proximity to residential components, has produced an immediate availability of materials. This has allowed the Silverton Merchant to make and trade specialised merchandise. The original town layout of Silverton was laid out to provide for small scale urban agriculture (Kritzinger 1980: 45). This was later replaced by small scale industry and retail that supplied the entire Pretoria with customised goods. As there is no space provided for these merchants, they are often disguised by factories, houses and overshadowed by large scale retail buildings.



Figure 1.2 The Silverton Merchant (Author)

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Figure 1.3 [de]BOX (Author)



01

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The mall as background
- 1.2 Research Problem
 - 1.2.1 Social Hijacking
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1.1 THE MALL AS BACKGROUND

Today, more people in South Africa and the world live in urban than in rural areas and this trend of urbanisation is set to increase further into the 21st century (Messedat 2015: 18). At the centre of these urban areas, there use to be vibrant market spaces, arcades and department stores, which have always been the driving force for urban design and central spaces for socialisation. With the arrival of the automobile and modernist urban design strategies in the 20th century, it brought about an entirely new urban fabric known as suburbia, which had an immediate demand for shopping facilities.

Retail architecture evolved continuously during this process of change in urban density and responded with new developments and innovations. That which started as small neighbourhood centres, quickly morphed into what is today known as the closed shopping mall concept, the mega retail centre. In the 21st century this initial American architectural invention, spread to metropolitan areas across the world, where it became an unparalleled engine of commerce (Saberwal 2013: 24). These centres of commerce started replacing downtowns as the central hubs of towns. Regarded as the practical ideology of capitalism, it became a set of social, cultural and economic practices based upon the notion of commodity exchange.

Shopping malls in particular are often seen by architects and theorists as places of extreme social control, yet these are the very places in cities which supposedly serve an unscripted civic function. They are frequently feared and deserted by the influential and elite of the profession as it is set to be populist and therefore lies outside the normal boundaries of good taste set by professional designers (Chaplin 1998: 7).

Retail architecture is a dominant force in the shaping of our environment, and is therefore an important factor in the production of architecture (Chaplin 1998: 7). According to Messedat (2015: 19), there have been attempts to revive these “decorative boxes” visually; however, the problem still remained that the design of retail spaces has often suggested that it is only possible to offer products successfully at the expense of spatial qualities.



1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

“Shopping malls have replaced the parks and squares that were traditionally the home of free speech... The economic lifeblood once found downtown has moved to suburban centres, which have substantially displaced the downtown business districts as the centres of commercial and social activity... The predominant characteristic of the normal use of these properties is its all-inclusiveness.”

New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Robert Wilentz. From declaring the shopping mall as a form of public space (Koolhaas et al.2001:154)

1.2.1 SOCIAL HIJACKING

In the 21st century shopping centres are no longer appraised merely as places for economic transactions, though it is their main reason for existence, but as a public space. Victor Gruen, the father of the suburban closed mall concept, wrote in his book *Shopping Towns USA*, that the modern shopping centre will become a centre of social, cultural, and recreational life, in addition to its primary function of a shopping facility (Gruen 1961: 15). He argued that the mall will be the community centre of the future that will bring more people to its premises and keep them there for longer period of time. It will be a boon to the social and cultural life of the community it serves (Kelly 1956: 68). A typology that will recreate something that existed in the Greek agora, Roman forums and medieval markets.

According to Leong (2001a), the problem is that the mall produces a system he refers to as social implosion. A system that misuses people's desire for public and social interaction through introducing controlled spaces with capitalist agendas (Leong 2001a: 134). The contemporary lifestyle observes shopping as the most important social activity. Developers and designers of the retail built environment exploit the power of place and intuitive understanding of the structuration of space to facilitate consumption and thus the realization of retail profits (The magic of the mall). Public space is replaced by the design of the mall which creates a self-enclosed, besieged and regulated environment. The shopping mall is seen as a space of social communion, yet it is only a quasi-public- and well ordered space (Gottdiener 1995: 90). The problem is that people who live in an environment with few public spaces and low density demographics, like in suburbia, realises the lack of social interaction and order, and then enter the mall (Gurciel 2003: 56). In the South African townscapes, malls have replaced the spaces of public interaction. Thus the importance and the impact its design has on social, public and urban identity becomes inevitable.

1.2.2 ISLAND SYNDROME

“First, all activities in malls are turned inward; they have blank walls on their outsides. The occasional logo of the department store can be seen from the parking lot in order to break the monolithic pattern of bricks and steel; in fact, they look like concrete bunkers.” (Gurciel 2003: 55)

Michael Beyard explains shopping centres as spaces that suffer from a term he refers to as the island syndrome (Beyard et al. 2006: 5). Where the box design approach of contemporary retail spaces produces a disengaged relationship between mall and town. Leong describes this as two entities, public space and town space, both disconnected through architectural intent as controlled space. This separation meant that retail spaces have grown larger, more concentrated and more autonomous from their surroundings. One of the foremost problems the archetypical box of contemporary shopping malls create is a condition of centrally owned clusters, architecturally unified retailing spaces designed to accommodate automobiles while restricting access to pedestrians in its core (Kawinski 1985, 48).

Karrholm (2012) argues that the fundamental problem retail space produce in our urban context is that they are turned inwards towards internalised pedestrian spaces. They create borders and have no interaction with their surrounding context. They have become isolated, single use developments that stand apart from the community and that turn their back on their context. This can be primarily attributed to the fact that they are designed around cars and not people.

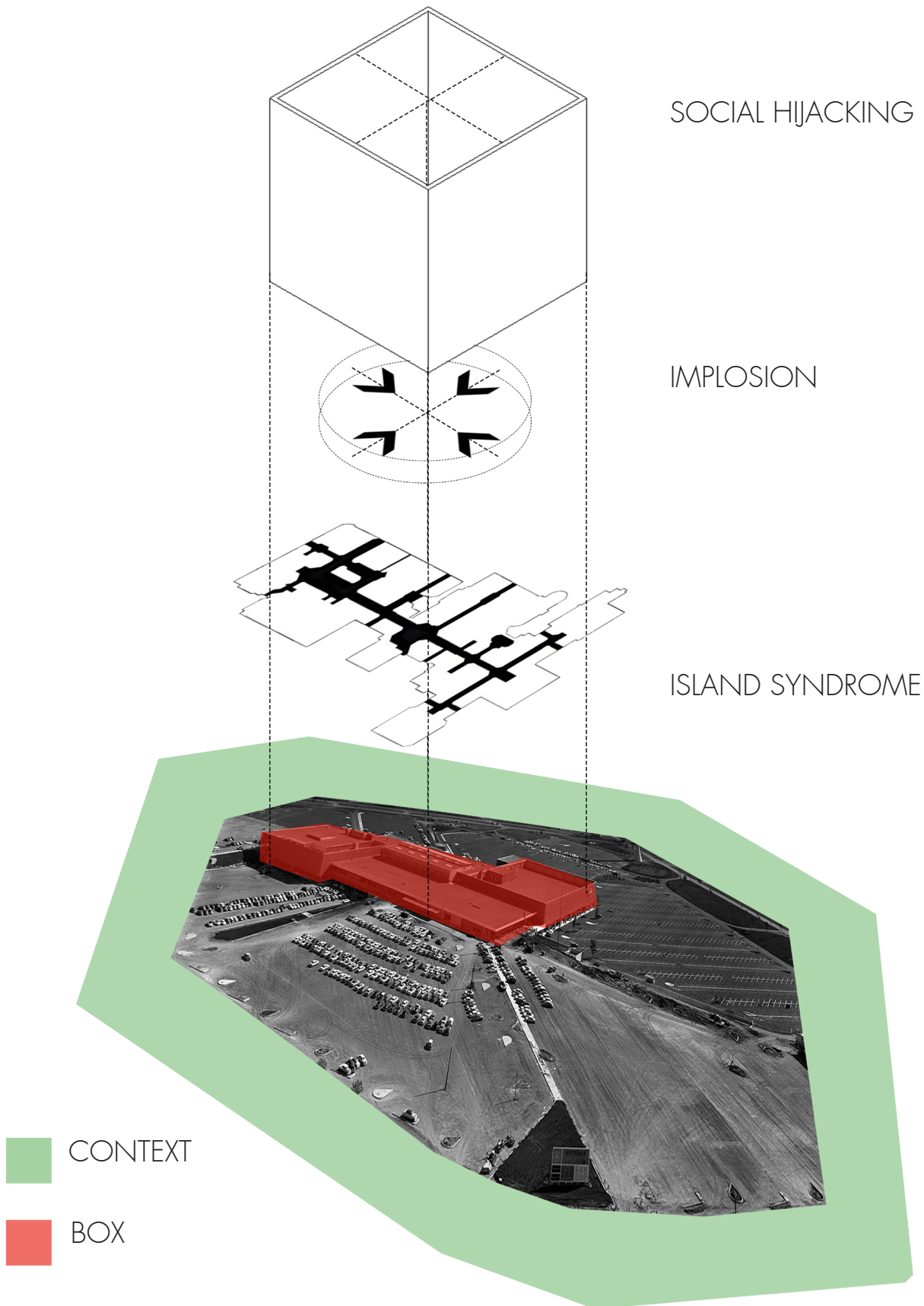


Figure 1. 4 The Research Problem (Author)

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1.2.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

“Is there a way to energize these facilities, to re-conceive them both as landscapes and as structures that can really re-engage community?”

—William Ivey (Smiley 2002: 1)

The research question is then summarised into the following three points:

- What should a retail space be in the South African context? Taking into consideration the context of Silverton, is the mall typology a relevant retail typology in the suburban South African environment?
- How do you design a retail space where the civic function becomes the primary function rather than the act of shopping? This will take into consideration the role single use retail space plays in our contemporary urban environments.
- How to design a retail space that will successfully reflect the authenticity of its context and that will serve as a community centre while at the same time keeping track of contemporary trends in the retail industry?

1.2.4 RESEARCH INTENTION:

The suburbs will not all become dense in the same way as traditional urban centres, nor will the car spontaneously disappear; people will still want to be seen in public. According to Smiley (2002: 2), as our culture changes, we need to envision other models for creating retail space. The primary goal in undertaking this dissertation is therefore to explore ways in which these sites of consumption can be re-imagined and transformed into viable, productive centres in places such as suburbia that have lost, or never really had, a community centre. It will investigate consumer and retail architecture as places of social interaction in the contemporary South African urban context. New approaches and innovative partnerships in the planning and design will be explored in order to produce/develop methods on how retail spaces can not only become fiscally viable, but also become positive assets to their communities.

1.2.5 METHODOLOGY

“Our architectural intelligence is insulted both by the incredible limitations of architectural imagination that the diagram of the mall represents and in a more anxious way the fact that we have no alternative to provide to it”. Rem Koolhaas (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 150)

Methods conducted in this dissertation will aim to provide answers on how to design an alternative to the current shopping mall typology; ways to re-imagine the box typology. The methods seek to “explode” the conventional mall in program and spatiality. Methods of rethinking retail architecture in its urban contexts where commercial activities will only be a catalyst to a more all-inclusive design typology.

Theoretical background studies will be conducted that include a historical perspective on retail spaces and how we got to the typologies we have today. This will include a **critical discourse analysis** of the mall typology, identifying the problems it set to us and methods of dealing with these problems. The writings of Rem Koolhaas in three books particular: S, M, L & XL, Mutations and The Harvard Project on the city: a Guide to Shopping and early theories of Victor Gruen regarding this topic will serve as a base of the research. This dissertation will serve as a continuum to these writings that will combine more up to date studies conducted on this topic.

The intention of the methodology will be to formulate a strategy through historical and theoretical backgrounds that will serve as informant for the design process from site to technification. It will be used as a tool to answer as far as possible the question of a contextual retail space.

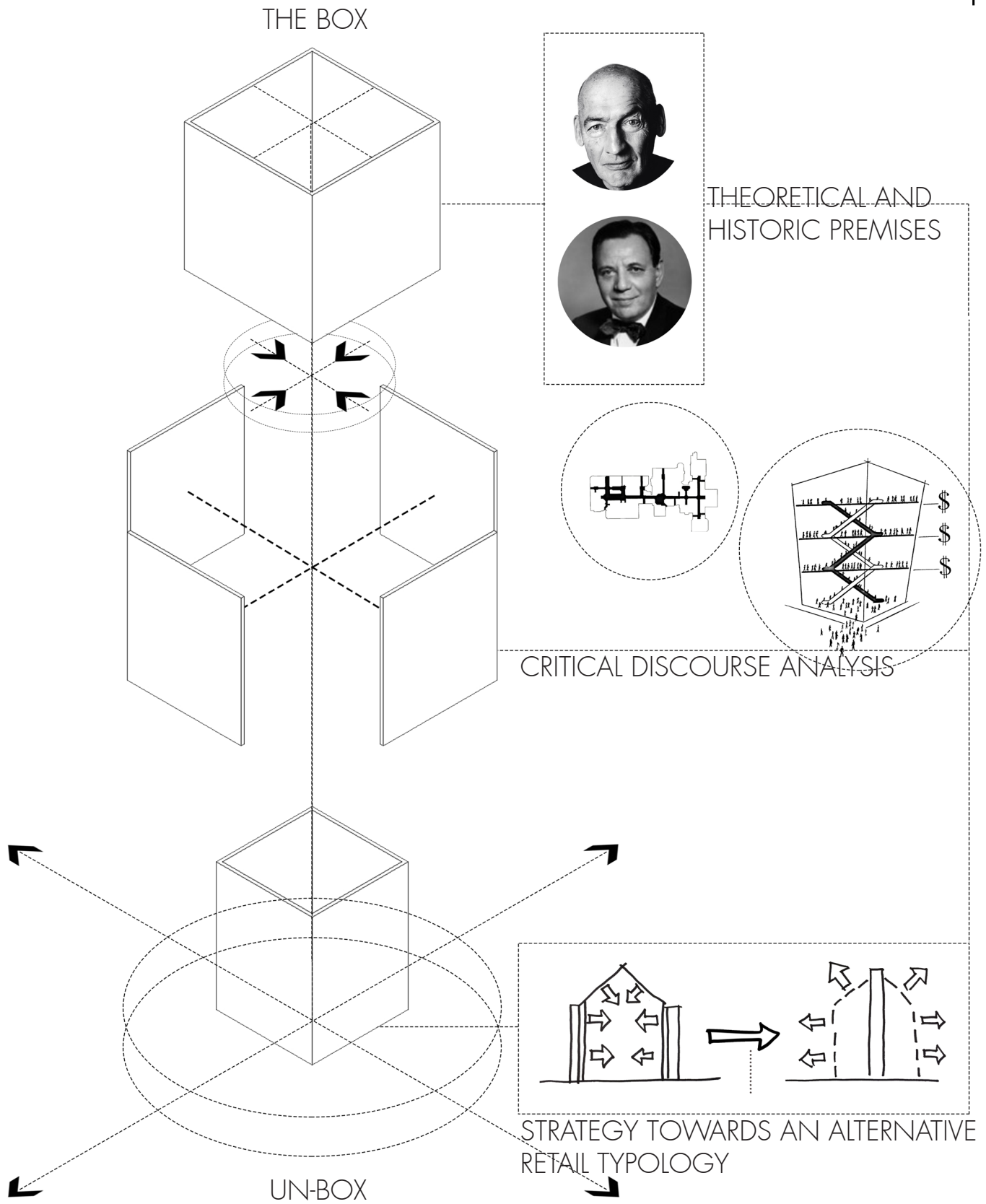


Figure 1. 5 Diagram of Methodology (Author)

1.3 STRUCTURE OF DOCUMENT

LOCATE

To thoroughly understand the context, chapter 2 and 3 will respectively serve as urban and site analysis through mapping and proposed urban and site visions.

PRECEDENT

Chapter 4 will investigate contemporary precedent studies that is relevant to both the urban condition and theoretical argument of this dissertation.

THEORISE

A theoretical premise will be developed and substantiated in chapter 5 through historical and contemporary research of retail architecture.

CONCEPTUALISE

The theoretical argument will be grounded in chapter 6 that will serve as a basis for the conceptual approach.

DESIGN

Chapter 7 and 8 will translate the dissertation as a critical discourse analysis into site specific design and technical explorations of the theoretical argument.



*“Sometimes I wonder why the world’s so small,
Then we can never get away from the sprawl,
Living in the sprawl,
Dead shopping malls rise like mountains beyond mountains,
And there’s no end in sight,
I need the darkness someone please cut the lights.”*

*Arcade Fire
Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains 2010)*