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Big store design and marketing effects: Non-western, new-build shopping malls and implications for the re-enchantment of consumption

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Abstract

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Introduction

This chapter grew out of a much larger, book-length study of consumer culture and identity in post-Soviet Russia (Roberts 2016). Work on the book's first chapter, on the re-

enchantment of consumption, led to a number of interesting discoveries. First, while recent years have seen a burgeoning of the literature in this area (Antéblian, Filser and Roederer 2013), the focus is almost exclusively on North America and Western Europe. This is all the more surprising when one considers how dynamic, heterogeneous and indeed innovative, retail markets are in many other regions of the world, such as South Africa (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009), South America (Miller 2014) and Central Asia. Second, although shopping malls have been portrayed alternately as either extreme forms of escapist entertainment offering consumers endless opportunities for self-realization (Gottdiener 1995, Backes 1997, Maclaran and Brown 2005, Zukin 2004, Ritzer 2010), or as places where consumers are subjected to constant control, manipulation and indeed surveillance (Goss 1993, Twitchell 1999, Ballard 2006, Morrison 2012), there have been no serious studies of the possible political context, or indeed subtext, of retail re-enchantment. This is quite extraordinary, given that many of the world's newest and largest malls can be found in those emerging economies of the Middle East and Asia, which are governed by undemocratic, and indeed authoritarian regimes (Federigan 2014). Such regimes use public buildings of all kinds to define and legitimize state power (Eisinger 2000, Adams 2008, Sklair 2010) – including shopping malls (Laszcskowski 2014, Koch 2014). To paraphrase Goss (1993), in Dubai, China, Iran and indeed much of Central Asia, malls may be seen as pseudoplaces designed to manufacture the illusion that something else other than shopping is going on whilst maintaining the political status quo (see Miles 2010: 108). Mention of physical buildings brings us to my third and final point. Despite the fact that shopping spaces are often architecturally highly innovative (Cairns 2010), there is remarkably little in the literature on the specific role architectural design may play in re-enchanting the consumer. This of course is symptomatic of the marginalisation of commercial architecture, not just by retail scholars (see however Woodward 1998, Kent, Warnaby and Kirby 2009, and McIntyre 2014), but also in much of the consumer culture literature (Schroeder

2002), and indeed in general studies of contemporary architecture (see for example Jencks 2002, and Frampton 2007).

My focus in this chapter is the Khan Shatyr shopping mall in the new capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. Not only is this a particularly striking example of contemporary shopping mall design, it also highlights many of the gaps in the academic literature(s) mentioned above. Employing a visual research, case study methodology, I propose to ask the following questions: first, how does this particular mall re-enchant consumption?; second, how does that re-enchantment relate to the discourses of political legitimacy and national identity currently circulating in Kazakh society?; and third, what are the implications of the Khan Shatyr for our understanding of retail re-enchantment? The chapter, which is conceptual rather than empirical, is structured as follows: after a review of the re-enchantment literature, I undertake an analysis of the Khan Shatyr complex, before concluding with a section highlighting the implications for our understanding of the re-enchantment of consumption.

The re-enchantment of consumption

Essentially, the 're-enchantment of consumption' involves downplaying the mercantile nature of retailing, and focusing instead on the consumer's emotional experience. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were among the first to point out that consumption does not merely involve rational information processing in the search for goods or services. Instead, they argued, many consumers also look to indulge their creativity and experience positive emotions when out shopping. It is only, they maintained, by looking at this experiential aspect of consumption – shoppers' 'fantasies, feelings, and fun', as they put it – that researchers and indeed retailers themselves can reach an adequate understanding of consumer behaviour (1982: 139; on 'hedonistic' shopping, see also Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994, and Bäckström 2011).

Interestingly, this insistence on the need to focus on the more intangible aspects of consumption – the aesthetic, the ludic and the hedonic – coincided not so much with the rise of new retail experiences (after all, malls and hypermarkets had already been around for decades), but with the coming into fashion among literary and critical theorists of the concept of 'postmodernism' (see for example Jameson 1984 and Lyotard 1984).

While Holbrook and Hirschman do not refer explicitly to 'postmodernism', this concept was central to the article in which the notion of 're-enchanting consumption' first appeared, almost a decade and a half later. In that article, Firat and Venkatesh claimed that in the 'modern' era (which they suggest runs from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century up to the present day), the consumer has been reduced to 'a reluctant participant in a rational economic system that affords no emotional, symbolic, or spiritual relief' (1995: 240). Reminding us that the postmodern age is supposed to sound the death knell for all metanarratives (Lyotard 1984), they continue: 'the postmodern quest is therefore to "reenchant human life" and to liberate the consumer from a repressive rational/technological scheme' (1995: 240). As this comment makes abundantly clear, re-enchanting consumption and re-enchanting life are for Firat and Venkatesh ultimately one and the same thing. Citing not just Holbrook and Hirschman, but also the work of Debord (1994) and Baudrillard (1994), they maintain: 'as the consumption sector turns more and more toward the consumption of images, the society at large becomes more and more a society of spectacle' (1995: 250). And it is precisely by embracing the spectacular, the symbolic and the experiential aspects of consumption, they argue, that the consumer will become the producer of her own experience, and thereby of her own self/-ves (see also Firat and Dholakia 1998, Kozinets et al. 2004, and Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). For Firat and Venkatesh this is where the 'liberatory' potential of postmodern consumption ultimately lies.

While some have criticised Firat and Venkatesh's narrative as simplistic (see for example Holt 2002), their faith in the power of consumer agency has nevertheless found a significant echo among marketing academics and practitioners alike. As Carù and Cova have put it: 'Since the 1960s and 1970s, consumption has progressively disengaged from its essentially utilitarian conception, one that was based on products' and services' use value. Consumption has become an activity that involves a production of meaning, as well as a field of symbolic exchanges' (2007: 4). This notion of the consumer as 'producer' recalls de Certeau's claim (1984) that individuals continually re-appropriate objects in new and unintended ways, actively transforming their cultural meanings via a process of customisation (or 'bricolage') as part of their personal self-identity project (see also Thompson 2000). More recently, the relationship between the 'productive' consum*er* and the re-enchantment of consum*ption* has been explored by George Ritzer. Ritzer takes up Max Weber's point that modern society is driven by the move towards rationalisation, and as such is characterised by disenchantment (Weber 1978/[1922]). In particular, Ritzer describes the relentless drive for efficiency, predictability, calculability and control in today's, post-Fordist (Western) world. He takes McDonald's as the archetypical example of this process, which he labels 'McDonaldization' (1993). For Ritzer, McDonaldization has produced widespread disenchantment, since it leaves no room for the magical or the mysterious in consumption (see Sassatelli 2007: 174-77). In response, stores, malls, and indeed many other forms of what Ritzer calls 'new means of consumption', such as casinos, cruise liners and even sports stadia, all attempt to re-enchant the consumer. They do this by various means, collectively described by Ritzer as 'spectacle and extravaganza through the use of simulations, implosion, and manipulations of time and space' (2010: xiv). However, these 'simulations', the purpose of which is to create an almost religious sense of wonder for the consumer, ultimately deliver commercialized and pre-packaged forms of enchantment, which leave the consumer

continually dissatisfied with the show on offer. The result, Ritzer maintains, is an endless cycle of enchantment-disenchantment-re-enchantment (Thompson 2006; on the limits of re-enchantment, see also Antéblian, Filser and Roederer 2013: 99-100).

For Ritzer, these new means of consumption, and the re-enchantment on which they are based, emerged – or rather 'accelerated dramatically' (2010: 6) – between the end of World War II and the beginning of the current recession, in late 2007. During this time, he claims, there was a significant increase both in the level of resources available to consumers, and in the means invested in persuading consumers to part with those resources. Those means were essentially advertising, and retailing. While Ritzer's account encompasses more than half a century of economic development, one of the leading French sociologists to have written on consumption, Gilles Lipovetsky, takes a slightly different view. Like Ritzer, he acknowledges the tendency towards what one might call the 'spectacularisation' of consumption. Describing contemporary consumer culture, he talks of 'enchantment resulting from spectacular excess', and 'an intoxicating recreation where one takes pleasure in the belief that the false has become true, the elsewhere is here and the distant past is now the present' (2006: 59; our translation). Unlike Ritzer, however, Lipovetsky sees this trend as essentially characteristic of the last thirty years or so (since the end of the 1970s). Echoing Firat and Venkatesh, Lipovetsky claims that this is a period in which a concern with the here and now has replaced the metanarratives' emphasis on the distant future, and political militantism has given way to unbridled hedonism. We have now, argues Lipovetsky, entered a new phase of capitalism, the era of 'hyperconsumption' in which 'the Fordian system generating standardised products has given way to an economy of variety and reactivity in which not only quality, but also time, innovation and product redesign have become the main means of competitiveness for companies. At the same time, retailers […] have invented new methods of conquering markets' (2006: 10; for a

discussion of some of the 'new' retail methods of attracting consumers, see also Cairns 2010, Ebster and Garaus 2011, and Antéblian, Filser and Roederer 2013).

Lipovetsky does not just note the spectacularisation of consumption in recent years, however; like Ritzer, he also believes that this will inevitably become a global phenomenon: 'Soon', he proposes, 'hundreds of millions of Chinese and Indians [will] enter the eternal spiral of goods and services. […] We are only at the beginning of the era of hyperconsumption, and for the moment nothing can stop or even slow down the headlong rush towards the sale of new experiences and lifestyles' (2006: 17). While Lipovetsky makes no explicit mention of the former USSR, the extreme popularity of the shopping mall throughout Russia (Roberts 2016) and indeed the rest of the region would seem to support his main thesis. Of course, it would be simplistic in the extreme to assume that countries such as Kazakhstan have spent the last few years merely aping Western consumer culture. As Sassatelli has cogently argued in reference to the former USSR as a whole (2007: 47), 'each of these countries has come to confront global commodities, commercial processes and consumerist discourses in a particular moment and from a particular position, concocting its own culture of consumption.' And as Mansvelt has put it in relation to Russia (2005: 52), 'the case of Russia illustrates well the hybridity of forms, practices and constructions of consumption that exist, the disjunctures that can occur, and the way in which consumption is actively made and imagined rather than reproduced to a standard framework or trajectory in place'. The same may be said of Kazakhstan, as we shall see shortly.

Despite Lipovetsky's bold prediction, and Mansvelt's astute observation, the literature on the re-enchantment of consumption remains firmly rooted in the neo-liberal democracies of Western Europe and North America. This Western orientation is characteristic not just of the work of sociologists such as Ritzer and Lipovetsky, but also of the research conducted by scholars working within marketing. A case in point is the study of retailers' re-enchantment

strategies put forward by Badot and Filser (2007). Their approach is at once narrower than Ritzer's (since they focus on retailing in the traditional sense), and deeper, since they maintain that re-enchantment does not necessarily involve the extraordinary or the spectacular. On the contrary, they suggest (2007: 168) that it may be produced by quite 'ordinary' experiences, such as discovering special price promotions in a hard-discount store, or interacting socially with other shoppers. As part of their argument, they propose a typology of four re-enchantment strategies. These are organised along two axes, first, contingent / non-contingent, and second, street corner / conspicuous. This gives the following four strategies:

- Strategy 1: non-contingent and conspicuous

- Strategy 2: contingent and conspicuous

- Strategy 3: contingent and street corner

- Strategy 4: non-contingent and street corner

Badot and Filser do not share Ritzer's pessimism concerning the capacity of the consumer to be endlessly 'enchanted'. What they do have in common with him, however, and indeed with virtually all other scholars who have written on the re-enchantment of consumption, is a tendency to ignore the broader social, and political context of that re-enchantment. This is not just because of their focus on the markets of Western Europe and North America, however. It also stems from the fact that scholars working in this area have tended to concentrate on the individual consumer, and on his or her experience within the physical retail environment. That experience may be rational, emotional, sensorial, physical or indeed spiritual (Gentile, Spiller and Noci 2007); nevertheless it is always conceptualised as a personal phenomenon, rather than a collective one (Antéblian, Filser and Roederer 2013: 62). Paradoxically perhaps, this personal, individual perspective is maintained in the literature even

when the emphasis is on shoppers' *inter*personal interaction (Arnould 2000, Rémy 2005, Borghini et al. 2009). This is also the case with many studies on re-enchantment in the mall (Andrieu, Badot and Macé 2004, Badot and Filser 2007). Of course, marketing scholars' apparent reluctance to take into account the broader socio-political context of the mall may stem from their belief that malls offer only a chimera of communality, and are in fact very private spaces with a very private set of rules (Satterthwaite 2001, quoted in Miles 2010: 108). As Miller et al. (1998), Miles (2010), McIntyre (2014) and others have shown, however, there is nevertheless an important social subtext to shopping, with shopping centres frequently implicated in the construction and representation of local, collective identity. In many of the non-Western, emerging economies, the subtexts of retail spaces and of retail re-enchantment are often not just social, however, but also political – as the Khan Shatyr mall illustrates particularly well.

Case Study: The Khan Shatyr shopping mall in Astana

With the breakup of the USSR on 31 December 1991, Kazakhstan, the largest Soviet republic excluding the Russian Federation, suddenly found itself an independent state. In 1994, the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his decision to move the country's capital from Almaty to a small town in the north. The town in question, Aqmola, was renamed 'Astana' ('capital' in Kazakh) in December 1997, when it officially became the country's capital city. As Wolfel (2002) has argued, Nazarbayev's decision was motivated both by the complex ethnic fabric of post-Soviet Kazakhstan itself (Kesici 2011, Laruelle 2014), and by the geopolitical instability characteristic of the region as a whole (Anacker 2004, Schatz 2008). Pointing out that the collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated the development of national identities in the newly independent states of Central Asia, Wolfel (2002) argues that the

relocation of the country's capital city sent out three symbolic messages: first, to other actors in the area, that the region of northern Kazakhstan was part of the Kazakhstani state and nation; second, that the old colonial, Soviet past associated with the old capital, Almaty, had gone forever; and third, to the people of the region itself, that Nazarbayev intends to maintain firm control over that region in the post-Soviet era.

The reasons behind Nazarbayev's decision to move his capital to Astana were, then, essentially political (see also Fauve 2015). Indeed, as Koch (2013) points out, while from a geographical perspective Astana is located on the margins of contemporary Kazakhstan, the city is frequently referred to by the country's President as the 'heart', not just of the country, but indeed of the entire continent of Eurasia. Paradoxically, however, even as they were busy forging the identity of the country as a modern, post-Soviet state, the Kazakh leadership appeared to be keen to reproduce the very Soviet practice of using monumental architecture to express political clout (Stites 2010). To coincide with the transfer of administrative power from Almaty, Nazarbayev commissioned a whole series of imposing, and visually striking public buildings in the centre of Astana. These were designed to symbolise both the city's new found status within the country, and the country's political and economic importance within the region. In what is a growing trend towards large-scale urban development agendas throughout Asia (Bunnell et al. 2012), over US $300M were spent (Fedorenko 2012) to make Astana, in Nazarbayev's own words, one of 'the most attractive and competitive capitals in the world', and a 'bright, strong, prosperous city which unites all Kazakhstan's people' (Nazarbayev 2010: 53; quoted in Koch 2014: 432). The buildings in question include the 105-metre tall 'Bayterek Tower' (on the tower's observation deck, visitors are invited to send a personal message to President Nazarbayev by placing their palm in his solid gold handprint; BBC 2015), the 77m-high pyramid-like 'Palace of Peace and Reconciliation', and the 'Ak Orda' ('White Horde') Presidential Palace (Bissenova 2014). As Koch herself has suggested (2013: 135), these

monuments 'both perfor[m] and materializ[e] certain constructs of the "state" and "territory" as coherent things' (see also Laszcskowski 2014). Little wonder, then, that the Astana project has been described as 'very probably the most important element of the regime's nation- and state-building effort since the country gained independence in 1991' (Koch 2014: 432). Unlike, say, in the new Russian capital of Moscow in the 1930s, no one architectural style dominates here, however: it is as if a deliberate attempt has been made to juxtapose as many different idioms as possible. The result has been criticised as 'tasteless' and 'inauthentic' in the local opposition press (Bissenova 2014: 138). Buchli, on the other hand, has described the Astana project as a whole as a 'plurality of materialities […] at play with differing social effects from indigenous Kazakh forms to Imperial colonial, Soviet and post-Socialist Kazakh forms' (2007: 49). 'What has characterised all [the buildings]', Buchli continues, 'is a certain endemic instability that has had profound implications for the way [Kazakh] society and personhood have been understood at this location both for residents and for officials of various stripes, and that helps explain the particular anxieties over built forms emerging here' (2007: 49).

One of the most remarkable built forms to emerge as part of Nazarbayev's Astana project is the Khan Shatyr mall, which stands at the opposite end of the 2km-long 'Millennium Alley' from the Presidential Palace. With its lop-sided dome majestically piercing the firmament high above the northern steppe, the mall, designed by British architect Sir Norman Foster and opened in 2010, bears a striking resemblance to a traditional Kazakh yurt, or nomadic tent ('Khan Shatyr' means 'Royal Tent' in Kazakh). Indeed, Fedorenko (2012: 11) has gone so far as to suggest that the Khan Shatyr is an 'example of the reinvention of nomadic culture [in post-Soviet Kazakhstan]'. This huge glass-and-steel edifice is impressive by any standards. The structure measures 150 metres high, and has a 200-metre elliptical base enclosing an area of 100,000m2, equivalent to more than ten football stadia (DesignBuildings 2014). Under its canopy one can find dozens of shops, including Gap, Zara, Nike, Adidas,

Reebok, Swarovski, Lacoste, Mango, and Aldo. The Khan Shatyr is much more than a shopping centre, however. There is for example a huge range of eateries, which even includes a Krusty Krab restaurant, named after the fictional restaurant from the Spongebob Squarepants cartoon series. It also houses a multiplex cinema, alongside the 'Cosmodrome' amusement park, complete with dodgems, a 'human pinball' game, a billiard hall, a log flume ride, and a 37m drop tower. There is a giant indoor park built to hold up to 10,000 people, as well as squares and cobbled streets, a man-made river, and a mini-golf course. A monorail with several stations skirts the circumference and a running track circles the upper layers. The high point (literally as well as metaphorically) is the artificial, glass-domed beach on the top floor, complete with water slides, a wave machine and golden sand flown in especially from the Maldives.

The Khan Shatyr complex, it would seem, offers precisely the kind of spectacular entertainment that Firat and Venkatesh, Ritzer, Lipovetsky and others see as the very essence of retail re-enchantment. Indeed, the re-enchantment on offer inside the mall corresponds very closely to the first of the four re-enchantment strategies in Badot and Filser's typology (2007: 170-71):

> Strategy 1 (non-contingent and conspicuous): [in this strategy] re-enchantment is an entrepreneurial act to promote the brand (e.g., Nike) or the site (e.g., Mall of America) more or less independently from the demand needs or desires. In line with amusement parks['] strategies, the objective is to attract the highest number of visitors by the extraordinary originality of the commercial proposition (assortment, design, events, etc.) and to make them buy impulse (and high-price) products as a result of the euphoria of the experience. Here, attraction marketing and transformation marketing dominate over loyalty marketing.

One could go so far as to argue that the Khan Shatyr complex, at one and the same time a shopping mall, an amusement park, a cultural site and a tourist location, offers a glimpse of Badot and Filser's 'mall of the future' (2007: 176-77). A hybrid space, materializing a new kind of bright tomorrow, it serves as a 'utopian island', a place, in Badot and FIlser's words,

'of hedonic and spiritual values as well as leisure and friendliness, full of simulacra, where the ideas of fear and death [are] absent' (Badot and Filser 2007: 177).

Design, however, is not just about how a thing looks; it is also a question of what it feels like (Borja de Mozota 2003) – not least when the 'thing' in question is a shopping mall (Sit and Birch 2014). Indeed, as Floch has astutely observed in the case of the Opinal pen-knife, the look and the feel of an artefact – its form and function - are often two sides of the same coin (Floch 2001). In the case of the Khan Shatyr, while it is described in official rhetoric as a mall 'for the people', the reality, as Koch (2014) astutely observes, is rather different. Koch discusses the mall in a fascinating article on what she calls the 'binary geographical imaginaries' of Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan, in which 'the narratives of [Astana's] centrality and progressiveness automatically code the rural visitor as peripheral and old-fashioned' (Koch 2014: 440). She begins by noting that the shopping mall is an increasingly popular retail format in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, as elsewhere, the mall is rapidly becoming 'the primary physical form through which consumers enter the world of consumption' (Miles 2010: 118). Koch specifically mentions the 'Mega' chain of malls (not to be confused with IKEA's 'Mega Mall' chain in Russia), whose modern, upscale shopping centres, located in cities such as Almaty, Shymkent and indeed Astana, have become popular destinations. Young Kazakhs in particular often spend hours on end socialising there without actually purchasing more than a cheap drink at the Turkish supermarket Ramstore. Koch then draws a sharp contrast between these 'Mega' malls and the Khan Shatyr complex. The complex's architectural design does not, she observes, lend itself well to the kind of idle socialisation so commonplace in Kazakhstan's many other malls. Instead, as she notes (2014: 439):

> The layout pushes visitors through it in a constant stream of motion, and does not encourage lingering to enjoy the space. Unless one pays to sit at a restaurant, the awkward seating arrangements in uncomfortably open spaces function like street furniture designed to discourage a certain kind of sociality, subtlely [sic] embedding control […] The Khan Shatyr even lacks a typical Astana mall entry square, equipped with bouncy castles and other children's amusements, which are among the most important public

places for socialising in Astana. As such, the solemn, [Lenin-]mausoleum-like entrance of Khan Shatyr does not provide the same opportunities for communal interaction found in the other malls and squares around the city.

The Khan Shatyr mall, then, is a deeply ambivalent 'space for consumption' (Miles 2010), a towering monument to neo-liberal consumerism (Koch 2014) where the country's dispossessed and the new post-Soviet urban élite come together without ever really meeting. At once spectacular and 'solemn' (Koch 2014: 440), inclusive and exclusive, open and enclosed, it is an archetypical example of what Rose terms spaces of 'well-regulated liberty', rather like the 19th-century department stores which emerged out of new ways of governing urban space (Rose 1999: 73; quoted in Koch 2014: 439). Poorer Astana locals stay away from the mall, while visitors to the city from the surrounding countryside do little more than walk briskly around, taking hurried pictures of amusements (the beach, the games, the theatre) they cannot afford to use, subjecting themselves in the process to the disdainful looks from the mall's upper-middle-class patrons, in what Koch terms, quoting Rose (1999), the Khan Shatyr's rather sinister 'web of visibilities' (Koch 2014: 440).

As Sit and Birch (2014) have shown, visitors to modern malls can be divided between those who engage actively with the range of amusements on offer, and those who respond passively, looking to be entertained. For many patrons of the Khan Shatyr, however, passivity would appear to be not a choice, but rather a socio-economic necessity. Given this fact, can we really talk about the re-enchantment of consumption here? To answer that question, we must step back outside the mall (McIntyre 2014, Roberts 2016). We must, in other words, see it first and foremost as an example of architectural practice. Architecture, as Schroeder points out (2002: 91), 'is more than the place [where] we shop, the building that we visit, or where we have our office – architecture expresses psychological, and cultural, and consumer values'. 'Structure signifies', he continues (2002: 95), with a nod towards John Ruskin, 'buildings have inherent meanings which result from their spatial and visible forms and contextual meanings

which have evolved out of historical traditions, aesthetic standards and cultural practice' (2002: 95-96). Boldly juxtaposing architectural elements reminiscent of the Soviet past with others suggestive of a bright, post-Soviet future, combining Western visual codes with Eastern architectural systems (Buchli 2007, Bissenova 2014), all Nazarbayev's follies in Astana are grist to Schroeder's conceptual mill. But what of the Khan Shatyr mall?

Like its sister structures, the Khan Shatyr mall is undeniably an attention-seeking symbol of economic, cultural and political regeneration (Koch 2014). In this respect, it is an 'iconic' building, in the sense discussed by Toderian (2008) and others (see Miles 2010: 83-87). 'Iconic' buildings are, to quote Miles (2010: 85), 'product[s] of a world in which architecture is more about a physical statement than the realisation of functional intent'. Bearing the hallmark of what Richard Stites has termed 'the Russian and Soviet architectural traditions of grandiosity and monumentality [in which b]ig is good, big is strong' (2010: 51), expressing oil-rich Kazakhstan new-found optimism (Bissenova 2014), the Khan Shatyr mal represents precisely the kind of triumph of 'statement' over 'functional intent' mentioned by Toderian. As such, it reminds us that sites of consumption are so often emmeshed in issues of political legitimacy and cultural identity (Whitaker 2011, Scharoun 2012). As Hilton (2012: 2) has elegantly put it, 'stores, shops, retail arcades, and marketplaces [are] not simply sites where buying and selling [take] place, but also agents and mediums of political transformation, social organization, and cultural training.'

Retail spaces are often, then, ideologically loaded. But what does that mean for those of us with a scholarly interest in retailing and retail design? How – to return to our question - does the Khan Shatyr 're-enchant' the experience of consumption? To answer that question, we need to look more closely at some of the work that has been done on the ways in which retail spaces interact with shoppers. As McIntyre (2014) has shown, physical shopping realms – and in particular architectural design – contribute to local 'social capital' (Bourdieu 1984).

In doing so, as McIntyre points out, they may help shape, in a literal sense as well as a metaphorical one, local social identities (see also Miller et al. 1998, Clarke 2003, O'Brien and Harris 2013/[1991] and Wrigley and Lowe 2014/[1998]). In particular, McIntyre suggests – and this is a crucial point – store architecture has experiential importance both for the consumer, and for the consumer's social identity, by the way in which it 'become[s] part of an attractive visitor experience economy that offers [her] distinction in terms of socio-culturally valued judgement, taste and utility' (McIntyre 2014 [n. p.]). In other words, the external design, or façade, of commercial environments such as shopping malls can help to define both a place, and by extension those people who circulate within that place (see also Bellenger, Steinberg and Stanton 1976). In the case of Khan Shatyr, by reflecting, and indeed perpetuating the 'architectural identity' (Miles 2010) of Kazakhstan's new capital, the mall's physical design functions like many other thematized environments which, as Firat and Dholakia (1998: 97) argue, give consumers the chance to experiment with alternative selves and self-images. It 'hails' the consumer (Althusser 1969), 'seductively' inviting her (Dovey 2008) to invest it with local, symbolic (and indeed deeply political) meaning (Sherry Jr 1998, Healey 2002, Julier 2005).

What might this mean in concrete terms? To paraphrase Stites (2010), one could argue that the Khan Shatyr's neo-Soviet 'monumentalism' is designed to reassure Kazakh consumers – those poor visitors from the countryside just as much as Astana's wealthy élite – that their country is once again 'big' and 'strong'. There is far more to the mall than this, however. A quintessentially hybrid, not to say 'heterotopic' space (Foucault 1998), juxtaposing otherwise incompatible Soviet and post-Soviet structures (the Lenin-mausoleum-like entrance as against the 19,000m2 transparent roof), and Kazakh and non-Kazakh shapes (the nomadic tent form as against the sloped concrete perimeter), the mall's physical design stabilizes in time and space that 'plurality of materialities' (Buchli 2007: 49) at the heart both of the Astana project as a

whole and of post-Soviet Kazakh national identity. To understand precisely how it does so, we need to look at the work of one of the most important modern theorists of urban architecture, Aldo Rossi. Rossi's contribution was to introduce into the study of urban architecture the concept of 'collective memory', a concept he took from Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). A sociologist, Halbwachs emphasized the role of shared rituals and narratives in providing the sense of continuity and connection with the past necessary for social cohesion. It is precisely these rituals and narratives, Halbwachs argued, that constitute the fabric of collective memory (1992/[1925]). For Rossi, it is the city that is the locus of a given nation's collective memory. More precisely, that memory finds expression through the architectural monuments that make up the city. As Rossi puts it, '[collective] memory becomes the guiding thread of the entire complex urban structure and in this respect the architecture of urban artifacts is distinguished from art, inasmuch as the latter is an element that exists for itself alone, while the greatest monuments of architecture are of necessity linked intimately to the city. […] Thus the character of whole nations, cultures and epochs speaks through the totality of architecture, which is the outward shell of their being' (Rossi 1982: 130-31).

By physically juxtaposing the architectural styles of different nations, cultures and indeed epochs, the Khan Shatyr building makes a spectacle of collective memory. In doing so, it becomes the recreational ground in which Kazakh consumers of all backgrounds may play (Kozinets et al. 2004) at joining the nation's past and its future together in the present. More specifically, it visually constructs a particular form of Kazakh national identity, rooted in a mythical, tribal past (the nomadic tent shape), and invites the shopper to participate in that identity in the (post-Soviet, Kazakh*stani*) present (Kesici 2011). In this way, the Khan Shatyr embodies not only neo-liberal capitalism (Koch 2014), but also that 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006) that is post-Soviet Kazakhstan. It is first and foremost in this, deeply political and indeed existential sense, that Khan Shatyr re-enchants consumption for today's Kazakh

consumer. It is this which makes it a 'utopian island' (Badot and Filser 2007), a carnivalesque archipelago of 'community', 'freedom' and 'abundance' (if not perhaps 'equality': Bakhtin 1968: 9, quoted in Maclaran and Brown 2005: 312) in a sea of increasing social and political tension, both within Kazakhstan itself, and without (Laruelle 2014). To borrow Balina and Dobrenko's (2011) expression, the Khan Shatyr mall constitutes a 'petrified utopia' in an almost, but not quite, literal way. Whether that utopian centre will continue to 'hold' (Maclaren and Brown 2005), however, remains to be seen.

Conclusion: Re-enchanting consumption: The lessons of Khan Shatyr

Embracing formal complexity at the expense of linearity and predictability, the Khan Shatyr is reminiscent of much post-modern architecture in the West (Woodward 1998, Jencks 2002). At the same time, however, as part of a broader political project undertaken by a deeply autocratic regime, the type of re-enchantment of consumption it offers is decidedly non-Western. Nazarbayev clearly hopes that the picture of economic well-being and ethnic harmony it paints will act as a positive influence on affective regard for the Kazakh state, thereby broadening and deepening the basis for his own political legitimacy (Spehr and Kassenova 2012). But as we have seen, while externally the Khan Shatyr offers a utopian vision of inclusiveness, once on the inside, the visitor is confronted by a very different, dystopian reality of exclusion.

What, then, are the theoretical implications of this particular mall for the re-enchantment of consumption? There are five points which emerge from this study. First, if we wish to understand the many different complexities, ironies and indeed paradoxes of re-enchantment, we clearly need to look beyond Western Europe and North America. Second, re-

enchantment may often have a significant political subtext. Third, that political subtext may be most clearly expressed through architectural design. If as Ren (2008) has argued, the physical design of sports stadia may be seen as a mode of (state-sponsored) national self-representation, the same is true of retail space. And as Ren suggests, to understand how those spaces signify, we need to step outside them, to visualise them externally (see also McIntyre 2014) To paraphrase a comment by Žižek (2009) on the work of architect Frank Gehry, the outside skin enveloping the functional inside is never just a skin, but a meaningful sculpture in its own right (see Lahiji 2009). Fourth (and perhaps paradoxically, given the conceptual nature of this paper), we need more empirical studies into the re-enchantment of consumption (see Langrehr 1991, and Csaba and Askegaard 1999). We need, in other words, to understand better the meaning(s) that consumers themselves invest in consumption spaces such as malls. Fifth and finally, an interdisciplinary approach to retail re-enchantment is absolutely essential. Retail environments emerge not in vacuums, but in specific political, geographic, historical, cultural, sociological and economic contexts. This is true not just in undemocratic states such as post-Soviet Kazakhstan, but in France, the UK, Canada and indeed elsewhere. It is only by grasping this truth that we will really be able to learn the lessons of shopping malls such as the Khan Shatyr.

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