

The mechanism of Beustraverse
-Rotterdam's well functioning
shopping machine.

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Feast for the senses on Saturday afternoon.

Saturday is the most crowded day on a the Beustraverse. The shopping day starts at 8 am with the opening of the nearby market on the Binnenrote, which boasts to be the longest one in Europe. Plenty of people come here to participate in a merchandising spectacle ipso facto maintaining long-lived tradition of Rotterdam's trade. The noises come from all directions. Hurdy-gurdy cheerfully encourages visitors to bargain. The trade stands owners are loudly praising the benefits of their products. Juicy fruits, crunchy nuts and smelly fish are all creating a colourful kaleidoscope. All treats are at your fingertips and tempt you to taste them.

When the need for food, drink and flowers are satisfied, the merry bunch of Shopaholics heads towards the Beustraverse, a pedestrian passage under the busy avenue, to try on some shoes, clothes and jewellery.

The procession of consumers starts their every-week playful wandering with ritual flirt with objects. The craziest of sales hunters loose their sanity in a shopping fever. They enter Jean Baudrillard's geometrical locus of abundance, where streets

"with their cluttered, glittering shop-windows(...)stimulate magical salivation. There is something more in this piling high than the quantity of products: the manifest presence of surplus, the magical, definitive negation of scarcity, the maternal, luxurious sense of being already in the Land of Cockaigne. These are our Valleys of Canaan where, in place of milk and honey, streams of neon flow down over ketchup and plastic. But no matter! We find here the fervid hope that there should be not enough, but too much(...)"

How does the machine work?

The double curved sunken passage leads its visitors along the storefronts under a protecting against inclement weather canopies and caring eyes of surveillance cameras. The passage is cut out from the rest of the street forcing pedestrians to walk through its entire length. The shoppers willingly participate in a choreography on a real-life stage-set. The street is built out of repeating sets of shopping windows, lights and advertisement.

The designer, Jon Jerde, created the frivolous atmosphere by decorating the façades with Italianate arches. This postmodern reiteration of historic forms generates a narrative pattern, that establishes relations between images and places, resemblances and meaning. To complete the picture of an idyllic setting, few entertaining facilities were added: trees, "impostor-fountains" for children and touching screens that help to navigate through the shopping maze and allow to make photos that are sent directly to the Beursplein facebook profile.

The materials of the "Koopgoot" (the shopping gutter) stand out from the surroundings. This creates the feeling of being abstracted from the total life of the city. The feeling of "being inside" is evoking the impression of being protected from outside dangers and problems.

The absence of sitting and resting places and the narrow shape that provokes the constant movement of people impedes socialising on a street.

"Being among others, seeing and hearing others, receiving impulses from others, imply positive experience, alternatives to being alone."

These favourable contacts in public spaces, discussed by Jan Gehl in his book "Life Between Buildings" are replaced with shoppers fascination for commodities. As Jean Baudrillard observes,

"Their daily dealings are now not so much with their fellow men, but rather(...)with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages. This runs(...)from the minor proliferation of vaguely obsessional gadgetry to the symbolic psychodramas fuelled by the nocturnal objects which come to haunt us even in our dreams".

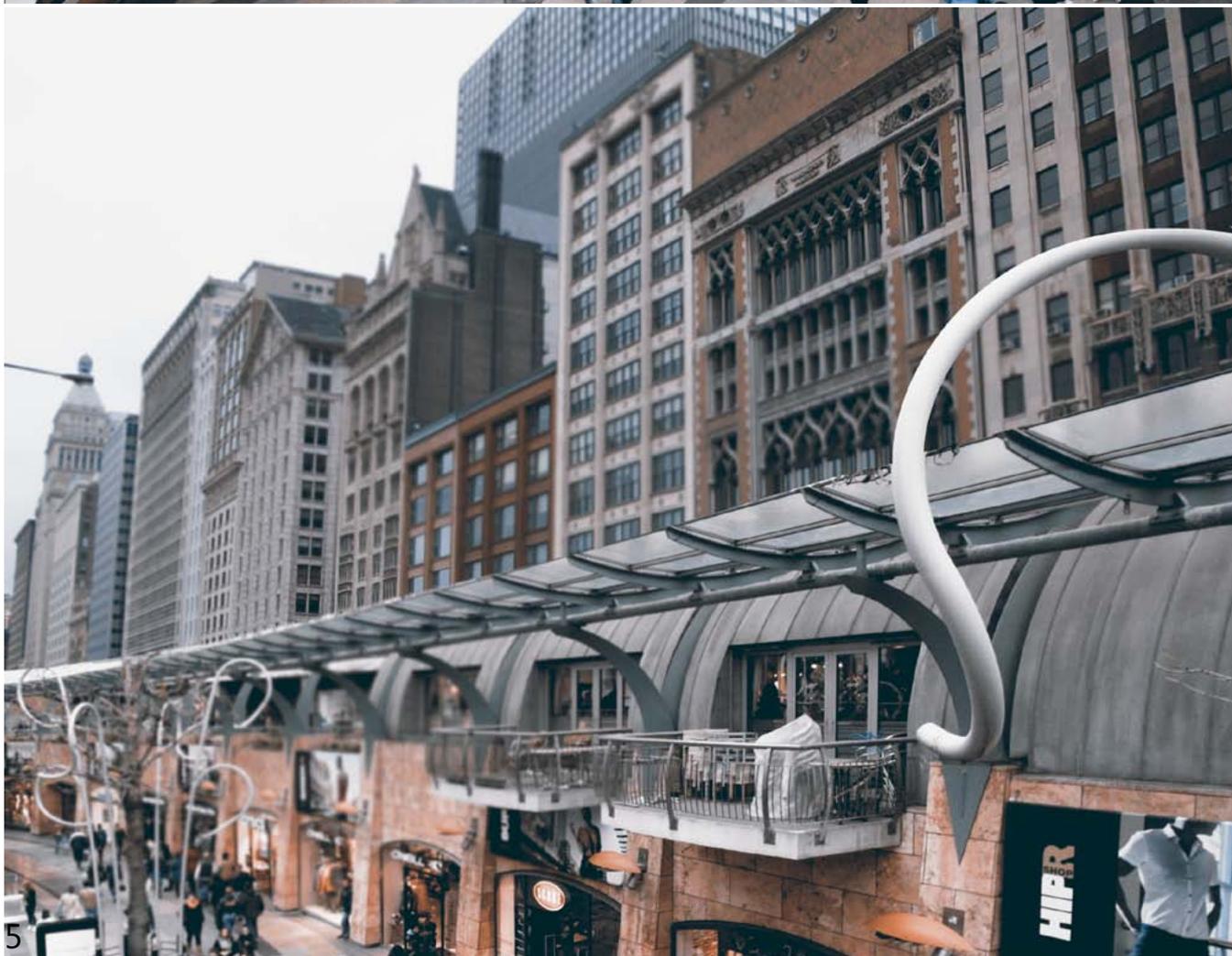
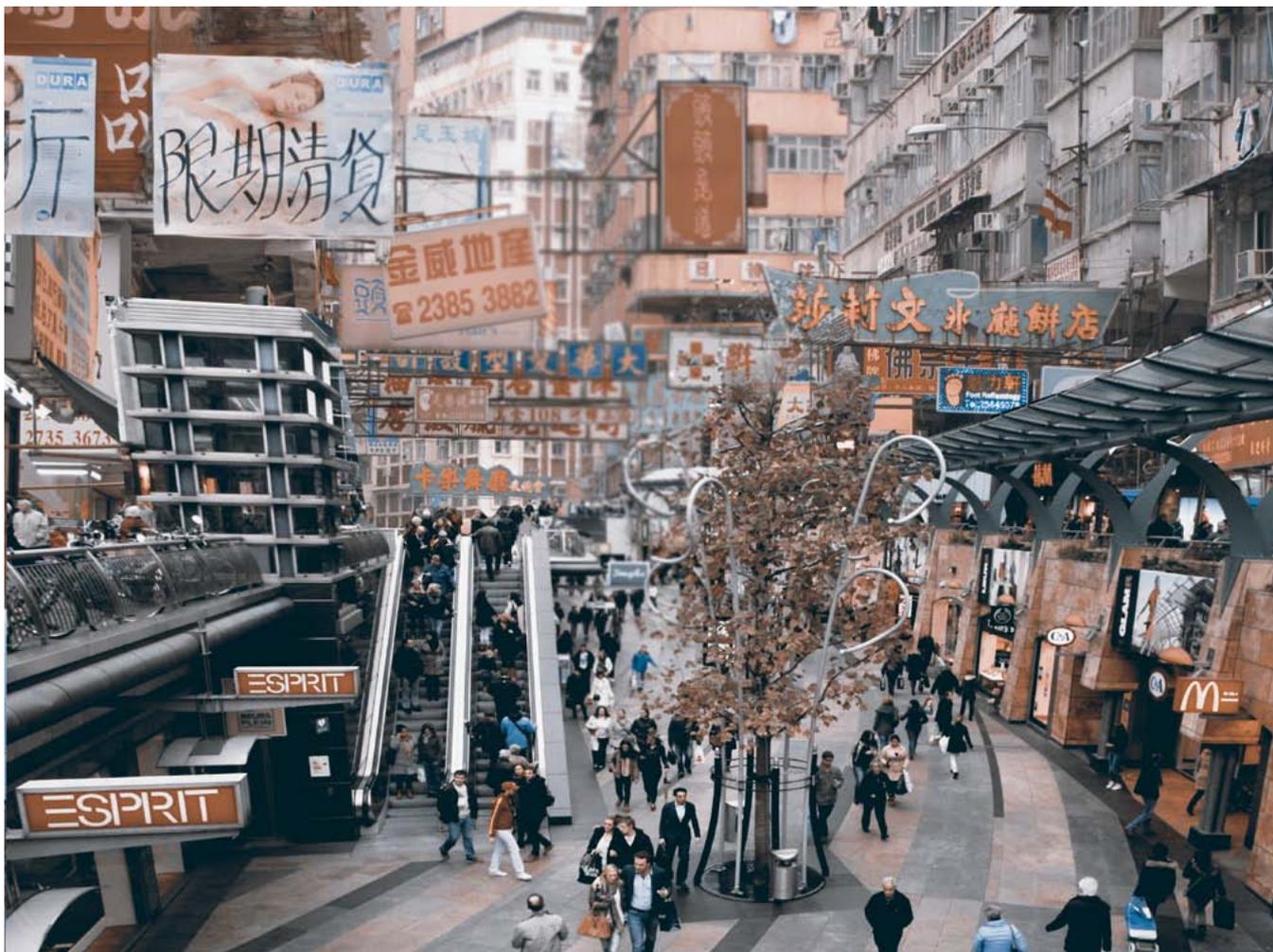
Opposite page (5):

Photo collages 1. and 2. :

The Koopgoot is a total design, that stylistically neglects its surrounding. With the copy-paste method, the sunken passage along with its elements, materials and functions, could be successfully implemented in any city environment.

Top: The photomontage of the Beustraverse in Shanghai.

Bottom: The photomontage of the Beustraverse in Chicago.



The Beustraverse is a well functioning shopping machine. Every passer-by, finds himself pulled into the vortex of commercialism, imposed on him by the images of goods. The “just looking” of a passer-by is, according to Margaret Crawford, a prelude to buying. Once the viewers see what they can buy, they realise what they are lacking and therefore needing.

“Shoppers can not only realize what they are but also imagine what they might become. The endless variation of objects means that satisfaction always remains just out of reach.”

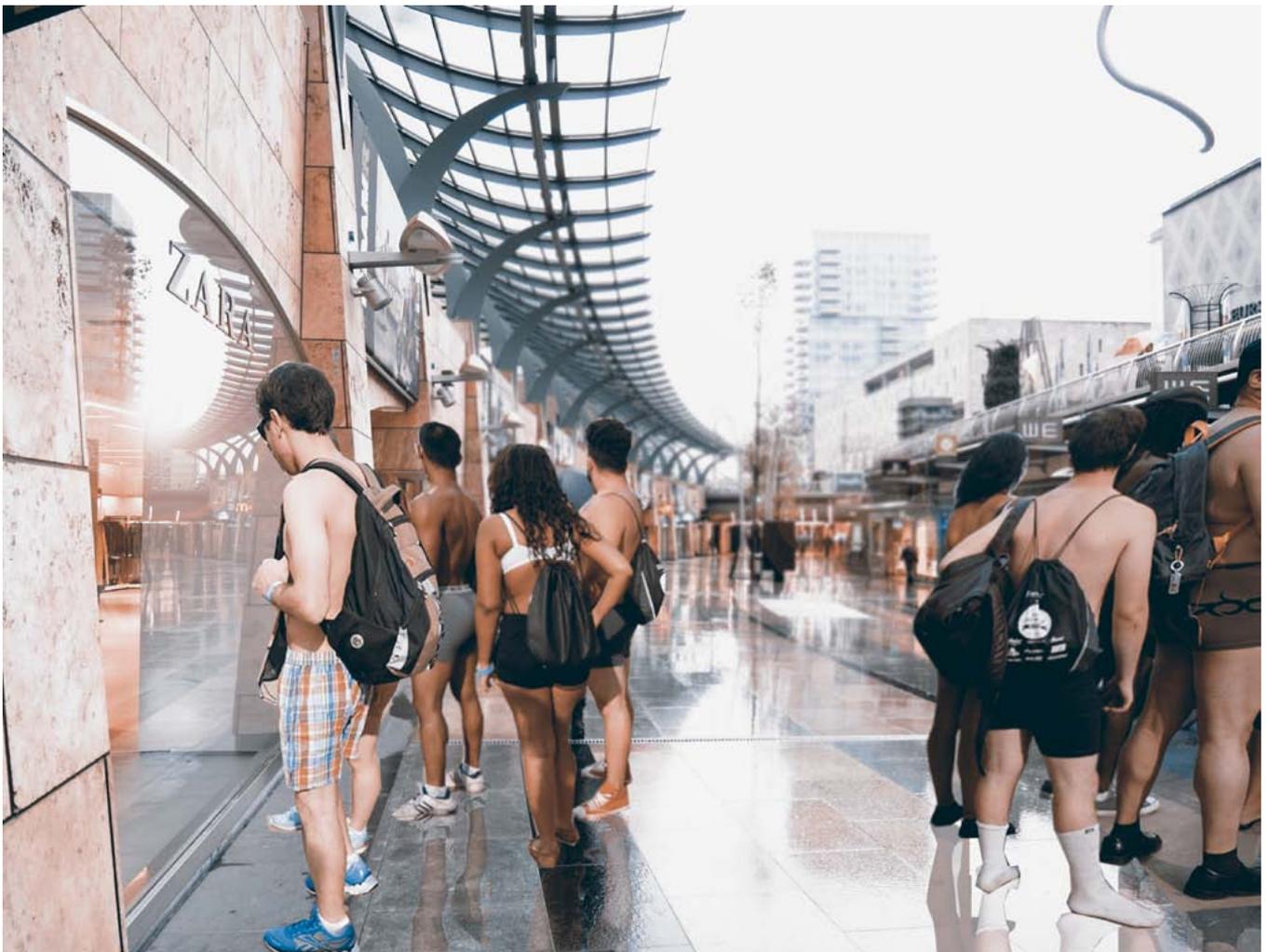


Photo collage 3. :

In the eyes of shoppers, the lack of a product equals to the need for possessing it. The mechanism of seeing = wanting is used in a merchandising strategy: showing = selling.

The first meeting of a potential buyer and his object of desire takes place through the cold surface of the shopping window, which is the equivalent of a market stall.

Behind the display, on the Beustraverse hides the underground shopping network. The illuminated glass is therefore a vestibule of the consumer paradise. To follow Jean Baudrillard:

“that specific space, which is the shop-window - neither inside nor outside, neither private nor wholly public, and which is already the street while maintaining, behind the transparency of its glass, the distance, the opaque status of the commodity - is also the site of a specific social relation. Tracking along the shop-windows, with their calculated riot of colour, which is always at the same time a frustration, this hesitation - waltz of shopping is the Kankan dance in which goods are exalted before being exchanged. Objects and products are offered there in a glorious mise-en-scene, a sacralizing ostentation (...) This symbolic, silent exchange between the proffered object and the gaze, is clearly an invitation to real, economic exchange inside the shop.”

Salon des Refusés



Photo collage 4. :

None of these activities can be found on the Beurstraverse. They are forbidden by shopping mall regulations.

The street life on Beustraverse is vibrant and rewarding, but limited to the opening times of shops and only one type of users: the shoppers. It is a simulated reality, where privacy is exchanged for the feeling of security and a range of activity is limited to one: going shopping. The unwanted behaviour (from an economic point of view), like doing sports or walking the dog is not only discouraged by the lack of suitable facilities, but also forbidden by the internal regulations. In case someone would like to sit on stairs or slide on a ramp, he should expect in no time a visit from a mall guard, who will kindly ask the outcast to leave this tabernacle of consumerism. With no place for gathering around living statues and buskers, chatting in an outdoor cafe or simply resting, the street loses its status of a place to meet people. Instead, it becomes a place to admire objects.

For the imperfect client, a creative planner of his own day and a claimant of a space, the place to be, is outside of the magic circle of the Beustraverse. To be in control of ones path, choices and actions, is a privilege of the escapee from the greedy hands of the shopping machine.

References:

Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings*

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City

www.jerde.com/about.html