



## UNTITLED MALLTOPIA

*THIS IS NOT  
MASLOW'S MALL OF  
FEEDS AND NEEDS?*

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"A building is a building. It cannot be read like a book; it doesn't have any credits, subtitles or labels like picture in a gallery. In that sense, we are absolutely anti-representational. The strength of our buildings is the immediate, visceral impact they have on a visitor."

— Jacques Herzog, Herzog & de Meuron Architects.

"What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself."

— Abraham Maslow

"PROBLEM CARING" as design tool versus "PROBLEM SOLVING" as optimization tool...

— Marc Fornes,  
TheVeryMany.net

My Malltopia comes rather late in the game but has been given enough consideration these past weeks that I would personally like to know what the final document reveals and to move on. Written in the first person as it would be too convoluted otherwise, in part, my continued interest has been driven by a deep-seeded aversion to malls—chronically negative reactions that have been interesting to analyze. Too much, too close, too manufactured. Persistence it seems is not futile as I have come to experience malls with greater ease in recent research forays. Most recently, Sheridan Town Centre. Yesterday (Sunday - en route to a First Holy Communion in a church from which the mall takes part of its lofted design) on a protracted pit-stop to see what the rave was all about I did not in truth have a bad time. To the point that as I'm rereading the material to date I question some of my 'mallergies' (mall allergies) which have led to a critical mindset, and hope the result will warrant the dis-passion. More importantly, a carte blanche utopian theme is not to be passed on when The Mall is in question.

Working with commons, town squares, town centers, the trade of goods, information, learning, politics, markets of lore, museums, art, expression, relics, a meeting place, despots for the height of human exploration, into the future, present and past - this has been and would be the place for it. It goes on... we want to live in a considered, participatory, evolving world. Continuity check. Mapping our future, once again, is not passive.

What could the mall of tomorrow be? What do we want to be? Malls could individually be improved upon with some tweaking and finessing but as an ideal The Mall could evolve a spectacular phenomenon and experience. Whether this Malltopia is it or not.

Untitled Malltopia first dawned as 'Maslow's Mall of Feeds and Needs' leading to sufficient refutation of the 'need' aspect to become 'Maslow's Mall of Feeds and Wants', the idea at the time still based on some order of physical/spiritual organizational and wayfinding system stemming from hierarchical speculations. Practically speaking: elevating what appears to hold greater potential for self-actualization or transcendence to higher planes (closest to natural light sources, requiring the climb, thinner air) while keeping the strict transactions of business 101 to earthy, base foundational levels seemed a reasonable first step. We'll see.

Note: buried none-too-deeply in this exploration are my own biases which have to do with a preference for shopping locally, outside and on the street. This coupled with a general anti-pervasive-brand outlook, a dislike of confinement and directional prompting, of being stuck in traffic, waiting in line, apprehending and being overwhelmed by the mass contagion of 'looking for something' (but what?), and the blur of perceived banality, it bothers me. Especially when there exist alternatives that could ultimately amount to inspiration.

To date we've ascribed many qualities, roles, values and experiences to The Mall as we know it and have suggested even more ways to improve on these. Last week, looking for a way to introduce Untitled MallTopia I thought to open by describing the mall as I approach it physically and psychologically which is something like this...



*The mall is an island unto itself, though fortress is another good descriptor. Visually both mall and fortress are massive and seemingly impermeable structures, purposefully stated with often little relief or physical differentiation other than reigning flags and banners. Though their functionality differs, there is a (lack of) consideration to their appearance that can be compared and imho, feels similar. For me negotiating a mall is anything but a walk in the park - it takes preparedness.*

*Accessing either fortress or mall entails a crossing of space and construction (fortress comes from the Latin 'strong', 'to make'): a drawbridge across a moat, or a walkway across a parking lot. Imposing, regardless of season, especially for pedestrians.*

I don't much like malls, but I like people.

I hate parking lots: a necessary but experientially unpleasant artifact. Expansive boundaries of tar, concrete, metal, and fumes that need to be traversed. No man's land. Extensions of commerce and the hiway melding into what seems to be part of the past. Untitled MallTopia revolves around integrating what we seek and want in The Mall experience with what we aspire to in community, landscape, the human experience, self, cities, society, culture, dignity, aspiration, foresight - utopian of course. The first step then would be to create a seamless physically and psychologically experienced continuity between the mall, it's surrounding neighbourhoods, and people. Bioinspired. Since a corral reef which would be most ideal requires that we exist under water, another way to achieve this would be to bury the mall, landscaping most of it underground thereby creating rolling hillsides, such a green roof peaked by soaring crystal trajectories of architectural glass that let in natural light, can open up, and that cap like mountain peaks, a wooded, grassy covering - a hobbit-like landscape if you will - punctuated with breathing holes, many ins and outs. Where we could go to grow things, picnic, swing, play, convene, talk, walk, mix, and evolve nature. It's ecological use of space.

A key consideration here too, the persisting and nagging dichotomy of "inside" and "outside" in exclusivity which leads me to want for a more meaningful state of integration and understanding in general. With this comes the responsibility however, of acknowledging a part in the relationships that define who we are and who we can become while mirroring the world around us. In the case of The Mall, what lies inside of it is as crucial to and dependent upon what lies outside of it and vice-versa. Architecturally I see a partial solution expressed via spaces with multiple connections and permeations delivering greater option, fluidity and transparency. Holistic is one word. Imaginative another. To certain extents, because I'm seeing less and less distinction between what is or occurs inside and outside of us than both our traditions and physically acknowledged boundaries typically permit us to observe, my desire is to create a more porous experience. That what is inside will reflect what is outside. That demand will inspire supply. To design a commercial space that is in equal measure a space for public expansion, and being able to switch tracks, enter and leave at will and on any level for whatever reason. In and out. Flow through and seamless. A communal indoor and outdoor space, a shopping-optional mall addressing needs and wants, providing opportunity to play, to



explore, and to discover our 'inner spaces' and 'outer beings'. Something that is more organic... I think grounds exist to ask for this...

Central to community this mall will need something like a church spire or facsimile thereof. Without allusion to the spire's historically religious, phallic or power-related implications and associations but more as to the experience of driving through the countryside where the sighting of a steeple or spire is the beacon of a town on the horizon - a place to rest, to eat, greet, explore. The church spire also provides visual orientation in a village, town, or city. For the purpose of this mall the spire might be a lookout, an observatory, or communication tower (see Calatrava's Montjuic Communication Tower, it has a crux). The general idea is to provide the opportunity to climb up high, test our language skills, get a scope, survey the lay of our domain, insure that it is good...

Initially, I'd seen the mall as the Colosseum covered in indigenous grasses and plants sloping in towards the centre to shape an amphitheater where performance, sporting and cultural events, public meetings could take place, outdoor markets... a pond / skating rink. A multi-purpose venue. The town square, but in a naturalized, central park setting. Meandering and terraced. Now I'm seeing something less restricted by form.

The mall would be a tribute not just to commerce but to culture, and communion. Civic center. The Louvre. Buckminster Fuller. Basilica. Mirror worlds. Promenades of Deep Space Nine. What else could we be? A regenerative and evolving sense of wonder as we wander in and out of vast caverns without the notion of being below ground because of light and transparency. Surfaces that breathe. Stalagmites reaching for stalactites.

Working loosely with Maslow's pyramidal structure, as we climb higher in the mall, closer to the light, addressed are our 'higher needs'. Buy/sell low, play/aspire high. Enjoy both as per self. With the option of diagonals and trajectories to bridge spontaneity throughout. No judgment lodged in here. Ground is where and means what? (You decide.) A want for escarpment and to live on the proverbial angle without discrimination because we need what we need, want what we want, dream what we dream. Fear what we do. But playing now with the notion of commerce and artistry, a place where parameters (we) could coexist and inspire. Learn, grow, explore. Elevator up / escalator down. Or take the stairs. Or the hill. Choice exists.

Architecture, urban planning and their ability to dignify and humanize are central to this premise providing not just great bones but grand movements. Space as symphonic compositions to be envisioned and newly created. We need to well consider the structures, systems, and environments we build and support as they wield enormous influence in our lives and societies. Just as we need to consider our reasons to shop, or how we spend our time and energies. Inevitably it all has consequence. There is a need for design that not only accommodates but proactively extends our desires and future state.

Parking lots replaced by parkland. Start here.