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Negotiating the global–urban: consumer flows in two Hong Kong retail sites

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on ethnographic data to investigate consumer flow in two retail sites and the urban territories that exist through them. The nature of urbanization is an integral and evolving factor in the everyday life of city-dwellers; however, the local forms of global–urban space remains opaque. This paper employs a flow and territory approach to analyse global retail culture in two local settings: a shopping mall and a flea market. While each retail site is defined by transnational connection, their respective locations in the global are products of very different urban territories. As such, the capability to make connections and territorialize global flows of retail goods becomes integral to understand the form of the urban constituting each retail site. Where the shopping mall can delineate the global to just the ‘world’s best’, the flea market is overwhelmed by the global flows of consumer excess. The analysis contributes a territorial approach to the study of cultural globalization, showing how globalization is demarcated by boundaries that are both local and global, real and virtual, making such global flows a resource or a threat to structuring one’s social world.

KEYWORDS

globalization; global–urban; non-place; retail; territory

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URBAN TERRITORIES OF THE GLOBAL–URBAN

The places of global society are common, and they are often symbolically and physically central in cities and communities. In contemporary society, places as diverse as shopping malls, airports, train stations, theme parks, movie theatres, casinos and resort strips, and even refugee camps are considered to be characteristically affected by the global superstructure that facilitates mobility (Augé, 1997; Gottschalk & Salvaggio, 2015; Sharma, 2009; Urry, 2007). These are spaces in which people spend a lot of time, focus a lot of attention and practice important rituals. Therefore, the make-up and process of these locations is central to the structure and outcomes of everyday life for people from every culture. Nonetheless, the term ‘globalization’ has many meanings, and understanding the distinctive qualities of global spaces and the sources of these qualities has often led to focuses on homogenization or hybridization. In both cases, however, what differentiates global places, which by their nature are the product of the same processes, can be unclear.

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This paper contributes to this tension by analysing the impact of global retail commodity flows on the urban territories of which two retail sites are a part. While each retail site is of a transnational connection, their respective locations in the global are products of very different territories. It is the capability to make connections and territorialize such global flows of retail goods that is integral to understanding the form of the global in each retail site.

CONCEPTUALIZING URBAN SPACE

Reflecting on the new post-war cities, Lefebvre (2003) developed on the term 'urban' to create an intellectual space in which to analyse the formations that are generated out of, and to an extent come after, industrial economies. The urban has a number of characteristics: it is tightly related to industrial society, it arises from a certain concentration of human activity, and it dominates other agrarian or industrial forms of the city. The urban is a process not an end; it is where the pace of commercial exchange comes to beget itself, creating the critical zone where 'the effect of the process – namely the urban reality – becomes both cause and reason' (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 14–15). This urban process dominates other types of space, 'the only regions left untouched by it are those that are stagnant or dying, those that are given over to "nature"' (p. 4). As such, the process encompasses the world: 'the urban revolution marks the onset of a new phase of transformative, planetary urbanism' (Madden, 2012, p. 780). Urban society is an ongoing, constructive and 'weaving' process that integrates industrial and municipal cores alike. However, while much of the world today may be urban, urbanization is neither finished nor real. Rather, Lefebvre (2003, pp. 16–17), describes it 'as a horizon, an illuminating virtuality' that continues to unfold. This horizon of urbanization is described as tending to 'overflow borders, while commercial exchange and industrial and financial organizations, ... now appear to reaffirm them' (p. 169). This 'overflow' ties together an increasingly complex network generating an 'ensemble of differences' (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 131). As such, Lefebvre's urban thesis paints a compelling picture of urban processes; however, the real and actual nature of urbanization in cities has been a point of contention (Millington, 2016).

In finding the real nature of the global–urban in contemporary cities, we might turn to Augé (1997) who proposed the term 'non-place' to describe a specific spatial outcome of globalization. Augé's argument turns on the observation that while anthropology had successfully implemented an ontology of discreet, immediately observable places, the contemporary realities of interconnection mean that an excess of events and spaces in the here and now – dubbed supermodernity – supersede the identification of said discreet locales. Augé proposed the term 'non-place' to describe the spatial outcome of that excess and movement, drawing on arguably new urban spaces, such as jet-age airports, as key examples, 'totalling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called means of transport (aircraft, train and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets' (p. 79). Non-places are defined as those which 'cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' in the manner that place can be (pp. 77–78). Here, though, all non-places become very similar as if they were really one single non-place of global movement and communication. While Augé's contribution suggests that locales are mutated by their role as thoroughfares of global–urban flows, in eclipsing the locale to supermodernity, the framework does not adequately enlighten upon how non-places might be different or stratified as global spaces. In this regard, researchers have observed the local make-up of particular non-places in accentuating certain mobilized subjectivities (Gottschalk & Salvaggio, 2015; Korstanje, 2015; Sadana, 2010), but this does not enlighten on the differentiating processes that might exist between them.

Places and non-places alike are recognized for their different local impacts on global movements. In transnationalism theory, local places have an active and central role in processes of movement (Brickell & Datta, 2011). Movements in this sense are rooted to local places, and

so are always of those places too. While the perspective does show the changes that local places undergo due to being woven into the global–urban, the emphasis on local-to-local connections ultimately dissolves the global itself into the stuff of local conditions. While the local is certainly influential, so firmly situating global flows into the local obscures the virtuality of the global–urban and the processes of becoming which that virtuality enables. Therefore, bridging these approaches means looking at the dynamics between local and the global–urban itself. For Sharma (2009), non-places are a matter of mobility politics, shaped by which flows are facilitated and accelerated, and which are controlled and decelerated. For example, the airport here is defined not just by better connection and movement, but also by the immigration gates and detention rooms that are used to stop movement. The crucial development here is to retain the role of the local place in relation to the global–urban excess that connection begets.

The urban can be seen as an in-process weaving of locales into one planetary urbanism. In practice, one prominent example is non-places; however, what differentiates individual locales that are all made up of the same global–urban is unclear. To bridge the high-globalization of the global–urban to the locales of everyday life, this paper draws on flow and territory.

FLOW AND TERRITORY

Flow and territory is a framework that employs ‘urban territories’ to cut across place, transnational connection and the global excess of non-place. It requires to see global flows of people, discourses or commodities as constitutive of geographically discontinuous territories (West-Pavlov, 2009). Flow means recognizing the distinctive qualities of something in movement; a pallet of consumer goods with no destination is given velocity and purpose when a delivery order is placed. While flows are at first anything moving, they are also ‘an immanent force of potentiality’, and by this Amin and Thrift (2002, p. 81) mean that flows initiate change and should be seen as partly autonomous in their desired velocity towards somewhere. While consumer goods with no destination are relatively inert to their environment, those on the move excite change around them: people load them onto trucks and offload them from ships under careful time management. An analysis of flow shows the changes that result from being a movement itself. Such movements may cross national or geographical–continental borders. For example, the exotic characteristic that may be perceived of goods that have travelled transcontinentally. In other words, border-crossing involves transformations of flows that are additional to any conditions or effects that may occur in the origin, intermediate place or destination of a movement. Crossing such a boundary brings territory into discussion; a slowing down, becoming and intermediate state of precipitated flow.

Following Deleuze and Guattari (2004), flows coagulate into territories (West-Pavlov, 2009), temporarily holding a form. While we distinguish flow and territory, the boundary between either is unclear, as each can be seen existing simultaneously in, for example, the territory of a beach that sees flows of wind, waves and beach-goers. Territories nonetheless exert varying autonomy, taking ‘pre-existing flows, the fluid materiality of being in itself in its state of becoming, and begins to make semi-formalized domains out of it’ (p. 181). To be sure, both territory and the flow itself are affected upon encounter. For example, raw produce arriving at a stall creates a greengrocer of the stall and consumer vegetables of the produce – there are parallel territorializations.

Territories are contingent structures, re-existing in each passing present – so many scholars prefer the term territoriality in order to think in terms of a quality, rather than a thing. Flows thus feed and reinvigorate territories with their arrivals and departures, or destabilize existing patterns. Brighenti (2010, p. 63) expresses this mutual relationship between flow and territory thus: ‘territories are actualized when one leaves them. ... One cannot leave a territory, Deleuze and Guattari argue, without at the same time creating another territory somewhere else’. At the

grocer, vegetables that are sold depart and are no longer consumer products for sale; they are then 'owned' items that people no longer want to purchase. Contingency is present, for if the produce were to stop arriving or departing from the grocer, it would cease to be a consumer grocer territory. Here, then, territories may shape flows by being the boundary of departure and arrival, while flows simultaneously actualize that boundary by exiting and entering. In this regard, territories are interactional and 'result from encounters and from the affect developed during these encounters' (Brighenti, 2010, p. 57). Territorial thinking helps explore the relationships between transnational movements and local conditions in a contingent and equal manner that does not privilege either. Nonetheless, there are structures, of which humans construct very often, that make territories more resilient – these range in scale and formality from state government to the white picket fence.

Some scholars bring territory into direct discussion with place, and territorialization with place-making (Cheetham et al., 2018; Duff, 2014; Platt & Medway, 2020; Saldanha, 2017), and in these studies we see territories being made more durable against the course of oncoming flows. Territories may be not only produced but also fortified by materiality, connection, and the potentials of human and non-human bodies that are present (Kärholm, 2007; Platt & Medway, 2020; Williams, 2008). In this respect, 'a territory is a manner of fixing the heterogeneous material flows going through and sustaining it' (Saldanha, 2017, p. 126). If we consider a city park, it has play equipment and walking tracks that sustain territorializations of park activities and the continual arrival of park goers in their many forms. However, when entering place into the discussion it is not a simple one-to-one equation of territory to place; places are inter-penetrated by multiple and fleeting territories, such as the two territories of children playing and dog walkers in the same park (Cheetham et al., 2018). In this regard, a place interacts with and is of multiple territories that may be internal, external or crossing the border of place.

In what follows I will analyse the oscillation between flow and territoriality of global consumer goods in a shopping mall and flea market to examine the urban territories that are present through them. While consumer flows in contemporary society are commonly global, that global is territorialized very differently around the city. The purpose of territory in the analysis is to provide a language to describe global urbanization in a manner that rests upon its own qualities rather than that of locales, non-places, or the hybridization of connection. What this means is that global-urban space is not just built by the specific internal elements of form or politics (Gottschalk & Salvaggio, 2015; Sharma, 2009), but that global-urban space is territorialized by the qualities of entering and exiting flows (Buchanan, 2005) and that places may be built specifically to territorialize global flows in a certain manner.

RESEARCHING TERRITORY IN TWO RETAIL SITES

The research design was led by the observation of the apparent homogeneity of global spaces, so two divergent field sites were selected. The two field sites selected were retail sites in Hong Kong: the International Finance Centre Mall (IFC Mall) and Pei Ho Market (PHM). The goal of using two very different field sites was to explore two different manifestations of global flows in the world. As the field sites are not a dichotomy and not placed on any spectrum, the study is not comparative, but merely a juxtaposition of two outcomes. IFC Mall is closest to a 'typical' non-place: it is a purpose-built shopping mall of the jet age, full of stores that can be found around the world. Of all the malls in Hong Kong, IFC Mall was selected for its prominent location and other global-urban infrastructure integrated into the city block on which it is built, namely an airport rail link. PHM, a night-time flea market, was selected for being both informal and of poor means. The market has very little materiality to territorialize flows, and the goods, while of global origin such as in IFC Mall, are mostly salvaged from garbage. The

aim was that the stark differences between these two field sites would enlighten upon the process of ostensibly decodified transnational flows generating codified places.

Retail places were selected for their centrality in everyday life, and their international nature. Retail has always been at the intersection of global capitalism and everyday urban life. The two rose together in tandem, as European capitalism explored the globe and returned with what would become key consumer goods, such as new edible plants. More recently, retail continues to expand (Kärholm, 2016b), and there has been a shift in the recognition of specifically 'global' retail and consumers in sociology (Wrigley et al., 2005) and marketing (Alden et al., 1999). Retail places can be planned and ordered, such as pedestrianized streets or as a part of mixed developments (Kärholm, 2016a, 2016b), and have been recognized for their close association with mobilities (Urry, 2007). However, informal markets, whether selling new or used goods, also arise in tandem with more formal, planned developments (Elshehtawy, 2008).

Data collection consisted of primary and secondary source research. Both field sites have attracted academic attention in the past, and the content of that attention is telling. Scholarship about IFC Mall focuses on the physical environment constructed (Soloman, 2012), while research on PHM focuses more on the people there (Chan, 2018; Ta, 2017). In this we see the impermeability of IFC Mall, where analysis of the identities, histories and relations are stunted, typical of a non-place. PHM, on the other hand, an economically impoverished institution, has a clear vitality. The literature and insights gathered are integrated into the following analysis. Primary data collection was conducted in the summer of 2019. The method was influenced by that of Gottschalk and Salvaggio (2015), whereby the goal is to be 'pushed around' by the flows present, and even to become territorialized oneself. To this end, the field sites were visited at their respective active times: IFC Mall in the afternoon and evening, and PHM in the late evening, around midnight. Through these initial observations, the focus turned from the form of the field sites to the flows inherent to them. The scope was thus limited to these auto-ethnographic interactions with flows, which were conducted until saturation. On these journeys, the researcher wandered alone or with companions, read materials, observed people, spoke to people, browsed goods and purchased goods.

As an ethnographer, my own positionality affects the encounter with each field site. The focus on commodities and consumption in this research, which are aspects of self-identity in many contemporary societies, in some respects emphasizes my position. As a white New Zealander, it is expected that the more Western IFC Mall is more conducive; however, living near PHM meant the market had a closer sensibility. Before the research I was already familiar with both field sites. Therefore, in my observations I tried to canvas each field site and visit them as broadly as possible while trying to see them completely.

DISCUSSION

International Finance Centre (IFC) Mall

IFC Mall is located in Central District on recently reclaimed land in Victoria Harbour. The area has a mixture of high-end and mid-range amenities and services. There are high-end office blocks, luxury hotels and prestigious retail shops, yet also present are alley markets, a nightlife area, domestic ferry terminals and a space for outdoor events such as carnivals. While most people there may not live or work in Central District, they may be visiting for an event or to transfer public transport while commuting. Amongst this, the mall serves as both a luxury shopping destination and somewhere to pick up regular items or simply walk through while doing other things.

The mall is the retail component of the larger IFC precinct that composes the city block. In addition to the mall, the precinct includes two office towers, 38 and 88 stories tall (the lobbies of which are in the mall), a 55-storey luxury hotel, a metro station serving two lines, airport check-in

desks, a large bus terminus, and many pedestrian bridges to adjacent buildings and ferry terminals. The shopping mall is the central thoroughfare of the precinct, connecting all the above components. While certainly high-end, the mall also has retail staples such as Zara and a supermarket. Furthermore, there is a cinema and public rooftop park. The construction of the IFC precinct was a part of another even larger plan, the Airport Core Programme (ACP), which included a new airport, a transport corridor with a highway and multiple railways lines, a Disneyland Resort, and other precincts similar in scope to IFC (Soloman, 2012).

As part of the ACP, the IFC precinct was an effort to establish new physical infrastructure to intercede and crystalize the elite global flows of the post-industrial economic transformation indicative of global-urbanization (Castells, 2010; Lefebvre, 2003). Hong Kong has long been a regional and global economic hub; however, enduring in this role has rested on the city being adaptable to changes in what are the important trade items and routes in the global economy. The ACP can thus be seen as another step in the city's global ambitions. Soloman (2012, p. 169) says it was 'Built explicitly to facilitate the transition from a colony to a global city, both [IFC and Elements] are elite shopping malls associated with international travel'. Similarly, Cartier (2016, p. 429) notes IFC Mall is 'the outstanding example of a mall whose built environment symbolizes a hegemonic project of the transnational capitalist class'. Constructed by a consortium of government and private institutions, the precinct is a key part of a strategic effort to physically construct a place that would intercede the new elite global flows of urban society.

The IFC precinct contains the physical infrastructure of various urban mobilities, and the shopping mall connects them, such as airport check-in desks in the basement and the integrated lobbies to the five-star hotel and office towers. In terms of architecture though, the shopping mall is grand, typical of global malls (Figure 1), as recorded in my fieldnotes:



Figure 1. Canada Goose and Lady M New York on the central promenade of IFC Mall. Photo: Kristie Cheng, 2021.

The escalator comes up from underground and into a glass atrium, with coloured sculptures hanging from the ceiling. From the escalator you arrive at the bottom of the ‘oval atrium’ an oval-shaped plaza cut through the three floors of the shopping mall, with a translucent ceiling letting the light in. In the centre of the atrium sits a black grand piano on a carpeted platform.

Standing here and looking around, I do not feel out of place as I notice there are a few other people around me doing the same. Some are taking photos of something around us in a kind of touristy manner (as opposed to for example, taking a picture of a sign or something for later reference). The atrium is bright and large, with a lot of room. Coming off the atrium are two hallways on either side. They are about as wide as a two-lane road with sidewalks. There are many people but still lots of room to wander. (field-notes, 12 May 2019)

Global malls have been described as ‘cathedrals of consumption’ (Urry, 2007) and sites of Debordian spectacle (Elsheshtawy, 2008). With its artwork, atriums and harbour views, IFC Mall neatly conforms to these concepts. Such flourishes contribute to the place-making exercise that pre-empts territorialization. However, the urban territory present in IFC Mall is also made up of the consumer and retail goods flows that enter and slow down there. In addition to the physical form, IFC Mall uses symbolism to deliberately associate with elite global flows – *International Finance Centre* – and sign-boards advertise ‘Tourist Privileges’ that may be redeemed at the concierge, and the tagline ‘beautiful: seeing the beauty in the world’ suggests a consumer experience that is supra-local. The mall is very much a typical non-place (Augé, 1997); however, it is not just a blank image, as Buchanan (2005) suggests about non-places generally: IFC Mall is meaningful.

The infrastructure of the precinct weaves the mall preferentially into the fabric of the global–urban, and through the corralling, arrival and departure of consumer flows, an urban territory intersects and is present. Interpreted as a transnational site (Brickell & Datta, 2011), IFC Mall is local and works to shape incoming flows. However, the territoriality of IFC Mall does not neatly end at the local boundary. Rather, present in the mall are territorial aspects that extend down the lines of flows themselves out of Hong Kong to faraway locations. The analysis then rests on investigating the contours and boundaries of the territory, which while engineered to crystalize flows to within the walls of IFC Mall, is nonetheless also constituted by the incoming flows.

Every shopping mall has goods from around the world, but IFC Mall controls and makes connections specifically to elevate it to being an eminent global retail place. Augé (1997) argues that it is an excess of events and space, which he terms ‘supermodernity’, that creates non-places. As explained above, Sharma (2009) argues that one should focus on the politics of movement, which in other words is the enablement or disablement of the excess of connection. In IFC Mall, an excess of events and space is seen in the ostensible distant origin of goods in their marking and branding. Upon scrutiny, though, it is clear that the excess of events and space that compose IFC Mall are carefully selected to reterritorialize the global–urban into a territory with certain affective claims.

The management of IFC Mall is selective in what brands and stores they rent to; in doing so the shopping mall is territorialized through what is included and excluded. In 2011, Karim Azar, assistant general manager for retail leasing, explained to the *South China Morning Post* that restaurants were being replaced in favour of luxury and global fashion brands that could pay up to triple the rent (Li, 2011). In this article the journalist Sandy Li points out that restaurants tend to cater to locals, while the luxury brands tend to cater to non-locals. There is another step to this process, though, in another article published in *The Wall Street Journal*, Azar explains that the mall sets itself apart by ‘bringing in brands the city has never seen before’ (Gu, 2013). Here

then is a selective engagement with the excess of supermodernity, on the terms of expense and spectacle. In IFC Mall, the creation of the non-place is not limited to local attributes such as schematic of design, function, etc. (Gottschalk & Salvaggio, 2015), but in how these elements territorialize through direction and control the excess of supermodernity. Such territorialization is present on the ground.

IFC Mall does not just position itself as selective, but rather selective of the universe of possible products: an uncompromised access to the virtuality of the global–urban. Throughout IFC Mall, the expansiveness of the global is present in many manners, store names are bylined with European capitals' names: Zurich, Paris and London. Brand names themselves cite plausible origins: Club Monaco, Boggi Milano and Links of London. When I visited, throughout was the marketing for a new restaurant opening in one of the rooftop pavilions:

Everywhere are advertisements saying 'From NYC to Hong Kong'. It has an outline of the Hong Kong skyline, and a brand name, 'Shake Shack'. In between shake and shack is a burger icon. This is a new burger place, that has replaced the semi-famous Red Bar, on the roof of IFC. The sign is plastered on the side of the atrium, on the elevator banks up 3 floors, and on the sign-boards beside each escalator. (fieldnotes, 12 May 2019)

The shops and the mall itself advertise the diverse global origins of the goods on sale, and stores are elaborately themed to associate them with the past or the future. In doing so, while centred on the cores of high-end production in Europe and North America, the virtual excess of events and space is nonetheless retained in the notion that this product has travelled and arrived *here*. Despite the selective nature of the products on sale, the boundless virtuality of the global–urban remains present in their diversity. However, rather than that diversity creating a noisy and pastiche group of cultural influences, such diversity establishes IFC Mall as part of a distinctive territory.

This virtual access to anything in the world is the true origin of the commodity flows present in the mall; an all-encompassing flat and seamless consumer plane. IFC Mall overtakes and resists the geographical measure of space; time to travel kilometres. Overcoming the costs of distance and crossing national borders, this is a uniform plane that shortcuts the real world. These geographical connections reterritorialize the boundaries of retail in the shopping mall to the furthestmost figurative distance, weaving the mall in a territory of everything desirable with virtual boundaries that may never be reached. The geographical boundary of this territory is the ostensible complete encompassing of the world's space without compromise. IFC Mall is a terminal of flows that ignore geographical distance. This territory situates IFC Mall onto a uniform plane where distance is irrelevant – the ostensible but virtual capacity of the global–urban.

The encounter between commodity flows and IFC Mall reterritorializes both, imbuing the qualities of that flat plane into their territoriality. Here we see this in the term 'global exclusive':

I find myself outside Lane Crawford, Hong Kong's premier department store. I go inside to have a look. There is one display by something a bit more 'designer', these are 'limited edition' items. There are caps, towels, tote bags, pins, that all match, and have some very obvious and flashy symbol on it. They are actually quite affordable, and you can buy a set of items for a decent price. The display stands out, and is unmanned. There is a little bio and portrait of the designers.

On another shelf is a series of ordinary looking items (at least to me) with a very understated sign reading, GLOBAL EXCLUSIVE. The text is in plain black text on a white background, it looks like something produced in Microsoft Word. The paper suspended in-between two pieces of plastic or glass. This is the only sign denoting the specialness of these items.

I leave Lane Crawford and see another very large sign, 'Charlotte Tilbury: The World's #1 Makeup Artist Exclusively at Lane Crawford'. (fieldnotes, 16 June 2019)

As the goods are sourced from a plane of perfect connection, the implication is that only the best are selected, positioning the mall at the apex of a complex global supply chain of production and delivery. IFC Mall establishes a heuristic boundary, territorializing the goods that are for sale as literally of the global, rather than of their real local origin. In IFC Mall the distant origin and an uncompromising capability combine to form these goods as chosen from amongst everything. The scope of IFC Mall's linkages impacts the encounter, which is clear if we consider the 'Global Exclusive' sign if seen somewhere of more modest means. If we consider a handicraft, such as a knitted scarf at a church fair, it is literally a 'global exclusive', too. However, the global connections of each place change the meaning of that claim. The goods in IFC Mall could have gone anywhere, but it was the discerning power of the mall that chose them to be here. Simultaneously, though, they are sought-after throughout some construction of the globe, of department stores, high-end fashion and trendy burger joints, by someone. The goods in IFC Mall are not just desirable for being unique or only on sale there, but they are made desirable by their positioning amongst a specific territorialization of the global–urban.

In IFC Mall are the simultaneous actions of the real selectivity of goods and the virtual potential of the global–urban. The material and the urban combine to generate a true global reality, that while affected by the local, is nonetheless literally global, too. Planetary urbanization, the critical zone described by Lefebvre (2003), is completely influential and present in the environment, but only as a virtuality – the only real existence of such is in the mutated form of the selected goods, where 'global' is territorialized to be discerning, of unlimited potential, and the world's best. In IFC Mall, planetary urbanization is manifest as the emanation of its complete superiority and ability to serve people's wants. The whole encompassing of the world is translated into an unparalleled presence of serving consumer needs, and these qualities of the virtual are territorialized in the shopping mall and in the goods.

In and through IFC Mall is an urban territory extending unbridled through the global–urban, territorializing certain places and goods as the world's best. IFC Mall, an expensive and well-funded mall that sits at the top of global retail, can safely claim and project a position of unparalleled connection. Goods are territorialized to be the world's best, selected from all that is available, and so originating from the planetary urban virtuality. This urban territory brings the virtuality of the global–urban into the real, in the form of the shopping mall that can be visited and walked through, and the goods that can be purchased from IFC Mall, or some other outlet. As such, the global is not a good being from faraway or being cosmopolitan, but in being discerning and sought-after. As is shown below, however, the global–urban can overwhelm the urban territory of a place.

Pei Ho Street Night Market (PHM)

The following analysis of PHM will show the outcome of a much less capable engagement with the virtuality of urbanization. While IFC Mall is an engineered environment, PHM is an informal market, where the control over the environment and the ability to make connections are marginal.

PHM is located on the streets of Sham Shui Po (SSP) District, in the geographical centre of Hong Kong. It is one of the few, if not the only, informal flea market that occurs daily in the city. That PHM occurs in SSP is no coincidence: the district is distinguished for being neither near the coast nor on a mountain, making it one of the least desirable of Hong Kong's districts in which to live – it is perceived that the air here is stale and polluted. Nearly the entire district is a grid of too-narrow roads and six-to-ten-storey buildings. This further lowers property values, meaning that SSP today is 'the centre of poverty in Hong Kong' (Cheng, 2013, p. 7); census data show household incomes are 20% lower here than Hong Kong's average. This current geographical position is partly the result of the ACP of which IFC Mall was a part: the associated transport corridor was built on reclaimed land off SSP's coast, cutting the district off from the sea.

The flea market is of SSP's social fabric. Cheng (2013, p. 20) describes the market as part of an 'informal, low-cost neighbourhood economy'. It is also a low barrier-to-entry opportunity for people to both earn money or purchase goods at a discount. PHM is informal, meaning it is not state-condoned. One result of this is that the time of the market fluctuates: during the time the fieldwork was undertaken, hawking began at 11 pm sharp, because this is when municipal officers who bar hawking stop patrolling. In his earlier study, though, Chan (2018) reports 7 pm as the starting time. The market's main trunk extends down a street from one of the busier SSP metro station exits. Like many streets in SSP, the roads of the market actually house a permanent daytime street market, which closes at night. In the evening, hawkers place blankets and tables in front of the shuttered stalls to sell their goods. The flea market then takes place in the foreground of a shuttered, legitimate street market that sells mostly new goods.

The market is a node of low-means connections, commanding the most meagre of retail flows; recovered goods that had been discarded, disposed or abandoned (shoes, canned food, cooking pots), slightly valuable second-hand goods (watches, smartphones), and new, affordable domestic staples (cigarettes, electric fans, nail clippers). Nonetheless, a significant proportion, if not the majority, of the goods sold in PHM are recovered from the streets and other garbage disposal locations within Hong Kong (Cheng, 2013; Ta, 2017), so this will remain the focus. As will be shown, such origins shape the contours of the market's territoriality. The recovery of goods mean that the market is intimately connected to Hong Kong's primary consumer behaviour, as Cheng (2013, p. 20) describes:

the high physical mobility of Hong Kong residents, as old items and articles are usually tossed out after relocation, as well as the highly consumerist nature of Hong Kong society, which results in a large surplus of second-hand goods that the street vendors sell.

This large surplus of consumer goods, purchased in places such as IFC Mall, are the raw flows that sustain the territory present amongst PHM. Such flows are generated out of the same consumer excess that sustains IFC Mall, only now they are composed exclusively of previously discarded goods. The researcher lived in SSP, and it is impossible for local residents not to be aware of this cycle. When walking home at night you cannot but notice the furniture abandoned on the footpath, or people searching through domestic rubbish waiting to be picked up. In reverse, the easiest way to dispose of useable, carryable furniture is to leave it on the street.

Visiting the market itself, it becomes self-evident that the majority of goods are second-hand, ordinary items, infrequently they are antiques or collectibles (Figure 2):

Walking around was a very diverse selection of things for sale. I saw, cigarettes, instruments, guitars, Chinese ones, cassettes, pot lids, drills, fan blades, ceramics, jade, and packaged dry goods. They are a mixture of new and old items, and some are pieces of something else like a lid with no pot.

There was a stall with a table and a cloth over it showing watches. Some of the more expensive things are arranged like this, nicely. It is like a fine wares store, (except for on the street). Another stall we pass is just a suitcase of pornography DVDs that has been opened by its zip and unfolded out. There are also very old cell phones that nonetheless still look in working order.

Another stall we looked at was selling ceramics and wooden jewellery arranged on newspapers on the ground. The man squatting is very tanned and has shorts on, he smokes a cigarette. He has some interesting items that stand out, like a small, but tall vase that has a bulbous base and a 10 cm stem. It is white, and while undoubtedly modern, looks ornate. Another item is a green round vase, with a snake chasing a mouse sculpture on the top. It has a nice green glaze with cracks in the paint, giving it a nice look. (field-notes, 21 May 2019)



Figure 2. A man arranges cosmetics and other items in his stall at Pei Ho Market (PHM). Photo: Author, 2019.

To be sure, there are new items available, but they lack the discernment of selection that is present in an established retail store:

A few places are selling new items. One has small appliances, electric fans and rice cookers that are very brightly coloured, much more than you see normally, as if to yell out that they are new. Another is selling small items, new nail clippers, kitchen knives, sewing needles and thread, combs. (fieldnotes, 21 May 2019)

These are the goods of a retail environment of meagre means. This is in two aspects. First, is the connection to the global–urban. The connection-making capability of PHM draws on the most meagre institutional, economic or physical labour resources to bring these goods to PHM. Many take what they can find from what has been discarded and can be carried by hand. Second, the sellers individually have much less capability to redefine what the goods are sold as. On the street with no resources, and hounded by government enforcement officers, they cannot erect the kind of enduring presence required to territorialize the goods into something more valuable. In other words, they cannot establish a definitive boundary between rubbish and salvaged good that may exist in a more established second-hand store.

Such meagre means limits not only the goods that can be sold, but also the ability of the sellers to overcome the virtual excess of the global–urban. Rather than the market being an influential receptacle that reterritorializes planetary urban flows, planetary urban flows overwhelm and

define the market. Hawkers go to lengths to present their goods nicely. Most lay either cardboard or some other flat material to denote their stall. While some people seem to have emptied a bag of random items into a pile, others work to present their goods well, spreading them out evenly, orientating them to face the customer, and making adjustments throughout the evening to maintain their appearance. Others who sell more valuable items, such as smartphones or watches, place these on small tables, with a cloth cover and LED illumination. Not unlike the cavernous environment of IFC Mall, these framing efforts attempt to reterritorialize the objects from their origin of being either discarded old goods or generic new goods and into desirable consumer goods.

Amongst all the hawkers, there is the crowd of shoppers, squatting down with their own LED lights inspecting items. This is not the typical practice of consumer inspection to see if a good conforms to one's needs and wants, but rather an inspection of a good's substance. In IFC Mall you are inspecting goods to see if they meet your needs, but at PHM inspection has a different quality:

On one stall I found a nice ceramic cup, and I bent down to inspect it. I looked at the sides, shape, and size, and it seemed very nice. I liked it. I turned it upside down and saw a store sticker on the bottom, with a barcode – and this turned me off completely. It just a cup I could have found in a regular retail store. So, I kept looking. (fieldnotes, 6 June 2019)

The barcode stood out to me as meaning that this is nothing special. Bought new, the cup would be part of a set, and it would be a variation of other designs from which the consumer can choose their favourite. Here, however, that 'new' retail experience is replaced by a recovered one, and it becomes generic. Other mass-produced items retain more of their origin as recovered goods:

A woman had a tube of Colgate toothpaste sealed in its box for sale. The item itself looked as it would in a supermarket, and seemed to be as good as that. It caught my eye as probably a bargain, personally I never buy Colgate because of its steep mark-up compared to other brands. As I walked past, a man jumped on it and asked the price, \$5, he bargained \$3, but was rejected, \$5, still a very good price. Normally this would retail for \$20 or more. The man had to inspect the toothpaste though, he handled the box, and wanted to check inside, but the box was sealed. He partially ripped open the end flap of the box and inspected the interior, angling the box to catch the street light, once confirming the contents, he wordlessly handed the woman a \$10 note, and she got his change. (fieldnotes, 3 June 2019)

Here the origin of 'garbage' overwhelms the ability of the market to territorialize the flows into proper consumer goods. Rather than territorialized as a carefully produced and quality-assured product, the toothpaste maintains its qualities as garbage. Other items are unpredictable, the market can never overcome the randomness of the items that may come up to be sold:

We asked about the snake vase, and the man put up two fingers, and said two hundred in Cantonese. This was obviously an inflated price. We kept negotiating and eventually settled on one hundred. A lot to pay if it was in a store, but in this instance, we have no idea if this item will ever be for sale before us again. In terms of the market, it is a one of a kind. And it hasn't been mass produced, mass delivered to here, it was a random item. But who knows, maybe the man will pull out another, identical vase tomorrow. (fieldnotes, 21 May 2019)

The vase brings up the reality that all shoppers at the market are aware of: that goods may never be available again. Their origin is shrouded by the garbage disposal process, the vase came from somewhere, it could be one or 20 years old, and it could be common or uncommon. The answers

to these questions lie in the vagaries of the consumer disposal process. In this we see how the market is again beholden to the garbage disposal flows, defining and shaping it.

In PHM then is an engagement with planetary urbanization that is, first, significantly curtailed short of the perfect and unlimited connection seen in IFC Mall. In the case of PHM, this curtailment is to the garbage disposal process in Hong Kong, and the few sources of budget new goods that are accessed. Therefore, the global–urban excess of events and spaces is still a determining factor here, but the territorialization of PHM caused by that excess is coloured by the source of these retail flows – which is markedly Hong Kong’s consumer waste. Second are the limited means of reterritorializing these flows using devices of place, as desirable ‘second-hand’ consumer goods. If IFC Mall is situated in the flat plane of perfect connection, PHM is situated in a plane of barriers and borders that curtails most routes. This shows the scope of the territory, whereby the boundary is located at the discarding of the goods by consumers. The goods are defined by the qualities of being disposed, which they retain through to the market and even after purchase. In this manner, as the consumer territory of IFC Mall extended down the lines to abstract global locations, in PHM those lines extend down the lines of urban excess and waste to the consumer’s trash can.

The market struggles to purposefully reterritorialize global consumer excess, and so present are poorly differentiated flows of salvaged and budget consumer goods. The pathways of consumer purchasing, the actual practice of consumption and the eventual disposal of the goods that move through urban society are able to breach and define PHM. Rather than being deliberately constructed and curated to generate a distinctive and enviable global presence, as occurs in IFC Mall, planetary urbanization makes itself present in PHM, pushing through and into SSP and redefining the area in the terms of the salvaged and budget retail flows. This market then is to a greater extent situated of flow, and shifts according to their terms; the goods on offer change largely depending on how Hong Kong consumers ‘feed’ the market through the discarding of once-new goods.

CONCLUSIONS

Lefebvre’s (2003) contribution of an urban society – analysing the urban itself – has been highly influential. As Millington (2016, p. 479) states, though, ‘scholars are less clear about what urbanization actually is’. To Lefebvre (2003), urban society is not an identifying concept such as a ‘shopping mall’; rather, it is a figurative point of arrival and departure for analysis, it is something that has both happened, its effect played out, but also something that continues on in a not identical manner. The analysis has worked into what that point of arrival and departure is in two contemporary and intimately connected retail destinations.

In these two retail environments, we see the uneven development of Hong Kong as a global city at the ground level. IFC Mall was built as part of the city’s largest construction effort, the ACP, a multitude of construction projects of which any single one would transform a city. The effort was largely successful, and if we focus on just retail, then IFC Mall has successfully placed itself near the apex. The shopping mall successfully reconfigures the messy excess of global urbanization into a highly desirable collection of the ‘world’s best’ consumer products, available to those of moderate and great wealth who can afford to participate. Here then a recognizable global place is guided into fruition. In PHM, almost the inverse is occurring. This environment has been overwhelmed by Hong Kong’s consumer excess, the goods of previous consumer desires are recovered and put up for sale. The site remains unable to form a distinctive structure; goods are of the garbage disposal process, and their supply remains unreliable and unpredictable. For those who are relegated to working and shopping here, global place remains a factor of other consumers’ whims.

I have discussed two urban territories. First was the ‘world’s best’ amongst the plane of perfect connection, found in IFC Mall. Second was the territory of salvaged goods of which PHM is a part. Shaped by their respective urban places, each territoriality is distinguished by two main factors. First is the capability for connection, whether that is an unlimited potential to connect to anywhere in the world or is extremely limited to just the garbage disposal locations inside Hong Kong. Such connections define the terminal distance, and so boundaries, of the flows that make the territory. Second is the reterritorialization of incoming flows, in other words, the autonomy of the place and people. Either using significant institutional and material resources to be the world’s best, or a weak reterritorialization, whereby the goods remain largely what they were before being put up for sale: flows of garbage. These two aspects, terminal distance and capability for reterritorialization, delineate urban territory.

Each urban territory operates upon the place and goods for sale. In IFC Mall, the territory extends between the real of the mall and the virtuality of unlimited global connection. Goods are territorialized as their origin being from the globe, and the mall as connected to the globe – a distinction that other ‘global’ goods cannot claim. The process remains dynamic as such territoriality rests on the continuing flow of the goods. Meanwhile, the territory in PHM extends between the market and the point of consumer disposal. The goods on sale in PHM had been reterritorialized as ‘Hong Kong’ goods, their foreign origin almost literally scrubbed off through the course of their use and discarding. A single territory with boundaries of garbage bins and PHM itself is thus woven. Nonetheless, different intensities of effort are put into the display of items to create a boundary separating garbage from consumer good, partially reterritorializing the flows.

The analysis traces the making real of urban virtuality, displaying how the urban exerts different influences on locations in the city. The urban is ‘a horizon, an illuminating virtuality’ (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 16–17), which is mutated into territorialities that beget non-places embodying global urbanization. In IFC Mall, the hyper-connection of global society is limited and down-sized to a small selection of goods and the demarcation of the ‘world’s best’. The virtual plane of perfect connection is engaged with, but it is ultimately controlled and filtered. A truly unbridled global culture exists only as a potential, as a source for what is on offer. Rather, what is present in the real is a territorialization of the virtual plane of a perfect urban connection. The goods on sale are reterritorialized to be desirable for their high position in the field of global retail. In parallel, speaking of PHM, the global–urban is present in the overwhelming of boundaries. While the market can only interface with certain goods, they are not territorialized as the product of discernment. The virtuality of global–urban society that is encountered in PHM is the result of meagre means. The goods on sale are defined by their unreliable origin and limited presentation that means they remain firmly as flows of discarded garbage. The global–urban in PHM is also defined by having gone through the ‘keyhole’ of Hong Kong consumers. While the goods were previously from elsewhere (Japanese cameras, etc.), their cycling through Hong Kong has made the local city their origin, and the breadth of goods that are available is exclusively of Hong Kong consumer excess. Together, when brought into the real in PHM, the virtuality of the global–urban is one of breadth and possibility, but only of the most meagre means.

The term ‘urban’ in urban territories refers not just to being in the city, but to their connection to Lefebvre’s (2003) urban society. In other words, urban territories are an outcome specific to the conditions, and have the characteristics, of urban society. Urban territories are not just a matter of what is in the real, but draw upon what is latently possible by the urban. The urban is therefore present as the scope of possibility for urban territories to remake city spaces. In this manner the global–urban permeates all locales as either the source of an excess connections to be made or as the origin of an excess of connections being made to the local area. In the context of the Lefebvre urban, groups use social power and capital to draw upon and wield the urban virtuality to their ends, generating novel territorialities such as those seen above. The analysis demonstrates that urban territories are not simply coagulated or corralled flows of people, products, materials, etc., but are also

purposeful products of the virtual urban. This gives urban territories the qualities of the virtuality, in this case the hyper-connection of the urban gives the quality of excess to urban places.

Cities are demarcated by the territorial hues of flowing excess. Excess is a state of too much that needs to move on to another location. While places exert an influence upon incoming flows (Gottschalk & Salvaggio, 2015; Kärrholm, 2007; Sharma, 2009), the process works in reverse and flows exert significant territorializing effects upon places. The flows and territories of the ‘world’s best’ or that of discarded items permeate and manifest through cities and places to different intensities. The city is not just a patchwork of places or non-places, but is interpenetrated by the urban in the manifestation of urban territories. These urban territories, when seen existing not just in one shopping mall or market, but across the city and the world, are at once continuous flows of excess, while also discontinuous local sites of intensity as those flows are redirected, pooled and territorialized. Looking at Hong Kong itself, the city is a patchwork of urban connection and autonomy that paints territorial qualities over it in relation to the wider urban virtuality.

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