

THE EVOLUTION OF SHOPPING CENTERS: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY CENTER IN THE SHOPPING MALL AS IMITATION/SIMULATION

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Abstract

Shopping malls have emerged in the Western world, starting from mid-1950s as a new architectural form that was constructed outside the city as a simulation of the city center, and in isolation from all the negative external aspects of the city, with their enclosed environments. Starting to integrate into the global economy in 1980s, cities set out to import the components of the global economy within the perspective of liberalism. The concept of the shopping mall, invented by the global economy as the new public space, was also imported to cities at 1980s. The import was carried out by copying the shopping mall concept, which is a simulation of the city center in the West.

The new concept of shopping malls changed the understanding of spending leisure time, shopping and entertainment in cities, and made a big impact on the city and the citizens. Paving the road for a new and significant public space model in the minds of residents in cities, shopping malls became one of the significant triggers of the postmodern transformation in global cities.

This paper analyzes the evolution of shopping malls in history briefly and explains the relationship of city centers (which are used as an imitation) and the shopping mall space design.

Keywords: Shopping Malls, Imitation, City Centers, Mall Design

1 INTRODUCTION

Shopping has always been an act dependent on socialization or public space, both during modern and pre-modern periods. It tends to be stronger in cities, integrates with other functions in the city and takes place in urban spaces. Urban space, as public space, consists of characteristics that enrich and support urban social activities. The common objective of spaces hosting such activities is to create an environment with positive characteristics in order to fulfill people's need to congregate, socialize and communicate with each other, while providing the function of purchasing goods and services (Redstone, 1973). The urban infrastructure determines the existential characteristics of shopping.

In the modern era, shopping is mainly clustered in the compact and enclosed system of shopping malls which contain many stores within certain boundaries. The shopping mall structure demarcates and isolates the shopping space from the urban environment visually, physically and socially within a gigantic enclosed

space, and thus recreates the public space outside the city center. In this structure, the shopping activity is transformed from an act of purchasing with the intention to fulfill needs, into an act of consumption which is independent from needs (Birol, 2005). In this way, consumption becomes an end in itself.

Until the 20th century, the fundamental characteristic of urban shopping spaces was their integration with the urban fabric. The agoras in the cities of Antiquity and the squares in the cities of the Middle Ages comprised the main shopping areas in cities, where the activity of shopping was fulfilled along with other urban functions, such as congregation and social communication with other urban residents.

2 THE EVOLUTION OF SHOPPING CENTERS

Enclosed shopping spaces which contained public areas first emerged after the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. The rapid increase in the production and the diversification of consumer goods after the Industrial Revolution have led to a tendency of exhibiting these consumer goods in abundant variety and in places isolated from the uncomfortable urban conditions of the day. The tendency of the affluent class to avoid shopping together with people from lower-income groups and the disturbing qualities of the urban physical environment were the main reasons which led to a preference for isolated shopping environments. Therefore, as enclosed marketplaces gradually started to serve the entire urban population regardless of social class, shopping spaces entered a process of redefinition along the demands of the affluent class who were disturbed by this predicament. Hence, the new large structures enabled expansive enclosed spaces within the city that were exempt from the negative aspects of the urban environment, and naturally became centers of attraction for the affluent people of the period.

Initially, there was a transition to multi-floor stores called “department stores” which were first planned and constructed in England. These department stores were mainly intended for the consumption of luxury goods, and boasted a minimum staff of twenty-five people (Mackeith, 1986). In time, the definition of the department store was expanded so as to cover large enclosed spaces ranging from ten to twenty thousand meter-squares and comprising of recreational areas, food outlets and branches of various brands (Zengel, 2002). These multi-floor buildings were the first institutions of the modern retail industry and the first enclosed shopping spaces of the 19th century (Ozcan, 2007). Moreover, the development of steel and glass technologies enabled the construction of well-lit structures, which had transparent ceilings, offered wide openings in common spaces and brought many shopping units together (Onbilgin & Uzun, 2002). In this sense, developments in architecture made a tremendous contribution to the transformation of shopping spaces from structures that were focused on city centers to independent shopping malls.

As a result of these developments, arcades and large department stores started to emerge at the end of the 19th century (White & Sutton, 2001). Arcades were the first indication of the tendency to isolate shopping structures from the city. In these structures, window-shopping and shopping itself were no longer performed merely out of necessity, but had also become a daily leisure activity (Backes, 1997). In addition to becoming a routine activity in daily life, shopping itself was also transformed into a hobby.

In time, shopping malls began to emerge outside the city. The first out-of-city shopping malls were structures consisting of a single complex building, which contained several large stores, a supermarket and open spaces for promenading that were independent from each other (Gosling & Maitland, 1976). Eventually, the shopping mall architecturally evolved into a completely enclosed structure where everything was brought together under a single roof. This approach was revealed as a closed universe in the 1950s, in Victor Gruen's Northland Center, which spread over five hundred thousand meter-squares on two floors, and contained a hundred and ten stores. With the shopping mall completely closed to the outside world, it became possible to control the climate within the complex (Sahin, 2010). Thus, shopping malls succeeded in isolating themselves from the world outside their walls, in terms of climate as well. From then on, shopping malls became a world of their own and created their own universe.

The consolidation of the liberal economy and changing global factors following the 1980s were influential in turning shopping malls into a significant part of the urban identity. In the 1990s and 2000s, shopping malls continued to proliferate in various cities of the world, and the preference for city centers declined increasingly over time.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF SHOPPING MALLS

In contemporary urban centers, the density of pedestrians dwindled and these spaces became business centers consisting of high-rise buildings, with avenues completely dedicated to vehicles, all of which lead the way to an environment where shopping spaces were reinvented in a new and unique structure. The most important embodiment of this predicament is the contemporary shopping mall.

Shopping malls are a spatial reflection of the transformation of consumption mentality and culture into a form in which the modern urban life is "packaged" and offered to urban residents. They are designed to be much more than mere centers for shopping activities. They are also intended to serve as meeting areas where many activities can take place in a closed physical environment with air-conditioning and safe social atmosphere (Akinci, 2013). Those strolling in shopping malls are distanced not only from unpleasant weather conditions, but also from the unpredictable and disturbing criminal activities they are likely to encounter on the city streets (Ritzer, 2014). The aesthetic characteristics of the space augment the satisfaction of those using it, enable potential users to be attracted to it and boost their morale by relieving them from the pressures of the city (Onbilgin & Uzun, 2002). As a result of the touch of a designer, they transpire as significant spaces of "pleasure and enjoyment."

Shopping malls are detached from their environments and contexts, and are thus closed in on themselves. These structures host a contemporary public space within their boundaries that has been designed as indoor urban space. With proper climate control and lighting, and with its functions and formal characteristics, it attains an appearance that looks increasingly like a city center (Birol, 2005). Integrating many stores, a few department stores, a supermarket or hypermarket and areas for social activities, it is a type of structure which constitutes a new urban focal point.

In these spaces where one can stroll freely, there is no obligation to buy and window-shopping is widespread. The consumer is allowed to look at, to engage with and to try products in carnivalesque atmosphere. The consumer experiences commodities which she or he does not own (Fiske, 2000). This space offers a different world to the consumer, and enables direct contact with this world.

Along with the act of purchasing, people also do other things at shopping malls. For example, they take part in experiences. The consumer incorporates the acts of buying and consumption in a short span of time and in a single event in the shopping mall. Even though such purchasing and consumption experiences include both tangible and intangible products, the act of consumption still remains experimental. This is particularly the case for eating in a restaurant, strolling around, sitting down to rest, going to a movie or visiting an art gallery. In this sense, the shopping mall contains sources related to experiences outside commodification and the significance of the world of objects becomes secondary (Falk & Campbell, 1997). A new universe comes into being with the shopping mall.

Shopping malls not only assume the function of shopping, but also attempt to cater to social needs such as recreation and relaxation, sense of security and the preservation of social distance between people. Given the way in which it defines the sense of relaxation and release, recreation bears the promise of distancing oneself from the fast and tiresome pace and turbulence of urban life, of regaining strength and of revitalization. The notion of recreation in shopping malls entails psychological recreation to a greater degree than physical recreation. The common spaces are intended to provide psychological relaxation to people, with their social environment, natural elements, artworks and various activities on offer. For common spaces to successfully provide recreation to its users, it is of utmost importance that these spaces offer psychological comfort in addition to physical comfort. Considered in terms of its social aspects, some users prefer spaces where they can rest and relax, while others prefer spaces where they can actively interact with it and its various aspects and can participate in discovery, new experiences and activities.

One of the most striking aspects of shopping malls is their incorporation of areas for passive participation. Passive participation is the conceptualization of a spectator and can be defined as the enjoyment attained by watching the environment, in addition to being an actor on the stage provided by the shopping mall. In passive participation, the act of watching becomes more important than doing things or talking, and the individual can perceive himself of herself to be a part of the surrounding society and the environment (Carr et al., 1992). Factors such as the presence of other people, visual quality and diversity, art, scenery and nature attract people to passive participation.

4 THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY CENTER IN THE SHOPPING MALL AS IMITATION / SIMULATION

In the post-industrialist society, everything is done according to a determined model. In this type of society, the model is not designed on the basis of “reality”, instead “reality” is based on the model itself (Saylan, 2009). Baudrillard calls this reconstruction of reality through models, where there is no original or reality to begin with, as hyperreality or simulation (Baudrillard, 2014). According to Baudrillard, simulation is the counterfeit which has replaced reality itself, by overtaking all of the signs pertaining to reality. In this perspective, simulation is a hyperreality which has insidiously destroyed and replaced “reality” at an unknown point and time. In Baudrillard's opinion, simulation is maintained through the simulacra, or in other words, representations which are perceived as reality. In Baudrillard's words, “the simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth - it is the truth which conceals that there is none” (Baudrillard, 2005). In this sense, simulation is reproduction of objects or events without having any basis on “reality”.

Baudrillard argues that the simulacra has four distinct stages (Gane, 2008), and the post-industrial period corresponds to the third stage of the simulacra. For Baudrillard, during the first stage of the simulacra, which encompasses the period between the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, and during the second stage of the simulacra, which in turn encompasses the period between the Industrial Revolution and the post-industrial era, the image strives to establish a connection with and to represent reality. However, this predicament changes with the third stage of the simulacra. At this stage, both the real image and the counterfeit image is perceived as a simulation (Grace, 2000). Under these conditions, images float freely without having a concrete connection to reality, and thus they can only generate meaning in relation to each other (Toffoletti, 2014). That is to say, there is a difference between reality and its representation during Baudrillard's first two stages of the simulacra, but with the third stage, signs have become representation of other representations, instead of reality. Now, a dimension exists, in which it is argued that the “real” is derived from the representation of representations. In this way, representations are derived from reality during the first and the second stage of the simulacra, while the third stage is governed by an order, in which reality is derived from the representation of representations.

The phenomenon which Baudrillard depicts as the third stage of the simulacra has directly determined the act and the architectural space of shopping as well. In fact, the shopping mall concept was invented in the post-industrial era. It was initially reconstructed as physically and socially distant from the city, but with an appearance that is similar to the city center in terms of architectural functionality. In this context, the city center was reconstructed within the shopping mall, which defined and presented itself as an alternative to the city center with its references to the city (Jewel, 2001). However, these references are not spatial but formal. They are not related to the essence of the city, but instead they are merely superficial and artificial. According to Baudrillard, shopping malls are akin to a festival of commodities, and exhibit a small scale simulation of the city to their users (Tuncer, 2009). Shopping malls behave like city centers, but they are indeed constructed with a completely different type of architecture. In this sense, they represent not a “real” city center, but the concept of shopping, or in other words, a representation in itself, and they establish this as a new reality, or as Baudrillard coins it, as hyperreality. Fiction, which starts out from reality, becomes an imposition of the fiction, as reality itself.

Urban space, which is reconstructed in the shopping mall, loses its ability to renew itself, and becomes an empty space created at once within a confined space. A uniform spatial organization which manipulates the user lies behind the rich appearance, created by the use of landscaping elements and decorative arrangements in the urban/public space that has been (constructed) moved indoors. Characteristics of real urban space are simulated superficially in the structure, with the aim to recreate the complex and chaotic urban atmosphere of the city in a sterile environment (Birol, 2005). In Baudrillard's words, in the shopping mall, “everything is taken over and superseded in the ease and translucidity of an abstract 'happiness', defined solely by the resolution of tensions” (Baudrillard, 2013). It turns into a controllable and easily manageable artificial urban space which is designed with a focus on commercial success. The urban space is imitated by allowing an ample amount of natural light into the structure or by recreating this sensation by artificial illumination, as well as by designing the facades of stores by mimicking the facades of buildings on avenues in the city (Birol, 2005).

Today, shopping malls have turned into surreal places where completely unrelated entertainment elements such as carousel and ice skating ring; technological elements such as panoramic elevators and escalators; and architectural elements such as arches, domes and bridges are combined together. However, it is also a

reality that shopping malls are the new public spaces of our age that are shaped with an indoor space approach, which is at times reminiscent of the past with a “kitsch” style, and which at other times reflects a “high-tech” appearance, evoking a space station. The public relationships established within such spaces, have also lost their naturalness, similar to the artificial world reconstructed in shopping malls. From air conditioning to security checks, everything is controlled in shopping malls. Likewise, public relationships are monitored and controlled as well. Everything is an imitation of the real city center, but all that is not sterile has been exempted from this imitation, thus a refined shopping space is offered to consumers. In this way, both physical and social needs are fulfilled in an urban environment that is secure, protected, air-conditioned, isolated from traffic and completely pedestrianized. According to Baudrillard, shopping malls offer an unprecedented comfort to those strolling in the promenades of shopping malls (Baudrillard, 2013). The imitation city center has started to replace the traditional city center (Gruen, 1960). For Baudrillard, the pace of modern life is reconciled with the idleness of antiquity in the shopping mall (Baudrillard, 2013). In this space, shopping transforms into a mechanical activity, while the appearance of the city center the shopping mall seeks to recreate is replaced by a mechanical and completely commercialized spatial organization.

5 CONCLUSION

Shopping Malls are the result of the third stage of simulacra, which characterizes the post-industrial society according to Baudrillard. This post-industrial society is organized in and around a perception of reality that is a representation of representation, and whose relation to reality to is reconstructed on the basis of shaping reality, instead of starting out from reality itself. Malls set out an example of the shopping behavior and concept, which was invented and reconstructed as a simulation of the city center, and imported from the West by modeling a representation of a representation.

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