



Shirley Daborn
University of New South Wales / Penrith Regional Gallery
shirleydaborn@me.com

The Suburban Shoppingscape and the Reconfiguration of Urban Ideals

Abstract:

This paper looks at how the mid-twentieth century suburban shopping center created a pseudo-public space specifically tailored to attract women in their role as the primary shopper. Driven by the demands of a changing urban landscape retail developers combined urban ideals with modern materials and technology to create a *shoppingscape* that ideologically merged community values with notions of progress. The crisp, clean lines of modern design, paired with the practical delights of childcare facilities, cafes and a women's lounge area re-presented a mix of city ideals and excitement with the familiarity and comfort of community facilities. Rather than displacing traditional city characteristics and activities, the suburban shopping center combined old and new development concepts to produce a new environment founded on principles of accessibility and comfort.

Keywords: modern; shopping center; women; space; suburbs

The Suburban Shoppingscape and the Reconfiguration of Urban Ideals



FIG.1 - Roselands Shopping Centre. Fashion Square with Raindrop Fountain, c.1965, Sydney, Australia. Coles Myer Archives, State Library of Victoria.

Designed to distribute a wealth of objects to a rising, prosperous society, the suburban shopping center came to symbolize the riches and benefits of a post-war western nation. The new community-focused space for modern living revolutionized the retail experience by reconfiguring urban ideals to suit the demands of societal change. As a result, the shopping center operated as a pseudo-public space designed to function as a valued suburban space of social interaction.

Importantly, acknowledging that accessibility for women was a key, determining factor in the success of the new retail venture greatly influenced the design of modern retailing space. Issues of women's limited accessibility to the city center – both physical and ideological – were countered by the provision of a new space that offered convenience and comfort. Services, such as ample parking, childcare facilities, cafes, lounge areas and picture theatres, advocated for a friendly atmosphere in which women and children were welcome.

This paper will look at how the mid-twentieth century suburban shopping center was created as a pseudo-public space specifically tailored to attract women in their role as the primary shopper. To do so, the new style shopping center will be explored as a site designed to deliver modern capitalist trends into a rapidly expanding suburban

landscape filled with traditional notions of domesticity and how, in so doing, these spaces reconfigured urban ideals in order to meet the practical and ideological needs of a changing society. Originating in Northern America during the first half of the twentieth century, the suburban shopping model has developed into a worldwide phenomenon that has, since its inception, attracted many vocal critics. It's origins, however, were charged with an unwavering belief in progress as an obvious and unavoidable vehicle for the delivery of community values that reveals the suburban shopping center to be a site of social complexity.

The reconfiguration of the retail environment exacerbated the fear of a disintegrating public sphere. The ideological delineation of space into either public or private supported an on going criticism of both the modern retail space and, subsequently, women's cultural identity as the primary shopper. The popular suburban shopping center became illogically deemed a poor replacement for the urban center's identity as the principal marketplace and, in turn, the privatization of the shopping space was held responsible for the demise of true public space. Challenging this simplistic view, Margaret Crawford suggests that we scrutinize the concept of public space, arguing Public space should be viewed not as a single, unified physical and social entity but as a situation that can be experienced in multiple, partial, and even paradoxical ways. Thus, there is no single public space but as many different public spaces as there are different publics (Crawford, 2002, p. 22).

Consequently, in evaluating new spaces of interaction, it is important to acknowledge that the reality of how a space is used contributes greatly to the creation of meaning. Furthermore, acknowledging the complexity inherent within notions of public space - including the suburban shopping center - could avail critics with a productive framework for adaptation and improvement.

In any event, changes within economic, social, cultural and political factors saw the role of the traditional marketplace significantly altered within modern living. In response to such change, industry leaders asserted that 'planners and architects need to assist in the evolution of meaningful environments that serve the social as well as the everyday economic needs of society' (Smith, 1969, p. 79). In so doing, societal change was acknowledged and the demands of a modern consumer society reconfigured notions of public interaction, thus resulting in the creation of an overtly privatized-public space.

The suburban landscape of Post WWII Australia shared similarities with those of America and, in particular, a growing fondness for the motorcar situated the self-service shopping model as a prime solution to changing retail trends. Australia increasingly benefited from economic security, underwent rapid population growth,

experienced rising numbers in home ownership and a general public embrace of suburban development. For planners, the rapid development of suburban living was viewed as an unregulated, sprawling suburban landscape that was in need of rational solutions in order to instill controlled expansion. For retailers, the shift in demographics required an adjustment to traditional city centric practices in order to maximize the delivery of modern, mass-produced goods to a growing market base. Consequently, urban planners and retailers operated within a rhetoric of regulation and progress as a means of providing a solution to the perceived 'ills' of unfettered growth and the suburban shopping center emerged as a symbol of modern Australian national prosperity.



FIG 2 - Hotpoint. When I'm a Grown Up Lady. *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 1 May 1943, p. 8.

Within post WWII Australian society, women's societal role was ideologically reset to a pre-war mindset of housewifery that encouraged women to re-embrace domesticity. During wartime, although ideologically remaining the pinnacle of homely virtues on behalf of husbands, sons and fathers overseas at war, women were actively recruited into war-work. During this time, women in service were socially portrayed as strong, self-determining individuals who were relied upon in a range of occupations, such as mechanics, machinists, engineers, medical officers, drivers, secretaries and typists. The hardships of juggling the demands of war-work and managing a home during this time were countered with dreams of a modern post-

war society in which access to new household commodities would be provided as a societal reward for both national and personal sacrifice.

In 1943, the Australian General Electric Company ran a full-page advertisement in the popular women's magazine, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, in which the face of an innocent young girl looks dreamily out from the page into the eye of the viewer (Picture 1). Her hands are folded, resting gently in front of her chest. Behind her is a modern industrial landscape of airplanes, trains, cars, and an electric power station. The script below is a dialogue between the little girl and the technological promise of a modern world and is framed by pictures of household electrical appliances. Society's future is being reassured through a portrayal of consumable goods and services as rewards tied to the inevitability of progress. The heading begins as a statement, 'When I'm a grown up lady', before falling into a question and answer format:

"I'll have a beautiful house..."

Indeed you will Susan. A wonderful house, and all the work will be done by electricity.

"I won't have to wash clothes..."

Of course not – neither will you have to sweep, dust and clean – or wash dishes. You won't have to iron by hand or cook in the old fashioned way, you'll have electric Servants to do this.

"And I'll have a big motor car..."

Or an aeroplane, or even something like a magic carpet. Who knows? Radios, telephones and refrigerators seemed like magic when Grandma was a little girl.

"And... I'll always be happy."

Happier, we hope, Susan, for when this war is over the factories now making weapons will turn again to making the beautiful things for this house of yours – more beautiful than they every made before and many, many people will be happy again (*The Australian Women's Weekly*, May 1, 1943, p. 8).



FIG 3 - Top Ryde Shopping Centre, c.1970. Photographer Rosemary Reid. Ryde Library, New South Wales.

The Australian public was being primed for a post-war life of ease and security and the return of women to the domestic sphere, following the turmoil of wartime, was advocated as a means of reintroducing national stability.

Societal roles and responsibilities within Australian culture had long been established on issues of gender. Australia functioned as a strictly sex-segregated society in which the role of women was culturally entrenched in distinct opposition to that of men and any challenge to the established norms was strongly resisted (MacKenzie, 1963). Roles and responsibilities based on gender dictated that men secure paid employment outside of the home and women, positioned in an auxiliary role, were to support their husbands by maintaining the home and nurturing the family unit. By the mid 1960s, the little girl portrayed in the General Electric advertisement would be married with children and living in a modern suburban household. It was to be a life founded on a traditional family structure and to be made easy by modern technology. In keeping with the responsibilities of home management, women were culturally identified as the primary shopper. Initially the act of shopping was understood as the procurement of goods required for the running of the family unit and, on a practical level, women purchased supplies for the running of the household. On an ideological level, however, notions of women-ness and shopping became synonymous. Methods of producing cheap products on mass during the late nineteenth century saw the concept of need replaced with notions of desire and the modern perception of

shopping became severed from ideas of sustenance. During this time of change, the association between women's identity and the act of shopping came to be culturally understood as intrinsically defined by her sex and, in light of contemporary norms, an activity that required the scrutiny and management of masculine control. A degree of societal resistance to the change in retail practices saw shopping negatively portrayed as a hedonist pursuit and women became increasingly disparaged for a role they were culturally required to adopt.¹ The ambiguous identity of the shopper's societal function was culturally ingrained during the nineteenth century and continued to be entwined with opinions regarding emerging retail practices.

The mass consumption of goods, however, was integral to the operations of the new post-WWII consumer society. The purchase of goods from an ever-increasing range of new products was seen as central to an individual's sense of belonging to the broader community. As such, actively encouraging the participation of women, in their culturally demarcated role as the primary shopper, was fundamental to the success of Australia's model for modern living. Subsequently, retailers and planners were challenged with finding modern solutions to the rapid shift in retail trends and suburban development, while also navigating the culturally sanctioned perceptions of the shopper. The resulting designs for suburban shopping centers were founded on a rhetoric of community access; thus creating a language that argued for the progressive viability of modern retailing as a conceptual bridge between established practices and controlled development.

Within a single decade, between 1954 and 1964, Sydney's population had grown from 1,863,217 to 2,300,100 with the greatest growth area being within Sydney's suburban developments (*Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1955, p. 308; *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1968, p. 124). The dramatic rise in private home ownership saw the operational demands of, and desires for, an individual's home becoming a major driving force behind the purchase of goods. Consequently, the changing suburban landscape resulted in a marked increase in the traditional market share being relocated away from the city center. Driven by the demands of a changing urban landscape, retailers needed to follow their consumer base into the suburbs and this in turn demanded a reconfiguration of established retail practices. Traditionally, small business establishments, chain stores and scaled

¹For a good engagement with the issue of women's agency and consumption during the late nineteenth century see Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure in the Making of London's West End*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000 and Stella Minahan, and Michael Beverland, *Why Women Shop, Secrets Revealed*, Wrightbooks, 2005 for a look at a range of shopping styles that women experience at different times, often dictated by circumstances or mood. Five main categories are identified: Ms Grab and Go; the lone browser; the retail therapy seeker; the girls' day out shopper; and the hunter, pp. 38-52.

down department stores serviced townships in a main street precinct. As the suburban landscape grew, many small retailers set up along the city's arterial roads and issues of congestion and subsequent accessibility soon became of paramount concern to planners and developers. Identifying some similarities between American and Australian patterns of development, Australian retailers, architects and developers travelled to the northern hemisphere to study the emerging trend for a retail environment designed to deliver goods and services to a growing number of highly mobile, car owning customers living outside of the city center.



FIG 4 - Roselands Shopping Centre, c.1965. Coles Myer Archives, State Library of Victoria, Australia.

The revolutionary development in shopping center design is attributed to the vision of architect Victor Gruen. Widely acknowledged as the father of the shopping center, Gruen migrated to America from Austria in 1938, taking to North America his European values of public space, which greatly influenced his design process. In order to capitalise on the benefits of post WWII prosperity, and a new allegiance to America, Australian developers widely embraced the latest in retail trends emerging from the United States. The Australian public experienced the first American style shopping center in the suburbs of Brisbane, Queensland, when Chermside, designed by T. J. Weedman for Alan & Stark retailers for a cost of £600,000, opened in May 1957. Later that same year, Top Ryde was the first suburban center to be built in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia, by architects Dwyer, Whitehead and Payne (Picture 2).

Situated on approximately 6 acres of land, Top Ryde cost approximately £380,000 and at approximately 65,000 square feet (6,038.7 square meters) was soon to be considered modestly scaled (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November, 1957). By 1965 Whitehead and Payne had designed Roselands, a fully enclosed center that was promoted as a city within the suburbs for the retail company Grace Brothers (Picture 3). At a scale of 604,000 square feet (56,113 square meters) and at a cost of £6,000,000, the Roselands complex attracted wide-ranging attention and fanfare as the 'largest in the southern hemisphere'. Promoted as integral to progress, and as a marker of a successful modern society, the center was officially opened by the New South Wales State Premier Robert Askin and featured on the front page of Sydney's leading newspapers. By 1966 other major suburban shopping center developments in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory included Warringah Mall in 1961, Monaro Mall, ACT, in 1963, Miranda Fair in 1964 and Bankstown Square in 1966. The genesis of the international Westfield Group also began in the western suburbs of Sydney when in 1959 Frank Lowy and John Saunders opened their first shopping centre Westfield Place, which boasted two department stores, a supermarket, twelve specialty stores surrounding a square and 50 parking spaces in an adjoining lot.



FIG 5 - General Electric. Finest Appliances in a Woman's World. *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 21 July 1965, p. 52.

A focus on creating and delivering a community space that provided both services and welcomed families was a marked shift in development principles. As economic spending power shifted towards the family unit the global market required a means of channeling goods and services into the local community. Importantly, utilising modern materials and technology, combined with modernist urban ideals, ideologically merged notions of progress with community values. The new retail space was required to provide more than an assembly of shops; the supply of both goods and services became core issues that influenced the overall design. As such, the new space for retail was designed as a revolutionary *shoppingscape* that functioned as a self-contained community-focused shopping environment in stark contrast to the uncontrolled growth of street-side retail development. The new shopping centre, therefore, created a demand for a language of inclusivity and access that would deliver the benefits and ideals of a modern world. By addressing key demands of a rapidly changing society, the suburban shopping centre was a new space created from a combination of old and new development concepts. As a result, the new retail environment did not displace traditional city characteristics and activities but rather produced a new pseudo-public space specifically tailored to attract women in the role of primary shopper.

Notions of space are culturally defined within the specificities of time and place; time helps to situate a particular place within a societal context whereas space assists an understanding of the cultural complexities. In response to the specificities of post-war Australian society, the creation of a community-focused shopping center was a conscious push to develop a space that would be particularly inviting to women. Historically, cultural meaning has been ideologically polarized based on issues of gender. The polarizing of meaning supported the association of women with the domestic realm and, in turn, western culture ideologically excluded women from participating freely within the public realm. For many women access to the city was typically restricted to the occasional special 'day out' in town. However, the restrictions placed on women's mobility, including the lack of rest rooms, were in stark contrast to the needs of a capitalist society. Responsible for the upkeep of the family home amid a new modern consumer society meant that women's participation was essential. First, the space of the urban department store and then the suburban shopping centre accommodated the ideological contradiction around women's access to public space by providing new environments that blurred the entrenched gendered boundaries between public and private. The creation of large 'inward facing' retail spaces combined a degree of privacy and security with a sense of freedom and pleasure that successfully operated as a pseudo-public space.

The suburban shopping center not only revolutionized retail design practices but also altered established cultural representations of women in the role of primary shopper. As long as men remained behind the counter as knowledgeable salesmen and providers, women were typically portrayed as requiring substantial guidance and assistance. The rise in modern consumer practices, however, saw an increase in the number of women working as sales assistants and the introduction of a degree of self-service that required women to be viewed as competent shoppers (*Personnel Practice Bulletin*, 1962). Vestiges of the old representations of women shoppers remained, highlighting a patriarchal fear of lost control as women were increasingly entering the paid workforce (Hutchings, 1997, p. 72). *Mrs. H. Wife*, for example, was a serial cartoon that illustrated the housewife as dithering and inept. Her venture to the seafood vendor brings the salesman to physical despair as she inquires whether the 'Live Crays' are fresh. In contrast, the image chosen by the Roselands Shopping Centre was the embodiment of the modern woman as shopper. The Roselands' image represents a woman of action. She is in motion, acutely leaning into the space that states 'explore Roselands Today', and yet her gaze is firmly anchored to a point behind her. She is moving through both time and space, representing the past, the present and the future. She is at home moving through the 'fashion square', beauty salon and travel agency, and yet she is also comfortable engaging with civic duties such as visiting the bank, post office or solicitor.



FIG 6 - Helicopter landing at Top Ryde Shopping Centre, c.1958. Photographer E. Moore. Ryde Library, New South Wales.

Recognition that women had substantial spending power is evident within the direction adopted by popular Sydney newspapers the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun* attempting to attract the retailers' advertising dollar. The *Daily Mirror* advertisement overtly references the government child endowment allowance that is paid directly to the housewife. The accompanying graphic shows a retail store filled with women who, keenly shopping in the children's department and 'teen shop', are clearly perceived as important decision-makers in a consumer driven society. In *The Sun* amazing readership statistics are announced to attract retail advertising. Representing the 432,000 women who *The Sun* asserts to be readers are six women sketched while engrossed in reading the newspaper. Although travelling together on public transport the women are shown as individuals physically separated by the seating arrangements and by their age differences. The women are portrayed as isolated, experiencing a personal engagement with the information before them, and yet they are united by their cultural identity as the primary shopper. Symbolically the women are travelling in the same direction and, informed by retail advertising, become the mediator between the mass production essential to western notions of modern living and the mass consumption required to run the modern home.

The influx of modern commodities also saw advertising focus on the ability for household appliance to decrease the physicality of women's workload while also adding to an increase in home-based leisure, comfort and style. White-goods, such as refrigerators and washing machines, were promoted as labor saving devices. Modern gas and electric ovens symbolized a wife's ability to nurture her husband and children while the selection of general appliances, home-wares and soft furnishings signified a degree of cultural belonging and societal success (Picture 4). The focus on creating a modern home also saw a broadening of advertising to include a particular customer image designed to appeal to the family unit. For Roselands, young couples dominate the Grace Brothers' department store advertising. Couples are portrayed as energetic and vibrant individuals, surveying the latest in home wares. Grace Brothers' advertisements promoted the availability of household furnishings that, equaling anything the city could offer, would update and elevate the home's appearance to match that of the modern world. Young couples are depicted gracefully perusing the store displays. An emphasis on gender is highlighted through representations of men in broad shouldered tailored suits, alongside women in suits and dresses that are cut sharply to emphasis the waistline. The couples shown in the center are subsequently represented in newspaper advertisements that show the family unit enjoying the benefits of modern furniture and household goods. Laughing and frolicking children are energized and parents are content. The depicted ambience of the shopping

environment is one of relaxed stimulation. The blend of traditional and modern imagery generated representations of the shopper that provided a modern edge to a traditional practice.

Although women were identified as the primary shoppers, it was clear that developers valued a rhetoric of civic engagement that ensured the new shopping center be perceived as a community based environment that would also service the needs of men (Picture 5). Services such as banks, travel agencies and hardware shops provided amenities that would attract the custom of male shoppers. The inclusion of civic landmarks, traditionally associated with the urban center, drew on a sense of cultural familiarity. Public art and water features were popular inclusions that signified the shopping center to be a community space rather than solely a commercial outlet. Open squares, fountains, rotundas and public sculptures were located in and around the newly created community spaces. These visual cues immediately presented the individual with a combined sense of excitement and security, drawn out of a new representation of recognizable cultural symbols. In his influential book, *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch acknowledges the importance of association to the practical and emotional wellbeing of the individual. Memory provides a means of interpreting the present and public images become a shared, cultural recollection (Lynch, 1960, p. 6). The location of well-known features throughout the site, therefore, constituted valuable landmarks for orientation, thus enabling a sense of belonging.



FIG 7 - Roselands Shopping Centre as Urban Hub. Coles Myer Archives, State Library of Victoria, Australia.

The conceptual engagement with urban ideals was paramount to the creation of a suburban shopping center focused on creating a community environment. The Centre Court was designed to be a hub of activity that would rely on an energy generated through public interaction (Picture 6). As argued by Margaret Crawford, 'the enclosed mall created a focused atrium space, a zone of urban intensity' (Crawford, 2002, p. 21). The facilities traditionally available across a widespread city landscape were to be condensed and relocated within a single location, easily accessible to a large suburban population. Modern technology was employed, in the form of strategically positioned passenger lifts and escalators, to channel the movement of people throughout the center. In Roselands, for example, the overall center floor space was estimated to be the equivalent of three city blocks, or a mile-long suburban main street (1.6 kilometers) (*Roselands Reporter*, 1965, p. 13). Yet, due to the use of three floors, the rooftop, eight escalators and three passenger lifts, the longest walk on each of the levels was expected to be no more than 180 yards (164.59 metres) (*Roselands, A Grace Bros Project*, 1965). Located in the center of Roselands, the modern glass sided escalators formed a striking architectural feature that crisscrossed between the floors (Picture 7). Furthermore, akin to the ship analogy favored by Gruen, the utilitarian functions that necessitate successful operations, for example the goods lifts, were out of public sight (Gruen, 1965, pp. 11-12). The separation of the people from the everyday workings of a shopping center enhanced the festive feel of the retail environment.

As the suburban shopping center developed into a fully enclosed environment, the introduction of air-conditioned comfort became a key draw card. Promoted for the ability to produce a 'perpetual spring city' as opposed to a day out in the city proper, the climate controlled suburban center promoted the benefits of modern technology to provide revolutionary standards of comfort (*The Sun Herald*, 10 October, 1965, p. 52). At a time when relief from intense summer heat was, for the majority of the population, non-existent the alluring power of air-conditioned comfort should not be underestimated. In particular, away from the coastal breeze, residents within the outer suburbs of Sydney frequently endured high temperatures and levels of discomfort exceeding those of the city. Furthermore, the provision of live forms of entertainment, including fashion parades, radio broadcasts, and appearances from music and television personalities, as well as opportunities to catch a film at the picture theatre or dine at one of the many eateries created an exciting and stimulating environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ability to combine a day of entertainment and physical ease while completing shopping needs was

extremely enticing to women fulfilling their domestic chores, while often caring for children. The luxurious nature of air-conditioned shopping, therefore, appealed to customers as well as retailers, who benefited from the prolonged shopping trips made by customers willing and able to travel further distances.

From the outset, the inclusion of childcare centers and playground facilities were considered to be vital assets to the appeal of the shopping complex. Such provisions clearly announced that children were to be accommodated and, therefore, women were not only welcome but also valued. In Top Ryde the children's outdoor play area was incorporated into the central square ideal, clearly acknowledging the family-oriented suburban location. Centralizing a place for children within an open court environment offered a crucial space for energetic children to play that did not jeopardize the adults' position as public participants. Provisions established to sustain and encourage the physical inclusion of children and supervising adults generated a place that added to the convenience and comfort of family shopping duties. When Roselands opened in 1965, state of the art technology was advertised as providing a link between mothers and their children. Closed circuit television screens were located throughout the center, enabling mothers to monitor their children in the childcare center while shopping.

Also supporting the new style of modern leisure shopping was the supply of affordable readymade items. Many of the duties traditionally performed by women in the home were now outsourced and thus perceived as market commodities, including the physical and emotional care of children and cooking. The move towards including processed foods and tinned goods as everyday dietary staples replaced many traditional homemaker duties such as baking with a visit to the supermarket and knitting garments with store bought factory-manufactured ready-mades. Furthermore, in exchange for cheaper more competitive prices, chain stores and supermarkets offered little customer service with no free home deliveries. Consequently, items of food and clothing that were previously produced within the home were now predominately items of consumption that relied on regular shopping trips. It became more economical to purchase a wide range of readymade goods than it was to make them. In 1966 for example, *The Australian Women's Weekly* introduced a 'Fashion from the shops' segment that highlighted the normalisation of ready-made clothes (Sheridan, 2002, p. 69). Likewise, the *Daily Mirror* newspaper promoted the inclusion of weekly women's pages as informative, educational aids to assist the woman busy with the upkeep of the family home. As modern consumer society increasingly became a self-service industry, a different form of expertise was required to navigate the changing relationship between the consumer and commodities.

Increasingly removed from modes of production, women were responsible for selecting particular items from a large array of products. As a result, women were increasingly called upon to make regular visits to the shops as well as be responsible for the transportation of goods to the home.

Many women still relied on public transport, as men predominately used the family car for work. The provision of attractive and comfortable access points to bus terminals was considered a valuable asset; such as wide concourse precincts that operated as a transitional space between the routine demands of domestic duties and the modern shopping center experience. Notwithstanding a heavy reliance on public transport, the number of cars being used to access the shopping center rapidly increased. By 1965 one-and-a-half-million cars were registered, equating to approximately one car per family. In the state of New South Wales alone the number of motor vehicles registered (excluding motor cycles) almost tripled from 4,463 in 1952 to 12,358 in 1964 (*Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics*, 1959; *Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics*, 1965). A need to cater for the rising numbers of cars led to the design and management of car park facilities becoming a focal point for the planning and development of shopping centers. The importance of the car park stall was considered in both economic terms and user satisfaction. In 1961 a Melbourne University School of Architecture postgraduate research group conducted a survey on standard car parking space requirements specific to Australian conditions. The report concluded a car park stall that was six inches (152 millimeters) in excess of minimum requirements would translate into lost earnings of approximately four to five thousand pounds annually, for a commercial car park averaging 600 spaces (Czech, 1961, pp. 104-7).

Also considered of great importance was the fact that women drivers would be among those accessing the car parking stations and, therefore, careful planning was essential to cater to the diverse competency of drivers. The employment of a traffic engineer was advocated because

It would be a sad thing if many timid drivers, such as some women and some elderly people, shrank consciously or unconsciously from visiting the centre, because they dreaded negotiating a particular crossing; or having to make a quick decision when the park was well filled (Comport, 1965, p. 358).

Furthermore, the construction industry publication *New South Wales Contract Reporter* cautioned that many drivers were women ferrying children to school and going to the shops, and observed that 'the problem exists that women drivers, generally speaking, do not like driving into those multi-storey parking stations', and

that 'women cannot help being afraid of driving in confined spaces'. In addition to the apparent concerns for the competency of women drivers, the building industry was advised that issues of parking would only intensify as living standards increasingly encouraged two-car families (*The New South Wales Contract Reporter*, 1966).



FIG 8 - Roselands Shopping Centre, Centre Court with Glass-sided Escalators. Coles Myer Archives, State Library of Victoria, Australia.

Traffic congestion had been identified as a problem associated with visits to the modern city that especially presented particular traffic dangers for women with young children. In contrast, the suburban center not only provided easy access, but also enabled mothers to feed and change young children without fear of not finding a suitable space to do so. The ability to fulfill, if not all then most, needs under the one roof eliminated unnecessary travelling and eased the demands on women caring for young children while shopping. The ability to relax and spend a full day of shopping was also encouraged by the extensive free parking that surrounded the suburban center. In Roselands, the access ramp to the multi-story car park was promoted with specific reference to the needs of women pushing prams, while a shuttle bus was provided freeing women from trying to juggle children and parcels between the center and her car. The success of the suburban center relied on its appeal to women and, in order to create an environment that would attract their patronage, issues of access and comfort were necessarily incorporated within the design of the community-focused retail space.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the reconfiguration of urban ideals within the design of the suburban shopping center created a pseudo-public space that navigated a cultural shift necessary to meet the demands of a rapidly changing post-WWII society. Created within a rhetoric of modern progress and controlled regulation, the suburban shopping center was promoted, and culturally legitimized, as a community-focused retail space. Importantly, as a modern site delivering a broad array of goods and services to the general population, the suburban shopping center also needed to appeal to women in their culturally sanctioned role as shoppers.

Modern technology and new building materials created an unprecedented fully enclosed suburban shopping environment that re-presented a mix of city ideals and excitement with the familiarity and comfort of community services. The crisp, clean lines of modern design were paired with the practical delights of childcare facilities, cafes and women-centric amenities. The incorporation of modern and traditional elements within the center's revolutionary design principles - including modern art, traditional landmarks and entertainment - signaled that the previously limited engagement with the excitement of urban living could now be experienced by all as part of their daily lifestyle.

The 'inward facing' focus of the suburban shopping center created a new type of public space designed to meet the needs of the primary user within the societal context of the day. Accessibility, comfort and safety were key catch phrases that underpinned the language of creating a friendly environment that sanctioned its use by women; whereas, stimulation through entertainment and spectacle celebrated the revolutionary suburban shopping center as central to modern living. All in all, within the particularities of post-WWII western society, the suburban shopping center introduced a new *shoppingscape* that revolutionized retail practice and modes of social interaction.

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