

**Title: Mallin' Rouge: A Literature Review**

**Number of words: 3778**

**Summary: The essay is a collection of literature regarding the phenomena of "mallin' Rouge." It discusses the different driving forces that make a person go to the mall and relate these forces to the over-all characteristics of the mall. The essay also embarked on a discussion of shopper's perception regarding malls.**

### **Mallin' Rouge: A Literature Review**

#### *Consuming the Spectacle Trap*

We are in an epoch wherein space is controlled by men. We are forced to alter and compress space in how we represent the world to ourselves (Urry, 22). With the availability of the modern techniques of simulation, we create a world within our world, and this can be envisioned in shopping establishments, specifically the malls, which have become the main street of suburbia and is central to our landscape (Duncan).

The mall is deluged with fantastic images to tantalize and entice the shoppers to buy, especially in creating the dream world of the mass culture, and so it was probably fitting to call it "the cathedrals of consumption" (Kowinski). "This diabolical aspect of shopping is centered on its fetishistic purpose, its sundering of the population from consciousness of reality" (Falk, ed., 34). And this breaking away from reality is further manifested in the way we experience the mall environment. It is said to have parallels to the way we experience television; "both try to entertain us by stimulating and lulling us at the same time" (Duncan). In other words, it creates an illusion which hides the failure of the society in terms of politics and economy through the image of material abundance exhibited in malls. This illusion is created both by "a capitalistic motivation and a person's pre-modern subjectivity" (Falk, ed., 35). Capitalists create an attractive stage

“in such a way as best to facilitate the growth of production, the reproduction of labor-power and the maximization of profit” (Urry, 22).

A typical characteristic of “mallng” is the feeling of timelessness (“Shopping Mall as a Way of Life”), where people can just kick back and relax and do not have to worry. Like the experience of television, there is a lack of a sense of time in mallng. The “jumble of stores and services of the mall resembles our channel-changing interactions with television programs as we randomly surf from a sitcom to a feature film to a documentary, all within a minute” (Duncan). And so the mall is where a tantalized audience would gather to experience this unusual but fabulous and enjoyable place and event, and unconsciously be trapped in this illusion (that there is material abundance).

#### *Positive versus Negative Readings*

The mall is said to be “a transmitter of culture, a shopper's paradise to escape the chaos of daily life in a postmodern world. A mall is a space, which the individual ‘re-appropriates’ in an effort to construct a self, and as a place where a woman might find the opportunity and space to resist the imposition of male values” (Backes). This view sees a positive transaction between the mall goer and the mall, which is seen to “offer more democratic hope and possibility” (Backes). Malls were even likened to abstract art in that it allows free-play for the viewer, like television is said to do (as abovementioned). Shopping malls are the best place to be unknown and at the same time posses the possibility to make contact with other shoppers. They offer customers the possibility to be anything or anybody they want to be, it gives them opportunity to be free and

independent even if it's just for a passing moment ('Shopping as a Way of Life'). Mall goers are not seen as being foolish to be duped, doped, or deceived (Backes).

On the other hand, there is negative reading of the mall as a text, which employs a Marxist approach. Hegemonic domination is believed to be apparent and disseminated through the various political, social and cultural institutions—and such an institution is the shopping mall. Hegemony is hinged on such negative elements as manipulation, control, and dominance. These are said to be at play in the malls when there is “spontaneous consent” by the masses to go and adhere to impositions on social life by a fundamental group dominating them, and this group would be the capitalists (mall owners, in this case). And once hegemony is attained, it must be upheld for the dominant groups' narrow needs to be met (Rosales). Thus, the shopping visit to a mall is a subtle "buying into" and an active involvement with the ideological values of consumerism, consumption, and class structure, which implies that it is a good thing to shop, to buy and to own (Rosales).

### *Composition and Structuring of Malls*

Working side by side with the creation of this staged spectacle, the creation of identity in malls, shops and boutiques are also functional. There are two systems that can bring about the creation of identity: 1) obsessive repetition of iconographic elements and, 2) configuration of an image defined as corporative yet which reflects the idiosyncrasies and the spirit of the company (Cerver, 2). This image is something that is standard but can be played around with and manipulated without being totally changed. The repetition of the icon makes it much easier to remember. This identity also reflects the

personality of the company, the products on sale or the creativity of the company's designers (Cerver, 2).

In the Trucco Company Shop in Bilbao, the designer Joseba Berano-Aguirre created his work on the objective of making each of the sectors of the shop perfectly identifiable: entrance, clothes section and footwear section. Despite the separation of sections in the shop, the designer maintains a uniform spirit throughout the interior (Cerver, 25).

After the malls are constructed, along with their images, these “places themselves are in a sense consumed, particularly, visually” (Urry, 1). Going to the mall is not strictly about burning money. People sometimes go there solely for the sake of being there and enjoying the staged spectacle. To go to a shopping mall means much more to people than just spending money and buying new things, it has more to do with the feeling and the “rush” of new experiences you get from the first moment you step into a shopping mall (“Shopping Mall as a Way of Life”). Akin to tangible objects, the place wears out in the long run. “What people take to be significant about a place is over time depleted, devoured or exhausted by use” (Urry, 1). If people feel that the utility of an object satisfies their desire, be it physically, emotionally or mentally, they tend to consume it over and over again, until the yearning stops.

Malls consist of different sections that cater to the different needs of the people who come in. It has a number of stores and boutiques, which employ their own unique gimmicks to accommodate their shoppers.

Many stores can afford a small space to be used as customers' rest corner containing a comfortable and colorful seat, reading materials, and probably a small table.

Customers, particularly women, enjoy spaces such as these. These secluded spots provide an outlet for an innocent natural voyeurism of people to watch other people other than the merchandise alone (Falk, ed., 101).

Boutiques understand the need for the items they produced to be displayed in a space that would match the inherent quality they offer (Cerver, 2). They display their products in the space available for them for the shoppers to try on. They also have display windows around their shop to give passersby a view from the exterior of almost the entire shop (Cerver, 50).

Two sections of the mall are the supermarket and the department store. Rachel Bowlby's article delved on the characteristics of supermarkets and department stores, as well as their commonalities and differences.

Both of these institutions sell a variety of goods under one roof and makes use of modern marketing principles in order to satisfy their customers' needs. Aside from the marketing techniques that owners apply, the looks of their establishment also matter a lot. The supermarket and the department store are represented in terms of magic and enchantment, dazzling with their lighting and display of goods (Falk, ed., 96) so as to attract more customers.

Aside from the fact that the department store is a century older than the supermarket, they also differ primarily in what they sell. The department store sells fashion items such as clothes. In the nineteenth century, department stores were represented as bringing the luxury of fashion to the middle classes. This had aspired to an image of affluence up until the present. Supermarkets, on the other hand, sell food, which is a basic commodity. For the most part, it sells cheap food to the masses, as well

as to the other members of the upper economic brackets, as against the lone middle and upper class customers of the department stores. In other words, the supermarkets can serve everyone, regardless of class (Falk, ed., 96).

The department store offers an image of service. Customers are served and treated like kings and queens. Sales representatives assist their customers just so they spend their time there. On the contrary, the supermarket displays an image of independence. There are no assistants thus a customer has to help himself/herself with the shopping spree (Falk, ed., 96). The element in highlight here is self-service. It is associated not only with the saving of running costs, but also with the unprecedented idea of the food store as an attractive and comfortable place for the consumer to enjoy (Falk, ed., 98). The shopper can roam around the supermarket, picking the items he/she needs without being disturbed by any assistants. It gives the customer more control over exactly what he/she buys, with nothing, and no one, between her and the goods, she can carry through her plan from home to store and back again (Falk, ed., 104).

A department store has its own festivities such as seasonal sales and gimmicks. They need to be as inviting as they can be so as to attract customers and buyers. And such gimmicks are their only way to do so. Supermarkets don't have the luxury to create such grand pretensions. With the fact that food is a daily necessity, people would buy them, regardless of how the supermarket is presented (Falk, ed., 96).

Outside the malls, there are parking lots, which are not exempt from interpretation. Some parking areas are buildings specifically for parking purposes only. These are for the public. But when a customer parks and takes a space, there is a sense of ownership that seems to be appropriate; they would go thinking, "That's my spot!"

(Rosales). The parking lot is indeed a private space and not public—but it belongs to the mall, not the mall goer (Rosales).

Malls that are located far from main avenues and highways provide a getaway from chaos, and hustle and bustle of city life. This does two things: it entices people to come by providing a sense of uniqueness, yet keeps out those who might not have the desired spending power – those who cannot afford a car, riff-raff, the homeless, teens who need to be driven, bus riders (Rosales). But this may not be so applicable to malls in the Philippines, because if anything, they are right smack in the middle of the cities and thoroughfares to make them accessible.

There is also a new trend in malls today. It is the commodification of nature, or “the increasingly pervasive commercial trend that views and uses nature as a sales gimmick or marketing strategy” (Beardsley), as is manifest in production of replicas or simulations. Fountains, bubbling brooks, trees, and other elements of nature are reproduced and put up inside malls to make them more enticing to mall goers. Indeed, this is evident in the renovated Greenbelt 3 in Makati. The landscape of which looks like a hideaway with tall trees, rocks and fountains flowing into a stream.

There is also the issue of shopper relaxation, which not only takes on a literal aspect in the physical elements of a mall (seating areas and lighting effects), but also on a more subtle level (Rosales). Comfort is manipulated to give a sense of orientation and belongingness to the mall goer. A climate-controlled environment (with the same temperature throughout the day and almost zero possibility of an inclement weather inside malls) adds to the predictability of finding comfort, which in turn gives individuals a sense of certainty and reassurance. Seats are provided for this purpose, but they are not

made comfortable enough that nobody will want to get up from it anymore, because this would stagnate the flow of shoppers and their possibility of parting with their money.

### *The Bourgeois Shop vs. Cheap Store*

In the Philippines where proliferation of malls is a fact of life, there are certain shops that cater to the needs of the bourgeois and a number of shops that cater to the masses. Perhaps the idea that malling presents an attractive stage to mall goers to be able to hide or make mall goers for a while forget about failures of society is true for the Philippines, it being a Third World country. In the midst of poverty (both a political and economic problem), people have made malling a preferred and prevalent activity probably to escape the ugliness of poverty.

In one ethnographic research done in 1997 in Chaguanas (which is one of the cheapest places in Trinidad) and in a city proper of Spain, local shoe keepers were described to display their products in a way that fit the expectations of the local residents. They avoid the more spectacular forms of window display that connote expensive products. Instead they use a pile-them-high-and-sell-them-cheap kind of aesthetic wherein the residents can comfortably come inside the shop (Falk, ed., 38).

By contrast, in urban areas, style dominates over thrift. Metropolitan shopping malls utilize eye-catching displays to gain more shoppers. The malls are also designed in a way to appropriate the current holiday season such as Christmas.

## **The Shoppers**

Considering the shoppers is also a requirement in constructing a staged spectacle. Inside the mall, “the shoppers consider the name of the store, quality of the product, the kind of service it offers and the store’s window display when choosing a mall store to visit” (Honquilada, 2000). The window display plays a large role in carrying out the message to the shoppers who pass by the store. He/she passes by the store, gazes into the windows, compares his ideologies with the ideologies presented by the display windows and this would tell whether or not the commodities presented by the shop would appease the subject’s desires (LaBarbera, 2001).

Among the various utilities that shoppers get from visiting the mall is the new experiences that give them fulfillment and pleasure by just strolling inside. Once a shopper enters a mall, he/she feels like he/she is taking an adventurous trip to some new and exciting place. Secondly, it also gives them the sense of independence and freedom. By just walking inside the mall, shoppers can be anything or anybody they want to be, free from the stress and problems of everyday life. Thirdly, the feeling of timelessness also creates fulfillment for the shoppers. Having to feel the rush everyday, people need to slow down and this can be experienced in malls. Thus, shopping, according to Myriam Jansen – Verbeke is viewed as a form of leisure in its own right. It is not simply as a mundane and routine aspect of people’s daily lives (Hewer, p.87). Also, the mall is also a

place to be with friends. People gather together in malls just for the sake of being together in the same public space (“Land of Consumption: Shopping mall as a way of life”). Lastly, shopping can also be a way to spend time together, thus, providing a means for creation and maintenance of social relations. At the same time, shopping as a collective activity makes possible the shared creation of taste and style. It produces a sense of social identification, whoever the shopper’s companion may be (Lehtonen, p.151).

### *Consumer facets*

There are many facets to the consumer or mall goer: as shopper, as chooser, as communicator, as character explorer, as pleasure seeker, as rebel, as victim, as activist, and as citizen (Thomas).

As shoppers, mall goers’ time is characterized by window shopping and malling; exploring and shopping have become one (Thomas).

The consumer, in having a purchasing power, also has the power of choice. He/she has the option which or what to buy, or whether or not to buy. Bus riders are said to be “enemies” of the mall because “their lack of car ownership could well reflect their little spending power, rendering them undesirable” (Rosales). Again, however, this may not be true for Filipino consumers. Commuters or those without their own vehicles seem to have as much spending power as car-owners.

As the act of consumption is seen by Postmodernism as a communicator of meanings, so is the consumer seen as “an artist whose purchases are the brushstrokes of

an ongoing cultural process” (Thomas). Their act of buying and spending are the essence of consumption.

As a character explorer, the choice of individuals—especially teenagers—is driven by image consciousness.

As a pleasure seeker, the consumer and his act of consumption is argued to be largely driven by the search for pleasure as a total emotional experience. This may be why there are people who go to malls simply for rest, recreation, or relaxation.

As rebel, a consumer embraces icons of rebellion and disaffection: symbols like body-piercing jewelry, cigarettes, lighters, hairstyles, alternative music, motor bikes, bleached and torn jeans.

Consumers are sometimes seen as victims who are blind to the fact that they are victimized. This is said to happen when they are unconsciously lured by marketing messages, gimmicks, or ploys. But when they complain about a purchase, they should get their way (“the customer is always right”) with the shop or salesperson for them to be appeased and return.

There are consumers who are considered “alternative”; these are individuals acting collectively or more frequently alone, to try to “recover some control over a world dominated by consumerism.” Some representations of this are the vegans, vegetarians, anti-GMO buyers.

“The citizen as a political animal is the belief that the good life can be attained through political actions” (Thomas). The good life is also sought in markets. Someone willing to sacrifice personal pleasure for communal wellbeing is considered a good citizen. Citizen consumers are those who try to drive their own governments to act for

the general welfare of the society (Thomas). Perhaps those who champion and patronize Filipino products are examples of citizen consumers.

### *The Shopping Blitz*

In malls, the major activity that is performed by the people is shopping. In Bowlby's article, shopping is defined as "a consumption-oriented movement in a space where one has the possibility of making purchases" (Falk, ed., 102). Shopping has something to do with buying, but which also gives space to plain daydreaming and planning of future purchases. In other words, shopping doesn't strictly imply purchase activities alone. "Mall displays are effective in attracting the attention of the shoppers...but not to the point that the displays will lead the customers to buy a product" (Honquilada, 2000).

Bowlby suggested two other ways of understanding shopping: . either as a recreation or a chore.

Shopping as a recreation connotes an open-minded wandering in malls, shops and stores. The shopper doesn't need to have any precise plans or destinations. In this case, shopping suggests something that is pleasurable, and possibly transgressive and excessive: someone may spend too much time or too much money (Falk, ed., 102). In other words, a shopper just enjoys himself/herself.

Conversely, shopping as a chore implies more of an obligation or a regular necessary routine for survival like food shopping. It is planned and limited in terms of money and time. Everything should be budgeted (Falk, ed., 103).

Daniel Miller also identified shopping as something that produces either pleasure or anxiety. There are some people who find pleasure in spending money. In some societies, “spending out of money as quickly as possible is an act which demonstrates one’s commitment to a network of peers with an ethos of generalized reciprocity and maximum sociability” (Falk, ed., 40). They feel that spending their money is exhausting and exhilarating, but at the same time relaxing.

Window-shopping, on the other hand, is one example of anxiety-producing shopping experience, according to some of the Trinidadian interviewees.

### *The Shopping List*

One of the tasks that the shoppers engage in order to abridge their shopping activity is making a list. This makes the expedition faster, without forgetting anything needed at home. Preparing a list is also beneficial for those with tight budgets. It limits the buyer only to those products that are needed and makes him refrain him/her from “impulse buying.” But making a list also has its own negative points. It limits the shopper only to those products he/she is used to buy and closes the chances for alternatives and additional suggestions (Falk, ed., 104). What other shoppers do is abstain from creating a list but visit all the aisles in the supermarket so as not to forget anything (which is an advantage in creating a list) but at the same time, to be open to other alternative and suggested products (which is an advantage of listlessness).

### *Dressing Up for the Dress Shop*

“There are also occasions when the ambience of a shop acts as a kind of frame intended to alter a shopper’s behavior in order to be appropriate to it” (Falk, ed., 39). The mall allows shoppers to become the “ideal self” (<http://www.arasite.org>). Shoppers read the dominating culture inside the shop and try to follow it. They try out a persona or a style of behavior appropriate to the venue. One may act out and dress up differently in an up-market dress shop and a cheap shoe store. He/she also walks and talks differently when in a parlor as against a record bar. They watch other people’s actions and absorb that collective action themselves. And this is because they need “to get the feeling of being accepted and feeling comfortable to be in this certain public space” (“Land of Consumption: Shopping mall as a way of life”), which is the mall. If everybody dresses up like this, they’d follow the recourse because they feel that they are “always being watched” (LaBarbera, 2001).

In the Trinidad ethnography done in 1997, the researcher found out that the shoppers “constantly dwell upon the appraisal of other shoppers” (Falk, ed., 39). They watch and comment on other people’s dress, bearing, body and language—and carefully watch their own, as well. This can be evidently seen in the time spent by shoppers in dressing for the shopping event (Falk, ed., 40). This is not only true for the shoppers, but also for those who just hang around in shopping malls.

**Sources:**

Backes, Nancy. “Reading the Shopping Mall City.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 31.3 (Winter 1997): 12 pp. Online. EBSCO. 4 May 2002.

Beardsley, John. “Kiss Nature Goodbye.”  
[http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/research/publications/hdm/back\\_issues/10beardsley.p  
df](http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/research/publications/hdm/back_issues/10beardsley.pdf)

Bowlby, Rachel. "Supermarket Futures". *The Shopping Experience*, Edited by Pasi Falk, ed. and Colin Campbell. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

Cerver, Francisco Asensio. *Commercial Space: Shopping Malls*. London: Rotovision SA. 2000.

De Jesus, Jennifer. "It's a Mall World After All: A dramaturgical approach for understanding malling as a communication experience". University of the Philippines, Diliman. Undergraduate thesis 1998.

Duncan, Barry. "Popular Culture Investigations: The Shopping Mall."  
<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/teamedia/duncan.htm>

Falk, ed., Pasi and Colin Campbell, ed. *The Shopping Experience*. Sage Publications: London, 1997.

"Go to the Mall and Get it All: Adolescents' Aesthetic Values in the Shopping Mall"  
<http://www.public.asu.edu/~ifmls/Visualculturefolder/Aesthshopmall.html>

Hewer, Paul and Campbell, Colin. "A Brief History of Research on Shopping". *The Shopping Experience*. Edited by Pasi Falk, ed. and Colin Campbell. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

Honquilada, Marion and Eva Eva Joyce Lucio. *Stop, Look and Purchase: A Study on the Influence of Mall Displays on the Behavior of the Shoppers of NE Pacific Mall*. Undergraduate thesis 2000.

Kowinski, William Severini. "The Malling of America: Travels in the United States of Shopping."  
<http://www.tidepool.com/~bilko/TheMallingofAmericapreface.html>

LaBarbera, Paul. <http://towson.edu/users.plabar1/mall.htm>

"Land of Consumption: Shopping mall as a way of life."  
[http://www.helsinki.fi/ml/maant/kaumaa/URBIS/shopping\\_mall/way\\_of\\_life.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/ml/maant/kaumaa/URBIS/shopping_mall/way_of_life.html)

Lehtonen, Turo-Kimmo and Pasi Maenpaa. "Shopping in the East Centre Mall. *The Shopping Experience*. Edited by Pasi Falk, ed. and Colin Campbell. London

Miller, Daniel. "Could Shopping Ever Really Matter". *The Shopping Experience*. Edited by Pasi Falk, ed. and Colin Campbell. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

Rosales, Mauricio. "Anything but Ordinary: Hegemony at Riverside Square Mall."  
[http://euphrates.wpunj.edu/faculty/parrasj/BurningLeaf/burning\\_files/essay\\_writing/essay\\_pg02.html](http://euphrates.wpunj.edu/faculty/parrasj/BurningLeaf/burning_files/essay_writing/essay_pg02.html)

“Shopping: the Pleasures and Profits.” <http://www.arasite.org/shops.htm>

Thomas, Michael J. “Consumer market research: does it have validity? Some postmodern thoughts.” *Harvard Design Magazine*. Winter/Spring 2000, Number 10. Pp. 1-6.  
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/pdfs/200182.pdf>

Urry, John, *Consuming Places*. Routledge: New York, 1995.