

Arch 384: ACSA Student Design Competition

Kristi Ante 99327128

Jason Hurd 99318606

## **Typologies revisited: A New Market for Boston**

Shopping is an activity inextricably linked to our definition of urbanity. The most common and traditional form of shopping is the market, one of the more familiar types being the Urban Market. The typological framework of this market has remained fundamentally unchanged since its inception in Rome, while the architectural expression of the form has been more fluid. Introducing this market typology as part of a proposed urban revitalization scheme for Boston is appropriate because in such a scheme, the market becomes the catalyst by which the rest of the project can grow as a magnet for urban activity and social interaction. This phenomenon is based on other “esteemed examples which have established their identity and assured their continued cultural resonance” and which have “established (a) line of inquiry in which new work may be effectively grounded “. <sup>1</sup> Designers can try to change the architecture of the type, in this case the retail experience, but for it to be successful one must remain within the familiar fundamental framework, and thus the archetype is inevitably revisited.

Shopping has become synonymous with the urban experience to the point where it is now the defining activity of

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<sup>1</sup> The Harvard Architectural Review. Volume 5. Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent. John E. Hancock

public life. Libraries, museums, art galleries, churches, all contain elements of consumerism in a way they never did before, becoming integrated into almost every aspect of our metropolitan lives. The customer experience must constantly be reformulated and reshaped to keep up with changing tastes in culture, and to remain appealing to the public in order to perpetuate the idea of a 'destination'. Because "the marketplace and (its) individual shop have endured...(and) have followed the development of civilization",<sup>2</sup> this reformulation can only take place through the changing materials, technologies, and fashions within the shop or market place itself.

The idea of a diverse group of merchants gathered in one area and offering a variety of desirable goods, stretches back as far as mankind. One specific kind of market, however, has become deeply ingrained into our metropolitan culture and way of life: that is the Urban Market. The essence of this familiar consumer experience can be defined by its connection to existing urban networks within the city, its integration of public gathering spaces, and its subsequent provision of dense sensual simultaneous engagement. This kind of market provides both nutritional and intellectual sustenance. As such, these fundamentals of the Urban Market cannot be radically typologically altered without losing its essential vitality and thus relinquishing its identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Koolhaas, Rem. "Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping" TASCHEN, 2001. pg. 131 (written in association with the Harvard Design School)

John McMorrough speaks of the reciprocity of large scale urban renewal and modern retail in creating a “connected and fluid urban experience”<sup>3</sup>, with shopping acting as “a reductive agent to subsume other programmatic entities”<sup>4</sup> in his essays regarding modern consumerism. Boston is currently undergoing an extensive urban renewal project, where the city is attempting to stitch up the seam that is being left behind by the removal of the John Fitzgerald Expressway. This massive freeway structure has, for years, essentially sliced the downtown core of Boston in to two parts, alienating the financial district from the waterfront. One aspect of the ‘Big Dig’ project attempts to reintegrate these two parts through the introduction of a large pedestrian culture and commercial greenway spanning from the southern Chinatown and Leather districts through the financial core and up into the historic tourist area. In this example, with respect to McMorroughs theories, a food market has been proposed to trigger the integration and subsequent urban growth.



1. The Fitzgerald Expressway  
A rift in Boston's urban fabric

A successful Urban Market will actually become an urban artifact and destination for other activities, as it will encourage many levels of social interaction and cultural exchange. It can be argued that the architecture of the marketplace plays a direct role in this development through the basic layout of form, and circulation. Trajan's Market in Rome, “planned as (an) integral part of an urban



2. Trajan's Market, Rome  
The strong form of the archetype

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<sup>3</sup> Koolhaas, Pg. 194

<sup>4</sup> ibid

redevelopment program”,<sup>5</sup> is one of the best examples of such a market. As the archetypal consumer complex, the experience of Trajan’s Market was one of multi-level, dense urban activity that went beyond being a basic house for the exchange of goods and became a direct contributor to the social fabric of ancient Rome. The arrangement of the stalls was conceived as a multi-level stacked layout, (6 floors of shops and offices) connecting to a central arcaded passageway which stepped down to an external court. The entire complex was semi-circular in form, surrounding the court and was directly adjacent to one of the principle forums of ancient Rome. The basic shape and stacked levels made the entire form conceivable from almost anywhere in the building and provided innumerable views from which to oversee the activities and hustle bustle of the market. It is easy to imagine how the energy of the merchants, the aroma of the colourful goods and the sounds of exchange that would have combined to make it an intense sensory experience. The provision of permanent and linear rows of merchant stalls confirm the market to be a fixed artifact within the urban fabric of ancient Rome, further enhanced by its direct connection to the other principle social spaces, the forae.



3. Individual shops, a key aspect of The Urban Market

Another historically significant marketplace that implemented the same fundamentals as Trajan’s Market was the Crystal Palace in London, England. As the site of the Great Exhibition of 1851, the building was simultaneously a market



4. Crystal Palace, London

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<sup>5</sup> MacDonald, William L. “The Architecture of the Roman Empire I: An Introductory Study Revised Edition”. Yale University Press, 1965, 1982. pg.

for the display of the wealth of the British Empire, and an important cultural destination. The Crystal Palace “marked a pivotal instance in the history of public spectacle, mass gathering, tourism, and trade...as an event, the exhibition was unparalleled; as an incased landscape, the Crystal Palace provided a new form capable of absorbing unprecedented urban congestion.”<sup>6</sup> It was a multi-storey, glass and steel structure, containing exhibits set out in a regular and modular format which centered around a massive interior atrium space. From any point within the Palace one was afforded a dynamic and engaging view of the people and ‘merchandise’ within the structure (nothing was actually for sale). Like Trajan’s Market, The Palace set out to be a site solely for the exchange and display of goods, the commodity in this case being information, but because of the strength of the typological form it became something much more important. The marketplace became the key node of social interaction and information exchange for Victorian London. The visionary of this project utilized the key aspects of the Urban Market typology with great success. As John Hancock points out, “the works of the past always influence us, whether or not we care to admit it”.<sup>7</sup> In this case, the similarities that tie both markets back to the typology are evident, and the varying differences are noted to be in the architectural form.



5. Interior of Crystal Palace  
Simultaneous engagement

By absorbing urban density and social activities, both Trajan’s Market and the Crystal Palace became microcosms

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<sup>6</sup> Koolhaas, pg. 241

<sup>7</sup> Hancock

of the city that they were part of. The special qualities that these two markets encompassed were highly sought after as approximations of metropolitan life that could be combined to produce a popular prototype, which eventually became what we know today as the common department store. Over time, the form became increasingly distilled and further removed from the city, culminating in the ubiquity of the suburban shopping mall. Somewhere along the way, this now common retail experience became the antithesis of the Urban Market prototype because as “the surrounding matter of the city continued to be disengaged, the mall revealed itself as an identifiable, autonomous figure...while the modern shopping mall produced a model of shopping that was increasingly self contained, the association with the urban remained a latent memory.”<sup>8</sup> At this point in time, the original archetype of the market has been fragmented and the key elements have been lost to the detriment of its success as an important urban and cultural ‘destination’. Without its integration with other social city networks, and its compacted form that once provided for both vertical and horizontal dynamism and interaction at all levels, the fundamentals are lost and the typology has been compromised. At present time, there is an urgent call within the retail design field to address these issues: the typology must be revisited.

Influential designer and arbiter of popular culture, Rem Koolhaas revisited the typology when he challenged the traditional individual shop with his Flagship Prada Store in Soho, by “investigating ways to reinvent the retail



6. Suburban shopping sprawl  
the antithesis of the Urban Market

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<sup>8</sup> Koolhaas, pg. 195

experience”<sup>9</sup>. The creation of ‘the wave’, a fluid wooden sculptural display element centrally located in the store, attempts to introduce a more dynamic and engaging consumer experience. With one continuous sweeping material, the customers and interspersed mannequins cascade up and down through the store next to an elevated walkway. A shopper’s sensory experience of the space changes dramatically while moving through it. The shape and form of the wave allow not only for multi-level merchandise display and customer interaction but also for public events on the stepped levels and stage-like spaces—thus rendering the store an urban destination. Although deemed revolutionary at the time of its debut, it is easy to determine that its historical precedent lies in the successful urban space of Trajans Market, in Rome. By trying to invent a new consumer experience for the Prada store it would appear that Koolhaas is actually returning shopping to an abstracted form of its original typology.



7. Prada Store, New York  
The ‘Wave’



8. Prada Store, New York  
Urban Destination

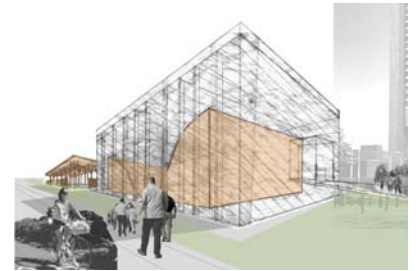
With the proposal for a new food market for Boston, it was essential to revisit the principles of the Urban Market. The site was chosen for the Boston Market with careful attention to its immediate surroundings. With an existing market at the north end of the proposed greenway, the Quincy Market, a secondary market book-ending the southern end of the site was appropriate. This would create a gateway to the area at each end of the corridor and allow the new market to integrate with existing urban networks such as the nearby South Station transit hub. The market, and by extension the

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<sup>9</sup> Prada Flagship Store New York  
<http://www.galinsky.com/buildings/prada/>

entire greenway corridor, can begin to fulfill its destiny as an urban 'place'. Its proximity to other social networks was key, as with any Urban Market, so the nearby lively Chinatown and Leather districts and Financial core offer a chance for vibrant cultural exchange. Like Trajan's Market and its antecedents, the Boston Food Market will directly benefit from, and contribute to, its rich urban location.

Within the Market structure, a singular fluid object of continuous wood houses all of the programmatic entities. The sculptural shape was inspired by the Prada store in Soho which as we have seen, used the form to create dynamism and dense multi-levelled activity. From anywhere within the main market space, one can view the social and material exchanges taking place, aided by a set of oversized digital screens which amplify and engage the market activity. Like Trajan's Market and the Crystal Palace, the level of sensory delight will be heightened by both the array of goods on display and the architectural form in which they are experienced. From the sweeping vista revealed upon entering the building, to sampling the food prepared fresh at the Marche kitchen, to perusing and purchasing goods from the market stalls, the entire shopping experience at this market approximates, and is a conductor of, the most positive aspects of the urban condition. As in Trajan's market, permanent stalls and other programmatic elements are provided to foster a sense of proprietorship akin to that of the traditional, individual shopfront. This will ultimately further enhance its role as a destination node in Boston.



8. Proposed Boston Market Sculptural Object



9. Proposed Boston Market Dynamic Engagement



Movement through the space is presented as a narrative sequence, reliant on the continuous sweep of the architectural form. The modular market stalls are hinged and closeable, folding up to reveal seating which allows the space to transform for large gatherings or presentations. The nature of the wave is such that an auditorium-like space can be created simply from transforming some architectural elements. Like the archetypical Urban Market, the central space is entirely public and can be fully opened to allow the energy of the adjacent city fabric to permeate the building. Continuing the success of its predecessors, the proposed market for Boston encompasses key elements of the Urban Market typology, further enhanced by the additional contemporary features which will no doubt make this market another esteemed example of the archetype.

Shopping and our notion of urbanity are inseparable. As we have seen, the Urban Market is one such example of how consumerism has followed man through the ages, always reshaping and molding to fit contemporary culture. With Trajan's Market as the first consumer complex, the archetype to which all other Urban Markets would aspire was established. The fundamentals proved strong enough to manifest themselves in many seemingly unrelated projects that are in fact simply variations on the same typology. As John Hancock suggests, successful architectural typologies of the past bear a strong influence on architectural work of today.

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