

Why I Hate the Mall

I hate shopping malls. No, you don't understand. I really hate shopping malls. I think sitting at the Food Court near the Burger King for one hour has served only to heighten my displeasure with these gaudy monstrosities. The only reason I'm here is because nothing else in the town of Poughkeepsie, NY. seems to catch my interest long enough for me to take notice.

I got here noon-ish I think. I had to take a taxi since none of my non-pedestrian friends were willing to roll out of bed to give me a ride. "You're waking me up why? The Mall? You insane?" *click*. If there is anything in Poughkeepsie worse than the mall, it would be Poughkeepsie taxi cabs. I never understood why it is that each and every one of them have air freshners which are so putrid smelling, they make one long for the odor of a New York City cabbie's "natural cologne". After enduring ten minutes of the cabbie's "lemme tell ya what's wrong with this country", I finally get to my destination.

As soon as I got there, I began to think about how sad it is that the mall has very much become a part of American life. The Chinese have their rice, we have our malls. Does anyone else see a problem with having over one-thousand of these gaudy monstrosities across the country? Despite the fact that the era of eighties-decadence has passed, the malls keep coming, and they keep getting bigger. It's like something out of an Ed Wood flick.

I remember reading an article about how bad it's gotten. The largest mall in America has 425 retail shops, 4.2 million square feet of space, over 13 thousand free parking spaces, 44 escalators, and cost \$625 million dollars to build. Oh, did I mention that there is a full blown amusement park in the center of it all. It's just sick. When I was in Freeport, I remember hearing a radio show which was running a contest. The prize? A trip to the largest mall in America! Pretty soon, you'll have family vacations to the mall. I can see it now. A room at the Hilton (which will be inside the mall of course). Dad goes Herman's. Mom goes to Ann Taylor. The kids romp at the amusement park. A piece out of Norman Rockwell's Americana.

When I went inside, I became dizzy at the sight of all of those frenzied shoppers who are coolly determined to make it to JC Penney, Macy's and Sears all in the same day. It was too much for me, so I decided I would just sit in the food court and absorb what has been labeled "Mall Culture". Although the term has Jerseyan origins, even in the Poughkeepsie Galleria, "Mall Culture" is everywhere you look.

I decided that I'd just grab a soft drink from Burger King and then go sit down to take notes. Even though I had to repeat "No..not Coke... Cherry Coke" several times, I managed to get my drink painlessly enough. I grabbed the table with the fewest remnants of past double cheeseburgers, and settled in.

Nothing too exciting at first glance. Three girls cat walking up and down the corridors, hair having been nuked with Aqua-Net Super Hold. I can almost hear the curling iron sizzling as the alcohol based spray evaporates upon contact with the heat of the iron. The result? The hair is arched, ascending almost a foot in the air before descending back down. They're at the mall not to shop, but to just absorb the mall culture. Although unlike me, they seem to thrive in it. Their purses are larger than any back pack I've owned, and are undoubtedly filled with several virgin cans of heavy duty Aqua-Net which they most likely purchased at the

CVS only days ago. They periodically stop at the in vogue stores to window shop, until they get to The Limited, and apparently something catches their attention. They wander inside, casually brushing off the sales person. "No thanks, we're just looking around". Even while inside the store, their attention doesn't seem to be on shopping really. I notice that each one of them has taken the opportunity to glance into the full-length mirror. Fingers are run through the hair hoping to add just a little more "bounce". They walk out of the store, laughing about something or the other, and I watch them until they are out of sight.

Across from the food court there is a K-B Toys store. Inside, the kids are running amuck, playing with all of the games on display. You can see the look of aggravation on the faces of the parents. The look says it all. "I knew I shouldn't have brought the kids into this store". There is one woman there trying to read the back of a box while her son is pulling on her pant leg. His insistence for attention becomes more and more adamant. He is obviously trying to convince her to buy him a new toy. I could never really understand why people take kids into the toy stores if they don't intend to buy anything. It seems like such a tease. The kid is going to want to buy something, whether it's a new Sega game or a Matchbox car. Eventually, the woman relents and buys the sought after item. For the moment, the kid is satiated.

Three boys, no more than fifteen years of age, walk into the food court. Their pants are sagging, caps turned backwards. They approach the counter at the Burger King and mull over what they're having. While ordering, they find time to hit on the cashier. She's older, and most likely out of their league, but that doesn't deter their efforts. She gives them an annoyed smile and requests the cash. They oblige and throw in a last ditch effort to woo her. She smiles politely. The boys walk away, joshing each other about their valiant attempts.

As they walk away, I've feel as though I've absorbed enough culture for one afternoon. I feel relieved to be able to go home. Once back on the safer confines of Vassar campus, I breathe a sigh of relief. It's premature though, because deep down I know. Somehow, some way, no matter how much I don't want to, I'll wind up at the Poughkeepsie Galleria soon enough.