There is always something intensely fascinating about exploring different worlds. This is because exploration is provoked by curiosity of the unknown. When an individual explores a world, she absorbs the atmosphere, environment, and space. She lives in the space and uses her senses to make sense of the space. The shopping mall is an exotic world that starkly contrasts with the home. Although the space of both the shopping mall and home are defined when people traverse in and make use of that space, they contrast in what they represent. The South Coast Plaza, a popular shopping center in Orange County known for its luxurious identity, is the symbol of the present, modernity, and renewal. Outside, it is a typical, opaque brick building. However, upon entering, one is flooded by the dazzling glimmer of luxury and brilliance. A spectrum of colors ricochets off the floors and the walls, evoking fascination, excitement, and newness. Dainty streams of sounds and music hover through the air and linger over atmosphere. This vibrant newness seems to stand in stark contrast with the experience of soothing familiarity, which is symbolized by a home. The home has soft tones whispering repose, walls paved with years of memories, and picture frames linking the present to the past, the wonderful, invaluable past. The home even has a subtle, warm, illuminating scent that drowsily speaks the language of comfort. It is familiarity, the rich embodiment of personal meanings, values, and history. In this way, the home is the foundation of identity and appears to be the polar opposite of a shopping mall. Comfort contrasts with vibrance. History, a key ingredient of identity, cannot exist in the present. If an individual emerges from her home and enters a place of modernity, one of renewal,
then she essentially departs from some part of her identity in search of newness. Modernity is change. A close analysis reveals that the shopping mall integrates elements of the home, such as comfort and embrace, with symbols of the present and modernity, vibrance and openness, to create a new scaffold for identity. Although movement defines the South Coast Plaza’s space and lends its architecture an aesthetic glow of modernity, because it aims to create a comfortable and delightful space, movement also hybridizes homeliness and modernity into the architectural and interior landscape, thereby allowing the individual to explore new meanings, values, and identities as she moves through the shopping center’s space.

Because space is not only defined by a physical construction, the South Coast Plaza uses placement and sensory strategies, such as anchor stores and lighting, to create the crowd-movement necessary in defining space. Michel de Certeau outlines the elements that define the city’s space and argues that individuals’ tactical practices, or practices opposing regulations, reflect the city’s physical and social landscape. The way individuals use and move through a space define the city. In explaining the existence of space, Certeau compares verbal linguistics to the “rhetoric of walking.” Although linguistics is composed of mechanics and words, they are meaningless unless linked together in a phrase or sentence to convey meaning. Similarly, the “rhetoric of walking,” the physical movement of different individuals, define and embed meaning into a space when waves of movement penetrate around, across, or about it (de Certeau 99). Although he uses this description in the context of spatially defining a city, the argument can be extended to include the procedure for defining a shopping center as the shopping center is like a microcosm of a city; it is a large structure composed of subunits with an existence dependent on individual movement. If no one knows about a space or makes use of it, though the space theoretically exists, it essentially does not physically exist. Because walking and movement define a space, they essentially bring a space into existence.
To exist as a real place and space in the local and national landscape, the South Coast Plaza uses anchor stores as the major instigator of movement. Henry Segerstrom, founder of the South Coast Plaza, explains that the intended “pattern was for two or more the [major retailers] to join together… as anchors… [to] team up and build a shopping center” (Henry Segerstrom). Several key terms used in explaining the planning of the shopping center include “join,” “anchor,” and “build.” The term “join” implies initial separation and connotes unity. “Anchor” conveys stability and “build” illustrates growth. By mentioning that at least two major retailers are required to essentially be the shopping center and contribute stability, the planners of the South Coast Plaza recognize that the anchors, the two major retailers, unify the mall and act as endpoints of one unified path to facilitate growth and success.

As endpoints, the anchors convey modernity and facilitate movement and flow among its customers, who move across the mall as they are attracted to the poles of the major retailers, and thereby define the identity, space, and existence of the South Coast Plaza. In a site plan of the shopping center, six phases of development and are shown, each shaded in a different color. Each phase consists of at least one major retailer as an anchor. For instance, in Phase 1, the first construction of the mall in 1967, only two figures are labeled on the site plan: Sears and Robinsons. The two stores are at polar locations of the mall. De Certeau explains that if “a spatial ordered organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge” (de Certeau 98). How a person interacts with her environment defines the environment’s space and boundaries. In a space, she can essentially move in any direction unless there is a hindrance preventing her from doing so. In the map, the path is shaded to define this space, a stretch bordered by long series of
stories and a spinal-cord like structure that truly recognizes existence of and gives sustenance to
the South Coast Plaza.

A notable and prominent feature of the shopping center’s interior design is its marble
flooring and marble-topped island enclosures, which refer to the tree enclosures and square glass
dividers overlooking on floor two, because their gleam polishes the shopping center as a modern
utopia where everything seems possible, even escaping reality. Mike Paz, South Coast Plaza’s
Director of Retail Design and Construction, explains that two types of marble are used in the
different phases: terrazzo and travertine. Terrazzo, smoothly integrated mosaic-like marble
fragments, is dominant in the Phase 1 design, which includes the Carousel Court and the stretch
between Sears and Robinsons. On the other hand, Roman travertine, a soft and elegant yellow
marble, is used for the more recent developments, such as in phases 3 and 4, respectively
developed in 1973 and 1977. He also explains that pavers, mellow mahogany ceramic tiles, are
used to line the shopping center’s entrances. Use of these different flooring materials, terrazzo,
travertine, and pavers, accentuates the interior design because they provide a sharp contrast
between dullness and vibrance. Victor Gruen, head of the architect firm that designed the South
Coast Plaza, planned for “blank facades… [where] the exterior was supposed to be serene and
uninspiring, a reaction to the bright lights of the commercial strip” (Hardwick 153). Upon
entering the South Coast Plaza, there is a sudden transition from dull ceramic tiling and opaque
brick walls to shining marble and illuminating light. One’s senses are pleasantly flooded by the
initial, unexpected transition, one from outside to inside, old and dull to modern and shining.
One’s senses change and one changes. In stepping into the mall, the individual makes a physical
transition from the monotonous drone of the familiar city to the vivid modernity of the exotic
shopping mall, stepping into a world where she may be enwrapped in the utopian illusion of
endless luxury and continual present. It is in this ideal landscape that she may escape reality,
which encompasses her history and identity, and physically enter the utopia of the shopping center, an illusion where the idea that an identity is fluid and changeable can be materialized.

The South Coast Plaza reinforces the sense of modernity and lingering present by setting guidelines for its tenants and avoiding signs of age, degeneration, and antiquity. Although the South Coast Plaza is the overarching architectural presence in the shopping center, according to Mike Paz, the shopping center’s tenants are those who create the larger part of the architectural experience. In the South Coast Plaza’s Tenant and Development Guidelines manual, it is explicitly stated that the use of “‘distressed’ woods (pecky-cedar, etc.)” and “antiquing, whether through the application of stains, varnishes,… or other means” is “generally not allowed on storefronts” (South Coast Plaza 11). As storefronts make up the greater part of the interior in the shopping center, the South Coast Plaza does “not allow” “distressed” or “antiquing” storefront displays. In its guidelines, the shopping center carefully outlines that, like an organic body, it does not want any of its components to show signs of aging. “Distressed” and “antiquing” imply degeneration and oldness; they are signs of history and past. Speckled woods and antiquing, even if artificially produced, are not allowed essentially because they symbolize existing values and meanings, a denial of renewal, all of which the shopping center does not represent. By clearly excluding elements indicating wear and antiquity, the South Coast Plaza smoothens existing dents of history and promotes the notions of modernity and newness to serve as a clean template for identity reconstruction and renewal as people interact with brands and materials to represent themselves.

To convey modernity, characterized by change, the shopping center invokes delight by provoking biological and emotional responses through the manipulation of light intensities, which magnetizes the shopper forward, to the other end of the mall. The South Coast Plaza is illuminated and darkened along many of its pathways. There is a delicately balanced interplay of
light and dark in the architectural structure. On the second level, the ceiling is perforated with a grid (Fig. 1). The ceiling visible to the shopper prevents light from passing through. However, the areas between two enclosing spaces, that formed by the ceiling and the floor, are open, allowing light entry. Within the slots, the open area is further divided by ceiling. Natural light floods through the open area and not only illuminates, but is decorated by the reflective marble flooring (Fig. 2). Artificial light implements also add an interesting element to the area as its warming color contrasts with the coolness of natural light. The integration of these textural light elements invokes a fascination in an individual because it is sublime; there is a balance between the natural and artificial, sunlight and mass-produced light. Richard Hill studies the aesthetic effects of architectural designs and expounds on Edmund Burke’s theory of aesthetic experience, which argues that contrasts and transitions between light and dark can illicit sensory and biological responses. He uses scientific evidence to make this claim and cites that the eye dilates the same way regardless of whether an individual encounters terror or when she experiences delight. Biologically, when an individual encounters sharp contrasts, “the iris of the eye undergoes muscular strain as it rapidly adapts the size of the pupil to new light conditions,” which, although “associated with conditions of terror,… is also a source of delight, since stimulating exercise of the body is delightful” (Hill 88).
The architecturally “sublime” experience the individual encounters is directly shaped by the individual’s biological response to her environment. In the shopping center, she sees a long stretch of contrasting light patterns horizontally lining the ceiling. On the shiny marble floor, she sees illuminated squares contrasting a shaded area. Through the balance of illumination and shade, the individual constantly undergoes “muscular strain” to adjust to the new lighting. However, because her environment does not allow her to biologically resting on one interior feature, either light or dark, she constantly experiences a sublime delight in her architectural experience. As her eyes are actively adjusting and readjusting, her mind dwells in this delight and is unsated by the present surroundings. Enveloped in the sublime architectural experience, the individual moves forward to see more, understand more, and perhaps find rest. Yet, with each step, she is surrounded by a feeling seemingly different from the last because she is flooded with light in a new intensity, a different intensity. The natural light penetrating through the gridded ceiling is meshed with artificial lighting, provided by cylindrical chandeliers and bubble-sized spotlights decorating the ceiling. Entranced, the individual looks around to understand why the atmosphere delights her. Light’s intangibility causes the individual to look for a physical structure to rest her sight on and thus see store fronts, which are regulated by the South Coast Plaza. The South Coast Plaza demands that “show window display lighting shall be incandescent, H.I.D. or similar color light source as approved by the Architecture Department” (South Coast Plaza 13). “Shall” connotes demand and absoluteness. Regulations are strictly enforced as tenants are not given a choice of lighting type, but must conform to a uniform model. Frank Manhnke argues that light and color can biologically affect individuals and thereby evoke delightful sensations. He discusses artificial and natural light and describes that the “spectrum of the incandescent bulb does not differ too much from that of natural light in the visible light region… [but] because of its low color temperature, incandescent light is a warm light
illumination closely resembling fire, candle, kerosene lamp, and gas mantle light” (Mahnke 117). This implies that natural light makes an individual feel colder than incandescent light because of its respective spectrum. Use of this lighting creates a strong contrast between the mall’s shiny and primarily natural-light interior with the storefront’s warm, artificially lit exterior and creates a shift in sensation. Because the South Coast Plaza strictly enforces use of incandescent lighting for storefronts, it tries to achieve warmth and welcome in the atmosphere for its customers as incandescent light is “a warm light” that resembles “fire,” a natural element conveying the sense of warmth. The shift from cool to warm is the store’s gesture of inviting the individual inside and the shopping center’s strategy for moving a customer into the store’s space to interact with its goods. As her eyes perceive changes from light to dark and coldness to warmth, the individual perceives change and newness, reflective of the South Coast Plaza’s ever-expanding goal of modernity. Signs of change and modernity line the South Coast Plaza as the changing, delicate weave of light and dark magnetizes an individual forward to define the shopping center’s space and the creative mesh of coolness and warmth invite her into a store’s space, where her movement into the space defines the store and allows her to interact with its embodied values, conveyed through its inventory and advertisements.

Flow and forward motion, which are symbols of the modern, changing present that define the South Coast Plaza’s space, are not only influenced by light intensity, but also changing sound and anthropomorphic decorations, such as fountains that reflect humanity and life. In the center of the South Coast Plaza on Level 1, an opaque, mahogany marble fountain stretches across the expanse of several stores. Resembling a river, the fountain has a pebble-covered bed and is dotted by a collection of plants. Its gentle curves and soft drops simulate a flowing current. The smooth flow of the water adds texture to the atmosphere as it integrates the sound of water, a natural element, with the sounds of people and music. Richard Hill describes the
anthropomorphism of architecture and maintains that people are often moved by architectural works because it is a metaphor of human life and experiences (Hill 91). A river characteristically flows; it is forever moving. On one hand, the fountain is located in the center of the mall as an aesthetic presence. Its pleasing flow is conducive to crowd flow. Anthropomorphically, it is the image of an individual entangled in and moving through the swift race of life. As the direction of its current influences an individual to follow it, that individual too is then involved in that race. It is a realistic structure resembling nature because it is unsymmetrical. As a man-made construction imitating a natural river, the fountain, which sits at the core of the shopping center, conveys the South Coast Plaza’s theme.

Through its water flow, the fountain anthropomorphically reflects the flow of people and life. Because water never flows the same way in that each current is unique from its predecessors, the fountain reflects the shopping center’s theme of constant change and continual present; a current only exists in the present as its quick dissolution makes it a memory of the past. It thereby reflects the larger theme of time and continuity as each dissolved current is replaced by a younger and newer one, a product of time and flow. The water also adds a textural element to the atmosphere as its reflective surface contrasts with its concrete and static surroundings and it mingles lightness and darkness while capturing and dispersing light. Consequently, the fountain is sublime on several different levels. On one level, it is the physical embodiment of nature and man, which is conveyed through its river-like structure, anthropomorphic metaphor, and artificially “natural” character; it is a river, a natural creation artificially produced. On another level, the fountain continues to orchestrates an ensemble of lightness and darkness as the water’s reflective surface is an visual concert inducing “muscular strains” and invoking a refreshing sense of delight and continuity, the present. As people’s eyes trace the downstream waterfall, they too move along with the water because the
fountain itself, river-like, represents continuity and change. Intrigued by the changes of interior texture, people follow the flow of water because it symbolizes change, continuity, and the present and thereby carve the space of the South Coast Plaza as they move and navigate the shopping center, which is, in itself, a symbol of the changing present of modernity.

As people move and flow through the South Coast Plaza, they experience a hybrid of intimate homeyness and modern independence as the South Coast Plaza’s architectural space weaves together properties of homeyness and modernity to create a comfortable yet elegant setting. Grant McCracken argues that a home can evoke the comfortable “sense” of a home, or homeyness, because the home’s family has made physical and emotional investments in that home. For instance, a simple, wooden dinner table can evoke memories of warm breakfast chats or intimate dinner conversations. He maintains that the sense of homeyness consists of several chief, but not sole, properties:

Individually and in combination,… [the] symbolic properties of homeyness work to create the involvement of the occupant of a domestic environment and finally claim them in a thorough-going sense…. [T]he variable property makes [the home] real, the mnemonic property makes it emplacing in time,… [and] the embracing property… demonstrates a descending pattern of enclosure. The cumulative affect of these persuasive properties can… situate individuals in the world as few other cultural devices can. Homeyness is for many people the adhesive that attaches them to self, family, time, and place. (McCracken 31-38)

Variability is equated with authenticity. The homey feeling lies in that the home is not uniform with mass-produced materials, such as laminate flooring or uniform walls, but an eclectic mix of
styles and textures. A homey home is unbalanced and “involving” particularly because, unlike dull uniformity, its authentic diverseness creates interest in the living environment as there is always something unexpectedly different. The mnemonic property “emplac[es] one in time” as objects emanate memories and experiences. In his argument, McCracken maintains that homeyness cannot coexist with elegance, which is characteristic of the South Coast Plaza’s version of modernity, because elegance denies authenticity and intimate interactions between the individual and her environment. In the interaction between people and objects, the individual draws her identity from authentic memories embedded in her surroundings. The embracing property exists when an individual feels securely embraced in an enclosing layer of spaces and objects (29). It is an essential property because homeyness is essentially a feeling of comfort and security and thus requires enclosure. Because the South Coast Plaza is a paragon of modernity, materialism, and consumption, McCracken inherently argues that such a shopping center cannot be homey due to its modernity, which does not host the authenticity of meaning and value. However, although these properties are argued with an exclusive focus on homeyness, it can also be argued that because the South Coast Plaza aims for a comfortable and elegant atmosphere, it is actually a hybridization of homeyness and modernity as it exhibits the variable, mnemonic, and embracing properties.

Embedding this sense of homeyness are the South Coast Plaza’s techniques used to create flow and movement, which include varying interior design and architecture. Walking through the middle stretch of the mall, a fountain can be heard. Its rushing flow can be seen. Along the aisle, stores flashing innumerable colors and expressing provoking messages create a flood of delightful curiosity. With each step seeps in a new sound, the playful chatter of children, the clicking shoes of adrenaline-pumped shoppers, or the exhilarating rush of meaning-infused music. With each step, the individual moves horizontally and vertically. Mike Paz explains that
the ground level of the shopping center tapers from one length to the other. Kinaesthetics enhances the senses and “provide the corroboration of the shape of the building plan[;]… integrating the senses make[s] the building more real” (Hill 84). While moving horizontally across the mall, individuals also move vertically because of the tapering floor, which changes their elevation. This intentional design, according to Paz, provokes “interest” as the individual is not only occupied by sights and sounds, but also touch as she physically interacts with the elevating or descending floor. The individual’s experience moving through the shopping center is enhanced through sensory stimulations, which denies boredom as the individual’s attention is always fixed on some changing element. Coupled with the eclectic sounds, diverse storefronts, and provocative lighting, the tapered flooring contributes to a powerful “synergy” as all the senses are awakened and thereby allows individuals to fully “interact” with the shopping center for an enhanced experience. It is not just a sight or sound, but also a feeling. The variation within the sounds, sights, and textures of the mall create the enhanced experience. Nothing is uniform; all storefronts convey a message in a unique manner. The storefronts, which essentially comprise the interior design, provide great variation as the different sounds and messages create a textured ambience with each step. Although the storefronts are unique in meaning and presentation, their variances harmonize to create and contribute to the delightful sensory experience of moving through the South Coast Plaza. The lack of uniformity, a creative blend of colors and music, reflects the authentic diversity of humanity and the universe. It does not overwhelm and is thus a comfortably delightful form of advertising and expression. Because the South Coast Plaza is infused with an eclectic mixture of sounds, sights, and sensations, it embodies the variable property of homeyness as it awakens different senses through its diverse interior texture.

Homeyness is not only embedded in the South Coast Plaza’s delightful variability, but also in its decorative displays, which emanate history and thereby exhibit the mnemonic
property. During the construction of Phase 1 of South Coast Plaza, a carousel was placed in the then-center of the mall’s space. Today, nearly four decades after the mall has been constructed, the carousel still stands and rotates in what is now Carousel Court, twirling for a new generation of children and entertaining for a new generation of parents. Old-fashioned carnival music still streams through the area today, just as it did four decades ago. Parents comfortably rest and find delight in watching their child’s delight. They may even reminisce to the days when they too sat on the same whimsical horse smiling to the same melodious streams of music. The carousel acts as an object “mediating messages from other humans removed from the receiver in space and time” (Material Culture in the Social World, Dant 154). This essentially means that an object is powerful because it evokes memories and emotions from the past that, although physically intangible, can touch a spirit and immerse it in a sea of familiar sensations.

The carousel is a powerful object emanating a profoundly evocative meaning as its history seeps with the identity and language of humanity. The history of the carousel dates back to a time immemorial; existing records are insufficient to elucidate a single chronological or geographical origin (Fried 13). However, although no precise origin can be deduced, existing records do demonstrate that the carousel has an eclectic history (Fried 13). It has appeared in many cultures in very exotic forms and for many unique purposes, which range from the Aztecs’ inclusion of the carousel in ceremonial practices to the French’s extravagant fashioning of it for entertainment (Fried 13-18). In the Americas, the Aztecs, dressed in plumage, tied ropes around their ankles and, as the carousel spun, revolved around the pole in ancient ceremonies (Fried 13). In France, the carrousel was a game, a lavish performance demonstrating horsemanship that Louis XIV staged to “impress his teen-age mistress” (Fried 18). The modern carousel has undergone a convergent evolution to become what it is today, an evolution among a multitude of cultures and an indefinable expanse of time. Its many distinct roots converge and unite in their
culturally distinct, yet overlapping forms of the carousel to define the colorful identity of humanity, an exotically complex tree. As Mike Paz describes, as a feature of the South Coast Plaza, the carousel is “history… [because] it’s been there since the beginning” (Interview, Mike Paz), thereby encapsulating memories of the shopping center’s infancy. However, because of the carousel’s colorful background, the carousel not only symbolizes South Coast Plaza’s past, but also embodies the eclectically unified origins of humanity. It conveys the universal and silent message of the past, one “removed from… space and time,” that is meant for and understood by the citizens of humanity. The carousel reflects human civilization, culture, and identity because it has historically been used by people of many colors for many different cultural practices, which include ceremonial and entertainment purposes. By incorporating an object of the past into its modern landscape, the South Coast Plaza demonstrates that it builds modernity and change onto a continuing thread of history rather than excluding old meanings and values altogether. Through its diverse origins and humanistic message, the carousel carries “an unmistakable historical character” (McCracken 34) evocative of memory and meaning, which is the mnemonic property that embeds the inclusive sense of homeyness into the South Coast Plaza.

This sense of homeyness is further embodied in the South Coast Plaza’s multiple layers of space and material, which demonstrates the embracing property as the shopping center strives for the ideal of comfort. The shopping center is comprised of several layers, which includes the parking structure, the sidewalk perimeter, the mall space, and individual stores. Each layer has some visible form of division. Towering trees line the perimeter of this area, the first layer, and thereby exclusively enclose the parking structure, the shopping center’s shell, from Orange County and the external world. The parking structure is an open space and is the second layer an individual penetrates before entering the South Coast Plaza. The sidewalk between the parking lot and the mall acts as a membrane. One may travel along it and skim the surface of the
shopping center or permeate it through the doors and into the space of the South Coast Plaza - an internal, vibrant core of modernity cloaked in the prosaic opacity of brick and stone. It is within this space, this cushioning layer, that an individual may access individual and individualized shops. Colin St. John Wilson, Professor of the School of Architecture at Cambridge University, reflects on architectural theories. On internal space, he supports Adrian Stokes’s argument that an individual feels secure when she is included within a space rather than exposed outside as exposure leads to a sense of vulnerability. This argument, based on Freudian psychoanalysis, maintains that just as the an infant has “an intimate experience of the protective and sustaining qualities of the mother-figure,… [t]here is a close analogue to this ‘position’ in the architectural experience of interior space that is modeled in rhythmic forms of flowing and merging continuity” (Wilson 6). A space’s coherence can allow an individual to architecturally re-experience the sense of universal communion, oneness with her environment. Lincourt, who argues that architecture is elegant if it exhibits certain physical characteristics, such as enclosure, agrees with this interpretation and further explains that “the enclosure generates both a reality and a feeling of protection and comfort” (Lincourt 112). In Freudian psychoanalysis, an infant experiences an “oceanic feeling” in which she is securely in communion with everything and detached from nothing. Upon awakening from this feeling, she realizes her detachment from the world and her self, her individual identity. Stokes argues that because the feeling of envelopment in comfort and security allows an individual to experience “continuity” with that space, an enclosing and encompassing architectural structure protects the individual from the vulnerability entailing independence by protecting her and allowing her to regain the “oceanic feeling.” South Coast Plaza’s physically enclosed space grants individuals protection from the external world as it accepts them into a different, glimmering world. Prompted by visual stimuli, such as lighting effects, the individuals rhythmically flow through the space of the South Coast Plaza. In
permeating the many layers of the shopping center, individuals are able to access the core of the enclosed mall. Because they move through the South Coast Plaza’s space, they not only define, but are included “in communion” with the shopping center. The enclosed space allows stores to remove physical boundaries between the store itself and the passage lining the shopping center, thereby allowing individuals to more intimately interact with the modern and elegant interior space, to be in communion with modernity and the present. The South Coast Plaza’s multiple layers gives it an embracing quality, which causes allows the individual a sense of comfort and security and thereby casts the shopping center as a hybridization of homeyness and modernity.

As the individual moves through the South Coast Plaza’s modern space, she moves through modernity and change in search of something, a search in which homeyness completes as it facilitates interaction between the individual and objects already infused with meaning. Fascinated by storefront displays and forwardly magnetized by sensory stimulations, people are constantly moving through the South Coast Plaza. When asked why people go to the shopping center, Mike Paz explains that it is “at the South Coast Plaza [that] people can find what they’re looking for” because “there is something for everybody” (Interview, Mike Paz). In his explanation, “find,” “looking for,” and “is something” are key terms and phrases. “Find” and “looking for” connote a search for something. As individuals in a shopping center, are constantly moving, wandering, through the space. In “Passegens-Werk,” Walter Benjamin theorizes about the stroller, or the flâneur, a person who loses herself in the crowds and wanders through the passages of the “arcade,” or the shopping center. He argues that the flâneur wanders through the city because he lacks a place and walks in search of one. The “street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur [as] he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls…. News-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafes are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done” (par. 2). Because he primarily spends his
time in the city rather than an actual home, the city is the *flâneur’s* home and the *flâneur* therefore does not truly have a personal space to call his own. He intimately interacts with its objects, such as the newspapers on the stands, to derive meanings and values rather than objects in a home, which already embed personal meaning and thereby constructs his identity through interactions with the impersonal rather than the personal. The individual browsing through a shopping center is similar to the *flâneur* because she too is constantly moving, constantly wandering as she needs to “find” and is always “looking for something.”

As homeyness embraces the individual, the individual is in communion with the shopping center’s interior space and can thereby intimately interact with objects within that space, such as the *flâneur*, to absorb meaning, value, and identity. The individual is in an enclosed space. She is not separated from the storefronts by doors or physical hindrances, but is welcome to participate in the store’s space as well. The storefront itself conveys an identity and offers it to the individual to absorb into her own life. She interacts with new objects and brand-name items, materials with meanings and values embedded by society. A South Coast Plaza magazine, which displays the diversity of its luxury boutiques, greets the reader, a potential *flâneur*, with the message that “spring calls for high drama and eye-catching effects that emphasize sophistication and a worldly élan” (South Coast Plaza Magazine 2). The text overlays the image of yacht and accompanies the picture of a woman wearing a striking black and blue Gucci dress. By complementing the message with the imagery, the text conveys that what is “high drama” and “eye-catching” is the clothing because it symbolizes a luxurious lifestyle. The text also conveys that the clothing is what creates the foundation for identity as it “emphasize[s] sophistication and… worldly élan.” On the first page of the publication, the reader is shown that the ideal identity can be achieved with materials as materials create and give meaning, allowing transformation.
The shopping center must maintain the illusion of the present and modernity because it symbolizes the individual’s ability to create new meaning and transform herself by interacting with objects infused with existing cultural values because a brand conveys meanings, such as refinement. The South Coast Plaza’s motto is “Quality is South Coast Plaza.” In this way, the shopping center creates its own identity and invites people to associate themselves with that attribute of quality. According to Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowski, who argue that materials and artifacts can extend or deny membership in social groups, the character of success in a shopping center is marked by success in upholding and maintaining the illusion of the present because “the store luxuriates in the infinite present of the commodity, box fresh” (Cummings 143). The shopping mall is a physical embodiment of materialistic and consumptive values. When a person interacts with an object, she derives significance from it by ascribing a meaning to it. An object is meaningless aside from the significance an individual places in it, a significance influenced by cultural messages (Dant 41). Because the significance of objects is influenced by such messages, to a person interacting with the object, the object embodies cultural values. Often, old objects and souvenirs are “priceless” because they symbolize old memories and events. Although they may be worthless in the monetary sense, objects may carry a meaning. Symbolic meaning is the strengthening skeleton of an individual’s identity because it is an “adhesive that attaches [her] to self, family, time, and place” (McCracken, 38). Because an object symbolically constructs an individual’s identity by chronologically, socially, and physically situating her, to seek new materials is to seek a value and meaning. It is essentially a reconstruction and renewal of identity through objects with different symbolic or meaning associations. And because old objects have a personal history and associated value, both of which greatly contribute to an individual’s identity, the individual therefore seeks for a redefinition, or perhaps even a new definition, in newness. By associating with brands and new
objects, people therefore convey that the brand’s meanings and values reflect them and are thereby able to construct their identity. As redefinition is achieved through the new meaning a person ascribes to an object, to encourage materialism and consumption, the shopping mall must glimmer with modernity, a sense that an object is untouched and thus able to define and redefine.

Bathed in the glow of a seemingly everlasting modernity, the South Coast Plaza is an attractive shopping resort as it creates an elegant yet homey ambience in striving for luxurious comfort. Its success may be attributed to the same mysterious forces, crowds drawn by a search for a luxurious world always seemingly out of reach. In its ability to create a sense of comfort by incorporating elements of homeyness, the South Coast Plaza has drawn headlines and crowds. The space has been able to carve itself by directing flow and movement; it moves people and people move within the space. The architecture and interior design of the South Coast Plaza greatly emphasize the importance of movement. Although architectural schools of thought recognize the importance of movement and space in a design, explanations to why movement and space are so powerful are still under construction today. Similarly, movement and space are also points of focus in the Eastern practice of feng shui. This provokes the question – how much do Eastern and Western philosophy overlap and is this unifying overlap reflective of a universal order or truth?
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Primary Sources


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South Coast Plaza Directory. Map. From the South Coast Plaza.

Secondary Sources


<http://www.othervoices.org/gspeaker/Flaneur.html>.


