

Introduction

What is the architect's position towards the global shopping trend and retail design? In her article *Between Architecture, Fashion and Identity* Jane Rendell contemplates the relationship between the architect and the 'consuming' world. She notes that the discussions of the relationship between fashion retail and architecture are entwined with political and theoretical attitudes to consumption. (Rendell 2000:8) (The search for the answer to the above question will not deviate into a political debate, as it would not serve the purpose of this thesis.)

Rendell (2000:9) explains the scenario of the topical, but also tricky physical place where architecture, fashion and identity come together. If the displaying of objects in a shop window, the designing of the window and the shop itself are all acts determined by their context, they can serve only one purpose – to sell. The architect plays a passive role in the service of commodity capitalism... However, in our western version of democratic and liberal late capitalism, things are not that simple. How, then, should we understand "to sell"?

The consumer purchases goods and services [commodities] for his own needs. To consume is to obsess, to use up or expend, to destroy or be destroyed or to waste. (Collins 1987:184) Could consuming be more than this? Could it be less? John Fiske's theories about the commercial and the popular might provide insight:

The market economy of late capitalism is awash with commodities, it is impossible to escape them. There are a number of ways of understanding commodities and their role in our society: in the economic sphere they ensure the generation of wealth; they vary from basic necessities of life to inessential luxuries, and, by extension, can include non-material objects such as television programs, a woman's appearance, or a star's name.

They serve two types of function, the material and the cultural. The cultural is concerned with meaning and values: All commodities can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self, of social identity and social relations. (Fiske 1992:11)

Rendell understands that the problem is embedded in popular culture. We can consider the relationship between architecture, fashion and identity in terms of everyday life, where the commodities one buys and the places in which one buys them are set within the context of popular culture... shopping is a socio-economic activity that is becoming increasingly important. (Rendell 2000:9)

To understand the concept of shopping as a socio-economic activity I turn again to John Fiske:

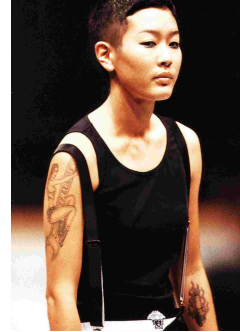
Popular culture in industrial societies is contradictory to its core. On the one hand it is industrialized - its commodities produced and distributed by a profit-motivated industry that follows only economic interests. But on the other hand, it is of the people, and the people's interests are not those of the industry... To be made into popular culture, a commodity must also bear the interests of the people. Popular culture is not consumption, it is culture - the active process of generating and circulating meaning and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities.

By "the people", then, I mean this shifting set of social allegiances, which are described better in terms of people's felt collectivity than in terms of external sociological factors such as class, gender, age, race, region, or what have you. Such allegiances may coincide with class and other categories, but they don't necessarily: they can often cut across these categories, or ignore them.

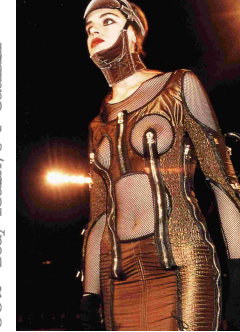
Popular culture is made by the people at the interface between the products of industries and everyday life. Popular culture is made by the people, not imposed upon them; it stems from within, from below, not from above. Popular culture is the art of making do with what the system provides.

What is distributed is not completed, finished goods, but the resources of everyday life, the raw material from which popular culture constitutes itself. Every act of consumption [and by extension consumerism] is an act of cultural production, for

001 Ashian Model, Jerry Shimizu



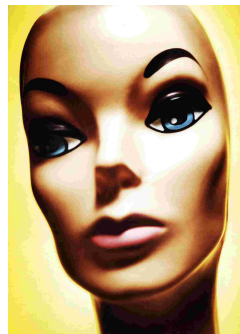
002 Body fetiSh, J-P Gaultier



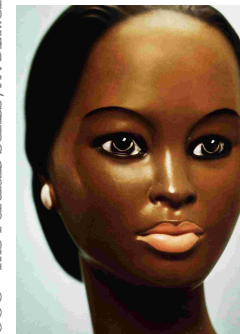
003 Shocking nudes, V Westwood



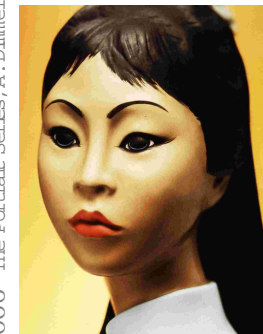
004 The Portrait Series, A. Dimmel



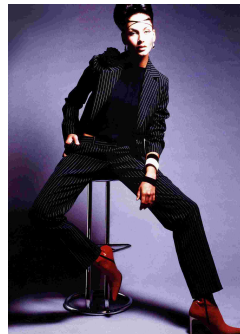
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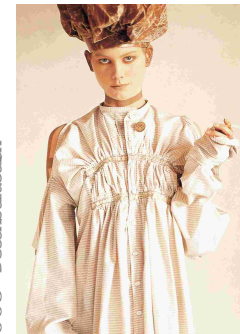
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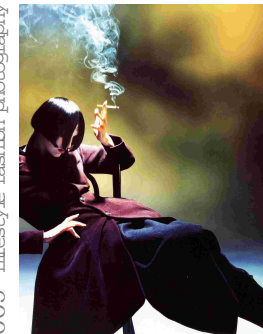
007 Power dressing



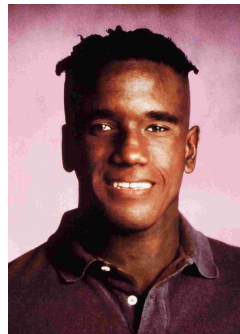
008 Deconstruction



009 Lifestyle fashion photography



010 Black Arnold



011 White Michael



012 Black Queen



consumption is always the production of meaning. At the point of sale the commodity exhausts its role in the distribution economy, but begins its work in the cultural. (Fiske 1992:23-35)

Indeed, this is what Rendell understands as consumerism. Shopping is a complex "weave" of different spatial practices: displaying, exchanging and consuming. Consumption, the selection and acquisition of goods, is not simply the act of buying and selling. (Rendell 2000:10) Shopping is now seen as a proactive pursuit, playing a dynamic part in the formation of social and lifestyle identities. By choosing and buying certain goods, the consumer identifies with status, lifestyle or social identity.

She puts Fiske's argument about consumption, being the production of meaning, in architectural terms. It can be argued that consumption is a form of cultural production, but in architectural terms production has a distinct meaning: the design and construction of a building by an architect and builder for a client. A shift from production to consuming (and vice versa) has changed the focus on how buildings are used and experienced after completion. (Rendell 2000:9)

Sally Mackereth puts the relationship between social allegiances and fashion retail in perspective, the place where new meanings are most vividly produced through consumption. Contemporary fashion cannot be contained in the garments we wear. Where you shop and what you surround yourself with have also become a means of expressing certain values and attitudes. In our overpopulated, increasingly urbanised world, brands express tribal allegiances. Fashion is now, more than ever, an indulgence, expressing status, kudos and 'belonging'. It enables people to mark themselves out from the anonymity of the city and align themselves with a particular group. (Castle 2000:61) The consumption of contemporary fashion, by extension, produces identity.

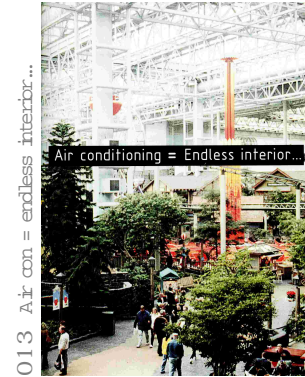
In Borden (2000:14) agrees: In shopping for clothes one is above all searching for identity, for a layer in which to drape one's self-image in relation to the city. Borden uses the city to argue against the homogeneity

of predictable goods in routine spaces as provided by mega-mall shopping complexes. It is the differentiation of the city that is most important, in wandering and interacting with others, one may find another new space, shop or item. (Borden 2000:14) The relationship between fashion and architecture in the city is about antihomogenisation. Urbanism means multiplicity, not the [false] multiplicity within [a shopping mall], but the possibility of true multiplicity in the city. Therefore the interaction between fashion and architecture is, or should be, about this variation, about finding different ways to mediate the relationship between self, clothing, place of purchase and urban context. (Borden 2000:15)

If fashion is about identity then the city is about experience. We come closer in establishing the architect's position towards fashion retail other than providing fashion with the commodity of retail design. In experiencing the city one can come closer to realising one's identity. Thus, fashion retail serves the city by providing something different to consume. It serves the consumer by providing something that can produce meaning, while providing a setting that further enriches the experience of the consumer.

Borden writes about the City Quarter: the newly fashionable part of town becomes one in which to cruise and get lost a little, on the lookout not for fashion stores that you know, but for those you do not.. This is the architecture of the unknown, of the promise of a new discovery. (2000:16) Or is it the architecture of complex experience?

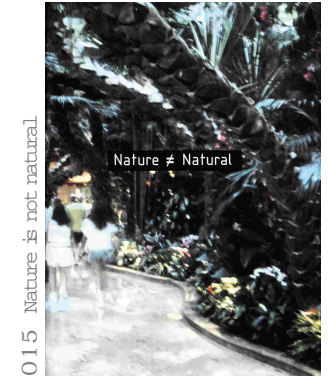
When arguing about diversity, Thom Mayne states that, as with art, the experience of diversity in a city make a more developed human being.. The movement away from an essentially simple and orderly way of life, to a view of life as complex and ironic is what every individual passes through in becoming mature. The essence of human development is in developing the capacity for ever more complex experience.. Our modern penchant for unification and simplification must be broken. And this, then, is the key issue - the recognition that diversity is the natural order of things. To accept this rather than looking to replace it with something



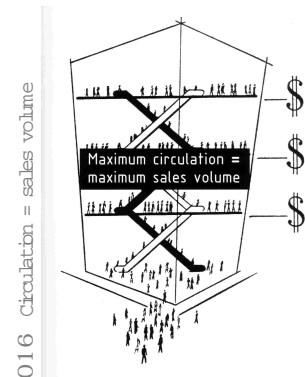
013 Air con = endless interior...



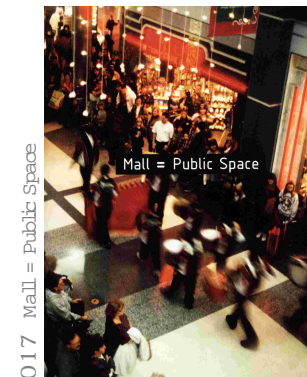
014 Air con = windowless...



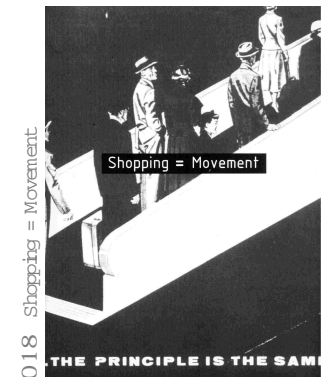
015 Nature is not natural



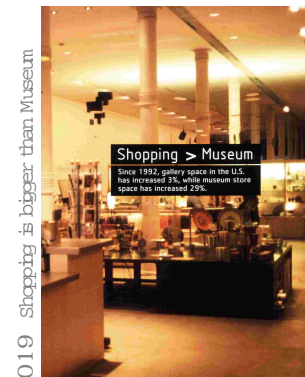
016 Circulation = sales volume



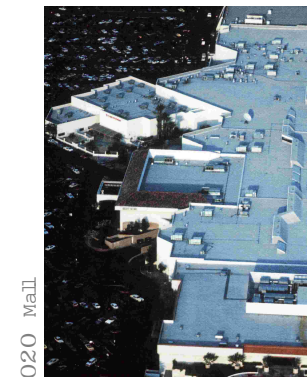
017 Mall = Public Space



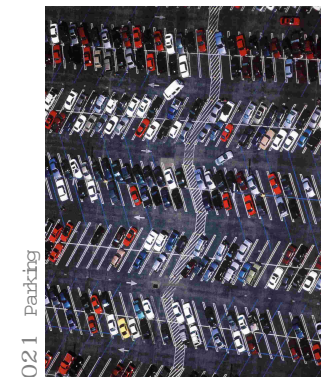
018 Shopping = Movement



019 Shopping is bigger than Museum



020 Mall



021 Parking

The above noted statements and graphics are discussed in the argument presented, either directly or subtly. Read the statements, think about them. How true are they? How real? How real should they be?



022 City in Motion

fixed, stable, whole, is to utilize the tremendous energy of the city. (Mayne 1992:49)

We return to Rendell who, through studying the works of Walter Benjamin, came to understand the city in terms of motion. Benjamin's interest in the more generic figure of the urban flâneur strolling through the city offer a new model of urban experience. The flâneur suggests that different sites may be connected through a mobile narrative, one that relies on the interrelation of place for its storyline rather than on a character-driven plot. (Rendell 2000:10) From Benjamin's working in fragments' Rendell concludes that everything, from design detail to Barbie doll, tell us something about the larger issues at stake.. Mundane objects and places, from telephone booth to wooden spoon, open the world of critical and political commentary on urban history and modern life. This view of architecture as integral to everyday life is important to the contemporary discussions about the importance of architecture, fashion and the role of consumption in constructing identity. (Rendell 2000:10)

If architecture is integral to everyday life, and if it is the finer grain of urbanism then one asks if mundane places provide only mundane experience and thus, mundane identity? If a place has a strong and coherent identity, would mundane buildings exist? Or do vibrant buildings provide the urban area with a distinguishable identity?

To be mundane, the everyday, ordinary, or banal, is to standardise, to make or become or be compared to the standard. Standardisation and globalisation could be the possible death of distinctive identity. Rasshied Din, interior designer for Donna Karan, Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein to name but a few, agrees that a great threat to this brittle business [the distinguishable identity of a fashion house], built on image and personality, currently lies in globalisation. (Castle 2000:54) There are essential tensions at the core of fashion retail. While entry into mass markets requires globalisation and standardisation, fashion is driven by novelty. (Castle 2000:53)

Novelty is a fickle friend to any designer:

Designers set out to innovate, to cover new ground. Nevertheless, in nine out of ten cases a new design is a creative combination of concepts that have existed before. It is already difficult to create anything novel in this sense, let alone making something that is completely new to the world.

The inability to create completely novel designs can easily lead to frustration and cynicism. If cynicism reigns, design can become an uninspired cut-and-paste profession. Many of these mediocre designs will be good enough to be dubbed successful, if the market accepts them. Design then easily degenerates into being a cheap trick.

Novelty is an elusive target to aim for. Maybe it should not ever be aimed for directly – if it occurs, it is often the result of a personal journey of discovery. (Dorst 2003:47)

Julian E Markham, author of *The Future of Shopping* (1998), asserts that today, it's no longer enough to do it well, you also need to do it new... The new factor needed to succeed today is the introduction of true innovation, which not only dramatically impacts on existing operations, but surprises and delights customers by surpassing their expectations. (2000:25)

Markham's article is about the change the Internet brought to retail design. Because retailers are finding it difficult to make their offers different from that of their competitors, and want to promote a distinctive message, they try to introduce innovation by creating an interactive experience for the consumer through the Internet. One of the fascinating predictions by two smart retailers, given the enormity of the investment every year that is still being added, is that "50% to 75% of retailing will be extinct within a decade". (Koolhaas 2001:37. This prediction forms part of Rem Koolhaas' article *Junk Space*.) But Markham argues that sensual stimulants such as feel, smell, taste, are absent in a virtual world and that it is difficult to see how an Internet screen can replace the personal experience of shopping. The Internet is a valuable retail tool, but as an ancillary to personal shopping. (Markham 2000:27)

The architectural imagination does not normally acknowledge sensuality, even though our culture is saturated with it. Architecture is supposed to be serious; money, calculations and gravity are its ingredients, not glamour and sex. (Van Berkel et al. 1999:140) This is why the predictions about the decline in retail space can be understood – it is a logic and rational argument. True to form, in a conversation with Charles Jencks, when asked about the use of sexuality in the design of the Prada store, Manhattan, Koolhaas denies the connection with sexuality.

But retail, and by extension also retail design, is part of popular culture, which is never rational but mostly emotional and complex. The private imagination of architecture disengages itself from the material and from public imagination, which is in reality impossible. (Van Berkel et al. 1999:155) The architectural imagination is as much informed by the environment as it is by the misty, semi-conscious preoccupations of the collective vision, such as magazine glamour, sex and celebrity. (Van Berkel et al. 1999:156)

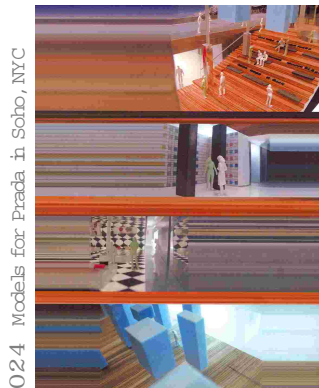
To repeat the initial question, what is the relationship between the architect and the global shopping trend now that we understand that it is embedded in popular culture?

Zaha Hadid, in her contribution to *The End of Architecture?* (1992), attempts an answer. The new role of the architect is to comply with competitively asserted standards of efficiency, to cater for commercial clients, increasingly with the objective of representing corporate identity or else of satisfying the fluctuating standards of good taste. The profession is thus torn into two distinct aspects: architecture becomes pure technique, as if it were a branch of engineering; or it becomes image-production, as if it were a branch of advertising. (Hadid 1992:27)

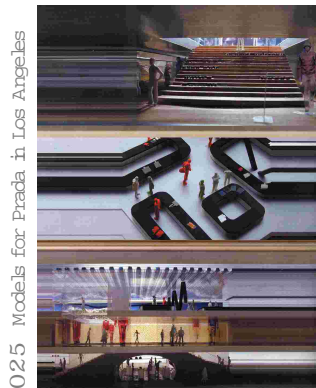
Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos tries to define The New Concept of the Architect. The architect is going to be the fashion designer of the future. Learning from Calvin Klein, the architect will be concerned with dressing the future, speculating, anticipating coming events and holding up a mirror to the world. Network practice extends existing forms of co-



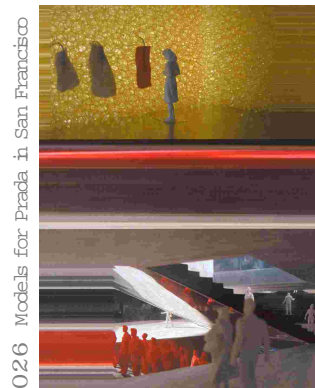
023 The Prada Key



024 Models for Prada in Soho, NYC



025 Models for Prada in Los Angeles



026 Models for Prada in San Francisco

operation with clients, investors, users and technical consultants to include design engineers, financiers, management gurus, process specialists, designers and stylists. Making use of new technologies, the network architect benefits from the increasing transferability of knowledge. The will to invent is fundamental, ensuring that the basic values of the discipline, ranging from geometry to materialism, are always evolving. (Van Berkel 1999:27-28)

Jane Rendell explains her view of the retail architect:

It is in the 'acting out' of shopping in and through architecture, and the 'acting out' of the purchase and use of architecture, that identities are continually constructed and reconstructed.. As magazines like Wallpaper* make perfectly clear, it is only in the combining of places - shop, home, work place and play space - and the juxtaposing of things - dresses, forks, computers and bricks - that we fully articulate who we like to think we are. And time is important. There are the times and places of consideration and deliberation, of desire before consumption; and there are the periods and environments occupied postpurchase, where products are displayed and enacted through use.. Increasingly, it is not only the goods bought in shops that say something about who we are, or would like to be, but also the design of the shops themselves.. It is not those architects who are passive, but rather those who challenge the status quo, who delight in being on the edge, who are most in demand. By being a bit 'different', they are able to create a distinct site and identity for a product. (Rendell 2000:11)

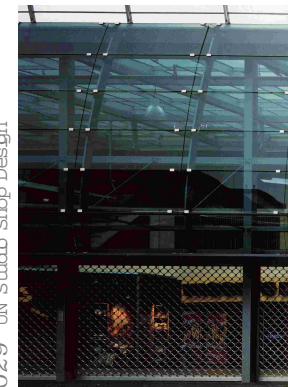
Joan Ockman sums it up well. "Just as 'make it new' was once the battle cry of the avant-garde and is now the drumbeat of the fashion industry, so 'experience' used to refer to something you had or underwent in the course of the quiddities of daily existence. Experience today is something to be architecturally engineered." (Ockman 2002:78)



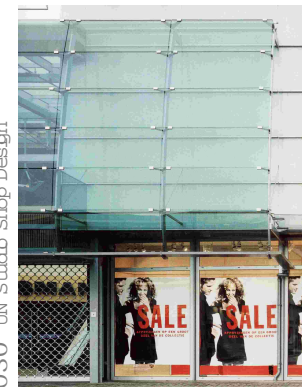
027 Calvin Klein's Future



028 UN Studio Shop Design



029 UN Studio Shop Design



030 UN Studio Shop Design

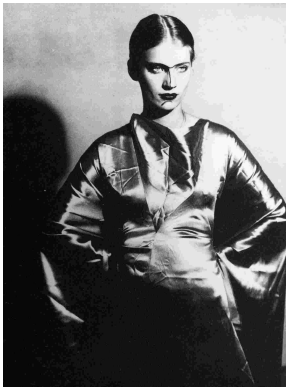
The initial purpose of this project was to explore the influence architecture has on other design disciplines, in particular fashion design. But it became evident that so many things other than their immediate environment inform fashion designers, that the pursuit of an architecture that inspires fashion is futile. Fashion transcends the spirit of the day. Instead of architecture influencing fashion design, architecture embodies fashion's identity while fashion and architecture together facilitate an identity for the consumer and the place of consumption.

The purpose of the project thus shifts to the exploration of architecture as the identity giver to a site and its context, the client and the consumer. The physical and metaphysical place where architecture, fashion and identity meet is founded in popular culture.

The form of the decision making process to determine what the project would exactly be, where it will be and whom it will be for, is circular. The spirit of the project is the starting point, but is by no means fixed. It is very much influenced by who the client is. The spirit of the project decides an urban context where the project would be most suited. The city's context informs the choice of precinct where the site might be. A detailed study of the precinct makes the most appropriate site evident while the in depth investigation of its context decides what is needed in the project. When that is established, the most suitable client can be chosen. And in its turn, the client influences the spirit of the project. The project will not only explore architecture as a means to identity, but will embody a spirit of movement, vibrancy, youth, urbanity and layering, very much like clothes wrap around us and defines our socio-economic identity.

The following arguments are arranged in a linear manner but it is important to keep the circular form of decision making in mind to fully understand the decisions the author has made. It is important to understand, to ask why and to investigate rather than to base fundamental decisions on assumptions. It not only the author who is concerned:

031 1920's Modern Experimentation



032 Sexual Revolution, 1976



033 Old and Beautiful, 1995



"Advertisers must tell consumers that they are each special individuals so that they will buy the same mass produced products - then consumers can construct their individuality by the unique combination of goods and services they buy."
(QUICK 1997:167)

The Harvard Design Project on the City began as a response to a pervasive condition of the architectural practice, in which the architect is asked to intervene in, but never to appreciate or understand, a given situation. An architect's interests are ultimately determined by a series of random encounters with projects and clients that do not allow an independent investigation of issues or conditions outside their field of vision. Thus architects operate, by definition, with ulterior motives; the capacity for independent analysis, research or investigation is simply not within their repertoire. It is becoming increasingly important for architects to operate on a level independent of architecture, in order to understand, at the most basic level, the phenomena affecting the development of architecture and the city. (Lavalu et al. 2001:116-117)