



No fish, no mall. Industrial fish produce new subjectivities in Southern Chile

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on recent theories of assemblage to consider the more-than-human geographies involved in the production of new consumer-oriented urban landscapes. Primarily drawing on Bruno Latour (2005), this article develops key conceptual tools through an examination of the Mall Paseo Chiloé in southern Chile and the more-than-human objects and processes that play a role in its inception. While this article is concerned with neoliberal retail capital and its expansion, this article focuses on how the possibilities for this expansion were produced, in part, by the force of techno-industrial salmon aquaculture that had arrived in the region in previous years. Importantly, this salmon-commodity holds together a series of human-environment relationships that make the arrival of the shopping mall possible in the first place. The mall is then conceptualized as an assemblage, with the salmon working as the linchpin that holds together multiple relations between the physical, built and emotional environments at the Chiloé archipelago.

1. Introduction

Researchers wanting to re-think the emerging built environments of urban life and consumption have a wealth of recent conceptual and theoretical-methodological innovations to engage with for inspiration. The wide scope of a broadly defined post-humanism and assemblage theory, in particular, have given researchers new vocabularies and new concepts with which to think about space, subjectivity, embodiment, and what brings them together (Farías, 2010; Robbins and Marks, 2010; Anderson and McFarlane, 2011; Müller and Schurr, 2016). For consumption studies, these include a focus on new financial technologies that enroll potential consumers into embodied relationships of data, debt and credit in new ways (Coll, 2013; Beckett, 2012; Deville, 2014); new affective techno-atmospheres created through architectural design (Healy, 2014; Lee, 2015; Thibaud, 2015); and the many ways that affective atmospheres are mediated by embodied subjectivity, emotion and identity (Rose et al., 2010; Degen et al., 2010; Krarup and Blok, 2011). The materiality of consumer-oriented space is enlivened in these diverse approaches to the retail landscape as an assemblage of ongoing events, processes, materials, feelings, sensations, interventions, surprises and everyday practices (also see Roberts, 2012; Pyry, 2016). These and other recent works have, from my view, breathed new life into the geographies of consumption and retail, once a contentious area of critical thought and debate in human geography, but is only now being revamped with these recent approaches that elucidate the “more-than-human” and embodied components of the built retail environment today.

This article concurs with the promise of assemblage theory and draws on Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to offer another way of exploring the components of an emerging urban geography of consumption in southern Chile. The analysis begins with the controversial Mall Paseo Chiloé in Castro (Fig. 1), the urban center of the Chiloé archipelago (population around 40,000), but traces its conditions of possibility to another “lively commodity” (Barua, 2017), the industrial salmon of aquaculture that have transformed the region in recent decades. While, in addition to the literature on consumption cited above, there are now many compelling and theoretically sophisticated accounts of the role of neoliberal retail capital and architecture in post-dictatorship Chile (Moulian, 1997; Draper, 2012; Fornazzari, 2013; de Simone, 2015), this article contributes by taking seriously the possibility that architectural projects such as the Mall Paseo Chiloé may also rely on the coherences afforded by broader environmental geographies and more-than-human activity. In focusing on the transformative impact of salmon aquaculture in the region, this article sets out to show how an ANT approach can help identify socio-spatial transformations that go beyond stability and organization, thereby highlighting emergent tendencies in the landscape, something numerous scholars have questioned when considering the relevance and explanatory power of ANT (Degen et al., 2010; Müller and Schurr, 2016). This interpretation of ANT claims to highlight the emergent qualities of human-fish interaction, qualities that become apparent in the controversy around the Mall Paseo Chiloé. The trajectory of this architectural project, specifically, and its regional context, is a perfect opportunity to consider the more-than-human components of this building

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Fig. 1. Mall Paseo Chiloé, with twin spires of the San Francisco Church to the left (photo taken by author 2015).

as a complex assemblage that includes the materials of the architectural space, but also goes beyond its physical materiality in important ways.

This is not the first attempt at deploying assemblage theory to understand the impact of salmon aquaculture in the region. Hidalgo et al. (2015) draw on Ingold's (2000) idea of "dwelling" to explore the new human – non-human relationships that constitute landscape change across the archipelago of Chiloé, while Blanco et al. (2015) engage with Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in presenting an assemblage approach to regional development in the Aysén region just south of Chiloé, also transformed by industrial aquaculture in the last three decades. For Blanco et al. (2015), assemblage theory is (1) a way of exploring the mutual "becomings" between people and their environments in new techno-scientific and capitalist circumstances and (2) simultaneously a challenge to the hegemonic theories preferred by neoliberal philosophy that refer narrowly to the flows of private capital, entrepreneurial enterprise and institutional actors in explaining landscape transformation.

This article makes similar moves conceptually, but focuses on a series of human – non-human relationships that must be accounted for in the unexpected arrival of the Mall Paseo Chiloé in Castro. In setting out with Latour (2005) to "trace the associations" (p. 5) of the mall as an assemblage, this article highlights an empirical example of the industrial salmon as an "actant" that mediates the landscape, in terms of catalyzing emergent transformations in socio-spatial relations that lead to the formation of new kinds of built environments, such as the Mall Paseo Chiloé. The fish, in addition to their economic role in new world markets, produce a shift in the way life is organized in terms of social reproduction more broadly.

In the spirit of Blanco et al. (2015) and Hidalgo et al. (2015), this article sets out to explain the Mall Paseo Chiloé as the result of a broader set of landscape processes that begin with the region's physical geographies and from there move outwards through the techno-scientific production of neoliberal environments during and following the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990). If the argument is that *fish produce consumer subjectivities*, then the use of Latour (2005) might perhaps seem like the wrong choice, considering the doubt that numerous researchers have expressed regarding the capacity of ANT to attend to human subjectivity as a part of assemblage thinking (Rose et al., 2010; Krarup and Blok, 2011; Müller and Schurr, 2016). While this article comes out of a larger ethnographic study of the mall itself and the many conflictual geographies and subjectivities therein, much of the focus of this article and its argument can be found in the rich secondary literature. In reading the historical geographies and development literature in this way specifically, and complementing that reading with findings from the original ethnographic research, I aim to illustrate how an ANT approach can do more than simply describe new kinds of

human – non-human relations, but actually help explain how certain non-humans gain power in particular ways. As such, this article also borrows from Barua's (2017) ANT-inspired exploration of "non-human labor" performed by lions in India, animals whose lives would present irresistible temptation for capitalists wishing to capture new kinds of value by pursuing the lion in eco-tourism activities. More than just describing a new set of relationships, this article follows Barua (2017) and traces a set of associations between the fish and the ecological environment, on the one hand, and the fish and the built urban environment, on the other. Through this lens, the mall arrives *trailing* the fish, as the harbinger of socio-spatial transformations in-line with the post-dictatorship consumer society that has been so well documented across Chile, but is only now arriving in places like the Chiloé archipelago.

The next section introduces Chiloé and the controversy around the mall. Then a section details the choice of Latour's ANT for this exercise and lays out key concepts, such as "actant". The article then sets out to "re-assemble" the MPC by "tracing the associations" that made it possible. The main empirical section outlines three main conduits that shape the Mall Paseo Chiloé as an assemblage: the physical geographies of the region and the existing built environment; the installation of industrial aquaculture infrastructure; and finally, the spatial technologies of retail capital. A discussion section follows that elaborates on retail architecture as an assemblage and points to future orientations that incorporate subjectivity and embodiment as foundational for a full understanding of the politics of the mall, a future research program that goes beyond the scope of this article. A conclusion again summarizes the main argument: that the industrial salmon hold together a new set of human – non-human relations that create the conditions of possibility for the development of new consumer subjectivities at Chiloé, thereby signaling not only emergence, but also its potential capture by retail capital.

2. The Mall Paseo Chiloé controversy

Chiloé is known for its rural and agrarian livelihoods and architectures, which help shape a proud "Chilote" identity as distinct from the mainland (Daughters, 2009). This cultural landscape, along with rich forests, attractive shorelines, lakes and beaches, attracts a growing number of tourists each year. Many stores and restaurants of Castro are still family owned and operate with informal systems of customer trust and store credit. As inhabitants often have to travel to the regional capital Puerto Montt on the mainland for advanced medical care, higher education and other advanced services, they take advantage of two large shopping malls there to access goods that are not accessible on the island, or that might arrive to the island with a marked-up price. The trip to the mainland, moreover, is complicated by geography and infrastructure: there is still no bridge that links the main island to the continent, and all travelers cross the channel by ferry, a process that takes both time and money.

In 2010, the Chilean company that operates the shopping malls in Puerto Montt began construction of a shopping mall in central Castro. The company, Pasmal, is in fact headquartered in Puerto Montt and has invested \$150 million in a regional retail development plan (Cárdenas, 2017) that includes the shopping mall in Castro and other towns, including Ancud, another urban center of Chiloé. As the building in Castro grew in size and photographs of the structure looming over the much smaller built environment of Castro began circulating on social media and in the press (Fig. 1), criticism swelled and prompted a passionate debate around the meaning of identity, heritage, landscape, environment and development, among other meta-concepts of interest in geographic thought. This mall is not only grossly out of proportion to the existing urban landscape, but located in the "historic" center of Castro and less than three blocks from the San Francisco Church, one of sixteen churches of Chiloé considered "World Heritage" by UNESCO. Critics alleged that Pasmal not only violated urban planning codes and

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