

# Mallbodies

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# 1. Standing In Front of The Wall of Concrete

Hello and welcome to *Mallbodies*, a performative elegy to the American Shopping Mall, created by Mike Durkin, Dylan Gygax, and Logan Gabrielle Schulman. Before beginning this journey, we want to make sure you're right where we want you. To start, you should be standing by your car, bike, or however you got here today, finding yourself in the parking lot of the mall. Don't start walking towards the mall just yet.

This is the outside. This is the world. Which is right now. This is our journey on this day. Together.

You can begin slowly walking towards the Mall. But don't go in until we say so. Be aware of your surroundings, look both ways before crossing.

Let's hold on to this moment. The moment before we cross over. Still far enough away that the automatic doors haven't opened for us.

Around you is the parking lot. Cars occupying spaces. What can you see?

What surrounds you?

Is it more stores? Wildlife? Highways? Pine trees? Palm trees? How does this mall fit within the world around it? Don't it always seem to go that they pave paradise and put up a parking lot?

Imagine what came before this mall. 10 years before. Now 100. Now 1,000.

Now imagine what will take its place when the mall is sold. And it will be sold.

With all of this information swimming around in your head, check in with yourself. For better or worse you are breathing this world in. With masks on, empty your lungs. Now take one big breath in, two, three, four... And release.

You've arrived. Your pilgrimage only just beginning. What goes through your mind as you approach this mecca? Is it your safety? The looming danger of a pandemic still swirling around? Be careful in there.

This is a guided journey, and we've made it just for you. An elegy to the American Mall. Welcome. Throughout this journey you will be asked to participate in some simple actions and tasks.

We've asked you here today because this structure cannot survive anymore. It is crumbling under the pressure. These are the last days of the American Mall. This obelisk will be vacant for the next generation. Your journey today may be the last. So, with masks on, and sanitizer in your pocket, let's take one last deep breath. Inhale, two, three, four, and exhale.

This is the last breath of the American Mall.

We are journeying into this dying star to savor the highs and lows.

It can all be yours now. Welcome to the palace of potential, the American dream.

Now, let us take our first steps inside and pay our last respects and continue on with our journey.

## 2. Initiation at the Welcome Map of the Mall

Find yourself inside the mall

Let the fluorescence wash over you. Bathe in it. You have arrived.

Seasonal decor as far as the eye can see — and for every Hallmark holiday, another beautiful sale.

You begin to wander. No clear path at this moment. We'll tell you where to go next. Welcome to the climate controlled paradise. A near paradise. The almost—

This place is familiar. You can't put your finger on it, but you know you've been here before - like in a dream. Even if you've never been *here* here before, this mall definitely looks like that other mall you've been to. You've only just arrived, but it feels like you never left. This place, like every other place. You could be in Ardmore, New Rochelle, West Palm Beach, or Tacoma. Are you in the suburbs, the city, or out in the country? You could be anywhere.

Take a deep look around you. When was the last time you saw tropical trees indoors?

Notice the mall's infinite moving parts: consumers passing here and there, the hypnosis of watching escalators traveling up and down. Elevators towing nameless individuals to nameless destinations, the blinking lights, the sweeping, the cleaning. As you walk around, notice where you get pushed and pulled, what lures you in? Where does your body want to travel to?

Notice the shapes, lines, textures of the space. Are we transported to the 70s, 80s, 90s, or are we transported to a lavender-scented Guggenheimian future, decades in the making?

Find yourself at the nearest map of the Mall. Then find yourself, most likely marked with a red or yellow star, picking you out amongst constellations:     You     Are     Here.

Look at the many paths available to you, this design made for you. You can perform these tracks in whatever order best conforms to what's ahead of you or what excites you, using the track names as your guide.

Notice the other bodies in this space. The mall bodies. Those that are strangers. Those looking for deals, those looking to fill time. Those selling off-brand iPhone cases. Those pushing trash cans, sanitizing everything in their path. Those looking for human interaction. Starved for human interaction. Those getting dropped off by their loved ones. Those wandering. Those window shopping. Those lost. Those found. Occupying space. Moving through this gigantic structure. Notice their movements, their actions, their stories unfolding. What can you overhear?

We are all used to the old dances: you'd pick out a great outfit just for this occasion, you'd carry branded bags that will outlive you for millenia just to show off your hot new shit, you'd make or not make eye contact with strangers. You would drop off kids, or get dropped off. You'd loiter, linger, want, and wait. You know, the *old* dances.

But we have adapted to a new dance for a new age. Maintaining a six foot distance. Adhering to markers on the ground, eyes peeled for sanitizer stations, and the many unwritten rules of occupying space and distance. As we continue on our journey, pay attention to these distances. Notice the bodies in this space. Notice their clothes, their face coverings. Those who cling to the old dances, and those embracing the new. Noticing both the real and figurative distances between ourselves and others. The dances we all perform.

Our journey today exists in the space between the dances of the past and the dance of the present.

Now, let us continue on with our journey.

### 3. STANDING IN FRONT OF A VACANT STOREFRONT

You've arrived at the vacant space. Yesterday's Treasures.

The negative space: every shuttered store, a capitalist success story.

Position yourself in front of a closed store so that you are able to see your reflection in the glass. The sparkling startlingly clean glass. Looking at yourself through the reflection. Seeing yourself in this vacant space. A mirror into your memories. A mirror held up to yesterday. Boarded up. Steel gate down, prison-like. What was this store before? Is the name still embossed on the outside, a soul stuck hovering over its body, forever unburied?

We stand, awed by the passing of time, sifting through the memories of the stores gone by, out of business, bankrupt, closing sales up to 50% off, liquidating whole stock, everything must go, going, going gone.

Unemployment can't help but come to mind, being essential, being out of work, laid off, fired, furloughed. When corporations have human rights, we can't help but feel sympathy for our abandoned four walls.

We stare at our reflection in glass smudged by hands long-gone. Have you ever bought a hand cream you loved, and then returned months later for more, to find the store was gone?

Why did we buy these things? What's my age again?

Broken down shelves, kiosks, everything must go.

And this repeats in your head: everything must go.

Everything must go.

Why did we buy these things? What's my age again?

Replaying memories over and over again. Why did we buy these things? What's my age again? What is real anymore? Nostalgic for nostalgia. Who's nostalgia are we walking through? Donald Trump's or Norman Rockwell's? Are they the same?

Stores left vacant

Malls left vacant

Memories left vacant

Hopes, dreams, visions left vacant

And they'll try again. Of course. They must. Everything must. Creating new products, airing new commercials, printing new catalogues, luring new customers, making new memories. The American Dream. What's my age again?

Time stands still.

History repeats.

Take a photo to remember this by. Maybe a selfie in the reflection of the glass. Because at least you're looking so good today.

Now, let's continue on with our journey.

## 4. STANDING IN FRONT OF THE BIG BOX RETAILER

Find yourself in front of one of those big box retailers, but don't go in yet.

You know the ones

Maybe a Macy's, a Dillard's, a JCPENNEYS

If you can even find a Penney's -- 170 locations closed in 2020, and another 120 to close this year

The ones with the glass display cases, beige walls, Ecru flooring, ivory countertops, khakis as far as the eyes can see.

The ones where you have to choose your own adventure: either taking the central path, and braving perfume samples, or slipping around the side through women's shoes.

Now, let's go inside. And have a walk around.

Notice the season's fashions. The models in the ads. The shapes of their bodies. The color of their skin. The digital alteration. The "It" celebrities of the moment.

Notice the decor. The staff. What they're wearing. What they're saying.

Notice the movements of other mall bodies and objects in space.

Head into a particular department. Any department. Let's find a particular garment. Something you're drawn to but might never wear.

Have you found one? Pick it up.

Check the tag: Where was this garment made? This exotic apparel, made by hands young and old. Halfway around the world. We are all the global village.

Explore the material with your hand. Explore the way the fabric feels against your skin. Luxurious, right? Who do you know who wears these clothes? Do you own anything like this? How much does it cost? Can you feel its history in its woven fibers?

Have you ever stopped to appreciate something this way before?

Now, let's continue on with our journey, and leave the Big Box to its ends.

## 5. Seated In The Food Court

Find yourself at the food court or its closest equivalent.

Of course also you should feel free to leave the food court at any point you start to feel uneasy having to sit here.

Tune yourself to the sights, the sounds, the smells, the tastes, the free samples. Who occupies the space? And better yet, what's on the menu?

Let your mind drift backwards. Let these observations take you to a yesterday. A time that is removed from the today. A time when you flocked to the food court. Moving in reverse like soft serve untwisting itself upward and back into the machine, sun-daes becoming centuries.

Would you like to try a free sample? Free sample?

Two All Beef Patties, Special Sauce, Lettuce, Cheese, Pickles, Onions on a Sesame Seed Bun.

But Don't eat meat

Beef upsets the stomach and thickens the blood

Guess I'll have fries with ketchup?

Maybe dunk my fries in the Wendy's Frosty

That time you sat in the food court in 9th grade

And you dropped your moo goo gai pan from Panda Express

On your brand new skechers

What's even *in* the Special Sauce?

You'd like to buy the world of coke, wouldn't you?

This food court is a wormhole, contracting spacetime so you can globe hop around an American ideal of the world. Your own personal Epcot conveniently located behind the Home Depot and next to Target. Take a gondola to Italy at the Sbarro's. Head south of the border at Taco Bell. Venture to the Great Wall at Panda Express. Dive right on into a Long John's Silver. Try the hushpuppies, that's my recommendation.

Standing in line for the PopEye's chicken sandwich

Make it extra spicy

Wonder where they source their ingredients from

Were their chickens farm or factory raised

Wonder if their employees get raises

Or at least Hazard Pay

Wonder if the secret ingredient is Love, or just smoked paprika flavoring

Isn't all about happiness when it comes down to it?

Happiness

At the bottom of a cinnabon box

Happiness

In the Burger King bag finding bonus fries

*AND an onion ring??!*

Happiness

Pocketing extra Fire Sauce packets from the T-Bell

Happiness with your

Hands covered in jamba juice

Hands covered in pizza sauce

Hands covered in big mac sauce

Hands covered in soy sauce

Hands covered in pepsi  
I'm sorry, Diet pepsi

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Now we come to the present. Eating today. Eating in a food court today. 2021, the year of our lord.

Precautions in place.  
Markers on the ground.  
Closed off sections.  
Masks on the table.  
Touching haphazardly cleaned tables  
Touch-free delivery.  
Touchless payment.  
Who's touched the food?

Noses creeping over the tops of masks. In the kitchen. Cashiers sneezing. Cover your Mouth. Wash your hands.  
Rinse. Repeat. Rinse. Repeat. Happy Birthday Song.  
Is there enough space between you and the person on your right?  
Do you even have an appetite?  
Hand sanitizer between bites.  
How can others eat here?  
When no one eats here, does the food court cease to exist?

Maybe we should have ordered it to go?

Now, let us continue on with our journey.

## Track 6. Wandering Like A Mall Rat Past The Things Remembered

Nothing sticks  
gum in hair  
a strong suction cup  
i'm moving and moving through and moving through this main corridor  
a mall is really just a hallway with some bathrooms/  
a tesla dealer in the mall across from the limited too and somehow out of fashion now/  
was it the fashion bug, or the Deb, or the Primark/  
what is the other one hmm i'll think of it later there/  
was one near the cheesecake factory/  
is there a cheesecake factory near me/  
looking it up now, opening google maps, typing cheesecake factory near me, some people think the  
cheesecake factory are only known for their cheesecakes, but actually the Oreo crusted spring rolls are pretty  
killer/  
actually the texmex dumplings/  
no wait the kung pao quesadilla/  
of course i forgot there's literally one attached to the mall/  
what was that store, they sold webkinz and crappy makeup/  
that place where I got my ear pierced by someone younger than me/  
someone that smelled like Mountain Dew Code Red and clove cigarettes/  
what was that store/ it isn't limited too but it's for young girls/  
where they sold webkinz in the early 2000s. Remember webkinz? Pay to play, spin the wheel, neopets for the  
rich/  
no - but this store/  
Like everything's pink and it's name is/  
Like the one that absorbed Limited Too?/  
I think that was just Limited Too. No, the name was like freedom/  
an american eagle soaring via aeropostal with its skinny jeans folded in front of the flag or hollister jeans for  
\$80 /  
gender segregated by a wall/  
you've gotta know when you enter if you are a man or a woman or if you are/  
oh shit it was Justice! /  
The store!/  
That was it./  
Justice.



## Track 7- Wandering Past The Kiosks

- Zachary! Zachary we're going now.
- No!
  - No, really I love that on you.
  - You do? No. No. I look like shit.
    - No, I'm telling you that is exactly what he said to me this morning.
    - Oh my god! What an asshole!
    - I know, right?
- How much for this one over here?
- This?
- No behind it.
  - There must be a mistake. Maybe run it through again. Are you sure you are doing it right?
  - Did you have another card I could run?
  - No, no. Just that one.
  - Oh, okay. Do you have Apple Pay or cash maybe?
  - Actually, I think I'd just like to speak with your manager.
- *Crying.*
- Oh, god, here you are. Thank Jesus. I'm here now. Mama's here. It's alright. Jane! Jane? I found her! I found her! You're okay honey.
- Mom, I need quarters. The change machine isn't working.
- Go ask your father.
- Where is he?
- God knows.
- But I'm trying to beat my high score! I only have ten seconds !
- It's always the end of the world with you !
- You never give me what I want!! Oh Dad! Hey dad, I need quarters for my game.
- Hey kiddo, go ask your mother.
  - Out of vanilla.
  - Chocolate?
  - No, the whole machine's down. Can't do the McFlurry today.
- *(Phone ringing)*
- Torrie, you have to come home right now, your grandma is in the hospital. She needs us right now.
  - God this is just what I needed!
  - *(all voices)* Girls Night Out!

## **TRACK 8. SEATED ON A BENCH PLAYING MALLBODIES TRIVIA**

Do u wanna play a game? Find yourself seated at a bench.

Welcome to Mallbodies trivia!

A trivia game to test your knowledge of the American mall! See if you can achieve the high score. Challenge your family. Kill time with coworkers on your next Zoom meeting. Impress your friends at your next socially distant soiree!

Let's begin.

Question 1. The first mall opened in a suburb outside of which major city? Is it A. Chicago B. Minneapolis, C. New York, or D. Cleveland.

The correct answer is B. Minneapolis. Designed by Victor Gruen, and constructed in 1956 and named the Southdale Center, just 30 miles west of the Twin Cities in Edina, Minnesota

Question 2. How many child laborers staff sweatshops, including garment factories, in developing nations? Is it A. 275,000. B. 760,000. C. 38 million. Or D. 168 million.

According to a report from the International Labor Organization in 2013, The correct answer is D. 168 million. Additionally, 85% of workers in garment factories worldwide are women who are often forced by their employers to take birth control so that they don't lose labor to women taking maternity leave.

Question 3. Which is the most popular Fast Food item in the United States? Is it A. The Burger King Whopper B. McDonald's Big Mac C. Starbucks' Caramel Macchiato or D. Pizza Hut's Pepperoni Pizza?

The answer is B. The Big Mac. You can find the Big Mac clogging arteries at over 13,000 locations throughout the United States. Over the course of McDonald's storied existence, it can be estimated that over eleven million cows have been killed to create their trademark hamburger, and McDonald's acknowledges that a single patty may contain meat from 100 distinct animals. Learn more about McDonalds in the hit 2016 film The Founder starring Academy-Award nominee Michael Keaton.

Question 4. What is the average yearly salary for a non-management mall employee in the US? Is it A. \$19,000 B. \$24,000. C. \$28,000. Or D. \$34,000.

The answer is A. \$19,000 spread out over a 2000 hour work year.

Question 5. How often does an American die from COVID-19 related issues? Is it A. 33 Seconds B. 5 minutes C. 10 Minutes or D. 1 hour?

As of our writing this question in January 2021, the correct answer is A. 33. 5 human beings have passed away due to COVID-19 since you have started played this game. Before moving on to the final question of Mallbodies Trivia, we encourage you to pause the track here and take a moment of silence.

Question 6. What was the hottest Christmas Toy of the Year in 1999. A. Beanie Babies B. Power Rangers C. Tickle Me Elmo. D. Pokemon Cards.

The correct answer is D. But really, who cares?

Well, that's all the time we have. How did you do? Thanks for playing Mall-Bodies-Trivia!

## Track 9. Standing In The Central Space. The Third Place.

Hello. Zis is Victor Gruen und I'd like to sank you for coming to my greatest and my most infamous creation, ze American Shopping Mall. You should now find yourself in a central space, maybe zere is a fountain, maybe a mass of metallic palm trees, maybe a customize-your-own-pretzel. A place vere ze paths are all united. In German, ve vould say zis is ze "stadtplatz." (*pronounced shtahht-plots*) Or as Americans vould say, ze town square.

As ve continue on our journey ve sink about vere ve began. Ze style and shape of ze malls ve are in. Ze purpose of zis mall und ze purpose of ze mall, universally. From ze beginning to ze end.

In Vienna, as I vas studying architecture, I vas also performing in ze cabaret seeatre (*theatre*). Oh how I miss it - ze lights, ze crowds, ze burlesque, und ze love. Ah, ze love in ze seeatre (*theatre*). But in 1938, it vas high time to escape ze Sird Reich. Und so I come to ze United States vis an architecture degree, eight dollars, and no English. I worked hard to find community, made a little Broadway seeatre vis some new friends, but finding peoples vas shver, hard. Because in America, zere ver no statdplaze, no place for ze pedestrian, and so, to combat zis, I dreamt up ze mall.

"Ze mall provides ze needed place and opportunity for participation in modern community life zet ze ancient Greek Agora, ze Medieval Market Place and our own" stadtplatz in Europe are more zan able to give. But vere vas zis in America? It simply vas not here.

I created a full vision for ze mall as more zan just shops. It vould have everysing needed in a healthy society: a mix-use space, vis apartments, offices, medical centers, child-care facilities, libraries, und a bomb shelter of course. A place for community enrichment und enlightenment.

But of course, zis, my spreche vis you, is more like a dream zen some documentary cinema. I am not ze real Victor Gruen any more zan she is Urban Sociologist Ray Oldenburg.

Hi, I'm Ray Oldenburg. The mall attempted to fulfill the needs of a place outside of the home and work, but of course, it faltered in this aim. Gruen knew that too.

Eh! A tragedy - all zat work, all zat potential, bastardized by ze corporate powers zet be.

Most needed are those 'third places' which lend a public balance to the increased privatization of home life. A Third place is nothing more than an informal public gathering space. The phrase 'third place' derives from considering our homes to be the primary or first places in our lives, and our workplaces to be the 'second.' but "Totally unlike Main Street, the shopping mall is populated by strangers with a common aim: commerce. As people circulate about in the constant, monotonous flow of mall pedestrian traffic, their eyes do not cast about for familiar faces, for the chance of seeing one is small.

Zis is true. Ze mall ist un symbol for ze anonymity provided by ze American suburb. Americans want zer security, zer privacy.

In a moment, I'll ask you to pause the recording, to unplug, to spend a minute or two just being present in the space. Feeling the world of the mall pass by you. Seeing the many paths you've taken or you will take. Thinking about the mall's potential as community space, as public space. Thinking about where you are today and the distance between the space you find yourself in from where Gruen wanted you to be. Thinking about your own third places, the loss of them. When was the last time you were able to go to a bar? The movies? The theater? Even to be outside the home, the workplace. Thinking about the strangers we see, and the strangers we'll never see.

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Now imagine the future. Not through the lens of Black Mirror or Westworld. Imagine a genuine future. Let's imagine the mall of the future. What will the mall mean when it's too hot near the equator to support human life?

What does a lifetime guarantee on that \$300 waterproof backpack mean when it turns up from another doomed start up, and the company disappears in the next two years? Whose lifetime is guaranteed?

Look around you. What does the mall remind you of? Maybe there are only two types of malls. Those falling swiftly behind us into the past. And those racing towards the future. But whose future? And what does it value?

So, zen permit me to ask: vat is ze future of ze mall? Vat can it be? Vis all zis vacant space, vat transformations exist? Vat does your community need? Public housing? Public education? Public arts? Certainly zis mall is open to anyone, but how can it be made open for everyone?

Now, let's continue on our journey.

## Track 10. Standing In Front of a “Hip” Store

Find yourself in front of one of those hip stores, you know the ones.  
The ones with neon graffiti, the ones with the white walled future.

Your friends want to shop here. The algorithm told you to shop here. Your feed wants you to shop here. Feed your feed. Our sponsored ads brought you here. Your google promotional emails. Analytics at work. Work hard play hard.

Who is this store for? Is this store for you?

We pride ourselves on staying current, staying on trend, on fleek  
We pride ourselves on Pride. Come back in June for our exclusive rainbow tracksuit  
Or for Apple’s new flex rainbow applewatch stretchband, just 49.99  
Behold the immersion. It is our gift to you, millennial. We’re sorry, we meant Zoomer.  
Those clothes you are wearing are ancient  
What, you still have an iPhone 11  
You still have a dongle  
What a dinosaur  
Maybe you’ve seen our ads on the subway. We took them out in New York and Pittsburgh.  
Your experience is most important, your opinion. Tweet us with hashtag this-is-my-year-girl  
Our hashtags keep us relevant. You can also pin us on pinterest with hashtag just-pin-it-girl and hashtag cameras-on

Go ahead, use our backdrop, take a selfie, take a video  
Please like, subscribe and share with your followers  
Hashtag Selfie Hashtag latte art  
Indulge with us  
Please like and subscribe  
Hashtag Winning  
Hashtag no filter  
Hashtag no life  
Hashtag we need you

Now, let us continue on our journey.

## Track 11. Leaving the Mall, But Come Back Soon

When you're ready, when you've finished all of your tracks, and made your quick stop in at the Lush, and after you've started coming down from your high off the Auntie Anne's or Weztel's Pretzels or whatever butter dough smell they're pumping us up with - find yourself heading towards an exit. This will more than likely be the place where you entered versus another exit, of course by now you understand it was designed that way. The mall is set up so that you see everything, and end up right back where you started. The cycle of life emulated for us in vivid franchise opportunities. You, reincarnated, with gobs of new stuff. Oroboros getting fat, never running out of more, and/ never catching up to its head.

This is the culmination of our journey together.

What pushed you away?

And what pulled you in close?

Let us envision the potential of this place. The third place. A hub of connectivity. A place where we aren't strangers but could know one another. Something better than retail, grander than email, a dream brighter and larger than the false lull of commercial delights and a swipe.

Or are we entranced by the nostalgia, the deals, the comfort, the stimuli, a welcome elixir to the burdens of the every day.

Or, could it just be that we all know deep down that this form of recreation is no longer enchanting. That its empty, the ritual complete long ago. Have we precipitated the downfall of this institution? Or are Amazon and its human, environmental, and economic consequences just *that* much more convenient? Anyway—

We've paid our respects.

We've passed by other mall bodies.

Now it's time to say our goodbyes.

Back to reality, back to the daily grind. We go back to our concrete jungles or lofty suburbs through solemn forests. Returning to our first and second places.

But, come back soon.

Tell your friends. We know you'll be back.

As we depart from the space, let us perform one last task. Now is your chance to close this performance, to bring an end to the elegy. In a safe place, free of moving cars, turn to face the monolith. This structure deserves whatever you can throw at: applause, a scream, a middle finger, be creative, but feel no pressure, this is just for you.

This is our farewell.

This is the end of our journey together. Thank you for spending your time with us at the American Shopping Mall.