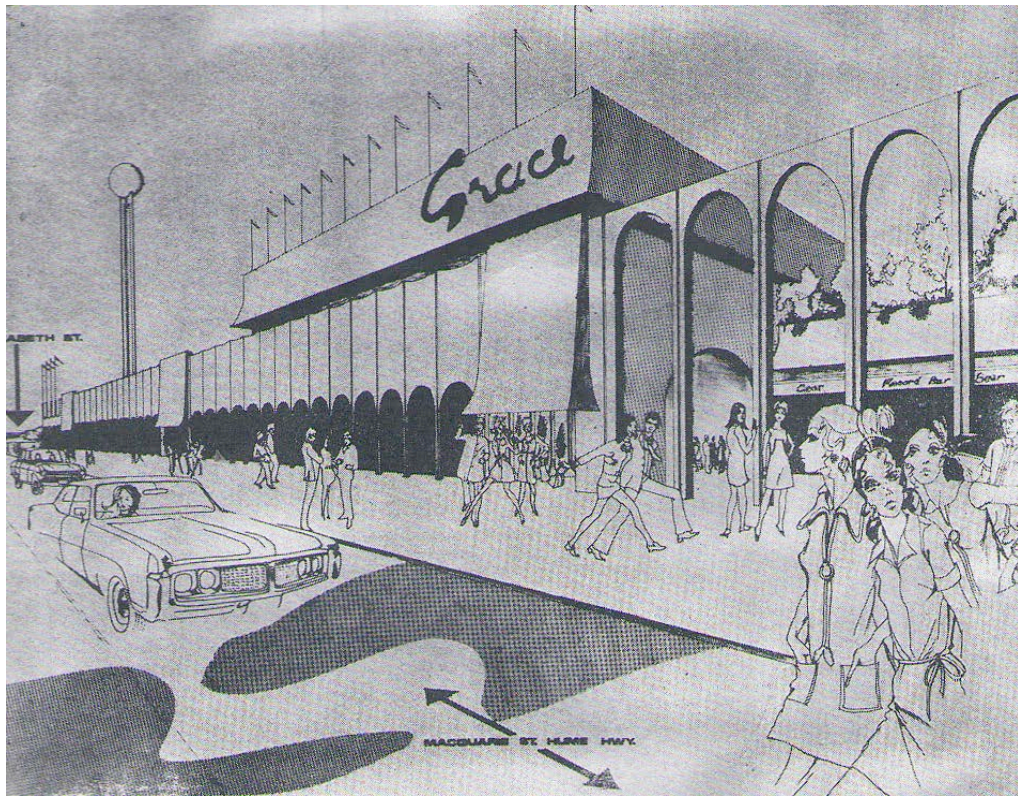


# Bringing ‘the city to the suburbs’

## Regional shopping centre development in Sydney, 1957-1994



Westfield Liverpool Shoppingtown, artist's depiction  
*City of Liverpool Leader*, 10 December 1969, p. 1.

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## Contents

	Synopsis	4
	Acknowledgements	6
	Introduction	7
1	The Prehistory of Australian Shopping Centres	22
2	Building Sydney's First Shopping Centres	42
3	Shopping in Sydney's Early Shopping Centres	78
4	How the West was Won: Retail Development in Sydney's Western Suburbs	114
5	The Consumption of Leisure at Macquarie Centre	161
6	Chatswood's 'Retail Battleground'	202
7	Westfield Eastgardens and Retail Employment	233
8	Building on a Good Thing: Shopping Centre Redevelopment, Institutionalisation and Homogenisation	267
9	Regional Shopping Centres and External Retailing	291
10	Leasing in Regional Shopping Centres	333
	Conclusion	370
	Bibliography	384
	Appendix A: Oral History Project Survey Questions	419
	Appendix B: Ethics Review Committee Final Approval	422

## Synopsis

This thesis traces the history of large pre-planned shopping centre development in Sydney, Australia. It begins with the pre-history of international and Australian retailing and the establishment of shopping malls in America that were built to accommodate the needs and desires of an affluent, car-driving population. It charts the establishment of the early shopping centres in Sydney, beginning with Top Ryde, which opened in 1957. Local histories of a number of centres demonstrate the westward spread of retailing in the 1970s, which accompanied the emergence of discount department stores in Australia. With the city largely staked out by the 1980s, the industry turned to expansions and refurbishments to consolidate existing developments. By the end of the decade, such expansions included multiplex cinemas and food courts, confirming the shopping centre as a site of leisure and entertainment.

Shopping centres have always been social destinations. From the 1960s to the present day, young people in particular have flocked to them as places to meet with friends and sample the latest goods on offer. Shopping centres have also been important social sites for women – the early centres were marketed almost exclusively to the housewife. As convenient, clean and safe environments that might also offer childcare facilities, they received a largely positive reception. This thesis uses oral histories, amongst other sources, to explore the social world of the shopping centre.

With success and expansion, came calls of retail saturation and abuses of market power. In the 1980s, pedestrianisation schemes were introduced to a number of Sydney suburbs in attempts to revive local retail. Meanwhile retailing associations pursued legislation aimed at curbing the power of the largest landlords. Both had mixed success, and neither halted the growth nor success of the industry.

Shopping centres form an important, as yet untold, component of Australia's social, economic and cultural history. This thesis explores their development, reception and impact in Sydney from the opening of Top Ryde in 1957 to the introduction of the NSW *Retail Leases Act* in 1994.

This thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Ethics Committee approval has been obtained for its oral history component (Protocol no.: HE25AUG2006-D04837)

This thesis is 97,068 words in length.

Matt Bailey

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To everyone who participated in the oral history component of this project, my sincere thanks, you had a fundamental influence on the story that was told.

## Introduction

Large pre-planned shopping centres were launched in Australia in the late 1950s, heralding a turning point in the nation's lifeways, leisure activities, and retailing activity. Providing a connecting link between the motorcar, consumption and the home, they serviced an increasingly affluent population. They were one of the key architectural forms of the post-war boom. Described by some as 'anywhere' spaces, they were nonetheless intimately connected to their surrounding environments through the people who shopped, worked and socialised within them. Economically they responded to and stimulated growth; politically and ideologically they signaled progress. To residents and shoppers, the early centres were 'exciting', 'modern' and transformative. Shopping centres epitomised a reinvigorated post-war consumer culture, and promised a social space for a new era.

Shopping centres came to Australia from the United States – the great font of twentieth-century consumer capitalism. If America held the reins of the global economy in the post-war era, it did so through its promulgation of consumer culture, reaping the rewards from the economy on which it was based.<sup>1</sup> Lizabeth Cohen has described America after World War II as a 'consumers' republic', in which individual spending was promoted as a national investment, creating jobs and ensuring prosperity.<sup>2</sup> This 'republic' spawned new urban forms, many built to accommodate the automobile – its first choice of transportation. Highways, roadside food outlets, motels, drive-in theatres and service stations were all created to service the car, and were then exported around the globe.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most exemplary of these new urban forms was the shopping centre.<sup>4</sup> Built for car-driving shoppers, it has been described by one commentator as 'the most

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<sup>1</sup> See Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), pp. 112-118.

<sup>3</sup> Graeme Davison with Sheryl Yelland, *Car Wars: How the Car Won Our Hearts and Conquered Our Cities* (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2004), p. 78; Noel Bell Ridley Smith & Partners Pty Ltd, 'Top Ryde Shopping Centre Demolition Report, Heritage Impact Statement', 30 October 2006, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Sally-Ann Murray, 'An Academic Milling Around 'The Mall': (De)constructing...' in *Critical Arts: A South North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1/2, 1997, pp. 153-177.

important space created by American society in our generation'.<sup>5</sup> After tentative forays between the wars and around the Great Depression, American development hit full steam in the late 1940s. By 1957, the country had 940 shopping centres. Ten years later, it had 8,000; by 1976, 17,520.<sup>6</sup> The total value of sales in American shopping centres in 1968 was \$68 billion.<sup>7</sup> In 1971, shopping centres accounted for over fifty percent of retail trade in twenty-one of America's largest metropolitan areas.<sup>8</sup> In 1972 sales topped \$117 billion, or one-third of total retail sales.<sup>9</sup> By 1977, eight of every ten new stores in America opened inside a major shopping centre.<sup>10</sup> In 1992 there were around 39,000 shopping malls in America.<sup>11</sup> Some 1990s' centres were so large they operated as tourist resorts, providing amusement parks and hotel accommodation for trade areas covering hundreds of square miles.<sup>12</sup>

Australia's post-war history is, at least in part, characterised by its engagement with America – from Curtin's iconic 'turn' after the fall of Singapore and subsequent defence alliances, to eagerly garnered business models, advertising techniques, manufacturing processes and technological innovations. Most obviously, the countries are linked through the spread of mass consumption. Shopping centres have a relationship with most of these influences: they symbolised the coming of modernity to Australian cities; supported the 'Australian way of life' that was positioned by conservatives against the communist Cold War threat; employed innovative construction techniques; reshaped retail geography; and used evolving marketing techniques to sell a broad range of mainstream consumer products, many initially manufactured in Australia but later, with globalisation, drawn from around the world.

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<sup>5</sup> R. Simon, 'The Formal Garden in the Age of Consumer Culture: A Reading of the Twentieth Century Shopping Mall', in Wayne Franklin and Michael Steiner (eds), *Mapping American Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), pp. 231-50, quoted in Carlos J. Lopes Balsas, 'Building Dreams of Mass-Consumption Across the Atlantic: A Comparative Study of Two Mega Malls', *Passages – Journal of Transnational and Transcultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2001, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, p. 258 cited in Paul Edwards, 'Reimagining the Shopping Mall: European Invention of the "American" Consumer Space', *U.S. Studies Online*, no. 7, Spring 2005, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> 'Shopping centres grow into shopping cities', *Australian Retailing*, vol. 5, no.11, January 1973, pp. 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *Reimagining the Shopping Mall*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> 'Shopping centres grow into shopping cities', *Australian Retailing*, vol. 5, no.11, January 1973, pp. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> 'Biggest U.S. retailer gets hit for \$10 million damages', *Inside Retailing*, no. 268, 25 April 1977, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, 'An Academic Milling', pp. 153-177.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Allan, 'Marion: A Study of a Super-Regional Centre and its Impact on Adelaide', *Urban Policy and Research*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1998, pp. 121-2; Nancy Backes, 'Reading the Shopping Mall City', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 31, no. 3, Winter 1997, p. 3.



This thesis focuses on pre-planned, 'regional' shopping centres in Sydney.<sup>13</sup> It begins substantively with the opening of Sydney's first regional centre, Top Ryde, in 1957, and concludes with the passing of the Retail Leases Act (NSW) 1994. Top Ryde closely followed the opening of Australia's first regional at Chermside near Brisbane. Myer's landmark Chadstone complex, ten miles from Melbourne, then opened in 1960. By 1969, around twenty regional and community shopping centres, as well as ten major department stores, had been built in Sydney's suburbs. Melbourne, dominated by Myer, had six new regional and community centres. Adelaide had seven, Brisbane six and Perth five. Smaller 'neighbourhood' centres also spread rapidly, with twenty-eight in NSW, five in Victoria, twelve in Queensland and eight in Western Australia.<sup>14</sup> In Sydney, regional centres following Top Ryde included Warringah Mall, Miranda Fair, Roselands, Burwood Shoppingtown and Bankstown Square – all of which opened between April 1963 and September 1966. Shopping centre development became a boom industry with department store companies and property developers scouring the suburbs of Australian cities for suitable sites on which to build.<sup>15</sup> In 1962, shopping centre construction, in its variety of sizes, was described by industry journal *The Retail Trader* as the major form of all new retail development in the country.<sup>16</sup> One developer described the industry as being 'in the forefront of the most exiting industrial development since mass production'.<sup>17</sup>

Shopping centres arrived in Australia with the maturation of the baby boom generation, riding the wave of post-war economic growth. They embodied and fostered middle class values and sensibilities, offering individualised consumption for suburban families in a secure, clean, air-conditioned and relatively homogenous environment. As they continued to attract key anchor stores and services off the street, they also became more

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<sup>13</sup> 'Regional' is an industry term reflecting a centre's size, range of shops and position at the top of the 'retail hierarchy' in a given area. See JLW Research and Consultancy, 'Examining Investment in Community Shopping Centres', Property Research Paper, September 1993, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> B. A. Grace (Managing Director of Grace Ltd. and President of Retail Traders Association of N.S.W.) quoted in *Australian Retailing* vol. 3 no. 1, April 1969, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> One *Bulletin* article described company directors studying maps of Sydney and its suburbs with 'the intensity of ... Napoleon[s] carving up Europe'. See Patricia Rolfe, 'Revolution in the Suburbs', *Bulletin*, 19 December 1964, p. 25, quoted in Peter Spearritt, 'I Shop Therefore I Am', in L. C. Johnson (ed.), *Suburban Dreaming: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Australian Cities* (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1994), pp. 134-5.

<sup>16</sup> Editorial, *Retail Trader*, vol. 44, no. 3, October 1962, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Benjamin, (Manager of A. J. Benjamins shopping centre at Top Ryde, addressing the 1958 Residential Conference of Retail Executives at Leura), *Retail Trader*, vol. 40, no. 5, December 1958, p. 44.

efficient in their management and control of tenants, invested heavily in promotions, grew in size, refurbished their premises to keep pace with changing community sensibilities, and added entertainment facilities such as multiplex cinemas and games arcades. Shopping centres became dominant players in the city's retail geography – drawing customers from near and far, increasingly by car. They became popular destinations for both leisure and shopping – often a combination of the two – bringing profound changes to the ways that Australians spend their time and money. While popular with many shoppers, their retail dominance has brought allegations of abuses of market power, government inquiries and eventually legislation aimed at protecting small tenants.

### *The historical literature on Australian shopping centres*

Despite their centrality to post-war social history and consumer culture, and their impact on the built environment, there is as yet no substantial history of the development of shopping centres in Australia. Retail history, too, is under-represented in academic literature – a somewhat surprising state of affairs for a consumer society. Those historians who have tackled retail history include in their works some of the best available material on shopping centre development, although this is necessarily limited in its scope and analysis due to their broader focus.

Kim Humphery approaches shopping centres through the prism of the supermarket; both were reflective of consumerism's consolidation in Australia in the 1960s. One-stop shopping had been a catch-cry of the supermarket, but it became even more effective when a supermarket located itself within a shopping centre. Humphery argues that supermarkets and shopping centres were heralded as vanguards of modernity in Australia, and that the men who built them saw themselves as active participants in 'the reframing of Australian social life'.<sup>18</sup> Both these claims are supported by evidence gathered for this thesis, and will be explored further in Chapters Two and Three.

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<sup>18</sup> Kim Humphery, *Shelf life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption* (Cambridge, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 114-18.

Humphery has also written specifically on the shopping centre, providing some historical background, through a cultural theorist's eye, to Melbourne Central.<sup>19</sup>

Like Humphery, Lindsay Barrett sees shopping centres as exemplars of modernity, promoted through nationalist and developmentalist discourse. Supporting literature that views consumerism as paradoxically empowering for women, he argues that shopping centres offered a unique and historically significant public space for women.<sup>20</sup> Meaghan Morris offers a feminist appraisal looking to go beneath the obvious homogeneity of shopping centres to unpack their differences. Morris provides site histories of selected shopping centres, tracing an accumulation of power over local retail geographies.<sup>21</sup> A similar methodology informs much of this thesis, with a number of case studies used to explore the larger themes of Sydney's shopping centre history. These explore the shopping centre as a built form and a business model, as well as people's subjective experiences of it, in order to position it within our social, economic and cultural history.<sup>22</sup> Part of this requires an assessment of the shopping centre's impact on retailing. Andrew Allan has used the 1990s expansions of the Marion centre in South Australia to consider its impact on surrounding retail. While his study is eventually inconclusive, it is a worthy attempt at a difficult issue, explored in this thesis in Chapter Nine.<sup>23</sup>

A number of historians have recognised the central importance of the car in the emergence of shopping centres. In her retail history of Australia, Beverley Kingston suggests that in the late 1950s, growing motorcar usage brought 'the most dramatic changes in two hundred years of shopping' in Australia.<sup>24</sup> Graeme Davison, too, argues that the key historical weight behind mall development was the motor car and the suburbanisation it fostered. He argues that the shopping centre incorporated a range of

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<sup>19</sup> Kim Humphery, 'A Stranger in Daimaru', *Meanjin*, vol. 53, no. 1, Autumn 1994, pp. 85–95.

<sup>20</sup> Lindsay Barrett, 'Roselands, or Everything Under One Roof', *UTS Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1998, pp. 123–38.

<sup>21</sup> Meaghan Morris, 'Things to Do With Shopping Centres', in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 393. There is also a different version of the article: Meaghan Morris, 'Things To Do With Shopping Centres', in Susan Sheridan (ed.), *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 193–225.

<sup>22</sup> For a similar approach, see Matthew Allen and Jane Long, 'Capturing Gender?: Identifying spaces in Perth's Forrest Chase', *Studies in Western Australian History*, no.17, 1997, p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Allan, 'Marion', p. 129.

<sup>24</sup> Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley: A History of Shopping in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 94–108.

emerging or developing technologies to achieve what for retail had ‘always... [been]... the underlying motive: realising the efficiencies of bringing products and consumers together into a mass retail market’.<sup>25</sup> In two (of the few) pieces specifically devoted to the history of Australian shopping centres, Peter Spearritt also argues that massive increases in post-war car ownership was central to their establishment. Spearritt traces a lineage of retail developments in Australia from the ‘great shopping streets’, through to cash-and-carry stores and then the shopping centre, noting that ‘the means of getting to a retail premises has an enormous influence on the nature and location of shopping’.<sup>26</sup>

The American shopping centre literature is voluminous. The pick of the early literature is Victor Gruen and Larry Smith’s 1960 study, *Shopping Towns USA*. Gruen, as we see in Chapter One, was the acknowledged father of shopping mall design, and his fascination with history is evident throughout the book. He traces human interaction in the marketplace through the ancient, medieval and modern worlds, only to find it lost with the car and suburban sprawl in post-war America. Malls, for Gruen, were an attempt to bring human scale and engagement back to American suburban landscapes, which he saw as barren and alienating.<sup>27</sup>

A groundbreaking work in the 1980s was William Kowinski’s *Malling of America* – a personal, journalistic account of his investigative tour of American malls. Kowinski became critical, but recognised the mall as seminal to American life, particularly as a social space for youth.<sup>28</sup> Lizabeth Cohen is perhaps the other most prominent American writer in the field. She has written about malls specifically in an American Historical Association special edition on the subject.<sup>29</sup> Her *Consumers’ Republic* also discusses the emergence and growth of malls. She traces the well-trodden history in which motorcar usage, suburbanisation and affluence combine to form the conditions from

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<sup>25</sup> Graeme Davison, ‘From the Market to the Mall’, Background Report, Victorian Retail Policy Review, Department of Planning and Community Development, December 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Spearritt, ‘I Shop Therefore I Am’, p. 130; Peter Spearritt, ‘Suburban Cathedrals: The Rise of the Drive-in Shopping Centre’, in Graeme Davison, Tony Dingle and Seamus O’Hanlon (eds), *The Cream Brick Frontier: Histories of Australian Suburbia* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash Publications in History, 1995), pp. 88-107.

<sup>27</sup> Victor Gruen and Larry Smith, *Shopping Towns USA: The Planning of Shopping Centers* (New York: Reinhold, 1960).

<sup>28</sup> William Severini Kowinski, *The Malling of America: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise* (New York: W. Morrow, c1985).

<sup>29</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, ‘From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 4, October 1996, pp. 1050-1081.

which the shopping centre industry grew. Her unique contribution is provided through her positioning of the mall within America's growing public consciousness of consumer spending as a public good – generating jobs, security and prosperity.<sup>30</sup> Australia awaits a parallel work on the evolution of consumer consciousness, but Cohen's analysis of the mall provides a valuable point of comparison and is used in a number of places throughout this thesis.

There are numerous useful theses on which the retail historian can draw. The two most valuable for this thesis have been Terrence Beed's 'The Growth of Suburban Retailing in Sydney' and Graham White's, 'The Changing Nature of Planned Regional Shopping Centres in Sydney in the 1980s'.<sup>31</sup> Both belong to the field of human geography. The former provides a comprehensive study of Sydney's retail geography in the early 1960s, the latter an overview of the changes occurring in shopping centre development in the 1980s.

#### *Sources on Australian shopping centres*

Extending from this secondary literature, this thesis draws on a wide range of sources to trace the impact and reception of shopping centres in Sydney. Local newspapers provide invaluable accounts of grand opening days, the words of political and community leaders, industry promotions, and details about specific developments. Metropolitan papers provide less frequent reports, but again offer useful commentary on the bigger shopping centre openings. Retail trade journals from the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s have been used extensively to provide the viewpoint of independent, chain and major retailers, as well as developers and their representative bodies. For the period covered by this thesis, contributors to these journals are remarkably candid and open in their discussion of retail and the impact of shopping centres upon it. International reports frequently found their way into the early Australian journals, and there is detailed discussion, from numerous perspectives, on key industry issues. These trade journals

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<sup>30</sup> Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*.

<sup>31</sup> Terrence W. Beed, 'The Growth of Suburban Retailing in Sydney: A Preliminary Study of Some Factors Affecting the Form and Function of Suburban Shopping Centres', PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 1964, vol. 1 and 2; Graham S. White, 'The Changing Nature of Planned Regional Shopping Centres in Sydney in the 1980s', Masters Geoscience Thesis, Macquarie University, 1989.

are a largely untapped goldmine for the historian, and an essential source for any Australian retail history.

Reports by government bodies offer quantitative analysis and historical detail. This thesis has drawn upon investigations into traffic congestion, tenancy conditions and leases, types and lengths of shopping trips and the economic impact of shopping centres. Planning reports by the Cumberland County Council (CCC) and the State Planning Authority of New South Wales (SPA) contextualise both retail and shopping centre development, providing the planning frameworks within which development took place. Consultants' reports for local government bodies add further detail at a municipal level on many of the same issues. They also offer a view into the concerns surrounding development held by councils and aldermen, including the retail health of local shopping precincts. These also become clear in the records and minutes of meetings from selected Municipal Councils that have been used to explore debates behind development.

The Coles Myer Archive held at the State Library of Victoria is an invaluable source for retail history. It holds the records of the two department stores most involved in Sydney's shopping centre development – Grace Bros and Myer. In addition it has records for one of the remaining major supermarket chains, Coles, as well as two of the biggest three discount department stores, Target and K mart. This voluminous resource offered abundant material for this thesis. Unfortunately records for other major retailers such as Woolworths and David Jones are not available to outside researchers.

Annual reports, promotional material and commissioned histories provide information on businesses, their specific projects and the attitudes or policies that drove them. Building Owners and Management Association (BOMA) publications and journals add to this information pool as well as providing a broader industry perspective. Company histories and industry biographies, some verging on the hagiographical, provide insights into company policies and personal philosophies. Other secondary material drawn upon includes Australian and international urban histories, and material on specific themes such as employment, consumerism and suburbanisation, and Australian social, economic and cultural history.

These sources, pieced together, create a complex picture of shopping centre development in Sydney. The broad influences behind the shopping centre model, the motivations for specific developments, the media coverage of centre openings, the welcoming words of the political elite, the voice of the industry, the gripes of small retailers and the business philosophies of the largest, all come through in relative degrees of clarity or persistence. Missing from the story, though, are the thoughts, attitudes and practices of the people who visit shopping centres, work within and live around them.

### *The oral history of shopping centres*

To fill this gap, an oral history project was designed to record the written testimony of the shopping public.<sup>32</sup> This was recorded via a survey website, which was set up with a series of questions as well as a free-form option for recording miscellaneous or unaccounted for responses. There were three banks of questions – listed in Appendix A – separated for customers, retailers and employees, and developers. While the first drew almost 100 responses, the second brought only a few, and the last nothing at all. While the latter was not, in hindsight, surprising, the second was a little disappointing. Fortunately retail trade journals provided substantial contributions from both retailers and developers.

The survey requested some brief biographical detail, and asked people for their recollection of any major shopping centre openings; how they spent their time in shopping centres; if they felt they had a say in the development of shopping facilities in their area; how major shopping centres had changed their community or suburb; how their usage of shopping centres had changed across their lifetime; and if they thought that their local shopping centre had been a good thing for the local community. Finally, a free-form field offered them the chance to make any comments that were not covered by the bank of questions. A media release resulted in articles in Sydney suburban newspapers of various length, and interviews on Sydney and national ABC, as well as

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<sup>32</sup> Records are stored in the Department of Modern History, Macquarie University. Throughout this thesis they are referred to as Oral History Record (OHR), followed by the chronologically ordered number of the record and the date. As records were downloaded in batches the date is given as a range within which the testimony was lodged on the website. For example, Pamela, OHR no. 94, 21-27 January 2008.

commercial radio stations. Readers and listeners were informed of the website and asked to respond to the survey. Ninety-seven people posted responses on the website; others emailed or phoned to provide their anecdotes and understandings of shopping centre history, bringing the number of participants to 134.

Paul Thompson has suggested that oral history can be useful for opening up new areas of inquiry, and this was certainly the case with this project.<sup>33</sup> The responses to the survey were qualitatively rich and diverse. Analysis was frequent and insightful. The survey and free-form responses added immeasurably to the scope of this thesis, taking it beyond the public record, and offering insights into the variety of ways that people use shopping centres and their attitudes towards them. Oral history expanded the focus of this work from buildings, infrastructure, developers, planners, councils and marketing to give a voice to shoppers, residents and visitors to the mall. Oral historians have been critiqued for their uncritical use of sources, so it should be emphasised that in this thesis, oral histories remain memories of experiences, and are not used as concrete records of what actually happened – even for the individuals involved.<sup>34</sup>

There are two purposes for using oral history here. The first is to uncover how Australians feel about shopping centres; what part they believe these retail complexes have played in the formation of Australian life. Respondents to the survey sought not only to make sense of shopping centres as retailing complexes, but of the place they hold in our society and culture.<sup>35</sup> People often commented on social changes, even as they discussed their personal experiences and habits. This does not necessarily indicate a new level of engagement sparked by the survey questionnaire. As Samuel Schragar reminds us, most oral histories are retellings of existing dialogues.<sup>36</sup> Attitudes about shopping centres amongst the general public are often complex, analytical and considered. Identified linkages between personal experience and broad historical trends

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past: Oral History', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 22. On the success of oral history in opening new horizons of historical inquiry, see Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism', in Perks and Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> On the criticism of oral historians, see Suellen Murray, "'Where Are They? Who Are They?': Reuniting With Family of Origin After Leaving Care', *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 39, 2008, p. 232.

<sup>35</sup> On oral history revealing people's struggle to make sense of their lives, and the insights this offers into their society and culture, see Michael Frisch, 'Oral History and *Hard Times*: A Review Essay', in Perks and Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Schragar, 'What is Social in Oral History', in Perks and Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 284-85.



are an example of this, and emphasise oral history's particular pertinence to a study of shopping centres, which have always functioned as social spaces. Most Australians frequent them at least semi-regularly, so it seems important in writing their history to find out what people make of them, to ask why people visit, how they experience shopping centres, and if this has changed over time. Following Alessandro Portelli's assertion that oral history tells us 'less about events than about their meaning', this thesis is concerned not only with the history of Sydney's shopping centres, but in peoples' subjective experiences of them.<sup>37</sup>

This leads to the second reason for including oral histories in this thesis. They are used here to humanise and complicate a story that is too often polarised.<sup>38</sup> The claims and advertisements of the industry receive wide media coverage, while a healthy disdain is evinced by cultural elites for the perceived tackiness of the mall and the enthusiasm of its customers.<sup>39</sup> As Portelli has noted, oral sources are more necessary in a history of the 'nonhegemonic classes' than the ruling classes.<sup>40</sup> It is no small irony that the people for whom the shopping centre was built have been largely excluded from its public history, while the complexity of their interactions with it have been overlooked. Oral histories, for all their imperfections, are the only real way to tell this aspect of the story. They are here used to open history to its participants. Certainly they are not definitive, and as memories need to be viewed as contingent upon present circumstances and the passage of time informing them. They cannot be conclusive in terms of formulating a particular argument about shopping centres, but they do provide a window into shopping centre usage. Respondents' voices are used throughout this thesis.

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<sup>37</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different', in Perks and Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> My thanks to Graeme Davison for this point. That oral histories can be useful in personalising formal histories is discussed in Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville; Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1981), p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion on the latter, see Spearritt, 'I Shop Therefore I Am', pp. 137-38

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

The angles from which one could approach a history of shopping centre development are numerous. Given that there is no existing thesis nor book on the subject, this study offers a broad history of Sydney's developments, an assessment of their impact and a coverage of their reception. It does not forgo detail, but there are aspects of shopping centre development that can still be investigated further: a book could be written on the history of shopping centre tenancies alone; Westfield and Lend Lease await comprehensive business histories that go beyond the hagiographical; and the revival of city retailing culminates in a period beyond the time frame selected for this thesis and the suburban geography in which the thesis is centered.

This thesis lays a foundation for further research. It focuses on Sydney to narrow its evidentiary base, and takes as its particular focus the reception and impact of shopping centre development in the city's suburbs. Despite the narrow geographic focus, there is much that can be correlated to developments across Australia. This is not to argue against further local studies, nor ignore their importance in uncovering variation and detail, but to recognise the broad patterns that run across Australia's shopping centre history. An Australia-wide, and up to the present study is an important and necessary following step from this thesis.

Balancing retail history with shopping centre history is delicate. The two are intimately related, but with the latter here the central focus, the former becomes an accompaniment – always present, an influential force, sometimes driving development, sometimes following. The key stages of Sydney's retail history have been included – the department store, self-service operations, the supermarket and the discount revolution – as well as the development activities of the major department stores. These, and issues such as retail employment, are included because of the significant role they play in the history of shopping centres. Other elements are not covered. The supply chain, for example, is important for retail history, and has a significant place in economic literature, but sits beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> On contemporary supply chains, see for example Robert J. Delforce, Andrew Dickson and John Hogan, 'Australia's Food Industry: Recent Changes and Challenges', *Australian Commodities*, vol.12, no.2, June 2005, pp. 379-390. On the vertical integration of department stores in the 1920s, see Howard Wolfers,

The structure of this thesis is chronological with themes emerging over time. The pre-history of Sydney's shopping centres is traced in Chapter One. Chapter Two moves to the development of the city's first regional shopping centres in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These followed suburbanisation and retail decentralisation, responding to a number of challenges and opportunities thrown up by the shifting city form. Traffic congestion and parking shortages in suburban shopping strips became major problems and the subject of much discussion amongst planners. There was considerable debate, too, within the retail industry as access to shops and the general amenity of retailing areas were affected. This was a particular issue for the suburbs, which were often positioned as havens from the noise and congestion of the city. Shopping centres were promoted as a solution to these problems. They provided immense parking stations that separated cars from shoppers, and offered large, comfortable areas protected from the weather in which people could meet, shop, eat and interact.

Shopping centres tapped into a rising consumer affluence that underpinned the suburban economy and conditioned its culture. Chapter Three examines their reception in this environment. When the first major Sydney shopping centres were being built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, incomes were good, unemployment low, credit accessible. Television beamed images of consumption and consumers into living rooms around Australia.<sup>42</sup> Advertising was becoming more pervasive; marketing a science. Shopping centres were declared a modernist vanguard, sweeping away old modes of retailing with the convenience of 'one-stop shopping'.<sup>43</sup> They supported the 'Australian way of life', providing goods, services and social space to suburban families who were being encouraged to focus on domestic life, home ownership and personal consumption.<sup>44</sup> After the privations of the Depression and War, material prosperity was celebrated as affordable, accessible and abundant. Shopping centres were said to bring 'the city to the suburbs'; and if they were sanitised versions of the metropolis, they were welcomed by many as exciting, convenient and attractive additions to local areas.<sup>45</sup>

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'The Big Stores Between the Wars', in Jill Roe (ed.), *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in Urban and Social History* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1980), pp. 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 11 October 1965, quoted in Barrett, 'Roselands', p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> On the 'Australian way of life', see Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 158-63.

<sup>45</sup> For 'the city to the suburbs', see Robert Askin quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1965, cited in Barrett, 'Roselands', p. 124.

The 1960s centres ringed Sydney from Brookvale in the North, to Bankstown in the West and Miranda in the southern suburbs. In the 1970s, following further demographic decentralisation, regional shopping centres began to colonise the outer western suburbs. Chapter Four explores the local histories and development of Westfield Liverpool Shoppingtown, Westpoint Blacktown, Westfield Shoppingtown Parramatta and Macarthur Square, Campbelltown.<sup>46</sup> It argues that shopping centres were welcomed by western Sydney councils starved of investment and precariously short of the resources required to provide infrastructure and employment to their booming populations. Shopping centres brought jobs, income from rates, air-conditioned social space, consumer goods, and cultural and economic cachet for the suburbs or cities which acquired them.

By the 1980s, most of Sydney's major shopping centres had been established. New sites became difficult to find or too expensive to contemplate. Chapters Five, Six and Seven examine the development of the few new centres that did open in the decade. In Chapter Five, Macquarie Centre is used to explore the changing aesthetics of centre development and the increasing integration of entertainment facilities in shopping centres. Chapter Six uses the battle between David Jones and Grace Bros over the construction of Chatswood Chase, and the subsequent Grace Bros involvement with Westfield Chatswood, to discuss and analyse the concentration of retail in the post-war period. In Chapter Seven, Westfield Eastgardens becomes the focus as retail employment is examined in light of the Wran government's extraordinary intervention to ensure that the shopping centre development at Pagewood went ahead.

Chapter Eight turns to shopping centre redevelopment and refurbishment. A continual feature of shopping centre history, expansions were in part a response to consumer demand, partly an attempt to exert retail dominance over particular trade areas, and partly a function of investor driven development.<sup>47</sup> The chapter explains the growth in power of major shopping centres in Sydney's retail geography since the 1960s. This leads to the final two chapters which examine the impact of shopping centres' retail domination: on external retail in Chapter Nine and small tenants operating inside their

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<sup>46</sup> Note that Westfield frequently made small changes to the names of its centres in advertising material. The names here are those used at the opening of respective centres.

<sup>47</sup> White, 'The Changing Nature', p. 62.

domain in Chapter Ten. Legislation to protect the latter from abuses of market power, introduced in NSW in 1994, marks the end of the major part of the thesis. It concludes with a summary and brief outline of developments since the 1990s.

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As the first book-length history of the Australian shopping centre, this thesis fills a gap in the existing literature, providing a detailed account of the rise of shopping centres and their accumulation of power in Sydney's retail geography. By including a range of voices – from ordinary shoppers and small retailers through to captains of industry – it emphasises the complexity of shopping centre development. It charts the broad sweep of post-war consumer culture in Australia, but also opens up the 'everyday' experiences of the shopper, following Andrew May's call for urban historians 'to do justice to the life stories of suburban dwellers'.<sup>48</sup> Regional shopping centres became key sites in the life of suburbanites from the 1960s onwards. Here, the words and experiences of shoppers humanise what could otherwise be a dry history of development, politics, business and functionalist architecture. The history of shopping centres is far richer than their bland concrete walls suggest; unpacking it enriches our understanding of post-war Australian life.

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew May, 'Ideas From Australian Cities: Relocating urban and suburban history', *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 49, no. 1, March 2009, p. 71. On the historiographical revival of the 'everyday' and the exploration of retailing, see David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby, 'Between the Shop and the Home' in David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby (eds), *Buying for the Home: Shopping for the Domestic from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 3-5.