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ARCADE ADDICTS AND MALLRATS: PRODUCING AND POLICING SUBURBAN PUBLIC SPACE IN 1980S AMERICA

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ABSTRACT: In the 1980s, teenagers came to dominate the last bastions of public spaces on the sprawling suburban landscape: the shopping mall and the arcade. Teenagers' presence and the sense of their domination of those spaces from media and popular culture initiated new regimes of regulation with distinct consequences. Through tactics designed to combat the disruptive presence of teens, including use of closed-circuit video monitoring, professionalization of private security staffs, and strict municipal oversight, mall owners, concerned parents, and local political leaders created systems of insistent and pervasive policing of mall space. That surveillance not only undermined the very nature of the space as public but also nearly eliminated teens from shopping centers while facilitating their reintegration into the supposed safety of the home.

Introduction

Nearly from their inception in the late 1970s, parents, teachers, and town officials moved to regulate and stop suburban video game arcades over fears that the arcade space, and the shopping centers that often contained them, lent themselves to deviant behavior including sex and substance abuse while the games themselves were assailed as addictive and a waste of teenager's time and money. From Mesquite, Texas to Babylon, Long Island, towns passed ordinances to regulate or even ban video game arcades. Yet, these efforts failed to stem the tide of arcade development into the 1980s as arcade games became a billion dollar industry even alongside the emergence of the home video game market from manufacturers such as Atari and Coleco and eventually Nintendo and Sega. However, the story of the video game arcade in suburban America is not one

of economic triumph or political compromise, but rather an example of the shifting perception of teens and suburban public space and the new policing of those people and spaces in the 1980s.

News media and popular culture were essential to new surveillance regimes in suburban public space. They represented the arcade and the shopping mall as dominated by teenagers and those teens as both dangerous and endangered when in those spaces. Indeed, the arcade, and the shopping mall that often housed the arcade, represented the increasing surveillance of public space in the 1980s through the efforts of parents, teachers, police, private security personnel and mall owners to protect and quarantine teens eventually leading them back into the supposedly safe confines of the suburban home (Cohen 2003, 265).¹ So, new regulation of the shopping center was not simply about limiting free speech in a quasi-public space. It was about the increased policing power exercised by private interests over public space in suburban life due to the perceived threats from and to teenagers seen in real shopping malls across the country as well as their elaboration in news media and popular culture.

Emergence of the Arcade Addict and the Mallrat

The video game arcade emerged at a propitious moment for suburban development. During the 1970s and 80s, a mall-building boom in these outlying areas provided new commercial and recreational spaces eventually overtaken by suburban teens. Developers constructed 16,000 shopping centers in the 1980s, many of them regional or super-regional malls featuring hundreds of stores, restaurants, and other amusements including movie multiplexes and carousels (International Council of Shopping Centers 2000). With these new amusements and lack of other available spaces to congregate, the shopping mall became the home of suburban teenagers.

At the beginning of the 1980s, news media depicted the extended area of the newly ubiquitous shopping mall as the space that filled a void for suburban teens—a “mecca for teens” and “more home than home” (Levey 1981; Sager 1983). It offered amusements ranging from fast food and arcade games to movie multiplexes. These largely unregulated spaces, including atriums and parking lots, allowed teens to do things other than

spend money. The space of the mall offered a venue for transgressive behavior like drinking alcohol and having sex.

Still, the shopping center was not entirely unregulated, just less so than school or home. The mall, in fact, was understood as safe enough compared to other public spaces to allow parents to feel comfortable with teens being there and for teens themselves to feel little fear of violent crime or zealous monitoring of their behavior. A suburban mother from near Syracuse echoed this point in a 1988 newspaper interview: "Part of me says when you get a lot of kids together it's not a healthy thing. The other part says they have to have someplace to go that's not on the street corner. At least it's well lit. I know she won't get raped" (Kane and Smith 1988). However, though the mall of the 1980s seemed a safer public space for teens than a street corner or a construction site for new housing, poor teen behavior and its elaboration in news media and popular culture, which emphasized teenagers' disruptive, transgressive, and even criminal behavior, associated the shopping center with danger not only to teenagers but because of them.

Popular cultural texts like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1981) subverted bygone notions in media and popular culture of the suburb as simply a spatial articulation of traditional family values where public space was safe and the public teen was a good citizen vulnerable only to outside (read: urban) influences. Rather, the film offered the mall as home to multiple transgressions presented as quotidian acts (Spigel 1992, 136-137).² Scalping concert tickets was presented as a legitimate enterprise alongside customary mall work, like taking tickets for the Cineplex or working the fry-o-lator at a fast-food restaurant.

Most prevalent in the film are sex and sexuality as a naturally occurring part of mall space, sometimes even as the reason for working in the mall. During their shift as waitresses at the pizza shop, Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh) expresses her frustration slinging pizza slices without the added social benefit of being in the mall. Stacy says to her slightly older and more sexually experienced co-worker, Linda (Phoebe Cates), "You told me I would get a boyfriend working in the mall." Later, Linda prods Stacy about losing her virginity, "What are you waiting for? You are fifteen already." Soon after that conversation, an older customer at Perry's asks Stacy out. Ron Johnson, a so-called "fox," does not become her

boyfriend. Instead, they go on one date that ends up inside the dugout of a little league field where 26-year-old Ron deflowers 15-year-old Stacy. The scene is presented without a hint of judgment. Later in the film, Stacy has sex with a classmate, leading her to get pregnant and choosing to have an abortion with no involvement from parents, teachers, or even the baby's father. All of these incidents are depicted matter-of-factly, suggesting not only the normalcy, but also the inevitability of suburban teen sexuality rooted in the opportunities afforded by the seemingly unregulated Ridgemonet Shopping Center. The behavior of the film's protagonists strongly suggested that teens were engaging in dangerous behavior at the mall helping to contribute to a cultural logic that justified increased oversight and discipline of mall space.

Depictions in the news media also suggested the shopping center was advantageous for its teen patrons because it afforded freedom of movement and spaces for transgressive behavior including sexual activity, drinking and drug use. *Washington Post* columnist Bob Levey wrote of the liminality of the shopping mall space in 1981. The first half of his article promoted the safety, fun, and sense of community the mall provided for teens with few other places to congregate. One subject of the article, Steve Rader, 15, said he would be at the mall day after day because, "This is like a community of friends for me. This is where I feel comfortable" (Levey 1981). In this way, Levey portrayed Rader as legitimately frequenting the mall. He worked there and spent money while hanging out with friends—all sanctioned activities. Yet, later in the article, Levey identified the "dark side" of the mall being a "teen mecca." "According to Montgomery County, Maryland police, the plaza's Lot 19—a parking area along the northwestern edge of the shopping center—is notorious as a nighttime gathering place for young drinkers, or vandals, or both" (Levey 1981). Levey then argues that without an increase in security personnel, the Montgomery Mall, and others like it, would continue to see fights and other disruptions of mall spaces. The presence of the "good" teen, like Steve Rader, alongside the drinking rabble-rousers in the parking lot highlighted the tenuous position of suburban teens in public. They were both dangerous to the primary purpose of the mall, selling goods and services, and vital to the shopping center's ability to make money, as more of them flocked to malls as largely unsupervised social centers.

The ubiquity of teens in the mall gave rise to an effort by the news media to name the phenomena. They dubbed teen denizens of the shopping center “mallrats.” Though any teen at the mall could be assumed a mallrat, not every teen was, according to security guards and mallrats themselves. Rather, a mallrat was someone who, “thanks to two 20th century phenomena—the shopping center and the computer chip ... may never again know the heat of summer. Instead, they may become what some Albany security guards call ‘mall rats,’ taking up seasonal residence in shopping malls, living on soda, ice cream and fast food and spending uncounted hours in air-conditioned arcades” (Elkin 1981). Mallrats were essentially teens who spent most of their free time in the mall with no particular agenda other than “hanging out.” News articles said, “They [mallrats] shift from place to place, moving in small knots, unnoticed by the average shopper,” and “gather in the sorts of numbers that once collected at drive-in diners and drive-in theaters. And, though most of the kids tend to be well-behaved, they bring with them fights, thefts, noise and drugs” (Latimer 1983; Kane and Smith 1988). Teens in the mall, even those who were not mallrats, came under increasing scrutiny just by being there. They conjured the image of disruptive teens without an agenda, prone to misbehavior and disruptive to the spatial order of the mall. Mallrats and their media portrayal helped recode the mall as a teen space, which meant it was essentially a hazardous place.

A rise in teens frequenting malls, and a sense of their domination of that space, amplified by narratives of crime and misbehavior in the daily newspaper and on the movie screen, resulted in a rendering of the mall as overrun by teens, a haven for mallrats and arcade fiends. Yet, it was not simply that teenagers in malls were hazardous to profits or to public life more generally. Teenagers were also possible victims of unruly groups of mall patrons or potential recruits for non-consumer activities in the mall, like loitering and drinking. The arcade, then, was part of the broader promise of suburban shopping spaces that could both protect and safely contain teenagers who were increasingly figured as both dangerous and endangered. Often set away from anchor stores or higher-end shops, mall managers sought to protect the teen from criminal dangers in public space as well as to sequester teens in their own spaces away from other shoppers where they would be more likely to spend money. However,

the checkered history of arcades, especially in shopping centers, tells a different story. The video game arcade of the 1980s moved from being a way to contain public teens to being understood as another home to teen misbehavior that helped legitimate the expansion and professionalization of shopping center security. In turn, the increased policing of suburban public space not only facilitated the movement of video games and their players into the home but also virtually erased the suburban arcade in the 1990s (Slovin 2001, 145; June 2013).³

Starting in the mid-1970s, coin-operated electronic video games began to crop up in various public spaces, to the delight of teenagers and adults alike. Kids after school and businessmen on lunch breaks found standalone machines or small clusters of game cabinets in pizzerias, convenience stores, laundromats, and bars (Ennis 1980).⁴ As the industry matured and more games became available, aggregating the games in one space provided a way to minimize costs and maximize profits by focusing on the increasingly popular games in the fashion of urban pinball arcades (Kent 2001, 5-7).⁵

In suburban places, this meant the introduction of arcades into established retail spaces like shopping malls where teens were already gathering (Pelosi 1983, 36). However, mall owners and parents realized clustering teens in one space, while distracting them from disrupting other mall spaces, could also lead to security problems (Koncius 1981). For this reason, shopping centers required arcade owners and operators to implement strict rules to safeguard arcade space (Koncius 1981). Some of the rules, like prohibiting alcohol and gambling, were designed to stop the transgressive behavior associated with urban pool halls and pinball arcades upon which video game arcades were based (*New York Times* 1980). Other rules limiting eating, smoking, and loitering mirrored those aimed at curbing teen behavior in mall space more generally. Spaceport, a chain of shopping mall arcades, made these points clear in their employee training video from 1981. The narrator emphasizes a polite but firm tone when enforcing the rules particularly those about behavior within the arcade and loitering around its borders. The video shows still photos of employees breaking up a group of young men hanging outside the arcade while a voiceover reminded them to never use physical force but to call security or police should the patrons resist (Spaceport Employee Training Video

1981). The video makes clear that teens were the primary patrons of the arcade and maintaining order by policing those patrons was paramount.

An alternative to the mall arcade packed with teens was the family-friendly arcade popularized by Pizza Time Entertainment's Chuck E. Cheese restaurant and arcade. The original, opened in San Jose, CA in 1977 by Atari founder Nolan Bushnell, promoted its safe environs, wide-variety of games, and cheap pizza. Businesses like Chuck E. Cheese, geared toward a wholesome experience, attempted to associate the arcade with families and safety and not unruly teenagers. However, for most of the 1980s, the mall arcade proved far more popular than the family-friendly arcade because teens did not go there to play games and parents could only suffer so many hours spent eating bad pizza and listening to the blaring sounds of video games and animatronic bands (Pauly 1984). In part, the changing economic conditions of the video game industry influenced the waxing and waning popularity of home video systems and arcades, both teen-oriented and family-friendly. By 1986, Chuck E. Cheese owner Bushnell filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy only a year after recording \$150 million in sales as most of the industry suffered a lull (Brandt and Green 1986). Still, there were thousands of standalone and mall arcades through the mid-1980s after the initial growth spurt that saw sales of arcade video game machines grow from \$50 million in 1978 to about \$900 million in 1982 (*U.S. News & World Report* 1982, 7). Indeed, arcade game releases peaked in 1989 only to fall nearly continuously until 2013 (International Arcade Museum 2013).

In this respect, teen-oriented arcades, like shopping malls, were victims of their success for owners and teenaged patrons. In news articles, the question was not whether teens in arcades would be disruptive; it was how disruptive they would be. Local officials feared, "adequate supervision would not be provided and the place would become a hang-out for teen-agers who would cause problems for police" (Kealy 1981). According to the news media, these officials were right. "In town after town, local officials are struggling to cope with a craze that has swept the country: Arcade videogames that gobble up the time and money of America's teenagers" (*U.S. News & World Report* 1982, 7). In Carlsbad, CA, a new arcade dramatically increased complaints about teen behavior in the Plaza Real Camino Shopping Center (Sherman 1984). The mall

manager complained, “A day does not go by that customers do not call this office complaining of the arcade and its patrons,” because teen patrons on the ledge of a nearby bookstore block its entrance, and they congregate at a bank of telephones and “inhibit their use by mall customers” (Sherman 1984).

Despite the implementation of strict rules and attempts at rigid enforcement, teens did congregate, spend money, loiter, and cause trouble. A manager of three malls near Wichita, KS said, “There’ve been times when we’re sorry we have a game room. At other times, we’re pleased they have somewhere to go. Occasionally we have to use a little persuasion on them from the security police. We had to make an example out of two or three of the real troublemakers. The rest just come to enjoy themselves, and they do spend some money” (Elkin 1981). This fundamental paradox of the video game arcade in the shopping mall of the 1970s and 80s suggested the larger re-coding of suburban public space. Even when teens were largely removed or distracted from other public spaces including malls, they created security problems in these new, seemingly, safe spaces. In turn, this created a new understanding of safe space while requiring new strategies to properly police them.

Other texts made similar associations between poor behavior and the video game arcade including allusions to the hardcore punk scene of greater Los Angeles in the early 1980s. Black Randy and the Metrosquad released their song “I Slept in an Arcade” in 1979 (Black Randy and the Metrosquad 1979). The song recounts the peripatetic lifestyle of a punk rocker who rubs elbows in Los Angeles with porn stars and fights with police but, ultimately, is homeless only finding his place in the arcade. The song reinforced the association of the arcade with degenerate teens, in this case the notorious hardcore punks such as Black Flag and The Germs, while also suggesting the arcade as a home for those disaffected teenagers. Similarly, a CBC radio anthology series *Nightfall* broadcast a story entitled “No Quarter” on March 4, 1983. “No Quarter” follows a similar storyline to the film *Nightmares* where a teen listens to punk rock on his Walkman as he masters the games at his arcade eventually getting addicted to the games. Taken together these texts hardened the link between teenagers and their participation in seemingly dangerous subcultures in the central spaces of suburban life paving the way for increased policing of those places.

Regulating Teens and Reducing Suburban Public Space

The seemingly addictive power of the games and the potential hazards of the spaces they were housed in called forth protests and regulatory responses from parents, teachers, town administrators, and mall owners. Though the immediate goal was to stop the spread of arcades or at least safeguard them from disruptive behavior, by pursuing that impulse, they all contributed to the increased policing of suburban public space.

Most states empowered municipalities to regulate businesses and zoning within their borders including specific provisions for coin-operated gaming establishments. For example, in 1984, Bloomfield, NJ required establishments that wanted to add more than twenty gaming machines to an arcade to employ professional security only consisting of off-duty police officers (*Bonito v. Bloomfield* 1984).⁶ The town council passed the law in part to deal with crime in and around existing arcades including bicycle thefts and graffiti. Though the latter part of the ordinance requiring off-duty police to work as security guards was struck down by the New Jersey Supreme Court, the court did find the requirement of security personnel “a reasonable measure to protect the public interest” including protecting “video arcade patrons.” In 1983, Vienna, VA, too, banned businesses from having more than three video game machines because “parents are worried about kids wasting money, staying out of school and ‘hanging out’ around the popular machines” (Hodge 1983). Others like Palm Springs, CA had local ordinances that prevented establishments from having more than four video games to prevent the congregation of teen patrons (*Amusing Sandwich v. City of Palm Springs* 1985). Similarly, San Gabriel, CA passed a moratorium on arcade licenses pending investigation into the “public health” of video game arcades (*Kieffer v. Spencer* 1984).

In some places, communities moved to ban arcades or limit access to those over seventeen to combat the risks associated with videomaniacs (Sangeorge 1981; Mitchell 1981; *New York Times* 1982; *Associated Press* 1982; DeVries 1982; *United Press International* 1982; Klein 1988).⁷ Bradley, IL passed an ordinance prohibiting children under the age of sixteen from playing video games in arcades located in shopping malls hoping to keep younger players away from the dangers of the arcade (*Associated Press* 1982). White Plains, NY banned arcades altogether in their

Galleria Mall (Wierzbicki 1983, 18; Brenner 1998). Near Washington, DC, critics speculated, “video game arcades located near residential neighborhoods might introduce undesirable elements into the community” (Mezile 1982, 4). In Brookhaven, NY, experts argued, “The problem is with the sleazy atmosphere that can develop around them, and the element of child exploitation” (Mitchell 1981). These strict laws and ordinances along with the commentary of town officials justifying them suggest the power of the video game arcade to raise the specter of the public teen as both victim and victimizer necessitating stricter supervision of their local suburban haunts opening the way for a new surveillance regime in arcades and shopping malls.

Yet, even against this backdrop of negative news reports and popular culture representations, bans and age-restrictions proved an unwieldy solution. They negatively impacted mall and arcade owners’ profits, themselves important political stakeholders in suburban communities. In lieu of all out bans, these proprietors sought private solutions to accommodate teens and their wallets while also protecting both the space and the cultural associations of the arcade and the shopping center. Mall owners initiated an overhaul in security strategy and tactics in the 1980s including a move toward professionalization of personnel through better training and more thorough vetting as well as the implementation of new technology including closed-circuit television (CCTV) that increased the overall scrutiny of mall space for all visitors.

The shopping center industry was concerned with the amateur criminal, particularly disruptive teens, because of profit loss from the petty crimes themselves and the negative perception of malls that came with the widely disseminated narratives of mall crime and disruption. In a November 1978 edition of a leading shopping mall industry journal *Shopping Center World*, mall owners identified shoplifting, loitering/drinking, and vandalism as their top three security concerns; all crimes predominantly associated with teenagers (*Shopping Center World* 1978, 39). Similarly, in his monthly column from March 1979, mall security expert Dr. Harold Gluck alerted his readers to the supposed “plague . . . called shoplifting” (Gluck 1979, 30). According to mall owners and security experts in their leading journal, teens proved a visible and disorderly presence in shopping centers that undermined the profit motive of the

space—a motive that would supersede the understanding of the mall as truly public space as owners moved to police that space to protect their investment.

In the pages of *Shopping Center World*, authors emphasized this idea of “loss prevention” through articles on insurance liability, the costs of hiring and training staff, preventing theft, fire-proofing, and making walkways and parking lots more well-lit to avoid lawsuits (*Shopping Center World* 1977; Hura 1977, 16; *Shopping Center World* 1977, 18; Potter 1983, 26). Their security writers, such as Harold Gluck and retired professional thief, Mike McCaffrey, had to combat the notion that the aimless, shoplifting teenager was the most dangerous threat to the bottom line while still addressing the highly visible threat of the disruptive teenager. Though the teen mall patron was an easily identifiable threat, Gluck emphasized that professional thieves were more dangerous. These individuals, he argued, were looking to live off their booty rather than stealing for a cheap thrill or to get the latest fashion like a teen shoplifter (Gluck 1977, 13). In trying to convince shopping center executives of numerous, less visible but high risk threats, *Shopping Center World* acknowledged the pervasiveness of the image of the disruptive teen and loitering mallrat among the journal’s audience of mall and store owners which helped structure the evolving security policies of shopping centers in the 1980s.

With both the nuisance of mallrats and the threats from professional thieves in mind, mall owners and operators shifted their security tactics and strategies to focus on providing an overwhelming response to problems at the mall that would handle less visible but costly threats from professional thieves as well as the more visible and publicly damaging hazards from teens in malls. The authors of *Shopping Center World* urged mall owners to make their security teams larger, more professionalized, and technologically advanced.

William R. Brown, in an article titled, “Protecting Shoppers Means Protecting Profits,” emphasized the use of CCTV monitoring to prevent crime, provide evidence for prosecution, and more effectively and efficiently monitor the shopping center for poor if not illegal behavior (Brown 1984, 64). This was a new use of CCTV, as it did not begin as a surveillance technology. Rather, cable television pioneers developed the technology to provide broadcast television access to low-lying areas and

urban apartment and hotel dwellers who could not receive a signal directly (Parsons 2008, 98, 228 and 316). Indeed, through the 1970s, CCTV was mostly an addendum to broadcast and cable television programming such as sporting events made available in bars or for the viewing of speeches and sermons for overflow crowds (Wortman 1974, 164-65). In the 1974 edition of the *Closed-Circuit Television Handbook*, the author, Leon Wortman acknowledged the use of CCTV for security purposes among many other uses. He even diagrammed the building of a surveillance system. Yet, Wortman only mentions use of this technology for policing the gates and entry points for industrial and manufacturing sites (1974, 183-87). He makes no mention of commercial security uses such as in shops or malls.

By the end of the 1980s, shopping centers adopted CCTV technology nearly universally as the technology got cheaper and more effective at capturing and recording images (Government Accounting Office 2003, 7-8; Nieto 1997). Though the efficacy of CCTV surveillance in stopping crime is difficult to assess, the presence of cameras, functional or not, suggested constant surveillance (Government Accounting Office 2003, 29-30). And, though the courts have found CCTV surveillance tantamount to police officers moving in and observing the public, this technology is actually quite different. It allows a small number of trained personnel to monitor the large space of the mall from a central location while also recording behavior for possible prosecution which is much broader than a few police officers walking a beat (Ricks, Tillet, and Van Meter 1994, 170-71; Nieto 1997). Initiated in large part by the presence of disruptive teens, this advance changed the very nature of mall space as patrons understood they were likely being watched which might have enhanced a sense of safety for some but discouraged free association and expression in the heavily policed, quasi-public space of the mall (Cohen 2003, 272-78).⁸

Beyond new technology like CCTV, leaders in shopping center management and security experts stressed the importance of maintaining a large number of highly trained, professional security workers who were very visible in mall space rather than the poorly trained and badly paid forces of the previous era (Bond 1989, 181). Seasoned thief turned columnist Mike McCaffrey pleaded for a new kind of security force by emphasizing the constant threat from thieves, "Remember, at all times, that your store is under surveillance by someone who knows how to steal,

perhaps even someone who is a professional and good at theft as I was" (McCaffrey and Oxenham 1983, 160). By 1994, private security personnel outnumbered public law enforcement due in no small part to the proliferation of suburban shopping malls in the 1980s (Truett, Ricks, and Van Meter 1994, 203). In *Principles of Security*, the authors cover best practices in retail security including an entire chapter devoted to private security education. They advise a multi-step screening process including a background check, honesty test, a credit check, and psychological evaluation. Once hired, the authors recommend a training program including at least 30 hours of firearms training for staff licensed for weapon use (Truett, Ricks, and Van Meter 1994, 203-211). These experts attempted to shift industry attitudes toward practices and tactics that would regulate mall space to prevent both teen misbehavior as well as the costlier damage being done by professional criminals. Though the shopping center industry attempted to create a more professional and efficient security force, this was not always the case in the 1980s. In 1988, *U.S. News & World Report* noted a spate of crimes committed by security guards including theft, murder, rape, and kidnapping (Levine 1988, 36). Security experts argued that despite the move toward better training and background checks, "For \$ 3.35 an hour, you're not going to get a West Point cadet" (Levine 1988, 36).

Still, in response to shifting perceptions of mall crime, the shopping center security industry grew throughout the 1980s. Security expert Anthony N. Potter wrote in 1983 of the change in shopping center security, "Today, the walls of my office are lined with bookcases containing over 1,200 volumes on private security, a knowledge explosion that is symbolic of the growth of the industry to the point where there are now two security officers for every law enforcement officer in the United States" (26). Revenues for private security firms increased 12% a year and the total number of security guard was up 300% from 1969-1988 (Levine 1988, 36). The *Hallcrest Report II*, a survey of private security, noted that by the end of the 1980s "private security is more than twice the size of federal, state, and local law enforcement combined" (Cunningham, Strauchs, and Van Meter 1990, 163). By 1989, Robert Bond declared in *Shopping Center World* that shoppers were feeling safe again because of the revolution in shopping center security over the previous decade (181). While new security measures may have made customers feel safe

and possibly protected the bottom line, more importantly, they more closely policed suburban public space for the purpose of reducing the presence and activity of suburban teens in the mall.

Ultimately, that shift in surveillance further moved the shopping mall away from being a space in the mold of Victor Gruen's original conception of the indoor shopping center that balanced public and private interests (Hardwick 2004, 4-5). Gruen envisioned a central space that included not only stores but also served the community. With Larry Smith, he wrote in 1960, "It [proper mall planning] also brings into being community facilities, such as auditoriums and meeting rooms. This is done with the express intention of creating an environment which, if properly utilized, will establish the shopping center as the focal point for the life of a community or a number of communities" (Gruen and Smith 1967, 257). They continued that shopping center security would function as "public relations" helping customers find parking and load their vehicles rather than preventing crime (Gruen and Smith 1967, 264). Instead, the 1980s mall exhibited a privatist ethic in policing its seemingly public space by using professional, private police forces working at the behest of mall and storeowners to limit the use of mall space by the public particularly the notorious mallrat and arcade addict.

Teens Go Home and Video Games Enter the Culture Wars

Despite an uptick in arcade revenues in the late 1980s, stand-alone and mall arcades mostly disappeared from the suburban landscape in the 1990s (Kleinfeld 1983). The implementation of new regulatory practices in suburban public spaces coincided with the decline of the video arcade market and the upswing in the sales of home video game systems helping to draw teens back into the home as they were being encouraged to leave public space. For players, the home market was understood as technologically superior to the flagging arcade market. For parents, the home was understood as morally preferable, a place without the dangers of the spaces of the arcade or shopping mall. The disappearance of arcades and the forced withdrawal of teens from suburban public spaces signaled the broader reorientation of that space toward private interests.

The home arcade alleviated the social and moral dilemmas of the mall arcade by transferring the powers of oversight and regulation back to parents while allowing the arcade industry to reform itself while many arcades became family-friendly choosing not to court a large teen audience (Morris 1987, 60).⁹ In 1989, an operator of a North Carolina mall said of the arcade in his shopping center, “The emphasis isn’t on teenage boys anymore. We have something for mom, we have something for dad, something for children. We have something for everyone” (McCloud 1989, 32). These venues also benefitted from new shopping center security practices that helped make arcades safer. By the end of the 1980s, video arcades, “made a comeback in malls after having been dropped by many centers in the early 1980s because of the sometimes unruly behavior of teenage patrons” (McCloud 1989, 32). Yet, as many casual gaming venues such as bars and convenience stores had been replaced by the arcade in the late 70s and early 80s, by the late 80s, the family-friendly arcade eclipsed the teen-friendly version that has yet to return to its heights of teen popularity of the early 1980s.

However, as video games moved into the home providing relief for mall owners and parents, a new problem emerged regarding content that would become the central political and social issue with home video games in the 1990s. At the beginning of home gaming, the most played games such as *Frogger*, *Pac Man*, *Dig-Dug*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Q-Bert* were not overly violent or sexual. *Electronic Games Monthly’s* 1982 arcade game of the year, *Asteroids*, featured a small spaceship zapping abstract space rocks with little graphic violence or titillating content (*Electronic Games Monthly* 1982). Still, video games did not escape the broader protests against popular culture content led by the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) and right-wing Christian organizations. An early arcade game, *Death Race*, based on the violent exploitation film *Death Race 2000* (1976), allowed players to drive their cars into others thereby earning points. *60 Minutes* highlighted it as a game that could abjectly influence teen players (June 2013). Culture warrior Dr. Thomas Radecki, head of the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV), made another public protest against video game content in 1983. He argued that video games encourage violent behavior and the game *Berzerk* “teaches players violent reactions” in the same manner he believed television and movies

affected their viewers (Mandel 1983, 97-98). Respected child psychologist Stuart Kaplan even believed that arcade games represented “sublimated violence” for their players (Mitchell 1981). Still, for most of the 1980s, arcade console content did not set off alarms for parents in the same ways as the so-called scourges of “porn-rock” and gangsta rap did during the latter half of the decade. According to parents and arcade purveyors in that era, a game’s main danger was its addictive, well-designed gameplay that drew teens to the arcade where aberrant behavior was likely. Rather than attack or protest game makers for this “flaw,” citizens acted locally to enact what were, in essence, moral codes for the use of public space by teenagers.

As gaming moved home, scrutiny increased on game content. In December of 1993, the United States Senate convened a Governmental Affairs committee meeting that exemplified the shift of concerns from space to content signaling a change in the status of the home as a refuge from the dangers of public spaces. Due to violent and sexually suggestive game content, the home was no safer morally than the arcade. Co-chairs Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (D-CT) and Herbert Kohl (D-WI) convened the hearing to investigate video game violence and provide evidence for their proposed legislation on video game ratings. Much like the earlier hearings on “porn rock” convened in 1985, this hearing, according to its co-chairs, was designed to inform the public about morally degrading video game content and to help move toward providing parents with information, à la the PMRC, and shame video game makers into creating less “inappropriate” content. In his opening statement, Senator Lieberman linked the kidnapping and murder of a young girl at a slumber party to the violent and lascivious imagery in video games. Subsequently, he described in detail the finishing moves in *Mortal Kombat*, known as fatalities, and later played a video montage of those moves. He also complained of the “troubling realism” and strong overtones of “sexual violence” in a CD-ROM game called *Night Trap*. He argued, in light of this sexual and violent content, “A ratings system is the very least the video game industry can do” while encouraging them to “simply stop producing the worst of this junk.”¹⁰ Nothing less was at stake than “nurturing healthy children” (Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs 1993). Again, much like the earlier debates over supposedly dangerous content

in popular music, critics from parents to representatives of the medical community to the United States Senators figured the home as under siege from morally questionable material undermining parents' attempts to raise healthy children.

Ultimately, the home game system reanimated debates over the proper content for children and teens in their popular culture products that had begun in the 1980s regarding television, film, and music. Many in the news media in addition to well-meaning politicians and morally-motivated culture warriors decried home video games in much the same way as arcade games were criticized a decade earlier. Magazines presented Nintendo and Sega Genesis, popular game consoles of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as addictive as *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* (Shao 1989). *Newsweek* intoned, "Nintendo has led people to do crazy things." The authors continue that home video game systems such as Nintendo created a hysteria that in the early 1980s would have been for an arcade game cabinet but by 1989 was for Nintendo game cartridges. "It is a madness that—like most—strikes hardest at adolescent boys and their young brothers; 60 percent of Nintendo players are males between 8 and 15, according to Bruce Apar, editor of *Toy and Hobby World*" (Adler, Rogers, Brailsford, Gordon, and Quade 1989). Other critics drew a simple and misguided connection between video games and the spate of high-profile teen violence during the 1990s, including most prominently the massacre at Columbine High School in 1999 (Cullen 2009).¹¹ These critics proved that though the home provided the physical safety an arcade or mall could not, it did not safeguard teen game-players from the supposed moral hazards of the games themselves.

Conclusion

Real teen behavior and its elaboration and exaggeration in news media and popular culture produced mall and arcade space as both dangerous to and because of teens. According to these accounts, in these places, teens drank, smoked, gambled, had sex, and generally caused disturbances to shoppers and security in addition to their own social group. Based on that understanding of public space, American suburbanites of the 1980s

increased regulation of those spaces that valorized private property rights and extra-governmental solutions to social dilemmas (McKenzie 1994).¹² Suburban parents of the 1980s, although occasionally troubled by the content of video games, were happy to welcome their children back into the home where they could be guided in their popular culture choices and segregated from large groups of teens thought to be bad influences (Collins 1981).¹³ Teens could play a vast array of games and avoid the possible hazards of public space from other teens or police harassment. This endorsement of parental guidance and teens at home was undergirded by the stricter policing of suburban public space placing the priorities of families and mall owners largely in agreement over the regulation of public space. Ultimately, the emphasis on private, local action by both mall owners and parents normalized the stricter surveillance of public space alongside suburbanites' complementary desire for increasingly non-civic desires with regard to everything from endorsing school choice to Nimby resistance to trash incinerators and nuclear power plants (Walsh, Warland, and Smith 1997; Riisman del).

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Notes

1. Cohen notes that, from its inception, the postwar shopping center moved to limit “unwanted elements” including racial minorities and political activists. However, she focuses on the legal definitions of public and private space as they regard political speech in these central suburban spaces.

2. Lynn Spigel has persuasively argued that early television shows with a suburban setting emphasized simple family disputes and straightforward conflict resolution within the span of one show. I would extend her argument to say that most family sitcoms through the cancellation of *The Brady Bunch* in 1974 followed this format and presented tame subject matter compared to later innovations. Further, more controversial material was usually relegated to shows with a distinctly urban setting such as *All in the Family*. Suburban films of the postwar era also rarely delved into the lives of teens as straightforwardly as the films discussed in this chapter. This is not to say that film dealt with suburban life in quite the same way as sitcoms, but the emphasis on realism and darker subject matter remain fixed on the lives of adults in films such as William Wyler’s *The Desperate Hours* (1955) or *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (1969).

3. Slovin argues that video games “shifted from immersive, social experiences in arcades (where, according to some academic studies, more than half the time participants would watch, ‘hang out,’ and socialize rather than play) to solitary, home-based entertainment”; June argues that arcades essentially only exist currently as family friendly venues such as Chuck E. Cheese or geared toward nostalgic adults in places like the national chain Dave and Buster’s and east coast mini-chain Barcade that rely on food and alcohol sales to make money.

4. Ennis described the ubiquity of coin-operated video game players, “Vid-comaniacs can be found everywhere here: In singles bars, mingling around Asteroids; in arcades, spending the last quarter of their allowances to beat the high score on Space Invaders; in nightclubs, vying for a spot at Galaxian between acts, and in fast-food restaurants, grabbing a quick game of Astro Fighter before heading back to work. They’re kids, businessmen in three-piece suits and unemployed writers. And, many of them will readily admit, playing electronic games is more than a mere pastime. It’s a lifestyle.”

5. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia banned pinball in New York City in 1942 because he believed it encouraged gambling and fighting. The ban lasted until 1976, right before the emergence of the video game arcade.

6. According to the briefs in this case, other states had similar provisions for regulating arcades or other businesses with coin-operated games including New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and California.

7. Beyond those discussed below, other places where bans that limited access were attempted or instituted included Mesquite, TX; Brookhaven, NY; Centereach, NY; Marlboro, MA; Oakland, CA; Coral Gables, FL, West Warwick, RI; Durham, NH; Plymouth, MA; and Hialeah, FL.

8. Cohen traces the battles over the legal definition of mall space as public or private throughout the postwar era. Ultimately, she finds that the controlling Supreme Court decision, *PruneYard Shopping Center v. Robbins* (1980), recognized limited free speech rights in malls but reaffirmed an earlier ruling that states should decide for themselves the protections within shopping centers.

9. Morris wrote of the late 1980s arcade, “In addition to featuring new, improved games in a more attractive setting, the new and overhauled arcades are being targeted more toward the family than they were in the past according to retailers and operators.”

10. Due to the pressure from the Congress and the Clinton Administration, the industry created the Interactive Digital Software Alliance (IDSA). Less than a year later, the IDSA created a rating system to better inform parents of the content in games.

11. Relying on the journals of the shooters as well extensive interviews with parents, friends, police, and doctors, Cullen persuasively argues that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris rampage was caused by many factors including mental illness and fractured social environments finding no evidence that violent video games led to the massacre.

12. McKenzie calls this tendency “hostile privatism” and sees it in the movement toward privately owned communities governed by their residents that upset the traditions of shared public space and government.

13. Teachers and psychologists were concerned with video game addictions and exposure to violent content which may spur adolescent players to transgressive behavior. Dr. Millman of New York Hospital predicted a slippery slope from addiction to video games to more dangerous addictions, “The games present a seductive world. They offer a social structure, a system, a special language, something to relate around. There is the ritual of waiting on line, of being the predator in a violent game. From time immemorial kids have wanted to alter the way they felt — to be totally absorbed in an activity where they are out on an edge and can’t think of anything else. That’s why they try everything from gambling to glue sniffing” (Collins 1981).