

The Aesthetics of Urban Production and Trade: A Short Summary*

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The aesthetics of economic spaces is currently attracting a great deal of attention. In an attempt to close lucrative deals, for years large commercial enterprises have been conceptualizing new ways of making their products look more appealing, in order to convince as many buyers as possible to purchase them. The strategies they used speak to the human senses. Sellers have thought of every detail from the architecture, to the right background music, to the scents wafting through the air. The consumers' habits are analyzed together with sociologists, psychologists and recently even neuroscientists, in order to guestimate how well products will sell on the market, even before they have been developed. By now malls have evolved into a sort of theme park, attracting even more customers.¹ But the consumers are more than just manipulated, uncreative buyers and users, as is often postulated by consumption critics. They adapt to products in a creative manner by using them to fit their needs and by doing this even establish their identity and connect to other people. Places and products of consumption therefore function as indicators of social life, which are of immense importance to the constitution, preservation and evolution of communities.²

As suggested by the opening theory of this section, this is not a modern day phenomenon. In fact, similar tendencies of a calculated aestheticization of urban economic spaces can be traced back to Antiquity. As part of a both social and economical influenced practice, characteristic form and structure models were developed, which connected products to associated architecture. These not only fulfilled functional needs but were also genuinely artistic in their own right and took on the shape of specific types of spaces.

The goal of this section was therefore to try to trace the aesthetics of ancient economical spaces. Naturally, it was not possible to systematically analyze the topic just based on short papers. But the speakers were still able to outline the potential of their analyses on ancient economic spaces. Overall three points were especially highlighted:

Staging the Economic Spaces within Urban Settings

Multiple contributions were able to show that and, with which strategies, economic spaces were staged within an ancient urban environment and were made to stand out compared to their surrounding area. Armando Cristilli demonstrated that the macellum was not an exclusively introverted building. Instead its front facade enticed walkers-by through the use of elaborate materials, colors and large-scale architecture. The sellers on Delos and in Pompeii designed iconographic trademarks advertising their shops and

products. Mantha Zarmakoupi noticed that the Italics on Delos made reference to their economic activities through the display of the lares compitales at the entrances of their houses. Taylor Lauritsen discovered that images of merchandise, animals or deities had been painted on the outer walls of Pompeian tabernae, which gave the property a definitive identity due to their high recognition factor.

Rich Atmospheres for Large Money Transactions

Just as in modern times, in Antiquity aesthetically ennobled spaces were created for the execution of large money transactions. Simona Perna showed this phenomenon based on a building lavishly decorated with marble and paintings, which is located about 600 meters south of Pompeii in modern day Murecine. One of the main characteristics of the complex is a porticus triplex with some seven triclinia. It lies grandly high above the Bay of Naples at the mouth of the river Sarno. She interprets this luxurious building as being a *statio negotiatorum*, so an aesthetically pleasing local for business transactions. An especially blatant case of creating an ‘honorable’ atmosphere is the Forum Romanum in Rome, which was the central theme of Jessica Bartz’s paper. Of course the reasons for its aestheticization are manifold. But it is clear that all ‘dirty’ industries were banned from this visually noble place, with only money changers being tolerated to stay.

Aestheticization and Consumption of Production Spaces

Both Pia Kastenmeier and Michael Feige pointed out that spaces of production were aestheticized and that there were different aims associated with this. Pia Kastenmeier analyzed the outer triclinia in inner-city Pompeian wine gardens close to the amphitheater and argued that their aesthetic appeal was in part due to the connection between spaces of production and consumption. Michael Feige’s research was of a similar nature. He explicitly turned his attention to oil and wine presses on the Italian peninsula and in doing so identified numerous examples of production sites being revalued and elevated into the sphere of leisure and representation of the villa owner through means of different forms of ennobling e.g. in terms of the building materials.

Even though these points were only based on case studies, it is already possible to clearly discern different ranges of the aestheticization of ancient economic spaces. A multitude of questions can be developed from this: How are economic spaces staged within urban settings? Are there specific forms of ‘economic’ design/décor? What might have been the purpose of decorating these buildings? In what way do people and architecture affect each other in economic contexts? How are economic spaces perceived? Do written or visual sources reflect on the aesthetic qualities of economic buildings?

An appealing task for the future could therefore be to systematically approach the collection of individual phenomena started in this section, in order to answer the overall questions on the emergence, development and motives behind the aestheticization of ancient economic spaces.

Notes

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¹ z.B. Hellmann – Zurstiege 2008; Lindemann 2015; Drügh 2015.

² Hohnsträter 2016.

References

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Lindemann 2015

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