

4 Theoretical Context

Consumerism vs. Architecture: an essay investigating how our environments are shaped by our consumer driven paradigm and the role of the architect within it.

Shopping = . . .

Fig. 4.1: Shopping = ...

The Paradigm

It is undeniable that we live in a consumer driven society and that it affects every aspect of our lives. Airports, museums, stations, universities, hospitals, cities and even entire countries are able to market themselves as products which can be consumed (Loeng 2001:135-154). Consumerism can be seen as a dominant force in the shaping of our environments and should be considered an important factor in the production of architecture (Chaplin 1998:7). Consumerist trends have to keep up with the most subtle changes in society resulting in the need for architecture to produce new forms in order to sustain the consumer market (Loeng 2001:131,155). While consumerism is politically wedded to capitalism it cannot be considered the absolute ideal. Capitalism brings with it a negative connotation, but due to the lack of a workable substitute it is difficult to imagine a radically different system or ideology in our lifetime (Chaplin 1998:7). It is imperative for the architect to act responsibly while utilizing the opportunities presented by the consumerist market.

The Environment

This need to consume has had a detrimental impact on the environment, causing the depletion of the earth's natural resources as a result of society's rate of unnecessary consumption. The consumer market has reacted by promoting the consumption of products that contribute to a cleaner environment. Environmental marketing uses the principle of ecological correctness to create a situation where the activist appears to become the corporation, which in turn makes a profit by using principles of sustainability. Environmental imperatives are thus seen as opportunities rather than constraints, aided by the fact that credibility and effectiveness are only measured by what the company actually achieves and not by what it intends to achieve. It seems apparent that architecture has reacted in a similar fashion, as sustainable building design becomes a sales technique, thereby allowing clients to feel as though they are saving the environment by spending money on an ecologically correct building(Cha 2001:319-306).

The User

Similarly the user is lured into a world of guilt-free shopping. The commercial environment allows for inclusiveness - public spaces where people can roam, sit and talk. Partaking in commercial society can now be representative of an activity in which all can participate and which thereby unites all kinds of people (Loeng 2001:131,153). Ethical imperatives concerning ecology and sustainability are prioritized by consumers and thus shape the market in a subtle manner. It is ironic that, in a world driven by consumer choice, opportunities are lacking for the consumer to choose more responsibly. Architecture itself has become an object to be consumed and is thus also driven by consumer choice. Seductive imagery and lavish forms have raised the consumer's expectation of what architecture should be. It is, however, important to remember that, while architecture can be consumed by the user, the resultant space is ultimately where the user lives and experiences his/her everyday life. Concerning this consumerist activity, theory suggests that when a consumer alters a consumed object to suit his or her own purposes, the user is acting in an anti-consumerist way. Some can, through their direct action, consume the object completely. Architecture can therefore design for this consumption of space as does Viennese architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, or discourage the user from altering his or her environment as in the works of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (Chaplin 1998:7). This leaves the architect to choose how to approach the challenge of having a consumer as the primary user of space.

- Fig. 4.2: Shopping = Airport; Church
- Fig. 4.3: Shopping = Train Station
- Fig. 4.4: Shopping = Underground
- Fig. 4.5: Shopping = Education
- Fig. 4.6: Shopping = City
- Fig. 4.7: City = Mall
- Fig. 4.8: Government = Shopping
- Fig. 4.9: Shopping = Hospital; Military
- Fig. 4.10: Duanne Hanson – Young Shopper





Le Corbusier did one unbuilt scheme for a boutique for Bat'a shoes, plus the "shopping streets" in the various Unité.



Mies did one unbuilt scheme for a department store in Berlin, as well as a "shopping concourse" in the Dominion Center.



Kahn did a shoe store and a paint store in the 1940s, as well as two unbuilt schemes for shoe stores.

What do you call an establishment designed by a high architect for the purveying of goods? That's right: a boutique.

Fig. 4.11: Architecture's Elite
Fig. 4.12: It's not a mall...

year	project	architect	city	type
1887	Marshall Field's Wholesale	H. H. Richardson	Chicago	dry goods store
1890	Second Leiter Building	William LeBaron Jenney	Chicago	department store
1891	The Fair	William LeBaron Jenney	Chicago	department store
1891	Siegel-Coppler	William LeBaron Jenney	Chicago	department store
1903	Carson Pitts Scott	Louis Sullivan	Chicago	department store
1905	Tiffany & Co.	McKim, Mead & White	New York	multi-level store
1907	Steiner's Plume and Feather	Adolf Loos	Vienna	boutique
1911	Goldman & Salatsch	Adolf Loos	Vienna	multi-level store
1913	Kraus's Men's Outfitters	Adolf Loos	Vienna	boutique
1915	Van Allen	Louis Sullivan	Clinton, IA	department store
1927	Recor	Gerrit Rietveld	Utrecht	boutique
1928	Schocken	Erich Mendelsohn	Chiemrüz	department store
1928	Schocken	Erich Mendelsohn	Stuttgart	department store
1928	Zaady	Gerrit Rietveld	Wesel	boutique
1929	G	Gerrit Rietveld	Cleef	boutique
1935	M/G Electrical Center	Gropius & Fry	London	showroom
1935	Rockefeller Center (intl. Bldg.)	Reinhard, Harrison, et al.	New York	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1938	Batt (unbuilt)	Le Corbusier		boutique
1948	V. C. Morris	Frank Lloyd Wright	San Francisco	multi-level store
1949	Bond Clothing	Morris Lapidus	Chicago	multi-level store
1949	Millarion's	Gruen & Krummelt	Los Angeles	multi-level store
1952	Traffic circulation reform (unbuilt)	Louis Kahn	Philadelphia	diagram
1953	Easton Center (unbuilt)	TAC, Rufuschi et al	Boston	urban renewal (w/ mall)
1953	Lijnbaan	Van den Broek & Bakema	Rotterdam	pedestrian mall
1954	Downtown Fort Worth (unbuilt)	Victor Gruen	Fort Worth	urban renewal (w/ malls)
1956	Mondawmin Center	Belluschi, Kiley, et al.	Baltimore	mall
1956	Roosevelt Field	I. M. Pei	Garden City	mall
1957	De Blijenkerk	Marcel Breuer	Rotterdam	department store
1958	Olivetti	Carlo Scarpa	Venice	showroom
1960	Tokyo Bay (unbuilt)	Kenzo Tange	Tokyo	megastructure
1962	Fun Palace (unbuilt)	Cedric Price	London	megastructure
1962	sin centre (unbuilt)	Mike Webb		megastructure
1963	Gawana	Carlo Scarpa	Bologna	showroom
1963	Neiman-Marcus	Edward Larrabee Barnes	Fort Worth	department store
1963	Walking City (unbuilt)	Archigram (Ron Herron)		megastructure
1964	Plug-in City (unbuilt)	Archigram (Peter Cook)		megastructure
1964	Neighborhood (unbuilt)	Constant Nieuwenhuis		megastructure
1965	Neiman-Marcus	Kevin Roche	Dallas	department store
1965	Retti Candia	Hans Hollein	Vienna	boutique
1967	CM	Hans Hollein	Vienna	boutique
1969	Dominion Center	Mies van der Rohe	Toronto	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1970	Design Research	Benjamin Thompson	Cambridge	multi-level store
1970	Centre Pompidou	Piano & Rogers	Paris	megastructure
1970	Macy's Rego Park	SOM	Ouwers	department store
1970	Derby Town Centre (unbuilt)	James Stirling	Derby	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1972	The Commons	Cesar Pelli	Columbus, IN	mall
1973	IDS Center	Philip Johnson	Minneapolis	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1973	Unicoop Domus	Alvaro Siza	Porto	supermarket
1974	Schullin Jewellery	Hans Hollein	Vienna	boutique
1975	BEST ("Indeterminate Facade")	SITE	Houston	showroom
1975	Pacific Design Center	Cesar Pelli	Los Angeles	mall
1975	Fox Hills Mall	Cesar Pelli	Los Angeles	showroom mall
1977	BEST ("Natch")	Robert Venturi	Oxford Valley	showroom
1977	BEST ("Natch")	SITE	Sacramento	showroom
1979	BASSCO	Robert Venturi	Bristol Valley	showroom
1980	Santa Monica Place	Frank Gehry	Santa Monica	mall
1982	Neiman-Marcus	Philip Johnson	San Francisco	department store
1982	Wullen	Josef Paul Kichlues	Wullen	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1983	Nina	Alvaro Siza	Porto	boutique
1984	Festival	Tadao Ando	Osaka	mall
1985	Magasin d'Usine	Richard Rogers	Nantes	mall
1987	Bercy	Renzo Piano	Paris	mall
1988	Sawgrass Mills	Architectonica	Fort Lauderdale	mall
1988	Comme des Garçons	Yoshio Mori	New York	boutique
1988	Louvre	I. M. Pei	Paris	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1988	Centro Torri	Aldo Rossi	Parma	mall
1988	Edgemoor	Frank Gehry	Santa Monica	mini-mall
1989	Collection Building	Tadao Ando	Tokyo	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1989	Carvalho Kaup	Alvaro Siza	Lebbon	boutique
1991	Haas-Haus	Hans Hollein	Vienna	mall
1992	Festival Disney	Frank Gehry	Marne-la-Vallée	mall
1992	Perugia Civic Center	Aldo Rossi	Perugia	mixed-use (w/ hypermarket)
1992	Eluna	Mario Botta	Florance	mall
1992	BCE Place Galleria	Santiago Calatrava	Toronto	mall
1993	Diagonal Building	Rafael Moneo	Barcelona	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1993	UNY Gifu	Aldo Rossi	Gifu	hypermarket
1994	Lureville Center	Jean Nouvel	Lille	mall
1994	Lane Crawford Place	Kisho Kurokawa	Singapore	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1995	Peek & Coppersburg	Gottfried Böhm	Berlin	department store
1996	Friedrichstadt	Jean Nouvel	Berlin	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1996	Friedrichstadt	O. M. Ungers	Berlin	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1996	Friedrichstadt	Henry Cobb	Berlin	mixed-use (w/ mall)
1999	Paramus Park Mall	Michael van Valkenburgh	Paramus	mall renovation (landscape)
2000	Paramus Park Mall	Michael van Valkenburgh	Paramus	mall renovation (landscape)

Fig. 4.13: Shopping Projects by High Architects

The Architect

In architecture there exists a mutual prejudice between architects who design commercially and those who do not, essentially between those who design for the masses and those who keep themselves distanced from the populist idea of retail architecture. This difference in approach has even resulted in a distinction between commercial 'firms' and the more design-orientated 'practices'.

"An invisible hierarchy of value and merit exists within the profession which categorises and castigates those who build for profit, leaving more 'committed' architects the moral victors. This has created the situation in which what gets the highest accolades in the architectural press is not the vast majority of highly effective projects built but those considered aesthetically or theoretically worthy."

(Chaplin 1998:7)

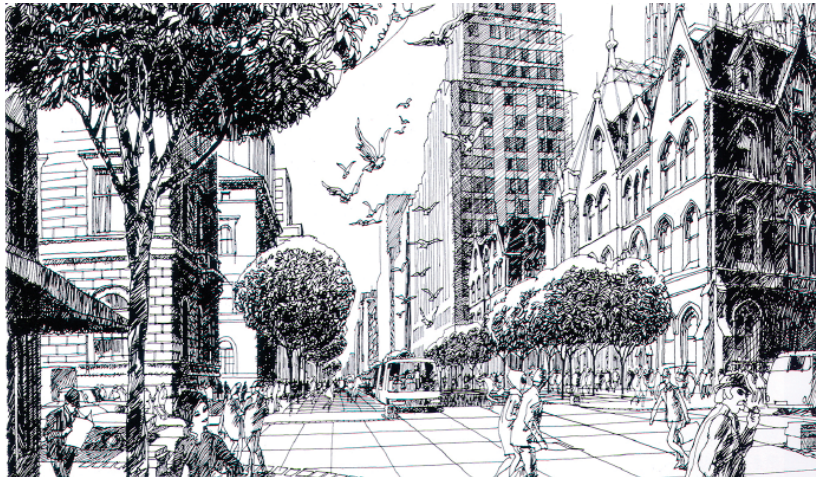
The architectural elite refuses to engage in retail architecture and even when they do, they prefer to describe commercial developments as something other than what they really are (Herman 2001:391). The architect's agenda seems to be at odds with commodification. The 'proper' calling would be to work towards some utopian ideal. It's as if architects strive to achieve well-designed surroundings for everyone, trying to free society from structures of desire (Chaplin 1998:7). The idea of "good" architecture is mostly related to projects like housing, schools, and museums; this is termed 'what "serious" architects do'. Stanley Marcus, CEO of Neiman-Marcus, described this dilemma very well when he said *"high architects do not understand shopping, nor do they want to."* (Herman 2001:392,395) It would appear that this refusal results in architects not realizing the potential of commercial architecture. It should be noted that architecture, while being a slow and ponderous process, cannot react quickly to consumerist pressures. Only at the most commercial end of the architectural 'spectrum' does an awareness of these reactions get built into the product: shop interiors and amusement arcades (Chaplin 1998:8). It is perhaps important that the architect makes public approval a higher priority than peer acceptance and starts creating architecture that serves the user and not merely the client.



"Toward Richer City Streets" — Jane Jacobs²

Jane Jacobs (standing) on Hudson Street, New York City, 1961

Fig. 4.14: Jane Jacobs on the Streets of New York



Utilizing Consumerism

At its very core the commercial market strives to be accessible and appealing to the public and has been used as a tool to revive urban centres (Loeng 2001:153). Commercial developers have used the four conditions of Jane Jacobs in her “City Life Model” to create profitable environments. Although it could be surmised that this is not what Ms. Jacobs intended, it is what the commercial market needs to generate vibrant city spaces. The combination of twenty four hour usage, short blocks to increase movement and opportunities, a mix of buildings both in age and condition, and a sufficiently dense concentration of people proves to be a successful recipe to renew urban environments. As Jane Jacobs stated in her 1961 book “The Life and Death of Great American Cities”:

“The necessity for these four conditions is the most important point this book has to make. In combination, these conditions create effective economic pools of use... All four in combination are necessary to generate city diversity; the absence of any one of the four frustrates a district’s potential.”
(Jacobs 1961:162).

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Fig. 4.15: Conceptual Sketch of South Street Seaport, New York City. 1981.

Fig. 4.16: Conceptual Sketch of Madison Avenue Mall, New York City. 1971.

There is a need for areas to remain alive, a need for people to enjoy their environment. Leisure theory has even proved that, without spaces that cater for our need to relax and be entertained, we would be more dysfunctional. The motivating force behind progress in the 20th century has been consumption, so why not harness this energy and realize its potential rather than struggle against it? Increasingly, commercial areas are the places where the experiences of modern life occur - places where people meet, make friends, and share their experiences (Chaplin 1998:8). So why don't we design for these experiences?