

By the 1960s, the suburban supermarket dominated food retail in the US with big box stores, as large as 30,000 square feet. In sociospatial terms, these supermarkets were idealised modern environments; hygienic and standardised in their spaces and merchandise, the sensuality and messiness of food was disciplined by functionalist logic and order. This was as far removed from the public market as the suburb was from the city, with food retailing following the anti-urbanism that characterised the postwar period, when 'new' meant 'improved' whether applied to a subdivision or a supermarket. Back in the cities, this manifested itself in massive urban renewal programmes which often targeted public markets as urban blight. In the UK, dozens of markets that had sustained bomb damage during the war were demolished instead of repaired, for similar reasons. In Paris, the vaulted glass and iron sheds of Les Halles were removed in 1974; they were replaced with a shopping mall.

#### Market Preservation: Two Results

In Boston, the market known as Faneuil Hall was the original trading house of the colonial city. Along with three Greek Revival structures designed by Alexander Parris (1826), it served as Boston's wholesale and retail food centre until the 1960s. Seriously dilapidated and bordering a large clearance project, the market was slated for demolition despite its historical and architectural significance. When it was finally set aside for redevelopment, the plan adopted was the one that seemed the riskiest at the time – to renovate the market into a market.

Architect Benjamin Thompson and developer James Rouse conceived a scheme centred on 'food in all its forms', including fresh produce from local purveyors along with restaurants and cafés. Non-food retail would occupy the flanking buildings with the streets between becoming pedestrian plazas. Here, Thompson and Rouse introduced pushcarts to enliven the pedestrian areas, bringing the urban market full circle in less than 40 years. The pushcarts reflected the ideas of critics like Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs who promoted urban diversity in spatial usage and visual perception, and who would have approved of statements that the renovation would radiate 'the distinctive bustle and life of a dynamic city centre' through forms that were 'non-yea oldee'.

However, the renovation reused many of the market's original signs, and these were precisely what made the Faneuil Hall Marketplace seem so nostalgically ersatz after its completion in 1976. Though it attracted 12 million people annually, as the crowds grew the market changed: while old signs advertising eggs and poultry hung above, the food sellers below were proffering foot-long hot dogs and oversized pretzels. Food remained the attraction, but Faneuil Hall embraced a new identity as a festival marketplace – a touristic, retail environment of calculated sensations and controlled chaos.

On the opposite coast, a contemporaneous preservation project had a very different outcome. Since its founding in 1907, the Pike Place Market in Seattle had occupied a warehouse district of wholesale and retail food halls, restaurants and even a dime-a-dance ballroom. By its pre-Second World War heyday, the market was a collection of undistinguished, billboard-covered buildings that was intensively used and visually and spatially congested. Though activists saved Pike Place from demolition in the 1970s, its renovation was not straightforward because the market had little

Opposite left:  
Pike Place Market, Seattle  
(George Bartholick, c 1980).  
The Pike Place renovation  
cultivated the look and feel  
of a working market and a  
grunge sensibility. Cheap  
materials, minimal sanitation  
and graffiti are tolerated.

Opposite right:  
Smithfield meat market,  
London (Horace Jones, 1868).  
By 1800, the covered market  
hall was a recognised symbol  
of modernity and civicism,  
usually following high-style  
architectural fashions from  
neobaroque to Moorish.

Above:  
New Market, Calcutta  
(Walter Granville, 1874).



Above  
Faneuil Hall Marketplace,  
Boston (Benjamin Thompson,  
1976). Developer James Rouse  
renovated Alexander Parris  
distinguished Greek Revival  
Quincy Market as part of a new  
urban type – the festival  
marketplace.

Right  
Pike Place Market, Seattle  
(George Bartholick, c 1980). The  
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architectural value by the conventions of historic preservation. Prettifying restoration strategies were avoided in favour of cultivated heterogeneity and disorder: food delivery and waste removal in public view; and no stylistic guidelines to foster the existing industrial-commercial character. Exploiting the market's low-life sensibility, including a tolerance of graffiti and drunkenness, became a strategy for ensuring that Pike Place would retain its sense of place even as it was transformed into a tourist attraction. Though mean-streets glamour often functions as the avant-garde of gentrification, the foregrounding of Pike Place's principal function – the buying and selling of local foods – kept the market real.

The redevelopment of Faneuil Hall and Pike Place offered three important lessons about food and urbanism: historic markets could become instruments of economic revitalisation; food retailing could serve as a stimulant to urban dynamism; and the boundary separating food markets and festival marketplaces mediated the authentic and the theme park.

#### Food as Urban Revitalisation

By the 1990s the public market was resurgent, serving a generation with a transformed relationship to food and cities who sought a reconnection with the 'meet the producer' tradition within the urban context. This desire became even more prevalent as reactions against the homogeneity of the supermarket were coupled with concerns about the expansion of agribusiness and the spread of genetically altered foods. Meeting the producer now had clear political overtones, especially in the UK. For urbanites, the burgeoning farm-market movement was also a way to revitalise high streets which, as in the US, had suffered keenly in the postwar period as retailing drifted towards the periphery.

In 1995 the Department of the Environment sought to reverse this trend through the retail redevelopment of the urban core, a position echoed by Richard Rogers in his influential *Cities for a Small Planet*.<sup>1</sup> Rogers called for modest commercial interventions at the neighbourhood level and proposed a London test case for the South Bank of the Thames. By the late 1990s, the regeneration of the area was already under way in projects like the Oxo Tower and the Tate Modern. Though poised for gentrification, the South Bank was regarded



as a retail desert, especially in its lack of food outlets. This was ironic since it contained Borough Market, one of the oldest in London, which had been a thriving wholesale food centre for more than 10 centuries.

The 4.5-acre site of Borough Market is a dense fabric of streets and alleys with Georgian warehouses, Victorian sheds and a few Moderne frontages, sprawling south of Southwark Cathedral and tucked beneath railway viaducts erected in the 1860s and the 1960s. As supermarket expansion caused the demise of the high street grocers who traded with Southwark's wholesalers, Borough Market experienced an acute loss of business and tenancy. In the early 1990s the market's trustees began to actively combat this decline by attracting speciality wholesalers such as Neal's Yard Dairy, the respected purveyor of handcrafted UK cheeses. In 1997, Neal's Yard began holding occasional warehouse sales for the public, and other wholesalers

soon followed suit. In 1998, the trustees established a regular retail food market featuring Borough wholesalers as well as locally based speciality and organic produce, and food vendors. The success of this venture ensured the regeneration of Borough Market as a wholesale and retail food centre.

The trustees regarded this combination as crucial to the market's rebirth, since it would stimulate virtual round-the-clock trading activity, and was a key component of the redevelopment plan designed by Greig + Stephenson in 1995. Since then, the redevelopment has proceeded at a deliberate pace as the architects and the trustees have balanced the needs of renovation and preservation within a framework of urban revitalisation, mindful that gentrification could easily obliterate the market's wholesale operations and workaday character. To avoid this, new retail trading was sited in disused portions of the market, initially the interstitial spaces between the wholesaler stalls in the main sheds.

Recently, the food market moved to permanent quarters flanking the cathedral, a shift that highlights the market's proximity to this important landmark. The move also allows the renovation of the sheds at the market's heart, including the cleaning of the glass vaults to restore natural light and cathedral views, and the construction of an infill structure that will have as its frontispiece the ferro-vitreous portico of the Floral Hall that stood in the pre-festival marketplace Covent Garden.

Facing Stoney Street and serving as a principal entrance, the Floral Hall portico will link Borough Market with the network of surrounding streets, encouraging their

renovation and redevelopment into mixed commercial and residential use. The portico will also give Borough Market a more forceful civic presence, serving as an architectural anchor and providing an identifiable image within the visual and spatial jumble of the district. It is precisely this jumble, the accretion of centuries of occupation, that gives Borough Market its distinctive character, what architect Ken Greig calls its 'anarchic and conflicting geometries'. As planned, the restoration will make use of this complexity even as it renders usage and circulation more legible. The goal is to smooth, but not eliminate, the distinctions between old and new, refined and industrial, undercroft and open air.

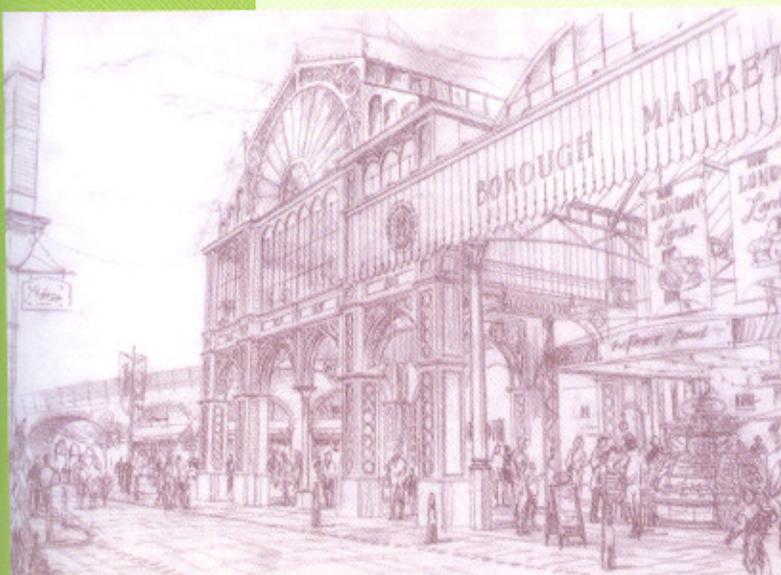
This complexity has an obvious social dimension as well, one that, with the ongoing restoration, must also be designed in order to smooth the transitions between early morning wholesalers, daytime shoppers, and evening and late-night revellers all existing within a single urban district. If the revitalised market succeeds in not merely accommodating this social mix, but in cultivating it, then it may become a model for 21st-century urbanism.

As a blueprint for community revitalisation, the redeveloped Borough Market is a more comprehensive version of a food-based urbanism that has been practised in New York City since 1976 when the Council on the Environment began its Greenmarket programme to bring local farmers to city streets to sell fresh produce directly to urban consumers. From a single roadside farm stand in midtown Manhattan, the council now runs 28 markets set up in public squares and parks, skyscraper plazas, school playgrounds and car parks in all five boroughs. Economically, the programme has kept small regional truck farmers in business; politically, it has improved relations between city and country; urbanistically, it has reactivated dead spaces through the introduction of diverse use and played a crucial role in the improvement of New York's public spaces. In Manhattan's Union Square, the Greenmarket spurred the transformation of a crime-ridden drug-zone into a civic amenity.

#### Food in the Society of the Spectacle

As a basic exchange between producer and consumer in a public space, the Greenmarkets are the antithesis of the fancy food emporia that are equally characteristic of the contemporary city. Though not unrelated to the great food halls of 19th-century department stores, the contemporary emporia evolved out of the rejection of the supermarket and the gentrification of the city. These are stores that offer the exclusive merchandise of the gourmet or speciality food shop in the self-consciously created atmosphere of the festival marketplace. These emporia effectively combine traditional, albeit high-

Below  
Floral Hall at Borough  
Market, London (Greig +  
Stephenson, begun 2002).  
The portico of the Covent  
Garden Floral Hall will  
become the frontispiece to a  
new market building and will  
serve as an architectural  
anchor for the renovated  
market, giving it a more  
pronounced civic presence.





Above left  
Union Square Greenmarket  
(The Council on the  
Environment, New York City,  
opened 1976). Upstate truck  
farmers and downstate city  
dwellers provide a crucial  
social mix that enlivens New  
York's public spaces.

Above right  
Dean & DeLuca, New York  
(Jack Ceglic, 1988, original  
store 1977). This expanded  
SoHo food emporium replaced  
the original, but utilises the  
same aesthetic blend of the  
industrial and the luxurious to  
create a retail food destination  
that is part of the SoHo scene.

Bottom right  
Detail of Metro Shelving  
merchandise displays and  
Dean & DeLuca 'generic'  
packaging.

end food selling with the leisure-time, recreational aspects of the shopping mall. Having emerged at a moment of expanding prosperity, the retail emphasis in such stores is on superabundance and a profusion of choice. Transcending the local emphasis of the farmers' market, they are deliberately global in their merchandising extent.

The pioneer of this type was the original Dean & DeLuca in New York, which opened in 1977. Situated in the downtown east-iron district of SoHo, Dean & DeLuca represented the first incursion of upscale retailing that would transform the scruffy artists' colony into a well-heeled outdoor shopping mall. The store occupied the ground floor of an abandoned manufacturing loft on Prince Street with a bare-bones design by Jack Ceglic that highlighted its battered floor planks, pressed tin ceiling and cast-iron columns. The merchandise displays were in the same spirit, with high-end grocery items occupying industrial-grade wire shelving. Dean & DeLuca's own food line was sold in generic tin containers and paper sacks – a contrast to their Lucullan contents.

The atmosphere was an anti-aesthetic with a deliberate layering of signification: occupying an industrial site in a post-industrial age, the store's character was either a nod to SoHo's manufacturing past or an ironic commentary on its commodified present. Within the cultural playground of SoHo in the 1970s and 1980s, such inscrutability was part of the allure, as the store achieved a see-and-be-seen cachet comparable to any neighbouring art gallery.

In the 1990s when the galleries shifted to Chelsea, commerce again followed art in its occupation of former manufacturing sites, notably in the former Nabisco factory converted into a mix-used project known as Chelsea Market. The project's centrepiece is a wholesale and retail market with individual, locally owned shops, retail and manufacturing occupy a single



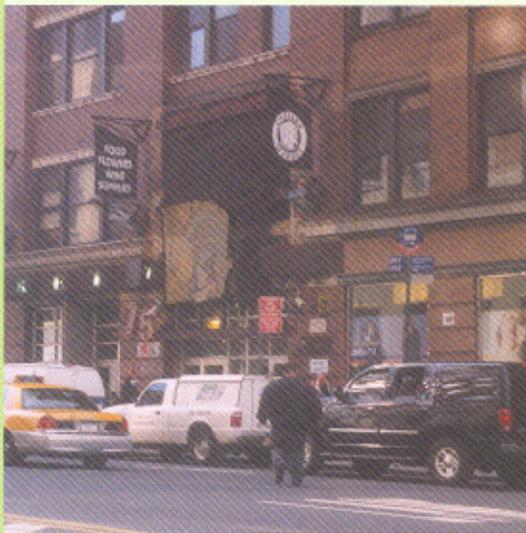
space, the latter offered as a semipublic performance visible from the concourse. To enhance the market's street-theatrical aspects, the concourse is promoted as an extension of urban space. Visitors are encouraged to stroll, loiter and even tango, ideally 24 hours a day, blurring the boundary between the public and private spaces of the city.

One enters the concourse through a glass and aluminium grid suspended from an original girder, now fully exposed and rusting. This entranceway reveals Jeff Vandeberg's renovation as a kind of architectural decomposition that accentuates the factory's physical reality as a collage of different periods, materials and spaces. Inside, ruptures in the built fabric are fully apparent, from sawed-through cedar posts to punched-through brick vaults; this is architecture that wears its scars proudly. These scars are most visible in the concourse where they are echoed by Mark Mennins' industrially inflected, site-specific sculptures including an imposing fountain – a huge cast-iron pipe pouring water into a 24-foot-deep well lined with rough granite blocks. Elsewhere are reptile tanks and upside-down streetlamps.

In its blending of retail and art, Chelsea Market recalls the 1950s art-in-the-shopping-mall



Above top  
Interior of Chelsea Market, New York (Jeff Vandenberg, 1997). The 800-foot-long concourse at Chelsea Market functions as an interior street, lined with shops. Exposed mechanical systems, old signage, and site-specific sculpture add visual interest.



Above middle  
Exterior of Chelsea Market, New York (Jeff Vandenberg, 1997). The renovated Nabisco Factory/Bakery cultivates a sort of industrial chic with its deliberately exposed structure and inserted rough steel members.

Far right (both images)  
Bluebird Gastronomia (c/o Partnership and Terence Conran, 1997). Conran renovated Robert Sharpe's 1923 garage into a high-end food emporium. The forecourt alternates between displaying luxury cars or luxury foods, both functioning to attract shoppers on the King's Road.

collaborations of Victor Gruen and Harry Bertola. But here the goal is not to imbue the marketplace with the aura of high culture, but to create a space as visually stimulating as the activities it contains.

In contrast, the expanding food empire of Terence Conran does seek to imbue the marketplace with the aura of high culture, or at least high style. In 1997, with his renovation of Robert Sharpe's Bluebird Garage (1923) into the Bluebird Gastronomia, Conran realised a longstanding ambition to bring together what he regarded as the crucial aspects of contemporary living – good design and good food. The garage on King's Road in London's Chelsea was a witty choice for adaptation into a food market since the qualities that made it ideal for cars lent themselves equally well to food; an easily cleaned terracotta facade; a wide forecourt close to, but separate from, the street; and an interior commodious enough to allow the turning radius of a car.

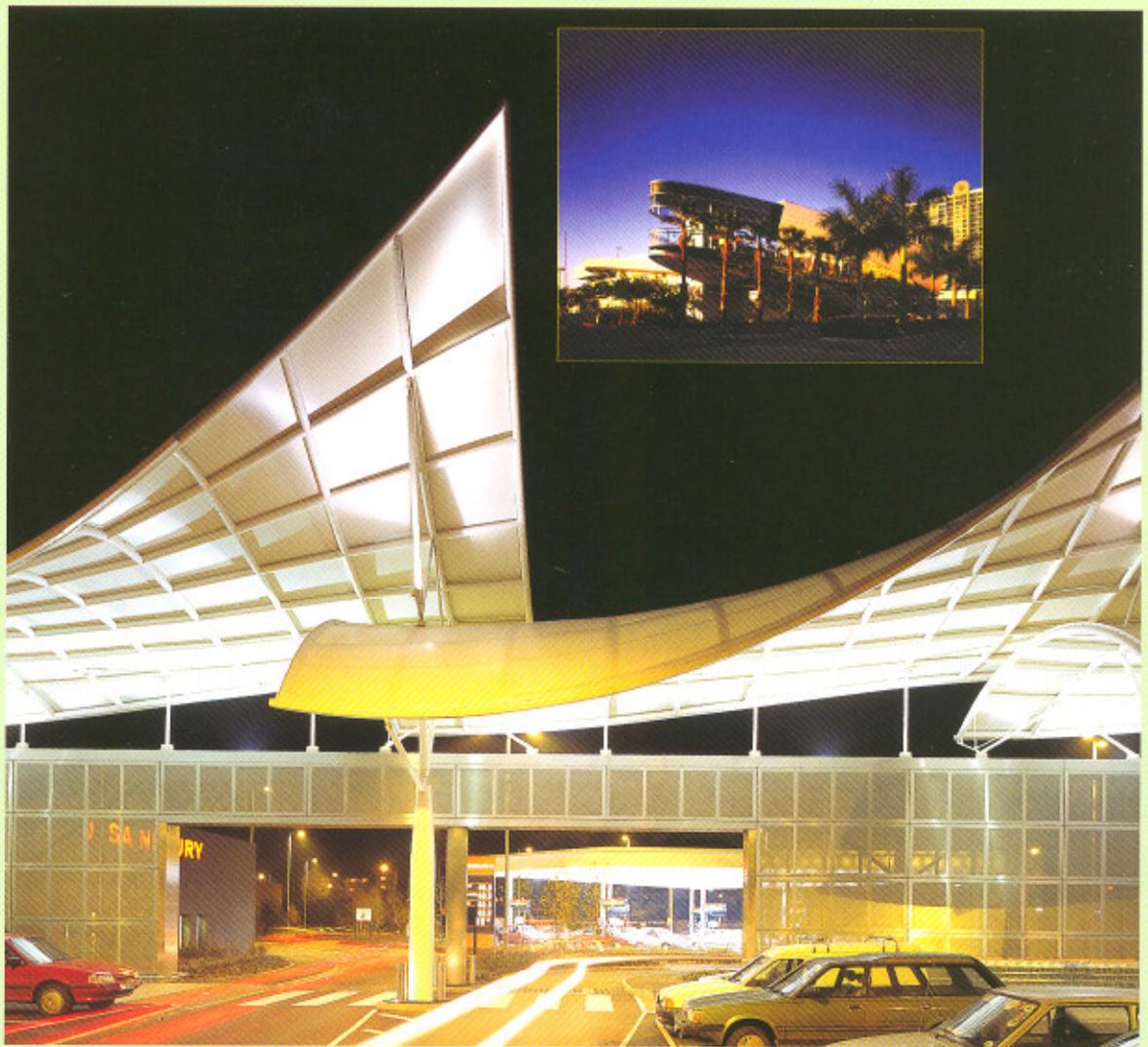
Accessorised by Conran's own design firm, c/o Partnership, in a sleek but not intimidating Modernism, the space now accommodates outdoor produce stands and an indoor food hall. The visual and spatial pull of the forecourt is

strong and crowds spill into it naturally from the King's Road. Once inside, there are wide interiors and a variety of retro merchandise displays, including circular open-top cases. Exploiting a psycho-merchandising strategy that dates to the 1930s, the rounded edges of these cases allow a smooth flow of traffic from forecourt to interior. Lacking the clear differentiation of aisles, the interior is well adapted for the browsing or strolling of the Postmodern *flâneur*, whose aimless sojourns now include the spaces of contemporary urban consumption.

According to Conran, Bluebird aspires only to 'maintain the efficiency of the supermarket together with the specialness of the small store', a remarkable understatement for a project the name of which recalls the pleasure dome of Xanadu. While the market itself occupies only 7000 square feet, it partakes of the same exalted atmosphere as Bluebird's café, bar, restaurant and club. Shopping here seems like a privilege – not the sort of place one pops in for a quart of milk, except of the organic, hand-fed on Kentucky bluegrass, variety. But, as Frank Lloyd Wright once observed, if you take care of the luxuries, the necessities take care of themselves.

That the distinction between luxury and necessity foodstuffs is no longer very clear for the urban bourgeoisie has presented a dilemma for the contemporary supermarket. Though standardisation





Above right  
Sainsbury's Plymouth  
(Dixon & Jones, 1994).

Inset  
Publix Supermarket, Miami  
Beach (Carlos Zapata, 1998).  
A swank skin wrapped around  
a dumb box, the Publix  
uses architecture to attract  
attention to the store, but  
leaves the supermarket's  
internal arrangements intact.

#### Notes

1. Richard Rogers, *Cities for a Small Planet*, ed Philip Gumuchdjian, Faber and Faber (London), 1997.
2. Richard Turcski, 'Store design: sign of the times', *Progressive Grocer*, October 2001; on-line edn, see [www.progressivegrocer.com](http://www.progressivegrocer.com).

and uniformity of the supermarket were once a guarantee of quality, these are now a liability, at least at the upper end of the urban economic scale. As a result, supermarkets have adapted the practices that have made the farmers' markets and the food emporia so successful, including organic produce departments, boutique-style merchandising and interior signage to create visual vitality. What these strategies have in common, according to *Progressive Grocer*, is that 'stores have to entertain shoppers in order to survive'.<sup>2</sup> Some supermarket chains are also using architecture as a selling-point – a magnet for style-conscious and visually literate customers. This is a bold step since it means departing from the supermarket's branded public image.

In the UK, J Sainsbury's began to individualise as early as 1985 when it sponsored a design competition as part of a chain expansion plan. The resulting stores use a hi-tech aesthetic, from the exposed steelwork and cantilevered tie-down rods of Nicholas Grimshaw's updated market hall in Camden (1988) to the sail-like canopies of Dixon & Jones' superstore in Plymouth (1995). While the shops are visually and technologically exciting, they fail to depart from the big box/decorated shed concept that

informs standard supermarket design, largely because the architects' work is restricted to the exterior.

This is also the case at Carlos Zapata's Publix supermarket in Miami Beach, Florida (1998). Zapata wrapped a classic supermarket box with tilted planes, cantilevered balconies and a soaring canopy that recalls Miami's modern architectural heritage. The facade also includes a three-storey open-air ramp connecting the main exit to elevated parking decks. It contains a moving conveyor which, like the Beauborg's escalator tube, provides a thrilling view of the city as it ascends towards the roof. According to Zapata, his design deliberately exaggerates the distinction between the dynamic vestibule and the dumb box behind.

Publix is unconcerned with this visual discrepancy since Zapata's exterior serves its intended advertising purpose. In a city of bikinis and buff bodies, where image is everything, the ramped facade transformed an ordinary supermarket into a tourist attraction and a backdrop for fashion shoots. Packaging supermarkets with high-style architecture may bring in the crowds, but it does little to address consumers' basic dissatisfactions with this type of food retailing. What the Miami Beach Publix proves, however, is that contemporary supermarkets, like the new public markets and the gourmet emporia, are now full participants in the shopping-cum-entertainment spectacle that defines the contemporary urban condition. ▽