CHANGING TRENDS IN THE CANADIAN "MALLSCAPE" OF THE 1950s AND 1960s¹

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he almost total absence of studies on Canadian shopping malls by architectural historians can partly be explained by the perceived lack of aesthetic value of such buildings. With the notable exception of Claude Bergeron, who contended in 1981 that "suburban and regional cent[re]s have been almost totally ignored by architectural historians who have been more concerned with styles than with planning,"2 Canadian shopping centres have, to this day, not yet attracted the attention they deserve.3 Their reputation, in part tarnished by the fact that they have been perceived as major contributors to the erosion of the modern public space, does not help either. Judged before being analyzed for what they really are, shopping centres have been depicted on many occasions as the necessary evils of our consumer society. Even among the commentators who are sympathetic to the genre, there seems to be an urge to warn the reader of the "conspicuous weaknesses" of such buildings. While acknowledging the importance of shopping centres in Canada, Ian Chodikoff, current chief editor of Canadian Architect, does not hesitate to define the type in unflattering terms, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Shopping centres define themselves through their own global spaces while promoting a subset of mismatched interiors competing with one another—the individual stores. In a sense, the shopping centre is filled with hypocrisies: it presents itself as a public space, yet it isn't one, it attempts to create dynamic streetscape, but this is nullified when one stops to take note of the surrounding sea of parking lots and toxic



FIG. 1. HANKS AND IRWIN, VIEW OF THORNCREST PLAZA, 1955. CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES, FONDS 213, SERIE, 1464, FILE 1, ITEM 16.

car-laden landscapes. It even attempts to introduce the spontaneity of street life through kiosks, but the effect is broken down by dispassionate vendors leaning up against racks of sunglasses, keychains, or cellphones waiting to be purchased by repetitive consumers. Our winters have forced us to refine the concept of not only the atrium, but all varieties of interior shopping spaces. At the same time, the mall is not usually a pure, formal composition but, rather, a series of accretions—the results of serial renovations. Often only commercial motivations are resolved.⁴

Chodikoff's assessment echoes some of the criticisms expressed by Canadian observers from the same professional journal who, in 1964, explored and inspected the new retail environment of the Yorkdale Shopping Centre. If the novelty of this enclosed mall seemed to have pleased the crowds, gained media approval, and attracted many European mall developers for a few years after its inauguration,⁵ professionals of the built environment were divided.

By exploring how postwar Ontario shopping centres and shopping malls were depicted by various proponents, I seek to provide a fresh perspective on the reception of these commercial buildings, whose construction entailed the development of new retail practices, the professionalization of the interior designer, and the fast-paced growth of suburban divisions.⁶ The discussion of these themes is divided into three sections. First I examine the context that led to the construction of two neighbourhood shopping centres, the Thorncrest Plaza in Etobicoke (Hanks and Irwin, 1955) and the Don Mills Centre (John B. Parkin Associates, 1955), focusing particularly on their links to broader considerations of suburban planning and, in the case of Don Mills, on its reception in the two Canadian professional architectural journals of the day, the Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (JRAIC) and The Canadian Architect (that later became simply Canadian Architect (CA)—which is the name used here, regardless of publication dates). I then examine a series of articles published in 1958 in CA, in a special issue on shopping centres. Then, through the analysis of the Yorkdale Shopping Centre (John B. Parkin, Victor Gruen Associates, John Graham Consultants Ltd., 1964), I concentrate more specifically on the divergent opinions expressed by professionals, representing some of the trades involved in the construction of such commercial facilities. In that last section, I rely on articles published in local media, the two journals of architecture cited above, and Canadian Interior (CI, a magazine that published its first issue the same year the Yorkdale Centre opened). The conclusion juxtaposes the contrasting opinions of the journalists, the critics, and other experts and casts light on the complexity of the new retail practices in the changing Canadian mallscape of the 1950s and 1960s.

A SHOPPING CENTRE FOR EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD

Shopping centres have not always been portrayed negatively. In fact, they were welcome suburban constructions that received the support of the first postwar generation of planners. Hungarian-born architect and engineer Eugene G. Faludi advocated the integration of shopping centres in the new residential areas that were then being developed. In 1949, he wrote "The Trend in Shopping Centres" for the JRAIC. The content of that essay was largely inspired by similar American studies published during the interwar period and in the late 1940s. Faludi described the shopping centre as an essential component in the "decentralization process

of the Canadian metropolitan communities."7 He provided a series of standards that served as guidelines in determining the sizes and types of future shopping centres.8 The location of these buildings within a network of "shopping nuclei" constituted an important aspect of his study. As a planner, Faludi might not have given much thought to the actual types of stores and the layout of shopping centres—these being the jobs of developers—but it seems he had anticipated that some of the commercial buildings of his "shopping nuclei" would be more than utilitarian retail destinations. In a study for Metropolitan Toronto, Faludi drew a map of the shopping nuclei for new residential areas of the Canadian financial metropolis. His hope was to replace the scattered clusters of stores by planned and controlled shopping areas, served by adequate parking space. To support his vision, he established a hierarchy of shopping centres whose numbers and categories of stores were determined by demographic and economic factors, while their location depended on geographic factors (including circulation routes), and their built forms on topographical features.

Thorncrest Plaza (fig. 1) in Etobicoke (a suburb of Toronto) is a mid-1950s example of what Faludi identified as a "nucleation, clustering of retail uses, assuming a structural unity at a street intersection of adjacent to it."9 Well integrated in the "self-contained community" of Thorncrest Village, which according to local sources was modelled after the Kansas City Country Club,10 the unusual fan-shape Thorncrest plaza (fig. 2) represents a departure from earlier commercial facilities and contemporary L-shaped strip malls whose configurations followed the more common linear grid of less pastoral residential settlements. While accommodating



FIG. 2. AERIAL VIEW OF THORNCREST PLAZA, 1955. GOOGLE EARTH. © EUROPA TECHNOLOGIES 20011.
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FIG. 3. VIEW OF THE FIELDSTONES AND GLASS FACADE OF THORNCREST PLAZA, 1955. | MARIE-JOSÉE THERRIEN, 2008.

pedestrians who live in the immediate neighbourhood, Thorncrest Plaza is just as much a shopping destination for vehicular traffic, as evidenced by the space allocated for parking at the front and back of the building. In Faludi's nomenclature, this commercial cluster is a "small neighbourhood shopping centre," itself part of a broader network of shopping facilities in the greater suburb of Etobicoke all geared toward providing goods for everyday needs. With its grocery, drugstore, and a small mix of tenants, it was designed as the focal service point of that new residential area. Thorncrest Plaza also illustrates the first generation of Canadian shopping centres that were planned by real estate developers whose principal occupation was the construction of the residential subdivision.11 As for shopping centre architecture, expertise in the field was practically non-existent. Early small shopping centres tended to blend in with their surroundings or at least to be of the same scale (fig. 3). Certainly, the layout of Thorncrest Plaza and the treatment of the facades, with their fieldstones, are in harmony with the scale of this residential suburban area, suggestive of pre-industrial communities.

Shopping centres continued to receive positive coverage in the national architectural journals during the 1950s and early 1960s. In a 1953 article on suburb development, an anonymous JRAIC author presented the shopping centre as an essential element of a neighbourhood. Echoing Faludi, the author contended that shopping centres—like schools, churches, and community buildings— "provide the real core and structure of a neighbourhood" and help "create a focal point in each residential area."12 This author further argued that all these community services "will be most attractive if there are adequate parking yards so that the buildings themselves may face upon a quiet open space in which pedestrians are free from traffic." Shopping centres of the era offered such an arrangement, which made the author conclude that this was "undoubtedly an important element in restoring some civic quality to our cities of the industrial age." That last comment illustrates the concern that postwar planners, merchants, and residents of suburbs had in common with regard to the invading presence of the automobile—a shared concern that led to the widespread presence of vast parking lots in front of and around commercial centres.

What these two authors do not discuss however is the notion that the spatial arrangement of a shopping centre could contribute on its own to the betterment of suburban civic life. Such a notion, which began to gain popularity among American shopping centre developers in the early 19050s, had not yet permeated the Canadian mallscape. Faludi's and the anonymous author's remarks are more in tune with the work of Clarence Perry, an interwar American planner and the chief proponent behind the movement of the Neighbourhood Units.13 For these two JRAIC authors, public buildings as a whole and their distribution in the neighbourhood were the contributing factors to the health of the suburban life.14

THE RISE OF PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED SHOPPING CENTRES

According to a report published by Statistics Canada,¹⁵ there were sixty-four shopping centres in Canada in 1956, and most of the large shopping centres were located in suburbs.¹⁶ Whether as a neighbourhood shopping centre or its larger kin, the community shopping centre, the early 1950s retail complex was planned to provide only "convenience goods":



FIG. 4. JOHN B. PARKIN ASSOCIATES, DON MILL SHOPPING CENTRE 1953-1955,

VIEW OF THE MAIN MALL. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES LIBRARY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES,
PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 59963-48.



FIG. 5. DON MILL SHOPPING CENTRE, 1953-1955, VIEW OF THE ROW OF SHOPS. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 55943-19.

products that were purchased on daily or weekly basis. Suburbanites still continued to depend on the city for "shopping goods" like seasonal purchases and more substantial items, such as furniture and kitchen appliances. For such goods, they had to fend for themselves by driving to the closest major city. It was not until the early 1960s that shopping mall developers seized the opportunity to develop a new market structure similar to the regional model implemented by their American counterparts.

In the early 1950s, American advocates of shopping centres began to depict their retail environments—not yet the enclosed mall that was about to become a standard—as ideal locations for social gathering and family outings, planting in this manner the seed that contributed to the commercialization of the public space.¹⁷ In Canada, Angus McClaskey—the president of Don Mills Development Limited, who, with E.P. Taylor, contributed to the development of one of the most publicized and acclaimed postwar suburbs of Toronto—was among the first commercial/residential developers to link the

suburban retail environment to the concept of an old marketplace. He was one of the financiers of the Don Mill Shopping Centre (figs. 4-6), an early example of a postwar retail environment that, as he wrote, introduced "pleasant surroundings [that] recreate the happy informality of the old market square." The comforting analogy of the old market square was the brainchild of Victor Gruen, who is among the most often cited figures in the history of shopping mall design and whose influence was to be felt across Canada for at least two decades.

Unlike Faludi, who revealed his sources, McClaskey remained vague about who could possibly have influenced his visions. However, the credits for the first phase of the Don Mills Shopping Centre include the name of Kenneth C. Welch as the "economic and planning consultant." It is most likely that Welch, who had already published numerous articles on the subject, did influence McClaskey's views. Some elements in McClaskey's evaluation of shopping centres seem to have been drawn from Welch's ideas on regional malls. McClaskey foresaw

that city centres would not accommodate the increasing number of motorized consumers. Both shared concerns about city traffic congestion, backlog on expressways, and insufficient parking spaces. McClaskey anticipated regional centres based on criteria similar to the ones elaborated by Welch. According to McClaskey, "In theory, the largest type shopping centres are to duplicate all downtown shopping facilities and eliminate all downtown disadvantages in regard to traffic and parking."21 For Welch, regional malls were a "new kind of downtown, surrogates for city cent[re]s that had reached capacity."22 To remedy these downtown predicaments, Welch devised a "cent[re] isolated and self-contained,"23 easily accessible by car. But the real "revolutionary" contribution of Welch, as Richard Longstreth pointed out, was the design of a commercial centre with stores organized around a pedestrian mall, a plan that "ensured compactness and thus helped intensify retail activity."24 A similar configuration was adopted by architect John B. Parkin for the Don Mills Shopping Centre. In its first stage, it comprised a row of



FIG. 6. DON MILLS SHOPPING CENTRE, 1953-1955, VIEW ON PARKING LOT AND SERVICE STATION. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 55943-18.

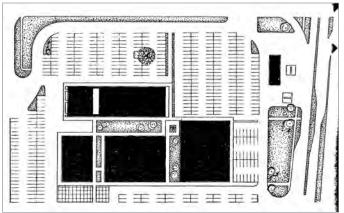


FIG. 7. DON MILLS SHOPPING CENTRE, FIRST PHASE, 1953-1955, SITE PLAN. | CA, OCTOBER 1959,

shops connected by arcades surrounding two open-air perpendicular courtyards (figs. 4 and 7).

That centre elicited many accolades from the architectural elite when it was only in its first phase and was no more than a modest "convenience centre" or, as McClaskey described it, "a corner store with a parking lot."25 In fact, the original Don Mills Centre received a national award as much for its first stage of completion as for its projected scheme (fig. 8), which was never realized as initially envisioned.²⁶ One of the rare shopping centres to receive such an award, an early Massey Medal in 1955, this suburban mall was praised for its aesthetic quality and its site planning. Judging it best in the category of commercial buildings, the jurors²⁷ of the Massey Medals wrote:

The buildings in this project are the first of a series that will eventually become an outlying retail centre of large size; the site planning shows regard for modern parking requirements. As compared with other contemporary and past constructions that cater to wide popularity among the consumer public, it is amazing in a way to find this composition so lofty an abstraction, as

though Bach were being played at a drive-in movie. With a very limited palette of glass, metal and masonry, the architects have composed in a rectangular style of great finesse, allowing little room for the traditional individuality of the separate shop or for the customary anarchy of competitive advertising. It will be interesting to see whether such a complete volte-face can endure.²⁸

That assessment of an emerging popular building type of the postwar consumer age might sound rather elitist to a present-day reader, but at the time it reflected the jurors' adherence to the International Style and the strict order of the Modern Movement that favoured uniformity over individuality. Despite their praise, however, the jurors anticipated that the architect's control would eventually be challenged by merchant needs.

In 1959, *CA* devoted its October issue to the eleven best buildings since the war. Twenty leading architects were invited to identify the most significant buildings that "have had the greatest effect on architects, on clients, and on the public." The Don Mills Centre, which was among the short list, earned further kudos. While

admitting that "the subjugation of commercial flamboyance and vulgarity is possibly too rigid (though no architect who has fought through a shopping centre will admit this)," the anonymous architect who penned the article contended that "it is a model of the manoeuvre itself." On a triumphant note, he concluded: "Every financial adviser in the shopping centre business said it would fail, and it hasn't: in fact its commercial success is a major root of its significance."30 Four years after the Massey Medals jurors had shyly suggested that commercial imperatives might affect the overall order of the centre, the architect this time eagerly reassured the reader that they had not done so. Such fervour underscored the growing tensions between the architectural value of the retail environment and its commercial value. As more and more shopping centres came to transform the mallscape of large Canadian cities, these brewing tensions eventually led to a clash of values.

The success of any shopping centre is evidently based on more than its architectural qualities. Good design could certainly spell good business, as Victor Gruen reportedly explained to his more

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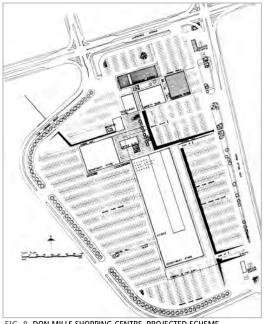


FIG. 8. DON MILLS SHOPPING CENTRE, PROJECTED SCHEME FOR SECOND PHASE (1959). | JRAIC, FEBRUARY 1956, P. 48.



FIG. 9. JOHN B. PARKIN ASSOCIATES, JOHN GRAHAM CONSULTANTS LTD., VICTOR GRUEN ASSOCIATES, YORKDALE SHOPPING CENTRE, 1962-1964, CONSTRUCTION SITE, CA. 1962, WITH HIGHWAY 401 AND DOWNSVIEW AIRPORT IN THE BACKGROUND. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 63379-1.

thrifty developers,³¹ but the science of constructing a successful large shopping centre proved to be a much more sophisticated task, entailing a close collaboration of several professions. Architects were only one group among these professions, and concessions had to be made. As Canadian suburbanites were fully embracing the culture of the shopping centre, the architectural profession saw its role transformed and challenged by the needs of clients whose investment power and knowledge of the latest trends in marketing and merchandising had to be met.

FESTIVE "CATHEDRALS OF COMMERCE"32

The question of the architectural qualities of shopping centres surfaced again in a special issue of CA in October 1958. The issue contains articles and reviews of malls, written by an architect, a developer, and a contributor whose

trade could not be identified but who seemed to be speaking from a business point of view. In general, the authors were favourably disposed toward shopping centres. Acknowledging the importance of this building type, the author of the introduction explained that the special issue "makes a tentative stab at defining the shopping centre architecturally" (in italics in the text).33 In the first article, James Acland, professor at the School of Architecture, University of Toronto, painted a broad picture of the evolution of the marketplace since the Greek agora. Acland cleverly used historical examples to root the contemporary suburban mall in a noble lineage, thus inventing a tradition whose most prevalent archetypical features must be emulated in order to create commercial hubs that achieve a truly urban spirit.

Contrary to the Massey Medals jurors' comments on the Don Mills Shopping Centre, Acland argued for diversity and

aesthetic freedom: "The greatest freedom should be encouraged in the use of individual taste and imagination."34 In modern shopping malls, we can expect "excitement and spatial drama," as found in interconnected squares of a Mexican mining town or Victorian market halls. He urged architects to employ "mechanical gadgetry," to plan for water fountains and plants with greater use of solar shading—all this "to attract shoppers and make for a more imaginative space." Acland also welcomed "brilliant colours," as they contribute to an "air of festive showmanship." Structures too should be more imaginative: "If these markets are to be cathedrals of retail commerce then why not exploit the full gamut of structural potentiality to solve circulation, function and constructional needs?"35 Acland's plea was a far cry from the comments made less than three years before by the Massey jurors. His perspective brought a breath of fresh air in a series of assessments that reduced the

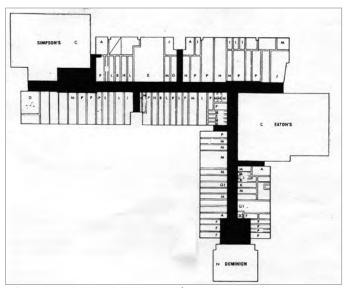






FIG. 11. YORKDALE SHOPPING CENTRE, SIMPSON'S COURT, 1964. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 6422-11.

architectural quality of the postwar retail environment to the modernist principles.

The CA special issue includes a second article on "The Business of Shopping Centres," by shopping centre consultant James F. Harris. In his insightful and well-balanced précis, he discussed the compromises that architects, developers, and other specialists must agree upon when planning a mall. In his opening paragraph, Harris explained that he hoped "to demonstrate that the skills of the architect must meet and intermingle with the skills of other specialists and that, if these are combined harmoniously under the control of the developer, they produce the desired results."36 For him, the emphasis is on profit: the success of a shopping centre is measured by its sales volume. To achieve such success, developers must keep abreast of the latest developments in the shopping centre business, including, among other things, market analysis, merchandising practices, specialized financial expertise, and the various professional skills of the trades involved in

the physical planning of the premises. Harris, on a few occasions, reminded the architects that compromises must be made, for instance as regards the question of the overall design versus tenants' considerations. The strain to preserve a balance between the two contingencies requires "a rare skill," as he suggested to his readership. Harris was very diplomatic is his criticisms of the architect's role and did not hesitate to share the blame when appropriate, as illustrated in this excerpt: "It has been too common a mistake for the developer to assume an architect holds these specialized skills within his profession and some architects have let that assumption stand without protest."37 For Harris, there was no doubt that architects play an important role, but he kindly reminded them of their position, advising them that the most successful are the ones who "can quickly differentiate between the problems that lie within their responsibility and those that belong to management."38

In 1958, when these articles were published, some of the largest shopping

centre owners had already put Harris's advice into practice. Competition was too intense among the newly large Canadian commercial developer companies for them not to abide by the market rules. They were quickly catching up with the latest American trends in the second half of the 1950s.39 In fact, these companies hired American experts as consultants, as their more modest precursors did. Such was the case for the Oshawa Shopping Centre (1956), and for the Wellington Square Shopping Centre (1960) in downtown London, Ontario. Both developers-Principal Investment Ltd. and Webb & Knapp Canada Ltd., respectively—hired John Graham & Co. as their planning and design consultants. John Graham had worked on the Northgate Shopping City in Seattle (1948-1950), a benchmark that became the "industry's model."40 Canadian architects were not excluded from these vast enterprises, but they became part of huge teams whose size and mix of expertise were necessary because of the risks taken by the developers and mall owners.



FIG. 12. YORKDALE SHOPPING CENTRE, SIMPSON'S COURT. | JCANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 64536-10.



FIG. 13. YORKDALE SHOPPING CENTRE, EATON'S COURT WITH ELEVATED DINING FACILITIES. |

CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 67052-4.

YORKDALE: THE MALL THAT EVERY RESPECTABLE TORONTONIAN DESERVES

In February 1964, when the Yorkdale Shopping Centre (figs. 9-14),41 "Canada's biggest, newest and most expensive plaza,"42 opened, Canadian residents of large urban agglomerations were accustomed to commercial "introvert" buildings, but enclosed malls with climate-controlled environment were still a novelty. Across Canada, there were only a handful of them43 who had been purposely built as totally enclosed malls, all of which had been initiated by Webb & Knapp Canada (Trizec). In addition to these, Webb & Knapp/Trizec also owned an underground shopping mall built under the podium of the Place Ville-Marie, a seven-acre urban building complex, by I.M. Pei, in collaboration with Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud & Sise—a mall that received much attention in the architectural journals, locally and internationally. The promise held by the Yorkdale promoters that their centre would comprise

"a shopping area unparalleled in this country" was not an exaggeration at the time, but adding that it was "one of the biggest in the world" was more typical of the boosterism prevalent in the field. Such claims usually do not hold true for more than a few months. That being said, Yorkdale—with its eighty acres, one hundred stores, two theatres, one auditorium, a total rentable area of more than one million square feet, and six thousand five hundred parking spaces—was a noticeable achievement.

Located on the south side of Highway 401 (fig. 9) and bounded on the east side by Dufferin Street and on the west side by what was supposed to be the Spadina Expressway (a highway that was abandoned after a grassroots movement of citizens fought against the project), 45 Yorkdale was truly the first regional shopping centre to take full advantage of a new highway system in the making. 46 It had captured the attention of the metropolitan newspapers, from the announcement of its construction in May 1962 to its opening on February 25, 1964. These

articles and the numerous advertisements that had created great expectations among the residents of the larger Toronto area fail to reveal the preliminary stage of the planning that was initiated by one of the two anchor stores, the T. Eaton Company. Here again, American experts proved to have been instrumental in the history of Canadian retail architecture. Eaton's executives commissioned the planner and real estate analyst Larry Smith to conduct a marketing study. Smith was one of the most "prominent planners commissioned by developers and department store companies" in the United States."47 Upon Smith's recommendations, Eaton's purchased a fiftyacre site south of the 401 in 1955. While assembling the rest of the parcel that would form the final site,48 Eaton's officials convinced the executives of Robert Simpson Co. to participate in the development of a "possible" shopping centre. That was a major coup as, up until then, there were no Canadian shopping centres that accommodated two department stores under the same roof. The practice of dual anchors was still facing resistance among department stores' executives in the United States.49 In Canada, considering that the department store owners had been reluctant to move to the suburbs, such a bold decision between these two historic competitors was astonishing. It is most likely that Larry Smith was no stranger to the deal. This consultant planner, who had been involved in the planning of the Southdale Shopping Centre (Edina, Minnesota, 1956)—"the first regional mall specifically designed for and constructed with dual anchors,"50 another benchmark of the industry—was certainly in a position to point out the merit of internal competition. Following the completion of architectural, traffic, market, and other planning studies, an invitation was sent to a selected group of developers in March 1960. Eaton's hired Webb & Knapp, who took over the project, built the commercial complex and leased the stores. Three other American companies, leaders in retail architecture, were commissioned: John Graham Associates for Eaton's store. Daniel Schwartzman & Associates for Eaton's interiors, and Victor Gruen Associates, who worked in conjunction with John B. Parkin on the Simpson's store.51

Yorkdale was a resounding success, an "instant downtown uptown," as it was described by the promoters. The enclosed L-shaped malls (fig. 10), totalling one thousand six hundred feet in length, included two department stores located along the east-west aisle and a Dominion supermarket that closed the north-south aisle. The mall featured three courts with benches and trees. The most spectacular of them, the Simpson's court (figs. 11-12), rose three storeys and comprised a reflecting pool and spiral staircase. One of the rare original decorative treatments still visible today is the intersecting barrelvaulted ceiling, but none of the cylindrical light fixtures, "topped by a crown



FIG. 14. YORKDALE SHOPPING CENTRE, BAZAAR AT DOMINION SUPERMARKET. | CANADIAN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES, PANDA COLLECTION: PAN 64233-6.

of golden balls—that gave a resultant glow of almost fairyland enchantment to the vaulting" has survived.⁵² Eaton's, for its part, featured a "floating" restaurant in the form of giant mushroom-like structures (fig. 13). A touch of "Middle East flavour"⁵³ was added with a bazaar area in the court of the Dominion supermarket (fig. 14). This so-called bazaar area comprised kiosks designed to create an environment reminiscent of old market places.⁵⁴

The local media coverage reflected the optimism of the merchants and the mall owners. Journalists depicted in great detail the experience of shopping in this climate-controlled "main street,"55 which was "designed to part a customer from her (his) money as painlessly as possible."56 Yorkdale was "marking another phase in the country's shopping revolution that affected the women's wear as

it has the corner grocery."⁵⁷ It was a mall that Torontonians deserved, now that their "city had become a mercantile centre with a cosmopolitan, sophisticated structure."⁵⁸ It provided them with access to all the goods brought by postwar prosperity. Under one roof, away from traffic and from the hustle and bustle of the city, Yorkdale's patrons discovered their first surrogate downtown, with indoor store facades designed to grab their attention.

The design aspect of each individual store held the attention of *Toronto Star* journalist Gordon McCaffrey, who observed: "Every merchant—from budget store to luxury trade—has wracked his (or his designer's) brain to come up with ways to tempt and pamper the shopper." McCaffrey then described a few specialty stores whose distinct facades and interior decoration ranged from an old-English decor with ceiling beams salvaged from

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local barns, for a men's tailor shop, to a circus-like atmosphere for a toy shop. He notes that "there are scarcely two stores alike" and that some of them look as if they "have come out of a Hollywood movie set." One might ask how it could fail to please every one.

YORKDALE: A SITE OF PERDITION

The eclectic decors described by McCaffrey were frowned upon by the commentators of CA and the JRAIC, who lashed out against the mall planners with caustic remarks. The special section on Yorkdale, published by CA in June 1964, set the tone with its inflammatory title: "Amentia59 in a Market Place." That special section featured a series of articles, two that are merely descriptions of the mall and the Simpson's department store and two critiques, the first by architect Ron Thom, and the second by architect and urban planner Donovan Pinker. Thom was the more acerbic of the two critics. He contended that a shopping centre must be viewed as a major institution "involved in the daily life of almost everyone in the community it serves" and not just a "building capable of handling people, cars and goods."60 He added: "In the lives of many, it often constitutes the major contacts with architecture beyond the scope of the home." Thom proceeded to ask whether Yorkdale was fulfilling its broader architectural role. His answer was negative: "with a few exceptions, it can only be described as sadly lacking."

The exceptions in his opinion were the Simpson's store—which stands as a coherent statement for what it is—and the Simpson's court, "a good deed in an otherwise naughty building." This "handsome big room works in terms of architecture and the way it treats people [...] It is a good-time out-place, a good meeting place." Beyond the Simpson's

court however, Thom was short of compliments. His vitriolic attacks were aimed at the developers and owners as well as the interior designers, although he did not specifically name that profession. Here are his conclusive criticisms:

This is the real criticism. In spite of the numerous grotesque affairs that have been added to pep up a dull building, it is not their presence that is objectionable, for anyone will recognize that in a market place, or an exhibition hall, or a stage, it is normal to expect incongruous and fanciful fittings. Places like these must allow for them and receive them graciously. No one criticizes frivolity or caprice, but one has a right to expect the same degree of quality in them that is expected in the architecture. What is so dismaying here is that the fittings are as shoddy as the building that houses them [...]

One is only saddened that most of those involved in creating Yorkdale were not more responsible in seeing that this great complex added to the culture and the quality of North Toronto in particular and of the community in general.

I suspect that the final results are due as much as anything to the owners' and developers' decision to make the statisticians responsible for the architecture.

Less corrosive than Thom, Donavan Pinker addressed larger issues related to the suburbanization of what was then Metro Toronto. He acknowledged the precursory work of Gruen, who envisioned shopping centres as "crystallization points for suburbia's community life," and recognized that early retail centres such as Gruen's Northland had been an improvement for pedestrians. Pinker's major criticism has to do with the void left between the large shopping centres. As they are entities of their own, these specialized centres, as Pinker calls them, are "quite

unrelated to each other." There is nothing between them other than the expressways. For Pinker, such retail complexes are based on wholesale and functional segregation, not on the integration of mixed activities—a position that led him to write of Yorkdale that, "while it may be an investor's dream, it is one the community can well do without, symbolizing as it does, the fragmentation of the city."

The commentators in the JRAIC were not much more enthralled by the mall than the two CA critics, but the editorial board had made the effort to invite three different types of professionals, whose views offered a more balanced assessment of the diverse phases of planning and the multiple aspects involved in the construction of such a retail building. Planning consultant Howard Lesser reminded architects that the success of a shopping centre the size of Yorkdale depends on the careful blending of numerous ingredients. He neither condemned nor praised Yorkdale, but simply described the steps that such a development business entails which, as he observed, "is considerably more complex than during the immediate post-war period, when demand for all types of accommodation virtually guaranteed success to enterprising persons and firms."62

Michael Hugo-Brunt, an architect and town planner, demonstrated a little more subtlety in his assessment than Ron Thom, but he too dismissed the diversity of the parts that reflected, in his own words, a "lack of discipline or control." Hugo-Brunt's opinions, though more positive toward developers and merchandising experts, concurred with those of Thom, as illustrated by his concluding remarks:

Yorkdale is probably more significant as a commercial achievement than a great work of architecture or of planning. Nevertheless, it is a new and more logical solution in

metropolitan shopping [...] The developers have functioned as patrons of the arts and evolved a variety of environmental experience for the use, both in the public and merchandising spaces.

Yorkdale's failures are poor elevations, an unfortunate but characteristic individualism between the various elements and a loss of scale in the enormous car parks [...] Yorkdale is an experimental shopping sub-centre which will, undoubtedly, become a prototype for developments in the future. With an example like this greater architectural control might be expected both internally and externally.63

Interior designer Allison Hymas, for her part, began her critique with a warning:

When one has added up the many factors involved in a project such as Yorkdale, it is difficult to assess one of those factors, design, as either good or bad. The design critic must bear in mind that this is essentially real estate and not architecture; that return on the financial investment is the aim of the developers and not a concern for the creation of well ordered buildings in which buying and selling take place.⁶⁴

As with Thom and Hugo-Brunt, a lack of an overall order was Hymas' main criticism, but there were a few good individual examples of store design that she briefly reviewed. She compared the *laissez-faire* attitude of Yorkdale to the well-ordered Place Ville-Marie underground mall, an icon of Canadian high modernism. There, the owner (the same as Yorkdale's) "provided a well ordered series of rentable space where the architectural features are controlled." Hymas concluded that an "imposed sense of order" is more pleasing than the juxtaposition of a fake thatched roof and Florentine arcade, and "would seem to have a more lasting architectural value."

The Place Ville-Marie shopping plaza was used again as a benchmark in the opening remark of a special section on Yorkdale in the new professional journal Canadian Interiors (CI). In his article entitled "Yorkdale Embarrassing, Frumpy," designer Norman Hay, in a more jovial style than the previously cited critics, did not spare the new shopping centre, as inferred by this remark: "It has some good features; it holds forth some architectural promise; it's scrubbed and fresh and all done up in party clothes, but the over-all impression is depressingly dowdy." In contrast, the Place Ville-Marie shopping plaza "exudes confidence and sophistication; Yorkdale does not."65 It would appear from that and Hymas's comments that the design profession makes common cause with the architectural profession; but the reality is far more complex.

In the mid 1960s, the Canadian architectural scene was at a turning point. High modernism, with a rigorous order that had produced exemplary buildings such as Place Ville-Marie, was rapidly loosing its appeal, at least to the masses. Designers trained after the war whether in architectural or design programs, had been exposed to the tenets of modernism. The aesthetic principles that many of them had come to appreciate and advocate were those influenced by the teachings of Bauhaus and other organizations, such as the CIAM (Congrès international d'architecture moderne) and art museums that promoted standards of "Good Design." But while the three related professions—architect, urban planner, and designer—displayed aesthetic affinities, consumers had different expectations, and mass culture was on the rise. The mass market was indifferent to the Good Design principles and to the austerity of the International Style. Of the three kin professions, that of the designer (interior or industrial) was the

most suited to providing consumers with what they had been accustomed to seeing on TV and in other popular media. Their alliance with mall owners and individual merchants was natural, but to broadly disclose such alliance was another matter in the early 1960s.

The timing of the inaugural publication of CI—the year Yorkdale opened—attests to the emerging influence that the design profession was having on the interiors of the built environment, particularly the retail environment. Many of the articles in CI featured store design. Norman Hay, by then the head of design at Expo 67 and an advocate of Good Design, might have personally preferred the modernist aesthetic, but the journal had the mandate of presenting the latest trends and the most innovative solutions applied by the professionals it represented.66 Yorkdale's original eighty stores were in many ways models of the interior design trade. The examples that the editorial committee chose to feature confidently stressed the quality of each individual environment, designed to display its merchandise in the most attractive manner and entice consumers to browse and buy, an art that in the current retail jargon is known as visual merchandising. This meant that the same design firm could recreate a pseudo eighteenth-century store front for one client and a proto-psychedelic fascia for another. As long as the rules of efficient store design were respected, stylistic preferences did not matter. Customers seemed to have been content to oblige.

CONCLUSION

In the fifteen years that separate the Yorkdale regional mall from Faludi's neighbourhood shopping centre, the Canadian society had considerably changed. It had become a full suburban nation increasingly more dependent on

the automobile. The middle class had abandoned the mentality of thrift prevalent during the Great Depression and the war. The universalist and collective values championed by the architects who adhered to the Modern Movement and the advocates of postwar Good Design may have been adopted by large corporations and governmental institutions, but when it came to private taste, individuals preferred to surround themselves with environments that reflected their personality. An imposed sense of order was not what the average consumer wanted to reproduce in her or his domestic sphere. With growing private affluence, consumers, wealthier than ever before, were on the hunt for status symbols. Design was no longer just about its utilitarian value; it was used as a social language to express one's status in society.⁶⁷ Yorkdale's developers and merchants understood these principles, as did some of the journalists who had followed the evolution of shopping habits.

In contrast, architects and urban planners who expressed their opinions in their professional journals were mostly concerned about the architectural qualities of the buildings, including their relation to the environment. But when it came to actually understanding how the consumers evolved in these retail environments, these professionals seemed to be unable to envision user behaviour and, worse, they regularly dismissed the commercial motivations that are the core values of such enterprises. Restricted by their limited criteria, their criticisms reveal their contempt for mass culture.

The interior designers, for their part—and from what can reasonably be inferred from the first volume of CI—were more disposed to please their clients, the store managers whose main motivation was the sale of their merchandise. This profession

was to get a firm grip on shopping malls interiors. There might have been dissension among the ranks, but they assumed the job of designing malls and greatly contributed to the festive atmosphere of the retail environment in the 1960s and beyond.

As for the Canadian architectural historians, it is true, as Claude Bergeron wrote, that they have not paid attention to the subject; but it was not just because "they were more concerned with style than planning."68 It was also due to the dismissal of the type by the architectural profession, which rarely featured them in its journals (with the notable exception of the Eaton's centre in the 1970s); and yet they were, and still are, among the most conspicuous buildings around. It is time to remedy the situation, and it is my hope that further studies will shed light on these complex built environments, which require an understanding of different disciplines and sub-disciplines, including business history, particularly real-estate history, retail economy, and design history.

NOTES

- I wish to thank Siegfried Betterman for his excellent work as a copy editor.
- Bergeron, Claude, 1981, "Canada," Developments in Architecture in Canada," In Warren Sanderson (ed.), International Handbook of Contemporary Development in Architecture, Westport (CT) / London (UK), Greenwood Press, p. 185.
- 3. While I was putting the final touch to this article, I came upon the following source: McGrail, Justin, 2011, "Big-Box Land: New Retail Format Architecture and Consumption in Canada," In Rhodri Windsor Liscombe (ed.), Architecture and the Canadian Fabric, Vancouver, UBC Press, p. 385-408. McGrail also comments on the little attention that such mundane building types received from the architectural historian community. McGrail has written his PhD dissertation en 2009 on the topic of "Big-Box." This publication, entitled

- Value Space, an Architectural Geography of New Retail Formats in Southern Vancouver Island, can be retrieved from the National Library of Canada website: [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/], accessed December 22, 2011.
- Chodikoff, Ian, 2003, "View Point," Canadian Architect, September, [http://www.canadianarchitect.com/news/viewpoint/1000176522], accessed August 14, 2011.
- Ainsworth, Lynne, 1989, "1964 the Theme for Yorkdale's Birthday Party," The Toronto Star, March 7.
- The planning of regional malls also entails the development of regional and even national highway systems. This aspect of mall history is beyond the scope of this research.
- 7. Faludi, Eugene, 1949, "The Trend in Shopping Centres," *JRAIC*, September, p. 267.
- 8. There are three types of shopping centres for the period that concerns this essay: the neighbourhood, the community, and the regional shopping centres. Distinctions between the sizes, the scope of services, and the target audiences, as mentioned by American architectural historian Richard Longstreth (1992, "The Neighbourhood Shopping Centers in Washington DC 1930-1941," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (JSAH), March 1992, p. 6.), were not formalized before the postwar era, and even then, fluctuation in the terminology was current among 1950s shopping centre developers.
- 9. Faludi : 268.
- 10. See Dunkelman, David, "History of Thorncrest Village," [http://www.torontoneighbourhoods.net/neighbourhoods/etobicoke/thorncrest-village/history], accessed July 21, 2011. Thorncrest Village was designed by Eugene Faludi. The estate was purchased in 1944 by developer Marshall Foss. It was the smallest neighbourhood of Etobicoke and consisted of only one hundred and eighty houses. Etobicoke resident Robert A. Given (2007, Ftobicoke Remembered Toronto, ProFamilia Publishing, p. 167) also mentioned that Marshall Foss had been inspired by the Kansas Country Club model, but I could not find further evidence of the role that the renowned Kansas model might have represented for Faludi and Foss. Faludi was well versed in American planning theory of the time. Being the internationalist that he was, the Kansas model may very well have been a source of inspiration. For his part, Marshall Foss had referred to Thorncrest as a "country club village

of the non-rich." Such a comment, extracted from an interview by an anonymous journalist in the Housing Newsletter of February 1960, was brought to my attention by Dr. Richard White, whom I thank for sharing this information. The source was found in the Canadian National Archive Fonds Eugene Giacommo Faludi MG30 B136. Richard Longstreth (1998, City Center to Regional Mall, Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950, Cambridge (MA), The MIT Press, p. 106-107, 171-174) addressed the importance of the role played by developer J.C. Nichols of Kansas City in the development of retail architecture in residential areas during the interwar period. Faludi's bibliography in the September 1949 article of the JRAIC contains two entries by J.C. Nichols published by the Urban Land Institute.

- On the early development of shopping centres, see The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Statistics Canada, 1976, Shopping Centres in Canada, Research Paper, no. 1, Ottawa, August, p. 22.
- "Community Services," JRAIC, May 1953, p. 61.
 The two following excerpts from this author are from the same page.
- 13. Canadian geographer Richard Harris (2004, Creeping Conformity, How Canada Became Suburban 1900-1960, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. 125) mentioned that the "homogenous residential areas [that] were designed as 'neighbourhood units' [...] made it the norm after 1945."
- 14. In 1924, Perry (1924, quoted in Gillette, Howard, Jr., 1983, "The Evolution of Neighborhood Planning from the Progressive Era to the 1949 Housing Act," Journal of Urban History, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 421) claimed "that a planned neighborhood with its physical demarcation, its planned recreational facilities, its accessible shopping centers, and its convenient circulatory system—all integrated and harmonized by artistic designing—would furnish the kind of environment where vigorous health, a rich social life, civic efficiency, and a progressive community consciousness would spontaneously develop and permanently flourish."
- Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Shopping Centres in Canada 1951-1973..., op. cit., p. 37.
- 16. Until 1957, as mentioned by Claude Bergeron (op. cit.: 186), "the shopping centre had been a suburban phenomenon." In comparison, there were 2900 shopping centres in the United States in 1958. (See Gillette, Howard,

- Jr., 1985, "The Evolution of the Planned Shopping Center in Suburb and City," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 51, no. 4, p. 3.)
- 17. On the commercialization and privatization of the public space, see Cohen, Lizabeth, 2004, A Consumers' Republic, The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America, New York, Vintage Book, A Division of Random House, chap. 6.
- McClaskey, Angus, 1957, "An Evaluation of Suburban Shopping Centres," *Evaluation*, vol. 1, no. 11, p. 1.
- "Business Builds a City. For Industry: Planned Factory Districts to Provide Jobs, Help Pays the Taxes," The Architectural Forum, June 1954, n.p.
- 20. Richard Longstreth (2010, The American Department Store Transformed 1920-1960, New Haven/London, Yale University Press / The Centre for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, p. 184 and 290) wrote about Welch that "he emerged as the leading advocate of the regional shopping centre during the immediate postwar years." Longstreth listed all the articles written by Welch from 1946 to 1951.
- 21. McClaskey: 1.
- 22. Longstreth, 2010 : 187.
- 23. Id.
- 24. Id.: 184.
- "Far From Doomed, Shopping Centre Head Defends Central Shops, The Globe and Mail, May 2, 1956.
- 26. Phase II, completed in 1959 by Fisher, Tedman & Fisher, was supposed to include an enclosed atrium similar to Southdale Shopping Center (1956), in Edina, Minnesota, also by Victor Gruen. (Information, mentioned in Bergeron: 186.) Don Mills Centre went through many transformations. For a brief account of these transformations, see: [http:// www.shopsatdonmills.ca/en/centreinfo/Pages/ OurHistory.aspx].
- 27. The jurors were John Bland (chairman), Gordon S. Adamson, Lawrence B. Anderson, and A.J.C. Pane.
- 28. JRAIC, December 1955: 453.
- 29. CA, October 1959:53.
- 30. CA, October 1959: 72.
- 31. M. Jeffrey Hardwick, "Creative Destruction, Victor Gruen and the Shopping Mall's Past

- and Future," *DOCOMOMO*, no. 31, September 2004, p. 54.
- Acland, James, 1958 "Shopping Centres, A Special Issue, The Market Place," CA, October, p. 36.
- 33. CA, October 1958: 30.
- 34. Acland: 35
- 35. Id.: 36
- 36. Harris, James F., 1958, "The Business of Shopping Centres," CA, October, p. 42.
- 37. Id.: 43.
- 38. Id.: 44.
- 39. Ken Jones (2000, "Dynamics of the Canadian Retail Environment," In Trudi Bunting and Pierre Filion (eds.), Canadian Cities in Transition, The Twenty-First Century, Don Mills/London, Oxford University Press, p. 407), professor at the Centre for the Study of Commercial Activities, Ryerson University, notes that the linkage between residential and commercial land uses helped foster the emergence of several large development companies. Among these companies are Webb & Knapp Canada Ltd. (1955), which was responsible for the implementation of the Oshawa Shopping Centre (inaugurated in 1956) and Wellington Square, in London, Ontario (1960). Webb & Knapp merged with three other companies to form Trizec in 1960, with the legendary William Zeckendorf at its helm. Trizec was behind the Place Ville-Marie (1962) and Yorkdale (1964) centres. (For details on the affiliation between Wellington Square and the Place Ville-Marie underground shopping centre, see Bergeron: 186.)
- 40. For a description of Northgate Shopping Centre, its subsequent impact, and the influence of John Graham, see Longstreth, 2010: 187-217.
- 41. Vintage photographs of Yorkdale Shopping Centre can be seen at [http://www.blogto.com/city/2011/05/what_malls_used_to_look_like_in_toronto/].
- 42. Young, Sybil, 1964, "New Look for Women's Wear Shops," *The Women's Globe and Mail*, February 13.
- Brentwood Shopping Centre (1961, BC),
 Wellington Square (1960 London), Halifax
 Shopping Centre (1960).
- 44. "Yorkdale Summarized Description," Press Release, February 21, 1964.
- 45. For a recent study of the history of the Spadina Expressway, see Milligan, Ian, 2011, "This

- Board Has a Duty to Intervene: Challenging in the Spadina Expressway through the Ontario Municipal Board, 1963-1971," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, spring, p. 25-39.
- 46. The developer had cleared the site in the fall of 1961 but waited to start construction until "it became clear the Metropolitan Toronto intended to build Spadina Expressway," as published in the Globe and Mail of May 31, 1962.
- 47. Longstreth, 2010: 191.
- 48. The details of these transactions are explained in "Eaton's Yorkdale, Yorkdale Background Information," Press Release, February 25, 1964
- 49. Longstreth, 2010: 194-197.
- 50. Id.: 196.
- 51. Fact information is extracted from the above press release (note 46).
- 52. "Simpson's Yorkdale Store, Dramatic in Conception," Press Release, February 25, 1964.
- 53. "New Shopping Mall Has Oriental Flair," Toronto Star, February 25, 1964.
- 54. The concept, designed by John Graham, was inspired by similar examples in Cherry Hill (near Philadelphia) and Southdale (Minnesota). "Yorkdale Bazaar Area," Press release, February 21, 1964.
- 55. McCaffrey, Gordon, 1964, "Yorkdale: It's Instant Downtown. Even Though It's Uptown, *The Toronto Star*, February 25. All subsequent excerpts from McCaffrey are taken from this article.
- Weiers, Margaret, 1964, "Spending Money Painless at Yorkdale," The Toronto Star, February 22.
- 57. Young, op. cit.
- 58. Weiers, op. cit.
- 59. According to the Collins Dictionary, amentia is a severe mental deficiency, usually congenital.
- "Critique One," CA, June 1964, p. 44. All subsequent excerpts by Thom come from this source.
- 61. Pinker, Donovan, 1964, "Critique Two," CA, June, p. 47.
- 62. Lesser, Howard, 1964, "The Role of the Planning and Development Consultant," JRAIC, June, p. 50.
- 63. Hugo-Brant, Michael, 1964, "Yorkdale Shopping Centre. A Study," *JRAIC*, June, p. 47.

- 64. Hymas, Allison, 1964, "Yorkdale's Interiors/ Comments," *JRAIC*, June, p. 51. All following excerpts from Hymas are from that page.
- 65. Hay, Norman, 1964, "Yorkdale Embarrassing, Frumpy," *CI*, 1964, p. 15.
- 66. On the mandate of the CI, see Piper, David, 1964, "Editorial, What Will Tomorrow Say," CI, first issue, April, p. 84.
- 67. On the use of design in the postwar society, see Whiteley, Nigel, 1987, "Toward a Throw-away Culture, Consumerism, 'Style Obsolescence' and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s," Oxford Art Journal, vol. 10, no. 2, special issue on "The 60s," p. 3-27. (Retrieved from JSTOR, August 7, 2007 [http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0142-6540%281987%2910%3A2%3C 3%3ATATCC%27%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5].
- 68. Bergeron : 185.