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Milton Keynes' Centre: the apotheosis of the British post-war consensus or the apostle of neo-liberalism?

Janina Gosseye

Between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, growing economic prosperity and social stability drove the emergence of a mass consumption society in the UK and brought about revolutionary changes in the structure of the country's retail sector. These included the implementation of self-service, the establishment of supermarkets, the expansion of shopping areas in pedestrian zones in existing city centres and – last but not least – the development of new shopping centres. Some of the earliest shopping centres were located at the heart of new towns and were destined to function as the 'civic centre' of these new towns. Milton Keynes' *Centre*, which opened in September 1979, is one of the most prominent examples. Today, the building is heritage listed, but when it first opened it attracted substantial criticism from the public, the popular press and architecture critics alike. Not entirely 'public' nor completely 'private', constructed at a turning point from modernism to post-modernism, and entrenched between welfare state ideals and neo-liberal politics, it assumed an uneasy position 'in between'. Combining writing by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation with contemporary architectural critique and popular discourse, this article investigates how its architects and planners endeavoured to reconcile these dialectics in their design. It exposes their struggle to relate the architecture of the Centre to new social ideals that emerged in post-war years and define a novel formal language able to respond to the ongoing political and economic transformations that gradually dismantled the welfare state and paved the way for the 'triumph' of neo-liberalism.

Introduction

In preparation for the official opening of Milton Keynes' shopping centre by newly elected prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) drafted an 'Imaginary dialogue between the Chairman [of the MKDC] and the Prime Minister'.[1] Expecting Mrs Thatcher to question 'why … the exchequer [should] continue to invest taxpayers funds in the future development of Milton Keynes'[2] and propose that '… it should be possible for the exchequer to reduce dramatically the levels of public investment in Milton Keynes',[3] the MKDC was clearly troubled by the impending visit and felt that Lord (Jock) Campbell of Eskan, its chairman, needed to be well prepared for this encounter and the harsh line of questioning that (they imagined) would inevitably ensue. But was this fear justified? Admittedly, Milton

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[1] 'Opening of Central Milton Keynes by the Prime Minister – Tuesday, 25 September 1979', MKDC Consignment 8298, Box 4, File 3, 40–43, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury).
[2] Ibid., 40.
[3] Ibid., 41.

Keynes was a grand outcome of the UK's post-war consensus and stood for everything that Thatcher opposed. But surely the symbolism of the opening of Europe's then largest indoor shopping centre – the architectural embodiment of a liberal economy and a harbinger of global capitalism – at the heart of this new town on the cusp of her election would not have gone unnoticed? Oddly enough, this symbolism *did* seem to elude the architects, planners and politicians involved in the development of Milton Keynes' shopping centre. For them, the *Centre* was not a 'shopping centre' – a big-box as it had emerged in the United States – but a piece of civic infrastructure that would benefit the community at large.

Questioning whether Milton Keynes' Centre was the apotheosis of the post-war consensus or an apostle of neo-liberalism, this article demonstrates the complex ways in which public and private interests were interwoven in British post-war urban development. Already prior to the assumed 'neo-liberal turn' of the late 1970s, local governments worked in close collaboration with the private sector, leading to different public–private partnership constellations, the importance of which, British historian Peter Shapely has argued, was highlighted by the construction of countless shopping centres.[4] As a result, contrasting and (at times) conflicting goals and aspirations were projected onto (and incorporated in) shopping centre designs. Milton Keynes' Centre offers an excellent example in this respect. Combining writing by the MKDC with contemporary architectural critique of the Centre and popular discourse, the article iterates how Milton Keynes' architects and planners endeavoured to reconcile these different interests in their design. It also exposes their struggle to relate the architecture of the Centre to new social ideals that emerged in post-war years and define a novel formal language able to respond to the ongoing political and economic transformations that gradually dismantled the welfare state and paved the way for the 'triumph' of neo-liberalism.

Milton Keynes: the birth of Britain's biggest and best new town

In 1942 – in the throes of the Second World War – Churchill's coalition government issued a report entitled *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services*. Drafted by Sir William Beveridge, a highly regarded economist, this document, which is today commonly known as the *Beveridge Report*, rapidly became the blueprint for the modern welfare state. It detailed five giant social evils that beset the British people – illness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want – and in extraordinary amplitude also set forth the remedies: national health care for all, full employment, universal secondary education, state insurance against sickness, unemployment and old age and, last but not least, subsidized housing.[5] When the war finally ended, Beveridge's words were translated into deeds. One of the first points of action for the incoming Labour government was to devise creative solutions to alleviate the pressing housing deficit. Some 200,000 homes had been destroyed by bombings and much of the remaining housing stock was in poor condition; an estimated two-thirds of working class housing was, for instance, dependent on outdoor lavatories. Furthermore, a quarter of the civilian population had been displaced, and the country was on the verge of its greatest baby boom ever.[6] Advice emanating from both the state and town planners as early as 1944 advocated for the adoption

[4] Peter Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-war City: Historical Reflections on Public–Private Partnerships in the UK', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 4 (July 2013): 1289.
[5] Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 339–40.
[6] Elain Harwood, 'Post-war Landscape and Public Housing', *Garden History* 28, no. 1 (2000): 102–16. See also Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-war World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002).

of the neighbourhood unit as a model for housing design in Britain.[7] Two years later, in 1946, the British parliament passed the 'New Towns Act', which enabled the government to designate areas of land for the formation of new towns and regulated the establishment of development corporations, each of which was responsible for the building and management of one of the projected new towns.[8] Over the following decades, three development 'waves' led to the creation of about two dozen new towns in England and Wales; twelve between 1946 and 1950, five between 1961 and 1964 and six between 1968 and 1971.[9] The neighbourhood unit became an important component of these new towns.[10] British advocates of this planning model were convinced that the neighbourhoods they produced would present the sort of physical environment that promoted 'neighbourliness' and suggested that a causal, deterministic relationship existed between spatial arrangement and the production of 'community spirit'.[11] The careful positioning of retail facilities in particular was attributed a key role in the production of community formation and in 1944 the Retail Advisory Committee on Town Planning was formed at the behest of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.[12]

Over the following two decades growing economic prosperity and social stability led to the emergence of a mass consumption society in Britain, which was supported by revolutionary changes in the structure of the retail sector, including the implementation of self-service,[13] the establishment of supermarkets, the expansion of shopping areas in pedestrian zones in city centres and – last but not least – the development of shopping centres. Well aware of the growing importance of what was then described as the new 'Retailing Revolution', the government became instrumental in supporting the growth of new shopping centres.[14] In the early 1960s, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government,[15] which was – amongst other things – responsible for the designation of new towns, created a working party to assess the distribution, size and growth of shopping centres. It aimed to advise local authorities on shopping provision and trends

[7] Ministry of Health, *Design of Dwellings* (London, 1944); Ministry of Health/Ministry of Works, *Housing Manual 1944* (London, 1944), cited in James Greenhalgh, 'Consuming Communities: The Neighbourhood Unit and the Role of Retail Spaces on British Housing Estates, 1944–1958', *Urban History*, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0963926815000449.

[8] Peter Hall and Mark Tewdwr-Jones, *Urban and Regional Planning* (London: Routledge, 2010), 68–71.

[9] Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 154–5.

[10] Anthony Goss, 'Neighbourhood Units in British New Towns', *The Town Planning Review* 32, no. 1 (1961): 66–82.

[11] Clarence Perry, who in 1929 had originally presented the concept of the neighbourhood unit, had remained relatively silent on the ability of the neighbourhood unit to develop social relations. See Greenhalgh, 'Consuming Communities', 6.

[12] Greenhalgh, 'Consuming Communities', 13–14.

[13] It is estimated that by 1948 ten self-service shops were in operation in Britain. During this period up to 1954 the drive for self-service was very largely pioneered by co-operative societies. During the 1940s a few British retailers experimented with self-service in grocery, including the London Co-operative Society at Romford in 1942, and by 1948 a number of London Co-operative Stores had self-service sections alongside counter service. See Gareth Shaw, Adrian Bailey, Andrew Alexander, Dawn Nell and Jane Hamlett, 'The Coming of the Supermarket: The Processes and Consequences of Transplanting American Know-How into Britain', in *Transformations of Retailing in Europe after 1945*, ed. Ralph Jessen and Lydia Langer (London: Ashgate, 2012), 39.

[14] Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-war City', 1293.

[15] The Ministry of Housing and Local Government was the successor of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. It was originally formed as the Ministry of Local Government and Planning in January 1951, when functions of the Ministry of Health were merged with the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, which had been created in 1943. Its name was changed to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government by the Conservatives after the October 1951 general election.

in towns around the same region. However, although the state promoted the growth of shopping centres, it also recognized that building them required capital, expertise and political will, thus necessitating the public and private sectors to work together.[16]

While several shopping centres were built at the heart of existing city centres in an attempt to revitalize inner city areas,[17] some of the earliest shopping centres were located at the heart of new towns. This was perhaps not entirely coincidental given the strong involvement of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in the development of shopping centres. In 1955, the 'Town Centre' of the new town of Cumbernauld, which is widely accepted as the UK's first 'shopping centre', was inaugurated. Two decades later, in 1976, Britain's first out-of-town shopping centre, Bent Cross, opened. Located at a major traffic intersection, Bent Cross not only followed the American planning pattern, but also adopted the 'typical' American-born dumb-bell plan formula, running east to west, parallel to the North Circular Road, with the two largest stores at either end.[18] It is thus safe to say that when Richard Crossmann, the Minister of Housing and Local Government, designated the construction of Milton Keynes new town in 1967, not only was the retailing (and consumer) landscape in Britain undergoing intensive and comprehensive transformations, but the synergy between the development of a shopping centre and (or 'at the heart of') a new town was well established.[19]

Of all the new towns that had been constructed up until then, Milton Keynes was to be the largest as well as the most ambitious and modern. Located in north Buckinghamshire, it was to provide for overspill from the towns in the south of the county and was also destined to contribute towards housing London's surplus. In May 1967 the MKDC was established and preparations to develop a 'strategic plan' began in December of the same year.[20] In early 1970, Lord Campbell, Chair of the MKDC and a representative of the Labour Party in the House of Lords, presented the *Plan for Milton Keynes* to the minister. The macrostructure of this plan was based on a grid of roads, spaced at about one kilometre intervals, with land uses coarsely distributed across the entire designated area.[21] At a local level the plan relied on an even distribution of so-called 'activity centres'. These grouped together different services inside the grid and ensured that wherever you were in the city, you were never more than a six-minute (or 500-metre) walk away from the nearest public facility. Complementing these local nuclei was a large centre located at the heart of the new town which was to offer '[…] most of those services and facilities which serve the whole population of the city' and following the MKDC's advice needed to include a substantial shopping centre.[22]

In September 1979, after a rather halting development process, the Centre was festively opened.[23] Just as the architects and planners of the mid-1940s had deemed retail facilities

[16] Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-war City', 1293.
[17] A famous example is the Bullring in Birmingham, which was developed by the Birmingham City Council in collaboration with Laing Development and which opened in 1964. See Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-war City' and Jo Lintonbon, 'The Drive to Modernise: Remodelling Birmingham City Centre 1945–65', in *Shopping Towns Europe 1945–1975: Commercial Collectivity and the Architecture of the Shopping Centre*, ed. Janina Gosseye and Tom Avermaete (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2016).
[18] Zoe Wood, 'Why Developers Have Stopped Building Shopping Malls', *The Guardian*, May 5, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/may/04/shopping-malls-developers-stop-building (accessed November 6, 2015).
[19] Michael Edwards, 'City Design: What Went Wrong at Milton Keynes?', *Journal of Urban Design* 6, no. 1 (2001): 87.
[20] Milton Keynes Development Corporation, *The Plan for Milton Keynes*, vol. 1 (March 1970), 3.
[21] Edwards, 'City Design', 88.
[22] Milton Keynes Development Corporation, *The Plan for Milton Keynes*, vol. 1, 30–31.
[23] In 1974 the shopping centre went out to tender. Although the bids were judged very favourable, the country was in turmoil; Edward Heath's government had just been toppled in a general election and

within the neighbourhood unit capable of promoting 'neighbourliness' and 'community spirit', so too did the designers of Milton Keynes' Centre believe that this new shopping centre would support community formation and civic education within the new town through its spatial arrangement. However, the Centre was not only to operate on a local level, but it also needed to put Milton Keynes firmly on the regional map and, to satisfy its investors, was to function as a major commercial hub between London and Birmingham.[24]

Not a shopping centre but a city centre: extending the city grid and cultivating community

It was – as has been pointed out – not unusual for new towns to have a shopping centre at (or *as*) their core. Cumbernauld and Irvine in Scotland and Runcorn in England, for instance, all had such a commercial facility embedded in their centre. But the shopping centre in Milton Keynes was different. In May 1979, a few months before the buildings' opening, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) published a lengthy piece in its monthly journal entitled 'The Shopping Centre', which plainly stated: 'It [the shopping centre at Milton Keynes] owes no allegiance to its new town brothers at Cumbernauld, Irvine and Runcorn'.[25] This text was authored by Derek Walker, Chief Architect and Planner of Milton Keynes, who contended that the building was ' … a strange animal in conventional shopping terms' and ' … a far cry from the dumbell (*sic*.) concept of earlier American centres or the prison-camp exterior/seedy nightclub interior mode of many recent commercial ventures in France and England'.[26]

In the early 1970s Walker commissioned architects Stuart Mosscrop and Christopher Woodward to design the shopping building. Taking their cue from Walker, Mosscrop explained: 'We were determined we would not design a "shopping centre"'. He continued:

> This building type of ours was the biggest in Europe when it first opened. But all other modern shopping places were modelled on Victor Gruen, the American architect who in the '50s came up with the "blobs" – tarmac machines for spending money, entirely enclosed … No, we thought … [t]his is going to be the first place that we actually make for *all the people* in Milton Keynes.[27]

Taking inspiration from the nineteenth-century European arcades or *passagen*,[28] Mosscrop and Woodward structured the Centre around two large pedestrian arcades, 12 metres wide, 14 metres high and 800 metres long that ran east to west along the length of the building and were connected by secondary pedestrian routes at 90-metre intervals (see Figure 1). These secondary interior

Harold Wilson's new government had not yet decided whether to continue the policy of accepting substantial private investment in new towns. Thanks to interventions by Lord Campbell and others, the necessary approvals were received and by 1975 the shopping centre slowly started coming together. However, the national economy was in terrible shape and in 1976 – as retailers were slow to invest – it was decided to postpone the opening of the shopping centre to 1978. In the end, the opening of the shopping centre was influenced by John Lewis. They decided to only open shop in Milton Keynes' new Centre in September 1979 and many of the smaller shops decided to do the same. See Terence Bendixson and John Platt, *Milton Keynes: Image and Reality* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 1992), 145.

[24] Brian Burrows, 'Milton Keynes: A Model for Regenerating our Cities?', *Long Range Planning* 20, no. 1 (1987): 72.

[25] Derek Walker, 'Central Milton Keynes: The Shopping Centre', *RIBA: Central Milton Keynes Annual Report* 5 (1979): 213.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Stuart Mosscrop, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Marion Hill, ed., *The Story of the Original CMK* (Milton Keynes: Living Archive, 2007), 27.

[28] Christopher Woodward, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 25.

walkways almost seamlessly connected the Centre to the exterior (outdoor) city grid, while the extensively glazed primary arcades effectively subdivided the building into three commercial strips. The outer two strips were designed to contain smaller 'unit shops' and the wider middle band was designated to house the large-space-use department and variety stores. This middle band also comprised two large public squares: an outdoor garden court, called 'Queen's Court', and a spacious indoor hall, 'Middleton Hall',[29] which was – in reference to the great public facilities in Italy – paved with travertine (see Figure 2). Located at the heart of the new town, firmly anchored in the city grid, and housing an array of different spaces – large indoor and outdoor squares, as well as high and light, and low and narrow arcades – the spatial design of the Centre, its architects believed, would construct community spirit in Milton Keynes: it was a hub for face-to-face interaction, both a locale of everyday sociability and a venue for major events.

Walker, Mosscrop and Woodward basically thought of the shopping centre as an extension of the city grid, a network of (covered) streets and squares that was accessible 24/7.[30] Contrary to contemporary enclosed out-of-town malls with only half a life – for 12 hours out of every 24 these buildings lie empty – the Centre had no doors (but air curtains). It was thus permanently accessible and able to attract people at all hours; a true city centre.[31] To visualize the Centre's aspired urban atmosphere, the architects commissioned renowned architectural renderer Helmut Jacoby to make a set of illustrations of the design.[32] In one of his drawings showing the Garden Court, Jacoby prominently included a group of chortling children playing with a ball, accompanied by a dog in the foreground. Another drawing depicting Middleton Hall foregrounded an amorous young couple, while placing an elderly person in a wheelchair almost at the centre of the tableau (Figure 3). Jacoby clearly wanted to emphasize the accessibility of the shopping centre, both literally and figuratively speaking, as he consistently included people of all shapes and sizes, young and old, male and female in his illustrations. In a drawing of one of the shopping arcades, he even included a woman wearing what seems to be a hijab. Perhaps most remarkable about Jacoby's drawings of Milton Keynes' Centre is that even though he consistently showed its arcades and squares crowded with people, walking leisurely, chatting happily, enjoying their leisure time, very few (in fact almost none) of these people were actually carrying shopping bags. Jacoby had thus clearly well understood the architects' desire to create a 'city centre' before a 'shopping centre'.

Not a shopping centre, but a civic centre: inculcating civic pride, educating the people and engendering social consciousness

In his 1979 RIBA article Walker expressed the hope that, once opened, Milton Keynes' shopping centre ' … will symbolically become a centrepiece for community activity [which] will hopefully

[29] Ken Baker, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 109.
[30] Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 63–5.
[31] Mosscrop, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 63. Due to complaints of shop tenants regarding 'freezing winds' howling through the building, however, doors were installed shortly after its opening, much to the dismay of the architects and planners involved in its design. In a recent interview conducted more than 25 years after the doors had been installed, Walker still rails against this decision: 'Those doors should not be there! Those are pedestrian streets and should always be operated as such. The minute they sold that bloody building off, you knew the kiss of death was going to be on it … [The design of the Shopping Building] was all about permeability. It was never designed for a door. Never in a thousand bloody years!' Source: Derek Walker, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 63. See also Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson and Geoffrey K. Brandwood, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 488.
[32] Walker, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 65.

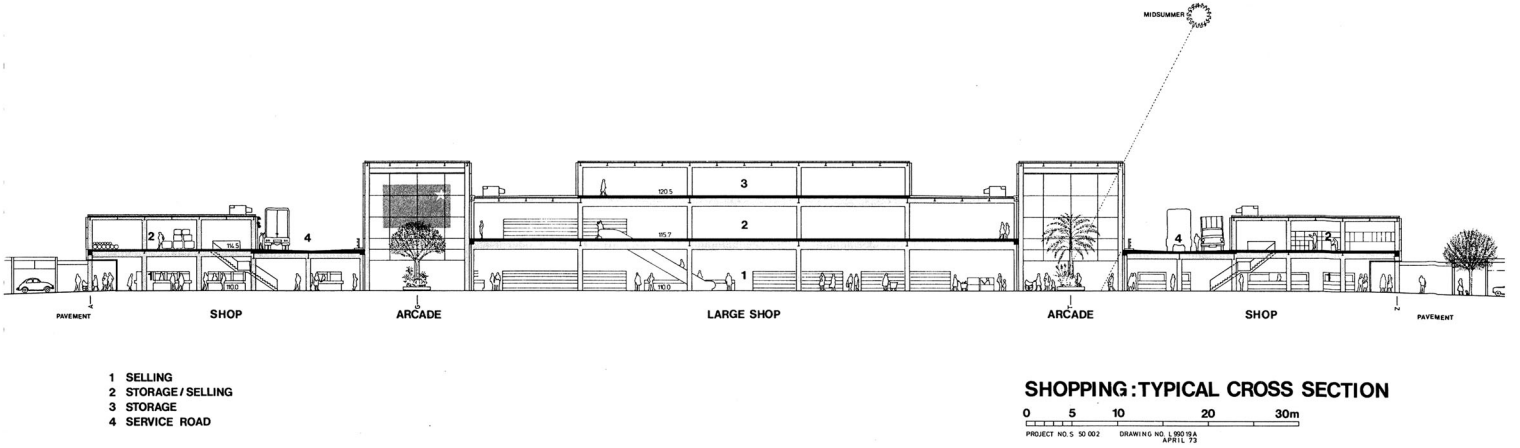

Figure 1. Schematic cross-section of Milton Keynes' shopping centre.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: Lib/ 15 and 16.

Figure 2. Image of the Queen's Court, inside the shopping centre.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: MK/ Photo/ 3/ 11.

Figure 3. Architectural drawing of Middleton Hall by Helmut Jacoby, 1974.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: Box of Photographs marked 'Misc Photos Identifiable Not Catalogued'.

inculcate the right kind of civic pride … '.[33] Like many of his contemporaries – local councillors, professional planners, architects, designers and even developers and builders – who highly valued civic pride as an aspiration for urban development and as a symbolic form of power,[34] Walker, together with Mosscrop and Woodward, consciously wrought to translate these aspirations into

[33] Walker, 'Central Milton Keynes', 213.
[34] Peter Shapely, 'Civic Pride and Redevelopment in the Post-war British City', *Urban History* 39, no. 2 (May 2012): 310–28.

Figure 4. Interior view of one of the main arcades of Milton Keynes' shopping centre, showing its lush vegetation in the foreground.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: MK/ Photo/ 3/ 11.

the design of Milton Keynes' shopping centre. One of the Centre's key design features destined to contribute to the inculcation of civic pride was its ambitious interior landscaping scheme. Supported by the extensive glazing of the main arterial walkways, which allowed natural light to penetrate deep into the building, Mosscrop and Woodward integrated approximately 40 plant beds in these two urban corridors. Each of these plant beds measured 11 by 1.8 metres on the surface, and extended to 13 metres in length, 4 metres in width and nearly 1.5 metres in depth underground.[35] Designed by Tony Southard of the MKDC landscape department in collaboration with the architects, the landscaping scheme sought to give each of the Centre's two 'streets' a unique character. The more shaded north arcade was given typical temperate forest and tropical plants with dark, dense foliage, while the south arcade (which got more direct sunlight) was

[35] Tony Southard, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 117.

landscaped with plants from hot, dry climates, the foliage of which is generally paler, smaller and less dense (see Figure 4).

Walker, Mosscrop and Woodward made the decision to include lush vegetation in the shopping centre against the advice of commercial surveyors, who informed them that it would impede consumption as shoppers would not be able to see 'what the name over the shop on the other side of the arcade is'.[36] Commercial success was however not a top priority for the designers and certainly ranked lower than the Centre's ability not only to 'inculcate' but also to express 'the right kind of civic pride'. They aimed to create a centre for community activity, a civic centre more than a shopping centre. Nonetheless, it is safe to assume that the architects also believed that the unique atmosphere that the landscaping scheme bestowed upon the Centre would become one of its key 'selling points' and would thus inevitably support its commercial aims. In a recent interview, Allen Duff, who was the commercial director of the MKDC when the shopping centre was built, recalls 'a number of disagreements between commercial people and architects … on how the Centre should operate'. With the benefit of hindsight, however, he adds: 'I'd acknowledge that the architects were probably right on most of them – the commercial criteria were not particularly helpful to the overall success of the place. The architecture – the quality of the space – was the single, biggest attraction'.[37] The local press indeed soon picked up on the Centre's distinctive design. An article published in the *Milton Keynes Express* on 21 September 1979 pointed out that 'unlike [in] some of the earlier covered shopping centres in Britain, the plants are not an afterthought but an integral part of the original design' and reported that one writer had already described visiting central Milton Keynes as 'like shopping at Kew Gardens'.[38] This likening must have pleased the architects as Kew Gardens not only contained the largest collection of living plants in the world, but was also a prime location for the cultivation of civic pride in the UK.[39]

Once built, the MKDC cleverly used the Centre's distinct vegetation to lay claim to Milton Keynes' urban superiority to attract prospective shoppers to the new town. Ahead of the shopping centre's opening, it issued a beautifully illustrated brochure, with a colourfully drawn composition of the flowers, shrubs and trees that could be found inside the shopping centre on the front, and a perspective drawing of the building from above indicating precisely which vegetation could be found where on the back.[40] In the margin next to this drawing, a short caption suggested that '[w]ith such distinctive quality of the interior landscape, shopping in Central Milton Keynes is a uniquely pleasant and stimulating experience'[41] (see Figure 5). This statement beautifully illustrates how the MKDC inextricably linked the need to market the shopping centre (and by extension the new town of Milton Keynes) to the inculcation of civic pride. It also corroborates Peter Shapely's suggestion that the inculcation of civic pride was part and parcel of urban development projects in post-war Britain and was – as it had been in early modern England – structured around architecture and the use of 'public' space.

[36] Frank Henshaw, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 117.
[37] Allen Duff, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 59.
[38] 'Shop in Kew at New City', *Milton Keynes Express* (Supplement), September 21, 1979, 27.
[39] In Britain, the relationship between landscape architecture and civic pride was by then already well established. Professor of landscape architecture Ian Thompson has, for instance, posited that in Britain '19th century legislation opened the way […] for local authorities to make provision for municipals parks and very soon these became matters of civic pride'. Source: Ian Thompson, *Landscape Architecture: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.
[40] Promotional brochure for Milton Keynes Shopping Centre, issued in 1978, found in: MKDC lib 19/20-21, Folder containing two advertising leaflets for Central Milton Keynes shopping, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury).
[41] Ibid.

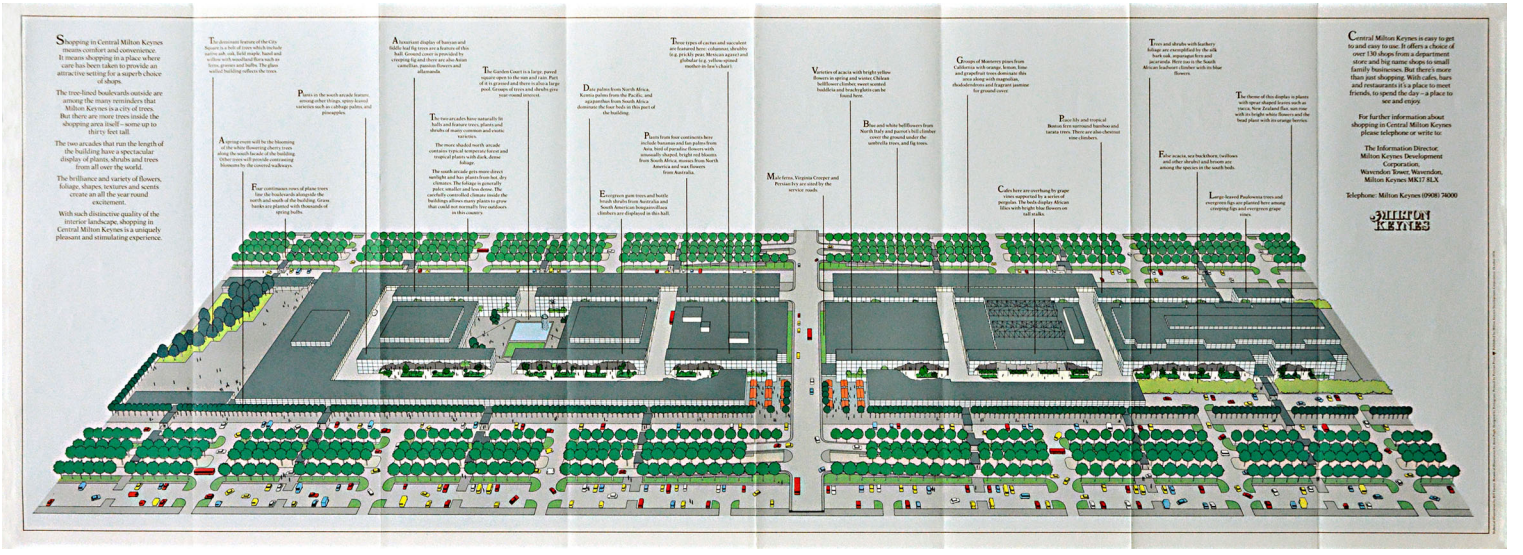

Figure 5. Brochure issued by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation in 1979, indicating which vegetation could be found where in the shopping centre. Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: Lib/ 19 and 20.

Now, however, it was no longer mirrored in the choice of Gothic or classical styles of design, but through a modern architecture of steel, concrete and glass, through new public spaces and, last but not least, through public art.[42]

Soon after its opening, the Roland Collection of art was on display in the shopping centre. The *Milton Keynes Express* reported: 'Pablo Picasso and Henry Moore are not names you generally associate with doing the shopping, but thousands of city shoppers have been popping in to see the works of these and other artists in a temporary gallery in Central Milton Keynes. What's more, there are hopes that the gallery will one day become a permanent feature'.[43] While Lord Campbell, chairman of the MKDC, credited the architects for changing '… the space of a shopping area into a perfect exhibition area',[44] Kenneth Robinson, chairman of the Arts Council, underlined that '[i]t is vital that this kind of exhibition should be available to people going about their business shopping, and able to drop in [as] this is the way you make converts to the enjoyment and appreciation of the arts'.[45] The Development Corporation also commissioned various artworks to be installed inside the shopping centre. In February 1980 an £18,000 'kinetic sculpture' by American sculptress Liliane Lijn, composed of 23 vertical aluminium cylinders, each of which was wound into enamelled copper wire to reflect light, was suspended from the ceiling above Midsummer Arcade. The installation of the sculpture, which was entitled 'Circle of Light' and which was to reflect 'the numerous sources of light, whether daylight, spotlights or incidental lighting from shops', was accompanied by an exhibition of drawings that showed how the sculpture was made (see Figure 6).[46] The MKDC thus not only sought to inculcate civic pride through the design of the shopping centre, but also encouraged the civic education of Milton Keynes' residents through the integration of art in the building and the programming of various public events and exhibitions.[47]

More than a shopping centre, the building was to become a civic centre, which through its design would craft better citizens. Instead of having an underground delivery system, or even one at the rear, the Centre's delivery routes were placed on top of the building (see Figure 7). This decision was quite controversial, but had strong practical and economic motives. Underground servicing was very expensive, Mosscrop pointed out, because the vehicles needed 5.4 metres' clearance. He suggested that '[u]p there, you only have to take them 3 m high and they get ventilation and light free of charge'.[48] In a recent interview, however, Woodward intimated that pragmatism and cost-effectiveness were not the sole motives informing this decision. He contended that by placing the delivery routes on top of the Centre in direct view of the shoppers – these service roads were located on the low, outer bands of shops and thus clearly visible from the two main 14-metre high arcades – the design team aspired to create a continuous reminder of the labour involved in the functioning of the Centre.[49] Beyond cultivating the individual shopper and inculcating civic pride, the building's design thus also aimed to heighten the social (or 'class') consciousness of its shoppers.

[42] Shapely, 'Civic Pride and Redevelopment', 310–28.
[43] 'Shoppers Meet Picassos', *Milton Keynes Express*, September 28, 1979, 38.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] 'Let There Be Light with Sculpture – Cost of £18,000', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, February 27, 1980, 22. See also 'The Circle of Light', *Milton Keynes Express*, September 28, 1979, 59.
[47] Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 109.
[48] Mosscrop, interviewed by Roger Kitchen in: Hill, *The Story of the Original CMK*, 113.
[49] Christopher Woodward, interviewed by Janina Gosseye, 13 January 2014.

Figure 6. View of the 'Circle of Light' sculpture by Liliane Lijn inside Milton Keynes' shopping centre. Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: MK/ Photo/ 3/ 11.

The commodification of urban life

Ahead of the Centre's opening, the Central Milton Keynes Advertising Agency was given the delicate task of launching an advertising campaign. This campaign was to instil confidence in private investors on the one hand, while maintaining the depiction of the Centre as a city/civic centre servicing the local community on the other. Countering (or perhaps rather 'complementing'?) descriptions by the local press – which was commonly keen to support claims to greatness[50] – of Milton Keynes' Centre as the 'Biggest Buy in All Europe'[51] and a 'Palace of

[50] This is eloquently described by Shapely in 'Civic Pride and Redevelopment in the Post-war British City'. Shapely cites examples of several 1960s urban redevelopment schemes to pinpoint how the local press never missed an opportunity to bolster the status of their city. As such, a discourse developed around civic pride, based on a clear ambition to build 'the biggest and the best'. See Shapely, 'Civic Pride and Redevelopment', 323–4.

[51] 'Biggest Buy in All Europe', *Milton Keynes Express* (supplement), March 23, 1979, 24–5.

Figure 7. Aerial view of Milton Keynes' shopping centre, showing how the elevated road provides access to the service roads on top of the building.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: MK/ Photo/ 3/ 33.

Varieties',[52] the Advertising Agency advised that the campaign was to depict the Centre as 'friendly and human and warm and inviting',[53] giving clear instructions to avoid any reference to 'bigness', 'inhumanity' and 'coldness'.[54] This inviting and humane campaign rhetoric not only neatly coincided with the democratically inspired unconditional access to the shopping centre promoted by MKDC's architects, planners and politicians, but also advanced the Centre's commercial aims. A similar egalitarian rhetoric was used by Thatcher to promote the sell-off of council estates, a policy that she rolled out at the opening of Milton Keynes' shopping centre, cleverly coined the 'right to buy'.[55] But the 'right to buy' was not a right available to all residents of Milton Keynes as Roger Kitchen, a social worker of the MKDC, pointed out in an article in the

[52] 'Palace of Varieties', *Milton Keynes Express* (supplement), September 21, 1979, 16–17.
[53] 'Central Milton Keynes: Shopping as it Should Be – The Launch Plan: Advertising and Promotion', found in: MKDC lib 22/2, Brochure on the launch plan, advertising and promotion for Central Milton Keynes entitled 'Shopping as it Should Be', Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury).
[54] Ibid.
[55] After the opening of the shopping centre Thatcher and her entourage visited the Galley Hill home of Peter and Patricia King, who had (by then) lived in Milton Keynes for more than six years. During this visit, she presented them with the deeds of their house, making Mr and Mrs King the first couple to make use of the substantial discounts offered by Thatcher's new government to tenants who wanted to buy their (council) homes. See 'She's Nice, Say Labour Voters', *Milton Keynes Express*, September 28, 1979, 3. See also Andy Beckett, 'The Right to Buy: The Housing Crisis that Thatcher Built', *The Guardian*, August 26, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/26/right-to-buy-margaret-thatcher-david-cameron-housing-crisis (accessed November 1, 2015).

Milton Keynes Express: 'There are many people', he wrote, 'the less well off – the people for whom Milton Keynes was intended to provide housing – who will never be in a position to afford the glossy life style the development corporation continues to portray in its undampened enthusiasm'.[56] Kitchen thus suggested that by subsuming Milton Keynes' 'city centre' in a shopping centre, not only did the quality of urban life become a commodity, but the city itself did as well.

Rather than a city or a civic centre, some suggested that the new shopping centre introduced the neo-liberal ethic of intense possessive individualism as a template for human socialization in Milton Keynes.[57] In a piece entitled 'A Potent Symbol', published in the October 1980 issue of *The Architects' Journal*, Sue Aplin wrote:

> I think the centre fulfils some deeper need in these pilgrims who travel from as far as Nottingham and Peterborough. It is a communal meeting place to which they can go and be contained as part of a group with a shared destination and purpose … there is something very alluring about the centre, standing on the highest point for miles around and incorporating mystical elements in its design. The building's interior has some of the symbolic content of a cathedral with aisles and naves on axes, and high central spaces which reduce human form. There are seven altars where you can pay respect to favourite saints in the form of Boots, Marks & Spencers and British Home Stores. The order of identity of a particular time is normally represented by a structure be it a mound, a stone, a pyramid, a temple, a castle, cathedral or palace. Today the new shopping centres, like Milton Keynes, […] have become potent symbols of our time to today's communities.[58]

This somewhat incongruous conflation of the Centre with the country's great medieval cathedrals, which suggested that in Milton Keynes consumerism had become a religion, was not plucked out of thin air. In September 1979, a few months after Bill Jowett, manager of the Milton Keynes Shopping Management Company, suggested that '[o]ne of the most exciting ideas is for Middleton Hall to become the "cathedral" of Milton Keynes',[59] Reverend Robin Baker, rector of the newly created city centre parish, soon joined in his enthusiasm, and – agreeing that 'Middleton Hall has almost a cathedral feel about it' – opted to host that year's harvest festival in the shopping centre.[60] As Milton Keynes had no church at that time, Reverend Baker's enthusiasm was not entirely surprising. Although it had the world's largest shopping centre, Milton Keynes lacked not only a church, but also quite a few 'civic facilities' that one would expect to have been constructed prior to such a large commercial structure. At the time the Centre opened, the new town, for instance, did not have a hospital[61] or a train station.[62] By building the 'biggest and best' indoor shopping centre in Europe at the heart of Milton Keynes before some of these basic civic facilities, the MKDC gave citizens the instruction that shopping was the civic value of Milton Keynes. In September 1979, mere days before Thatcher officially opened the Centre, the *Milton Keynes Express* announced:

> Shopping as it should be – that is the slogan Milton Keynes Development Corporation has chosen to publicise the new shopping building. But for thousands of city people the beautiful multi-million pound building symbolises more than just a place to do the weekly shopping. For fifteen years

[56] Roger Kitchen, 'Glossy Life Style', *Milton Keynes Express*, March 23, 1979, 31.
[57] David Harvey, 'The Right to the City', *New Left Review* 53 (September–October 2008): 31–2.
[58] Sue Aplin, 'A Potent Symbol', *The Architects' Journal: Reflections on Milton Keynes Shopping Centre* (October 22, 1980): 801.
[59] 'Biggest Buy in All Europe', *Milton Keynes Express* (supplement), March 23, 1979, 24–5.
[60] 'Planning Harvest Festival in Shop Centre "Cathedral"', *Milton Keynes Express* (supplement), September 21, 1979, 12.
[61] G. Farmer, 'The Cash Should Be Going Towards a Hospital', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, March 5, 1980, 9. See also Bendixson and Platt, *Milton Keynes*, 146.
[62] 'Green Light for New £7.8m Station Plan', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, February 20, 1980.

Figure 8. Aerial view of Milton Keynes' shopping centre shortly after completion.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: MK/ Photo/ 3/ 33.

> Milton Keynes has been a city in name only, without a natural centre and relying heavily on the towns within its boundaries and beyond to supply its needs. But now Milton Keynes has a focal point worthy of any city and can claim to be a regional centre, drawing visitors from far and near who call it "Crystal Palace".[63]

The official opening of the shopping centre[64] was largely overshadowed by demonstrations held in 'honour' of the visit of Prime Minister Thatcher. 'Prime Minister gets Rowdy Reception', the *Milton Keynes Express* headlined on 28 September 1979, continuing that during the official opening of the shopping centre Thatcher was met by a 'mob' of protesters, who 'booed and heckled throughout her 10 minute speech in Middleton Hall' as '[s]houts of "go home" and "boring" rang out across the hall'.[65] This protest, however, was not directed against the 'multi-million tribute to the consumer society', as the *Milton Keynes Mirror* called it,[66] and the

[63] 'Crystal Palace Opens', *Milton Keynes Express* (supplement), September 21, 1979, 2.
[64] Although Margaret Thatcher 'officially' opened Milton Keynes' shopping centre on 25 September 1979, the shopping centre had already opened to the public more than one month earlier, on 9 August 1979. See 'Prime Minister to Open City Centre', *Milton Keynes Express*, July 6, 1979, 1; 'Prime Minister to Open City Centre', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, July 11, 1979, 1; 'Mrs Thatcher Puts off Visit', *Milton Keynes Express*, August 3, 1979, 1; 'Super City Centre Has Lift-Off!', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, August 15, 1979, 1; 'Crystal Palace Opens', *Milton Keynes Express* (supplement), September 21, 1979, 2; 'As Thatcher Opens the City Centre … Hundreds in Protest over Cuts', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, September 26, 1979, 1; 'Prime Minister Gets Rowdy Reception', *Milton Keynes Express*, September 28, 1979, 1.
[65] 'Maggie Is in a Fighting Mood: Noisy Hecklers at City Centre Demo', *Milton Keynes Express*, September 28, 1979, 3.
[66] 'Supershop … We're Number One in Europe!', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, August 8, 1978, 1–2.

neo-cliberal ring of this development. Instead, protestors who 'noisily shouted' as an 'unmoved'[67] Thatcher walked through the shopping centre, railed against government spending cuts to Milton Keynes that had (supposedly) made the development of Milton Keynes' Centre possible. Many regarded the development of the Centre as a form of 'government' expenditure that was necessary to attract private investment and guarantee the survival of Milton Keynes.[68] In the late 1960s and 1970s, as many old industrial cities like Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham plunged into economic decline and economic hardship was a realistic threat, local authorities (not in the least development corporations) needed to 'sell' their city, both literally and figuratively speaking, in order to attract investment. Failure to do so, Shapely claims, would have meant missing out on major investment opportunities, leading inevitably to accusations of incompetence.[69] Many (if not most) Milton Keynes' residents thus silently condoned the MKDC's rather pragmatic and business-minded approach; they did not rail against the shopping centre for commodifying public space in Milton Keynes, but (quite on the contrary) joyfully proclaimed: 'I feel that the shopping centre has given a heart to the city … it is a joy to shop at Central Milton Keynes, it is just what Milton Keynes needed and in my opinion shopping as it should be'[70] and:

> On my first shopping expedition in the city centre my biggest reaction was a sense of community, at last here is a place where the people of Milton Keynes could come and feel at home. A feeling of "this is our shopping centre", a place that binds all the small areas of the city together. I strongly feel that the Milton Keynes centre has brought the cementing OUR city.[71]

Enveloping the public and the private in a (post-)modern jacket

While the local popular press and many Milton Keynes residents marvelled at their new shopping centre, some national commentators were more critical of this development. In a television programme called 'Shop', executive producer of arts and features for Anglia TV John Swinfield blandly labelled the complex 'Shopping out of a test-tube – its countenance is smooth anonymity'.[72] Not entirely public nor completely private, not a real shopping centre but not a wholesome civic or city centre either, constructed at a turning point from modernism to post-modernism, and seemingly entrenched between welfare state ideals and neo-liberal politics, the Centre's ambiguous position 'in between' became a particular point of contention.

Architectural critics were maddened and baffled by Milton Keynes' shopping centre. In *The Architects' Journal* of October 1980 – an issue dedicated entirely to the shopping building – some questioned the dubious way in which the Centre promoted 'consumer society values' while others

[67] Ibid., 9.
[68] The Milton Keynes Development Corporation was faced with severe cuts in their budget. 'City in Danger if Tories Win', *Milton Keynes Express* announced on 6 April 1979, claiming that 'the new city and its long-awaited hospital would be on the danger-list if the Conservatives win the election'. Attracting private investment was thus seen as a necessity to guarantee the survival of the city, which was confirmed in a June 1979 article, stating: 'The government has cut Milton Keynes Development Corporation's budget this year by £3m but this week an MKDC spokesman claimed it would have little effect on the development of the new city. For there has been "increasing support" from private investors, rising from £40m last year to £60m this … '. See 'Government Cuts MKDC Budget', *Milton Keynes Express*, June 29, 1979, 15. This was not unusual, as Peter Shapely has pointed out: 'From the late 1950s through to the late 1970s, local government in Britain worked (often closely) with the private sector to secure investment and redevelopment'. Source: Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-war City', 1288.
[69]. Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-war City', 1292; Shapely, 'Civic Pride and Redevelopment', 314.
[70] 'City's New Heart', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, January 30, 1980, 22.
[71] D. Parker, 'A Sense of Community', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, February 6, 1980, 15.
[72] 'Shopping Out of a Test-Tube?', *Milton Keynes Express*, January 25, 1980, 6.

deprecated the shopping centre for its 'failure to follow orthodox marketing practices in the lack of inviting signs and "razzamatazz"'.[73] Terry Farrell, for instance, expressed his 'unease' about 'the way the designers knowingly or unknowingly contributed to the overall institutional effect with an obsessive use of grids and anonymous mirror glass'[74] (see Figure 9). He continued: 'The '60s argument that anonymous buildings and frameworks allow people freedom to do what they like is clearly mistaken; creative, personal prompts are needed to prevent pubs looking like railway buffets and public squares like exercise yards'.[75] Thus unmistakably categorizing the Centre as an utterance of a bygone architectural era – modernism – Farrell expressed a desire for the architects to 'breathe more fun into the whole mixture'.[76] The tone of Peter Smith's contribution, 'Shopping Inside the Gridiron', was even less forgiving. After railing against the Centre's 'inexorable gridsquare', 'blank walls' and the 'perverse' handling of parking and first floor servicing, Smith concluded: 'No, Milton Keynes, I can't rate you very highly in my shopping centre stakes. Most of the tasteless developers' schemes up and down the country have more go, more sense of place about them. I don't even think that one can blame (or credit) Mies or the Modern Movement with this phenomenon, or rather mania'.[77]

The architects and planners of the Centre had of course been given a very daunting task. At a time when architecture was increasingly turning away from the blandness and failed utopianism of the modern movement, allowing for 'complexity and contradiction'[78] to enter the profession, and the precedents of shopping centres that had 'architecture' were few and far between,[79] they had to manage the expectations of private companies who needed to be seduced to open a shop in the building while attempting to imbue the shopping centre with a sense of civic 'dignity' befitting a city centre. It is then no surprise that they relied on (or 'reverted to') the modern methods they were familiar with, leading to what Nicholas Pevsner has labelled 'a sleek Miesian steel-framed and glass-clad style',[80] the only discernible post-modern element being its mirror glazing.[81]

More than with form and design idiom, the local community was concerned with the financing of this glass and steel leviathan. In 1979, for instance, when the MKDC announced that it had set

[73] David Embling, 'Editor's Comment', *The Architects' Journal: Reflections on Milton Keynes Shopping Centre* (October 22, 1980): 806.
[74] Terry Farrell, 'Endless Arcades', *The Architects' Journal: Reflections on Milton Keynes Shopping Centre* (October 22, 1980): 798.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 799.
[77] Peter Smith, 'Shopping Inside the Gridiron', *The Architects' Journal: Reflections on Milton Keynes Shopping Centre* (October 22, 1980): 805.
[78] Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Press, 1966).
[79] Owen Hatherly, 'Milton Keynes Shopping Centre Becomes Grade II Heritage Listed/Expert View: A Lost Vision of Public Modernism', *The Guardian*, July 16, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jul/16/milton-keynes-shopping-centre-grade-listed (accessed November 30, 2015).
[80] Pevsner, Williamson and Brandwood, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*, 489.
[81] According to John Dorst, the mirror-glass surface is one of the most complete signifiers of post-modernity. It signifies the post-modern agencies that absorb and project all contexts as surface effects or simulacra; it signifies the very technology of reproduction, which centrally defines the post-modern moment and as a physical façade it signifies the operation of capital in its latest and most refined phase. In the opening chapter of his highly influential work *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson – through the analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles – similarly links mirror glazing to post-modernism and capitalism. For him, the mirror glass exterior embodies the glazed superficiality of the commodity in late capitalism. See John D. Dorst, *The Written Suburb: An American Site, an Ethnographic Dilemma* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 107; Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 224–55; Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

Figure 9. Exterior view of Milton Keynes' shopping centre, showing the mirror glass panels applied to the façade.
Source: MKDC Collection, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury), archive location: MK/ Photo/ 4/ 2.

aside half a million pounds for the advertising campaign for the shopping centre,[82] Borough Councillor David Taylor questioned why public funds should be invested in the marketing campaign of a shopping centre. 'Who Pays City Publicity Bill?', he openly asked in a letter to the *Milton Keynes Express*,[83] and questioned if it is '[m]orally right to spend public money advertising a selection of private companies?'[84] Similar doubts were raised regarding the cost of the artwork commissioned for the shopping centre. After the *Milton Keynes Mirror* invited citizens to inform the newspaper if they believed that the £18,000 spent on the 'Circle of Light' sculpture was 'money well spent or cash down the drain',[85] the weekly was inundated with letters claiming 'Yes, that sculpture is a waste of money' and lamenting 'Where will it end?' Many writers felt that this money should have gone towards a hospital,[86] while Pauline Williams from Bletchley contended that it would have made 'much more sense … if the £13,000 so easily donated by MKDC could have been used for a more "worthwhile operation"', such as creating a 'pleasant park' opposite the Bletchley train station, 'where one could sit and wait for one's family and friends'.[87] This of course leaves the question of whether similar concerns would have been raised if Milton Keynes' Centre had been a true 'city centre' open for discussion.

[82] '£500.000 Promotion', *Milton Keynes Express*, October 26, 1979, 7.
[83] David Taylor, 'Who Pays City Publicity Bill?', *Milton Keynes Express*, November 2,1979, 8.
[84] Ibid.
[85] 'Let There Be Light With Sculpture – Cost of £18,000', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, February 27, 1980, 22.
[86] Farmer, 'The Cash Should Be Going towards a Hospital'.
[87] Pauline Williams, 'Where Will It End?', *Milton Keynes Mirror*, March 5, 1980, 9.

The most pertinent debate regarding the shopping centre's finances was raised in a note sent to the *Milton Keynes Express* by resident Gwen Howick, suggesting that the shopping centre had been made too ornate at the expense of housing estates.[88] Her suggestion received an impassioned reply in the following edition of the newspaper by an anonymous 'shopper', who pointed out that:

> … the shopping building was funded by the Post Office Pension Fund. They invested their money in the future of Milton Keynes. They would not have spent that money on housing. In a capitalist society that is their choice. They, after all, have to think of their members' future needs and they need a good return for their investment.[89]

The fact that the Post Office Pension Fund put up £24 million[90] for the development of Milton Keynes' Centre indeed placed the MKDC in a very advantageous position. It not only freed the corporation from entering into a partnership with a private developer, which might have compromised the design, but it also provided a welcome rebuttal against claims that the MKDC was squandering taxpayers' money. Although the 'Royal Mail' was part of the public sector, its pension scheme was not run in a similar way to other pension schemes for public sector workers. Contrary to most public sector pension funds, which were paid for directly out of general taxation, the Post Office Pension Fund relied on contributions from workers and the growth of the scheme's assets to pay for workers' pensions, while the company was liable to pay for any shortfall out of its own revenue. In theory, the anonymous 'shopper' whose letter was published in the *Milton Keynes Express* of 15 February 1980 was thus correct; the money invested into the shopping centre did not come from the taxpayers' purse, but from a private fund. However, as the decades rolled past and the expenses of the Post Office pension scheme steadily increased, the deficit between the fund's assets and liabilities also grew gradually. By the early 2000s, when talks started about the privatization of the Royal Mail, this deficit was estimated at £37.5 billion. So, when in March 2012 the Royal Mail was privatized in one of the largest government sell-offs in generations and the service was sold for £28 billion, the company's future obligations, which were tied up in the Post Office Pension Fund and which amounted to approximately £10 billion, were nationalized. This deal thus relieved the (now private) Royal Mail of its immense pensions deficit by effectively passing this financial burden on to the UK's taxpayers.[91]

This entanglement between the public and the private (in economic as well as spatial terms) which started in the post-war decades and was subsequently strongly supported (and elaborated) by Thatcher's regime, has made it increasingly difficult to qualify precisely what the country's 'public' assets are and what are its private ones. The likening of a visit to the Centre to 'shopping at Kew Gardens' was in this respect very telling, as it succinctly summarized the ambiguous position that was attributed to the new Centre. At Milton Keynes' (shopping) Centre the public sphere – or 'civic realm' – was intimately enmeshed with private interests. Here, citizens became

[88] Gwen Howick, *Milton Keynes Express*, February 8, 1980.
[89] 'Hurrah for Shops Centre', *Milton Keynes Express*, February 15, 1980, 8.
[90] 'Opening of Central Milton Keynes by the Prime Minister – Tuesday, 25 September 1979', MKDC Consignment 8298, Box 4, File 3, 18, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (Aylesbury).
[91] Mitch Feierstein, 'Royal Mail Pension Nationalisation: Far from Providing a Windfall, It Turns MPs into Hypocrites and the Rest of Us into Debtors', *Daily Mail*, March 20, 2012, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2117106/Royal-Mail-pension-nationalisation-Far-providing-windfall-turns-MPs-hypocrites-rest-debtors.html (accessed November 1, 2015); David Kingman, 'The Privatisation of Royal Mail: What about the Pension Scheme?', Intergenerational Foundation: Fairness for Future Generations, September 25, 2013, http://www.if.org.uk/archives/4280/the-privatisation-of-royal-mail-what-about-the-pension-scheme (accessed November 1, 2015).

consumers who, MKDC's politicians, planners and designers hoped, would through the spatial design of the shopping centre and through encounters with exotic foreign plants and modern artworks become 'elevated' citizens with a keen community spirit and heightened social consciousness.

Conclusion

The transition from the state attempting to order and control the spaces of consumerism towards a heavy consumerist neo-liberal agenda and policy is often assumed to have happened at some point, but has rarely been evidenced in concrete terms. Untangling the construction history of Milton Keynes' Centre, this article attempts to address this dearth. It demonstrates the complex ways in which public and private interests became increasingly entangled in post-war urban development in Britain and uncovers how architects and planners responded to the ongoing political and economic transformations that gradually dismantled the welfare state and paved the way for the 'triumph' of neo-liberalism. In Milton Keynes, Derek Walker, Stuart Mosscrop and Christopher Woodward sought to create a city centre that was able to inculcate civic pride, educate the public and engender social consciousness, while responding to the economic aims of its private investors. The resulting design – a gleaming glass and steel Miesian box, which formally brings to mind the utopian optimism of the modern movement, the only identifiably post-modern element its abundant external mirror glass – was a function of the synergies and dissonances between these different aspirations. Although the Centre, a shopping centre, commodified urban life in Milton Keynes and introduced the neo-liberal ethic of intense possessive individualism as a template for human socialization in this new town, it did create a modern heart for the new town that – as one resident noted – 'binds all the small areas of the city together'. The study of Milton Keynes' Centre thus evidences that it was neither the apotheosis of the post-war consensus nor an apostle of neo-liberalism, but both simultaneously, as the building expresses the confluence of these somewhat antagonistic socio-economical ideologies in its material form.

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