

Like a perennial high noon, mall lighting casts no shadows. Ambiance is left to individual vendors though most, by default, opt for the cold blue incandescence that brings out the reptilian tones in mall shoppers' flesh. The compound illumination – skylight, screen light and staged display – cast a glow similar to that which is reflected by our personal digital devices. And this is by design – our collectively imagined mall is one laid out by Viennese architect Victor Gruen, whose 1954 Northland Center set the stage for malls to come. Climate control. Open, tiered architecture with an exposed courtyard center. Tiles, fountains and ferns. The architecture of the perennial mall mimics that of a theater-in-the-round, with individual stores and kiosks on the periphery functioning as side stages. The enclosed site recursively nests spaces within spaces, carving out corners, huts, pavilions, stores and courts from a seemingly inexhaustible resource, ever expanding inward, never acknowledging the existence of or possibility to extend into the outdoors. A commercial panopticon as apt for performance and surveillance as for a fish-in-a-barrel style attack. The exposed mall courts were meant to mimic the design of a town square – the commons – a space where movement occurs on the periphery, with the center reserved for both sanctioned functions and leisurely strolls that have clearly delineated hours of operation, working under the auspice that nothing good happens after dark. Though far from common space, retail space is similarly structured for flow and circulation, with stagnation and loitering as it's enemy. Good lighting encourages movement, leaving no shaded corners or hallways for vice's respite.

There is no space for the outside world inside of the mall, and this fact, along with the rise of e-commerce, bankruptcies of leveraged buyouts, and the shift towards experience spending has resulted in the Retail Apocalypse. Congregating youth in declining and dead malls only accelerated their undoing, because a group of teenagers, like water, assumes its meaning through context. Darkened spaces equating to threat and fear, illuminated commons connoting exuberance and hope. In dead malls, brick and mortar stores no longer serve their purpose as a point of purchase. Catering towards the shift towards consumers valuing of experiences over physical goods, brick and mortar stores no longer hawk wares but offer pop-up environments, backdrops for selfies, free wifi and power banks for a quick charge. To reanimate themselves from the dead, malls have a few routes: shutter their doors, become open-air, reimagine the mall from a hermetic caisson to an open air esplanade, become multi-use spaces combining co-working and co-living with commerce, provide funhouse style content generating experiences, or become a utility – a place with data good enough to stream and plugs for days.

The term Mallrat first appeared some time in the mid nineteen eighties, and unlike the Parisian dandy-esque boulevardier or jeune fille is not an affluent or aspirational subject. The mallrat is a product of American suburban ennui – a teen that goes to the mall because of a lack of third-space alternatives. They arrive by car, they're up to no good, and like their eponymous creature, they feed of society's waste. Grifters lurking in darkness, outstaying their welcome. The term was popularized by Kevin Smith's 1995 film *Mallrats*, which, if produced in 2018, would be quite a different story. In *Mallrats* we follow two teenage protagonists post breakup as they roam the mall, trying to win back their girlfriends with the help of local denizens including a fifteen year old sex novelist, a triple nipples psychic, and two agents of chaos – Jay and Silent Bob. The film culminates in the protagonists crashing one of the ex-girlfriend's dad's television game show.

One protagonist is later rewarded with a talk show of his own, while another gets married at Universal Studios' Jaws spectacular.

As at the time of the term's origin, the mall still is a refuge for listless teens to play out their flirtations, frustrations and angst insurveilled public. Each store a kammerspiel unto itself the spaces of retail, laden with signifiers, mapped meaning onto teenagers' nascent identities. The mall provides a stage, with teenagers moving throughout like caged tigers stalking their prey. In *Mallrats*, the mall functions as a non-space, a stand-in backdrop that allows us to focus on character psychology and dialogue. It is in a sense a Kammerspiel film, a cinematic portrait of an ever bottoming out middle class life. The mall as site for chamber drama is only heightened by its function as backdrop for micro dramas mediated by social platforms that play out in group chats and FaceTime. Teenagers hone their craft for direct address, both speaking amongst themselves and at a hypothetical public audience – or to no one at all. If made in 2018, the protagonists of *Mallrats* would not aspire to weddings at Universal Studios or television shows, they would be jockeying for metrics – follower counts and engagement rates. A 2018 *Mallrats* would feature no wide shots, instead dominated by the tight framing of teenagers faces as they oscillate between emotions of ecstasy and despair, cropping ever closer onto filtered features, as the mall-as-stage fades farther and farther into the background.