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FUTURE CITY

THE *PROJECT ON THE CITY* assembles research from an ongoing graduate seminar directed by Rem Koolhaas at the Harvard School of Design; its first two volumes—the *Great Leap Forward*, an exploration of the development of the Pearl River Delta between Hong Kong and Macao, and the *Guide to Shopping*—have just appeared in sumptuous editions, from Taschen.¹ These extraordinary volumes are utterly unlike anything else one can find in the print media; neither picture books nor illustrated text, they are in movement, like a CD ROM, and their statistics are visually beautiful, their images legible to a degree.

Although architecture is one of the few remaining arts in which the great *auteurs* still exist—and although Koolhaas is certainly one of those—the seminar which has produced its first results in these two volumes is not dedicated to architecture but rather to the exploration of the city today, in all its untheorized difference from the classical urban structure that existed at least up until World War II. Modern architecture has been bound up with questions of urbanism since its eighteenth and nineteenth century beginnings: Siegfried Giedion's modernist summa, *Space, Time and Architecture*, for example, begins with the Baroque restructuring of Rome by Sixtus V and ends with the Rockefeller Centre and Robert Moses's parkways, even though it is essentially a celebration of Le Corbusier. And obviously Le Corbusier was both an architect and, with the Radiant Cities, Chandigarh and the plan for Algiers, an 'urban planner'. But although the *Project* testifies to Koolhaas's commitment to the question of the city, he is not an urbanist in any disciplinary sense; nor can the word be used to describe these books, which also escape other disciplinary categories (such as sociology or economics) but might be said to be closest to cultural studies.

The fact is that traditional, or perhaps we might better say modernist, urbanism is at a dead end. Discussions about American traffic patterns or zoning—even political debates about homelessness and gentrification, or real-estate tax policy—pale into insignificance when we consider the immense expansion of what used to be called cities in the Third World: ‘in 2025,’ we are told in another Koolhaas collective volume, ‘the number of city-dwellers could reach 5 billion individuals . . . of the 33 megalopolises predicted in 2015, 27 will be located in the least developed countries, including 19 in Asia . . . Tokyo will be the only rich city to figure in the list of the 10 largest cities’.² Nor is this a problem to be solved, but rather a new reality to explore: which is, I take it, the mission of the *Project on the City*, two further volumes of which are so far projected: one on Lagos, Nigeria, and one on the classical Roman city as prototype.

Volume One of the *Project, Great Leap Forward*, interprets the prodigious building boom in China today—almost nine thousand high rises built in Shanghai since 1992—not so much in terms of some turn or return to capitalism, but rather in terms of Deng Xiaoping’s strategy to use capitalism to build a radically different society: *infrared* rather than *red*:

the concealment of Communist, red ideals . . . to save Utopia at a moment when it was being contested on all sides, when the world kept accumulating proofs of its ravages and miseries . . . INFRARED®, the ideology of reform, is a campaign to preempt the demise of Utopia, a project to conceal 19th century ideals within the realities of the 21st century.

Those who believe that the market is a reality, anchored in nature and in Being, will have difficulty grasping such a proposition, which from their perspective will be dispelled either by an outright conversion to capitalism or by economic collapse. But consider the architectural perspective: we witness thousands upon thousands of buildings constructed or under construction which have no tenants, which could never be paid for under capitalist conditions, whose very existence cannot be justified by any market standards. We here follow the outlines of housing communities in the Pearl River Delta area which are being projected for a future quite unlike those researched by Western speculators or

¹ Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas and Sze Tsung Leong, eds, *Great Leap Forward*, Harvard Design School *Project on the City*, 722 pp, Cologne 2002; and *Guide to Shopping*, Harvard Design School *Project on the City*, 800 pp, Cologne 2002.

² *Mutations*, Barcelona 2001.

banks and funding institutions in the capitalist world. Indeed, the four communities explored here are something like four different Utopian projections: Shenzhen, a kind of alternate or double of Hong Kong; Dongguan, a pleasure city; Zhuhai, a golfing paradise; while the old centre, Guanzhou (Canton), becomes a kind of strange palimpsest, in which the new is superimposed on an already existing traditional economic centre. It is an extraordinary travelogue into the future, and gives a more concrete sense of China today and tomorrow than most guide-books (and many real tours).

Proteus goes shopping

The *Guide to Shopping* is something altogether different, both in style and intent. Consumption is, to be sure, a hot topic, but this is no conventional study of it. Indeed, the question of what this book is—an extraordinary picture book; a collection of essays on various urbanistic and commercial topics; a probe of global space from Europe to Singapore, from Disneyworld to Las Vegas; a study of the shopping mall itself, from its first ideologues all the way to its most contemporary forms—corresponds to the more general ambiguity of its object. Even if we stick to the initial characterization of that object as ‘shopping’, what kind of categorization is that? Is it a physical one, involving the objects to be sold? Is it psychological, involving the desire to buy the objects in question? Or architectural, having to do with the spatial originality of those malls—which, famously, trace their ancestry back to Walter Benjamin’s nineteenth-century arcades; if not, as some of the time charts in this book suggest, back to the 7000 BC ‘city of Catalhöyük founded for the trade of commodities’, or perhaps the ‘invention’ of the retail trade in Lydia in the seventh century BC? Or are we talking here about the globalization of consumption (consumerism)? Or the new trade routes and production and distribution networks involved in such globalization? (Or the businessmen who organize those?) And what about the new technologies evolved for commerce since Catalhöyük? The prodigious increase in size of the merchandizing companies and conglomerates, some of them larger than many foreign countries? What about shopping and the form of the contemporary city—if there is one: significantly Koolhaas’s collective project changed its name from the ‘Project for what used to be the city’ to the plainer and more optimistic *Project on the City*. To which may be added the question: is a new kind of space emerging—control space, junk space? And what does all this imply for the human psyche and human

reality itself? (The first theoretician of advertising, Edward Bernays, was Freud's nephew.) What does it imply for the future and for Utopia?

I am probably forgetting some of the other modulations of this protean topic; but it will be clear that it mobilizes, alongside the obvious (and obviously anticipated) areas of architecture and urbanism, such heterogeneous disciplines as psychoanalysis and geography, history and business, economics and engineering, biography, ecology, feminism, area studies, ideological analysis, classical studies, legal decisions, crisis theory, et cetera. Perhaps this kind of immense disciplinary range is no longer quite so astonishing in a postmodern era, in which the law of being is de-differentiation, and in which we are most interested in how things overlap and necessarily spill across the disciplinary boundaries. Or, if you prefer, in the postmodern the distinction between the old specialized disciplines is constitutively effaced and they now fold back on each other, in the most interesting studies—from Deleuze/Guattari's *Thousand Plateaux* to Caro's *Power Broker*; from *Empire* to *Rembrandt's Eyes*; from Benjamin's *Arcades* to the *Geschichte und Eigensinn* of Negt and Kluge; let alone *SMXLX* or even *Space, Time, and Architecture*. Theory is here mostly eschewed (although Baudrillard is mentioned once, I believe), but you must not let that tempt you into thinking that this is a non-theoretical piece of cultural journalism, let alone a coffee-table picture book. It is, as the enumeration above might also suggest, a collective volume; although not in the sense that experts of the various disciplines mentioned above are somehow judiciously assembled and their contributions sampled in turn. This makes it embarrassing for a reviewer to single out specific names, although Sze Tsung Leong has the most, and also the most philosophically reflective, chapters, with Chuihua Judy Chung a close follow-up for more concrete discussions. As for Koolhaas, his role seems to have been mostly organizational (that is to say, like certain versions of the deity, nowhere and everywhere all at once) save for an astonishing appearance in his own name, which will be discussed at the proper moment.

After the mall

I will try to put the theory back into all this; but it would first be better to work through some of the detail of the layers or strata of the book, whose alphabetical table of contents is quite misleading in this respect; and thus a veritable *tour de force* in its own right. For a few previews

on the mall are the way in here: they will return, far more developed, in a variety of contexts later on. But it is as though the shopping mall is the spatial and architectural wedge into this immense topic. Few forms have been so distinctively new and so distinctively American, and late-capitalist, as this innovation, whose emergence can be dated: 1956; whose relationship to the well-known decay-of-the-inner-city-rise-of-the-suburb is palpable, if variable; whose genealogy now opens up a physical and spatial prehistory of shopping in a way that was previously inconceivable; and whose spread all over the world can serve as something of an epidemiological map of Americanization, or postmodernization, or globalization. So the mall focuses the inquiry and serves as the frame for the prodigious enlargement of all this later on. Meanwhile, pages of chronologies, colour-coded cross-referencing systems and innumerable thematic indexes already train us in the rhizomatic form of that enlargement; while a first set of comparisons between retail areas all over the world, and between national GDPs and retail revenues of the top corporations, help us begin to map the process in our minds and to form a picture, not only of the relative hierarchies of globalization, but also of a view of 'shopping' that will shortly become, dare I say, not merely a political but also a metaphysical issue.

At once, however, we are pulled up short, and a fundamental difference between this work and the proliferation of new and excellent cultural-studies volumes on shopping, malls, consumption and the like, becomes clear. Before we even get to the thing itself, we come upon the mall in crisis, losing money and tenants, and on the verge of replacement . . . by what? Benjamin took his snapshot of the nineteenth-century arcade at the moment of its decay—and thereby developed a whole theory about history: that you could best understand the present from the standpoint of an immediate past whose fashions were already just a little out of date. Crisis puts us on notice that we have here to do, not merely with the archeology or prehistory of shopping, nor even its present but rather its future. Whatever the future of the mall as such, however, “there’s lots of trash out there”. Many cavernous old malls are dinosaurs that can’t compete with the convenience of drive-up value retailers in power centres or strips—to which one now needs no doubt to add eBay.

Something has evidently happened to the preconditions for the existence of malls in the first place. But what were those preconditions? As in Aristotelian causality, they come in a variety of forms and shapes:

the physical or engineering preconditions are staged for us at once, in the very first letter of this ABC of shopping: namely, air-conditioning—to which we will return shortly in a more appropriate place. As for the pre-history, we have certainly been treated, in recent years, to a host of interesting predecessor forms, if not generally going as far back as Catalhöyük. Most notably the arcade itself, essentially developing in the early nineteenth century and reaching *its* crisis in the 1850s and 60s—exactly the moment when the next form comes along: the modern department store, whose emergence Zola immortalized in *Au bonheur des dames* (*Ladies' Delight* is a fictionalized version of real-life names like *Au printemps* and *La Samaritaine*, which have also been exhaustively studied in recent years, for their urbanistic as much as their commercial consequences: for one thing, they are roughly contemporaneous with Haussman's immense transformation of Paris). As for our form—now falling into decay in its turn?—we will come to it in a moment; indeed we will even put names and faces to it. Like a novel or a poem, it actually has an inventor or author, although the inventor of a whole genre is a more appropriate parallel; something one does not come across very often.

Delirious technologies

First, we leap ahead to measure the scope and transformations of this protean form—into airports, for example, which have now, all the new ones, also become shopping malls; into museums; finally into the city itself. The older city centre—blighted by suburbs and the new supermarkets, and then the malls themselves—now, with postmodernity and gentrification, catches up: not only by housing huge new malls within itself, but by becoming a virtual mall in its own right. Indeed, something fundamental begins to happen to it (as is fitting in a volume from the *Project on the City*):

In 1994 the mall officially replaced the civic functions of the traditional downtown. In a New Jersey Supreme Court case regarding the distribution of political leaflets in shopping malls the court declared that 'shopping malls have replaced the parks and squares that were "traditionally the home of free speech,"' siding with the protesters 'who had argued that a mall constitutes a modern-day Main Street'.

But if 'this return of shopping to the city has been nothing short of triumphant', the authors find themselves obliged to add: 'To be saved, downtowns have had to be given the suburban kiss of death'.

Back now to preconditions: could the bar code itself—the Universal Product Code—be one of these? Analyse its functions, and one begins to see how the statistics it immediately provides the retailer transform the whole structure of inventory, resupplying, marketing and the like. Brand names may well be more of a cultural consequence of this kind of shopping than a precondition, for their zones, the flagship boutiques, mark ‘the sacred precincts of the last global religion—capitalist consumerism’. They also underscore a new kind of dynamic, itself consumerized under the Singapore logo ‘co-opetition’, which celebrates the tide that lifts everybody’s boats, including those of the competitors.

But with this we are off on a tour of the world, or rather shopping’s world tour as it touches one spot after another and gets transformed by the local culture. Singapore is an old fascination of Koolhaas’s (see *SMLXL*), but its dynamics remain an extraordinary object lesson—not only in development, but also in the way in which a city-state fits first into the region and then into the world itself. The Crystal Palace takes us back to origins once again (and to the signature of an individual, Joseph Paxton). The Depato, or Japanese department store, flings us, if not into the future, then at least into an extraordinary cultural mutation, intimately connected with the logic of Tokyo’s growth along the various private railroad lines that fan out from the world’s third largest city. And finally: Disney himself. For no study of any innovations in this area can be complete without a comprehensive recognition of everything—all the various things, from a new urbanism to a new kind of shopping, a new kind of globalization, a new kind of entertainment industry, even a new kind of Utopia itself—that Walt invented. Indeed, perhaps Disney and Disneyfication is better studied in this new comparatist and globalized context than as a sport or typically American singleton.

But what about the mall itself, its space for example? There is a psychology of space in the mall—the patch, the corridor, the matrix—just as there is an ecology of the thing. And here the preconditions flow back in with a vengeance: not only air-conditioning and its very interesting history (more zany inventors and creative and obsessive dreamers); but also the escalator—the elevator had been a crucial operator in Koolhaas’s early book on the skyscraper landscape, *Delirious New York*—with its momentous consequences for shopping space and building possibilities; this whole rich section takes up some thirty pages. And also, somewhat later on, the skylight and the sprinkler system; not to speak of

the way the new space can hide its service systems out of sight—and not even to mention the precursor ‘technologies’: counter, display window, mirror and mannequin.

But let’s get on into the ideologies of the matter, for here at last we rise from the body to the soul: poor Jane Jacobs, for example, is cast as something of a Hegelian ruse of history in her own right for defending the fundamental features of a true city experience against the various urban and architectural modernisms, and thereby enumerating ‘the ingredients by which shopping could stand in for urbanity and creat[ing] a “city lite” that became the model for resuscitating America’s ailing downtowns’. This seems a little harsh, but it is certain that Jacobs—credited by many architects and urbanists as triggering the postmodern revolution in their field—is no anti-capitalist and lays a good deal of stress on (small) business.

But with Victor Gruen we are at origins (we can’t call it ‘ground zero’ any more; what about Harold-Bloomian genius?). For the mall was his brain-child, and it is certain that our experience of contemporary American space or non-space is to a certain degree disalienated by finding out that someone had the idea for all this, and that it is not just some weird accumulation of market-historical accidents but the result of human production. To stress Gruen’s achievement, however, is also at once to set off the canonical reaction and to recall, voluntarily or not, how few of the great modernists ever designed such things, let alone theorized them in the first place (whereas they have become a staple of the post-modernists). It is also to impose some reflexion on that contemporary *auteur* who is the garish or mass-cultural equivalent of all these loftier aesthetic projects, and a true phenomenon in his own right: Jon Jerde, builder of Horton Plaza in San Diego and much else. The high art/mass culture split becomes unavoidable here too, as much as in every other contemporary cultural field.

But just as we are about to reflect a bit on that, and to go on to other related global phenomena—the Lippo Group in Indonesia; a return to the old Venturi–Scott-Brown notion of ‘learning from Las Vegas’, and a rich interview with the authors; feminism too (women and shopping are an old and scurrilous topic); artificial landscapes; the relation of all this to psychology and psychoanalysis; the European resistance to the mall and its Americanizing consequences; and many other interesting topics

raised by the second half of the alphabet—suddenly we come upon a black hole, generating prodigious energies in all directions.

Down with the junkspace virus

It is Rem Koolhaas's contribution, 'Junkspace', an extraordinary piece of writing that is both a postmodern artefact in its own right, and—a whole new aesthetic perhaps? unless it is a whole new vision of history. In the light of this serried text, we must pause and rethink the entire project. But first we have to look at the writing itself, whose combination of revulsion and euphoria is unique to the postmodern in a number of instructive ways. We knew Koolhaas was an interesting writer—in this, comparable to any number of distinguished contemporary architects; his books, in particular *Delirious New York* and *SMLXL*, combining formal innovation with incisive sentences and characteristically provocative positions. But no single text in those books prepared us for this sustained and non-stop 'performance' of the built space, not just of the contemporary city, but of a whole universe on the point of fusing into a kind of all-purpose indeterminate magma.

This goes much further than the querulous culture-critical complaints about standardization (or Americanization). It starts with junk as the classical *remainder* (what is left over after the dialectic, or after your psychoanalytic cure): 'If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet'. Very soon, however, junkspace becomes a virus that spreads and proliferates throughout the macrocosm:

angular geometric remnants invading starry infinities; real space edited for smooth transmission in virtual space, crucial hinge in an infernal feedback loop . . . the vastness of Junkspace extended to the edges of the Big Bang.

But this by itself could be little more than Baudrillard or television theory—the critique of virtuality as a promise (like the passing critique of Deleuzian 'flows'): the point of the exercise is rather to find synonyms, hundreds upon hundreds of theoretical synonyms, hammered one upon the other and fused together into a massive and terrifying vision, each of the 'theories' of the 'postmodern' or the current age becoming metaphorical to the others in a single blinding glimpse into the underside:

Junkspace exposes what previous generations kept under wraps: structures emerge like springs from a mattress, exit stairs dangle in didactic trapeze,

probes thrust into space to deliver laboriously what is in fact omnipresent, free air, acres of glass hang from spidery cables, tautly stretched skins enclose flaccid non-events.

As a tendency, Junkspace has been around for some time, at first unrecognized; again, like a virus undetected:

Architects thought of Junkspace first and named it Megastructure, the final solution to transcend their huge impasse. Like multiple Babels, huge superstructures would last through eternity, teeming with impermanent subsystems that would mutate over time, beyond their control. In Junkspace, the tables are turned: it is subsystems only, without superstructure, orphaned particles in search of framework or pattern. All materialization is provisional: cutting, bending, tearing, coating: construction has acquired a new softness, like tailoring.

It would be too simple to say that architecture and space are here metaphors for everything else: but this is no longer architectural theory; nor is it a novel whose point of view is that of the architect. Rather it is the new language of space which is speaking through these self-replicating, self-perpetuating sentences, space itself become the dominant code or hegemonic language of the new moment of History—the last?—whose very raw material condemns it in its deterioration to extinction.

Aging in Junkspace is nonexistent or catastrophic; sometimes an entire Junkspace—a department store, a nightclub, a bachelor pad—turns into a slum overnight without warning: wattage diminishes imperceptibly, letters drop out of signs, air conditioning units start dripping, cracks appear as if from otherwise unregistered earthquakes; sections rot, are no longer viable, but remain joined to the flesh of the main body via gangrenous passages.

These alarming ‘Alzheimer-like deteriorations’ are realizations of the nightmare moments in Philip K. Dick, when reality begins to sag like a drug hallucination and to undergo vertiginous transmutations, revealing the private worlds in which we are trapped beyond time. But these moments are no longer terrifying; they are in fact by now rather exhilarating; and it is precisely this new euphoria that remains to be explained.

Empire of blur

To be sure, Koolhaas means no more than perpetual renovation, and not only the tearing down of the old but also the perpetual recycling to which the once noble (and even megalomaniacal) vocation of the Master Builder has been reduced: ‘Anything stretched—limousines, body parts,

planes—turns into Junkspace, its original concept abused. Restore, rearrange, reassemble, revamp, renovate, revise, recover, redesign, return—the Parthenon marbles—redo, respect, rent: verbs that start with *re*—produce Junkspace’. This is the disappearance of all the ‘originals’ no doubt, but along with them, of History itself:

the only certainty is conversion—continuous—followed, in rare cases, by ‘restoration’, the process that claims ever new sections of history as Junkspace. History corrupts, absolute history corrupts absolutely. Colour and matter are eliminated from these bloodless grafts; the bland has become the only meeting ground for the old and the new.

We are henceforth in the realm of the formless (Rosalind Krauss, out of Bataille); but ‘formlessness is still form, the formless also a typology’. It is not quite the ‘anything goes’ of the new generation of computer-generating ‘blob architects’ (Greg Lynn, Ben van Berkel): ‘in fact, the secret of Junkspace is that it is both promiscuous *and* repressive: as the formless proliferates, the formal withers, and with it all rules, regulations, recourse’. Shades of Marcuse and repressive tolerance?

Junkspace is a Bermuda triangle of concepts, a petri dish abandoned: it cancels distinctions, undermines resolve, confuses intention with realization. It replaces hierarchy with accumulation, composition with addition. More and more, more is more. Junkspace is overripe and undernourishing at the same time, a colossal security blanket that covers the earth in a stranglehold of care . . . Junkspace is like being condemned to a perpetual Jacuzzi with millions of your best friends . . . A fuzzy empire of blur, it fuses high and low, public and private, straight and bent, bloated and starved to offer a seamless patchwork of the permanently disjointed.

There are no doubt still ‘trajectories’ with their magical moments:

Postmodernism adds a crumple-zone of viral *poché* that fractures and multiplies the endless frontline of display, a peristaltic shrink-wrap crucial to all commercial exchange. Trajectories are launched as ramp, turn horizontal without any warning, intersect, fold down, suddenly emerge on a vertiginous balcony above a large void. Fascism without dictator. From the sudden dead end where you were dropped by a monumental, granite staircase, an escalator takes you to an invisible destination, facing a provisional vista of plaster, inspired by forgettable sources.

There are also, in this churning pseudo-temporality of matter ceaselessly mutating all around us, moments of rare, of breathtaking beauty: ‘railway stations unfold like iron butterflies, airports glisten like cyclopic dewdrops, bridges span often negligible banks like grotesquely enlarged

versions of the harp. To each rivulet its own Calatrava'. But such moments are scarcely enough to compensate for the nightmare, or to make the hallucinations all worthwhile. Cyberpunk seems to be a reference to grasp at here, which—like Koolhaas, only ambiguously cynical—seems positively to revel in its own (and its world's) excess. But cyberpunk is not really apocalyptic, and I think the better coordinate is Ballard, the Ballard of the multiple 'end-of-the-worlds', minus the Byronic melancholy and the rich orchestral pessimism and *Weltschmerz*.

For it is the end of the world that is in question here; and that could be exhilarating if apocalypse were the only way of imagining that world's disappearance (whether we have to do here with the bang or the whimper is not the interesting question). It is the old world that deserves the bile and the satire, this new one is merely its own self-effacement, and its slippage into what Dick called kipple or gubble, what LeGuin once described as the buildings 'melting. They were getting soggy and shaky, like jello left out in the sun. The corners had already run down the sides, leaving great creamy smears.' Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.

Breaking back into History

But I think it would be better to characterize all this in terms of History, a History that we cannot imagine except as ending, and whose future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here. The problem is then how to locate radical difference; how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia. The problem to be solved is that of breaking out of the windless present of the postmodern back into real historical time, and a history made by human beings. I think this writing is a way of doing that or at least of trying to. Its science-fictionality derives from the secret method of this genre: which in the absence of a future focuses on a single baleful tendency, one that it expands and expands until the tendency itself becomes apocalyptic and explodes the world in which we are trapped into innumerable shards and atoms. The dystopian appearance is thus only the sharp edge inserted into the seamless Moebius strip of late capitalism, the punctum or perceptual obsession that sees one thread, any thread, through to its predictable end.

Yet this alone is not enough: a breaking of the sound barrier of History is to be achieved in a situation in which the historical imagination is paralysed and cocooned, as though by a predator's sting: no way to burst through into the future, to reconquer difference, let alone Utopia, except by writing yourself into it, but without turning back. It is the writing that is the battering ram, the delirious repetition that hammers away at this sameness running through all the forms of our existence (space, parking, shopping, working, eating, building) and pummels them into admitting their own standardized identity with each other, beyond colour, beyond texture, the formless blandness that is no longer even the plastic, vinyl or rubber of yesteryear. The sentences are the boom of this repetitive insistence, this pounding on the hollowness of space itself; and their energy now foretells the rush and the fresh air, the euphoria of a relief, an orgasmic breaking through into time and history again, into a concrete future.

Such is then the secret of this new symbolic form, which Koolhaas is not the only one of our contemporaries to mobilize (but few do it better). To come back now slowly, to reenter as in a decompression chamber the more prosaic world of shopping that was the takeoff point for this delirious adventure is also to search for the occasion, for what triggered it off, what provoked such a monumental and truly metaphysical reaction. It was in fact given to us early on, in an offhand sentence of Sze Tsung Leong, at the end of a more restrained and focused account of the commercial transformation of the globe which is, after all, the topic of the present volume: 'In the end, there will be little else for us to do but shop'. The world in which we were trapped is in fact a shopping mall; the windless closure is the underground network of tunnels hollowed out for the display of images. The virus ascribed to junkspace is in fact the virus of shopping itself; which, like Disneyfication, gradually spreads like a toxic moss across the known universe. But what is this shopping we have been on about for so long (and the authors even longer)?

Theoretically, it comes in many packages (and predictably we can shop around for our favourite theoretical version or brand-name). The tradition of Western Marxism called it 'commodification', and in that form the analysis goes back at least as far as Marx himself, in the famous opening chapter of *Capital* on commodity fetishism. The nineteenth-century religious perspective is Marx's way of foregrounding a specifically superstructural dimension in the market exchanges of capitalism. He

understood ‘the metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties’ of the commodity as the way in which the labour relationship is concealed from the buyer (the ‘shopper’?) and he thereby grasped commodification as an essentially ideological operation, a form of false consciousness which has the specific function of masking the production of value from the (bourgeois) consumer. Georg Lukács’s philosophical classic, *History and Class Consciousness*, the inaugural text of so-called Western Marxism, develops this analysis on the larger plane of the history of philosophy itself, resituating commodification at the centre of the more general overall social process of mental as well as physical reification.

After World War II, however, the ideological orientation of this theme takes a somewhat different turn, at a moment when the sale of commodities and luxury items beyond those of simple subsistence or social reproduction becomes generalized throughout the increasingly more prosperous First World areas of Western Europe and the United States (and eventually Japan). At this point, the situationists and their theoretician Guy Debord invent a new perspective on commodification in their dictum that ‘the final form of commodity fetishism is the image’. This is the takeoff point for their theory of so-called spectacle society, in which the former ‘wealth of nations’ is now grasped as ‘an immense accumulation of spectacles’. With this perspective, we are much closer to our current assumptions (or doxa), namely that the commodification process is less a matter of false consciousness than of a whole new life style, which we call consumerism and which is comparable rather to an addiction than a philosophical error or even an ill-advised choice of political parties. This turn is part of the more contemporary view of culture as the very substance of everyday life (itself a relatively new postwar concept, pioneered by Henri Lefebvre).

The images of the *Guide to Shopping* are thus images of images, and should thereby enable a new kind of critical distance, something they do conceptually by returning the notion of the commodity to its original situation in the commercial exchange. What we do with commodities *qua* images, then, is not to look at them. The idea that we buy images is already a useful defamiliarization of the notion; but the characterization whereby we *shop* for images is even more useful, displacing the process onto a new form of desire and situating it well before the actual sale takes place—when, as is well known, we lose all interest in the object as such. As for consumption, it has been volatilized altogether in

this perspective; and, as Marx feared, has become altogether spiritual. Materiality is here a mere pretext for our exercise of the mental pleasures: what is any longer particularly material in the consumption of an expensive new car one drives around the local streets and has washed and polished as frequently as one can?

‘In the end, there will be little else for us to do but shop’. Does this not reflect an extraordinary expansion of desire around the planet, and a whole new existential stance of those who can afford it and who now, long since familiar with both the meaninglessness of life and the impossibility of satisfaction, construct a life style in which a specific new organization of desire offers the consumption of just that impossibility and just that meaninglessness? Indeed, perhaps this is the right moment to return to the Pearl River Delta and Deng Xiaoping’s post-modern socialism, in which ‘getting rich’ no longer means actually making the money, but rather constructing immense shopping malls—the secret of which lies in the fact that to shop does not require you to buy, and that the form of shopping is a performance which can be staged without money, just as long as its appropriate spaces, or in other words Junkspace, have been provided for it.