Demalling, Remalling, its all Falling

by

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B.A., Architecture
The University of Minnesota, 2005

Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February 2010

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ABSTRACT

Victor Gruen's reliance on architecture of consumer consumption to construct the “crystallization points” of social, cultural life in the suburbs has failed. We see through history the decline of architectural quality and importance given to public space. (By the time we get to Bedford NH in 68 it's really bad.)

Gruen's principles of introversion and enclosure are discredited for the production of public space. Yet, public space has a very limited existence in America today (stations, museums, parks, churches). Gruen's dream of bringing European city living to America has long faded.

But Americans do engage in leisure, in fact more than ever. The twist is that these are essentially private, individual activities. This suggests that to make public space useful for everyday leisure there could be such a thing as a private (as in intimacy not ownership) public space.

The mall is flipped.

The original exterior walls are retained, supported, and buttressed as a vital register and material action point for the reversal. Working through Debord in Society of the Spectacle, this thesis highlights the structures of pseudo needs and desires created by our self-justifying economy of consumption. It serves to make clear our unconscious dependence and thus break it.

Thesis Supervisor: J Meejin Yoon
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my committee, Meejin, Dennis and Alan without whose steadfast, diverse and frank critique this thesis would not have been possible.

To Charles Curran, Marissa Grace Desmond, Najiyah Edun, Tim Olson and Laura Rushfeldt for their camaraderie, support and good cheer.

To my professors at MIT for laying the intellectual and technical groundwork for such a far reaching project and reinforcing the values of critical engagement in the public realm.

Thank you.
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PROLOGUE

Guy Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle* of the doom that the economy creates for itself as development of the economy becomes the necessity in itself rather than the solutions that it had henceforth provided.

The economy acts by, “replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs, now met in the most summary manner, by a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs, in the end to just one – namely the pseudo need for the reign of an autonomous economy to continue.” This economy, Debord explains, breaks all ties to authentic needs as society comes to depend on it subconsciously and emerges like a camouflaged monster, fully formed.

In the society of the spectacle “the commodity contemplates itself in a world of its own making.” Space, the space of consumption, is the unconscious commodity.

What is built is for the moment that the sovereign economy falters, its weakness exposed. The economy acts by, “replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs, now met in the most summary manner, by a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs, in the end to just one – namely the pseudo need for the reign of an autonomous economy to continue.” This economy, Debord explains, breaks all ties to authentic needs as society comes to depend on it subconsciously and emerges like a camouflaged monster, fully formed.
the dead mall
and a second chance at suburban public space
Gruen's malls were to "fill the vacuum created by the absence of social, cultural, and civic crystallization points in our vast suburban areas."

unfortunately, it was the malls themselves that began to 'suck'.
Ultimate, the extreme expense of the large scale spectacles that served to make the mall such an attractor became unattractive and fell off. So did the commitment to well considered and appointed public spaces within the mall as considerations of profit and leasable area took over during the construction of malls by people with less social vision and commitment than Gruen.
"As more stores have closed, mall vacancies are at their highest point in almost a decade, according to Reis, a research company, which said the vacancy rate at the end of 2008 was 7.1 percent, compared with 5.8 percent at the end of 2007. Other analysts have slightly lower figures, but all agree that vacancies are rising."
Between 1990 and 2005, consumer spending per capita rose 14 percent, adjusted for inflation, yet retail space per capita in the United States doubled...that created too much store space even for a good economy, and then retailers were hit by the recession.

The acceleration of retail bankruptcies brings into vivid relief the degree to which the U.S. is over-retailed. With more than six times as much retail square footage per capita than in Europe and the collapse of two of the leading contributors to retail abundance — the sprawl development boom and consumer's access to easy credit — the retail landscape in the U.S. is likely to contract and refocus.” NYTimes 2009/04/05
Why do malls die?
As sprawl keeps on sprawling, mall development follows affluent and new customers leaving regional centers behind. Mega, entertainment, malls pull people from ever greater distances.

Consumer shopping trends mutate and change: Capitalism necessitates an ongoing desire for more upmarket and classier products.

The arrival of the PowerCenter (a strip mall of big box stores) sealed the fate of many.

As a result of buyouts, competition and changing desires, traditional anchor stores are largely defunct.
the bedford mall
1968-2008
The mall of New Hampshire, two miles east of the site, contains 80 million gross square feet of shopping illustrating the saturation of the market and the inability of the relatively small Bedford Mall to compete. Thus if we are in need of something, it is not more consumer goods but rather leisure and public space without such tight programmatic and sociological constrictions as the nearby golf course or cemetery.
Bedford mall present day. Creepy, empty, waiting.
Gruen might wonder how did it get this bad?
if not shopping then leisure a future public space
consumer spending: time and money
CONSUMER SPENDING
According to US Department of Labor statistics, consumer expenditures on leisure activities and goods have the greatest increase in spending over the last two decades. These data taken with other survey data indicating an increase in overall leisure time for Americans indicates an opening for not more shopping centers but for public space related to leisure. This is a chance to build spaces not for spectacle but everyday being.

The following pages are an examination of ESRI (the company that produces GIS data) Community Tapestry methods for market segmentation and definition as well as local data collected from an informal survey or Bedford NH potential users. The hyper specificity and reliance on machinery for fun indicates the consumption driven nature of such data products.
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<td><strong>Religious club member</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Union member</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Veterans club member</strong></td>
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**Service**
- Physical
- Lasting
- Temporary

**Mental**
- Education
- Therapy
- Solitude
- Comrades

**Parameters**
- Relations
  - Users self/others
  - Services
- Time
  - Internal / extroverted
- Connection to site
  - Iconism [sic]
- Structural imperative
  - Interior / exterior
- Cost
  - Initial investment
  - Maintenance
  - Profit potential
  - Permanence or intractability

**Activities**
- Stationary
- Defined limits
- Flow
- Defined limits
- Flow
Poll results from Local children:
- Snacks
- Wii
- Karate school
- Sports
- Reading space
- Blocks and building space
- Chill out
- Climbing structures(s)
- Ballet studio and performance
- Bugs
- Dollhouse
- Slides and swings
- Biking
- Wave riding
- Laser tag
- Paintball
- Ice skating

Old Timers:
- Garden
- Bonsai
- Walking
- Gin Rummy
- Aerobics / Fitness
- Nails
- Hair salon
- Health care
- Smoothies
- Crematorium

Leon Sanders:
- Company
- Coffee
- Sitting with a view
- Library

Chaperones:
- Financial services
- Bakery
- Coffee
- Brewery
- Spa / Bath
- Pharmacy

ESRI Community Tapestry

Market Segment Profile:
- grill
- Bread Machines
- Treadmill
- Stair Stepper
- Volleyball
- Biking
- Board games
- Zoo
- Soccer and baseball games
- Photography
- Golf
- Motorcycles
- Bird watching,
- power boating,
- target shooting,
- hunting,
- auto racing
- workout
- exercise
- snorkeling
- Bowling
- Skating
- Chess
- Billiards
- Yoga
- Rollerblading
- Hiking
- fly Kites
- go to Zoo
- Cooking
- Movies
- Gym

Problems:
- workouts confer both temporary and permanent effects
to what extent is the mental benefit of activities a self service?
- climbing, coffee, sitting what if a counter interpretation were taken; you could climb anywhere
- Constant would be proud.
AGENCY
The original mall was predicated on enclosure and introversion. Architecture can sharpen consciousness of the self in the world. One with agency and free will.

In contrast ESRI (and their “Community Tapestry”) negates agency; anti-agency to the max. You are the result of your determining demographics. By connecting back to the river I am opening up the possibility for a renewed agency of connections and access, contrary to the introversion of the original mall. The architecture that does this “opens a window onto its own making” (the instrumentalized shell).

In Perspecta 32, Isenstadt writes of Jerde Partnership’s, “themed environments [that] dissolve consciousness of the self other than being a protagonist in a script.”

A whole sense of self is now replaced by temporary selves, that are total allegiances to singular activities.

Putting in continuity errors, for which there is no room in immersive environments is a counter tactic. This is another reason not to totally remove the existing mall. The new environment cannot be so immersive as to assume the role of the “whole self” themed space.
Poll results from Local children:
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ESRI Community Tapestry Market Segment Profile:
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program
fixed

auto racing
workout
exercise
snorkeling
Bowling
Skating
Chess
Billiards
Yoga
Rollerblading
Hiking
fly Kites
go to Zoo
Cooking
Movies
Gym
American Leisure time trends

- Reading
- TV
- Family, kids time
- Computer
- Movies, fishing

Timeline: 1997 to 2008

Values: 0 to 35
PUBLIC PRIVATE SPACE
Public spaces centered around interaction are no longer viable as is evidenced by the fact that the top leisure activities are all individual pursuits, therefore the leisure space is no longer centered around this communality rather it is spaces for individual pursuits with interstitial zones that encourage and permit this interaction in a way that is not at the forefront.

1 READING ROOM
modulated light, less busy external view towards pine stand, many small pods for individual and groups

2 TV
integrated couch style pods for easing back, connected to river walking path in case motivation strikes

3 FAMILY + KIDS TIME
S facing, bright, prominent frontage and beacon for project glassy, very open, low slope for easy playing.

4 COMPUTING
low traffic, low ceiling for quiet.

5 GOING TO THE MOVIES
naturally low light - N facing; highway for the driveby voyeur
DEMALLING

The banal slug that was once surrounded by a sea of parking now becomes the container for the car; its thin membrane charged with the insertion of foreign bodies.

Its loading docks and delivery portals are reversed and are now the orifices for projecting public rooms and connection to the landscape. Access is inverted as well, allowing cars to dart in and people to emerge from the shell. It frees what was parking for new public uses, encourages pedestrian access, and acts as a new public face of Bedford.

Rather than proscribe a definitive solution or fill what was the parking lot its disuse gives it a charge and requires the public to appropriate it. In support a tentative taxonomy of different approaches: productive landscape, racetrack, art projects, etc. is created. This will allow for a process to develop and emerge.
Phase 1: evacuation

FIGURE/GROUND OF DRIVABLE SURFACES
In the process of demalling for public use Gruen’s principles of introversion and enclosure are inverted. The mall thus becomes a site of extroversion and disclosure. What was parking becomes a public ground and the internally evacuated mall becomes parking. What was once a banal experience in flatland becomes charged and defamiliarized as you inhabit the empty shell.

Phase 2: extroversion & new entrance from tollroad
The site proper, 1 million square feet, is located near a major interchange and exit for the town is ideal for a more public use. In addition, its proximity to the Merrimack river, along a stretch along which there is currently no public access is an untapped resource. Connecting with this regional amenity removes the generic nature of the site and firmly roots it in its context both cultural and physical.
SCALE 2: SITE PLAN
Extroverted volumes are carefully calibrated with respect to programmatic dependent light conditions and viewsheds, surrounding context, and new spaces created between the evacuated shell and new volumes.

Interior public programs inhabit the erstwhile delivery portals of the flaccid and illconsidered exterior shell giving it a charge and reaching out to the surrounding context.

By setting up entry by car solely from the adjacent highway and pedestrian access/priority from all others, the exterior shell is charged as it mediates between these two previously unconnected publics.
Site section across voided mall showing connection to river.

Section detail entrances to interior forest.
SCALE 1: READING ROOM
What was formerly the exterior parking lot and is now liberated for public use flows gently into the fabric of the reading room. Individual and group niches provide privacy and seclusion while still participating in the public sphere. Bookshelves and media storage line the niches.
REVERSING THE FLOW
The very portals that were created to accept the detritus to be, the material consumption that sustains capital production, are inverted; they become public protrusions, extroverting the mall, disclosing its public functions.
productive - farming

non productive - asphalt prairie

follies - or architectural products showroom

ant? - google earth shout out

temporary spectacle - puma store

spatial - walls with compost backfill

hybrid - corn maze

speedy - race track
PEOPLES’ TABULA RASA
straddling permanence, productivity, and spectacle
View of the reading room and people's tabula rasa.
Interior of reading room and mall shell beyond.
Entrance to interior play forest and buttress/catwalk system.
Night view of cinema from adjacent toll road.
excursions
nascent exercises in form and polemic
Rebounding from the failure of the original Situationist project, Constant’s New Babylon is revived through a liaison with a strange bedfellow: New Urbanism.

Realizing the impossibility of the endless takeover of Situationist space the project confines itself to a particular generic dross: dead malls.

Ironically, the palette of identity and place that New Urbanism [NU] offers is the perfect materiel to lose your self within a drive.

As Mark Wigley writes, [NU] New Babylon is intent on “puncturing the fetishism, overcoming the alienation.” It is a perfect product for a community seeking a destination and an identity. Live free or die.

Coherent planning, walkability, and the village green are in tension with the atmosphere and ambience that take over this environment of spontaneity and playfulness.

While Constant’s original proposal was a liberation from the ground plane NUNB (noon-bee) embraces the ground as the point of entry and enfolds it into its pleasurable indeterminacy.

Behind the scenes the machinery of capitalism continues to power the gears and to release us from the drudgery of daily life.

Homo Ludens in 2009: no buying power, but much staying power. Is this a for-profit venture or a non-profit? Can it be both? Could it make a profit and in the meantime recoup Gruen’s old dream of the civic center?

What can I do besides portend the logical continuation of shopping mall development? Open air, lifestyle centers.

Shall I engage the debate of “public space” in the private realm?

Situationist city and Constant in tension with late capitalism, the desire of commodity running rampant. A hungry populace.
Significant point pollution sources of runoff into Merrimack River.
Regional Perspective

Merrimack River population density. Census 2000
Path (il)Logic

- **operation**
- **image**

- elevate & pocket
  ![Image](image1)

- canyonize
  ![Image](image2)

- berm tuck under
  ![Image](image3)

- switchback stepup
  ![Image](image4)

- ridge runner
  ![Image](image5)

- cut & pass
  ![Image](image6)

- fatten
  vertical and or horizontal
  ![Image](image7)
Flow:
Bundle and Separate
TV scheme:
mangakista style


Christensen, Julia. *Big Box Reuse*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. American precedents categorized by type, most projects are not too flashy or famous.


Holl, Steven. *The Edge of a City*. — “new programs and hybrid typologies mediate between landscape and metropolis.” Lukez, 18


Maas, Winy. *FARMAX.* “Lace...alongside, over, under roads that link malls” Lukez, 19.


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