05

THEORETICAL PREMISE

5.1 Theoretical Background
5.2 Historical Perspective
5.3 Consuming Architecture

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Figure 5.1 Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 228)

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5.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

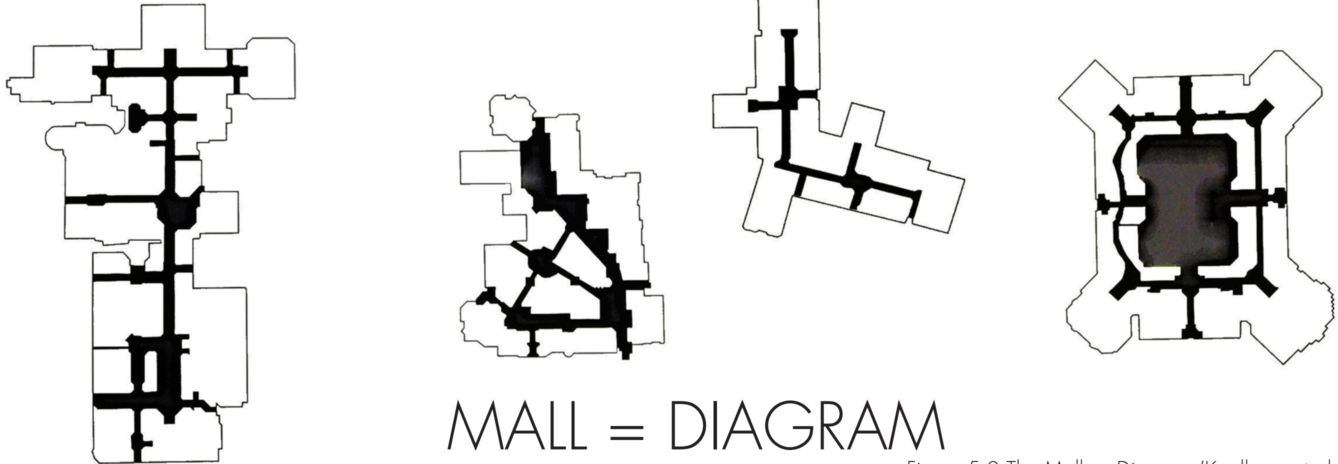

Figure 5.2 The Mall as Diagram (Koolhaas et al. 2001)

Retail spaces in particular are often seen by architects and theorists as places of extreme social control, despite their obvious popular appeal, yet the very places in cities which supposedly serve an unscripted civic function, are frequently feared and deserted by the architectural elite (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 150). In Sarah Chaplin's 1991 article based on architecture and consumption, she asks why there has been so much literature generated in the 20th century on almost every aspect of consumption from healthcare to gay lifestyle magazines, but so little on the architectural component of consumption, the spaces of consumption (Chaplin 1991: 8).

Rem Koolhaas suggests in his writings that this is due to the fact that architects feel that 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 (Koolhaas et al 2001: 140) It is this refusal of the architectural elite and academics to engage in retail spaces that disqualified designers from participating in the current biggest contribution to urbanism (Herman 2001: 391).

George Simmel already noted in his 1908 essay, The Metropolis and Mental Life, increasingly it is the spaces of consumption that the city is constructed of (Simmel 1908: 3) and it is therefore important for architects to reconsider their position where consuming architecture is concerned, to take account for the wide array of insight and possibilities it has to offer.

This naïve view of architects towards our retail environment has resulted in the typology we see in our urban centres today. A typology that is synonymous with the autonomy of the suburbs and the car. Physically, economically, culturally and socially this typology creates borders. And as Jane Jacobs (1961: 257) states: "borders in cities makes destructive neighbours".

Though borders and the archetypical design of shopping spaces were done with specific intentions to respond to their contexts i.e.: climatic considerations. Nonetheless, due to its economic success this model was applied across the world and also in South Africa.

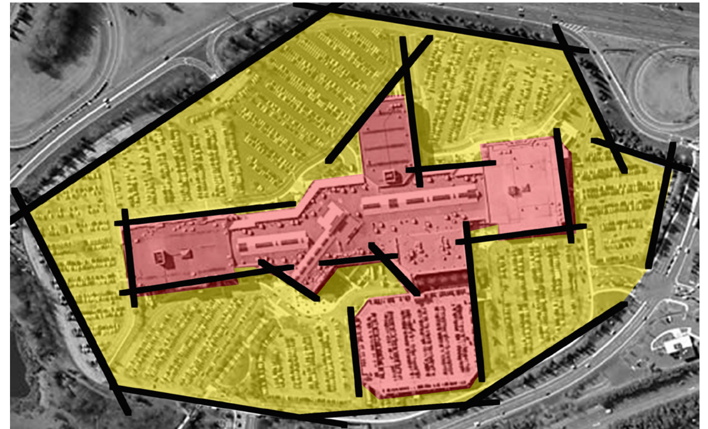

Figure 5.3 The Urban Borders of The Mall (Author)

The South African urban context, where we experience continual rapid suburbanisation and car orientated urban design, creates a continuous need for public space. Shopping malls have accumulated on this and made use of it to attract more people to their premises. South Africa's continuing growth of the middle class and previously underserviced urban areas such as townships and rural developments is allowing South Africa to produce shopping malls in unprecedented numbers, whilst retail spaces in the rest of the world are experiencing a deadlock (Mosaka 2016). While our pioneering city planners may have envisaged a bustling high street, today South Africa is identified more by a serious mall culture with a plethora of shopping centres and strip malls (Shirley 2013).

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South Africa currently has 1785 shopping malls, which is abnormally high when compared to other developing nations such as Brazil with 423 and Mexic with 536, both countries with far greater populations than South Africa (Prinsloo 2013: 6) Taking this into consideration it is only fair to presume that retail spaces play a fundamental role in South African civic culture and for this reason it is important for designer to give more attention to the making of these space.

Though shopping and the spaces thereof has been viewed in a negative light by theorists and the architectural elite, Karrholm (2012: 7) counters by saying that it is not all negative. He argues that trade and shopping are increasingly being seen as a means of creating a living urban environment in which people can meet and see each other. He argues that shopping is thus not just something that threatens to destroy or fragment the city, but has also been put forward as something that can enrich city life.

Karrholm (2012: 7) states that shopping is seen from two perspectives: 1) as controlling, manipulating and even reducing the potential or richness of public life. 2) As something many people enjoy and engage in and as such create opportunities and meaning in our lives. The important urban function of retail has beer acknowledged by researchers of urban design since Jane Jacobs, where even the role of malls as important public spaces were acknowledged. Jane Jacobs already argued in 1961 that shopping has outgrown the role of being an important urban function and became a necessity for urban identity itself.

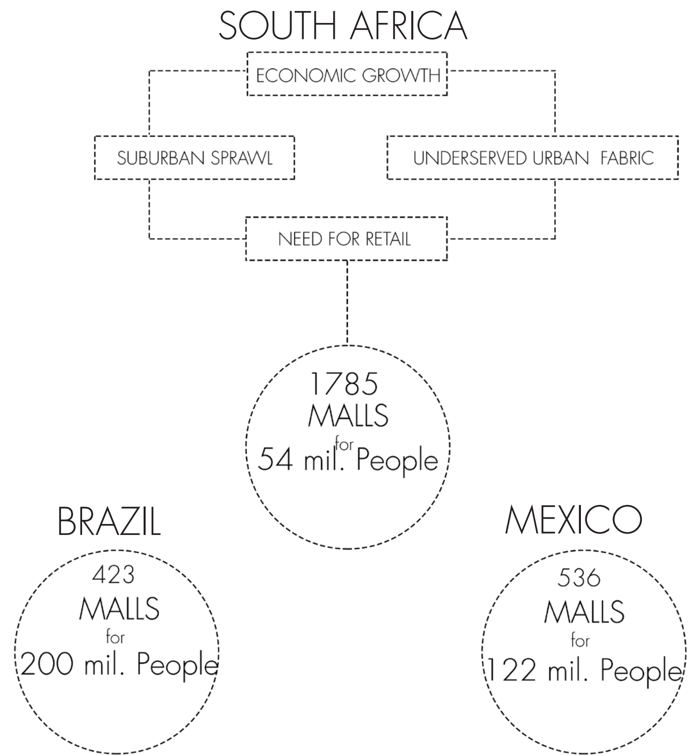

Figure 5.4 Retail Spaces per population for developing nations. (Author)

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Figure 5.5 The Stoa at the ancient Greek Agora (Eirene 2016)

Figure 5.6 Reconstruction the Roman Forum (Frampton 2015)

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Figure 5.7 The Grand Bazaar at Isfahan (Oruj 2015)

Figure 5.8 Example of a Parisian Arcade (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 178)

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Figure 5.9 Galeria Vittorio Emanuale (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 10)

Figure 5.10 The Gum Department Store (Koolhaas et al. 2001: 12)

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Figure 5.11 Interior of Southdale Shopping centre by Victor Gruen (Trufelman 2015)

Figure 5.12 Menlyn Park Shopping Centre (Author)

5.2 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since the earliest civilisations, spaces of trade played a fundamental role in the shaping of our urban environments. When Prehistoric people started to communicate they also started to trade. From the Neolithic trader settlements (fig 2.2.9), the Greek Agora, the Roman Forum, the Medieval markets through to the department stores and modern day suburban malls, retail spaces continued to provide spaces in which the gravity of civic life and the liveliness of trade coexisted in indistinguishable ways. As cited from Lewis Mumford's book The City in History, Victor Gruen (1964: 21) states that one of the primary purposes for the founding and functioning of cities is exchanging goods, with the first historic accounts of trading taking place around 150000 years ago.

Historically retail studies and its influences on the urban had form part of studies of not only theorist such as Victor Gruen and Lewis Mumford but also Jane Jacobs. In 1969 Jane Jacobs developed a new theory, called New Obsidian Theory, based on prehistoric settlements, to explain the progress of urbanization in Neolithic ages. In this theory Jacobs (1969) explains the city through the exchange of commodities, where the Obsidian trade exposed the New Obsidian city and the whole city was a market place in function.

The first market spaces appeared with the arrival of the merchant, the middleman who turned trade into commerce. Wherever he settled he became an integral part of urban life. In ancient Greece the merchant settled under the colonnades of the Stoa (Gruen 1960, 17). According Gruen (1960:17), the Stoa was the first recorded building to be designed for the purpose of trade. This spatiality was then translated in the Roman forum. In medieval times it evolved into market squares and eastern bazaars to become not only the geographical centre but also social centre of cities. Trading activities then started to take place in our meeting and gathering spaces with inevitable influences on our urban environments (Coleman 2007: 19).

Up to the 19th century, shopping spaces were generally disorganised and subordinate to other building uses. While there are examples of planned collections of shops, such as the Forum of Trajan and the eastern bazaars of Istanbul and Isfahan, these were exceptions to the various other collections of shops which remained secondary to the prime activities of the town hall, market hall and guild-hall (Kocaili 2010: 22).

Even in the exchange buildings and 19th century market buildings, which were built specifically for trading, the collections of shops were secondary to agricultural or commodity trading. The late 19th century with the arrival of arcades and department stores, marked the arrival of a new generation of planned spaces where retail became an independent typology for the first time. These new spaces marked a step-change in the evolution of retail which reached new heights. They marked the beginning of shopping spaces becoming recognisable individual pieces of architecture in their own right (Coleman 2007: 30).

In the late 19th century the arrival of the Parisian arcades and the early department stores intensified urban life, by creating a previously unknown experience of the city (Leong 2001a: 153). Arcades are the highlight of the evolution of retail spaces. It is the first recorded spaces planned to accommodate a collection of shops. The arcade is a milestone in the relationship between shopping and the city, as it exposed the demand people had for the experience for the first time and that they are willing to pay for it (Amendola 2006: 86).

The arcade is primarily a pedestrian street that is a space with a beginning and an end aligned with shops on each side. Before the arcades, collection of shops were either unplanned organic parts of town centres or occurred in mixed-use buildings with the shops, as mentioned earlier, being secondary to the other uses, i.e. in the town hall or market hall. There were, of course, notable exceptions with the covered shops of the Roman Forums and the Middle Eastern bazaars.

Arcades both reflect and inspire the utopias projected by the social visionaries of the nineteenth century with their glass and steel design; this was a turning point in the history of architecture; embodying the anticipation and imaginative expression of a new world. The arcades were the first buildings to be roofed in iron and glass, and were taken as a model for roofing markets, greenhouses, rail stations, etc. (Salvadori 1990: 87).

Parallel with the development of the arcade as a retail type, structural innovations in iron and glass enabled previously unimagined structures and roofs, as seen in Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace. The crystal palace transformed the arcade from glass covered street

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Figure 5.13 Illustration of Harrod's Department Store in London (Jha 2012)

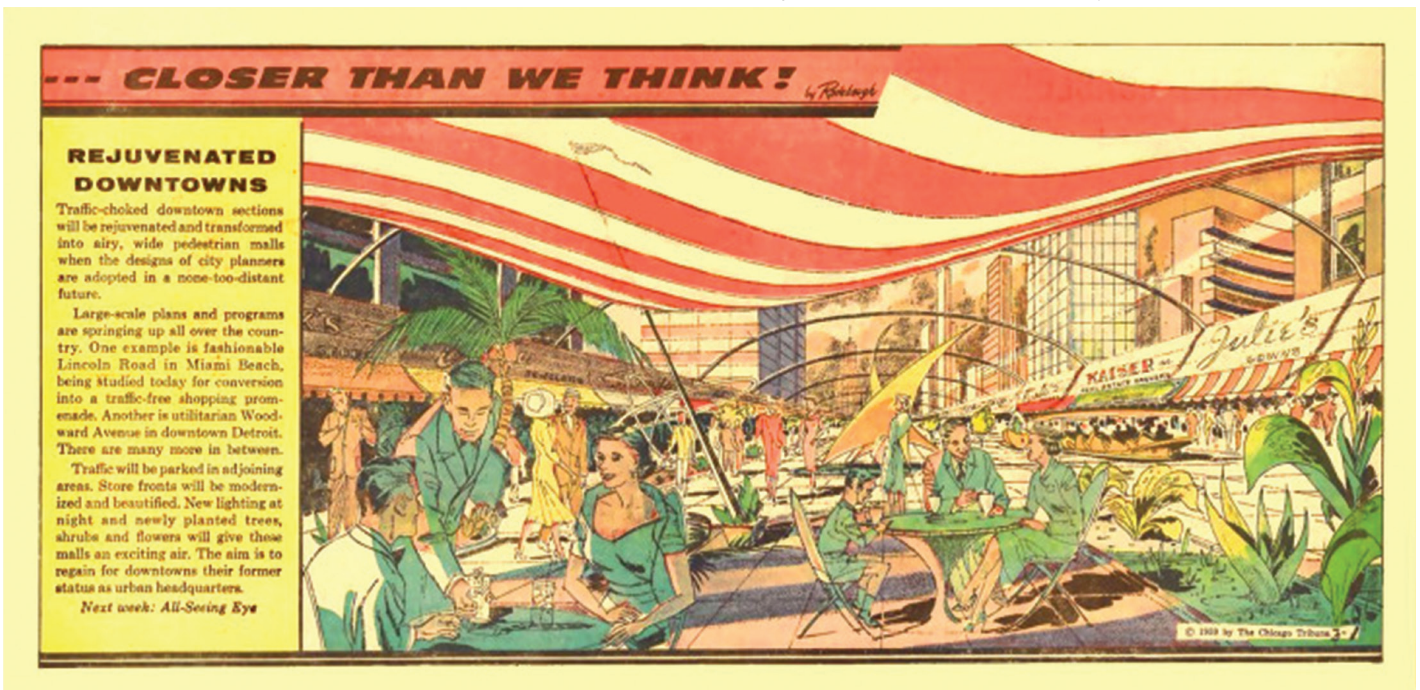

Figure 5.14 Advertisement for Victor Gruen's 1958 Southdale Shopping Centre (Trufelman 2015)

to glass building and a container of landscape (Wyman 2001: 230). Wyman (2001: 230) describes the Crystal Palace as one of the highlights of retail development. In a way most of the modern shopping malls today contain shocking similarities to it. For the first time in history it allowed people to experience and travel between products as a journey. It was a journey through a charged landscape, where industrial products and artwork were displayed alongside statues and ornamental gardens. All taking place in one enclosed and controlled space.

The Crystal Palace further inspired other designers and developers such as Williem Whitley and Aristide Boucicault who designed the first department stores of Whiteleys in London and Bon Marche in Paris. They transformed the nature of the Crystal Palace into the department store where goods were devoured not only by eyes, but also wallets (Wyman 2001: 241).

"The department store tends to replace the church. It marches to the religion of the cash desk, of beauty, of coquetry, and fashion. Women go there to pass the hours as they used to go to church: an occupation, a place of enthusiasm where they struggle between their passion for clothes and the thrift of their husbands; in the end all the strain of life with the hereafter of beauty "(E. Zola1883 cited in Lancaster 1995:19).

The arrival of the department stores brought with it the need to supply, control and manage water, heat, light, waste, and the movement of goods and people in such large numbers and in such huge buildings, that it forced engineers and architects to redesign the commercial buildings using new materials and equipment. Cities such as New York and Chicago became world famous and still are. It is no coincidence that the department stores built in those cities were by far the most modern, the most luxurious and the biggest the world had ever seen (Tamilia 2005: 5).

Moving into the 20th century the arrival of the personnel vehicle and the modernist urban design influences of Frank Lloyd Wright's Broad Acre city and Le Corbusier's Radiant City brought with it an entirely new urban environment, suburbia. Frank Lloyd Wright believed that infrastructure such as the highways would set urbanites free to inhabit and work in separate lots in the countryside while Le Corbusier believed that most urban problems could be fixed by separating the city into functionally pure districts (zoning) (Montgommery 2013: 63). The arrival of the automobile brought with it an entirely new set of urban design layouts.

As people would previously arrive in cities by train, bus or tram, they now preferred to arrive in their own car. The automobile with its freedom of dependence opened up metropolitan areas to include sections lying beyond the reach of earlier modes of transport. This resulted in the rise of the dispersed cities and a culture of suburban migration that was now possible in large numbers. As people continued with their daily migrations to the town centres, it did not take long for people to become unhappy, because of problems such as finding parking space and walking some distance to their final destination (Redstone 1973:4).

Unlike the department store that was specifically designed around air-conditioning, the closed mall typology primarily existed because of air-conditioning and the car (Leong , 2001b: 116). According to (Leong 2001b: 116) the history of air-conditioning and retail culminates in the invention of the shopping mall. As seen with the first shopping malls, the arrival of air-conditioning gave way to the first development where the window became unnecessary, with the only connection to its exterior being the opening to admit customers. The arrival of the air-con allowed the activities of the exterior to be turned inwards to an interiorised urban realm, completely protected, sheltered and controlled. This became the common circulation space with a configuration of stores facing this space reducing outside exposure and provided tempered air to all stores.

As predicted by Gruen (1960: 37) this development was quickly followed by urban activities, as the controlled climate guaranteed that the mall not only became the meeting place for people, but also the place for urban events. This drastic change in retail space changed a typology that historically developed alongside, sustained, amplified and aspired to the urban resulted in an implosive architectural typology that disconnects the city, its people and its spaces.

The modern shopping mall crystallized the desires of consumption into a potent and succinct form. This distilled environment provides a lens by which to read the history of the territories of shopping, and thereby

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recognize its logic. The new and popular mall appeared to allow for all effects of the city within isolation of the suburbs, without the urban conditions that, prior to the mall, seemed unavoidable (McMorrough 2001: 194). With the revelation that these effects could be created within the mall, without the cost of politics of creating an actual city, or even building within a city, shopping itself was poised to become an independent instrument of urbanity (McMorrough 2001: 195).

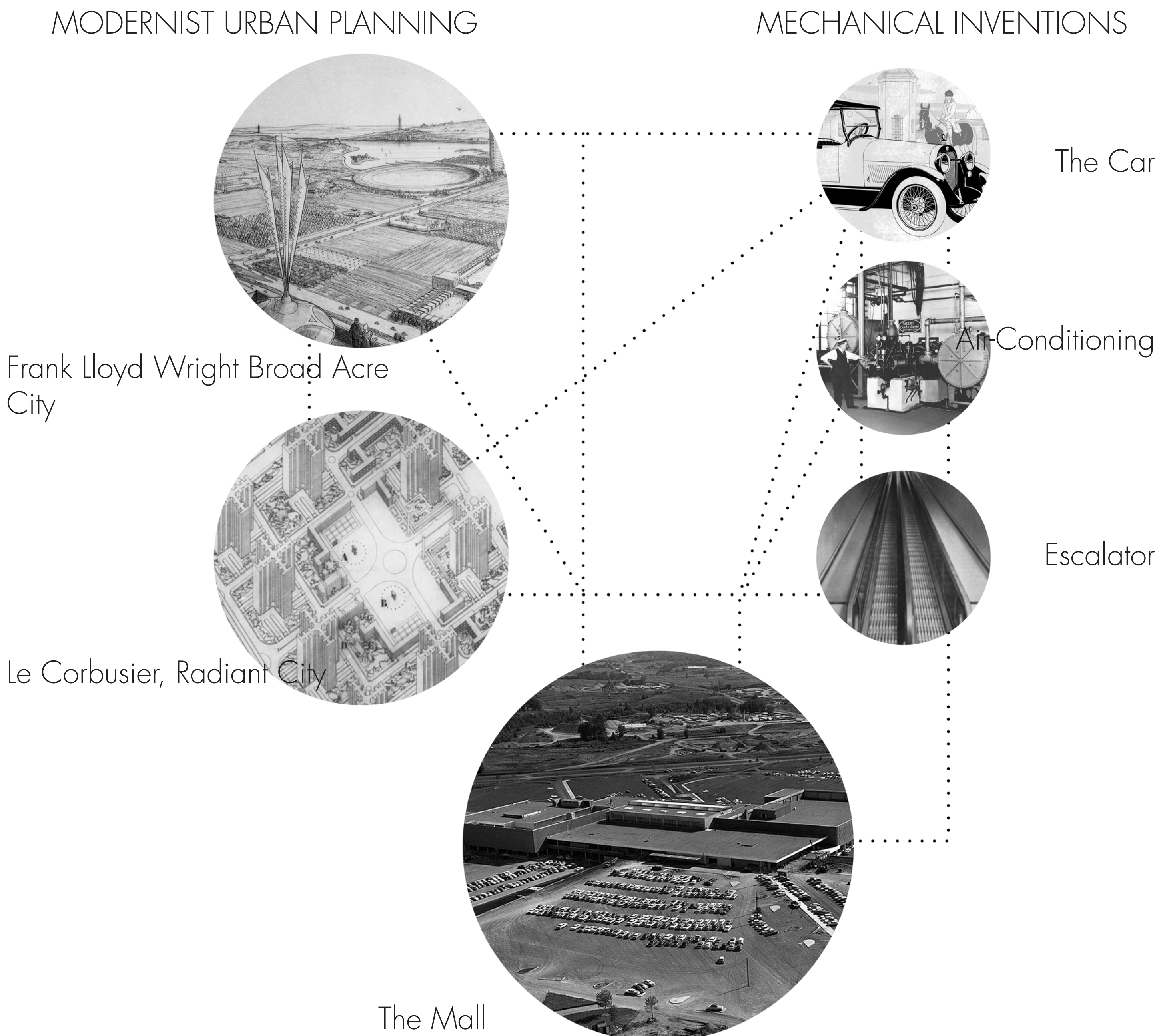

Figure 5.15 Historical development of the shopping mall. (Graphic: Author; Data: Koolhaas et al. 2001)

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5.3 CONSUMING ARCHITECTURE

Figure 5.16 Modernism and the escalator. (Koolhaas et al. 2001)

"Unfortunately, when choosing how to live or move, most of us are not as free as we think. Our options are strikingly limited, and they are defined by the planners, engineers, architects and marketers who imprint their own values on the urban landscape." Charles Montgomery (2013:76)

In the 20th and 21st centuries, shopping as an activity and its spaces has become synonymous with the most significant and fundamental development to give form to modern life. In the Harvard design school of Shopping Sze Tsung Leong (2001a: 128) describes shopping as a public activity that not only melts into everything, but that everything is melting into shopping. Few activities unite human beings in the way shopping does. Apart from housing and work, no other program compares in sheer quantity. John McMorough (2001:195) in the same book states that the effects of shopping on political and economic levels is seen as more than just an indicator of society, but also as the source of change in society.

Consumption, as an individual act, collective process and steadfast tradition propels the engine of the economy which transforms our society. Mattias Karrholm argues in his book Retailising Space, the territorialisation of Public Space, that the arrival of shopping malls brought with it a transformation of public space (Karrholm 2012: 5). He argues that by virtue of the scale, design and function of shopping centres they appear to be privately owned public spaces, more or less open to anyone (Karrholm 2012: 7). Shopping spaces become more and more important parts of urban development and they have even been described as emblematic of our time.

Planned retail space is colonizing the privately owned public spaces such as hotels, railway stations, airports, as shopping had become the dominant mode on contemporary life (Koolhaas et al. 2001). When we analyse shopping malls in their contemporary context we need to realise that they are not only retail environments, but spaces that aim to satisfy the human need for public interaction. Messedat (2013: 53) argues that shopping malls are increasingly becoming the place where social life takes place, and where a broad and creative range of interaction is possible. This appearance is important to their success as retail in its essence is generating the third place. The American urban sociologists Ray Oldenburg described areas of public activity as the "third space" while he describes the home is the first and work the second place (Messedat 2013: 53).

In order to reproduce a "successful public space" with the aim of attracting more people and keep them there for longer periods of time, developers aimed at creating the illusion of the city to produce an impression of urban identity in the suburbs. As Relph (1987: 215) notes, malls can be seen as urban, complete with pedestrian walkways, courts and fountains, all under one roof. Yet one can argue that an enclosed shopping mall with no connection to its surrounding context cannot be regarded as successful public space. It can only as (Kocaili 2011: 10)) states, be regarded as simulated urbanity stuck within a box.

According to (Trufelman 2015) many architects criticised the father architect of the Mall, Victor Gruen, as the creator of bold and visionless architecture through his creation of boxes with dead facades. But for Gruen it was not the façade that was important, but the inside. Originally from Vienna Austria, Victor Gruen moved to the United States in 1938.

Living in a typical American suburb, he came to realise that American suburbanites have a lack of place to socialise, hang out and build communities. He wanted to give Americans that third space. He wanted Americans to experience public space the way he experienced it in Vienna. His aim was to design the mall as a functional self-sufficient urban space, a city. His response being the Southdale Shopping centre in Minneapolis.

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An internalised urban public space complete with fountains, benches, art and greenery. All the complexity and vitality of an urban experience without noise, dirt; completely sheltered from the cold Minneapolis winter climate (Trufelman 2015).

Gruen further identified shopping as part of a larger web of human activities, arguing that merchandising would be more successful if commercial activities were integrated with cultural enrichment and relaxation and vice versa. He saw mall design as a way of producing new town centres on the suburban outskirts, or what he called 'shopping towns' (Crawford 2002: 24).

As stated in his writing in Shopping Towns USA in 1960, he envisioned the retail centre of the future to take the shape of urban organisms serving a multitude of human needs. He even proposed the mall as being the basic unit of urban planning. A model that will be centres of cultural enrichment, relaxation and education, a suburban alternative for public space. What started as a good intention, quickly altered into a planned consumerist system that imploded the economic and social circumstances in the contexts they are placed; a model of design that even the inventor himself criticised in later years. He argued that his original vision for the mall had been completely skewed by a consumerist society, where he was later even quoted as saying "I refuse to acknowledge this development that have swamped our cities" (Trufelman 2015).

In the capitalistic society shopping became the medium by which the market has solidified its grip on our spaces, buildings and cities. Historically, architecture has been used as a referential device by the institutions, political bodies and influential families attempting to establish themselves as the preeminent authority to organize society. In the post-industrial society it is the capitalists that improved on incentivised techniques, borrowed from each forerunner and coupled grand architecture with innovative methodologies to foster and command societal admiration (Scanlon 2011: 11)

According to Scanlon (2011: 12), consumption was part in tract with the greater industrial revolution and its omission from the historical record, is a grievous oversight. As the practice of everyday life goes largely unnoticed, and we fail to see how all-encompassing retail consumption is (Scanlon 2011: 29). According to Rick Carusso in his critique on dying Malls in America, he argued that people are yearning for place to connect with each other and that developers are not building town centres but rather the centre of towns. It is arguably this need for people to socialise that was hijacked by the contemporary capitalist order to promote commodity exchange (Carusso 2015). Koolhaas et al (2001: 134) refers to this as a system of social hijacking. That is in recognition of the culturally perceived emptiness of the activity of shopping for which they provide the main social space, designers manufacture the illusion that something else, other than mere shopping is going on, while also mediating the materialist relations of mass consumption and disguising the identity and rootedness of the shopping centre in contemporary capitalist social order.

Guy Debord states in Society of the Spectacle that individuals live in a world that is fabricated for them, and what was once directly lived is now experienced as a commodified or a bureaucratically administered representation to reality (Debord 1967). In Baudrillards Society of the Simulacrum as cited by Goss (1991: 18), he argued that the real has been irrevocably replaced by the illusion, and the world is not merely represented in commodified images, but consists of such images. In constructing an attractive image for the shopping centre, developers have, with remarkable persistence, exploited a modernist nostalgia for authentic community, perceived to exist only in past and distant places, and have prompted the conceit of the shopping centre as an alternative focus for modern community life.

According to Goss (1991: 19), designers and developers the like have obscured the logic by constructing shopping centres as idealised representations of past or distant public spaces. The current state is that the shopping centre appears to be everything that it is not. It contrives to be a public, civic place even though it is private and run for profit, it offers a place to commune while it seeks retail dollars and borrows signs of other places and times to obscure its rootedness in contemporary capitalism.

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