

Ad hO.C.: The O.C. Fun Palace

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ABSTRACT

The shopping mall was born out of visions of real estate developer utopias. We're familiar with the dystopian views of the mall. Instead, looking to models of mobile, social space, particularly those proposed by Cedric Price (1934-2003), shows a different mode for generating delight. This position paper suggests Ad HO.C.: the O.C. Fun Palace.

Keywords

Ubicomp, ubiquitous computing, architecture, design, mesh networks, mobility, social networking

1. Introduction: It didn't have to be this way

It didn't have to be this way, though maybe Walt Disney would've been happy. His original vision of EPCOT was a best-of compilation of modernist town planning. Not only was it a



theme park, with its model PeopleMovers and happy, orderly people, its lessons learned from Disneyland's success. But it was a sanitary utopia that borrowed from Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse and Buckminster Fuller's "Case for a Domed City." His 1967 film, *EPCOT* [2] outlined the plan for a dymaxion, domed Disney utopia where unsightly traffic was contained underground and the weather inside was always balmy.



Figure 2. The EPCOT transportation lobby, 1966 [1]

It didn't have to be this way, though maybe Victor Gruen would have been happy. In 1954, construction began on the world's first fully enclosed shopping mall Southdale Mall in Edina, Minnesota. This shopping environment makes sense in a place like Minnesota, where winters are frigid and summers muggy. Gruen generated the term "Gruen Transfer," where smaller stores along a mall's transfers (hallways) pull shoppers off their path to the anchor stores, thus enticing them to spend more money. Like spores carried by the highway, enclosed malls spread all over the country. The Gruen Transfer expanded to the highways, where shoppers would be enticed by the malls, strategically placed on heavily trafficked junctions.



Figure 3. Southdale Mall, Edina, Minnesota, 1956 [3]

How does it end up? There are two versions. In one, the early malls die, anchor tenants moving out, community service organizations move in, and the customers go to the sexier, prettier malls with more amenities. They are greyfields, named for their huge parking lots and impervious surfaces.

Then there's the film version. Cue the movie trailers. In *Dawn*

of the Dead, death imitates life: the zombies converge at a suburban Philadelphia mall and stumble between the anchor stores, eating brains as they go. Or consider *Night of the Comet*. Most of the Earth's population is wiped out, save for two Valley Girls. They fight cannibals. They go shopping—because when the earth's population is almost zero, the sales are so good.

2. It might have gone differently

It didn't have to be this way. They might have followed Cedric Price's approach.

Price understood how to design for delight. He was the architect that Archigram emulated. Not known for his visual expression, he sought to create the conditions that would form the building experience, rather than specifically defining the form of the structure, as architects typically do. Throughout his career, he honed the critical notion of designing for pleasure and exploration—something he found to be rare. "Designing for delight and pleasure should very seldom be seen to happen, and must encompass—indeed nurture—doubt, danger, mystery and magic," he said in a 1989 speech. "Why should Mickey Mouse always be bigger than the children he frolics with. Why doesn't Walt Disney Productions have very small people wearing the uniforms, so that children can stomp on their feet for a change? Distortion of time, space and substance is as necessary a design tool for pleasure as it is for religious architecture." [4]

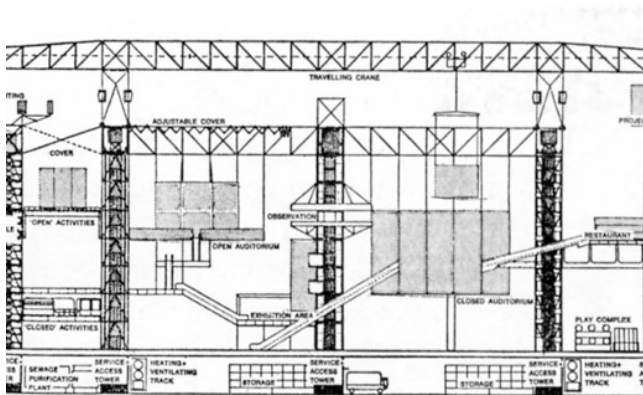


Figure 4. Cedric Price's Fun Palace, 1961 [5]

Influenced by systems theory, he used the principles of cybernetics to guide his proposal for the Fun Palace, which he started in 1961 and adapted until 1974 (when it was stymied by a London's local political situation and abandoned by Price). It was a "proposal for a temporary, multi-programmed twenty-four-hour entertainment center that marries communication technologies and standard building components to produce a machine capable of adapting to the users needs and desires." [6] Collaborating with theater director Joan Littlewood, they suggested a laboratory of fun where visitors could take part in or watch a variety of improvisational, pleasurable activities. Price mused, "It's a kit of parts, not a building," stating that the Fun Palace would unlikely be the same thing twice. [7]

3. The O.C. Fun Palace

Following Cedric Price's principles, I propose an Orange

County Fun Palace on greyfield space. The Orange County Planning Commission identifies 700 sites as ripe for redevelopment [8]-- one of these would be appropriated for the project. Rather than building yet another New Urbanist housing development, I suggest following Price's design principles to generate a space for delight—an Orange County mall and theme park unlike the typical Gruen Transfer and Disneyland.

The O.C. Fun Palace is a kit. It is flexible, modular; its distortions in scale allowing for children to feel big and adults to feel small. Price was inspired by cybernetics; the O.C. Fun Palace is inspired by the mesh network. The flexible kit allows spaces to be moved and built by the desire of participants, or for these spaces to disappear altogether.

There is a dark underbelly, just as the Fun Palace did: cybernetics could be co-opted as a system of control; the O.C. Fun Palace would be aware of its users. In 1989, Price presaged such concerns, weighing the negatives and the positives:

"An increased mix of energy exchanges could increase the number of such activities as 'learning while traveling' or 'browsing and hopping' from home, towards continuous data and activity monitoring on a nationwide scale. Whilst continuous voting may seem appealing, the nationwide ownership of mobile telephones and the resultant method of billing would mean that someone always knew where you were—every citizen would, in effect, be 'tagged.'" [9]

4. Next time, it can be different

It didn't have to be that way, with futurist visions ala Disney, anchor stores and Gruen Transfers, theme parks built into malls (ala the Mall of America). Movies showing zombies crawling the shopping malls demonstrate our disquiet and show the dark side of these places. We can instead look to the true principles of designing for delight: putting in place flexible frameworks that generate the circumstances fun. We can appropriate the space; use the principles of modularity and ad hoc. networks. In creating the O.C. Fun Palace, we'll offer a different approach to improvisational space.

5. REFERENCES

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