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# We Have Seen It All. At the Mall

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Qualitative Inquiry

1–7

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## Abstract

Many of us have conflicted attitudes toward suburban shopping malls in the United States. Malls are environmentally irresponsible, reinforce a dependence on cars, fortify economic and social stratification, generate private-property, emphasize consumption, and are architecturally disappointing. Malls are also the places where we bought school shoes, where we garnered our first jobs, where we may see a diversity of products and people and tastes, and, remarkably, malls can still surprise us. This article is an overview of mall criticism and a narrative from reluctant mall enthusiasts. We sit at an equivocal place—in between the complexity and contradiction of the suburban shopping mall—while enjoying lunch.

## Keywords

shopping, mall, architecture, collaborative autoethnography, globalism, ethnography

## Introduction to Our Mall

The shopping mall is a vanilla staple of suburbia. Typically, a fully enclosed, behemoth of consumption, surrounded by blacktop and centrally located just off the interstate; it is difficult to tell one from another. Scholars and popular-culture critics alike have long denounced The Mall (see, for example, Mars, 2015; Sorkin, 1992). In a way, it is an easy shot to take. Malls are banal and capitalist. They are unoriginal and retail conventional. Due to the economic downturn and an upturn in online shopping, our popular press predicted the malls' time of death yesterday (Segal & Harris, 2009), today (Thompson, 2017), or maybe it will be tomorrow (Sanburn, 2017). While some malls have failed, as Mark Twain might write, the reports of their demise are greatly exaggerated.

This article is about the complexity and contradiction of the shopping mall today. Although no longer uniquely American, the mall is representative of many mainstream American values, from consumption to car culture, with all the attendant consequences. But the assumption that the mall is a demographically homogeneous, repetitive environment, full of chain stores, selling name brands, to middle class white women wearing yoga-pants, who eat frozen yogurt in some place called a "food court," is a limiting and partial story.

*We have seen for ourselves.*

We are participant observers who occasionally utilize the shopping mall and who share a lunch date at a Pan-Asian bistro just inside "the grand entrance" to a regional mall, which dubs itself a "Fashion Place." Laurel, an inveterate ethnographer, ordered Molly's Happy Family. Carla, a

practicing architect turned sociologist, had Rainbow Vegetables. Both dishes were scrumptious, creative, and unique. This bistro is one of many owned by a local "celebrity" chef who invests in our Midwest city. How un-mall-like! This is no Ruby Tuesdays.

To unfold the complicated nature of our relationship with shopping malls, we acknowledge some of the history, theory, and research underpinning the mall's critics and note that, to our knowledge, none of these writers was enjoying lunch at our bistro that day.

*What a shame.*

## Mall of All of America

Austrian architect Victor Gruen is credited with (Hardwick, 2004), or more recently faulted for (Baldauf, 2017; Smiley, 2002), creating the American shopping mall in 1956. When he arrived in the United States, Gruen was initially disgusted by American suburban sprawl he immediately described as "avenues of horror" (Sanburn, 2017). The shopping mall was this architect's antidote to the placeless suburb. Architectural historians report that planners, developers, and architects alike were influenced by Gruen's shopping mall idea as a formal vehicle for reconfiguring

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the vitality of an urban experience in the suburbs, without the unpleasant noise, grit, and confusion of the city. Gruen's intention was to fabricate the social interaction of the dense European city street, under one roof, in the American suburb (Mattson, 2002). Thus, he advocated for integrating retail shopping with cultural activities, such as movie theaters, restaurants, and artistic events. Advocates imagined the mall would offer order and a "crystallization point" for a rational and formal solution to the vast residential stretches that were burgeoning across post-war America (Crawford, 2002).

*We meet at the so-called Grand Entrance, which, objectively, was not very grand. In fact, like many shopping malls, it is difficult to orient yourself in space. Are we at the front door? I am glad I looked at the mall floor plan online, prior to our first lunch date.*

Rather than giving order to sprawl, shopping malls contribute to the creation of what planners label the "exurbs"—an affluent area beyond the suburbs of a city. The suburbs of a city have a suburb of their own. Sometimes referred to as "edgeless cities," exurbs deepen dependence on cars, use scarce resources, devour land, and eliminate natural habitats according to their critics (Lang, 2003). Exurbs are where you may find "McMansions," the pejorative term used to describe developer driven mass produced single-family houses with more square feet of dwelling space than is thought required for an average size family today and whose footprint edges to the property's end-line (Bruegman, 2005). People of means move farther away from city centers into these McMansions, taking their shopping with them and abandoning existing malls. Shiny new malls open in the suburbs' suburb and cannibalize the older malls (Northrup, 2017). People drive out to the newest shopping concoction, which may include an Ikea nearby as well. How far shall we travel for a package of 100 colorful napkins and a particleboard nightstand we will put together ourselves with an enclosed hex key at an "impossible price?"

*Our Fashion Place shopping mall is just on the outskirts of our city's freeway outer belt. It is a mile from the new Ikea, too. Sigh.*

In urban design and architecture courses, we teach and learn about architectural typologies (Moneo, 1978); how to take into account what buildings in a context have in common, whether it be function, form, or meaning. In dense urban places, wherein people walk the streets and buildings are directly juxtaposed, we rarely find successful suburban-type shopping malls. In urban designs, the streets are the *subject* defined by the building facades, which create a border for the street-space. In suburban typologies, buildings are the *object* in an undefined sea of open space. The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, Italy, is among the most celebrated of urban retail places because, typologically, the form of the gallery responds to its urban context. The formal relationship of a glass vaulted roof crisscrossing

to enclose a four-story streetscape with retail storefronts at the base, and offices above, makes sense in this urban setting. The Galleria is essentially a commercial street connecting the Duomo Piazza to the LaScala opera house. Pedestrians, whether shopping or not, inhabit the streets of the Galleria enroute, hence its aesthetic and financial success. Typologically, in the suburbs, malls are destinations, not connectors. When stores decline, the mall destination fails too. A factor influencing why shopping malls collapse is found in their architectural typology (Dilworth, 2005).

*We hypothesize that's why urban vertical mall Water Tower Place in Chicago succeeds as a tourists' attraction, while suburban horizontal City Center Mall in downtown Columbus, Ohio, failed as a locals' destination.<sup>1</sup>*

If we can search for merchandise online, why shop the mall stores at all? I have a friend who ordered dozens of gowns from a department store's website that offered free delivery. Click. She tried each dress on at home, eventually pinpointing the keeper, and returned the rejected frocks to the store at the mall. It was the most efficient means of shopping—dresses in her size waiting at the door when she got home from work. Click. Click. Modeling the dresses with potential, she took selfies and sent the photos to her friends for appraisal. We were in a *virtual* dressing room helping select a gown. Malls, says Harvard business professor Leonard Schlesinger, "were built for patterns of social interaction that increasingly don't exist" (quoted in Sanburn, 2017). Malls are planned for leisure time wandering. This mall as destination requires a time commitment that fewer people enjoy. Given the mall's distance, that middle class people are working longer hours, and working class people are working two jobs (Varda & Tziner, 2017), who has time for the mall?

*I went online and made a reservation for two via the Open Table app. Hope we do not have to wait for our Asian Bistro table.*

If you cannot beat them, join them is one of the retail strategies that create social interaction at the mall, and in cyberspace. Acknowledging current patterns of social interaction—several clothing stores offer wifi so we can "gram in the fitting room." Apparently, taking photos while trying on clothes in the store and then posting to Instagram is "a thing." The niche and hoping-to-be-relevant chain stores have their own Instagram and Pinterest pages inviting consumers to include images of themselves and their friends wearing the merchandise.

*Or as the cool kids call it, the "merch." Well, maybe they are the cool kids, how would we know? Maybe "cool" isn't even the right word to describe the hip and happening.*

Sociologists pan suburban shopping malls as stratification reinforcing, private-property generating, neoliberal phenomena (Manning, Price, & Rich, 1997; Richer, 2015). Much of their concern is about power and the corporate control of space. The scholars of social movements and

politics agree that public space is a vital component of a fully functioning democracy (Bodnar, 2015; Goffman, 1963; Kohn, 2004). Geographers and political scientists criticize malls as private spaces hailing individualism and political exclusion, noting that public space is in decline and the mall is part of a quasi-public sphere commercializing, sanitizing, and excluding urban forms of democracy (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2015; Tyndall, 2010). Staeheli and Mitchell (2006) demonstrate how owners regulate and zone the mall to cultivate *civility* among shoppers and workers, rather than diverse and messy public identities. They contend that malls preclude a politicized public domain full of people and competing ideas. Once proclaimed the “new town square,” some developers, urban planners, and architects alleged malls would replace the village town hall after suburban sprawl left American suburbs with no obvious public gathering space (Hardwick, 2004). In the suburbs, there is no “there,” there. However, the shopping mall as town center precludes the political potential of public space and is replaced with predictably safe-for-the-status-quo civil discourse and behavior. We all behave ourselves at the mall, whereas we can create “occupy” protest sanctuaries in public spaces.

*There are seniors in teams walking the mall with purpose on this chilly day. They must be an exercise club. We wonder if they were former Teamsters or United Auto Workers. Our town is rustbelt adjacent, after all.*

Malls are neither sustainable nor energy efficient. Whether in Minnesota or Arizona, regardless of climate, the mall is constructed with a flat roof, a skylight or two, and gargantuan heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) units stationed along their backsides and on the roofs. Because they are object buildings sitting in the center of massive parking lots, can a suburban shopping mall have a backside? There is a joke in there, somewhere. How many engineers and architects does it take to camouflage an HVAC system? We know there is always a loading dock to ignore as well. Importantly, a suburban mall is no joke for the environment. Typically, fields, forests, and natural habitats are flattened and paved over to make way for our shopping malls (Scharoun, 2012).

*The recycled mall air may be going to our heads. It is sweet. Is that Cinnabon I smell?*

Then there is the issue of “place.” Just off the ubiquitous interstate leading to anywhere, in every state, is the shopping mall. It is everywhere, USA, yet nowhere, too. *Placelessness* refers to physical structures and locations that do not reflect the unique local culture, history, or architectural styles of their immediate surroundings (Relph, 1976). Some critics call mall environments inauthentic and superficial, designed without awareness of, or care for, local characteristics or traditions. We can pick up a mall in one location, and replace it with another, without much friction. Malls are modern and deceptive environments designed to

make most of us comfortable with their predictability (Ritzer, 2008). The replication of a common aesthetic should be expected when we consider that globally, a few transnational architecture firms design the majority of shopping malls (Salcedo, 2003). Then the chain stores have their own architects and interior designers ensuring uniformity. An Abercrombie & Fitch store in Palm Beach Gardens Mall Florida looks and smells like the A & F store in Pacific Place Mall in Seattle, Washington. The retail sales associates look pretty much the same, too.

Even though many Americans refer to the mall closest to their childhood home as “my mall,” whether by formal design or corporate habit, suburban shopping malls fit a similar pattern or typology. There may be a fountain in an atrium to help orient us. Escalators criss-and-cross and inevitably we approach the up threshold when we intend to head down. Wayfinding, as interior designers call it, is intended to be confusing in a mall. “They” want us to lose our way, glide past the merchandise (the merch), and make an impulse buy (Underhill, 2004). The architecture is background. The products are foreground.

*Does this make us, middle ground?*

## Laurel

### *Mall Insider: The Past*

Past One: In a time, long-ago, now it seems, cities had actual department stores, lots of them with lots of odd departments under their roofs. I grew up in Chicago during that time, before there was “The Mall.”

At 13, I went to work (on Mondays and Thursdays after school and all day Saturday) at Goldblatt’s Department Store on Ashland Avenue. My boss, Olga, was a Russian Jewish immigrant whose naturalization papers had been “fixed” by my attorney father. In gratitude, perhaps, she had hired my underage older brother as a stock boy, and then me as a sales clerk at 50 cents an hour. Father was teaching his children “responsibility” and “good citizenship.” Olga was helping, looking the other way.

Olga managed the notions department. It had over 6,000 items, most used for sewing. I loved the challenge of knowing about these peculiar objects, their cost and use. (I still collect peculiar little things.) Many cost a few pennies. Olga warned me but, eventually, looked the other way, when I continued to ignore the minor pilfering by some older women. (I still look the other way.) Rather than fire me, though, Olga sent me to the gift-wrapping department. (I still have a love of gift-wrapping and giving.) That manager chose me to be a “Runway Model.” I walked the store in “Fashion Now” clothes with price tags hanging down my back, stopped and talked whenever they were admired. (“Project Runway” is my current favorite TV show.) When I wasn’t walking about, I was “accessorizing” the

mannequins in the windows. (Want to see my necklace collection?) Someone must have noticed me because I was then promoted to sexing and selling the parakeets for sale in the basement. I got 50-cents commission for every bird sold; of course, birds have to come in pairs. (Just like my cats and dogs.) When the parakeet department closed, I was moved to the Optical Department by the main entrance. I helped the optometrist's clients choose frames, adjusted them on their faces, and listened to their complaints. I was a *de facto* optician. I was 15.

And, I dated a much older stock-boy who had a car and drove me home and I ate whatever I chose at Walgreen's counter and paid for it with my own money. I still choose my own food and pay for things with my own money. Although I don't date stock-boys anymore, I married one.

*Maybe everything I needed to learn, I learned at Goldblatt's?*

Past Two: I visit Chicago; I go to the Water Tower Mall. Doing so, I feel as if I have returned home, even though the Water Tower Mall was never a part of my growing-up Chicago experience. What was a part were all the upscale department stores on State Street. At Marshall Field's, I would buy a Storybook Doll; at Carson Pierre and Scott, I bought (with my own money) cashmere sweater sets; at Lord and Taylor's, I'd watch my much older sister buy the sleekest black dresses; and then, back to Field's, admire the windows, and zap my feet in the X-Ray Shoe Fitter that guaranteed I would receive the right size new shoes.

State street shopping is gone. But the Water Tower Mall is here. Upscale familiar shopping. Walking Company shoes. Window shopping. I am grateful.

### *Mall Insider: The Present*

Well, today, I have seen it all at the mall. Seen something I've never seen before—something that got me back on track. Of course, I saw the usual—toddlers sliding off the backs of gigantic hard-plastic turtles, helicopter moms circling around, humungous "Ohio" women eating humungous turtle sundaes, pairs of teeny boppers in plaid mini skirts and orange Uggs, swarms of swaggering teen boys with jeans as wide as Kansas, boxers with silk screened kisses rolled over their hips, light and dark skinned mothers, some with heads covered, pushing babies in Kermit colored Kidgets, while their older sibs, clean and neat as cat-licked plates, amble alongside, and couples, some young and some old, holding hands, promenading as if the mall was not the mall but Cote d'Azur.

And, of course I saw the usual kiosks vendors—"Come, lady . . . May I show you something?" "Toda, lo," [Thank you, no.] I say using my few words of still remembered Hebrew to the Israeli hawking Dead Sea skin cream. *Who would want that?* His face is saying without words, "Funny. She doesn't look Jewish . . ."

"May I help you?" says the Croc lady. She's noticed me noticing the purple Croc boots. *Who would want those? Well, actually, I would if I didn't already have a pair of cowboy boots and if I had anything at all to wear with purple and if they had any support in their arches for my arches and if they had them in my size.* "Those boots have been very popular," says the Croc lady. "We only have two pairs left. Size six." She looks at my generous feet, but well proportioned to my height, if I must say so myself, which I must since no one else will, and smiles her apologies. *Oh, well.*

"Ready to trade-up to a Smartphone, Ma'am?" says "Ken," the Verizon salesman. He has spotted my US\$29.00 Verizon do-nothing-but-phone phone hanging out of my purse. "Sorry," I say. "I'm too dumb. You bastards have locked me into a two-year contract that will break my savings account to break." *No, I don't say that. Just think it.*

I shake my head at the "Word of the Day" calendar display. *How many trees, just how many trees, have been sacrificed for this vast wasteland of unsaleable words? I've got a word—or two—for it.*

Fortunately, the bathtub liner salesman and the shiatsu master's hands are busy, as are those of the hair extension girl. The wrist-watch seller is busy on her iPhone. And then there are the salesclerks. Like merchants in an Indonesian bazaar, they leave the sanctity of their shops to lure in customers.

*"What life lessons are these sales folk learning?"*

"Cinnabon," says the heavy-set man toting a plastic plate of itsy-bitsy pieces that smell, well, like cinnamon.

"Bourbon chicken . . . have a taste—free," says the Chinese youth, also carrying a plastic tray of itsy-bitsy pieces. They are odorless.

"Bourbon chicken?" says the Latino youth with the Big Easy Cajon shirt. His tray is silver-plated, and his chicken is red-hot red. Thankfully, I am a special diet that excludes anything even slightly alcoholic—or sweet or red-hot.

I catch a reflection of my newly trim and shapely body in the Sleep Number store. The bearded salesman is winking at me. He's sitting on the edge of a bed, juggling balls. He's in striped pajamas.

Well, he's not the cat's pajamas to me, I'll say that, and as I do, I peer into Dentalworks display, a Dickens's Village set in poly snow. Some of the little carolers are face down in the snow. Maybe too much revelry at The Plough or washing away their sins, pointed out for them at All Saints. But no. I see what's happened. The whitest, fluffiest, most nose-pushed in cat there ever was is in the window, half-buried in the snow, as if burrowed in a field of catnip. The carolers are collateral damage.

"A special today on Bare Essentials," says the high-school girl. "Let me help you find the right colors . . . They'll take years off you." *Do I want to look like her?!*

"Have you tried our new lemon-supreme hand cream," asks the leggy Bath & Body works gal. She looks like she



belongs on Project Runway's runway, and she knows it. Despite myself, I put out my hand and squirt the sickly looking yellow cream into my palm, and mash it in. I feel sticky.

A Goth sales-girl stands outside Aroma Perfuma. I let a Pakistani family come between her and me.

"Good-afternoon," says the Vietnamese beauty standing outside Perfumania beside a collection of colognes on a table, higher than her waist. "You look like Jaguar," she says, smiling, bowing, and pointing to a spray cologne bottle. I bow back. "Thank you, no. I'm allergic." My nose is running. "Ah Oh, so you would like Touch of Pink?" she says, lifting another spray bottle. "Oh, no. I'm allergic to all colognes." I am sneezing, now. "Perhaps, Delicious Chocolate?" She's pointing to a chocolate colored liquid. "Good idea," I say. "I'll head over to Starbucks . . . Thanks."

I stop at the Mall Directory. Hmm. Twenty-eight stores in this mall dedicated to beauty. Eyebrows, hair, Personal Touch spa, massage, creams, perfume, teeth. I could spend years here, and my savings, too. Thank goodness, I'm already beautiful.

I wonder if the beauty sellers move from venue to venue? If they move up—or just out? None of them seem to be teenagers or older-agers. Hmm. I met one at Sephora. She is a college grad with a degree in art. Hmmm . . .

"Happy Birthday-cha-cha-cha," sings a trio of hapless teeny-boppers, sales associates at Build-A-Bear. An unhappy little girl, with her tan coat buttoned up to her ears, stands in the middle of a circle of similarly unhappy looking little girls, all buttoned up. Each one is toting a cat-sized carrier with their very own "Build-A-Bear." None of the children have joined in the singing. Nobody looks happy. Not even the mothers. Or, me. If their off-key singing were the only cacophony, I would be relieved. But, Abercrombie & Fitch is lavishing the mallers with its loud metallic playlist, and Forever 21, not to outdone, is sharing their whining sing-songs. Damaged, at least, has the courtesy to lower the volume on their surf and skate rat-a-tat's. Actually, I rather like their clothes—Fox, Quick Silver, Joey. Lucky for me they're for guys. *And I am woman!*

But, now I come to what I saw that was new. Something I had never seen or heard of before in all my years of malling. On the escalator in front of me, there are two wiry teen-agers, wearing hand-woven red caps on their heads. They sit down on the moving steps and start texting. They are still texting when their stairs are about to disappear into the underworld, but smooth as Glad Wrap and more quickly than I can say "Watch out!" they move from their crouching to walking, still texting, their feet unfettered by shoes. Ah, yes. Seeing them, reminds me that I have come to the mall today for the most pedestrian of reasons.

"I need to return these New Balance shoes. They give me leg pains," I say to the manager of The Walking Company. *No X-ray Shoe Fitter machine here.* "Sorry about the discomfort," he says, issuing me a refund. "Come again." "Oh I will," I say.

## Carla

From several perspectives, I too have seen all, of the mall.

### *Mall Insider One*

When I was a child, the women in my family went on an annual pilgrimage to the big regional malls, ostensibly to shop for back to school clothes. In retrospect, I understand they were looking for a day from work and home that was safely adventurous. One mall we visited near Pittsburgh had an ice skating rink indoors and we pretended to be Peggy Fleming and Dorothy Hamill! I found these outings exhilarating. From the start, I felt comfortable at a mall as if they were designed for people like me. In many ways, malls are designed for women. Women hold most retail jobs and we are most frequently the shoppers.

The first job I had with a paycheck was at "my mall" in a locally owned department store's Giftwrap section. Riding the escalator up to the boring second floor where they sold underwear, lamps, linens, and children's clothes, I would find the furthest corner from the glamour of jewelry, make-up, and dresses, and arrive to my station. I typically worked after high school from 5:00 to 9:00, alone at a workbench in a back room. It was solitary confinement with minimum wage and an AM radio. "Missing you," by Chicago and "Walk this way" by Aerosmith, played relentlessly. I was glad the DJ gave time and weather updates because I was so far inside, I could not tell if it was night or day, rain or shine.

However, the holiday season was fabulously different in Giftwrap. There were lavish decorations, shoppers and sales clerks everywhere, and upbeat festivities pervaded the entire store. Giftwrap bustled and I had co-workers. Sometimes, I would take a shift at the kiosk on the main floor, nearer the glitz, distributing boxes for customers to wrap their treasures at home. I enjoyed the older women who worked full-time in Giftwrap. They liked their jobs and treated me as if I was valuable, because I worked hard. Eventually, they threw me a going away party when I left for college. None of my gifts were wrapped, because, well, why take work home with you? Once you see how the sausage is made, there is no going back.

Soon thereafter, my local department store was sold to a regional department store, which was then sold to a predatory national chain. Today, the entire department store world is one homogenized and universal Macys. I resent their red star logo and miss the distinctiveness of Marshall Fields, Higbees, Strouss, Lazarus, Horne, Hudson, Filenes, Wannamaker, and the rest.

### *Mall Insider Two*

I earned a degree in architecture and eventually took a job working on the design of an upscale shopping mall. It was a natural fit because I had gone to malls most of my life. This

was a turn from previously working on the designs for a bank in Cairo, Egypt; a Hard Rock Café in Chicago, Illinois; and an office building in London, England. None of those building typologies was familiar to me, while the mall felt like natural habitat. I wrote and drew design guidelines and evaluated each store's design drawings. From Coach to Henri Bendel, I was the architect who decided if their architects' and interior designers' concepts passed muster.

When the leasing agents were negotiating with potential retail tenants, I would draw up the spatial options—what the storefront might look like from the atrium or when stepping off an escalator. I imagined shoe stores and jewelers, cosmetics, and bridal gown windows. I was decidedly out of giftwrap solitary confinement, entrusted with helping create the illusion. None of this work felt real.

What was real was the construction site. When the shopping mall was under construction, I was tasked with ensuring the individual contractors built to the specifications and drawings that I approved. I donned a hardhat and steel-toed boots, and I was on site with rolls of drawings and eventually, an attitude. Foremen patted my padded plastic helmet and said things like, "That is cute, can you read these drawings?" Sure, it was cute. My mall job was a headache and not just because they kept pressing on my hard hat. Now get me to a sociology of gender class to deconstruct these interactions. I suppose that is another paper all together.

Working in retail architectural design gave me a sense of the ephemeral nature of what I mistakenly thought of as landmarks. You know that shop around the corner from where you grew up in the city? It may no longer be a deli, but the brick building with the storefront still exists. Literal brick and mortar architecture has longevity. Mall stores evolve, growing larger or smaller depending on inventory. They may just change branding, image, and aesthetics; or former mall constants such as Casual Corner and The Limited seemingly evaporate overnight. It takes no time to dismantle retail-staged architecture. People line up to watch a stadium or bridge implode and cameras capture the moments for the 6 o'clock news. At the mall, deconstruction happens behind a temporary barricade with signs asking us to pardon their dust.

Suburban shopping malls taught me the important lesson that what looks permanent and real is neither. Those Doric columns holding up the Structure store sign are hollow core and made of plastics. When the lease on that store runs out, it may become part of Macys, too.

## Laurel and Carla

*Back at the Asian Bistro, we read our fortunes in the cookies. Turns out, they are less our destinies and more our descriptions. "A foolish man listens to his heart," and "A conclusion is simply the place where you got tired of thinking." Therefore, in conclusion . . .*

We figure that the mall is the material representation of the immaterial, the world of illusion and allusion, deconstruction and re-construction, the real-real and the real-virtual, contradiction and confirmation, and among the best and worst of the suburbs. We are implicated in creating and maintaining what are left of malls in America. We are patrons and designers, former gift wrappers, and current ethnographers. Both of us use the mall for people watching, clothes shopping, and lunching with friends. While the suburban shopping mall can be disparaged for all of the issues noted in our review above, like most modern American developments, it has postmodern currency. Malls are not homogeneous entities, nor are they representative of the multicultural and social class diversity of America. They are somewhere in between. Perhaps we can live with that for now.

Maybe the mall will continue to be *our* place. If we can find our cars in the parking lot.

*We sip our tea and let our cookies crumble. Both . . . and.*

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## Note

1. The City Center Mall in Columbus with over 1.25 million square feet of retail, opened in 1988, and was demolished in 2009.

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