What Do We Want at the Mall?
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In the classical world, shopping was more than a mission to acquire goods. The marketplace or agora of ancient Greece was a lively gathering spot “where people met, talked, and conducted business and civic activities” (Rubenstein 2). As civilizations rose and
Thesis statement: The modern mall is a place intended strictly for business, and it evolved from single-minded, business-like institutions that totally transformed the ancient ways of buying and selling.

Introduction: In ancient times, shopping was a community-building activity. For over 2,000 years, markets were the means by which people in agricultural-based economies socialized.

I. History: The changes we see in shopping patterns today started 200 years ago.
   A. Ancient marketplaces and bazaars were economic and social centers.
      1. The agora of ancient Greece was a place of business, commerce, and government.
      2. The bazaars of the Orient were social as well as economic centers.
   B. The revolutionary change began in the late 18th century with the Industrial Revolution. Country dwellers moved to the cities.
      1. The new industries gave rise to a middle class with expendable income.
      2. Shops stayed open all week.
      3. Shopping on market days no longer was the main way of socializing.
   C. Indoor shopping areas called arcades arose at the start of the 19th century.
      1. Arcades grew in population centers.
      2. Arcades encouraged people to shop, not socialize.
      3. The arcade was a privately owned space that appeared to be public.
II. Malls today: the modern shopping mall serves an exclusively economic function, like the arcade.
A. Modern malls descend from the arcades of the 19th century.
1. Malls are located according to the same criteria that arcades were, but now in suburbs.
2. Many malls have been built.
B. Despite many activities in malls, shoppers do not look for community but for a safe place to shop.
C. The rise of online shopping will further isolate individual shoppers, continuing the trend begun during the Industrial Revolution.

III. Social critics and developers debate the value of shopping mall culture.
A. David Guterson and others lament the rise of pure commercialism in the shopping experience.
   1. Guterson criticizes the Mall of America.
   2. Others critique shopping mall culture.
B. Specialists in the shopping mall industry are not nearly so negative.
   1. They believe the function of the mall is to make money, nothing else.
   2. Many shoppers want an economic exchange, only.
   3. Store owners want an economic exchange, only.
Conclusion: Guterson’s desire for an older type of marketplace is not appropriate for the modern era. Times have changed. Even though online shopping may give rise to virtual communities of shoppers who chat with one another, shopping malls today serve an economic, not social, function.
What Do We Want at the Mall?

In the classical world, shopping was more than a mission to acquire goods. The marketplace or agora of ancient Greece was a lively gathering spot "where people met, talked, and conducted business and civic activities" (Rubenstein 2). As civilizations rose and fell, these multiple functions remained important. In fact, for over 2,000 years, both the markets of the West and the bazaars of the East were the primary means by which people living in agrarian economies socialized and conducted business (Guterson 51). With the Industrial Revolution, however, the character of the marketplace underwent a radical change, and its social functions faded into oblivion. Although the malls of today, with their food courts, arcades, shops, and theaters, may seem deceptively like the bustling marketplaces of old, they are not. The modern mall is a place intended strictly for business, and it evolved from single-minded, business like institutions that totally transformed the ancient ways of buying and selling.

The ancient agora of Greece, the medieval markets of Europe, and the bazaars of the Orient, from which the mall is descended, did in fact serve important social functions. As early as the sixth century BC, the Greek market, or agora, offered a wide variety of goods in one convenient location. Significantly, historians describe the space in terms of its commercial and its social function: "As [Greek] commerce and government expanded, the agora became the focus of business, the market-place, as well as the place of assembly" (Rubenstein 2).

The economic and community functions of the agora extended forward in time, both to the marketplaces of Europe and to the bazaars of the Orient. In the medieval towns of Europe, market days were held once
each week. Since "nearly everybody lived in the
country and earned their living in some way from the
land" (Harrison 10), a trip to market became a much-
anticipated social event as well as an opportunity to
buy or barter. Bazaars also had a double function,
social and economic. Medieval Islamic cities con-
sisted of separate "familial clans, each with its own
housing units" that faced inward, to courtyards
(Geist 5). The only shared community space in these
cities was the collection of buildings that included
a bazaar, as well as a mosque and school (Geist 5).
From the fifth century BC through the eighteenth cen-
tury AD, markets and bazaars served important social
as well as economic functions.

The revolutionary change in our marketplace be-
gan in the late eighteenth century, when the Indus-
trial Revolution triggered massive migrations from the
countryside to the cities--a direct reversal of older
population patterns ("Industrial"). The new industries
in which these new city dwellers labored created
wealth, and for the first time in history a whole
class of people could afford luxuries. With a rising
urban middle class came shops that remained open prac-
tically every day of the week. A trip to market was no
longer a difficult, dangerous outing over poorly main-
tained roads. Nor--in the city--was it the principal
means by which people expected to meet others. Whereas
farmers could see dozens of faces only once a week, on
market day, city dwellers could walk into the street
and see hundreds of new faces whenever they chose.
Under these new conditions, the need to combine social
interaction with the activity of purchasing goods
gradually became less compelling.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, a
new type of marketplace arose: the arcade, precursor
to the modern mall (Jacobs 1–2; Kowinski 119). Histo-
rians tell us that these arcades were built "where a
growing population coincided with a shortage of shops,
Paragraph A (Reference to an alphabetized or single-page source): When referring to an alphabetized source (in this case an encyclopedia entry) or to a one-page source, there is no need to cite a page number. Readers will find the information in the “Works Cited” list.

Paragraph B (A reference to two sources in a single citation): When you want to refer to two sources in a single citation, place a semicolon between the citations and treat them as you would any citation. Note that you can refer to two page numbers in a single source: (Geist 4, 17). In this case, use a comma between page numbers.

Paragraph B (Citing the origin of an idea, if it is not yours): The double in-text citation to Jacobs and Kowinski is important, for Koman is here acknowledging that an idea in his paper was not his but one found in a pair of sources. For his argument to succeed, Koman needs to convince readers that the mall is the direct descendant of the arcade. Koman wants help in making this point clear; even though he does not quote or paraphrase Jacobs or Kowinski, he is careful to locate the authority for this idea in their books. Here are brief excerpts from those books.

From Jacobs

A forerunner of the enclosed shopping mall was the development and expansion of arcades in the 19th century. These were built as a way to deal with the increasingly hostile public environments of urban centers. Enclosed shopping centers of this kind were preceded by the agora of Athens, Roman forums and oriental bazaars (Gruen, 1973). (1–2)

From Kowinski

The solution [to the weather problem facing the builders of Southdale, which would be the first mall] was, of course, complete enclosure. Gruen [the project’s architect] saw it immediately and went to the Dayton-Hudson hierarchy [the developers] with his proposal. He told them about the covered pedestrian arcades in Europe, especially the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan, Italy, with its arcades rising four stories to a glass barrel vault and a central glass cupola 160 feet high. (119)

Relying on these sources enabled Koman to feel confident about a key claim in his essay: that the arcade was the direct predecessor of the mall. For an example of information that Koman found in several sources but decided not to cite (because he felt the information was common knowledge), see the facing-page note at paragraph C.
availability of land, finance and an entrepreneur” (MacKeith 16). Like the modern mall, the arcade presented an illusion of outdoor space in an indoor space, with pedestrian walkways that wound through rows of store fronts and that encouraged shoppers to make purchases, not to stop and talk (Geist 4, 17). Though the arcade was privately owned, it presented the illusion of being a public place, and it became a destination for people in search of safe, essentially solitary, activity. Indeed, this new venue fundamentally changed the relationship between those who bought and sold—and, significantly, between buyers themselves (Gumpert and Drucker 188). The single purpose of the new marketplace, the arcade, was to exchange goods for money. The historic role that community played in the marketplace was abandoned.

The modern mall descends directly from the arcades of the nineteenth century. Like arcades, malls are located in growing population centers, which in post-World War II America has meant the suburbs. The nation’s first completely enclosed mall, the Southdale Center, was built in Edina, Minnesota (a suburb of Minneapolis) in 1956. Over the next forty years, developers added 40,000 more shopping centers to the American retail landscape (International 15). In each case, like the arcades of the last century, the shopping centers have been situated according to consumer need and with one purpose in mind: to promote buying, not socializing.

Although the variety of food, merchandise, and entertainment in most malls offers a greater range of possibilities for activity than did the old arcades, sociologist George Lewis observes that the activity modern shoppers seek has nothing to do with community. What they want, he says, is to go shopping in a safe, secure place. As part of a larger study in popular culture, Lewis observed that while mallgoers can be said to form a collection of people under one roof, they do not constitute a community: they do not
**Paragraph C (Common knowledge):** The entire question of what information and ideas count as common knowledge and what should be attributed to a source is complicated. Partly, the issue depends on audience. A great deal of technical information could be considered common knowledge, if you were addressing an expert audience. For an audience of nonspecialists, who might think that the information you’re presenting originates with you, cite the source.

Consider the case of Southdale Center, America’s first mall, which Jason Koman refers to in paragraph C. Jason decided that Southdale’s status as “first” should be considered common knowledge. Identical information identifying Southdale as first appeared in three sources, none of which cited their information. Jason believed that this fact of mall history, even though unknown to his audience, could justifiably be considered common knowledge. By contrast, see paragraph B, where Jason attributes a key idea in his paper to two sources.

**Paragraph D (Paraphrase):** In an early draft, Koman quoted a long passage from George Lewis and on rereading the draft decided that the material had too many specialized terms. Jason therefore decided to write a paraphrase, keeping Lewis’s main points but casting them in more commonplace language. At the very end of the paraphrase, Koman retains one brief phrase from the original. This gives readers a feel for Lewis’s language. Note that the paraphrase is roughly the same length as the original.

**Original passage**

What emerged from the initial observations and interviews, then, was a picture of mall shoppers as a *collectivity*, located in one enclosed space, but utilizing the mall primarily for their own self-defined and rational economic transactions. They may well shop with a friend, or the family may come to the mall, but they are *not* there for the face to face primary interactive relations that are the core of community. (125)

**Paraphrase**

Lewis observed that while mallgoers can be said to form a collection of people under one roof, they do not constitute a community: they do not search out the types of interpersonal contacts on which communities are built. Even if they go shopping with a friend or family member, they remain isolated consumers during their time in the mall, looking to make what Lewis calls “self-defined and rational economic transactions” (125).
search out the types of interpersonal contacts on which communities are built. Even those who shop with a friend or family member remain isolated consumers during their time in the mall, writes Lewis, looking to make what he calls "self-defined and rational economic transactions" (125). Much the same could be said of arcade shoppers one hundred years ago (Geist 35).

Recent technological developments promise even greater isolation for shoppers, as we conduct business from a distance via the Internet. According to a recent study, "consumers will spend $26 billion online in 2002," some $21 billion more than the online dollars spent in 1998 (Deck). This explosion in virtual shopping will keep increasing numbers of people at home, threatening (eventually) to create a marketplace in which shoppers don't even see one another. Not only would community be stripped out of the shopping experience as has already happened with the rise of arcades and malls; but direct contact with other human beings would be stripped out as well. This move to disembodied shopping on the Internet represents the purest form of the commercial emphasis on shopping that began during the Industrial Revolution.

Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, then, changing economies transformed the marketplaces of old from social and economic centers into economic centers only—a shift that has given rise to a debate between social critics and retail developers. Essayist David Guterson laments the failure to establish a sense of community in our malls. Along with others (Gumpert and Drucker 188–89; Ode), he believes that shoppers secretly want, but won't openly ask for, a connection with other humans in an isolating world. Having spent a week at the Mall of America in 1993, he reports on the disorienting experience of "[g]etting lost, feeling lost, and being lost" (50). Malls,
he says, take our money without returning even the hint of intimacy and community:

Here we are free to wander endlessly and to furtively watch our fellow wanderers, thousands upon thousands of milling strangers who have come with the intent of losing themselves in the mall’s grand, stimulating design. [. . .] The mall exploits our acquisitive instincts without honoring our communal requirements, our eternal desire for discourse and intimacy. (50)

Emphasizing business to the exclusion of community, Guterson argues, has trivialized the act of shopping. A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation video, “Temples of Mammon,” makes much the same point, arguing that malls are a “controlled retail environment [. . .] that [have] changed our values and even the course of our lives. Shopping malls have eliminated the concept of neighborhood shopping” (Temples). These cultural changes are now being debated in university-level courses with titles like “Geographies of Consumption” (Crang).

Industry specialists view the change in shopping environments from a different perspective. “Malls are designed to maximize profits,” says the Chairman of the Environmental Subcommittee for the International Council of Shopping Centers. “They were not built as a replacement for Main Street. If intimacy encourages sales, there will be intimacy” (Marks). One mall executive makes the point with particular bluntness: “We don’t want the mall to be a community. [. . .] It would upset our tenants who want to make money” (qtd. in Lewis 123).

Transforming the mall into a community, as Guterson and others would have us do, might also upset shoppers, who are used to thinking of shopping centers as places simply to make purchases and then to go home—a perfectly reasonable expectation for those
who are unfamiliar with the richness of ancient mar-
etplaces. Guterson’s desire for an older type of
market that encourages direct contact and intimacy is
understandable. But that desire is appropriate for an
era that no longer exists—and that has not existed
for two hundred years.

Projecting into the future, the arrival of on-
line shopping would seem to promise even more gloom
for the critics of shopping malls. But the critics
may not want to abandon all hope. Taking advantage of
our digital times and working with high-tech tools,
young people may be creating shopping-based communi-
ties of their own: virtual communities. If we were to
log on to the Internet site of “Downtown Anywhere,” a
massive complex of online stores, we would find an
invitation to help build a virtual city that even
Guterson might like to visit. One of the largest of
these enterprises, Galaxy Mall, bills itself as “the
future of online shopping” (Galaxy). More conven-
tional malls, still housed in physical structures,
take care to establish their presence on the Web
(Westfield; Mall of America). Conceivably, the hun-
dreds of thousands of teenagers and adults who now
“chat” with their peers in the thousands of virtual
communities across cyberspace will urge these malls
to institute forums where they can share experiences
as they shop.

Still, we should be realistic about the pros-
psects for such communities. The virtual mall develop-
ers who would control chat rooms would have one
purpose only in sponsoring them: to sell more prod-
ucts. If (to paraphrase the industry analyst quoted
earlier) online intimacy encourages sales, there
will be intimacy. Tragic or not, and for historical
reasons that can be clearly traced, the desire for
profit, not community, lives at the heart of the mod-
ern mall.
Works Cited


