Iconic Architecture and the Culture-ideology of Consumerism

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Abstract

This article explores the theoretical and substantive connections between iconicity and consumerism in the field of contemporary iconic architecture within the framework of a critical theory of globalization. Iconicity in architecture is defined in terms of fame and special symbolic/aesthetic significance as applied to buildings, spaces and in some cases architects themselves. Iconic architecture is conceptualized as a hegemonic project of the transnational capitalist class. In the global era, I argue, iconic architecture strives to turn more or less all public space into consumerist space, not only in the obvious case of shopping malls but more generally in all cultural spaces, notably museums and sports complexes. The inspiration that iconic architecture has provided historically generally coexisted with repressive political and economic systems, and for change to happen an alternative form of non-capitalist globalization is necessary. Under such conditions truly inspiring iconic architecture, including existing architectural icons, may create genuinely democratic public spaces in which the culture-ideology of consumerism fades away. In this way, a built environment in which the full array of human talents can flourish may begin to emerge.

Key words

consumerism ■ globalization ■ iconic architecture ■ shopping ■ transnational capitalist class

THIS ARTICLE sets out to explore the theoretical and substantive connections between iconicity and consumerism in the field of contemporary architecture. It does this within the framework of a theory of globalization. For the sake of clarity in understanding what is to follow, each of these concepts – iconicity, consumerism, globalization – requires at the very least a brief working definition.

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Iconic, in general, refers to events, people and/or objects that (1) are famous for those within the fields in question (notably popular culture, fashion and sport) and often also for the public at large and (2) have special symbolic/aesthetic significance attached to them. Icons are famous not simply for being famous, as is the case for various forms of celebrity, but famous for possessing specific symbolic/aesthetic qualities, qualities that are the subject of considerable debate within the specialist fields and, increasingly, with the recent rise of the blogosphere, debate to which the general public actively contributes. In a previous paper (Sklair, 2006) I distinguish between two contrasting meanings of iconic in architecture, namely the stereotypical copy, like the iconic Palladian villa or iconic mosque (Iconic I), and something unique as in unique selling point (Iconic II). Both meanings are, confusingly, in use in current debates – here it is the second meaning that is intended.

Consumerism – or more accurately, the culture-ideology of consumerism – refers to a set of beliefs and values, integral but not exclusive to the system of capitalist globalization, intended to make people believe that human worth is best ensured and happiness is best achieved in terms of our consumption and possessions. This is relentlessly reinforced by an infrastructure of transnational cultural practices within capitalist globalization.[1] Globalization is conceptualized in terms of transnational practices, practices that cross state borders but do not necessarily originate with state agencies, actors or institutions. These practices are analytically distinguished on three levels – economic, political and culture-ideology – constituting the sociological totality. At this point, the distinction between generic globalization, capitalist globalization and alternative (non-capitalist) globalizations can usefully be introduced. Generic globalization may be defined in terms of four criteria – the electronic revolution, postcolonialism, the creation of transnational social spaces, and new forms of cosmopolitanism.[2] Generic globalization is an abstract framework for analysis, it is not actually existing globalization. In the concrete conditions of the world as it is today, a world largely structured by global capitalism, the transnational practices of capitalist globalization are typically characterized by major institutional forms. The transnational corporation is the major locus of transnational economic practices; the transnational capitalist class is the major locus of transnational political practices; and the major locus of transnational culture-ideology practices is to be found in the culture-ideology of consumerism. Not all culture is ideological, even in capitalist societies. Culture-ideology indicates that consumerism in the capitalist global system can only be fully understood as a culture-ideology practice where cultural practices reinforce the ideology and the ideology reinforces the cultural practices. The 'Books are just the beginning' marketing campaign of the Boston Public Library is a telling example of the culture-ideology of consumerism – not even libraries are exempt (see Figure 1).[3]

My argument is that iconicity plays a central role in promoting the culture-ideology of consumerism in the interests of those who control capitalist

Figure 1 'Books are just the beginning': cultural brand stretching. Boston Public Library (2004)

globalization, namely the transnational capitalist class, largely through their ownership and/or control of transnational corporations.[4] While such connections have been made for the fields of popular culture, fashion and sport, there has been very little systematic research on the links between iconic architecture and capitalist consumerism.

Architecture and Globalization

Iconic architecture is defined as buildings and spaces that (1) are famous for those in and around architecture and/or the public at large and (2) have special symbolic/aesthetic significance (see Sklair, 2006).[5] The argument is located within a diachronic thesis suggesting that in the pre-global era (roughly the period before the 1960s) iconic architecture tended to be driven by the state and/or religion (though there are, of course, many famous buildings before the 1960s that were inspired by neither states nor religions), while in the era of capitalist globalization the dominant force driving iconic architecture is the transnational capitalist class. In cities this is organized in the form of globalizing urban growth coalitions (Sklair, 2005).

Iconic architecture and architects connect analytically with generic globalization, in the first instance, through the capacity that the electronic revolution provides to design and build spectacular buildings with new materials in ways that were not previously possible. As capitalism globalizes, and the culture-ideology of consumerism begins to take hold, iconic architecture starts to be used in more deliberate ways to transform the built environment, particularly in globalizing cities. With the emergence and development of computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), qualitatively new patterns of production in architecture and engineering are rapidly disseminated. Tombesi (2001), for example, shows how technological innovations, particularly in the realm of computer software and increasing availability of hardware, have promoted a new international division of labour between architectural offices in the First World and in the Third World, and Chung et al. (2001) vividly illustrate how this works in China. The use of computers to help design and build extraordinary architecture started with what may be called the first architectural icon of the global era – the Sydney Opera House – whose tortuous building process lasted from 1957 to 1973, surviving the resignation of the architect, Jorn Utzon, in 1966.

> The Opera House could not have been built without computers. If the project had been attempted ten years earlier it simply could not have been done in the way it was because the computers were not available to process the vast quantities of data involved in the structural analysis of the shells. (Messent, 1997: 509, n.28)

A booklet published in 1971 by the Opera House Trust estimated that the work carried out even on these primitive computers would have taken 1000 mathematicians more than 100 years to do (1997: 509, n.28). Many celebrated living architects readily accept that they could not have made their most famous designs without the help of CAD. Prominent examples are Norman Foster's Reichstag Dome in Berlin, the Great Court in the British Museum and the Swiss Re Building in London, and Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao and Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. Gehry (or rather his computer technician Jim Glymph) famously adapted the CATIA

(Computer Aided Three-Dimensional Interactive Application) software developed by the French aerospace company Dassault Systèmes (Gehry and Friedman, 1999: 15–17), initially for a monumental fish sculpture for the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 and, most famously, for his Guggenheim Bilbao. Fierro illustrates how CAD in architecture connects directly with consumerism in her analysis of how a new system of glazing developed by the engineers RFR made possible the Paris of the *grands projets*: 'As a patented system, RFR's structural glazing became a commodity available for purchase and installation in any type of space. It was immediately appropriated by developer culture as a means of endowing commercial space with a fashionable technological flourish' (Fierro, 2003: 217). Thus, iconic architecture becomes easily, if sometimes expensively, available for globalizing cities everywhere. Much contemporary architecture, like much of contemporary life, is unthinkable in the absence of the electronic revolution – the first criterion of generic globalization.

The postcolonial revolution has had profound effects on architecture, urbanism and identity all over the world. At one level, this continues the long-standing arguments about cultural imperialism. King (2004) makes the connections between postcolonialism and globalization directly, demonstrating that, despite obvious disparities in power, these relations are rarely in one direction. This is particularly true in the special, though not so uncommon, circumstance of 'Western' architects building for governments or other clients in what used to be called the Third World. An excellent illustration of this is the case of the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, built for the state-owned oil company in this self-described 'moderate' Muslim country. In his account of the attempt to integrate Islamic motifs into the floorplan of the building to give it a local dimension, the architect, Cesar Pelli, shows how the postcolonial is not simply a new form of imperialism but something rather more subtle (Pelli et al., 1997). The Islamic motif floorplan and Malaysian design elements in no way inhibit the operation of the shopping mall that occupies the ground floor of the building, one of the most prestigious transnational social spaces in Asia.

Transnational social spaces are spaces, like globally branded shopping malls, theme parks, waterfront developments and transportation centres, that could literally be almost anywhere in the world. What makes them transnational is that they are designed to represent simultaneously one of the various global architectural styles recognized – through the mass media as much as through direct experience – by quite different communities of people from a multitude of geographical, ethnic and cultural origins, and visual references that mark out specific senses of belonging identified with each of these communities without offending the sensibilities of members of other communities – the connection with the postcolonial revolution. This is the sphere in which iconic architecture and the culture-ideology of consumerism relate most directly, insofar as the culture-ideology of consumerism provides the defining set of practices and beliefs – in a word, shopping – that aspires to transcend the very real differences that exist between geographical,

ethnic and cultural communities, at 'home' and 'abroad'. Thus, it is in shopping malls of varying designs that we find typical transnational social spaces all over the world (see Abaza, 2001). The ritualistic aspects of shopping and the places where people shop have led to the common use of the evocative expression 'cathedrals of consumption' in this context (see Figure 2).

> Shopping malls are cathedrals of consumption – a glib phrase that I regret the instant it slides off my pen. The metaphor of consumerism as a religion, in which commodities become the icons of worship and the rituals of exchanging money for goods become a secular equivalent of holy communion, is simply too glib to be helpful, and too attractive to those whose intentions, whether they be moral or political, are to expose the evils and limitations of bourgeois materialism. And yet the metaphor is both attractive and common precisely because it does convey and construct a knowledge of consumerism. (Fiske, 1991: 13)

Ritzer (1999: ch. 1) takes this further, and though he does not speak of transnational social spaces, his theory of consumption as enchantment clearly has a universal reach. Whatever the merits of the enchantment thesis, this approach does draw welcome attention to the architecture of places, metaphorical or literal cathedrals where consumption happens. An apt illustration of this process is the way in which pre-global era iconic buildings – often traditionally surrounded by sellers of relics etc. – have become increasingly commercialized in recent years, usually in the interests of tourism and city-marketing. As malls become more cathedral-like, cathedrals, notably St Paul's in London, have begun to charge admission and open souvenir shops.

New forms of cosmopolitanism are more difficult to pin down in this context, but the most famous architects – dubbed 'starchitects' – of today play an increasingly pivotal role in creating them. This can be seen in the celebrity coverage of the leading architects in architectural and design magazines and, increasingly, in the cultural and arts sections of mainstream media (see Sklair, forthcoming). In some special cases, for example, the debate over the redevelopment of the World Trade Center after 9/11, such coverage spills over onto the front pages and moves up the media news agendas (see 'Iconic Media Wars' in Jencks, 2005: 64–99). In Glasgow Charles Rennie Mackintosh and in Barcelona Antoni Gaudi are now part of the marketing of the cities. There are more architects working outside their places of origin than ever before, and demand for 'foreign' architects – especially from urban growth coalitions in globalizing cities (urban boosters) – has never been greater. Among many clear and already well-researched examples of this phenomenon two stand out: first, what has been termed the Bilbao effect, referring to the continuing influence of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao (Del Cerro Santamaria, 2007: ch. 6; McNeill, 2000); and, second, the case of the foreign architects, notably Herzog and de Meuron, Rem Koolhaas and Paul Andreu, designing iconic structures in the build-up to the Beijing Olympics (Broudehoux, 2004: ch. 6; Ren, forthcoming).[6]

Figure 2 Cathedral of consumption: Bridgemarket on First Avenue at 59th Street, Manhattan (2004)

Cosmopolitan iconic architects are now an essential element in the marketing strategies of globalizing urban growth coalitions.

Global capitalism, therefore, mobilizes the commercial potential of generic globalization in the sphere of architecture as it does more or less successfully in all other spheres. While global capitalism provides the structure, the transnational capitalist class (TCC) provides the agents. The TCC can be conceptualized in terms of the following four fractions: those who own and/or control the major transnational corporations and their local affiliates (corporate fraction); globalizing politicians and bureaucrats (state fraction); globalizing professionals (technical fraction); and merchants and media (consumerist fraction).[7] The consumerist fraction is directly responsible for the marketing of architecture in all its manifestations and, ideally, turning architectural icons into special types of commodities. The end-point of the culture-ideology of consumerism is to render everything into the commodity form. In architecture, as in other quasi-cultural fields, endowing the commodity with iconicity is simply a special and added quality that enhances the exchange (money) value of the icon and all that is associated with it. Obviously, this process peaks in the realm of shopping.

Iconic Architecture and Shopping

When Goss reported in the early 1990s that shopping was the second most important leisure time activity in the US after TV, which also promoted

shopping in any case, and proclaimed that 'shopping has become the dominant mode of contemporary public life' (1993: 18), many were sceptical. Now, at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the sceptics are a declining minority – whether from the point of view of those who live by the culture-ideology of consumerism or those who condemn it as the greatest blight on our humanity. The study of malls thus seems important to understand how this phenomenon is organized – invoking findings from the consciousness industry, environmental design, Madison Avenue and Disney, and the centrality of 'Learning from Las Vegas' both literally and in terms of the highly influential treatise of Robert Venturi and his colleagues (1977). The mall is an instrumental space, where commercial success depends on nothing being left to chance, from escalator design to entrances, temperature, lighting, music, mirrors, cleanliness and, of course, the floorplan: 'a too direct and obvious route between the entrance and exits must be avoided' (Goss, 1993: 32). The ideal is to construct a narrative which draws the shopper through maximum consumption opportunities. (This idea is revisited below in the context of Klein's analysis of 'scripted spaces'). There are, of course, some commercial constraints on mall architects and developers, notably the imperative of maximizing revenues for every available unit of retail space, but apart from this there are plenty of opportunities for ingenious designers to build various forms of iconicity into malls at scales from neighbourhood to regional, aspiring national (as in Mall of America) as well as the globalizing. While the locations are local, the phenomenon is transnational, connecting the built environment to capitalist consumerism.[8] Similar trends can be observed in theme parks, waterfront developments and transportation infrastructure (airports, rail and bus stations) all over the world.

Every city in the world now has its malls and, at least in a minimalist sense, it can be argued that many if not most malls achieve a measure of local iconicity just by being malls – they are known to all the locals (thus famous), they have specific symbolic-aesthetic qualities in terms of either crude modernism and/or postmodernism and/or variations on vernacular themes. The most famous malls in the world tend to be admired more for their scale and monumentality, and for what they represent – often the regeneration of a neighborhood or a whole city – than for their architectural qualities as such. However, in recent years the connections between shopping, consumerism and iconic architecture have been driven much more by boutiques than by malls. This is best illustrated by the relationship between Prada and its architects of choice, notably Rem Koolhaas, Herzog and de Meuron, and Kazua Sejima, all of whom have designed deliberately iconic stores for Prada in globalizing cities. Vlovine (2003), in an article on the new Prada store in Tokyo, designed by Herzog and de Meuron (the architects of the Tate Modern in London), quotes the CEO of the company: 'Architecture is the same as advertising for communicating the brand.' On the $40 million Prada store in Manhattan, Ockman writes:

> The ingenious transformation of commercial into cultural space on which Koolhaas has persuaded his client to bank here is fraught with risks... Both fascinated and repelled by the world of commerce, he bestrides the

> globe in his brown Prada coat like a post-modern Howard Roark. (Ockman, 2002: 78; see also Sari, 2004: 36–51)[9]

While a leader, Prada is not alone. There are many other retailers who see the advantages of such connections. In England, a long-established central London store, Selfridges, had a new store designed for them in Birmingham by architects Future Systems (see Figure 3). This was instantly dubbed iconic – 'A New Icon for UK's Second Largest City: The "Sexy" Silver Building' – in the Taiwanese magazine, *Dialogue: Architecture + Design + Culture* (Sari, 2004: 68–81).

The architects were asked if their visuals could be used on the store credit card (Speaks, 2002). Recognition of the outline of a building, especially in a skyline, is one of the great signifiers of iconicity, Manhattan being the most famous example. In the pages of the influential *Harvard Design Magazine*, this phenomenon is termed architainment. 'Theme parks and art museums are increasingly joined by upscale retailers [and top-end boutique hotels] as patrons of high-profile architecture' (Fernandez-Galiano, 2000: 37). Branches of the luxury goods chain LVMH by the trendy French architect Christian de Portzamparc, Prada by Rem Koolhaas, and the Royalton and Paramount hotels designed by the even trendier Philippe Starck (all in Manhattan) are but the most sparkling pinnacles of this global consumerist iceberg. While luxury boutique hotels

Figure 3 A new icon: the sexy silver building, Selfridges. Birmingham, England (2007)

have attracted most attention in the glossy design magazines, there are also many large luxury hotel developments that have caught the eye, like malls, as much for their monumental scale as for their architectural quality. An outstanding example is the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai, designed by Atlans & Partners, a distinguished regional practice (also iconized in Sari, 2004). This hotel complex, with its distinctive Arab dhow shape, is only the best-known of many self-proclaimed 'iconic' architectural features that have turned Dubai into a new wonder of the (consumerist) world.[10] Of the major architect–developers of the global age, John Portman (e.g. his Peachtree Center in Atlanta and Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles; see Jameson, 1991; Portman and Barnett, 1976) and John Jerde (e.g. his Bellagio in Las Vegas, Mall of America in Minneapolis and waterside projects in Fukuoka; see Jerde, 1999; Klein, 2004) have made the iconic atrium integral to the culture-ideology of consumerism.

For shopping malls, boutiques and hotel resorts the connection between iconic architecture and consumerism is quite obvious, at least at the local level, but it is not so obvious with respect to other types of architectural icons, especially in the field of culture (performance spaces, especially sports stadia and museums). The Sydney Opera House is a paradigm case of how a performance space commissioned by public bodies and designed deliberately to be what is here conceptualized as an architectural icon (Messent, 1997; esp. chs 3–5; Murray, 2003) is transformed under the conditions of capitalist globalization into a global icon of the culture-ideology of consumerism. From its roots as a city icon for Sydney, promoted as a national icon for Australia, to eventual canonization as a UNESCO World Heritage listed building – one indicator of global iconicity – the Sydney Opera House has become one of the best-known buildings in the world. It is, arguably, the gold standard against which the attempt to manufacture iconic architecture in the global arena is measured. The clients of the Guggenheim Bilbao are widely reported to have cited it in these terms (Jencks, 2005) and in her discussion of the project to build a new National Theatre in Beijing, Broudehoux (2004: 227) asserts:

> The theatre was to become an emblem of late twentieth-century modernity and a deserving symbol of China which could attract worldwide recognition and compete as a visual icon with structures such as the Sydney Opera House or the Grande Arche in Paris.

A spokesperson for the federal arts minister commented on the ongoing process to upgrade the Opera House: 'The Federal Government acknowledges the icon status of the Sydney Opera House, not just as a building in the hearts of all Australians but as a world-recognised symbol of Australia' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2007).[11] A manifestation of this was the headline image position of the Opera House in the multi-million dollar 'Where the bloody hell are you?' international advertising campaign launched in 2006 for the Australian tourist industry (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2006: 1).

The global dissemination of the image of the icon, already boosted by exposure during the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, goes hand in hand with the ever-increasing commercialization of the building itself over the last few decades in the forms of reproduction of the image on more and more memorabilia, and the enlargement of spending opportunities in and around the site.

The Olympics in particular, and sporting venues in general, provide many good examples of the links between iconic architecture and consumerism. The architect explained that after the success of HOK's Stadium Australia for the Sydney Olympics he decided to focus exclusively on sports and leisure architecture because this is the building type that most touches the hearts and minds of the common man. 'As symbols of a region or a nation, as icons of popular culture, stadia are never viewed in isolation . . . [they] are vigorously competing for praise and attention with their counterparts elsewhere' (in Sheard, 2001: xiv) and identified with popular aspirations. These 'New Cathedrals of Sport' are 'multi-experience venues fully tuned into the digital age' – circumlocutions signalling the culture-ideology of consumerism. Sheard goes on to philosophize on sports architecture, a philosophy grounded with a healthy dose of commercialism:

> beyond its physical presence, the stadium also provides a tangible focus for community consciousness and social bonding, a place representing urban pride, a place in which one feels part of something important, a place to share and enjoy with one's neighbours. It has also been shown that city centre venues also help to generate revenue for surrounding businesses and services as the secondary spend from these venues can be considerable. (2001: xviii)

Hence, the new consumerist phenomenon of 'stadium tourism'. In Munich, for example, the Olympic Stadium is the second most popular tourist attraction in the city, while in Barcelona more tourists visit Nou Camp (the home of Barcelona football club) than the Picasso museum. As gate receipts for sports events decline relative to TV income, merchandising becomes more important, as in airports all round the world, and this is reflected in the layout of both types of architecture. For stadia and airports, 'spending time' is literally two to four hours. The latest high-profile project of HOK Sports with Foster + Partners is Wembley Stadium in London, whose original twin towers, known to football fans all over the world, have been replaced by an already globally recognizable iconic arch, images of which adorn myriad publicity materials, directional signs on all the highway approaches to the stadium, and the cover of the semi-official publication *Wembley Stadium: National Icon* (Barclay and Powell, 2007).

This two-way process whereby deliberately iconic architecture and enhanced consumerism of sports stadia feed into one another is also evident in the case of museums. Andy Warhol is reputed to have said – and if he did, it was a remarkable prediction – that 'All department stores will become museums, and all museums will become department stores'

(as quoted, but without a source, in Jencks, 2005: 44–7).[12] Many museums have increased and upgraded their coverage of architecture and design at the same time as virtually all major new museums around the world have been proclaimed architectural icons by their patrons (at the local and/or national and/or global levels) and their images have been mobilized in the service of the culture-ideology of consumerism. The production and marketing of architectural icons and architects as icons (starchitects) have been at the centre of these developments (Sklair, forthcoming).

The role of new museums for urban growth coalitions in globalizing cities can hardly be over-stated. Lampugnani and Sachs (1999) show that architecturally distinguished museums by world-famous architects are to be found not only in the obviously 'global cities' but in many other less obvious candidates for global credentials, for example in Nimes (Foster), Hamburg (Ungers), Karlsruhe (Koolhaas), Monterrey (Legorreta), Milwaukee (Calatrava), Cincinnati (Hadid). The first iconic museum of the global era was probably Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York, completed in 1959 a few months after the death of the architect, and 40 years later Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao has become just as iconic. Of the reasons commonly given to explain why some museums become iconic for the public three stand out, and all of them connect directly with the culture-ideology of consumerism, i.e. they promote the idea of museums as consumerist spaces. First, the two Guggenheims and many other successful museums have unusual sculptural qualities: people visit them to see the museums themselves, as much as and sometimes rather more than the art inside. Second, as argued above, museums – like all cultural institutions – have become much more commercialized in the global era. Most new museums today have larger shops and a greater variety of art and architecture-related merchandise and spaces for refreshment than was the case 50 years ago (Zukin, 1995). A ubiquitous feature of the remodelling of old museums is the addition of consumerist spaces (Harris, 1990). 'Remarkably, the key performance indicator of retail sales per square foot is higher in MoMA's museum stores than in Walmart' (Evans, 2003: 431). A further illustration of this is the monumental advertising of extended opening hours for the Prado in Madrid, fighting off competition from the more modernist Reina Sofia and Thyssen museums, nearby (see Figure 4).

Similarly, consumerist refurbishment of the Victoria and Albert in London led to the jibe, or maybe it was an advertising slogan, that it was 'a great café with a museum attached' – and this sentiment has been repeated for other museums, for example the recently remodelled MoMA in New York (Evans, 2003: 434). Third, museums often become endowed with iconicity when they can be seen to successfully regenerate rundown areas, when they seek to upgrade the shopping and entertainment potential of the area. This is certainly true for the Guggenheim in Bilbao, and new museums in many other cities. In London, the 'Tate Modern effect' helps to explain how a converted disused power station has transformed a grimy area south of the Thames and, by connecting it via the new Millennium

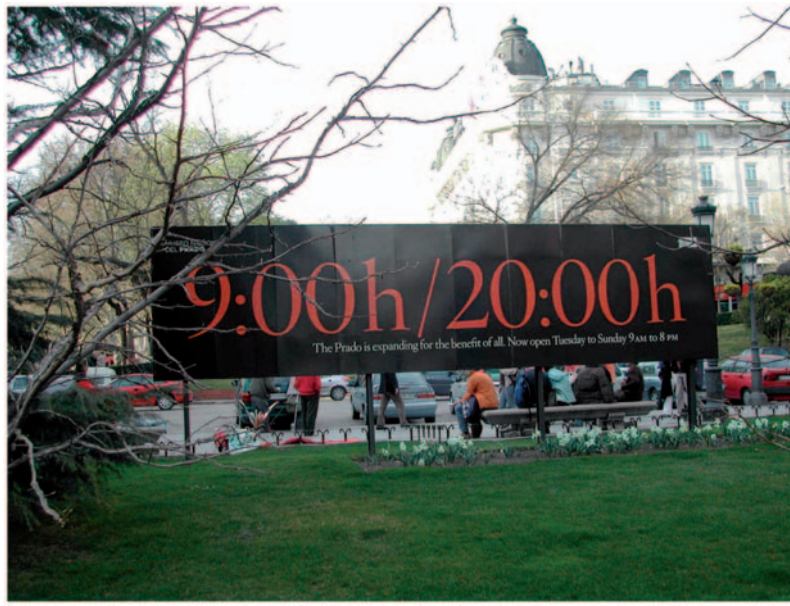

Figure 4 Extended opening hours for the benefit of all: the Prado reinvented (2006)

Bridge with St Paul's Cathedral on the north side of the river, has created a new urban pole of attraction. In all of these cases the iconic museum stands not in isolation but as part of an urban renewal and/or urban upgrading plan. As Wu (2002: 198) argues:

> Since the eighties it has become ever more popular among developers whose sights are set on acquiring the aura that art generally brings with it, and who seek to use art, as well as top design and architect-signature buildings, to redefine the social character of their enclave developments within an unsatisfactory environment.

Globalizing Cities and Consumerist Space

Consumerist space can be defined as space in which users are encouraged and provided with opportunities to spend money, in contrast to non-consumerist space, that does neither. While Hannigan's idea of 'fantasy city' (1998) is something of an exaggeration, there is no doubt that his triad of shopertainment, eatertainment and edutainment, added to the architainment of Fernandez-Galiano (2000) noted above, is a key component of the mix intended to turn cities that were once centres of productive labour into sites devoted to the culture-ideology of consumerism. The phenomenon reported in research from UCLA in 1995, cited by Hannigan, showing that

for the first time entertainment provided more jobs than aerospace in California, can be replicated in more or less all globalizing cities all over the world. Iconic architecture, at least at the local urban level, is the sine qua non for this. This raises the issue of the relations between public and private space and, more pointedly, the very survival of genuine public space in our cities (Herzog, 2006). It must be said that this much-used but monolithic distinction is not as simple as it sounds, because much public space has been effectively privatized and some private space has been made public (Kayden, 2000, on New York; Minton, 2006, on London). The crux of the matter, in the context of consumerism, is that while logically it would appear that consumerist spaces need to be public to facilitate spending, sociologically it is clear that much consumerist space operates as restricted public space, that is, restricted to those with the means to buy what is on sale. In his study of Melbourne, Dovey (1999: 187) puts this position quite starkly, arguing that in the thrill of the skyscraper, public space suffers:

> As the corporate towers have replaced our public symbols on the skyline, so the meaning and the life have been drained from public space. The degradation of public space encourages its replacement by pseudopublic space (public access but private control) as part of a slow expropriation of the city.

And in his highly influential chapter on 'Fortress L.A.', Mike Davis expounds a characteristic radical history of the struggle over public space, arguing that the traditional complaints by local liberal intellectuals about 'anti-pedestrian bias... fascist obliteration of street frontage' miss the 'explicit repressive intention, which has its roots in Los Angeles' ancient history of class and race warfare... the fortress effect emerges not as an inadvertent failure of design, but as a deliberate socio-spatial strategy' (Davis, 1992: 229). This is evident all the way from people-unfriendly benches and mega-structures, to the works of Frank Gehry, Disney's 'imagineer' of urban boosterism. The logical conclusion to this process is the 'panopticon mall... [surrounded by] belligerent lawns... and creating the carceral city' (Davis, 1992: 229, ch.4 passim). The dilemma for globalizing urban growth coalitions in globalizing cities is how to reconcile the maximum number of shoppers with the fear of undesirables. In many cities the appeal of the mall is precisely the promise of some protection from urban crime. Such promise can be built into the design of buildings. For example, it is difficult to enter the exclusive Daslu department store in São Paulo, Brazil, on foot – the obvious entrances are the parking garages (where valet parking is about one third of the weekly minimum wage) and the helipad on the roof (São Paulo, one of the 'poorest' cities in the world, is said to have the highest proportion of private helicopter ownership per capita of any major city). Restrictions can also be designed into the spaces, for example not providing comfortable seating, thus discouraging undesirable elements from lingering. Whatever the contradictions, whatever the

restrictions, there is no doubt that cities all over the world are becoming more consumerist.

The clear trend to increasing commercialization of transportation hubs (especially airports), museums, art galleries, indeed cultural centres of all types, schools and universities, even some places of worship – not to mention the more obvious examples of the massive rise in the numbers and scope of malls, theme parks, entertainment spaces and so on (Ritzer, 1999) – suggests that a major spatial effect of capitalist globalization is to squeeze out non-consumerist space and replace it with consumerist space anywhere that people are likely to gather or pass through. The use of buyer-generated advertising (wearing and bearing designer labels on clothing and bags, drink and food containers) on the streets of cities, towns, even villages all over the world is one highly visible indicator of the colonization of public space, by the purveyors of the culture-ideology of consumerism. Klein (2004) elaborates the useful idea of 'scripted spaces' from its origins in architectural illusions in the 16th century, to the present day, labelled the 'electronic baroque' of the cinema, amusement parks and all the other spheres of consumerist space of what has been referred to here as capitalist globalization. 'By decoding scripted space, we learn how power was brokered between the classes in the form of special effects . . . gentle repression posing as free will' (2004: 11). Contemporary transnational scripted spaces can be seen as instruments of class control in terms of the hegemony that the transnational capitalist class wields through the culture-ideology of consumerism. This phenomenon reaches its apogee in Las Vegas, a mélange of globally iconic architecture devoted to the culture-ideology of consumerism to an almost absurd degree.

> That's the way Vegas has to work. It plays on instant recognizability. A lot of people haven't been to New York, but almost everyone knows its iconic image [as represented in New York, New York in Las Vegas]. It is more important that New York looks like the familiar map of the city than the city itself. (Bailey, quoted in Klein, 2004: 347)

While there are cases of new iconic buildings creating consumerist spaces that sit in isolation in marginal areas of cities, or even in the countryside, it is in global (or better, globalizing) cities that most iconic architecture is to be found. Sari (2004) identifies nine 'New City Icons' – Taipei 101; The Forum, Barcelona; Burj Al Arab Hotel, Dubai; Selfridges, Birmingham; Guggenheim Bilbao; Jewish Museum, Berlin; Esplanade, Singapore; The World Trade Center site, New York; and the Olympic Stadium in Athens – mostly built by architects with global reputations, all major urban presences and all, with the possible exception of the Jewish Museum, fitting my description of consumerist spaces.

> The unveiling of major works of architecture in emerging cities has generated enormous publicity for cities such as Dubai, Bilbao and Beijing.

> Aside from the socio-economic impact of such high-profile buildings on the cities themselves, such iconic architecture puts these cities on the fast track to join the rankings of well recognized city brands such as New York, London, Paris, etc. (Sari, 2004: 23)

The vast majority of those active in urban growth coalitions in globalizing cities believe that the Bilbao effect could work for them, even if they can afford neither Frank Gehry nor the Guggenheim franchise. Examples can be cited from cities in all five continents. In Melbourne:

> A cluster of new civic icons are built or proposed; all marked by a dynamic aesthetic signifying the state slogan 'on the move' . . . The Manhattan skyline, Westminster, the Eiffel Tower and the Sydney Opera House set the standards of urban iconography. Like corporations without logos, cities without icons are not in the market. (Dovey, 1999: 158–9)[13]

In Buenos Aires: 'Transnational corporate elites, international financiers, tourists, and the global "jet-set" (*los elegantes*) create the demand for advanced infrastructure [read iconic architecture] in Buenos Aires as elsewhere' (Keeling, 1996: 205). Keeling provides a timely reminder that the relationship between iconic architecture and consumerism produces losers as well as winners. The upper middle class and the elite occupy Barrio Norte and the northern suburbs, where bankers are linked to global financial centres, industrialists to foreign franchises and distributorships, and agriculturalists to export markets. In the rest of the city, the 'people' carve out their living: many fear globalization and the destruction of what makes Buenos Aires (and thus Argentina) special, though this is often a Europeanized version of the national identity. The globalizing urban growth coalition in Salerno, a small rather dilapidated port south of Naples, recruited experts from the group that had recently revitalized Barcelona to draw up a 'programmatic document' to reinvent Salerno. Zaha Hadid was employed to design a new ferry terminal (dubbed 'iconic') and David Chipperfield to regenerate the historic centre, among many other projects. According to Burdett, a leading architectural entrepreneur, these projects have transformed Salerno from an industrial backwater to a city of culture and tourism. As in Barcelona, a charismatic mayor, pragmatic architects and commercial interests used iconic architecture to boost the city and a 'significant indicator of the success of the operation is that property values in the city centre have increased sevenfold' (Burdett, 2000: 100).

However, it is in Asia that the most spectacular architectural results of the efforts of globalizing urban growth coalitions have occurred. Marshall explains:

> these projects provide two very important global advantages to their host locations. First they provide a particular type of urban environment where the work of globalization gets done and second they provide a specific kind

> of global image that can be marketed in the global market place. These projects represent a new way of thinking about the role of planning in the city, which more than ever is concerned with marketing and the provision of competitive infrastructure. (2003: 4)

Current developments in Singapore and Beijing are just two among many. In Singapore, plans to rebuild the downtown, including iconic projects by foreign architects, are well under way along with government aspirations to turn Singapore into a global city for the arts (Chang, 2000; Marshall, 2003: ch. 9). In 2006, an ambitious scheme was announced to build a new bridge, whose double helix steel structure design will be a 'world first', as part of a $300 million Urban Redevelopment Authority scheme for the downtown Marina Bay area. This will provide a walking route linking the iconic Esplanade cultural complex with a proposed tourist resort and a Singapore Flyer ferris wheel, copying the success of the Millennium Wheel in London. Justifying the cost of the project, the National Development Minister told Parliament that many cities are now 'building new attractions and actively marketing themselves . . . No idea is too far-fetched or too bold' (*Business Times*, 2006). Visa, an Esplanade corporate partner, leveraged the popular image of the building as a durian (a local fruit) in an advertising campaign, illustrating once again the commercial value of iconic architecture (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Visa via architecture in Singapore: creating consumerist space from the durian (2006)

In Beijing, Business Improvement Districts were introduced in the 1990s:

> the provision of modern infrastructure, high quality shopping facilities, and the creation of up-to-date business environments . . . generally devised by downtown business owners with the support of municipal authorities . . . organized around a set of functions oriented to business people, commercial tenants, and foreign tourists . . . these simulated downtowns rely on a spectacular imagery designed to connote sumptuousness and luxury . . . [demonstrating] the direct influence of world capitalism and global consumerism. (Broudehoux, 2004: 94–5)

What Broudehoux calls the malling of Wangfujing, the 'Fifth Avenue of Beijing' and once home of the world's largest McDonald's, followed rapidly. A new Central Business Districts policy permitted the displacement of McDonald's (albeit to a site nearby) by the massive Oriental Plaza scheme, and many others, mostly joint ventures between Hong Kong and Beijing developers, with the active participation of the government at city and national level. 'The goal was to turn Wangfujing into an elaborate and highly efficient machine devoted to a single activity: consumption' (Broudehoux, 2004: 108).[14]

Africa presents a special problem in this context. As the editors of a comprehensive collection on global cities (Brenner and Keil, 2006: 189) comment: 'it appears as if an entire continent has been sidestepped by contemporary forms of globalization'. However, despite its general position at the bottom of the global socio-economic hierarchy, similar trends of globalizing through malling can be observed in the major cities of Africa. South Africa has many malls, some of them, in mall-speak, of 'world-class standard'. In the last few years, the Mlimani City mall in Dar es Salam in Tanzania, the Lagos Palms mall in Nigeria, and the Accra mall in Ghana were all marketed as the first world-class malls in their respective countries.[15]

Conclusion

In a work that deserves to be much better known, Bentmann and Muller (1992, first published in German in 1970) argued that the rise of the villa as a building type associated with the name of Andrea Palladio in 16th-century Venice can best be analysed as a form of hegemonic architecture, that is, architecture that serves class interests. In this article I have tried to show that most iconic architecture of the global era is also best analysed as a form of hegemonic architecture, serving the interests of the transnational capitalist class through the creation of consumerist space or, more accurately, through the attempt to turn more or less all public spaces into consumerist space. Just as one can appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the best Palladian villas while deploring the socio-economic system they promoted

ideologically, one can appreciate the Sydney Opera House or the Guggenheim Bilbao while deploring the consumerist interests they serve. Fiske raises a fundamental point, even if in an ironic manner:

> The aesthetics of the Manhattan skyline are an aesthetics of capitalism: they are as ideological as those of the renaissance. The awesomeness of Sears Tower [in Chicago] is as attractive as that of Chartres Cathedral – if one is to be oppressed one might as well be oppressed magnificently; one can thus participate in one's own oppression with a hegemonic pride. (1991: 214)

The message in a piece of neon art in a boutique hotel on Rodeo Drive, Los Angeles – 'visual space has essentially no owner' – expands this sentiment in the populist mocking democratic rhetoric so vital for the success of the culture-ideology of consumerism (see Figure 6).

Perhaps luxury hotels are not the most sensible sites to engage the critique of iconic architecture in the service of capitalist consumerism. Goss (1993) explored the challenging idea that malls should become a third, public, space after home and work/school. Malls, then, could become places not only to buy and sell but places with other functions, for example providing for the educational, cultural, health and child care needs of the community. Some malls do offer some of these facilities in relatively safe

Figure 6 Populist script for a luxury consumerist space: neon installation from the lobby of the Luxe Hotel, Rodeo Drive, Los Angeles. Artist: Vincent Wolf (2004)

environments, but most are understandably reluctant to provide anything for non-shoppers and other types of deviants. Staeheli and Mitchell (2006) have revisited these issues more recently in terms of the useful distinction between community and public. In their study of the Carousel Center Mall and plans for its enormous Disneyesque Destiny, USA complex in Syracuse, New York, they remind us that malls, in North America at least, have been sites of struggle over free speech, public access and social services for decades. However, they argue, malls generally cater for specific communities, principally of consumers, and their design and regulations are often biased in terms of class, age, ethnicity and politics. Parallel to the argument made above that a major spatial effect of capitalist globalization is to squeeze out non-consumerist space and replace it with consumerist space, radical critics of malls argue that they squeeze out publics, replacing them with consumer communities. One of the hegemonic effects of the architecture of malls, which frequently become endowed with lower-level local iconicity, is to create a disposition to see these buildings – usually characterized by glass and shiny metal to encourage happy and colourful thoughts of transparency, openness and light – as integral to the pleasures of consumption. In this process, the costs of the culture-ideology of consumerism, in terms of debt, addiction, stress, ecological damage and class polarization, are conveniently hidden.

It need not always be so. The inspiration that iconic architecture has provided down the ages often coexisted, albeit uncomfortably, with unpalatable political and economic systems. But, for change to happen, an alternative form of non-capitalist globalization is necessary. Under such conditions a truly inspiring iconic architecture, including existing architectural icons, may enhance genuinely public spaces in which the culture-ideology of consumerism fades away and is replaced by a built environment in which the full array of human talents can be given free rein.

Notes

1. Although she uses different terms, Juliet Schor (see Holt, 2005) expresses very well the view of consumerism assumed here. While I share her emphasis on producerism, I would explain it as a direct consequence of how the major transnational corporations operate. My argument in what follows assumes that capitalist globalization and the culture-ideology of consumerism are unsustainable in the long run, due to the crises of class polarization and ecological stress (see Sklair, 2002: 48–57 and passim).

2. For a detailed discussion of these four criteria of generic globalization see Sklair (2009). Postcolonialism is used here in its widest sense, not simply with reference to colonial powers and their colonies (see, for example, the varied contributions to Krishnaswamy and Hawley, 2008).

3. All images used in this article are my own (the dates indicate when the picture was taken).

4. For a full exposition of the transnational capitalist class and its relationship to capitalist globalization and the culture-ideology of consumerism, see Sklair (2001).

5. Architectural icons tend to be large, and being the tallest building in the world at any one time normally guarantees at least temporary iconic status. However, scale cannot be considered a defining characteristic of iconicity as buildings of modest size relative to their surroundings have achieved iconic status, for example, Mies' Barcelona Pavilion, Wright's Guggenheim in Manhattan and, more recently, Gehry's house in Santa Monica, Zumpthor's Thermal Baths, Hadid's Vitra Fire Station and Herzog and de Meuron's Laban Dance Centre in London.

6. With Beijing 2008 in mind, according to a Chinese official:

> The building [Koolhaas' CCTV headquarters] will be a landmark piece of architecture recognized at home and abroad, reflecting the spirit of the times and a high level of cultural taste... [it] will play a starring role on screens around the world' (quoted in Irving, 2002)

In the event, it was upstaged by the National Olympic Stadium, labelled the Bird's Nest, an instant icon and another global success for architects Herzog and de Meuron along with local partners, China Architecture Design Institute.

7. For an elaboration of how these four fractions of the TCC work in the context of iconic architecture, see Sklair (2005). Here the focus is on the links between the four fractions in the interests of capitalist consumerism.

8. In the course of an interview in the arts section of the *Financial Times*, Koolhaas was reminded that critics consider that his Prada store in New York 'had sacrificed architectural integrity on the altar of consumerism'. Koolhaas is reported to have laughed at this and cited his public works in the USA in rebuttal (see Irving, 2002).

9. The Roark reference is to the architect superhero of Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*. The character was widely said to be based on Frank Lloyd Wright. In my article on contemporary global starchitects (Sklair, forthcoming) I argue that the four I chose (Foster, Gehry, Hadid, Koolhaas) all deliberately espouse what I call the culture-ideology of consumerism in their work.

10. For a chilling exposé of the conditions under which those who build such buildings labour in Dubai (and elsewhere), see Human Rights Watch (2006).

11. This repeats almost word for word the citation when Jorn Utzon won the Pritzker Prize in 2003.

12. In a letter dated 10 April 1954 to Harry Guggenheim (nephew of Solomon, the original benefactor of the museum, who died in 1949) about the new director of the Guggenheim, Frank Lloyd Wright presciently observed: 'Sweeney wants to run a museum-business' (Wright, 1986: 201).

13. This whole chapter (Dovey, 1999: ch. 11) is very instructive, particularly the Leunig anti-icon cartoon reproduced in Figure 11.7 (1999: 169).

14. Referring to another massive mall in the area, Broudehoux (2004: 113) observes:

> While Sun Dong An's interior design conforms to the sleek signature style of international shopping malls, the exterior architecture of the building is a superficial attempt to integrate the building into the local urban landscape by cloaking it under a familiar guise.

This is an interesting comment on the postcolonialism – architecture debate referred to above (see also Abaza, 2001).

15. These details come from various web searches on 'Malls in Africa' during late 2007.

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