INTRODUCTION

The Shopping Centre
1943 -2013
The Rise and Demise of a Ubiquitous Collective Architecture

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In his seminal essay ‘Public Spaces, Collective Spaces,’ which was published in 1992, Spanish architect and critic Manuel de Solà-Morales suggested that the civic, architectural, urban and morphological richness of contemporary cities resides in their collective spaces that are not strictly public or private, but both simultaneously. De Solà-Morales described these places as ‘the ambiguous spaces where the public form of our cities is played’ and encouraged architects to resist ceding the battle over the design of shopping malls, vacation centres, parking lots and cinema complexes to commercial logic and developer standards. De Solà-Morales argued that these spaces warrant architects’ attention, even if only for their ubiquity, volume and massive use, as he pleaded for a shift – both in terms of design and research – away from the standard, safe ‘subsidized urbanity’ to more slippery, less evident and (arguably) more interesting areas.

In the more than seventy years that have passed since Victor Gruen and Elsie Krummeck first introduced the concept in Architectural Forum, much has been written about the shopping centre. Curiously enough, the discipline of architectural history has made little contribution to this existing scholarship. In the canonical histories the perception has been shaped that the shopping centre is a ‘second-class’ citizen, an outcast, less valuable than its more ‘high-brow’ civic companions such as the museum, library or theatre. This historiographical discrimination seems at odds with the growing impact of mass production, mass distribution and mass consumption on our cities and territories since the end of the Second World War – of which the shopping centre is the spatial epitome. Moreover, architectural scholars have refrained from engaging profoundly with the shopping centres’ original premise that it could ‘expand beyond the goal of creating merely machines for selling, and could satisfy the demand for urban crystallization points and thus offer to the suburban population significant life experiences.’ Victor Gruen’s claim that the shopping centre can act as a full-fledged ‘urban centre’ is generally accepted, but even so did conspicuously not make it into the pages of architectural historiography. The reasons for this radical exclusion of the shopping centre from the histories of architecture remain vague: Intentional distance from an architectural figure that is complicit with late-capitalist logics? Difficulty to engage with the non-explicit authorship and the generic style of the shopping centre? Or, a lack of a conceptual apparatus to qualify the public character of this privately-owned and collectively-practiced instance of the built environment?

The few occasions when the shopping centre has been admitted into the ‘prestigious’ realm of architectural history, the writings have commonly been biased towards the United States with surprisingly little attention for the numerous shopping centres in other national and cultural contexts. This has led to the assumption that the North American dumbbell mall is the singular, immutable paradigm that has hovered over geographies and cultures since the mid twentieth century without losing its prime characteristics; an enclosed box surrounded by a large parking lot, which is characterized by comprehensive surveillance, engenders social segregation and encourages unchecked urban sprawl. Are these assumptions justified? Or, are the true capacities of the shopping centre – as a result of negative propaganda – obscured by our failure of vision? As more and more shopping centres are changed beyond recognition or die a slow death, this conference questions if we should all cheer and shout ‘hooray,’ or if there is more to shopping centres than meets the eye. By offering a fine-grained, region-specific reading, this conference aims to distil the shopping centre’s key characteristics and reassess the contribution that it has made to post-war built environment and architectural culture.

The proceedings of this conference are divided into four parts, each of which corresponds with one of the thematic conference sessions. The first subsection, entitled Acculturating the Shopping Centre investigates if ‘hybrids’ developed as the paradigmatic shopping centre concept, the American dumbbell mall, encountered different socio-cultural climates, and what region-specific typologies can be identified. It also questions if, as societies changed over time, the shopping centre concept also – in a true Darwinistic fashion – evolved over time. Nicholas Jewell’s contribution ‘Eastern Promises’ accordingly explores...
the hybridization of the shopping mall as its international spread mirrored the migration of global capital from the Western to Eastern hemisphere. Jewell recounts the transformations that occurred when the mall arrived in Singapore, where it became an object of quasi-metabolist experimentation, to its adoption in Hong Kong as an agent that manipulates the city section, to the synthesis of these propositions in mainland China where the shopping mall has become a keystone in the mixed-use expansion of its urban schema.

By revisiting Jameson’s analysis of the Bonaventure hotel in his seminal essay *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* Esra Kahveci and Pelin Yoncaci Arslan conversely develop a comparative analysis, which presents the Cevahir shopping mall in Istanbul as a player in the global league of shopping centres, which signifies an architectural mutation; a constructed instance of postmodernity, similar to the one that Jameson observed in the Bonaventure hotel, albeit repeated in a remarkably different socio-cultural environment.

Kahveci and Arslan thus argue that Cevahir is nothing more than another expression of the global post-modern ‘shopping mall’ phenomenon, making the users that dwell in the building, the only visible remainder of local context. Cynthia Susilo similarly identifies the Boulevard Commercial Project (BCP) in Manado (Indonesia) as a generic reproduction of foreign ideas, but attributes a greater role to the users in the process of ‘acculturation.’ Susilo claims that the BCP’s spaces are socially reproduced through intense interactions between the mall and the Manadonese, thus creating spaces that are neither foreign nor completely local but both at once – a genuine indigenous modernity. Finally, Scott Colman recounts the evolution of Westfield. In the 1950s, this Australian company began with the importation of the American, suburban car-oriented mall typology to Sydney. Since then, in a true expression of the ‘survival of the fittest,’ the company has continuously evolved and redefined itself to meet current market demand and consumer logics. As a result, Westfield today constructs dense, vertical shopping typologies that occupy legacy sites of the industrial city and are ‘hardwired’ into the city’s public transport system.

The second section, **Building Collectives and Communities,** focuses on the reformist underpinnings and socio-cultural ambitions of shopping centres. It explores the contribution that shopping centres have made towards moulding a ‘common ground’ and casting a ‘space of appearance’ within contemporary society. Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi investigates the transatlantic migration of ideas and references for a community ‘core’ in the period between 1950 and 1970. He illustrates how an osmotic relation existed between the concepts that were elaborated in the avant-garde theoretical debates of the late CIAM and the ones that were implemented by Victor Gruen in his initial designs for shopping centres. Sanja Matijević Barčot and Ana Grbić similarly investigate the shopping centre’s ‘core’ potential, but shift the focus from West to East, as they probe into the social role that the shopping centre assumed in the construction of Croatia’s socialist reality between 1960 and 1980. They claim that shopping centres in Croatia were often ‘institutionalised’ to a certain extent. Not only were they publicly financed and managed but, more importantly, they were regarded as indispensable and powerful components of a socialist urban planning. Finally, Jennifer Smit and Kirsty Mátě’s paper, in an attempt to redress the growing international criticism of the shopping centre as an undemocratic space that has a problematic relationship between private ownership and public participation, researches the malleability of the ‘public character’ of the shopping centre through the applied practice of ‘guerrilla-picnicking.’

**From Node to Stitch,** the third subsection addresses the key role that the shopping centre has played as part and parcel of urban planning from 1943 to today. It connects the development of shopping centres to urban reconstruction and revitalisation efforts on the one hand and explores shopping centres’ contribution to urban expansion projects and structured suburbanisation on the other. Il Lee, Joo hyun Park and Hyemin Park study the emergence of a new type of mall in South Korea in the early 1990s; the mega shopping mall. This typology is characterized by the augmentation of the shopping function with cultural and leisure facilities, such as multiplex theatres and various food and beverage stores, thereby giving the shopping centre the spatial and programmatic density to act as a new urban anchor. Thirty-three case studies illustrate the key role that these mega-shopping malls have played in South Korea’s urban planning and design over the past last fifteen years. Travelling back in time, Joonwoo Kim takes us to 1960s South Korea, when one of the first ‘shopping centres,’ the Sewoon Complex, was built in Seoul. In his paper, Kim narrates how this megastructure, which is one kilometre long and fifty metres wide, which incorporates shopping, public functions and housing, and which was initially built as a ‘stand alone’ autonomous entity on an inner city clearing, has over the years forged strong connections with the surrounding tissue. Rana Habibi’s paper discusses a similar ‘superstructure’ with shopping, built at the heart of a satellite neighbourhood in Western Tehran, called Ekbatan. Habibi deconstructs the development history of Ekbatan to explicate how in the shopping centre in mid-century Tehran became the object of forceful crossings between European, American, Asian and (last but not least) Persian models and influences. Viviana d’Auria finally takes us to West-Africa, where she iterates the development of the main city centre of the new town of Tema, which was planned by the Greek firm of Constantinios Doxiadis. According to Doxiadis’ plan, the centre’s civic and
commercial activities were to be accumulated into a spine heading northwards, aligned with the ‘Ekistic’ growth of the city. D’Auria subsequently explains how the carefully planned figure of this civic and commercial ‘spine’ has since been ‘recentred’ by its everyday users through processes of selective appropriation, rejection and resistance. She thus illustrates the capacity of indigenous cultural practices to suspend models of development but also to intensify the infrastructure of the shopping centre beyond its projected intentions.

Together, these papers present a first attempt to displace the discussions on inertia between the envisioned and real futures of consumer environments. They illustrate that the paradigm of the shopping centre should be looked upon as a typologically more complex and performatively more diverse paradigm than the dumbbell mall. In addition, the different contributions start to suggest the necessity for a more sophisticated theoretical framework to conceive the spaces of appearance that the shopping centre articulates in cities and territories, as well as for the continuous acculturations, transformations and re-articulations of this ubiquitous collective architecture.

Endnotes