

Architecture of Consumerism as Public Space

Deconstructing the shopping mall and revitalizing it as an urban park

P4 Reflection

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A Matter of Scale

Chair of Methods of Analysis & Imagination

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Introduction

Over the last century, shopping has been transformed into an urban institution through the shopping mall. Considered a fundamental component of the city, it has become a prerequisite for urbanity. Originally designed as a meeting place for the population, it was meant to serve as a multipurpose town center that would enhance the human network of activity in the suburbs, safe from the seasons. However, since its conception, commercial activities have become the main function, retail spaces taking precedence over the consumer itself and its use as a 'public space'. The architecture has been specifically designed to enhance profitability and gain the continuous attention of consumers. However, with the rise of e-commerce, the typical mall design favoring retail is struggling to compete, resulting in closures and abandonment. It is at this crossroads, that I reconsidered the structure of the mall as a public space that sets the individual above retail and sought to answer, ***'How can the architecture of consumerism be reshaped to create public space?'*** through my project.

Synopsis

This project takes the Nautica Keskus mall by the ferry terminal in Tallinn, Estonia, and deconstructs the consumerist design factors to reach its underlying presence as a public space. The existing building is given a new rooting in its surroundings by fragmenting the mass and softening its edges. Taking precedence from the closure of malls and their abandonment, nature is allowed to take over and revitalize its interior. The building is transformed into an urban park creating natural wildness in an otherwise organized typology.

Methodology

To reshape the architecture of the mall, the design factors first had to be understood. The design factors the mall is tasked with solving are the climate, security, concentration of retail, and sales volume. The response to these factors is to create a building that is closed off from the outside, usually privately owned, and creates a homogenous function concentrated on sales. What is left, is a building that disregards its surroundings at an important axis between the ferry terminal and the inner city forcing the quickest path through the building in hopes of sales.

To counteract these factors, my approach has been to do the opposite of the original design factors. The solution has been to cut open the building in several areas, make it publicly owned, and scatter a diversified program over the entire site. Rather than destroying the building, a heritage approach is taken, seeing malls as a remnant of their time. Three new functions are specified in the building: public functions consisting of a library, workshop and theater, greenhouses, and open nature reflecting the Estonian landscape. The building is reused to show the varying states of possible decay, either through complete reuse of the existing, structural reuse only, or natural decay of the structure.

Fragmentation & Thresholds

The architecture of a shopping mall has very clear borders and does not allow for large thresholds as these take away from the retail spaces. In response to this, I have developed longer thresholds between the functions of the building creating various spaces for different public uses. Examples include allowing the pavement of the surrounding to extend into the greenhouse as well as using a

foldable glass facade to blur the edge between the outside and inside. A smaller example is the faceted mirrored glass facade which extends the entrance into the building and also creates an illusion between viewer and user. The building is therefore softened in its fragmentation through different functions and further integrated into the surroundings with various thresholds for public space.

I believe the question, **'How can the architecture of consumerism be reshaped to create public space?'**, has been answered through several design components consisting of softening the existing through fragmentation and thresholds. The building has been opened up to the outside not only by piercing the exterior facade but also by perforating the interior through light and nature. While not every mall follows the same design concept, especially now with the competitiveness of e-commerce, several aspects could be applied to any shopping mall to reshape it.

Personal Reflection

P1 & P2

My fascination for this topic did not stem from a previous project or personal fascination but came through our site visit to Tallinn. While exploring the city I was overwhelmed by the number of shopping malls centered in a small radius and the ensuing lack of public space useable in the oncoming winter. Only after researching the design components of shopping malls did I understand the depths of architectural manipulation disguised as public space. Still, I am both fascinated and shocked at the ability of architecture to influence us unseen, and has opened my eyes to everyday retail components and their relation to the human scale.

After choosing the Nautica Mall as my site I was overwhelmed with the sheer size of nearly 20000m² of space. I obtained original plans from the archive and managed to rebuild the building as best as I could. Yet every time I tried to insert a design, it was lost in the size of the site which equates to nearly 50000m². Perhaps, that is why leading up to P2, my design consisted of 3 new buildings that took precedence from the existing structural grid of the mall. Instead of confronting the mall in its entirety, I sought to only keep the thinnest parts, the columns. The design at the time seemed to get lost in the size of the site and was not a convincing approach to reshaping the mall as public space. In hindsight, the design was a complete demolition of the mall rather than a reshaping.

P3 & P4

After P2 I learned a valuable lesson on overcoming obstacles by taking a step backward. I discarded the P2 design and instead focused on what I enjoy, heritage and reuse. I decided to embrace the mall in its complete impenetrability and focus on reusing the building, incorporating the theme of its decline. With the theme of decay came the idea to allow nature to take over but also to shape it into a part of the building. However, I still struggled at first to fully understand the various structural systems from different eras and to find a function. The moment the project became the reality it is today, was through the quickness of decision-making. During a studio talk, zones were designated over the building and have since developed into the areas they are now. Bold, clear, and quick decision-making allowed me to finally bring the concept to paper.