

NEW CATHEDRALS OF CONSUMPTION FOR GERMAN CAR MAKERS

Autostadt as a built metaphor

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German automobile manufacturers have been busy revitalizing their relations with their customer base by designing and developing new showrooms and flagship stores. In many cases these include museums, restaurants and other leisure attractions under the same roof. Beyond the extension of the production sphere with consumption spaces, the erected consumption spaces are all about the ‘experience economy’ which has become en vogue during the past ten years. Autostadt from Volkswagen, located near Wolfsburg in Germany, is a good example. The paper will describe the various aspects of this case and compare them to the projects of the other German car makers. The business chain is undergoing a shakeup, resulting in the emergence of a new spatial network of consumer activities. Producers are looking for distribution opportunities and at the same time the consumption sphere is filled with ‘leisure’ and ‘experiences’. The paper will shed some historical light on the new cathedrals of consumption, and notes that this metaphor is wearing thin in places. The concept of ‘adjacent attraction’ (Sennett) was helpful to analyse the importance of the new architecture of the automotive industries in to pinpoint the various marketing ambitions. The empirical material for this article came from our systematic observation of German cases. Also interviews were held with three architects who were involved in the design (Henn, Qua, Van Berkel) and with various representatives of the brands in Germany.

NUEVAS CATEDRALES DE CONSUMO DESDE EL MERCADO ALEMÁN DEL AUTOMÓVIL

La industria automotriz alemana ha buscado revitalizar las relaciones con sus clientes a través del diseño y desarrollo de nuevos espacios de exhibición y tiendas insignia. En muchos casos el mismo techo incorpora museos, restaurantes y otras atracciones de ocio. Mas allá de la extensión de la esfera de la producción a los espacios de consumo, estos últimos se inscriben en la «economía de la experiencia» que se ha impuesto durante los diez últimos años. Autostadt de Volkswagen, localizada cerca de Wolfsburg en Alemania, nos ofrece un buen ejemplo. Este artículo describe los varios aspectos de este caso y lo compara con otros proyectos del mercado alemán del automóvil. La cadena de negocios está experimentando una reorganización que lleva a la emergencia de una nueva red espacial de actividades de consumo. Los fabricantes están buscando oportunidades de distribución y al mismo tiempo la esfera de consumo se llena con «ocio» y «experiencias». El artículo aporta alguna clarificación histórica a las nuevas catedrales del consumo y resalta como esta metáfora se está agotando en algunos casos. El concepto de ‘atracción adyacente’ (Sennett) resulta útil al analizar la importancia de la nueva arquitectura en la industria automovilística y para precisar las variadas ambiciones del marketing. La sistemática observación de casos alemanes ha servido de material documental. También las entrevistas con tres arquitectos (Henn, Qua, Van Berkel) involucrados en el diseño y con varios representantes de marcas en Alemania.

Key words

German car industry, architecture, theming, marketing, experience economy

GERMAN AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS HAVE BEEN busy revitalizing their relations with their customer base by designing and developing new showrooms and flagship stores. In many cases these include museums, restaurants and other leisure attractions under the same roof. Autostadt from Volkswagen, located near Wolfsburg in Germany, is a good example. The business chain is undergoing a shakeup, resulting in the emergence of a new spatial network of consumer activities. Producers are looking for distribution opportunities and at the same time the consumption sphere is filled with 'leisure' and 'experiences'. The paper sheds some historical light on the new cathedrals of consumption, and notes that this metaphor is wearing thin in places.

Shop types that have arisen since the beginning of the nineteenth century such as shopping arcades, department stores and even shopping malls have often been compared to cathedrals and palaces.¹ There is much to be said for that, for they imitate their religious and aristocratic forebears with large, high-ceilinged interiors and lavish decorations. Milan's gigantic Galleria, the immense dome of the Printemps store in central Paris and the huge atrium in the Mall of America near Minneapolis USA all represent this approach in their different ways. They are retail spaces you literally have to look up to – just like churches and palaces. Palaces and cathedrals were obvious metaphors for shops like these. They made new socio-economic developments acceptable

to the developer, the retailer and the consuming public alike. Metaphors serve often enough as lubricants of social change.

The American sociologist Richard Sennett analysed medieval cathedrals in terms of social boundaries. The cathedral represented a safe haven of order for the congregation amid the chaos of the surrounding town. As we know, the faithful get their reward only after death. The social unity which in Sennett's view has been lost is thus restored posthumously.² With regard to the consumption of goods in today's shops, this question takes on somewhat earthly dimensions. The vertical relationship between the worshipper and his God has tipped over to a horizontal one between the consumer and the product on the shelf. The satisfaction of needs is no longer a postponed state of bliss but an immediate one – except in that the goods must first be paid for at the checkout. The spacious arcade, the heavenly vaulting of the department store and the cavernous shopping mall atrium are no more than backdrops for that climax. These imposing retail spaces are often literally within our grasp; they have become functional spaces which no longer force us to look up at them. The moving stairway has made it possible to traverse the space with serenity, so that we may easily imagine ourselves as omnipotent beings in the postmodern retail atrium; having reached the top floor we gaze down on our own sort and thus on ourselves.³

1 See *inter alia* CROSSICK, G. & JAUMAIN, S. (ed.): *Cathedrals of Consumption. The European Department Store, 1850-1939*. Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999; CRAWFORD, M.: 'The World in a Shopping Mall'. In: Sorkin, M. (ed.) *Variations on a Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1992, 3-30.; FALK, P. & CAMPBELL, C. (ed.): *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage Publications, 1997; GARDNER, C. & SHEPPARD, J.: *Consuming Passion. The Rise of Retail Culture*. London: Unwin Hayman, 1989, pp. 95-125.

2 SENNETT, R.: *The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities*. New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1990.

3 Gardner and Shepperd *op cit.* followed, at first sight, a similar track of reasoning. The 'cathedral' has been considered as an metaphor, but within the sphere of consumption the relationship between the consumer and his 'God' is different. What is important, they stated, is the 'participatory' relationship (p. 125) between the consumer and the shop and this participation represent (more) 'democracy'. A few comments: 1) The hypothesis of democracy has been researched and falsified by Lizabeth Cohen in her book about mass consumption in the United States (COHEN, L.: *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-war America*. New York: Vintage Books, 2003). Mass consumption has always had the meaning of economic buying power, but no real political representation was implied. 2) Several analyses have made clear that the result of modern and post-modern consumption is moving towards the direction of 'doing' instead of 'having', meaning that the shopping process itself has become more important than the goods purchased (DAVIS, D.: *A History of Shopping*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966; Crawford *op cit.*;



1. Green environment of Autostadt near Wolfsburg, Germany (Photo: Dion Kooijman, Delft, 2003).

The function of the metaphorical form language must here be sought primarily in what Sennett has termed an 'adjacent attraction'. The architecture is required to compensate for the 'poor' (in other words, standardized) products of industrial manufacturing.⁴ The attractor thus consists primarily of the shop rather than the products it sells, although much the same could of course be said about the packaging of those products. The use-value of the products have been suspended for a while. A more detailed analysis of the cathedral metaphor reveals that the analogy with shop types often falls flat. The familiar guise of the metaphor has often enough served as a disguise for genuine social innovation.

The brief for the Munich firm Henn Architekten was to make Wolfsburg attractive to potential Volkswagen purchasers.⁵ Their answer was Autostadt. A metaphor is at play here as before, but

now it is one that links the 'city' ('Stadt' in German) to vehicle consumption. Wolfsburg houses Volkswagen's main factory, the largest car plant in the world with a daily output of some 3,500 to 4,000 cars. The town of Wolfsburg is pre-eminently a home for Volkswagen employees and has little to offer non-residents. The requirement for something 'extra' was inspired largely by the marketing objectives of the vehicle marque. A brand image consists nowadays of emotion and subjective experience. Emotion here means the nonrational aspects of buying behaviour, while subjective experience relates to the extensive perceptions constructed around the brand. An emphasis on the experience is an attempt to disconnect consumption from daily preoccupations and to redefine it as a leisure activity. There is little ground to be gained on competitors in technical respects, the marketeers agree; but emotions and experiences can make all the difference. The management gurus Joseph Pine and James Gilmore set the tone for this in their book *The Experience Economy*.⁶ Consider car advertising: the message is nowadays seldom about horsepower or top speed, but instead about accessories such as navigation systems, the leisure uses of the vehicle or simply a sexy image. German car manufacturers like Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz have for years been offering purchasers the option to collect their new vehicles from the factory in person, and in practice 35% of German customers take advantage of this opportunity. All that was required, in effect, was to dress up the logistic happening; and the use of a city metaphor was the first step in this direction.

KOOIJMAN, D.: *Machine and Theatre. Design Concepts for Shop Buildings [Machine en theater. Ontwerpconcepten van winkelgebouwen]*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999; BENSON, A. L. (ed.) *I Shop, Therefore I am: Compulsive Buying and the Search for Self*. Lanham, Ma/Oxford: Jason Aronson, 2000). The issues of compulsive buying, the phenomenon of 'de-shopping', the importance of shopping for personal and group identities are related to the subject. 3) What is 'participatory' is the involvement in life-style groups and specific market-segments; I will elaborate the issue with the concept 'consumer-shareholder' and the analyses of Autostadt and Gläserne Manufaktur.

4 SENNETT, R.: *The Fall of Public Man*. London/Boston, Faber & Faber, 1977, p. 148.

5 Interview with Henn Architekten (Gunter Henn and Jan Esche), Munich, 14 February 2004.

6 Pine and Gilmore are obviously speculating about social evolution. Experiences are fourth in a chain of developmental stages. They have been emerged after commodities, goods/products, and services have become in use. Each new stage makes the former obsolete. Pine and Gilmore also stated that the trade of experiences will make the escape from price competition possible. The history of retail however has showed a quite different, multi-layered development an not the absolute extremes Pine and Gilmore have propositioned. PINE, J. B. & GILMORE, J. H.: *The Experience Economy*. Harvard Business School Press, 1999.

Consumer-shareholders

Autostadt is a different kind of consumption space from the above-mentioned shopping arcades, department stores and shopping malls. To start with, it is not a conventional (separate) retail outlet but one which is tied to a single manufacturer. It no longer involves shopkeepers selling goods on their own account and at their own risk, but manufacturers who have taken over the retail function. This is remarkable in that a separate economic branch of retailing has been the favoured trading model for some two hundred years; the distribution of consumer goods was believed to take place most efficiently without the interference of manufacturers. Nearly all the familiar shops and formulas are based on this principle. During the last two decades we have become familiar with the so-called factory outlet stores and factory outlet centers – distribution extensions of several producers – but what is conspicuous is the high-end quality of Autostadt.

A second phenomenon of growing importance is what I would term the consumer-shareholder. Consumption has taken control over production. Market researchers are constantly probing for details of consumer preferences and hammering them into new or modified products and formulas. The market-

ing is carried out along the new borders of life-style representing a plethora of niches and segments.⁷ It all happens a breakneck speed, and is referred to nowadays as a demand-driven market. In the process, consumers have considerably expanded their territory in recent years – not only as to the volume of goods consumed but also in that consumption has become a criterion of many social activities. We not only consume products and shops, for example, but TV programmes and political parties. The consumer has usurped the citizen, it would seem.⁸

In cases where consumers participate in the financial risk of an enterprise, they are often also shareholders. There are plenty of those around nowadays. Manuel Castells draws a picture of a ‘management elite’ of employees who participate in the future of their employing company.⁹ In my view, this symptomizes a much more widespread phenomenon. To start with, those of us who fill in our own income tax returns know that the taxman assumes a fictional return of 4% on capital.¹⁰ Modest though this amount is, ordinary savings accounts rarely offer an interest rate as high as that. Only investment in equity holds out the prospect of a higher return. Shares in vehicle companies, which may be concealed in an equity fund from a bank or insurance company, are one possibility. Incidentally, the professionals have

7 Already in the late twenties, the car industry became consumer directed. But, at that time, this new orientation was towards a mass market. In the seventies and eighties different and separated markets showed up. COHEN, L.: *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-war America*. New York: Vintage Books, 2003; GARTMAN, D.: ‘Three Ages of the Automobile: the Cultural Logics of the Car’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2004, vol. 21, 4/5, pp. 169-196.

8 Michael Sorkin was about one of the first who recognised the confluence of city and consumption. In *Variations of a Theme Park* (1992) - the book he edited - several scholars analysed in depth this new phenomenon. Several authors noted the nearly endless duplication of images in leisure and retail spaces, which is relevant considering metaphors as specific examples of duplication. Boyer suggested that a ‘feeling of social insecurity seems to breed a love of simulation’. Images of e.g. a heroic past offer ‘a reassuring anchor’ (BOYER, M. C.: ‘Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport’. In: SORKIN, M. (ed.) *Variations on a Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1992, p. 187, p. 195). Crawford (*op cit.*, p. 12) indicated a close, more fundamental, relationship between consumption and identity: “If the world is understood through commodities, then personal identity depends on one’s ability to compose a coherent self-image through the selection of a distinct personal set of commodities”. Cf. Ward and Gold who – more in general – considered “Cliché and repetition as understandable, with respect to limited promotional budgets” (GOLD, J.R. & WARD, S.V. (ed): *Place Promotion. The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1994, p. 4).

9 CASTELLS, M.: *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

10 This part of Dutch income tax policies since 2002.



2. Selbstabholung Mercedes, Mercedes Benz Customer Centre in Sindelfingen, near Stuttgart.
Photo: Henk van der Veen, Delft, 2004.

already recognized for some years how influential small investors can be on the ups and downs of the financial markets, having been responsible for triggering a number of crises. These crises can in turn have a crucial impact on individual investors.¹¹

Autostadt

The economy and consumption have in effect been short-circuited in several ways. A hybrid conglomerate of demand and supply factors has developed, each showing certain hybrid features in its own right. After all, the car makers have set up shop; and the consumer shops around – often uninhibited by brand

loyalty – for goods as diverse as cars, leisure packages and shares. The Wolfsburg Autostadt raises many questions. What consequences will Autostadt have for geographic space? What similarities and differences are there between the German car makers Volkswagen, Audi, Mercedes, BMW and Porsche? How do architects and other designing disciplines adapt to the car manufacturers' policies? Perhaps the most important question, however, is to what extent does marketing dominate the architecture and urban design of consumption spaces? And what implications do all these developments have for countries outside Germany?

Autostadt consists of ten buildings in park-like surroundings. This green environment gives

¹¹ James Farrell observes considerable dissavings in American households, probably the combined effect of high-level consumption and the devaluation of shares. FARRELL, J. F.: *One Nation under Goods. Malls and the Seductions of American Shopping*. London/Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003.

Autostadt a rather suburban character. The Autostadt 'city' is situated opposite the railway station and alongside Volkswagen's existing manufacturing facility. Each of the company's marques has its own building: Audi, Bentley, Lamborghini, Seat, Skoda and Volkswagen itself are presented separately. There is also a museum giving an overview of Volkswagen history. The new vehicles awaiting collection by their new owners are parked in two transparent cylinders, each as tall as a block of flats. A miniature railway conveys interested visitors on a behind-the-scenes tour of the Volkswagen factory. The marque thereby demonstrates that it has nothing to hide.¹² The architecture of the individual buildings underlines this principle by draping itself in glass curtain walls. There is also a hotel at the edge of the park to accommodate multi-day visits.

Autostadt's 'adjacent attraction' starts, however, at the entrance hall, which is linked to the railway station by a footbridge. Here it is not only the cathedral-like height that impresses but also the depth. A glass floor offers a view underfoot of colourfully rotating globes of the world. Those who are not yet satisfied by the visual consumption of this spectacular space are free to turn left towards the shop or right towards the restaurant. The tour for new car owners follows a route from the impressive entrance lobby to the *Kundenzentrum* (customer centre) where the purchaser finally takes possession of his or her new vehicle. On the way it passes the *Zeithaus* (museum) and the pavilions for individual marques. All this is free of charge for new car purchasers; tourists and museum visitors have to pay. Autostadt opened in the summer of 2000.

Autostadt was created for the 2 million temporary 'residents' who pass through annually. The planned volume of visitors made it imperative to design it for

efficiency. A well-planned visitor route and smooth flow patterns were major considerations. To this end, the designers carefully studied existing examples such as Disneyland, Futuroscope and Nike Town. But at heart, the well-designed visitor route is like that in a supermarket. The guided tour traverses the park clockwise; the guide has his group of visitors in his supermarket trolley, so to speak, and wheels them along the shelves of the marque pavilions.¹³ A cluster of 20 to 30 visitors passes every 45 minutes. At the end of the tour, the new car, designed of course with a feeling for proportions, awaits in the *Kundenzentrum*. The new owners gather on a platform and gaze down on the assembled vehicles. They are then summoned one by one to descend and take possession. The customer is king or God - if only for the moment.

Glass

Volkswagen's 3D marketing is not restricted to Autostadt. Autostadt is more or less the theme park for quite an amount of visitors. All the brands are present. The marketing message, here, is directed to potential future consumers (kids accompanied by their parents) or to current customers (owners collecting their new cars at the factory). Of course these two groups are often combined in one visit. The company has strengthened its ties with its customers in two other ways as well. In Dresden, they built the *Gläserne Manufaktur* (The Glass Factory), a stylish glass box in which they construct the Phaeton (VW's top of the range model) on an assembly line floored with parquet (including the conveyor). *Gläserne Manufaktur* is a special factory, representing the high-end of a market segment and combining the spheres

12 See also: BARNSTONE, D.A.: *Transparency in Postwar German politics and Architecture*. Delft: Delft University of Technology, 2004.

13 The comparison with a supermarket, here, is a bit more than just a metaphor. The design has provided the well-known efficient shop-layout. The American super-market Piggly Wiggly may be considered as the prototype: turnstiles at the beginning and end of the store impose the one-way direction and the positioning of the shelves at an angle of 90 degrees of the store front provide the cashier maximum overview. The store opened in 1917 and its design was patented in 1920 (KOOIJMAN, op cit.). The Ikea-stores illustrate that this type of shop-layout is not restricted to supermarkets. Now we see the same kind of efficiency in leisure parks and projects like Autostadt.



3. Assembly line in Gläserne Manufaktur, build for construction of the Phaeton.
Photo: Henk van der Veen, Delft, 2003.

of both production and consumption. The building has turned production into a real experience, according to the VW-company. In the centre of Berlin, too, at the corner of Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse, there is *VW Forum*; a showroom for all the company's current models - once again with large areas of glass. *VW Forum* is not just an ordinary showroom, but also showing the presence of the brand in the centre of a big city.

Glass is a material that both separates and connects. Large panes of clear glass began appearing as shop display windows from the mid nineteenth century onwards.¹⁴ Glazing optically connects the consumer with the product; in other words, it puts wealth within grasping distance if only visually.

Besides shutting out all kinds of climatic inconvenience, the glass window delays actual possession of the goods until the purchaser has paid for them. Some 150 years ago, when the department stores first began to turn their whole premises into shop displays, shoppers sometimes proved incapable of distinguishing between the two above mentioned aspects of glass. Retailers complained frequently about shoplifting. The specific knowledge needed to distinguish visual from economic possession was not yet universal.

The glass walls of the *Gläserne Manufaktur* disclose a comprehensive functional programme: the reception lobby, the restaurant, the glass cylinder containing cars ready for handover and, of course,

14 PEVSNER, N.: *A History of Building Types*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1976; VAN DER GRINTEN, E.F.: *Shop Windows of the 19th Century in Western Cities [Negentiende-eeuwse winkelpuien in westerse steden]*. Nijmegen: Radboud University, 1980.

Table 1: Overview 'factory outlets' German car brands

| Name | Brand | Main characteristics* | Location | Year |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------|
| Audi Forum | Audi (Volkswagen) | Car handover centre, museum | Ingolstadt | 1989 |
| BMW Welt | BMW | Restaurant/theater, car handover centre | München | 2006 |
| Customer Center | Porsche | Racetrack, car handover centre | Leipzig | 2002 |
| Mercedes Welt | Mercedes | (New) museum, car handover centre, restaurant/theater | Stuttgart | 2006 |
| Autostadt | Volkswagen | Car handover centre, museum, restaurant/theater | Wolfsburg | 2000 |
| Gläserne Manufaktur | Volkswagen | Production space, restaurant/theater, car handover centre | Dresden | 2001 |
| VW Forum | Volkswagen | Showroom | Berlin | 2001 |

*All brands are looking for a complete package of services: delivery space, museum, restaurant etc. Everything must be there. The main characteristics of the project are listed in the first position. All locations are in Germany.

the assembly plant. The glass is also intended to convey a message: Volkswagen is making a show of its concern for 'sustainability' and its culture of employee job satisfaction. Sustainability has been put to effect in the principle of the assembly plant, and the car components are delivered to the plant on the non-polluting *Strassenbahn* (tram). Working in teams on a rotating scheme reduces the monotony of work for the employees and allegedly raises job satisfaction. The professed principles are emphasized by the quasi-domestic styling of the parquet-clad production line. 'What you see is what you get' is now a familiar slogan, but it's only actually true when you lack the relevant knowledge. The components delivered to the plant are fabricated elsewhere in 'normal', smelly factories. The clean electric tram, once out of Dresden, is relieved of its task by polluting diesel

lorries. Even the most honest of purchasers is thus transformed into an environmental felon.

The other German car marques have similar projects. See Table 1 for an overview.¹⁵ Audi was first in 1989, constructing its 'Audi Forum' on the outskirts of Ingolstadt. The project combines the *Selbstabhöhlung* (car handover centre) with a museum, a shop, a restaurant and a factory tour. Since 1996, the hangar format of the *Kundenzentrum* has become the architectural hallmark of all dealers worldwide. Henn Architekten took on most of the designing work. Porsche built a factory near Leipzig for its new Cayenne model. Customers are free to test-drive the cars on the factory's own race circuit. Van Gerkan, Marg & Partners, renowned for many station designs, sketched a building shaped like a pulpit.¹⁶

15 My source of data was the interviews I conducted with representatives of various German vehicle manufacturers in February and March 2004. I visited the projects of Volkswagen in Wolfsburg, Dresden and Berlin in May 2003. For the Dutch situation and contribution, I benefited greatly from interviews with Porsche in Leusden, BMW in Leidschendam and Breda, Mercedes Benz in The Hague and Nieuwegein, Volkswagen/Audi (Wittebrug) in The Hague, design agency Qua in Amsterdam, and Ben van Berkel of UN Studio in Amsterdam.

16 MEYHÖFER, D.: *Motortecture. Architektur für Automobilität. Design for Automobility*. Ludwigsburg, Avedition, 2003.



4. The design by Ben van Berkel for Mercedes World in Stuttgart.
Source: UN Studio, Amsterdam, 2004.

Once again the ecclesiastical metaphor comes into play, now with the consumer as preacher.

BMW and Mercedes Benz are still working hard to catch up. The architects have been selected and the foundations have been laid. The Dutch architect Ben van Berkel of UN Studio designed a new museum building for Mercedes in the shape of a double helix, uniting the myth of Mercedes with the company's collection; and the collection has a great deal to offer, not in the last place because Benz is widely considered the inventor of the modern automobile. The design recalls that of the Guggenheim in New York. The visitor starts at the top where the oldest vehicles are on show, and descends via spiralling ramps to the earthbound level of today's models. For BMW, Coop Himmelblau designed a building that almost floats on air. The glass in this case emphasizes the immateriality of the marque. The ideas of the above-mentioned Pine and Gilmore are here almost literally illustrated.

New BMWs will in future be handed over to their purchasers in this building. The projects of Van Berkel and Coop Himmelblau are both scheduled for completion in mid 2006.

Mobility

The designs strongly underscore the idea of mobility. Mobility here applies not only to driving cars (obviously) but also to conducting streams of visitors around the vehicle museums and other buildings. The individual architects have their own emphases in this regard. Ben van Berkel stresses 'the dynamic and integral spatial concept' as the selection criterion (the phrase is quoted from his website). For the Austrian architect Coop Himmelblau and BMW, BMW Welt is intended as a 'portal' to all the company's other functions. This is not so much a matter of mobility as

of the related accessibility. The metaphor of mobility is, to put it bluntly, taken very literally in each case. This may well be the most significant difference from the cathedrals and palaces of bygone eras, and even from the arcades, department stores and malls of the last century and a half, because in those cases other meanings are additionally involved. Those consumptive spaces are not limited to 'mobility' in their meaning.

The car makers are bringing about a rearrangement of spatial activities. They draw consumptive activities in towards themselves, with the result that consumers consume and enjoy recreation in different places and at different times. This change also results in a realignment within the business chain. The dealers may be less concerned with marketing, and the transportation of new vehicles by road between the factory and the sales point is less frequent. Yet, dealers throughout the world are confronted with ever more severe regulations about the presentation of the models and the architecture of the building. Different cities consequently become important within the pattern and distribution of consumption: Wolfsburg and Dresden in the case of Volkswagen, Ingolstadt and Zwickau (Audi), Bremen, Regensburg and Stuttgart (Mercedes Benz), Munich (BMW) and Stuttgart and Leipzig (Porsche).¹⁷ New characteristics are thereby added to the existing network of cities with its countless meanings – Berlin as the 'city of politics', Stuttgart and Leipzig as 'commercial centres', Dresden, Leipzig and Munich as 'cultural cities'. All these cities enter into a relationship with one or more car manufacturers and vice versa. Existing urban structures are not written off. On the contrary, existing cultural values are intensified as far as possible. Car marques also try to do something for the city. Several marques explicitly flirt with the city's cultural significance. Examples of such new combina-

tions include Dresden-Volkswagen and Munich-BMW. Both these cities are famed for their musical and artistic life, and a tour of the factory is conveniently combined with a night at the opera or a museum visit. The 'adjacent attraction' is in this case already part of the existing context. The German car companies comply in this sense with the tradition of consumer cathedrals that has developed since the mid 19th century. There is one important difference however: the manufacturers now claim a significant presence in the consumptive realm.

The spatial effects are expected to be identifiable on various levels and scales. Firstly, the developments are taking place at the national scale of Germany. The sharing of functions between manufacturers and dealers is undergoing many changes on that scale. The market positioning of marques is primarily local. This is not so much a matter of industrial upscaling (i.e. fewer but larger dealers); this kind of scale growth is taking place in every country. The German marques lead a life in other countries which is different from that in Germany. A Porsche, for example, costs twice as much in Holland as in Germany. This means that the marque has to be surrounded with a mystique of wealth that does not strictly accord with the engineering under the bonnet. Architecture here once again facilitates a milieu of luxury that casts a sumptuous light on the marque itself. For the Dutch Porsche facility, the Amsterdam agency Qua decided on a 'pit stop' which harbours such brand attributes such as 'history', 'passion', 'reputation', 'dreams come true' and 'me'. No less than 12 brand attributes (each a combination of a pithy description and an image) are central to all the marketing presentation and design of Dutch Porsche. For Porsche, and also for Audi and for Volkswagen's Phaeton, architecture has played an explicit part in construction of the brand image. In the case of Mercedes Benz and BMW,

17 Most of the countries have different (well-known) combinations of industry and cities. Though the industrial characteristics have been changed or even disappeared, the combination is often still 'branding' the city. Spain has e.g. Valencia-Ford, Valladolid-Renault and Zaragoza-General Motors. Sorkin, *op cit*, pp. mentioned three characteristics of the post-modern theming: placeless, cocooning, surveillance & control, and simulations. One may conclude about a uniform strategy among various cities, but most of the examples in this paper, however, do not show the placeless characteristic. See also: HOLCOMB, B.: 'City make-overs: marketing the post-industrial city', In: GOLD, J. R. & WARD, S. V., *op cit.*, pp. 115-131.

Table 2: Brand pavilions in Autostadt*

| Brand | Values | Design and themed nature |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bentley | Aristocratic understatement | Plant covered hill, like a jewel in its setting. English oak. |
| Lamborghini | Unsubdued strength and pure automotive emotion | Black cube. Sweet chestnut tree. |
| Skoda | Security and honesty | Faceted pavilion, fanning out from the center. Lime tree from Bohemen. |
| Seat | Southern gaiety, innovation and quality | Sensually-sweeping, brilliantly white sculpture. |
| Audi | Design and elegance, selective exquisiteness | Interlocking rings. |
| Volkswagen | Classic modernity, evolution, democracy and perfection | Glass cube and sphere. Cheerful, yet though pioneering birch. |

*Source: Press release Volkswagen AG, *Architecture of Autostadt*, June 2000.

architecture plays at first sight a much more modest role; in these instances, the evolution of the brand and its physical context was crucial. But Mercedes and BMW also cherish the expectation that the prominent designs now being erected will have a long term effect on the image of the whole building stock. From a global standpoint, the interviewed representatives of the companies anticipate that the buildings will show more ‘movement’.

Without exception these factories and cities have huge ambitions. They want to be cultural, rich, high-end, responsible for the environment, historical, authentic, unique, etc. The use of glass may show one or more of these listed characteristics. There is hardly any metaphorical use of the material left here. ‘What you see is what you get’. But not a single critical or negative characteristic has been mentioned, of course.¹⁸ There is also a promise of an participatory

relationship between the consumer and the brand, but this promise do not differ much from the one connected with the glass shop windows of the mid nineteenth century. Today the architecture of the building has to contribute to brand awareness. Both the brand pavilions and even the landscaped nature of Autostadt have to express the ‘personality’ of the brands (Table 2). And because of the importance of brand awareness through architecture car brands are also imposing adapted regulations on dealers worldwide.

On one hand the experience economy tries to reach the already existing emotionality of consumers. The use of glass not only makes the brand visible, but sets the consumer in the spotlight too. On the other hand this seems even not enough. Some quotes from a recent article about place branding: ‘Place branding aims to *create* deep-rooted and genuine changes in

18 GOLD, J.R. & WARD, S.V. , *op cit.*, p. 2.

the make-up of a place'. Also: 'It has been driven by a political ambition to *change* the way people in the area live and reflect on their identity'. And: 'This plan builds on the intention to create and communicate the brand form the *inside out*'.¹⁹ Again, the aforementioned Pine and Gilmore have formulated this ambition the first time. Their book contains no doubt relevant trends and cases about the importance of

leisure in society today. But experiences represent just a provisional phase; they are after what they called 'transformations'. A change of individuals is their ultimate goal. "With transformations, *the customer is the product*".²⁰ They also stated that 'theater' and 'stage-set' are not metaphors for the experience economy but models. Transparency, then, implies imposed behaviour.²¹

19 PEDERSEN, S. B.: 'Place Branding: Giving the Region of Oresund a Competitive edge', *Journal of Urban Technology*, 2004, vol. 11, nr. 1, p. 78, p. 80; the italics are mine, DK.

20 PINE & GILMORE, *op cit.*, p. 172.

21 I started this paper with the common use of metaphors in the history of retail and more specific the metaphor of 'cathedrals'. Pine and Gilmore not literally stated, that customers and behaviour can be produced. But with the expression "The customer is the product", they are pretty close. They eventually left the production-issue to God. 'What could be the ultimate customer-as-product be? The utmost would be *perfection*, the perfect human being. According to our own worldview, there can be no sixth economic offering, because perfecting people falls under the province of God, the Author and Perfecter of our faith rather than in the domain of human business" (PINE & GILMORE, *op cit.*, p. 206).