

# DOTSHOPS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines internet shopping sites in relation to developments in earlier spaces of consumption. It is a critical analysis of the use of virtual space in Internet shopping sites and the way they often reflect established practices rather than producing new modes of consumption. Despite the potentialities of virtual space, retailers and brands continue to commission sites that constitute limited remediation of catalogue and magazine formats with their linear and shallow navigational design. The neurotic referencing to real space (shops) and rationing of space in all its dimensions in the design of their websites reveal an anxiety on the part of brands and retailers regarding their ability to harness cyberspace through design.

## KEYWORDS

Electronic Spatiality, Virtual Reality

## INTRODUCTION

The curious phenomenon that was the inspiration for this paper is the frequent reference made in the internet sites of certain brands to the real space of their early shops and their current flagship stores. Brands like Gucci and Armani incorporate in their Internet sites reference to the designed pleasure found in the retail spaces that have been created to express the qualities of their brand. While I'm not about to predict the end of real space shopping in favour of Internet shopping, this tendency of established brands to cling to the space of their successful retail stores and to feature it so significantly and distractingly is anachronistic. It is a sign of the anxiety of brands and retailers regarding their ability to control cyberspace through design. A source of this anxiety is the understanding that shopping on the internet lacks the particular sensory and sensual qualities that can be invoked in real space.

The last two hundred years have seen the evolution of a number of kinds of shopping spaces from atelier to showroom, from arcade to department store, from shopping strip to mall and from generic store types to designer boutiques. We can also include as shopping spaces, the pages of the mail order catalogue and the magazine. Contemporary retail spaces result from the collaboration of the brand, manufacturer, retailer, brand consultants, marketers, architects, interior designers, communication designers, retail designers and visual merchandisers. The degree of sophistication that has been developed in creating spaces that

have successfully engaged consumers is not easily dispensed with. The notion that the experience of the shopper can't be controlled in the same way that is has been in real space contributes to this anxiety. The advice of some authoritative marketers [1] that existing brands can only survive by clearly separating their Internet business from their existing business may exacerbate

this fear.

As well as being a new medium of mass communication the Internet provides a wholly new means of marketing goods and new relations between consumers and sellers and also between consumers and other consumers. It is already clear that entirely new players can be phenomenally successful while established retailers and brands can be resoundingly unsuccessful in establishing sites that result in significant sales. They are often reduced to using their Internet presence only as a form of advertising/promotion with a merely tokenistic opportunity to shop.

The fear that their sites are a less authentic experience for shoppers also drives the anxiety of brands and retailers. Each era of capitalism has produced new retail environments and forms of selling that both respond to consumers' relations to the world of objects and form consumer behaviour. It is a reflexive relationship between the seller and the buyer that mediates the kinds of goods that are sold, the nature of the spaces of consumption and their design. Therefore how to produce the best space for consumption on the Internet is not only a contemporary design problem, it is also a production, supply, marketing and communication problem. While forms of internet shopping are diverse to address diverse markets and will proliferate further, many are either pedestrian and useful, or visually sophisticated while failing to deliver a genuinely innovative shopping experience. The most successful shopping sites embody new relations between the consumer, the object, the consumer's desire, the seller, and other consumers.

Shopping for commodities beyond the fulfilment of basic needs has been understood as evidence of the inherent desirability of particular commodities and subsequently as evidence of a drive to complete the self by obtaining an object of desire. More recently shopping has been explained as the confirmation of the manifestation of a desire that is elicited by an object.[2] Thus the spaces where shopping has occurred have been important not only in providing a context that establishes the value of commodities, but also in providing shopping experiences that successfully elicit desire.

In the 19th century, the form of the department store was developed as a result of innovative business practices, the new technology that made them possible and the new capacity of industry to produce a mass of goods. Every element of department store design was intended to encourage people to consume beyond their needs and to shop for wants. The resulting space was an overwhelming pleasure and an overwhelming success. The need to create new pleasures in virtual space provides a challenge to the flexibility and imagination of manufacturers, retailers, marketers and designers. It demands the development of new forms that will effectively use the technology in a way that translates into consumption.

Some highly successful Internet shopping sites provide the opportunity to buy at a bargain price from a relatively undifferentiated mass of goods that the consumer must hunt through as in a bazaar, such as E-bay. Brands targeted at youth markets like Nike and Virgin have also been successful at selling on the

Internet so far. This is not merely due to the fact that young people are open to new experiences and ways of doing things, but also because these sites have incorporated more sophisticated and appropriate uses of the potentialities of the medium. While legibility and clear navigation are always welcome, anyone who is potentially an Internet shopper is not going to shift from the shopping habit of a lifetime without being engaged by an exciting new relation to the product and/or brand or retailer.

Developments in the design of retail spaces over the past 200 years have not only been about creating spaces where consumers will engage with the objects and services that the retailer and manufacturers want to sell, they have been about inducting consumers into new practices of consumption. This has been achieved by creating spaces of sensory pleasure and play which have the task of invoking consumer desires. In this paper I will be examining the way retail spaces have developed and how they reflect technological and economic change and new practices of consumption. My aim is to analyse the reasons for certain characteristics seen in current Internet shopping sites and to speculate about the ways in which future directions of shopping on the Internet might be located. It is my contention that we can learn from the history of retail spaces, the way their forms encode technological and business innovation and the relation of object and consumer desire. A better understanding should lead brands, manufacturers, retailers, marketers, and designers to confront their anxieties about their control of virtual space and successfully address the opportunities that the Internet provides as a new retail space.

### MODERN SHOPS

Modern shopping began in the late 18th century when middle class consumers visited showrooms to purchase mass-produced products. Showrooms were a development from the tradition of visiting the craftsman's studio to order an individually designed and manufactured craft object. The Wedgwood showroom in London combined innovations such as glass-fronted display cabinets only seen in the homes of the very rich and juxtaposition of more humble teapots and milk jugs with unaffordable iconic designs, like the Portland Vase. This was a limited edition of ceramic copies of the Duke of Portland's Roman cameo glass original, which was imbued with the Duke's social status, classical education, fortune and taste - a product of these three attributes. These iconic objects functioned in the way that couture collections work in the fashion and beauty industries today, running up huge losses but adding value to millions of lipsticks and bottles of perfume sold to the middle class.

Another innovative feature of the showroom was the use of catalogues in conjunction with the displayed merchandise. These allowed middle class consumers to select their own combinations of patterns, colours and shapes. Catalogues for decorative arts were also used by travelling salesmen and as a means of developing export markets for goods. They had the unintended function of facilitating the copying of designs by rival manufacturers and subsequently of unifying tastes by spreading them more widely. Successful companies like Wedgwood were responsive to the demands of regional and foreign markets through the evaluation of orders

from various places. This included the development of designs for specific markets, like the native flora designs introduced to decorate standard cream-ware for the Australian market in the 1880s.

The department store represents the subsequent stage of capitalism, technological development and social and cultural change. The transition from individual shops, showrooms or groups of shops in arcades into the more complex department store is one of the more striking and influential changes in 19th century commerce. [3] It required more sophisticated structures, more sophisticated administration and new approaches to marketing categories of goods to support it. All over the globe large stores selling a mass of different kinds of goods appeared by the 1830s; *magasins de nouveautés* in France, universal providers in Australia and department stores in Britain, the US and Hong Kong.

The rise of the department store represents the assembling of thousands of employees in a single workplace, the organization of a meticulous division of labour, a super-imposition of several hierarchical levels of command and the systematizing of the entire work process. It led to production being based increasingly on quantity and economy of costs and to consumption that was indulgent and wasteful. The department store's implied commitment to mass production led to changes in the number of goods that were produced for a mass of consumers. Products became commodities. Department stores radically changed the act of purchasing, turning it into a cultural activity, rather than a response to basic needs. New stores and their mode of display not only satisfied demand, they created new ones, and kept on endlessly creating them.

The fundamental distinguishing element of the department store was its overwhelming size. Each department store strove to represent itself as an entire world, self-generating and with the capacity to grow endlessly. The visitor was encouraged to think they need go nowhere else, but could wander aimlessly, drawn from one part of the store to another by the spectacle of the endless variety of commodities, the infinite bounty of capitalist mass production. [3]

The department store was intended to bring the commodity closer in order to make it seem more available. Goods were taken out from behind the counter so that visitors would encounter them directly and allowed to touch, smell and to look up close. Readymade garments could be tried on. Goods such as bolts of fabric were extravagantly piled up, encouraging the sense of mastery gained by choosing from a large selection. The design of the department stores recalled palaces and theatres; they were grand in scale and extravagant in their use of materials. They provided better fuel for fantasies that people harboured - the act of purchasing was felt to be a means of realising them.

Casual visits to department stores were encouraged, stimulating impulse purchasing or the purchase of required goods or services that might otherwise have been made elsewhere. Thus a variety of services and environments were provided to attract customers; art galleries, cafes, rest rooms, nurseries and meeting places for women. Musicians were hired to provide concerts and employees were encouraged to join company

choirs that gave performances after hours. The idea of speculative consumerism that the Wedgwood showroom initiated in the 18th century was further advanced by the new social practices of window-shopping aided by the capacity of industry to produce and department stores to afford large plate glass windows. In Paris, people were encouraged to promenade on the new spacious boulevards laid down in Baron Haussmann's re-design of the city. The department store as Emile Zola wrote [4], opened itself to the passer-by. Its windows were larger, better lit and more full of merchandise than specialist shops had been. Window displays demanded attention. Commodities were offered to whoever was passing, including people who had no intention to shop. The window display offered a new kind of space, like the cyberspace of the Internet it was both utterly exposed to the gaze and physically inaccessible.

In England mail order catalogues preceded the department store. The earliest were begun by companies licensed by the British Government to supply goods to members of Britain's armed forces while on campaign or serving abroad in Britain's colonies, in places like India and Australia. They eventually extended their lines of goods and their services from military men who were stationed abroad and their families, to become patronised by anyone living in places remote within Britain but accessible by mail. Eventually people in London began to patronise them too. Like some internet-only retailers, they began as large warehouses with mailrooms attached. When they developed a reputation of providing reliable quality goods they were so widely patronised by local people that eventually they found it worthwhile to open as department stores.

In the US department stores preceded the mail order catalogues. When laws relating to the establishment of postal services were set down, in order to facilitate trade and the economic development of the country, it was decided to legislate against taxes being levied against goods that crossed state borders. This meant that instead of being taxed twice, once by the state where the sale occurred and again by the federal government, goods that were sent by mail were only subject to one tax. This resulted in goods being sold through mail order catalogues being cheaper even though they may have come from across the country, than if bought at a local store. This continues to be the case in the US and accounts for the relatively easy acceptance of internet shopping in that country.

Mail order catalogues of the late 19th and early 20th centuries developed into extremely interesting publications due to the print technology, the need to keep catalogues relatively light and compact and the mass of different commodities they had to illustrate and list the qualities and prices of. The resulting form has a number of interesting features one of which resonates with the contemporary tendency to refer to the real spaces on internet shopping sites. The early pages of mail order catalogues, as with the advertising posters of the period for a myriad of products, show the stores, factories and even in the case of the Sears and Roebuck company, its own railway station in Chicago. This strategy served to encourage prospective customers to feel confident in sending off their hard-earned money to a successful business that wouldn't cheat them or go broke before their goods were delivered.

Another reason for the illustrations of stores in catalogues was that in big city centres there was the possibility to shop around and therefore the business of a large stores implied not only economies of scale, but also successful patronage and thus low prices. They also encouraged the prospective consumer to feel that they were participating in a shopping experience that was somehow equivalent to that experienced by people who lived in less remote areas. The reference to real shops on internet shopping sites duplicates this strategy. The reality is however, that shopping from a catalogue or an internet site is a very different experience to shopping in a real store and thus this strategy has an impending use-by date.

Throughout the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue of 1902 [5] as in other 19th and early 20th century catalogues there is an intended repetition of language, just as there is in an evening's television advertising or flashing panels on the Internet today. This includes the repetition of words and images. It includes photographs and drawings of the company's real estate and real retail premises. Repetition serves both to ensure a message is received, even by the slowest and most dim-witted customer, but it also has the effect of creating a sense of inevitability. Sears is telling us not only that its wealth and real estate holdings are large; it is also telling us that nothing can stop this behemoth, this monster of capitalism. The catalogue browser may just as well give up any residual anxiety about controlling her purse strings and start shopping.

A fascinating feature of 19th century catalogues is the way illustrations functioned to draw the readers' attention. Illustrators had only black lines on a white background or later black and white photographs very poorly reproduced with a big dot screen and a strict grid within which to do this. This resulted in a number of approaches used throughout each catalogue to catch and then to maintain attention. The all-important element of design used I have decided to call the 'phantasmagoric'. This is the development of small differences in a sea of similar objects. Pages of footwear, clothing and implements are unified by repetition while inducing a kind of frantic desire to determine the differences. This is almost a necessary outcome in illustrating a number of extremely similar goods, is avoided in catalogue-style Internet sites.

The phantasmagoric emerges again in the directional lines in illustrations of a single, double or series of pages. The emphasis on similarity over a group of minutely different goods results in a mesmerising effect. We are drawn into an hallucinatory world, in the case of illustrations of bangles and other jewellery, of turning or oscillating shapes. While we begin by trying to determine the unique qualities of each, matching up the particular motif that fits with our identity, or if a gift is required, with the identity of the recipient, before we know it we find ourselves whirling over the surfaces of these highly decorated goods, in a roller-coaster ride that sucks us into an illusory space conjured within the catalogue page.

A third version of the phantasmagoric is the repetition of faces, each similar but each differentiated not only by the product, but by the accessories which again lure us into a feverish attempt to create a hierarchy - the one most like ourselves, the prettiest, the snootiest, the

most devious. All of these phantasmagoric elements have a strange connection to the art of people who are suffering from various forms of schizophrenia as seen in the work of the posthumously famous Mexican artist Martin Ramirez [6]. This is the inversion of normal hierarchies of representation in which the repetition of what are usually less important elements overwhelm a scheme. An example is the way lines which begin by define the boundaries of objects, lead us inevitably into a vortex from which there is no clear escape. The sense of being on the brink of a loss of volition or at the least an awareness of a parallel reality in which normality is suspended or absent, might be understood as a manifestation of the consumer's unconscious fear of loss of control when encountering appeals to their most fundamental desires. A further strategy of mail order catalogues to draw attention and hold it was to make the product leap out of the page with an unexpected sudden increase in scale. This effect contrasts with a further effect of mail order catalogues - the sense of a bizarre sort of equivalency in the diverse goods displayed. This is a feature Karl Marx described as pervading the Great Exhibition in 1851, the first truly international exhibition of manufactured goods. He used this observation as a means of explaining how capitalism inducts people into an unreal relation to objects and money and ultimately keeps them captive because they must operate within its systems. Marx's insight into capitalism is mirrored by the major religions' traditions of the problems of wealth, understood as dangerous to humility, empathy and greater self-knowledge.

The next major development in retail space after the department store and the mail order catalogue was the shopping mall. A cluster of shops sometimes attached to a major department store under a roof, it can also be understood as an enlarged series of arcades. This new shopping space was popularised after World War 11. One of the earliest malls was an open-air shopping centre in the Netherlands, which influenced the design of the Olympic Village Shopping Centre in Melbourne's West Heidelberg, for the 1956 Olympic Games athletes' village. The development of refrigeration technology, the expectation of greater comfort by consumers and retailers' desire to encourage longer and therefore more shopping in malls developed in the US meant they were roofed, fully air-conditioned and surrounded by car-parking areas by 1956 [7]

Architectural features like fountains, sculptures and plants to compete with close to home shopping strips and downtown retailers, shopping malls. They developed food courts rather than the couple of cafés that they had had in the earliest years and entertainments such as ten pin bowling alleys. Other features which became mall standards in the 1970s and '80s were banking and post offices facilities, child-minding, medical suites, further sporting facilities including ice-skating rinks and swimming pools and eventually cinemas and game arcades. These features are replicated in the games, downloads, clubs, subscriptions to email updates and other features that occupy internet shopping sites.

In order to differentiate one mall from another and to attract successful franchises and up-market stores that could sustain high rents, theme parking was introduced in the 1980s. This was the introduction of larger areas between shops, extravagant interior architectural features and break-out areas, often adjacent to food-

courts. Theorist Celia Lury [6] effectively describes this theme parking as real space taking on cartoon space. She argues that malls designers created impossible, vertiginous fantasy spaces that have been proved to have a great appeal for consumers. The theme parks that influence malls are in turn the product of animation design and film and television production designs. Design in the film, TV program or cartoon has a relation with the real world, but not necessarily any real commitment to reflecting real relations of space, individual protagonists (actors or cartoon characters) and viewers. The production of spaces that invite us to participate in a pleasurable fantasy, that challenge our perception of scale and our sense of physical integrity, results in our identification with the fantasy space and a further break down in the separation of the consumer from the commodity.

Harvey Ferguson [2] describes a subsequent development observed in mall spaces in the early 1980s using Princes Square, a mall in Glasgow, which was a re-use of existing 19th century commercial buildings. Ferguson explains that apart from its refurbishment rather than replacement, one of the things that seems to distinguish it from an earlier example of a more standard hermetic mall in Glasgow, was the relative lack of commodities on display. Ferguson argues that in this later kind of mall the commodity seems to 'recede into the skin of the mall itself'. He suggests that this represents the new stage of the consumer's relation to the commodity and also of capitalism. He writes that with the prevalence of advertising on TV and other media we no longer have to be trained to desire what we don't need by department stores and malls. Now we come to shop with an established acceptance of our desire to complete ourselves through purchasing commodities. All we need are a few triggers and we are activated into consuming.

Ferguson's analysis of contemporary practices of consumption is based on a critique of academic psychologies' explanation of the relation of desire to the self. He explains how desire was seen as an absolute or groundless force propelling the individual to action. His conclusion is that in the new shopping spaces for the contemporary shopper "both outside world and inner reality are held at arm's length", commodities need only carry the possibility rather than the promise of connecting them with their fantasies.

## DOT SHOPS

Cyberspace is the latest kind of space where we encounter commodities and go shopping. Internet shopping sites and brand sites that are intended to encourage us to shop for their merchandise are widely varied in their approach for a number of reasons. These include the level of resources available to companies, their interest in fostering new markets and their different target markets. Retailers and new companies that have been set up to use the internet to sell have come up with a range of strategies that reflect the relations of the consumer to the object, to the brand and to the act of shopping on the part of designers, marketers and clients.

Some Internet sites derive strongly in their form and use of virtual space from earlier types of retailing and marketing spaces. These instances of remediation refer to the two-dimensional space of the mail order catalogue and the magazine. An interesting aspect of the growth

of sites devoted to selling goods on the Internet is that the gorgeous ones don't necessarily perform better in a strictly functional manner. Sites that are aesthetically pleasing and those that are interesting users of the media don't necessarily encourage consumption and some of the most visually banal sites and technologically pedestrian can be the most successful in an economic sense. These catalogue sites tend to be quite shallow in the way we can burrow into the information they provide. We quickly come to a dead end and have to return to a previous spot on the site in a very linear manner, like backing out of a narrow passage - never a comfortable experience.

Amazon.com is notable for its development of the catalogue form into something entirely new by its capacity for users to influence the content of the site through reviews and to communicate with one another about its wares and through reviews and responses to them. This results in the capacity of the user to personalize their shopping experience. The capacity to browse in lateral as well as vertical and horizontal ways through the "people who bought this also purchased" feature, results in a more fluid and open experience of cyberspace. The lateral and the personalizing elements of the experience of this site combine to create a sense of the user's interests and identity as central to the shopping experience and thereby appeal to our desire for acknowledgment, our desire for distinction. It also provides a sense of mastery for the consumer in not only accessing goods and navigating the space, but of making their mark in the form of a book review or comments, for all the world to see.

Very few sites offer a virtual shop in which to browse despite the repeated tendency to illustrate magazine and journal articles with virtual shop spaces. More often the approach is a combination of catalogue and magazine formats. Some are information-rich and offer a very limited scope in goods to purchase online. Others provide a significant amount of goods, enough to feel that you are genuinely shopping. The trick seems to be to offer enough diversion in the form of diverting animation, games, 'clubs' and information to engender playful engagement in fantasies of identity while allowing some sense of mastery over the shopping experience. They offer a combination of horizontal and vertical space - means to burrow into what is provided and to spread out sideways and encounter other information. Another positive feature is the way we can move in different ways to other choices in a number of ways. Amazon is the most successful site I've encountered in this category.

A number of sites that are more visually appealing, fashionable and compete effectively with magazines in the quality of their photography, layouts and other features are connected to fashion brands such as Gucci, Prada, Fcuk and Giorgio Armani. Interestingly some of them connect us back to the mail order catalogue tradition of drawing our attention to the real store and thus real space. In 2002 the Gucci site homepage for example featured photographs of its newly finished New York store as prominently as its access to merchandise and information about its chief designer/artistic director, Tom Ford and its president and CEO Domenico de Sole. Sometimes reference to the stores, as in the Armani site is a means of showing us where to shop, at others it's a means of establishing that the brand is connected

to either a long tradition of shopping pleasure, as in the case of Gucci. The Gucci site's cataloguing of its stores' history of successfully fulfilling our fantasies seems a ploy more appropriately targeted at investors than at shoppers. At other times this strategy is a means of establishing the connection with the brands' recent investment in architecture and interior design. This approach seems to reveal a lack of confidence in the brands' ability to invoke desire in cyberspace - as if it's a dimension that they don't yet trust or feel they can control. The design of Internet shopping sites needs to reflect the balance of sensory pleasure, images that elicit our desires and enough controlled aspects or familiarity that promote the sense of mastery that characterise the individual consumer's experience in leisure shopping. Brands and retailers are used to assuming that they are in control of the consumer and that this mastery is attained through appeals to the senses, the abandonment to sensuality on the part of the leisure shopper. The reality is that shoppers have always maintained a level of control/mastery despite the seduction of new practices of consumption.

Perhaps as a result of the technology we have and the problem that many people's home computers aren't powerful still places considerable limits on what can be achieved. But it still seems to me that there's sameness to even the most fashionable of shopping sites in their approach to space. The use of what I'll call the 'Curtain' pops up with monotonous regularity. This is a motif of the horizontal movement of a band of colour, texture and imagery that appears to cover over an earlier image or view. Notable examples are the site of Barneys' the department store and the brand Fcuk. On one level the 'Curtain' suggests a certain spatial depth beyond the illusionism of a photograph or illustration, but at the same time flattens it off even further. The provision of sections of the website where we can play, where moving images are accessed if we have the ram, are means of alleviating this shallow entry-point.

An extremely effective evocation of space on Internet shopping sites that has only just begun to be explored is the use of soundscaping. This is especially effective considering the limited capacity of home PCs. The opening segment of the recent Louis Vuitton site has an appealing animated collage of photographs, but even more excitingly a collage of sounds. The noise of an ocean liner hooting at the dock, hurrying people, whistles and shouts, the throb of the engines evoke not only the space of the departure, but also the imaginary space of the places we've always wanted to go. The groovy techno backing-track of other fashion industry sites like that of Sportsgirl, seems the aural version of the 'Curtain' by contrast.

The most innovative feature shopping site I've encountered is Nike's, with its 'design your own sports shoe' section. I have to note here that I have never purchased any Nike goods, that I don't fit the target demographic and I am certainly not interested in promoting it or any other company. This section invites the visitor to choose from a range of colours, styles and within a limited character group to customise their sport shoe with a name or message; "eat my dust" or whatever. Though as we all know from the extremely successful culture-jam example, it can't read 'sweat shop'. This feature reflects the capacity of contemporary manufacturing to 'mass-produce' individualised

commodities, using 'just in time' supply systems and the small batch production made possible by 'kamban' digital management of inventory. Its origins in new technological developments and business practices guarantee its novelty value.

The Nike 'design your own sports shoe' feature of its internet site adds play to the act of shopping beyond what we might expect in a store though it does hark back to the showroom and catalogue combination while adding a uniqueness to the experience of shopping on the internet. Recently Gucci has added a similar feature in which shoppers are invited to order a customised handbag. Above all it allows the site to compete with the thrill of real space by providing the thrill of being mastery over the actual production of the commodity. The time delay that is a negative feature of internet shopping, between paying and receiving, becomes a delightfully extended period of anticipation because of the 'creative' input of the shopper into the final product.

Contrary to marketers' initial predictions, sites that aren't attached to a major store or even connected to a shop have been some of the most successful at turning over stock. In contrast major companies, who early on devoted a lot of energy and finance on getting sites up and running, have not found them entirely successful. A frequent argument is that people are reluctant to use their credit cards and that they don't have faith in the current security arrangements and standards of encryption. My hunch is that too few sites offer what Nike does, to encourage consumers to change from an earlier, comfortable pattern of consumption by offering something that seems genuinely exciting and new; a sense of creativity, the possibility to create a unique product that is supposed to be a tangible reflection of the consumer's individuality and is a projection of a desire. In this case the desire for distinction that Nike creates by buying space on the bodies of elite athletes as they achieve what none of the rest of us can.

## CONCLUSION

Shopping on the Internet can provide a sense of mastery through the sense it provides that the world's resources are laid out for our shopping pleasure. Just as the department store allowed access to a mass of goods from all over the world, so the Internet allows us to range over the world to shop. It also provides endless fantasy space in which anything is possible, extending beyond the vertiginous effects of the shopping mall. We no longer need to be taught to desire things we don't have the cash for and beyond what we need. We accept our want for things that remind us of our unfillable desires and we have an almost endless form of credit as long as we have a plastic card. We can play with fantasies of who we are and the life we can lead, by ranging far and wide on the net and playing with the idea of putting things in our virtual shopping basket or trolley. The problem is that shallow catalogue formats in themselves, fail to contribute to our fantasies.

The phantasmagoria of the mail order catalogue is not so much duplicated in the imaginary space of the single screen, as endlessly replicated in numerous spatial dimensions in cyberspace. Vertical and horizontal navigation of content, images with illusionistic depth, the use of time in the animated features of sites and the increasingly rapid replacement of site architecture,

images and content are all spatial elements that mesmerize and draw us into a state where ostensibly, we become more detached from rational decision-making. The capacity to play and fantasize about how our life would be different if we just had that pair of shoes, or how we would be different if we just had that holiday/book/piece of software, is no longer facilitated by proximity to the actual product as Ferguson argues [2], it is achieved by this detachment and by creating a space where our desires can surface. Just as we could look away from the catalogue or shut the cover to destroy the effect, today we can just click a box and shut down. Our fantasy selves have nevertheless been channelled by that new image, that new idea in that new space. We'll probably be back.

The anachronistic appearance of representations of real shops on fashionable brand websites is a strategy to validate the act of internet shopping as a delightful experience rather than the poor substitute for real experience that brands and retailers fear it is. As I have argued, brands and retailers need to look more to the ways in which new technology, new business practices and changes to the practices of consumption can influence the kinds of goods they offer on the internet and the way they are produced and delivered in addition to paying attention to the use of design in the internet shopping site. Within cyberspace, connecting people in virtual space to objects and services, engaging them in play and allowing shoppers a sense of creativity input into the product outcome or delivery will result in better engagement. The new model provided by Nike gives the consumer a sense of mastery over the shopping experience, rather than feeling as if they are stuck in the space outside a closed shop with their nose on the glass peering in. The use of sound too, provides significant potential to connect us with our fantasies by effectively liberating the spaces contained in our imaginations.

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