Title: Embodied Architectural Geographies of Consumption and the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* Controversy in Southern Chile

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Abstract

In recent years, the geographies of architecture have expanded to include the affective and emotive dimensions of everyday life and the politics of urban space. This article explores these embodied geographies of architecture in an emerging urban landscape that has the built environment at its core: the post-dictatorship retail landscape of neoliberal Chile. By drawing on findings from ethnographic research around the role of affect and emotion in the controversial development of a particular shopping mall in southern Chile, we get a better sense of how retail capital expands into new territories and how it responds to and enrolls embodied geographies in the process. While this process does include the expansion of a particular kind of spatial technology that works through affective architectural interventions, this article also illustrates how such an expansion relies on prevailing imaginative and emotional geographies in important ways. As such, this embodied architectural geography does not sideline human subjectivity, but explores its complex relationship with the materiality of landscape and affective architectural space. Keywords: *affect, emotion, imaginative geography, landscape, shopping mall*

**Introduction**

In 2015, the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* opened for business in Castro, the urban center of the Chiloé archipelago in southern Chile. As a symbol of the post-dictatorship and neoliberal economy of consumerism, the mall was an abrupt arrival to this mostly agrarian and rural society, known for its unique cultural identity and architectural landscape of “palafitos” (sea-front homes on stilts that hang over the water’s edge) and colonial era churches recognized by UNESCO as “World Heritage” since 2000. Critics claimed that the mall displays a lack respect for the heritage landscape by locating so close to one of the churches and jeopardizing its World Heritage status, while the national Chilean Architecture Association (*Colegio de Arquitectos*) pointed out several irregularities in the development process, prompting them to join with other community and civic leaders to oppose the mall through legal and other challenges. However, the long-standing Mayor at the time largely *supported* the project and claimed to have widespread grassroots support. Indeed, in recent decades, life has been transformed by the rapid growth of industrial salmon aquaculture that has brought a shift towards an urban consumer-oriented society and the decline of rural and agrarian traditions for some parts of the archipelago (Daughters 2015). The controversy around the shopping mall, then, is situated at the complex intersection of rapid socio-spatial change and the dynamics of post-dictatorship retail capital that seeks to expand into new territory.

The transformation of Chilean society and economy since the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) has been rapid, far-reaching and well-documented. The brutality of the regime coincided with a more intense integration of the country with the global consumer markets of an emerging neoliberal society. A new built environment of retail and consumption was perhaps the most notable consequence for everyday urban landscapes across the country (De Simone 2015). As the shopping malls proliferated in the 1990s, critical Chilean scholar Tomás Moulian (1997) suggested that they are much more than merely spaces of consumption, but had become an essential technology of governance for post-dictatorship Chile. Moreover, Moulian highlights the embodied dimensions of these spaces as central to the power they assume in a society experiencing the contradictions of uneven development:

“Today’s pleasure is found in strolling in the mall, where many families experience the emotion of being able to realize, voyeuristically, without buying, their mercantile desires. The urge for a microwave, or a better stove, is consumed, or realized, in vision. But for many families, happiness comes in the proof that postponing desire is not necessary. Notwithstanding the minimum wage, the feast of objects is within reach... This is the integrating power of the credit apparatus” (Moulian 1997, 109; my translation)

This functioning of Moulian’s mall space resembles the logic of what John Allen (2006) calls “ambient power”, in which a kind of affective biopower works through the embodied experiences of what has been called the “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Thrift, 2008). While some shopping malls continue to resemble a kind of “fortress” architecture familiar to critical urban theory, in cities like Santiago malls have become widespread and are often widely accessible to diverse publics (Stillerman and Salcedo 2012), a point of overlap with Allen (2006). Similarly, Moulian’s (1997) mall is a perfect architectural manifestation of what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls “cruel optimism”, a socio-affective spatial experience that binds the political subject of consumption to hegemonic flows that also contribute to that subject’s deterioration or subjugation in a neoliberal economy (cf. Miller 2015). A sizeable literature has in fact detailed the construction of a new techno-urban network of everyday space and consumer finance in Chile, thereby expanding the reach of capital, credit, commodities and consumer debt across Chilean society (van Bavel and Sell-Trujillo 2003; Han 2012; Ossandón 2014; Tinsman 2014, among others).

By drawing on theories of both affect and emotion, this article illustrates how the shopping mall in Castro *hit a nerve* in Chilean society that is situated at the confluence of architectural space and prevailing imaginative geographies. There has been significant debate around the meaning and alleged differences between affect and emotion in recent years. At the extremes, affect has signaled a more ontological approach to embodied reality that relies less and less on the concept of a human subject, whereas emotion signals another kind of embodied experience that can be communicated (represented) and is seen to circulate through the politics of representation and difference that are so crucial for critical human geography since the “cultural turn”. This article builds on my previous work at another shopping mall in the region that researches both affect and emotion simultaneously while using a combination of qualitative methods toward those goals (Miller 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015). As such, this article allows the reader to further imagine how affect and emotion relate not only to each other, but also to the politics of representation that are so foundational for human geography and critical theory more broadly.

This article, then, takes the controversy around the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* as an opportunity to consider how both affect and emotion infuse and sometimes mediate the urban development process, particularly in rapidly urbanizing places like Chiloé. In 2013 and 2015, I conducted ethnographic activities with inhabitants of Chiloé and the civic leaders involved in the controversy, including those associated with the Architecture Association. Participant observation and mobile interviews were used to generate insight into the mall’s affective spaces, as well as a photo-elicitation technique that helped get closer to the emotional connections people have to the changing landscapes that the mall is situated in. By approaching the community in this way, I attempted to better understand what was moving the participants and the debate around the mall. Seen through the analytics of emotional and affective geography, we can also glimpse somewhat surprising configurations of consumer subjectivity in its post-colonial and architectural formations.

The following section provides context and background. Then a brief section summarizes recent scholarship on the embodied architectural geographies of consumption. A section on research methods then elaborates on the techniques introduced above. The empirical material then unfolds in three sub-sections. These sub-sections correspond to categories of embodied experience that emerged from the findings: *outrage, optimism* and *ambivalence*. By exploring the differences across each category, this article elaborates on the role of affect and emotion in the production and reception of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé***,** thereby expanding the scope of what these theoretical and methodological insights are capable of addressing in terms of urban development. Conceptually, the architectural and affective force of retail capital issituated among broader sets of flows that include Chiloé’s historical, cultural and political relationship to mainland Chile. The mall’s affective spaces could very well be analyzed, defined and critiqued using only participant observation or textual analysis, and this article does elaborate on the specifically affective dimensions of the mall as an experience and as a representation. However, an even more complex reality becomes apparent with an openness to emotion, emotional politics, and the many ways that affect and emotion intertwine. This article discusses some surprising findings that resulted from such a methodology. More specifically, we can consider the possibility that desire for the mall may be more oppositional to post-colonial power relations than it appears at first glance.

**Terror of the Malls and the *Mall Paseo Chiloé***

Along with state terror, the Pinochet regime unleashed a torrent of retail and consumer technologies that coincided with the new dynamics of uneven development. Not wanting to disconnect this new landscape of shopping malls and credit cards from its conditions of possibility in state terror (a move resonating with Berlant’s 2011 “cruel optimism”), Susana Draper (2012) finds an adequate architectural figure in the “prison-malls” of Chile and other South American countries that have gone through similar geopolitical trauma on the way to neoliberalism. The “*Punta Carretas Shopping”* mall in Montevideo, Uruguay, for example, represents this embodied geopolitical figure perfectly, as it occupies the same building used to detain political prisoners during that country’s recent right-wing military dictatorship (1973-1985). The affective lures of the shopping mall, then, remained linked to the trauma that authorized and ensured their expansion in the first place.

In southern Chile around the Chiloé archipelago, however, the arrival of this kind of spectacular retail development has been delayed until recently. In 2010, a Chilean company called *Pasmar*, headquartered in the regional capital Puerto Montt, began construction of a mall in Castro (figure 1). As part of a multi-million dollar expansion in the region, the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* (figure 2) grew in size and soon local architects and others began questioning its compliance with the planning codes and protocols. They also spoke out about the ethics of architecture and heritage. As noted above, one of the most obvious issues is its location near the church. In 2000, UNESCO named 16 churches of Chiloé “World Heritage” because of the cultural history they embody, which is the history of encounter between European colonists, Jesuit missionaries and the original indigenous peoples of Chiloé. While this encounter is common across Chile and Latin America, postcolonial development at Chiloé had several unique twists that have led to the emergence of a distinct regional identity that takes pride in its difference from the mainland and its identity as *Chilote*, as “from Chiloé” (Daughters 2015).

Figures 1 and 2 here

The dictatorship and neoliberal transition also meant that natural resource extraction for export to the world market was also a priority. The physical geographies of the region around Chiloé are perfect for industrial salmon aquaculture and by 2001 Chile was the “second largest salmon producer in the world” (Schurman 2004, 320). Much recent scholarship on Chiloé has focused on the impacts of this transition, as the agrarian and rural livelihoods of Chiloé decline and the new urban landscape of consumption grows (Barton et al. 2013; cf. Daughters 2015). As the towns and cities have grown and more people learn to desire the services of corporate retail (there are some corporate supermarkets, pharmacies and banks, in addition to a new big-box store and a casino, for example), the landscape includes many local and family owned shops and businesses. To access large department stores and shopping malls, inhabitants travel to the regional capital Puerto Montt on the mainland, a trip I heard described and lamented throughout the fieldwork in Chiloé (discussed in Miller 2018). Despite these barriers, consumer culture, it is safe to say, has been developing at Chiloé along with work in the salmon industry. The multi-million dollar investment in the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* shows that *Pasmar* believes that now is a good time to expand into new territory. However, the location of the building and its construction resulted in significant resistance from some residents and civic leaders, leading to a series of controversies and legal challenges that delayed its opening to mid 2015.

**Embodied Architectural Geographies of Consumption**

For Lees (2001), the “new cultural geography” of the 1980s and 90s initiated crucial questions about architectural space and society, but also had limitations primarily due to its alleged reliance on representation as a primary conceptual assumption and mode of methodological inquiry. Lees (2001) was one of the first to highlight the benefits of incorporating so-called “nonrepresentational theories” of affect and performance into the geographies of architecture, taking on the Vancouver Public Library as a case study and Nigel Thrift (1996, 2000) as a guide. While the meaning of the Library was debated vigorously in the press, Lees (2001) insists that an entire range of affective life and everyday practice also constitute the building and should be acknowledged more seriously. In these embodied spaces of encounter and public use, Lees (2001) argues, we find the materials for another kind of politics, one that is less predictable and one that is more open to chance, surprise and potential alternatives. Lees’s (2001) article anticipated where some geographers would take the embodied urban geographies of architecture in the years to come (Latham and McCormack 2004; Kraftl and Adey 2008, among others).

Nonrepresentational theory is compelling for the geographies of consumption, in particular, for other reasons as well. Several have focused on how architecture and the built environment can exert a subtle “push” that registers in embodied experience but often goes unnoticed (Kraftl and Adey 2008). One implication is that affect can be “engineered” (Thrift 2008, 182; cf. Allen 2006) as a kind of background to everyday life. For shopping malls and other mega-infrastructures of the experience economy (entertainment, retail, service and tourism), the potential affective power of architecture is exceedingly important (Klingmann 2007; Lee 2015). However, as discussed above, non-representational theories of affect have been criticized for paying too little attention to questions of identity, subjectivity and embodiment that are relevant for a wide range of emotional, feminist and post-colonial geographies (Thien 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006). In more recent years, scholars like Rose, Degen and Basdas (2010), and Lees and Baxter (2011), among others, have developed innovative ways of accessing both affective and emotional geographies of architecture and everyday practice. Perhaps less concerned with the non-representational ontologies of what the built environment *is* (see Roberts 2012), they are more focused on how affect is always situated amid broader distributions of socio-cultural life and its emotional underpinnings (also see Miller 2015).

These insights are necessary for an ethnographic approach to the *Mall Paseo Chiloé*, where I arrived as an outsider and sought to understand community responses to it. As such, this approach takes on the challenge of conceptualizing architectural space as affective while also remaining open to the affective “force of representation” (Anderson 2018) and the emotional politics of the building as part of a broader landscape in flux. The politics of representation can also be deeply affective in certain ways. Here lies an important link to “imaginative geography” as a key term for critical geography (Gregory 1995). Bruce Braun (2002), for instance, draws on Edward Said, Donna Haraway and others to discuss how post-colonial power relations often rely on the temporal assumptions of colonial modernity; namely, the carving out of “modern” and “traditional” geographies. Braun’s (2002) notion of how space emerges through these “temporal boundaries” (10) is apt for the kinds of developments unfolding at Chiloé and across Latin America (cf. Mignolo 2000; Quijano 2008). The *Mall Paseo Chiloé*, as we will see, has become such a polarizing figure in the landscape because of the way it transgresses and disrupts these boundaries, thereby eliciting diverse reactions and complex feelings. Rather than signal a return to representational methodologies, this work attends to the ways that imaginative geographies become emotional and affective. This article examines this process in some detail, as the construction of a new techno-urban landscape includes obvious new affective spatial experiences that can inform emotional reactions, while emotional life can sometimes even negate the mall’s powerful retail affects (Rose, Degen and Basdas 2010). Additionally, how people feel about the mall often relies on its spatial dimensions (what it looks like and the experience it offers) as well as what it means to them. Following Anderson’s (2014, 2018) recent work, the gaps between representation, emotion and affect may not be as wide as was originally thought by early enthusiasts of non-representational theory. Anderson (2018) reviews recent work that charts the many overlaps of these domains, rather than insist on their incompatibility (also see Wright 2010).

The geographies of Chiloé, as we will see, require these inputs as they relate to a prevailing imaginative geography inherited from the colonial era, wherein Chiloé takes the place as a territory of “otherness” in distinction to a modern and urban Chilean “self”. By considering these dimensions of the controversy, we get a glimpse of the contemporary spatial practices of retail developers seeking to expand their empire into new territories. Attending to representation does not require an evacuation of embodiment, as imaginative geographies are oftentimes productive of new affective and emotional events and subjectivities. With this approach, we can stay open to unexpected and counter-intuitive insights regarding this architectural controversy and the way it is involved in the formation of new subjectivities and future geographies. Namely, that desire for the mall might contain *oppositional* potential. This article is nevertheless suspicious of this optimism as very likely material for Berlant’s (2011) “cruel optimism”, a theory that I have previously suggested is appropriate for understanding the neoliberal shopping malls of the post-dictatorship Southern Cone (see Miller 2015). “Cruel optimism” appears here as another recent theoretical approach working at the intersection of affect, emotion, representation and neoliberal power. These insights appear throughout the empirical sub-sections below at key moments when the political significance of the landscape is at stake.

**Methods**

A preliminary visit in 2013 confirmed the feasibility of an ethnographic approach and I returned in 2015 for a longer stay (March-November). I was based in Castro and made smaller trips to other towns and islands. In addition to searching out the civic leaders of who have been involved in the controversy (the architects, neighborhood organization leaders, Municipal officials and others), I also solicited interviews from ordinary inhabitants of Castro. I asked a core set of questions: what does it mean for Chiloé to have this mall? What impact will have? What was the sensation when you saw the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* for the first time? Are the *Chilotes* for or against it, and why? In your vision of a utopian world, would there be shopping malls? In 2015, I conducted 110 interviews total, in addition to countless other informal conversations. 72 of the interviews were with ordinary residents or visitors whom I met randomly around town or at the mall. I also collected articles from the local newspaper *La Estrella* from 2012-2015 that chronicle the building’s controversial history and I spent hours in the mall conducting participant observation.

While these classic methods can generate rich insights that are of interest for geographies of affect (Dewsbury 2007; Woodward, Jones and Marston 2012), I drew on two other techniques to get closer to the affective and emotive dimensions of the transforming landscape. First, I solicited “go-along” interviews (Kusenbach 2003) in the mall once it was open for business, in which I accompanied the visitor-participant during their visit, chatting along the way as we move through the space and with the voice recorder rolling (n=12). This method creates the opportunity to observe the mall visit as it unfolds, including its affective tones, while also creating the opportunity for the participant to reflect on the specific environments. Second, I used photo-elicitation in interviews with some participants. Researchers have long used photographs to solicit the more intimate and emotional dimensions of space and everyday life (see Rose 2012, chapter 11). Harper (2002) claims that “the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information” and that therefore images “evoke deeper elements of human consciousness” than do words (13). Harper (2002) goes on to cite the 1950s work of John Collier on the “environmental basis of psychological stress” for multi-ethnic and industrial populations in Canada, highlighting the ways that photo interviewing involved “…a more subtle function of graphic imagery. This was its compelling effect upon the informant, its ability to prod latent memory, to stimulate and release emotional statements about the informant’s life…” (14). Intrigued by this potential of the image, I also borrowed from visual Q-sort methodology (Hawthorne, Krygier and Kwan 2008) in which participants were asked to rank-order a series of photographs according to the prompt: “I prefer Chiloé to be like this” (“*Prefiero que Chiloé sea así”)*. Respondents chose out of 15 photographs of different landscapes and environments, from the most iconic and mundane rural spaces, to the emerging urban spaces exemplified by the mall. Nineteen participants engaged with this exercise. The findings below display the richness of qualitative data that can be produced with these techniques. Furthermore, they are presented for the reader to imagine different registers of emotion and affect associated with the building and how they relate to the complex politics of representation (the imaginative geographies that link Chiloé to the mainland) and post-dictatorship urban development.

This methodology surely risks ontological confusion as a result of using classic representational methods within an overall approach that wants to also incorporate the non-representational potential of affect. As such, this article works to combine different kinds of qualitative data in a way that follows Anderson (2014, 2018), Berlant (2011), Laketa (2016, 2018) and others who consider the complicated spaces where affect, emotion, representation and subjectivity intersect. This methodology, then, stays attuned to the affective dimensions of the mall’s architecture and built environment as a visual and phenomenological experience, but does so with the simultaneous interest in how other people respond to and react to such a building, which builds a more complex perspective on how it is situated among wider geographies of post-colonial development and power.

**Affective and Emotional Geographies of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé***

Running throughout the interviews are three conceptual categories that help approximate the embodied geographies of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé*: outrage, optimism and ambivalence. By considering the diversity of responses that fit into each category, we can get closer to the embodied geographies that shape the debate and the embodied contradictions of development. These findings illustrate how desire for the mall can even be considered *oppositional* in the way it challenges the prevailing imaginative geographies of the postcolonial era. Outrage and optimism run throughout the passionate arguments both “for” and “against” the mall. Most respondents, though, are more ambivalent and seemed conflicted in various ways. Across these three categories of embodied experience – outrage, optimism and ambivalence – are two geographical processes. The first is the production of *Chilote* difference, as everything that modern urban Chile is not. The second is the expansion of neoliberal retail capital.

Outrage

Amid the outcry over the mall in early 2012, the developers eventually stopped construction following an order from Municipal officials. On March 2, 2012, *La Estrella* published a statement from a *Pasmar* official who claimed that “the criticisms are coming from people who don’t live here, and that the inhabitants of the Island will benefit greatly – and they know it” (Pereira 2012, 10, my translation). While this geographic discourse circulated through society and the debate around the mall (more below), this sub-section first wants to consider another set of responses that involve the architectural design of the mall itself. By 2012, the building’s exterior became visible and revealed a pasty crème color with hard horizontal lines of dark blue, a design that came under criticism as out of place. In addition to the comments above, *Pasmar* also responded with a “visual mitigation” (Contreras Villarroel 2013a, 5) plan that included a new exterior. In 2013, they unveiled a dark coffee-brown exterior of multiple shades, simulating the most classic and iconic building material of Chiloé: wood. Raul Poduje, President of the Association of Consumers (*Asociación de Consumidores*), a local non-profit consumer protection organization in Castro, said that “Personally, I like it, but as consumers what we want are better deals” (qtd. in Contreras Villarroel 2013b, 9). Doris Chiguay, a staunch pro-mall neighborhood leader, said “it is good that they are using materials that are more harmonious with the landscape, so that we won’t lose our cultural identity” (qtd. in Contreras Villarroel 2013b, 9). Jorge Espinosa, President of the Chiloé chapter of the Chilean Architecture Association, pointed out that such cosmetic changes to the building’s exterior fail to address the major underlying problems with the building, including its compliance with the planning code due to its large size, location in the urban environment, and several other irregularities regarding the development process.

It is important to consider that in 2012 the court battles over these issues had not yet been fought and won by *Pasmar*. If public opinion shifted and enough citizens put pressure on the Municipality to stop the construction, the project could have been in more serious jeopardy and perhaps face demolition. As part of their strategy, *Pasmar* mobilized an *architectural response* in addition to making discursive statements about geography (insider/outsider) and assertions about public opinion. Architects went to work producing a new kind of space that would give them leverage in the public debate, perhaps exerting a needed affective “push” in public opinion through aesthetic and design materials (Adey and Kraftl 2008). Fully understanding this push, though, involves acknowledging how its materiality is entwined with the imaginative geographies that link Chiloé with mainland Chile. In other words, the architectural response is meant to trigger not only an affective response (through its visual form and impact) but also the dense emotional narratives that are summoned by replacing the original crème design (out of place) with a simulated dark wood, allegedly more “appropriate” for the region and its architectural heritage.

In reading through the local newspaper during this time, it is clear that tensions were high in 2012 when construction was halted. The remainder of this sub-section considers more closely how the controversy over the building involved passionate emotions, especially feelings of outrage. That is, although *Pasmar* was working to build a new affective “background” of consumption that also displays some modicum of respect for Chiloé’s architectural heritage (while simultaneously refusing to modify the volume and dimensions of the building itself), there is no guarantee that it be well received. Some were, in fact, outraged at what they saw as an unjust and absurd monstrosity in their city, one that was achieved and constructed improperly (some say illegally). Others defended it with another kind of outrage – outrage aimed at the critics. I found that to fully understand the embodied dimensions of the mall controversy, it was necessary to acknowledge the ways that imagination shapes perceptions of the landscape and attachment to place. Equally important is acknowledging how the prevailing imaginative geographies of the region also informs these contradictory desires and feelings of outrage.

Jorge Espinosa[[1]](#endnote-1) (above) is one of the leading critics of the mall. He was also one of the original members of *Ciudadanos por Castro* (Citizens for Castro), a community group of concerned citizens that began to organize around the mall. In an interview in 2015 in his office in central Castro only blocks away from the church and the mall, he recalled the *mesa de trabajo,* or workshop held in 2012 that included *Pasmar*, Municipal officials and other civic organizations like the Architecture Association to discuss the future of the project. In this workshop *Pasmar* presented three alternative options for the mall that they were willing to implement instead of the original exterior design. Jorge said that they felt like the meeting was “a trick (*engaño*)” meant to merely simulate public participation:

“we felt like they used the meeting in order to say that ‘oh yes, we are listening to the citizens’, but in the end, they did what they wanted to…. They gush saying ‘Yes, we changed the materials as you requested’, but this is a lie! We didn’t ask for this… It’s a trick (*engaño*), just another trick” (April 7, 2015, interview in Castro, Jorge’s office)

Rather than a sign of goodwill and cooperation, for Jorge and others the “visual mitigation” strategy masked an undemocratic process where the building maintained its problematic size and location while merely modifying its aesthetics and surface design. When I arrived for the interview, he immediately launched into a spirited and gloomy denunciation of the mall as a threat to the World Heritage status of the churches. The problem with the mall, he argued, was not only technical, but ethical, as a threat to the heritage landscape. Jorge drew immediately on the impending ruling of UNESCO (as to whether or not the churches will enter the list of “World Heritage in Danger”) to create a kind of moral geography around the building. Yet there was more to what drives Jorge’s action as a critical architect. Near the end of the interview, I asked Jorge to sort the photographs. It was not surprising that he grouped all the newer retail landscapes on the negative side, and the most iconic photographs of Chiloé to the positive side. His explanation of why, however, revealed a common imaginative geography of Chiloé:

“Because they [points to the iconic photographs] speak to a form of life that is Chiloé. Chiloé is this. Chiloé is landscape (*paisaje*), it is a relationship with nature. It is touristic with this type of thing, it is industry with artisanal fishing. It is tourist development with respect to the architecture. It is the fields, the relationship with the forest, that is all Chiloé” (April 7, 2015, interview in Castro, Jorge’s office).

Strong feelings about what Chiloé is or is not run throughout the controversy around the mall. That private developers have compromised the cherished heritage landscape is outlandish and outrageous for Jorge and other critics. I spoke to other architects who shared this perspective and who also lamented what they see as a lack of education and public awareness around the importance of heritage and the environment. Another member of the Architecture Association said that “the people who are against the mall are people that, we are happy to be from here and we maybe even value it more than others who are also from here” (Karen, May 16, 2015, interview in Ancud).Karen and Jorge have a connection to Chiloé that is worth defending against the onslaught of private retail development.

This imaginative geography, however, is also infused with the assumption of colonial modernity and its “temporal boundaries” (Braun 2002, 10). Responses to this imaginative geography are multiple and sometimes contentious. That is, not everyone links together imaginative and emotional geography with the emerging affective retail landscape in the same way. Passionate mall defenders, as we will see, also respond to post-colonial imaginative geographies through their desire for the mall and what it promises. The “insider/outsider” binary promoted by *Pasmar* at the height of the controversy in 2012, in other words, has a long history, and it is known that the population of Chiloé is often proud of what makes their territory and heritage unique (Daughters 2015). Because of how these dynamics shape the emotional geographies of development at Chiloé, not everyone was immediately outraged by the mall. The insider/outsider binary was articulated with a “right to consume” discourse (see Miller 2018), through which residents demanded a kind of justice in having access to corporate retail. One pro-mall neighborhood leader, Doris Chiguay, vented frustration and anger at the critics of the mall, going so far to discredit the anti-mall *Ciudadanos por Castro* group by suggesting that “it does not exist”. In an interview with *La Estrella* she said:

“all they have done is divide the community with their series of declarations... they are just some friends who got together and decided to create this movement, but it is really only them, which is why I insist that this organization *does not exist.* They have hurt the community by believing they are the big thinkers, they think they are the messiahs that are going to save the architectural heritage of Castro. We might be poor, but we are not mentally handicapped. They are just feudal lords” (qtd. in Eugenia Núñez 2012, 9, my translation with emphasis added)

There is a lot of resentment in these lines from Chiguay. She felt the same way in 2015 when we met for an interview, and I could hear it in her voice. She pointed immediately to the Architecture Association as a source of the problem and she didn’t hesitate to label them “outsiders” in contrast to those, like herself, who are “engaged in” and is “part of” the community (interview, November 17, 2015, Castro). If Jorge and the architects use the UNESCO status as an emotive tool to generate support for protecting the churches and the architectural heritage of Chiloé, Chiguay produces another moral geography, one of “local” people having the “right to consume”. The long trip to Puerto Montt was often described not only as annoying, expensive and uncomfortable, but also as an *injustice*. Some even accuse the local merchants of price gouging, while others merely recognize the added cost of transporting goods to the island. Chiguay and others offered a passionate argument for the “right to consume”, one that challenges the legitimacy of the critics. In conclusion of this sub-section, it should be clear that the building hit a nerve that connects the embodied dimensions of architectural space (its affective and emotive potentials) with perception and socially constructed imaginative geographies.

The following sub-section pays closer attention to the “right to consume” discourse and the feelings of optimism that the building has generated for some residents. By turning to key findings from these participants, we gain other perspectives on the embodied dimensions of this mall and its arrival along with the contradictions of postcolonial and neoliberal modernity.

Optimism

While the sub-section above highlights the affective potentials of the mall’s exterior architecture and design aesthetic, the affective architectures of retail capital are perhaps more clearly at play in the mall’s interior. In addition to the many now familiar mall designs (Underhill 2004), the design of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* includes additional elements that link it with its broader environment in powerful ways. By producing new *visual and mobile experiences of the landscape*, the mall offers a kind of dramatic experience through its layout and design. Again, this embodied experience can intertwine with prevailing narratives and discourses around what the building means, and this sub-section aims to further our understanding of that process. However, this approach also takes seriously the affective work of the architectural space itself in the creation of a new embodied experience that brings together spatial technologies of retail capital, the landscape surrounding the mall, and the new retail formats that incorporate new flows of capital, credit, commodities and consumer debt.

The mall’s interior is shaped like a cylinder, with each floor comprised of store fronts in a circular shaped enclosure. The visitor moves from floor to floor through an escalator in the middle of the cylinder (or on a single elevator off to the side). Moving upward on the escalator, the visitor arrives at the second floor facing a wall of glass approximately 10 meters wide that leads to a patio overlooking the calm inland sea. Arriving at the third floor facing the same direction, the glass wall is *wider*, this time approximately 17 meters. Arriving at the fourth floor becomes a *crescendo*: an approximately 45-meter wide wall of glass curves with the shape of the building in a dazzling panorama (figure 3). Today, this is where the food court is located, allowing visitors to eat “fast food” in Castro for the first time while gazing out over the water. No building in Castro offers anything like this commanding view, which is perhaps one reason the developers were so intent on building in that specific spot along the edge of the plateau that drops down to the shoreline.

Figure 3 here

In addition to this *new visual perspective*, the architectural space is made even more dramatic by offering a *new kind of movement* through space. The escalators linking each floor (figure 4) are a fundamentally new experience in the architectural practice of life inside buildings at Chiloé. I can only think of one other escalator in Chiloé that I rode on, which was in the shopping area of central Ancud, a much smaller and less dramatic indoor shopping environment. I was often told of people living in more remote areas of Chiloé that allegedly “haven’t even traveled to Puerto Montt” and have never seen or experienced anything like a shopping mall before. I did notice several times when elderly or child visitors froze in front of the moving platform, unsure of how to take the step forward, often with much laughing and amusement all around. This mall is a unique architecture of spectacle through its combination of location, design and choice of materials to engineer a radical new kind of spatial experience: new indoor movement and visual perspectives, all wrapped-up with corporate retail.

Figure 4 here

When the mall finally opened in August, I spent the first few days there circulating with the crowds, observing and participating in the fanfare. Groups were drawn to the windows and posed for many photographs, and a non-stop flow of movement filled the space with the hum of activity. Despite its imposing appearance in the landscape, the interior space that was available in August was only partially finished, forcing visitors to circulate between only about a dozen stores and only one food proprietor, a doughnut shop that was overrun with customers (along with the Wal Mart-owned *Líder* supermarket in the basement level). I kept visiting almost daily at different times and solicited interviews from visitors. In the remainder of this sub-section, I focus on what I perceived to be an oppositional tone in the argument for the “right to consume”. In short, I was able to get a sense of why some people were strongly in favor of the mall and I began to pick up on the intensity of their opposition to the critics. It occurred to me that*the critique of postcolonial imaginative geography is being harnessed and directed in the service of retail capital*. That is, I began to see the “right to consume” rhetoric as potentially oppositional to a postcolonial imaginative geography where Chiloé remains tethered to a “traditional” and timeless identity.

Consider Nancy, age 61, who said she was “proud to be born and raised in Chiloé” (interview, October 6, 2015, in the mall). We sat in the rest area on the third floor, on plastic chairs around a table, and she shared her somewhat ambivalent feelings about the mall and the changes taking place at Chiloé. Although she was there enjoying some of the amenities, she also had a sense that “there is too much consumerism” in society and she said that she really prefers to shop at local businesses rather than the mall. At the same time, she explained the mall as something good for the “younger generations, some of them haven’t ever seen a place like this!” she exclaimed. The photo elicitation exercise helped access the intimate and embodied elements of landscape change even more. Her photo-sort stood out for one obvious reason: she was the only one to rank the photograph of the mall looming over the built environment of Castro as her #1 top pick of how she “prefers Chiloé to be”. In explaining why, she says “because it is *ours*”, emphasizing the possessive *ours*. She went on to say that Chiloé is often ignored by the rest of the country, but not only that:

Nancy: “I also say, Why don’t they take us seriously? Because there the people in Santiago, they think that we are, I don’t know, ignorant, I don’t know, that we go around like before, dressed in leather (*cuero*)! That, I don’t know!”

Jacob: “like they have an idea of Chiloé that isn’t true?”.

Nancy: “exactly, that isn’t true, that we are like, I don’t know, little animals or something like that. The people who haven’t been here [think that]” (October 6, 2015, interview in the mall)

Perhaps most importantly, Nancy said the mall made her feel a kind of “optimism”, notwithstanding her doubts. Other testimony from local mall supporters attests to an oppositional consciousness that *does not fear* the new retail technology. I began asking people if they thought the mall posed a threat to Chilote heritage and culture and I began to hear nuanced arguments about the potential for Chilotes to co-exist with the new consumerism. “I don’t think that because the mall is here that we will lose our identity and stop being Chilote, stop enjoying, I don’t know, the sea, or the island. Know what I mean?” said Carmen, a woman from Castro (November 2, 2015, interview outside the mall). Elias, a young man from Chiloé, said

“I think that every city should keep developing. Heritage is always going to be there. It will not be lost as long as people want to maintain their heritage. It is inside of us” (August 14, 2015, interview in the mall).

Another highlighted the limited impact that a single building could have, saying that “We are the ones that conserve heritage, because we are the *Chilotes*, and one building does not mean that we are changing the way we think” (Claudia, from Chonchi; August 18, 2015, interview in the mall). In these ways, a kind of oppositional subjectivity can be detected, one that takes the technology of empire and turns it in alternative directions (Harraway 1991).

However, if we are to attend to this optimism, we would be well advised by returning to Berlant’s (2011) “cruel optimism” which points to the psycho-emotional and affective dynamics of a capitalist system that makes promises it cannot always keep and distributes the benefits and disadvantages of the system unevenly. The dispersion of consumption practices across Chilean society in the neoliberal era confirms the relevance of Berlant’s wide-ranging theory of how we become attached to things that ultimately hold us in subordinate relationships of power. The interviews I conducted with the critical architects also resonated with these themes that the power of retail capital has taken on a kind of geographic truth, such that its expansion is perceived as natural and inevitable. Select findings from this research add to our understanding of how emotional geographies are often implicated in broader kinds of development trajectories and the regional connectivity that make them possible. Karen, the architect from above, is a resident of Chiloé who left to become an architect and travel abroad, but has since returned and lives in Ancud. She opposes the mall for many of the reasons outlined by Jorge Espinosa above. In our interview, though, Karen moved into the emotional geographies of development that inform not only the mall controversy, but others like a mega-bridge currently in construction that will link the main island to the continent for the first time. “It’s about self-esteem” she says and explains:

“Look, if you ask people for their opinion of the bridge, many will say ‘I’m not in favor of the bridge, but *at last* they are looking at us – *finally they are looking at us* (says in English) – they are finally looking at me, finally they are going to invest in us’. It doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter to them, they will pay any price. ‘But look, they are investing in us’. It is about self-esteem. Again, to *not* value what you have. As if believing that you, too, are worthless, just like the fauna and the ecosystem, too worthless to take care of, actually value, and say ‘Listen Mister, you think you can just come here? No you can’t just come here and destroy everything just because you sell the idea that what you bring is ‘progress’ and that I need it’. Instead [quick inhale] ‘Yes, because he says it is progress, that I need it, so it must be the progress that I need’; it’s all the same” (interview, May 16, 2015, Ancud).

Karen is describing a relationship of power that includes feelings of inferiority, neglect and (as discussed above) even resentment. Being on the wrong side of modern colonial time (Braun 2002), Chiloé is pressured to change and become more open to new flows of commodities and capital. Listening to Karen, we get a better sense of how the production of this new architectural landscape relies on, and responds to, the emotional geographies that have formed between Chiloé and the continent in such conductions. In short, the imaginative geographies of Chiloé as a timeless and mysterious “other”, in this rendering, has become a barrier to the neoliberal expansion of capital, insofar as opponents of the mall criticize it for transgressing the prevailing “temporal boundary” (Braun 2002, 10). Post-colonial politics of representation are now getting in the way of the expansion of neoliberal retail capital.

The mall, no doubt, signifies the arrival of a “modern” architectural spectacle. Prior to the mall, only a few national corporate chain retailers could be found in Castro. A refrain through the fieldwork was the word “advancement” (*avance*), in summarizing what the mall represented. When the mall opened its doors in August, 2015, the public was now facing the object of desire that many had advocated for in previous years. The architecture they found featured a dramatic architectural design that complements the discursive framing of the mall. There is an affective overlap between the spectacular and dramatic sensorial experience of visiting the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* and the prevailing discourses around progressing into modern time, an overlap that deserves more attention in future work to come on embodied architectural geographies of consumption.

A key finding of this research, though, was that most of the randomly chosen participants were largely ambivalent about the mall. It is to the ambivalence we now turn as essential for understanding the embodied architectural geographies of this mall and its context.

Ambivalence

While this article attends to emotional geographies of the building and will continue to do so below, this sub-section first wants to focus on non-representational possibilities that remain immanent to the experience of the mall itself. Along with the ambivalence of the human response to the mall, there is another kind of ontological ambivalence in the architectural space itself that was documented during participant observation. For example, the affective ambience of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* in the opening weeks was marred by ongoing construction of individual stores and the food court. Along with the carefully chosen audio and sound effects to set the mood, excessively loud hammering and electric power-tools also rang out through the building. Male construction workers in their dusty work clothes occasionally appeared in the mall, popping in and out of stores fronts covered with advertisements. While these activities will hypothetically end at some point, stores come and go, and will always require physical construction; there is no way around the use of tools and methods that cause disruption to the planned dreamlike state the mall seeks to produce. There were other objects that also disrupted the planned affective atmosphere. Coin-operated children’s rides are scattered through the mall and put a small child in gentle motion on a pedestal, usually with a change of theme music, devices to grasp and maybe flashing light effects. Several of these devices were in bad need of grease on their metal components, resulting in a high-pitched squeak that rang through the building with each revolution of the mechanism. As families utilized the rides in hope of producing joy in their children, the machine itself produced an excessive sonic factor that ran through the mall, grating on ears all around.

Other kinds of excess were impossible to miss. The anti-theft system at the entrance of the *Falabella* department store would sometimes go berserk and send an unstoppable, frantic and piercing sound through the mall’s cylindrical design; I could hear the high-pitched beeping from other floors as the sound travelled upwards and downwards with the escalator shaft. In another instance, a series of thefts at the mall had been reported to the police in the opening days after the Grand Opening and were covered in the local newspaper. I later heard rumors of a suspected a gang of thieves that frequent shopping malls in the region, a gang that had allegedly came to Castro to target the event. On another occasion I observed other nonconformist interventions. When I visited on September 11 – the highly charged anniversary of the military coup in 1973 that overthrew the Salvador Allende government and installed the military dictatorship led by General Pinochet – I rode the escalators and noticed small paper flyers scattered all around on the fixtures. Each flyer provided a brief history of the military coup and a critical warning of its contemporary legacy. I imagined someone dropping these flyers from the top floor and let them rain down onto the escalators and the floors below. There, suddenly, unexpectedly, inside the mall, a warning about the neoliberal “prison-mall” (Draper 2012), suddenly appearing where it usually does not.

These kinds of insights are what appear with a non-representational approach, one that does not only see domination or bio-political control in the retail design and architecture. Scholars like Pyyry (2016) and Roberts (2012) would suggest that if the mall is a spatial technology, we also have the responsibility to remain open to new possibilities in the forms of life that emerge there. Part of that commitment is to acknowledge that the space is perhaps not as powerful or omniscient as some critical theories might suggest. The architecture itself is multiple, insofar as it structures reality in some ways, while always coming undone in others (Miller 2014a).

This ambivalence of retail space resonates with the ambivalent human subjects that inhabit it. One refrain in the fieldwork was “yes, we wanted the mall, but not like this!”, or “yes, but not located there!”. I was often reminded of the recent opening of other mega-retail sites like the *Enjoy Casino* and hotel, and the *Sodimac Homecenter* big-box store (similar to a Home Depot), both located on the outskirts of Castro where they did not cause controversy. Some participants acknowledged the failings and risks of the mall but were also eager for its ultimate arrival. Ernesto, age 24, originally from Castro, elaborated on these conflicts:

“We thought we would have a mall, but when they started building it and it was really big, people started to say ‘whoa, this is complicated, this is gigantic, I don’t know, it’s ugly.’ It stops you when you see it, it’s gigantic. It’s really shocking. It’s not that attractive.... but even the people that are against it are going to also be here. All projects have problems at first. It’s like the bridge. A *necessary evil*, more than anything” (August 15, 2015, in the mall)

“A necessary evil”: perfect material for an embodied architectural geography of “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011), insofar as the evil is rendered necessary. We become attached to the evil (whatever it is), signaling a kind of spatial articulation of power. I began to pick up on other potential reasons for the mall’s *menacing* affect. In addition to the critical discourse of the architects, some residents were highly skeptical of what the mall would bring to Chiloé. Karina, age 38, for instance, was heading into the *Líder* Supermarket in the basement level of the mall and said I could tag along with the voice recorder. She was looking for a good deal on wipes and diapers for her twin infant daughters. The visit was quick, and she shared skeptical views about the mall, even though she went there looking for a good deal. We met several weeks later for a follow-up interview in which she elaborated on the role of consumerism in her life. When we looked at the photographs, she pointed to a difference between the small family-owned shops and the newer corporate retail formats. This, she said, is evidence of the kind of risks that are involved with the newer consumer infrastructure:

“With this little store, it might be over priced because of the shipping, but with these big malls it generates consumerism (*consumismo*). A lot of it. They are always offering credit cards. Outside of the malls or in the streets, they are always saying ‘you want this? you want that?’ without knowing what your finances are, whether or not you can actually pay the bills. Nobody asks, “O you’re a housewife? Here’s a credit card!”. They need to ask these questions, but they don’t. So people buy and become indebted. But maybe with these kinds of stores (points to the local convenience store) people wouldn’t take on so much debt. But if you have something like this (points to photograph of the malls) you are going to have total consumerism. Yeah you have a lot more options, greater variety, brands, quality, everything. But in the end it becomes a vice (*vicio*) and you end up spending too much. *This is how they change you* (*en eso te convierten*). With this kind of business and construction they turn you into a consumerist (*una persona consumista*)” (interview July 3, 2015, Castro library).

Karina gets to the heart of a key element of the post-dictatorship consumer society: easy consumer credit embedded in the built environment. She would go on to describe how she personally was targeted by this consumer-finance apparatus when she was a college student and how easy it was to get a credit card, even if you didn’t have a job or couldn’t afford it. She worries about the impact of this system for those vulnerable populations around Chiloé, those who “don’t know how to shop [like this]”, meaning that they don’t understand the interest rates and other common fees. In her elaboration, she also points to the gender dynamic of a patriarchal society in which women become “housewives”, implying limited control over finances. Even her status as care-giver influences her relationship to the mall, insofar as her search for wipes and diapers led her there against her critical disposition. I met others who shared skeptical views about the mall, but who found themselves there because they “didn’t have anything else to do!” (Sonia, 34, Castro, September 27, 2015, interview in the mall). For these respondents, the mall is menacing *and* attractive.

**Conclusion**

There are two main conclusions. The first is that we should consider very carefully the possibility that desire for the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* is potentially oppositional to the hegemony of postcolonial imaginative geographies. In demanding access to the mall as a “modern” infrastructure, pro-mall residents effectively reject the imposition of an imaginative geography that holds Chiloé as a traditional and ideal “other”, many times while also defending their cultural identity. Acknowledging these dense emotional geographies of development, *Pasmar* and Municipal authorities promoted a “right to consume” argument, one that destabilizes the prevailing heritage and tourist landscapes of Chiloé that conceive of the local as different, traditional and primarily rural. Through architectural practice, the forces of retail capital have responded to the imaginative geographies of the region in a way that facilitates their expansion. This methodology has therefore led to greater complexity in our understanding of the embodied politics of this building. In other words, the “not in my backyard” position risks enacting an “epistemological violence” (Spivak 1988, 219) on those wishing to transcend the constraints of postcolonial imaginative geography. Rather than present a passive or hollowed out consumer subject, this work has instead located a potentially oppositional affect in the desire for retail capital.

However, should we *really* consider desire for the mall as oppositional? The second conclusion, then, questions the first: retail capital, evolving in a post-dictatorship landscape, attends to embodied geographies in their strategy of enrolling new territories into new relationships of commodities, credit, consumer debt and architectural space and infrastructure. If attending to the emotional geographies of postcolonial development has helped identify possible counter-intuitive subject positions, then the ontological tenets of non-representational theories of affect help us hold on to another key insight of embodied architectural geography: that built environments of shopping malls do form part of a material infrastructure of governance and control, one enclosing in on populations in new ways. The critics of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé* are suspicious of this impending spatial technology and have resisted it, not only as the expansion of a perverse system of neoliberal governance, but one that is ultimately disrespectful of already existing emotional geographies of heritage and cultural identity. If the critics of the mall risk epistemological violence in their resistance, they are nevertheless aware of the power of architecture to influence social transformation and everyday life in the city. *The second main conclusion, then, is that retail capital is capable of encouraging and directing the oppositional feelings of resentment among parts of the Chilote population.* The critique of postcolonial geography is subsumed in the expansion of retail capital, an expansion that represents another kind of postcolonial colonization that is specific to the contemporary post-dictatorship era.

This article has considered how commercial architecture is at once embodied and political. Charting the overlaps between affective, emotional and imaginative geographies does not signal a reliance on representation as the master meta-concept that drives explanation. Rather, and much like Berlant’s (2011) methodology, it is to explore how people feel, perceive and understand the world, and how that process can be strongly informed by affective atmospheres themselves, as well as socially constructed meaning and the “force of representation” (Anderson 2018). In other words, more than just offering a descriptive analytic into the materiality of architecture, this article illustrates how emotion and affect became central in the struggle over the production of new urban architectural spaces. Importantly, this article reports on a series of unexpected findings and surprising conclusions around the embodied politics of the *Mall Paseo Chiloé*. Others concerned with the politics of urban transformation might find these insights compelling as an example of how to go about research in the context of rapid socio-spatial change, controversial urban development and passionate struggles over basic geographic truths among competing groups. Truths are often complex and can sometimes challenge the normative assumptions of the researcher. Research in the tradition of embodied architectural geographies can help us remain open to these realities, their complexities, and the political dilemmas therein.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. X Los Lagos Region (map by Manuel Prieto, reprinted with permission).

Figure 2. Mall Paseo Chiloé (photo taken by author 2013).

Figure 3. Forth floor wall of glass (photo taken by author 2015).

Figure 4. Escalators, new movement in space (photograph by author 2015).

1. The names of all participants have been changed to protect their anonymity, but in the case that a participant was a public official, civic leader or architect, most consented to and preferred using their real names. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)