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**MANAGING THE SHOPPING CENTRE AS A CONSUMPTION SITE.
CREATING APPEALING ENVIRONMENTS FOR VISITORS; SOME
AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND EXAMPLES.**

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The Strand Arcade, central Sydney.

Source: Salisbury (1990) *The Strand Arcade - a history*.

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ABSTRACT.

The position occupied by retailing within the production - consumption debate is the subject of dispute. As neither sphere can be fully analysed in isolation such argument may be somewhat irrelevant. The need to conceptualise the two spheres together, therefore, has informed this research on the created environments of shopping centres.

Planned and managed shopping centres are a ubiquitous part of the built environment in 'advanced capitalist' nations. There has been a tendency, however, for researchers to focus upon exceptional centres rather than everyday examples of this particular consumption site. They have concentrated upon how shopping centre environments appear to be created and the appeal researchers assume they may have for an observer. My research for this thesis, however, has been concerned with how managers create shopping centre environments and how they are designed so as to appeal to their centres' perceived markets. This was done by conducting semi - structured interviews with a number of centre managers in Australia and New Zealand.

The unified ownership and management structure of shopping centres makes it easier for their created environments to be controlled. Shopping centre researchers and those who have attempted to read the built environment as if it were a text have tended to assume that the architectural styles used will reflect dominant ideologies and that they are powerless to interpret or alter them in any other than the manner intended by the designers, developers and owners. Many of the managers recognised, however, that shoppers cannot be forced to visit nor can they be made to purchase. Research was therefore commissioned by management as a way of gaining socio - economic information on the individuals in their catchments, their 'needs' and desires.

Selecting tenants which would appeal to their markets and arranging them in a manner which reflected the way people liked to shop was thought to be paramount to the success or otherwise of a centre. Some managers, for example, claimed that there was a difference between 'doing' the shopping (which is a chore) and 'going' shopping (which is enjoyable) and that this needed to be kept in mind when they positioned retailers within their centres.

Consumption does not only involve the purchase of commodities for their use and/ or sign value but is also concerned with experience. Managers attempted to provide their shoppers with an enjoyable experience when they visited their centres by, for

example, the creation of an appealing ambience and by either suggesting or insisting, respectively, that the common areas and leased spaces be regularly refurbished.

PROLOGUE.

The geography discipline is broadly concerned with the physical environment, the created environment and society. While there is debate as to whether the 'natural' is socially constructed, those spaces that have been influenced directly by the behaviour of individuals are referred to as created environments (Johnston, 1993). During the last decade there has been a revival of interest amongst human geographers in the created environment as an object of investigation. This thesis examines a particular form of the created environment, that is, the planned and managed shopping centre in the 'advanced capitalist' economies of Australia and New Zealand.

The circulation of capital has an extraordinary influence on the built environment in capitalist nations. In this research its importance has not been rejected but rather I have extended this existing body of knowledge by examining shopping centres as sites of consumption. Capitalist societies are believed to operate through the interaction of three interdependent spheres, that is, the state, the sphere of capitalist production and the sphere of struggle. The sphere of struggle which is also referred to as Civil Society '*... comprises the linked spheres of circulation and reproduction*' (Johnston, 1991, 98). It is within the sphere of circulation that exchange occurs. Exchange involves the '*... buying and selling of all commodities (including labour power)*' (Johnston, 1991, 98). Within the sphere of reproduction, society is reproduced

'... both biologically and culturally; the commodities that are bought with the money earned in the sphere of production are used for subsistence and for meeting the created 'needs' and 'wants' of individuals' (Johnston, 1991, 98; emphasis in original).

The underlying unity of production and consumption has, however, been put to one side by researchers who have chosen to examine the production sphere as if it were autonomous. In this thesis the production - consumption dialectic is explored but it is consumption which is focused upon in depth. Shopping centres are spaces of circulation and reproduction, but such spaces are also produced. Shopping centre managers attempt to create appealing environments for their visitors. Although purchasing (the exchange of capital for a product) and using commodities are important within Civil Society, the experiences associated with looking, selecting and even displaying goods maybe equally or even more important to the consumer.

Within capitalist societies space is commodified, that is, it has an exchange value. If it is privately owned it may be bought and sold. Space is not only exchanged for its

use value. It can also be 'sold' or 'rented' (and this applies to both public and privately owned places) to consumers for the experience (or experiences) associated with occupying the space (Sack, 1992). Shopping centres contain a number of retail outlets in which shoppers can browse. When visitors go to a shopping centre they not only look at and perhaps purchase commodities they are also consuming and producing the created environment of the centre. Shopping centres provide space for commodities (a place where commodities can be displayed) and are themselves commodities in space.

'Commodities, stores, and clusters of stores become landscapes which advertise both particular goods and consumption in general. Because sales are enhanced by window - shopping, browsing, and exposure to an environment that titillates the senses, the landscapes not only contain commodities that can be consumed, but the landscape itself is being consumed' (Sack, 1992, 135).

The frequency and ease with which capital can (now) be shifted from one type of investment or region to another, as well as between nations is reflected within the created environment, simultaneously producing places of both economic boom and decline. Shopping centre managers, try to respond to these changing conditions by producing environments which they believe will attract visitors to their centres and ultimately make a profit. Agents must encourage their visitors to become purchasers and attempt to cope with the impermanence of any organisational solution to these changing conditions. In order to do this the developers, owners and on a daily basis the managers of shopping centres, attempt to discover what individuals in their centres' catchments 'need' and want.

The extent of a state's authority is demarcated by political boundaries. Within these boundaries a number of other local authorities, groups and individuals have their own areas over which they attempt to exercise control. Such control occurs within public as well as private spaces. Shopping centre managers demonstrate territoriality (that is, '*... the geographical exercise of power*' (Sack, 1992, 42)) over the created environments of their centres by, for example, the selection and positioning of their retail tenants, the choice of particular marketing campaigns and by moderating the behaviour of visitors. As well as complying with national and local government legislation, retailers and visitors in shopping centres also have to conform with the restrictions placed upon them by centre management. Centre managements' area of authority not only includes the interior of their centres but can also extend to their exterior environments - centre car parking areas are an example of this.

All studies are affected by the position occupied by the researcher. The created environments of shopping centres can be interpreted in a number of different ways.

Rather than focusing on how the circulation of capital within 'advanced capitalist' societies manifests itself in the form of the consumption fund and in particular within the built environment for consumption (Harvey, 1985a, 1985b, 1989), I have emphasised how centre managers attempt to create and re - create appealing environments for shoppers within the constraints of the capitalist economic system. This is important. Although planned and managed shopping centre are a ubiquitous part of the urban built environment in 'advanced capitalist' nations, how they are managed so as to appeal to shoppers has not been examined by geographical researchers.

PREFACE.

Retailing is more than a purely economic transaction between retailers (or retail paid workers) and purchasers. A 'visit to the shops' requires a certain amount of social interaction between the parties. It also concerns the creation and re - creation of environments which will appeal to and involve shoppers. Consumers are not simply acted upon but also act. Shopping is an experience which may be, but is not always, associated with purchasing.

Until the early 1990s, theoretically informed analyses of retailing were all but non - existent within the social sciences and in particular within the geography discipline. One notable exception, however, was Ducatel and Blomley's (1990) article on 'Rethinking retail capital' which examined the position of retailing with respect to the circulation of capital.

This thesis originally stemmed from the frustration felt while completing my Masterate thesis, in 1991, entitled 'Retail Change and the Impact of these Changes on 'High Street' with reference to Palmerston North', due to the dearth of articles available on retailing within the academic and professional journals. Except for those who concentrated upon housing (Johnston et al, 1994) the studies conducted by geographers tended to be production - based, that is, researchers focused upon production while ignoring consumption.

The exact position occupied by retailing within the consumption - production debate is disputed but as the sector had been ignored within the productionist literature, I decided at the beginning of my review of the literature for this thesis, in 1992, to search for conceptual analyses of consumption within the broad framework of the social sciences. While finding useful insights into consumption, I increasingly began to question the appropriateness of examining either consumption or production as if they were separate entities and came to agree with Morris (1988) that the spheres should not be conceptualised in this manner. Although this research is informed by the need to analyse consumption and production together, it is not, however, its central concern.

Since 1992 the number of articles within the journals which focus on consumption has steadily begun to increase. Fine (1993), for example, has stated that consumption should be studied by examining the production - consumption chains of commodities while Glennie and Thrift (1993) argue that the conceptual approach a researcher interested in consumption should take is to an extent dependent upon the focus of their study. Glennie and Thrift's (1993) stance is more flexible and their

interest in consumption includes the consumer as well as the commodities. Place and context, they claim, influence consumer practice.

As my research topic became more defined, the decision to focus upon a particular retail format, that is, shopping centres, was stumbled upon almost by accident. Shopping centres which are a common feature of the urban environment in 'advanced capitalist' nations often appear to be able to attract a large number of visitors. I wanted to find out how these particular created environments were managed so as to appeal to the shoppers.

The shopping centre phenomenon which essentially started in the United States of America after the Second World War spread to Australia and New Zealand between the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although the industry began later in Australasia, its growth and development in these countries has not simply reflected a diffusion of ideas from North America. There are similarities between centres built in the United States and those operating in Australia and New Zealand but there are also some important differences. Shopping centres in Australia and New Zealand (except for those built in the inner city), for example, tend to be food based, that is, they have at least one supermarket as an anchor tenant whereas this is not such an important feature of the industry in the United States.

This thesis, examines, using some Australian and New Zealand examples, how managers try and create appealing shopping centre environments and what they perceive makes a centre attractive to their visitors.

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